

# **PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING**



Shepherds Global Classroom exists to equip the body of Christ by providing curriculum for rising Christian leaders around the world. We aim to multiply indigenous training programs by placing a 20-course curriculum tool into the hands of spiritual trainers in every country of the world.

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# DIRECTIONS FOR CLASS LEADERS

If studying as a group, you may take turns reading the material. You should stop periodically for any class discussion. As the class leader, you are responsible to keep discussion from wandering from the material being studied. It is helpful to have a time limit for each discussion period.

**Discussion questions** and **in-class activities** are indicated by arrow bullet points. For discussion questions, the class leader should ask the question and give students time to discuss the answer. If the same student usually answers first, or if some students do not speak up, the leader can direct the question to someone.

Much **scripture** is used in the course. Passages that should be read aloud in class are also indicated by arrow bullet points. Ask a student to read these for the group. At other times, scripture references are given in parentheses in the text. For example: (1 Corinthians 12:15). Those references are support for the statements in the text. It is not necessary to always read the passages in parentheses.

Each lesson has **assignments** described at the end. Assignments should be completed after the lesson and reported to the class leader at the next lesson time. If a student does not complete a lesson and its assignments, he can complete them later. However, the leader should encourage students to keep on schedule so that they learn more from the class. A chart is provided in the back of the course to record the assignments the student has completed.

One of the purposes of the course is to prepare students to become teachers. The class leader should give students opportunities to develop their teaching skills. For example, the class leader should occasionally let a student teach a short section of the lesson to the class.

At the end of each lesson is a section with directions for group sharing. The class leader can decide how much time to spend on that discussion time. Many lessons will have plenty of discussion while covering the material.

Also at the end of each lesson is a short prayer, asking God to apply the truth in the life of the students. The class leader could ask a student to read the prayer for the class.

If the student wants to **earn a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom**, he should attend the class sessions and complete the assignments. A form is provided at the end of the course for recording the assignments completed.



# LESSON 1

# CHRISTIAN INTEGRITY

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Understand what the Bible means when it talks about “the world.”
2. Recognize areas in which the world’s values have influenced one’s life.
3. Describe how and why the thinking of a believer must be different from that of an unbeliever.
4. Explain what it means for a believer to live a life of integrity.
5. Show that Christian truth should be applied throughout the details of life.

## JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, PREACHER OF INTEGRITY

John Chrysostom (370’s),<sup>1</sup> was a godly pastor who became known as “the golden mouth” because of his powerful and oratorical preaching. He was much beloved by the common people and became the most famous preacher of the Eastern Roman Empire. In 398 he was taken to the capital city of Constantinople (modern day Istanbul, Turkey) to serve as pastor and patriarch of the 100,000 member national church.

John was known for his uncompromising character. He used his office to serve the needs of the entire city, not just the rich. He fed the poor, built hospitals, and supported widows. He confronted bishops in Asia Minor for their corruption and financial mismanagement and preached against their indulgence and immorality. He warned the upper classes of Constantinople that attending the theater would ruin them. He compared theater attendance to exposure to a deadly virus. John said,

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1 Gerald L. Sittser. *Water from a Deep Well*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 135

If you see a shameless woman in the theater, who treads the stage with uncovered head and bold attitudes, dressed in garments adorned with gold, flaunting her soft sensuality, singing immoral songs, throwing her limbs about in the dance, and making shameless speeches... do you dare to say that nothing human happens to you then? ...Long after the theater is closed and everyone is gone away, those images still float before your soul, their words, their conduct, their glances, their walk, their positions... their unchaste limbs—and as for you, you go home covered with a thousand wounds! But not alone—the whore goes with you—although not openly and visibly... but in your heart, and in your conscience, and there within you she kindles the Babylonian furnace... in which the peace of your home, the purity of your heart, the happiness of your marriage will be burnt up!

To wealthy citizens John warned,

It is foolishness and a public madness to fill the cupboards with clothing and allow men who are created in God's image and our likeness to stand naked and trembling with the cold so that they can hardly hold themselves upright... You are huge and fat, you hold drinking parties until late at night, and sleep in a warm, soft bed. And do you not think of how you must give an account of your misuse of the gifts of God.... For our money is the Lord's, however we may have gathered it. This is why the Lord has allowed you to have more; not for you to waste... but for you to distribute to those in need.

John Chrysostom was eventually banished to the eastern shores of the Black Sea but died on the journey (A.D. 407). His final words were, "Glory be to God in all things. Amen."

## A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

John 17 is Jesus' prayer for his disciples shortly before His crucifixion. It expresses his great love and concern for his disciples. He said he was also praying for those who would believe the message of the apostles (verse 20), so believers today are included.

» A student should read John 17:14-18 for the group.

What did Jesus mean when he said that he was not of the world? We know that he did not originate in this world; he is the Son of God, who came to earth from heaven. However, when he made the statement that he was not of the world, he was not talking about the fact that he came from somewhere out of this world. He said that the disciples were not of the world either, just as he was not. Jesus was talking about men who had been born on earth, born to human parents, and had grown up as citizens of their own country.

So what did Jesus mean when he said his disciples were not of the world? We need to understand what the Bible is talking about when it refers to the world.



- » A student should read Ephesians 2:1-3 for the group.

These verses show us that to live like the world lives is the same as following the direction of Satan. We also see that the people of the world follow their sinful desires, and they will experience the wrath of God. Believers have received new life and no longer live like the world.

- » A student should read 1 John 2:15-17 for the group.

The world is spoken of in 1 John as an evil entity. It is not to be loved, and its things are not to be loved. Wrong desires and motives are typical of the world. Sinful desires are called the desires of the world.

Satan is called the ruler of this world (John 16:11). That does not mean that the world belongs to him rightfully; he is the leader of a rebellion against God, and the people of the world follow him. He is already condemned, and people who persist in following him will also be condemned.

To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God (James 4:4).

The world is composed of millions of natural, fallen people, separated from God, and united by what they have in common. **First, they have wrong affections or desires.** They love the things in the world more than the Creator of the universe. 1 John 2:15-16 says, “Do not love the world... For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”

**Second, their wrong affections lead to wrong behavior;** a lifestyle focused on satisfying themselves, often at the expense of justice and mercy (Amos 5:11-15; 21-24). They go their own way, demand what they want, and determine what is right and wrong for themselves. Though they have many forms of religion, all those who are of the world make themselves (human intellect, human wisdom, human appetites, human goodness, human power) the center of their worship (Romans 1:25). They resent God’s authority and believe a philosophy of life that justifies what they have decided to do. They don’t seek to know what is right and to do it. They do what they want, then look for a way to explain that it’s right.

Non-Christian psychologists and counselors of the world try to help people solve their guilt without repenting and finding God’s forgiveness. Philosophers of the world try to describe a purpose for living that doesn’t involve God. Scientists of the world try to explain an origin for everything while denying a Creator. Politicians and social workers of the world try to find ways of preventing the natural, negative consequences of sin while denying that sin is the real problem. Fashion designers of the world work to produce clothing that is sensual and attention getting. Entertainers of the world make jokes about sin, morality, and religion. Pastors of the world believe in a god who tolerates sin and is most concerned about you being wealthy, happy, and having good self-esteem.

Colossians 2:8 warns us not to be robbed by philosophy and deceit, by the elements of the world. A con artist robs someone by selling a false idea. By convincing people of wrong ideas, the world robs people of their relationship with God, spiritual benefits, and heaven.

The philosophies and controlling motivations of the world show in the lifestyle of people who are of the world. The speech, attitudes, dress, entertainment, and behavior of the world are all expressions of the sinfulness of their hearts.

Followers of Christ cannot follow the morality of their society. Followers of Christ will be different from their society.

Cultures are shaped by this entity the Bible calls the *world*. Generations of people in a place develop a culture. They want many good things such as security, prosperity, and stable families, but they pursue those things with a worldly philosophy and the determination to find them without submitting to God's Word. This means that followers of Christ cannot completely follow their own culture. Some cultures are more influenced by biblical principles than others, but no nation's culture is completely Christian.

- » Based on what we have studied so far, what does it mean that Jesus' disciples are not "of the world"?

Believers do not follow sinful desires and ambitions. They want to please God most of all. Their affections have been, and are continually being, transformed (Philippians 1:9-11). God's law has been written on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). God's commandments are not burdensome to believers but are instead a delight (1 John 5:1-3, Psalm 19:7-11). Believers have eternal priorities (Matthew 6:33). Their behavior shows that they want to resist temptation and live in victory over sin.

People of the world think believers are strange because they are not interested in the same things (1 Peter 4:4). Jesus said that the world hates a person who is spiritually different (John 17:14). The world is hostile to those who do not belong to it. They don't understand, they resent righteousness, and they are convicted of their own sin. That's why Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). The Apostle Paul said, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

- » A student should read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 for the group.

The Bible tells believers to be distinct from the world. This distinctiveness begins with one's attitude, as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Here he described the believer's attitude as an attitude of humility, sorrow for sin, meekness, righteousness, mercy, heart-purity, peace and willingness to endure persecution. Distinct attitudes will result in distinct behavior. For example, believers cannot form partnerships that require them to do things that are wrong. God promises to be a Father to the one that is distinct from the

world. Remember, we looked at a verse that says that a friend of the world is the enemy of God (James 4:4).

- » A student should read Matthew 5:13-16 for the group.

To be distinct and separate from the world does not mean that believers should separate from society and form their own communities. Jesus said he was not praying that his disciples be taken out of the world (John 17:15). He also said that his disciples are salt and light for the world, which means they must be present and visible in society. Believers should participate in government and in community business except when participation would require them to do something wrong.

Gerald Sittser tells us what this looked like in early Christianity:

Aristides, an Athenian philosopher who... lived in the second century, listed a number of attributes that distinguished Christians from the rest of the population. Christians, he noted, modeled [faithfulness to their promises], truthfulness, contentment, respect for parents, love for neighbors, purity, patience in the face of persecution and kindness to strangers. They cared for widows and orphans. They treated slaves with unusual kindness too. “Any male and female slaves... they persuade to become Christians because of the love they have towards them. If they do become Christians, they are brothers without discrimination.”<sup>2</sup>

## A GENUINE FAITH

The letter of James emphasizes that true Christian faith is demonstrated in life. James said that people who hear God’s Word and do not do it are deceiving themselves (James 1:22). Some people think they are better than others because they know more Christian truth—even though they don’t obey it—but that is not true.

James said that some people are religious, but their religion is worthless. God is pleased by the religion of people who meet the needs of others and keep themselves pure, not being contaminated by the world (James 1:27).

- » A student should read James 2:14-26 for the group.

There are people who say that because salvation is received by faith and not by works, our behavior doesn’t matter. They think it is possible for a person to have saving faith even if his attitudes and lifestyle are like those of an unbeliever. This passage in James’ letter speaks to people like that.

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2 Gerald L. Sittser. *Water from a Deep Well*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 54

James says that *belief* is not enough; even the demons have right beliefs, but they are not in a right relationship with God (verse 19). A person who believes in God but does not submit to God is like a person who hears the gospel but does not repent.

It is important to explain verses 21 and 24. They say that Abraham was justified by works, and that a person is justified by works and faith together. This seems to contradict other scriptures that emphasize that a person is saved only by grace and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9, Galatians 2:16, Romans 3:28). By the term *justified*, James does not mean that a person is *saved* by faith and works but that a person is *shown to be a saved person* by faith and works. He is not saved by works, but if he does not live a godly life, he does not have saving faith either. James says that a person's faith is dead if he does not have a life that matches faith (verse 26).

James said that just as it is impossible for a tree to have two kinds of fruit or a fountain to give two kinds of water, a person should not be able to speak both blessing and cursing (James 3:9-12). A person's behavior should consistently match his Christian faith.

## THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRITY

In Romans 2:21-24, Paul spoke to Jews who thought they were superior to the Gentiles because they had the scripture, even though they did not obey it. He asked, "While you preach against stealing, do you steal?" He said, "You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law." The fact that they exalted themselves as religious people yet did not have good character caused the Gentiles to say blasphemous things about God and the scripture.

If a person has integrity, his behavior matches his beliefs. For example, a person who is honest will integrate honesty throughout all his behavior and speech. A person who says he is honest but does something dishonest does not have integrity.

The term *integrity* can be applied to a person's character. In some languages the term is also used to describe other things, such as the structure of a building.

» What do you think it means for a building structure to have integrity?

It is important for a building to stand. It must support its own weight and the weight of whatever activities occur inside it. If it collapses, people and property may be injured, and the value of the building is lost. Integrity for a building means that principles of strong construction are used throughout the entire structure.

It is also good for the building to stand for a long time. A person who builds a house may hope it will stand for his lifetime. Buildings for government or large businesses require large investments and may be expected to stand for several generations.

If a building begins to lean or collapse, it is because it lacks integrity. Sometimes a building is damaged by an earthquake, and though it is still standing it is not safe. It does not have integrity.

Before construction begins on an important building, there is a blueprint—a drawing with the details. The most important details are about how the building will be strong enough to stand. The parts of the building must be connected and mutually supporting.

It is important for the builder to follow the plan when he builds. If he reduces expenses by leaving out necessary parts of the structure, the building will not be safe.

» What does it mean for a person to have integrity?

Jesus used the illustration of a building's integrity. He said a person who hears and obeys God is like a person who builds his house on a rock. That house stands when storms come. A person who does not obey God is like a person who builds his house on sand (Matthew 7:24-27). It is not enough only to hear and know the truth.

» A student should read James 1:22-25 for the group.

James said that people are deceiving themselves if they hear God's Word but do not do it. He is referring to people who think they are good because they know biblical truth even though they do not consistently live by it. Such people do not have integrity.

James said that when we read God's Word we should not be like people who look into a mirror but do not change because of what we see. God's truth is transformational. As we look into God's Word we see our faults, and we should allow the Spirit of God to change our character and behavior to match God's truth.

Integrity is demonstrated in lifestyle. Believers should not be satisfied with themselves when they realize that an attitude or behavior is not consistent with God's truth.

## The Test of Fruit

Jesus said there will be many false prophets. These are people who want the status of religious leadership or want to make a business of ministry, but they do not have Christian character. He said we can recognize them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-18). Fruit does not refer to success. **Instead, fruit is the natural expression of the character of the tree.** Fruit of a person is his life's demonstration of his inward character. If a person is not bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 13), or is living a life of sin, he has sinful character and is not a true spiritual leader (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

The Apostle Peter said that believers are not to be controlled by their former desires but must be holy in all that they do (1 Peter 1:14-15).

Good fruit does not mean that a person understands how to perfectly apply all Christian principles in his behavior. We are all in the process of learning God's truth. A child working in a garden may mistakenly pull up the wrong plants. God does not judge us for sincere mistakes. However, grace does not excuse a person for refusing to repent of his sin. The Apostle John tells us that a person is cleansed as he walks in the light, living according to the truth (1 John 1:7).

## Integrity in Leadership

Leaders make decisions that others do not have to make. A leader's responsibilities and opportunities create many opportunities for temptation. A leader's decisions are especially important because they affect many other people.

A ministry leader should remember that he, following the example of Jesus, is called to serve God and people. His goal must not be to become a celebrity who is praised and served by others.

If a congregation has a large number of people who are not sincere worshippers of God, they try to change the worship service to focus on performance. These people honor talent more than spiritual focus. They want performers to lead the worship service rather than true spiritual leaders. They are entertained by sensual performance. They are willing to hire unconverted musicians who are just as willing to play in discos and are unqualified to participate in worship. The pastor must guard the worship of the church so that it attracts and serves true worshippers.<sup>3</sup>

- » If a person visits a church on Sunday morning and sees the same musicians he saw in a disco Saturday night, what will he think of the church?

A leader may be tempted to consider himself exempt from the normal rules of morality. Some pastors have wrong relationships with men or women in their congregation just as worldly leaders in their culture do. Some churches wrongly tolerate the immoral behavior of pastors because of their status.

A pastor may be tempted to believe that he owns the church. If he thinks this way, he puts people into positions because they are loyal to him, not because they will do a job well. This kind of pastor favors relatives and wants to choose who will inherit the church after him. He covers the sins and mistakes of his supporters in the church. He treats the church's money and property as if they are his own.

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3 For a full exploration of Christian worship, see the Shepherds Global Classroom course *Introduction to Christian Worship*, available at <https://www.shepherdsglobal.org/courses>



## The Witness of the Church

The church can become corrupted when it fails to require integrity. When the congregation shares the desires of the world, they accept leaders who are like the world. They tolerate sin in their religious leaders. Even sincere believers may follow sinful leaders because they don't understand the necessity of integrity and good fruit. When this happens, people of the world take control of the church, and it loses its witness.

Peter warned that false spiritual leaders would make a business of the church (2 Peter 2:3). When the church becomes popular in its society, worldly people become interested in getting status in the church. They learn the forms of worship and religious leadership but have not repented of their sins and found salvation through Christ. A church that does not have good doctrine fails to recognize these false leaders.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus used the illustration of salt to explain what happens when the church loses its distinctiveness (Matthew 5:13). Salt that loses its saltiness is no better than sand or gravel.

When the church becomes like society, the church can no longer change society.

The world mocks the church when the church follows the world's patterns and does not follow biblical truth.

## REPRESENTING GOD

*Theology* is the system of our Christian beliefs, including doctrines about God, humanity, sin, Christ, and salvation. Our beliefs about God are foundational to all other beliefs.

When God began to reveal himself, the first purpose of his revelation was to show what kind of God he is. God described himself primarily as *holy*. The Hebrew word for holiness (*kadosh*) occurs more than 600 times in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah repeatedly referred to God as "The Holy One of Israel." The holiness of God was the theme of worship (Psalm 99:3, 5). God's people did not worship just because of his power, but because of his holiness.

God also revealed himself as *love*. The predominant passage in the Old Testament where God revealed himself to Moses and Israel is Exodus 34:6-7. There God describes himself as, "...a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty..." It's important to keep God's holiness and love together. A term often used to describe the nature of God is "holy-love." Because God is holy, he demands holiness in us; because God is love he has made a way for us to become holy, as he is holy.

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4      2 Peter 2 and the book of Jude are written on the subject of false spiritual leaders.

God's holiness showed that people are not fit to serve and worship God without first being transformed by grace. The prophet Isaiah saw that he had something in common with the sinners he had been preaching to—he had a heart that was not pure (Isaiah 6:5). “Unclean lips” represented wrong words and actions that came from an impure heart. This impurity made Isaiah unfit to be in the presence of God. Isaiah did not try to justify his condition, nor did God. God responded to the prophet's confession with grace; not tolerating grace but cleansing and transforming grace (Isaiah 6:6-7).

The God of Israel was different from the false gods and required a different kind of worship. In Psalm 24 King David asked the question, “Who is allowed to come into the presence of the Lord?” (verse 3). He was asking, “Whom does God accept as a worshipper?” Then he gave the answer, “The person with clean hands and a pure heart” (verse 4). Not everyone is accepted as a worshipper of God. A worshipper is not just a person who can lift his hands and feel emotions. A sinful person does not qualify.<sup>5</sup>

God said his own holiness is the basis for His requirement that his worshippers be holy. “Ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44-45, Leviticus 19:2, Leviticus 20:26, Leviticus 21:8). God was not a god like the ancient eastern deities or the gods of later Greek and Roman mythology. The myths about those gods described them as corrupt, deceitful, and cruel. These gods had all the character flaws of humanity. Like shadows on a wall, they were exaggerated distortions of man's image. These gods did not require a moral standard or a standard of character, and their worshippers were wicked and cruel.

The God of Israel is not a projection of man's image. He is not imaginary, but has revealed himself to people. He is different, and that is why his worshippers must be different.

God's standard is repeated in the New Testament: “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15-16). *Conduct* is a word that refers to our attitudes and behavior—every part of life. God does not ask only that his worshippers be *ceremonially* holy or *called* “holy” when they really are not. He expects his worshippers to actually live holy lives.

Our attitudes and behavior show what we think of God and the kind of relationship we have with him. The Apostle Paul said that the Jews who were proud of having God's law dishonored God by breaking it. Because of their behavior, people said bad things about them and about their God (Romans 2:23-24).

What kind of God do you represent? What do people think your God is like? If you want people to know that God is holy while he is also forgiving and gracious, they need to see that you are like that.

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5 For a full exploration of genuine worship, see the Shepherds Global Classroom course *Introduction to Christian Worship*, available at <https://www.shepherdsglobal.org/courses>



Churches need their pastors to teach consistent and thorough doctrine. A pastor should not neglect basic doctrine. Every generation and all new converts need to hear it. Even mature believers need to be reminded. The pastor's sermons should not just be emotional, dynamic performances for building excitement. He must describe God and describe how the Christian life should match the Bible's concept of God in all of its details.

The church should transform society and culture, but that will happen only as our biblical concept of God is applied to the details of our lives.

## **FOR GROUP SHARING**

- » What concepts in this lesson were new to you? How do you plan to change your approach to Christian living?
- » What is a concept that you think is commonly neglected in the churches in your culture? How would you explain that concept to someone you know?

## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father,

I want to honor you with a life that matches your character. I want to represent you in a world that is not submitted to you.

Make my life consistent with your truth. Help me to be willing to change anything that should not be part of a believer's life.

Thank you for your empowering Spirit and transforming grace.

Amen

## LESSON 1 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a paragraph about a worldly value that has influenced your thinking or behavior in the recent past. Then find two scripture passages that address this part of life and record them. Write a paragraph about how you can begin living in obedience to these scriptures.
2. Study Titus 2:11-14. Prepare a brief presentation about Christian integrity based on this passage. Use this passage to explain why Bible truths must be applied throughout the details of life. Share this presentation at the beginning of the next class time.

## LESSON 2

# THE PRACTICE OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Explore the practical relationship between Christian love and the believer's personal life.
2. Reflect on ten areas in which believers should increasingly align their lives to scriptural principles.
3. Explain at least two reasons why believers differ on personal application of scriptural principles related to lifestyle issues.
4. Summarize nine principles (given in the text) for making lifestyle decisions.

### AN OBEDIENT SON

An African mother went outside to check on her young son who was playing under a tree. She was shocked to see a large poisonous snake hanging from the tree just over her son's head. The snake seemed about to bite the boy. The mother knew that if she tried to warn her son he would look up instead of moving away quickly. Instead of explaining, she called to him, "Son, drop down low to the ground right now." The boy was puzzled, but because he was taught to obey, he did so. Then his mother said, "Stay low and crawl to me." Again, he obeyed and was soon safely away from the snake.

Why did the boy obey without understanding the reason for the command? He respected his mother because he had been taught to obey already, and he had been corrected when he disobeyed. He also trusted his mother because he knew his mother loved him. We should obey God completely, not only because we fear his correction but because we know he loves us.

## THE MOTIVATION OF LOVE

- » What would be some results if a person loved God more? You could consider the question by finishing this statement: “If I loved God more, I would...”

One result of loving God more is described in Philippians 1:9-11:

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

These verses talk about an ongoing process in the believer’s life. His love should be continually increasing. As his love for God grows, his ability to discern what is best is strengthened and expanded. As he discerns what is best, he adapts his life to focus on what is best. This must be happening in order for a believer to be sincere and without offense.

Just as a newborn baby has a lifetime of learning and growing ahead of him, so we, at the time of our conversion, do not understand all the truth that should guide our lives. In the above verses, Paul wrote to people who had been followers of Christ for some time already. Yet Paul prayed that they would keep loving God more, and by that love be able to better understand and obey God’s will.

We should expect to continually improve our lives as God gives discernment. God wants our complete obedience in all aspects of our lives, not just in religious observance.

We should not assume that we already know everything that we need to know about how to live. We should not assume that we have made all of the adjustments to our lives that are needed.

## SOME AREAS IN WHICH A BELIEVER SHOULD IMPROVE

### 1. Carefulness of influence (Proverbs 22:1, Matthew 5:14-16)

Are there things you do that you would not want others to do? Would you be disappointed to see your pastor do the things you do?

### 2. Self-control (Proverbs 16:32, Proverbs 25:28; Galatians 5:22-23)

Do you control your feelings and desires enough to do what you should, or do you sometimes let your feelings cause you to act in a way that would be expected of an unbeliever?

**3. Care of health (1 Corinthians 6:19, 1 Corinthians 10:31)**

Do you care for your body as a set of irreplaceable tools dedicated to work for God? Since your body belongs to God, it should not be damaged. You are not to treat it carelessly.

**4. Choice of entertainment (Colossians 3:17, 1 Corinthians 6:12)**

Does your entertainment tend to bring you into struggles with temptation by causing wrong thoughts or attitudes? Beware of anything that presents sin as attractive or funny.

**5. Manners (Romans 13:9, Colossians 3:19, 1 Timothy 2:8, 1 Peter 3:2)**

Treat others respectfully, because people are made in the image of God and have eternal destinies. People have customs for showing courtesy. You should learn to be courteous in a way that people recognize. You should be kind even when someone doesn't deserve it.

**6. Business ethics (Proverbs 20:23)**

Are you completely honest in all dealings? Do you describe things exactly as they are or cause someone to think something that is not true?

**7. Punctuality (Galatians 5:14)**

Time is a valuable resource that we should use for God. Do you put value on your time and others' time by keeping a schedule when possible?

**8. Dress (1 Timothy 2:9, 1 Peter 3:3-4)**

Does your clothing show these values?

- Decency - concealing the body sufficiently
- Humility - not trying to attract undue attention or admiration by what you wear
- Thriftiness - not buying more expensive clothes than you need

**9. Language (Colossians 4:6, Ephesians 4:29)**

Is your conversation pure and respectful of God and others? Many of the words the world uses as exclamations come from obscenities or terms for God.

**10. Reliability (Psalm 61:8; Proverbs 20:6, Proverbs 28:20)**

Do you keep commitments? Can people expect you to do what you say? Do you forget your promises if they are not convenient?

Many people don't take seriously their need to improve. They feel responsible only for the plain commands of scripture, not realizing that those commands have many applications.

We need to realize that improvement is linked to the increase of our love for God. We need to seriously meditate on the verses we started with in this lesson (Philippians 1:9-11). If our love is increasing, our discernment and choice of right behaviors should be improving.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

- » What is an example of a change that you made in your life when God showed you that an attitude, habit, or action was not the best?
- » Is there something in your lifestyle that you know you should change? Will you do it?
- » Are you doing anything that you are not sure pleases God?
- » Are you willing to let God show you in prayer any changes that you should make?

Let's commit to pray this week with an open heart so that God can show us His values and any changes He wants to make in our lives. Will you commit to do that? Next week I will ask you if you did.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- » Have you ever noticed differences among believers, especially in practical questions of what they do and what they don't do? Why are there these differences, when they use the same Bible? Since there are so many differences among believers, does it really matter what we do? Why?

Not all believers agree on the details of how to live out biblical principles and values. Yet a follower of Christ must be serious about living consistent with what he believes.

Behavior, choices of entertainment, and clothing all show something about the inclinations of the heart.

Here are some principles that every believer should remember as he tries to discern what is best in specific lifestyle issues.

## Principles for Lifestyle Decisions

### 1. We must obey all of the Bible's commands to believers.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:19,

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

We cannot simply choose the points that we think are most important. No scriptural command is unimportant enough to ignore.

### 2. God's commands are for our benefit.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13,

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?

Psalms 84:11,

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.

God does not keep from us something that is good, nor command something that is harmful for us. We would not be better off without His restrictions. To reject His directions is to doubt His wisdom and love. We prove that we truly have faith in God's goodness and wisdom when we obey the instructions of His Word instead of following human ideas.

### 3. Christian freedom is not freedom from obeying God.

Paul wrote this to believers in 1 Corinthians 9:21:

To those outside the law [of Moses] I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.

We are delivered from the law—both the Law of Moses and God's moral requirements—as a means of justification, because we are saved by grace and not by fulfilling God's commands. We are also delivered from the condemnation of the law, because the sins we committed are forgiven.

However, we are not freed from the requirement of obeying God or from the obligation to love, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). As 1 Corinthians 9:21 (above) shows, we are under God’s authority. His will for us is revealed in the Bible.

Some people wrongly believe that they must keep God’s laws as a means of receiving forgiveness for sins, or as a means of maturing spiritually. The truth is that we are saved by grace through faith, not by keeping the law (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Though we are not justified as a result of what we do, we should obey God in all of life’s details because we have been made right with him. “Having been set free from sin, [you] have become slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:18).

Because we love God and are grateful for his grace, we gladly obey him (1 John 5:3). The obedience of those who are justified is evidence of love for him (John 14:15).

#### **4. If we love God we want to know his will, not avoid it.**

1 John 5:2-3 says

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

Jeremiah 31:33 says, “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”

A person who loves God will not first ask, “Will God condemn me for doing this?” but, “What would God be most pleased with?” or, “What is the most excellent thing?” (Philippians 1:10, Titus 3:8).

#### **5. Scripture gives a basis for establishing specific rules for our lives.**

The Bible does not give only general principles. Some passages are listed in Assignment 2 that provide a basis for careful Christian living. Some of them give specific directions for the Christian lifestyle.

#### **6. Rules about details of life are not our most important beliefs.**

The Pharisees made the mistake of putting the most emphasis on minor things. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus said to them



Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

This verse does not say that there is any truth that doesn't matter, but it says that some things matter more than others. We should be more concerned about the most important things.

### **7. Keeping rules is not enough to prove our obedience or love for God.**

In the same discussion with the Pharisees Jesus said (Matthew 23:25),

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

A person may live a very strict lifestyle yet not love God or even be obeying him completely. On the other hand, a person may love God with his whole heart and yet not see the reason for some standards. Therefore, the stricter person is not necessarily more spiritual.

### **8. Our confidence in the testimony of others does not depend on the small details of their lifestyle.**

In Romans 14:10 Paul asked believers

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

This verse comes in a passage discussing the different views believers have on practical issues. There are often sincere disagreements about what a follower of Christ should and shouldn't do.

Another believer may not agree with our interpretation of a particular scripture passage, or he may not see the harmfulness of something we have rejected. It may be that God is working on different aspects of his life, or that God has placed him in a different cultural context. That doesn't mean that the person is not a true believer.

- » What do you think of this statement? "God will show everyone the truth about how he should live; therefore, all believers should have the same practices."

Christ's followers have never had agreement about all the practices of life. People who love God and live godly lives do not all agree about practices and details of doctrine. It is wrong for us to say that others are not believers because they interpret or apply scriptures differently. We may accept them as sincere believers though we think their opinions are wrong. The work of the Holy Spirit does not cause all believers to have an identical lifestyle.

We must also be ready to learn from the perspectives of other believers. Pride causes me to think that I always interpret or apply scripture perfectly. But a humble, teachable, accepting spirit cultivates Christian unity and edifies the body of Christ.

### **9. Tolerance of diverse opinions does not excuse personal carelessness.**

“Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5b).

“But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

Disastrous results will follow when one violates his conscience. If a person decides to do something that he thinks is wrong, he is guilty of sin. There are blessings when one walks in the light God has given him (1 John 1:7).

## **FOR GROUP SHARING**

There will be no difficulty in starting discussion on this topic. Some students may emphasize the need for churches to require rules of behavior. Others may emphasize tolerance of differences.

Try to get fair consideration for each of the nine principles listed above.

- » Which of these principles do you think many people forget?
- » Which of these principles are you most likely to forget?

## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father,

I want my love for you to continually increase. I want to better understand your will for me.

Help me to learn to discern what is most pleasing to you so that I can live a life that is pure and without offense.

Help me to see habits and attitudes that need to change, and to gain habits and attitudes that glorify you.

I want to bear fruit for the glory of God.

Amen

## LESSON 2 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Study 1 Corinthians 13. This chapter describes the life of a person who has the love that he should have for others. Let God show you how He wants to change you to make your life more consistent with love. List some changes you would like God to enable you to make in your own life.
2. Study the following scriptures that provide a basis for careful Christian behavior:
  - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
  - 1 Corinthians 10:31
  - 1 Corinthians 11:14-15
  - 1 Timothy 2:9-10
  - 1 Peter 3:3-4
  - Psalm 19:14
  - Psalm 101:3

Write the basic meaning of each passage. Describe details of lifestyle that you believe you should practice because of those scriptures.



# LESSON 3

# WORK

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Explain what the Bible teaches about work.
2. Demonstrate the characteristics of a Christian work ethic.

## BROTHER LAWRENCE, WORKER FOR GOD

Brother Lawrence was a simple monk who lived in a monastery in the 1600s. He became famous for doing very common work—peeling potatoes and washing dishes—out of love of God and for never letting God’s presence be far from his mind. He continually made God the central focus in his whole life, including his work.

*The Practice of the Presence of God* is a very brief book which has been read by millions. It contains interviews and letters from Brother Lawrence. He writes, “Our sanctification [does] not depend upon changing our works, but in doing that for God’s sake which we commonly do for our own.”

- » What is work? Is work only *employment*—being hired to do something?

Work includes employment, but it also consists of taking care of ourselves and others, managing the things we have, producing things, doing business for profit, and helping others freely.

- » Should a believer work? Why?

Many people think it would be wonderful to have enough money that they would not have to work. They think the most enjoyable life would be a life of leisure.

## A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF WORK

Think about how God designed the world at the beginning. It was perfect (Genesis 1:31). It was the perfect environment for the first people God made. God gave jobs to the first people (Genesis 1:28). God could have designed the world to meet all human needs without work, but he didn't. God knew that the best life for people includes work.

God planned for our work to be involved with our relationships. People must learn to cooperate, depend on each other, be reliable for one another, use strengths and help others with weaknesses, meet challenges together, work out disagreements, correct mistakes, be trained, and train others.

God gave people the authority and responsibility to manage the earth, bring it under control, and develop it for his glory. This assignment has led to the development of agriculture, raising of animals, mining minerals out of the earth, and development of technology.

God created us above the rest of nature because we have something of His nature in us. Psalm 8:6-8 says

You have given him [mankind] dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Because of the first sin, the world changed, and work includes many difficulties and frustrations that were not in God's original design (Genesis 2:17-19). However, we must realize that God designed us to need work.

Our work is similar to God's work of creation. Work is man's way of reshaping his environment. Earning a living is not the only purpose of work. People have the instinct to change their environment. They try to improve their houses. They try to dispose of trash. A person who no longer desires to work has given up his desire and ability to change his environment. He is giving up part of what it means to be human.

» What do you think when you see a house or yard that is not maintained well?

The human orientation toward creating, planning, organizing and producing—work—is part of the image of God in man. Therefore *all* work is sacred for the believer. All work is an act of worship when it is done to please the Lord (Colossians 3:17, 23). Jesus said that his Father worked, and therefore he worked as well (John 5:17).

You should not think of work as an unpleasant necessity, like taking medicine when you are sick. Work is not just something that is necessary for survival. It is part of God's design for humanity.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 says that we should work, “For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”

What shall we do if our work seems insignificant? Mahatma Gandhi said, “What you do may seem insignificant, but it is most significant that you do it.” Imagine a man who was hired to sweep floors. That may seem like an insignificant job, but he is making an important choice. When he goes to work every day, he is choosing to do that rather than spend his time idly, giving no value to anyone. He is choosing to take responsibility for supporting himself rather than being a parasite on friends or family. He is taking care of those who are depending on him, perhaps a wife and children, rather than forcing them to look for help. All those considerations help us realize that while the work itself may seem insignificant, it is significant that he chooses to do it.

Are there many people who truly cannot work? No. Even if a person is unable to be employed to work for wages, he probably could do something to help meet the needs of others.

Followers of Christ should work because they are responsible for themselves and others. They should not expect others to provide for their needs if they are not willing to do what they can.

A believer is first responsible for his family. “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).

A believer is commanded by scripture to work so that he can meet the needs of others. “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (Ephesians 4:28). Notice the contrast between the one who steals, taking something for nothing; and the one who works so that he can give. A believer is not just one who does not steal, but one who works in order to give.

You can find work to do even if you are not hired by anyone. Find ways to be helpful and meet the needs of others. It is better to live that way than to do nothing and complain that nobody helps you.

Believers should work to provide for themselves and for their families, and to be able to give to others who have needs.

## GOD'S USUAL WAY OF SUPPLYING OUR NEEDS

- » What would you say to a person who says that he will not work because he is depending on God to supply his needs?

Imagine that late one summer you walked into your backyard and found that a large section of it had grown tomatoes, corn, beans, and other vegetables, and there was enough to last you for a long time.

Would that seem like a miracle? It happened to thousands of people last summer. They walked into their backyards and found all that growing and even more. But they weren't amazed, or even surprised, because a few months before, they had cultivated the ground, then planted seeds in it, then for months made sure it was watered and weeded. So when they found a crop growing, it was only what they expected.

You may react, "Then that wasn't a miracle at all." But God made millions of plants, and people have never made one. Psalm 104:14 says, "You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth." God does it, but people prepare for it by preparing the ground, planting seeds, and watering when necessary.

A lot of people think of an act of God as something unusual, an exception to natural law, such as when Jesus healed or when the sun stood still. So in that sense, the growth of plants is not miraculous, because it is ordinary.

But in wishing for a miracle, we too often ignore God's normal way of doing things. There were millions of people who walked into their backyards today and did not find anything growing that they could eat. They did not get involved in God's way of producing food. The process for food growth is just one example of God's normal way of working. For example, God's normal way of providing for needs is through human's work. Proverbs 14:23 teaches us that "In all toil there is profit," while Proverbs 19:15 warns us that "an idle person will suffer hunger."

There are people who wish God would provide something for them, but they reject opportunities to work, because these opportunities are not things they want to do.

What if you are willing to work but have not found someone to hire you? There is work that you can do to help others, and through that work, some of your needs can be met. If you are unemployed, you have time. Why not look around and see what you can do to help someone else?

Imagine a man who is unemployed and spends hours every day sitting and doing nothing. Is there really nothing valuable for him to do? In his neighborhood are people who need help. There is trash in his yard and on the street that should be cleaned up. There



is ground that could be cultivated to raise food. There may be books available for him to read and increase his knowledge. There is someone for whom he can pray. The man who is sitting and doing nothing has one employee, himself, and his employee is not producing or developing. He is not being a good employer of himself, so he probably will not get the opportunity to manage others.

In many times and places, most people are not hired by someone. They produce something to exchange, or they offer a service to others. These are all ways that God provides for us.

## **BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CHRISTIAN EMPLOYMENT**

The principles of responsibility and honesty provide some ethics for believers to apply to their work.

- » How should a believer apply biblical principles when he works for an employer?

The New Testament gives directions to workers. At the time the books of the New Testament were written, many workers were slaves. An employee today differs from a slave in that he or she may have the opportunity to move to different employment. That freedom makes it possible for them to accept or reject the terms of employment. However, if they have agreed to work for certain benefits, they are required by scripture to be good workers as long as they remain with the employer.

You may be in a situation where you are not free to choose the work that you want to do. Maybe you are forced to work in an oppressive situation. You should still have the attitude of Christ. Some people work slowly and badly when they are forced because they want to show that they are not willing to be working. When a person does that, he shows that he is not free. If you want to act freely, you should work cheerfully and do the work well. When you work like that, you are acting freely, because nobody can force you to do that.

If nobody has hired you, you are your own supervisor. What kind of employee have you been for yourself?

### **Ephesians 6:5-8 – The Principle of Responsibility**

- » A student should read Ephesians 6:5-8 for the group. Discuss the meaning of this passage, then look at the list below to add to your observations.

Some applications from Ephesians 6:5-8:

1. A worker is to obey his employer, not only when watched, but always. That also means that he should not neglect details that he knows are unlikely to be inspected (“...not by the way of eye-service...”).

2. A worker should maintain the quality and diligence of his work as if working for God (“...as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God...”).
3. A worker will be blessed by God for faithfulness in his work (“He will receive back from the Lord...”).

## **Titus 2:9-10 – The Principle of Honesty**

- » A student should read Titus 2:9-10 for the group. Discuss the meaning of this passage, then look at the list below to add to your observations.

Some applications from Titus 2:9-10:

1. A worker should be respectful in his response to his employer’s directions (“...not argumentative...”). What are some results when a worker speaks disrespectfully about his employer to other workers?
  2. A worker should not steal from his employer, even if he thinks he deserves more pay (“...not pilfering...”).
  3. Faithful work is a testimony for the gospel; unfaithfulness is a reproach on the gospel (“...that they may adorn the doctrine of God...”).
- » What are some examples of ways that some people are dishonest in their work? Describe how a believer should be different.

The scripture passages in Titus and Ephesians are talking about how a person should work if someone hires him. The same principles apply to a person who is hired to build something or repair something. He should do the same quality of work that he would want someone to do for him. A person who makes things to sell should not hide defects to make buyers think they are getting something better.

## **DEVELOPING DESIRABLE QUALITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT**

What qualities do employers want a worker to have? Research shows that employers want people who have a positive attitude about work. They want people who are reliable and ready to learn. Often people are hired for their attitude about work more than for their training or talents. God also cares about our attitude toward work as we have seen in scripture already.

Develop the qualities that make you a valuable worker. You should be ready to serve. You need to be honest, reliable, and patient. Some unemployed people think only about what

they need. An employer does not hire you to help you; he hires you to help him. You need to be the kind of person who would be valuable to an employer.

A person may say, “I would be friendly and helpful and honest if I were getting paid for it,” but employers don’t hire an unfriendly person and pay him to be friendly. They don’t hire a dishonest person and pay him to be honest. They are looking for a friendly, helpful, and honest person to hire.

In the church things are different. We don’t wait for people to give or be friendly before we are willing to help them. God also reaches out to you and blesses you before you do anything good. But for your own benefit, you need to start responding to grace. Learn to give and serve and smile.

Develop your qualities. Learn skills by working with people who already have those skills. Maybe you can offer a service to others. Maybe you can make a product to sell. Maybe you can raise a crop. Most of all, have an attitude of helpfulness to others even when it does not profit you. God will bless your service.

What does it mean to *serve*? To serve is to use your abilities, time, and energy for the benefit of someone else.

Whether or not you are working for an employer, service requires you to set aside some of your rights and privileges. For example, if you are working for others you may not be able to sleep as late as you want in the morning, and you cannot spend work time doing what you want to do. You submit aspects of your life to a purpose you are hired for. Employment even affects the way you dress and the way you treat other people.

A readiness to serve brings many benefits:

1. It forms relationships that result in some of your needs being met. Often this happens in unpredictable ways, so it’s not just a matter of helping the people that you think will be able to do something for you.
2. It gives you a valuable place in the church, the body of Christ.
3. It may make you a person that someone wants to hire.

What if you can begin to form a new mindset—looking for ways to serve others? Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Do you really believe that? Do you live like you believe it?

There is a spiritual principle of thinking of the needs of others and not being totally absorbed in your own needs (Philippians 2:4). There is also a practical principle. Remember, those who hire people are not usually doing it to help the people they hire. They hire someone

because they think that person can meet a need that they have. So if a person is only able to think of what he wants somebody to do for him, he may not be worth hiring.

Things happen when people are willing to work. Those benefits are things that would seem like miracles if they just happened unexpectedly, but God has a normal way of bringing those benefits into your life.

It's probably a waste of time to be hoping, wishing, or even praying for God to do a miracle if you are not willing to work so that you can receive help the way God likes to give it.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

- » Someone could share a story about how good work for an employer made an opportunity for the gospel.
- » Someone could share a story about how helping a person in his neighborhood was a good demonstration of Christian care.
- » The group should share ideas together about the work opportunities that are available for a person who is unemployed.

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the privilege I have to work creatively. Help me to see opportunities to help others. Provide my needs as I work to take responsibility for myself and others.

Bless me with resources so that I can support my family, give to the church, and help others with needs.

Help me to be honest and reliable in all of my responsibilities. Prepare me for greater opportunities and responsibilities if that is your will. Thank you for always being faithful to me.

Amen

## LESSON 3 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Study these passages:

- Proverbs 6:6-11
- Proverbs 10:4-5
- Proverbs 12:11, 24, 27
- Proverbs 13:4, 11
- Proverbs 14:23
- Proverbs 18:9
- Proverbs 20:13
- Proverbs 22:29
- Proverbs 24:30-34
- Proverbs 26:13-16

Write a page of points and applications about work and laziness from these passages.

2. Work with another classmate to prepare a brief presentation on one of the topics listed below. (The class leader will assign a topic to each team.) Share the presentation at the beginning of the next class time.

- Work and the image of God in man
- Work and responsibility for oneself and others
- The way a Christian employee should work (This presentation should be based on Ephesians 6:5-8 and Titus 2:9-10.)
- The way God usually provides for people's needs
- Work and relationships with others



# LESSON 4

# RELATIONSHIPS

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Apply the principles of love, peace, and respect in relationships with others.
2. Embrace nine scriptural rules that enable a believer's speech to bless others and glorify God.

## ROBINSON CRUSOE, SURPRISED BY RELATIONSHIP

In the fictional story *Robinson Crusoe*, a man survived a shipwreck at sea by swimming to an island. There he was alone for months. He built a shelter, made clothing, and learned how to find food. Then one day while walking near the sea he was shocked to see a human footprint in the sand. It meant that another person was there. He did not know if the person would be a friend or an enemy. He didn't know anything about the person's character, language, ethnicity, or reason for being there. He didn't know how this person would change his life on the island. Because relationships greatly impact an individual's life, Robinson experienced both hope and fear when he saw the footprint.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS TO SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The first century church, made up of men and women, Jews and Gentiles, and people from many different social classes and cultures had to work through a number of conflicts. The Apostle Paul told them to welcome one another (Romans 15:7).

- » Imagine a man alone on an island. Can he be patient with anyone? Can he forgive anyone?

You could not develop and show the Christian quality of patience without being in relationship with other people. You could not give forgiveness to others or be forgiven by others without relationships.

» What are some other Christian qualities and activities that require other people?

These things happen in relationships with other people. The qualities can be developed and demonstrated only in relationships. That means that our relationships with people have much effect on our spiritual development.

The Bible gives directions for different kinds of relationships. There are specific directions for relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, pastors and churches, and elderly people and young people.

There are at least three principles in scripture that apply to any kind of human relationship: the principles of peace, love, and respect.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF PEACE

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14)

This verse states the importance of relationships very emphatically. Holiness is closely connected to pursuing peace with everyone.

» What are some things we should do to pursue peace with people?

To pursue peace, you will at least give every person the treatment that you owe (Romans 13:7). To those whom you owe gratitude, respect, or obedience, you must give it. If you don't, you are guilty of causing conflict. If you fail to fulfill your responsibilities, keep your promises, or pay what you should to others, you are not pursuing peace. When you realize you have failed to give what you should, you should seek forgiveness and fulfill your obligations as much as you can.

But to pursue peace requires more than giving what you owe. It includes giving the love and kindness you do *not* owe.

» A student should read Titus 3:2-3 for the group.

We should be patient and forgiving, understanding that unconverted people tend to have wrong attitudes and wrong motives.



If you want peace, you will seek reconciliation when there is a conflict. You will be willing to forgive. You will not be quick to assume that peace cannot be restored. You will not easily accept a permanent separation.

Jesus said that you must go to the person who wronged you and explain to him what he has done (Matthew 18:15). If you consider the matter too small to be worth confrontation, then you should not tell others about it or hold resentment against the wrongdoer.

Sometimes people struggle with unforgiveness towards other believers who have done wrong against them. We may expect mistreatment from unconverted people, but it's hard to understand when other believers do something wrong against us.

Jesus said that we must be willing to keep on forgiving even when people mistreat us repeatedly (Matthew 18:21-22). A common reason that people leave the church and give up spiritually is resentment of mistreatment from Christians. Resentment often comes before other kinds of spiritual failure.

When a person refuses to forgive, he puts an area of his life in resistance to God's authority, for God requires us to forgive. (Read Ephesians 4:32.) That area becomes a territory from which Satan can affect other parts of the life. If a person refuses to forgive, he will soon be unable to resist temptations that seem totally unrelated.

The basis of every personal offense is our value of our rights. Because we believe we deserve certain treatment or respect, we are offended when we do not receive it. We believe we deserve better than we get.

The key to forgiving others is to understand redemption. To redeem means to buy back. Since God has redeemed us, we belong to Him, and our rights belong to Him. We must consciously yield our rights to God. You can pray, "Lord, I know that all my rights belong to you. I want you to take charge of them and give me only what you see is good for me to have." Then, when people treat you well, you can thank God that He allowed that privilege to you. When someone treats you badly, you can remember that God has charge of your rights, and He saw that you could be better developed without having that right at that time.

By forgiving others, you are submitting to God and letting Him develop you as He chooses. This principle of surrendering your rights to God applies to every human relationship. (Other references to forgiveness include Colossians 3:13, Matthew 6:15, and Romans 12:19.)

## **THE PRINCIPLE OF LOVE**

The person to whom we owe nothing we still must treat with love. Because we have received grace, we are in debt to God. We cannot pay Him back. He has no needs, but He has told us to give to others the undeserved love that we have received.

“Owe no one anything except to love each other” (Romans 13:8).

Love is evidence that a person is a true believer.

If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (1 John 4:20).

There is a special love among Christian believers, and Jesus takes personally your actions and attitudes toward other believers. He will say at the judgment, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

But Christian love is to be expressed not only toward other believers. In Matthew 5:44-45 Jesus said,

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Some people find it difficult to be kind to those who offend them, but there is never an excuse to be rude. We are not to treat people as they deserve. We are to treat them with love and kindness whether they seem to deserve it or not (1 Corinthians 16:14). We need to remember that when we were unbelievers, we were not fit for God’s love, but He loved us anyway (Titus 3:2-3).

## THE PRINCIPLE OF RESPECT

- » If I offered you for free a \$100 bill that is dirty and torn, would you want it? Would you reject it because it is dirty and torn?

You would take it because it has a value that does not depend on its condition.

Every person deserves respect because human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The image of God gives every person inherent value.

Some people may not have high intelligence. Some people lack skills, training, or something else that would make them successful or useful by ordinary standards. Yet they still have value because they were made in the image of God.

All people have this essential value, even if they’ve made themselves less valuable in other ways by their foolish choices. Those who have quit school without finishing, destroyed their health, or formed bad habits are still valuable as persons made in the image of God.

Because of the inherent value of the image of God in every person, respect should be demonstrated in every contact between people. Courtesy is the minimum.

Manipulation and deception are wrong, because everyone makes choices with eternal consequences and needs to know the real factors for a decision. To cause a person to do something right for the wrong reason is not a success, for he still hasn't made the right choice.

As much as possible, we should treat people respectfully even when their behavior is wrong. Even correction of mistakes and punishment of wrongdoing (by those who have the proper authority to do it) are done with consciousness that we are dealing with immortal beings with something of God's nature.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

There should be abundant examples of applying these principles.

- » Share and ask for examples of when someone made an effort to follow peace.
- » Share and ask for a commitment from members to forgive those against whom they have had resentment.
- » Ask for a situation when a person could show someone more love than they seem to deserve.
- » Discuss what it means to treat a person with respect even when his behavior is wrong.

## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CONVERSATION

- » There is an old statement that says, "The pen is more powerful than the sword." What does that mean?

There is power in an idea, in persuasion, in communication. You can accomplish more by motivating people than by forcing them. An idea—a concept—can spread and influence many people.

The Bible talks about the power of words to do either good or harm (James 3). The plan of salvation is being finished by the power of the gospel, entrusted to human messengers.

How can we use our words to accomplish good and avoid harm? The Bible gives some principles.

### **1. Don't talk too much.**

"A fool multiplies words..." (Ecclesiastes 10:14).

"When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent" (Proverbs 10:19).

"Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent" (Proverbs 17:28).

So don't talk too much. An excessive talker does not properly value either his own words or others' words. He says things that he doesn't really mean, and he assumes that other people do the same. He gives opinions without knowledge. You don't have to give an opinion about something you don't know; not every opinion is of equal value.

### **2. Don't speak before you think.**

Don't let your feelings cause you to make statements that you will regret.

"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19).

"A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back" (Proverbs 29:11).

"Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly" (Proverbs 14:29).

### **3. Don't judge a situation at first sight.**

"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame" (Proverbs 18:13).

"The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him" (Proverbs 18:17).

Most conflicts are based on misunderstandings. Time and carefulness can usually resolve them. If someone with a reputation for honesty says something that seems wrong to you, don't be quick to judge that person.

"Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears" (Proverbs 26:17).

### **4. Be careful with humor.**

Because of the effect that words can have, uncontrolled humor is like a weapon in the hands of a crazy man.

“Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, ‘I am only joking!’” (Proverbs 26:18-19).

Don’t cause people to make serious mistakes because of believing your joke. Don’t tell them you are serious when you are not—they will not believe you again. Don’t make fun of defects that people can’t help. Don’t joke about someone’s failures. Don’t tell jokes that make sin seem trivial.

» What are some other wrong uses of humor?

### **5. Don’t say it to the wrong person.**

“Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered” (Proverbs 11:13).

“For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases” (Proverbs 26:20).

Something may need to be said, but you may not be the right person to say it. You should not say it in the place of the authority who ought to say it.

Do not spread information about people’s mistakes.

People will not trust you with personal information if they think you will tell others.

“Argue your case with your neighbor himself, and do not reveal another’s secret” (Proverbs 25:9).

A coward tells his cause to the wrong people instead of following the procedure in Matthew 18:15-17.

### **6. Be careful with criticism.**

There is a right time and way to criticize.

“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend...” (Proverbs 27:5-6a).

Make sure your criticism is intended to build, and not to destroy. You should demonstrate that you care about them and want to help. Usually a healthy relationship is necessary before your criticism can help.

## **7. Don't deceive.**

"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices" (Colossians 3:9).

Deception fits in the sinful life, not in the Christian life.

"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight" (Proverbs 12:22).

## **8. Keep your speech pure.**

"Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving" (Ephesians 5:4).

Don't tell about past or present scandals except when appropriate to officially deal with a situation. Don't tell jokes that you must tell secretively. People of the world commonly use sexual terms or terms for private body parts in their exclamations, but that is not appropriate for a believer. It is irreverent to use terms referring to God or Jesus as an exclamation in a time of stress, unless you are sincerely calling upon God for help.

## **9. Don't divide people with your words.**

"A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends" (Proverbs 16:28).

"There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him... [the seventh] one who sows discord among brothers" (Proverbs 6:16, 19).

Don't try to make yourself look better at another's expense. Don't cause conflict between others. Don't hurt the effectiveness of someone's ministry by gossip.

Before speaking, consider not only "Is it true?" but also "Why should I say it?"

## **Conclusion**

A believer should be willing to apologize if he realizes he has done harm with his words. He should be willing to correct anything that he said if he realizes it was not accurate.

Harmful and offensive words from others do not justify wrong words from you.

There are some errors in speech that you can gradually improve. For example, you can learn to think before speaking. There are other errors that show a problem in the heart, such as the desire to hurt someone with your words. If you are guilty of that kind of speech, you need to ask God to forgive you and to cleanse your heart of that tendency.

Your speech reveals much about your heart (Luke 6:45). Don't damage your Christian testimony by speaking in a way that is not consistent with Christian values.

Your speech can bless those around you. Most ministry consists of communication. The effect of your words can be greatly increased if you follow biblical principles.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

- » Most people see the faults of others' speech, but not their own. The leader could share an example of a time when he failed to follow one of these principles or could admit which one he is weakest in.
- » Ask members to choose a principle they are weak in and to commit to improving with God's help.

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Help me to live by the scriptural principles of peace, love, and respect in all my relationships.

I want to be forgiving to those who do wrong against me. Help me to seek reconciliation with those who are in conflict with me.

Help me to respect every person because they were made in your image. Help me to remember the effects that my conversation can have, and to take responsibility for my words. I want my words to accomplish good and not harm.

I want my testimony for you to be respected.

Thank you for the privilege of communicating your truth.

Amen

## LESSON 4 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read James 3. Observe the great potential of conversation described here. In verses 13-18 notice how speech flows naturally from the person's spiritual condition. Read Ephesians 4:25-32. Write a paragraph prayer in response to these scriptures.
2. Study Ephesians 5:22-6:9. List and explain the specific directions for behavior in various relationships. Write an explanation of how these directions are related to the principles of love, peace, and respect discussed in this lesson.
3. Pick three of the following questions. Write a paragraph answering each one of them:
  - What are the practical implications of the fact that God has called us to pursue peace in our relationships?
  - Why is forgiveness of others essential to maintaining one's salvation?
  - What does it mean for a person to give their rights to God?
  - What is the motivation for our love for others who may be undeserving?
  - How should the fact that all people are made in the image of God affect our relationships with others?



# LESSON 5

## GOD'S GUIDANCE

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Understand how God helps us to make decisions.
2. Know how to be ready to discern God's will and make good decisions.
3. Avoid errors when seeking direction.

### THE TSUNAMI IN PALU, A FAILURE OF COMMUNICATION

In September 2018, an earthquake beneath an island caused a tsunami (giant wave) to move toward the city of Palu, Indonesia. A man on top of a high building saw the wave coming. He shouted warnings to the people on the streets below, but most of them ignored him. More than 4,000 people died, and 10,000 were injured.

Ten years before (2008), the government had placed 22 floating buoys in the ocean with electronic sensors designed to send a warning if a tsunami came. However, during the next few years, the buoys were not maintained, and all of them stopped working. None of them sent a warning about the tsunami in 2018.

### COMMUNICATION WITH OUR COMMANDER

- » What is something that is installed in every military vehicle?

Every tank, jeep, and plane has a radio. It is not a radio for soldiers to listen to their favorite music station, but a radio for communication.

Communication is essential to winning a battle. Soldiers in the battle cannot see the whole field of action. They may not know where their friends are and where their enemies are. They don't know which direction they should be shooting, and which direction they should be moving, except by communication from the commander.

There have been many cases where soldiers have been killed by “friendly fire,” misdirected bullets from their fellow soldiers. There have been times when missiles and bombs have struck friends instead of enemies because of bad communication.

In modern warfare, it’s a common strategy to try to knock out the enemy’s communication center. The side that succeeds at that will probably win the battle.

We are in a spiritual war. The devil tempts and tries to deceive us. The world tries to pull us into its lifestyle and values. People around us sometimes hinder and discourage us from living for God. We are like soldiers in a hostile country, with only a few friends and many enemies.

**God wants us to win the spiritual war. Prayer is our means of communicating with our commander.**

Imagine a soldier in a battle who decided to ignore his orders and go on his own. He might do harm instead of good; he might fail to help people who are depending on him; and he would probably be killed or captured.

Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18).

This verse comes at the end of a passage where Paul illustrated a believer’s spiritual armor with the military armor of his era. He said that our enemies are not physical, but spiritual.

Maybe if radios had been available for soldiers at that time, Paul would have used them to illustrate another part of the equipment of the spiritual soldier—prayer. After describing armor, Paul said that *prayer* is to be used along with the spiritual armor.

While we are standing in battle against spiritual evil, we are to be praying, staying in communication with our commander. We are called to be vigilant in prayer, being watchful and perseverant.

God has promised guidance for those who will listen.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way (Psalm 37:23).

A follower of Christ does not make decisions the way people of the world do. Some people are guided only by their own desires and ambitions. They say, “I have to do what’s right for me.” They mean that they must consider their own desires first rather than letting other

people control them. They think freedom means being self-centered. Christ's followers are different because they want to please God and bless others with their lives.

Some people advise us to look inside ourselves for all the answers. They believe that our feelings and instincts are enough guidance for decisions. They encourage young people to ignore tradition and the advice of older people. They despise religious morality. This kind of advice is popular in modern Hollywood entertainment. They feature stories about a young person who succeeds by rebelling against authority and tradition to follow his own dream. They do not show the truth that such decisions lead to sorrow and disaster.

In some cultures, individual decisions are limited by the extended family or tribe or clan. Individuals are not expected to leave the region, change their occupation, pursue higher education, or marry without the approval of the group. The hardest change in that environment is for a person to change his religion. If a person becomes a follower of Christ and is guided by principles that his people do not understand, he may suffer persecution. A believer in such a situation must pray for wisdom and guidance.

We need God's guidance all the time, and He is guiding us in ways that we are not always conscious of. He never forgets us, even when we are not thinking of Him. But there are times when we especially need to seek His direction and ask Him to help us see choices as they really are. God may want to change our course in an unexpected way.

» What are some times that we need special direction from God?

We should look for direction from God:

1. **When making life-changing decisions:** marriage, occupation, education, commitment to a local church.
2. **When making practical decisions:** job opportunities, where to live, large purchases.
3. **When planning and doing ministry:**<sup>6</sup> a person's personal calling, where and with whom to minister, themes to preach and teach.
4. **When participating in the life of the church:**<sup>7</sup> how to worship, what to learn, what to give, how to be a part of the body of Christ on the earth.

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6 Acts 16:6-9 tells of special guidance that the Holy Spirit gave Paul and Silas during a missionary trip.

7 The early church was conscious of the Holy Spirit directing their worship, guarding their doctrine, guiding them in solving problems, and empowering their message. See Acts 15:28, Acts 5:3-5, and Acts 6:10.

## HOW YOU CAN BETTER DISCERN GOD'S GUIDANCE

1. **Stay close to God in prayer (Philippians 4:6).** If much of your life becomes disconnected from your conversations with God, you are following your own inclinations and limited perceptions.
2. **Don't trust your own reasoning more than definite scriptural truth.** As the verse above says, "do not lean on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).
3. **Always obey what you know for certain to be God's will.** That will improve your perception. A person who is disobeying God's Word does not really want God's will because God expresses His will through scripture. If you obey only parts of what you know of God's will for you, you will get more confused—the light will turn to darkness (Luke 11:35).

We know it is God's will that we:

- Take up our cross daily and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23)
- Do right and speak the truth in our hearts (Psalm 15:2)
- Respect faithful spiritual leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).
- Rejoice all the time (1 Thessalonians 5:16).
- Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- Give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- Not quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19).
- Not despise prophecies (1 Thessalonians 5:20).
- Test everything (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
- Hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
- Abstain from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).
- Be sanctified completely (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

And there are many other commands which are summarized in one word: love! (Romans 13:8-10). As we do what we know to be God's will, many of our less important decisions become obvious.

4. **Be patient.** You may need to wait while God opens doors and prepares situations for you. Don't make decisions too soon because of impatience. "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him" (Psalm 37:7). Never do something you know is wrong because of a sense of urgency.

5. **Listen to good advice:** "for by wise guidance you can wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory" (Proverbs 24:6). When God wants you to make a big decision, he will often show that to other important people in your life. If there are godly, older people who know you and care about you, you should not easily decide to do something they think is a mistake.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

- » Share an example of a decision that you know was directed by God. How did God show you that it was the right decision?
- » It would be helpful if you could also share an example of a wrong decision. Did you fail to follow one of the five principles for being better guided by God?

Allow others to share similarly.

- » Someone may be presently trying to make a decision that they would be willing to discuss with the group.

## ERRORS TO AVOID WHEN SEEKING GOD'S GUIDANCE

The story is told that a preacher named Charles Stalker was praying one morning when God spoke to him and said, "I want you to go to China." Stalker was amazed because he did not have contacts or money to go. The impression was so strong that he packed his suitcase and went to the station where such a journey would begin. There a stranger approached him and asked, "Are you Charles Stalker?" then went on to say, "I was sent here with a ticket to send you to China."

- » Is this the way that we should *normally* expect God to show us His will? Would there be a problem with a person expecting to find God's will for his decisions in this way?

Some people expect supernatural directions for every decision they make. They ignore normal reasoning and circumstances, because they assume that God's will might be opposite to all reasoning and circumstances.

It is wrong to insist that God must give supernatural revelation for our decisions because he often does not show his will that way. If a person ignores reasoning and circumstances, he may think he is getting direction from God when really he is following his own emotions or imagination.

Whenever something is clearly commanded or forbidden by scripture, we know the will of God. However, there are many decisions in life where we have alternatives that are not specifically commanded or forbidden. How can a person know where he should live, what job he should have, and how he should spend his money?

- » Without special revelation, how can a person know God's will for a decision that is not specifically directed in scripture?

Some people, because they expect that God's will must be supernaturally revealed apart from reasoning and circumstances, find a nonrational method that they think God will use

to give them directions. They may ask God to give a certain sign to show His will. Or they may open the Bible to a random verse that they apply to their situation.

## MORE PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR MAKING GOOD DECISIONS

John Wesley gave some practical instructions on how to discern the will of God. He said that we know that God's general will for us, revealed in the Bible, is that we be holy and that we accomplish good. **Therefore, to make a specific decision, we must consider which option will most enable us to be holy and will maximize our effectiveness.**

**We learn from experience which circumstances are spiritually helpful for us and which are dangerous.** Some circumstances are spiritually dangerous for anyone; others are dangerous for some people, but not for everyone. As far as we are able, we should put ourselves into the circumstances that help us be spiritually strong and should avoid situations that will bring us temptation (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).

**By reason and experience, and by the advice of others, we can also discern which option will maximize our effectiveness.**

God does not ordinarily show His will by special revelation. **He expects us to apply scriptural principles as we reason carefully and examine the circumstances.** The Holy Spirit guides us even when we do not realize it. For most decisions we should not expect revelation but pray for wisdom and understanding.

People who claim to receive special direction from God sometimes refuse to listen to other people (Proverbs 12:15). They may become angry when people question their decisions. They show pride and stubbornness rather than humility.

» A student should read 1 Peter 5:5-6 for the group.

Except in unusual cases, it is better for a person not to claim that God told him exactly what to do. When a person says that, it is difficult for anyone to give him advice or opinions. It would be better for him to say that he is trying to make the best decision with God's help.

Besides the principles Wesley gave, when thinking about your options, consider:

1. **Is it consistent with clear scriptural commands?** God never wants you to disobey His Word.
2. **Is it consistent with scriptural priorities?** The Bible shows us the things that are important to God. Does your decision keep first things first?
3. **Is it consistent with a realistic view of the circumstances?** You should be able to see how God has been preparing your situation for this decision.

4. **Is it reasonable?** God may sometimes lead you to do something that does not seem reasonable, but if so, He will make His will clear. Never reject reason as a means of helping you discern God's will.
5. **Is it godly behavior?** Don't think that any situation is so exceptional that you can do something that would ordinarily be displeasing to God.
6. **Is it consistent with loving others as yourself?** Selfish motives will distort your discernment.
7. **Will it have a good influence?** What if others do as you are doing? Would that be good?
8. **Is it confirmed by godly advisors?** We all know how to find friends who will agree with us, but what would the people who seem the most spiritual and wise say about your decision?

When God's will is something very unusual, he is able to make it known to you beyond doubt. An angel, or vision, or a burning bush has given certainty for some people in the past. God may simply give an inner assurance that is beyond doubt. But when no clear message from God has been received, you should follow reliable principles for discerning the right option. Don't expect to receive special revelation for every decision. If you sincerely and prayerfully reason with the right priorities, God will be faithful to guide your decision.

In Romans 12:1-2 Paul wrote,

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

These verses show how a person's spiritual condition affects his decisions. To find the will of God, one must first be completely devoted to God. A believer's decisions contrast with the decisions of the world, because the believer is not conformed to the world but transformed and making decisions with a renewed mind.

Motives are the most important factor in discerning God's direction. A person who seeks the will of God only so that he can decide whether or not to do it will probably become confused. If a person seeks God's will according to scriptural and reasonable means, and with wholehearted determination to do it, he will not miss God's will.



## FOR GROUP SHARING

- » Discuss some applications of Wesley's principle. Some examples could be choice of friends to spend time with, options of employment, or a dating relationship (if unmarried). Consider, "*Which situation will help me be holy and will maximize my effectiveness?*"
- » Some people cannot seem to maintain their Christian identity when they are with certain kinds of people, or in certain places. Consider examples.
- » Other possible points for discussion:
  - The role of motivations in decision making
  - The error of waiting for a sign
  - The danger of trusting inner feelings too much

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for planning good things for me. I know that you are guiding my steps even more than I can see.

Help me to stay close to you in prayer. Help me to pay attention to the truth that you show me.

I want to be holy and to accomplish all I can for your glory.

Make my motives pure, so that they don't lead me away from your will. Guide me through the wise counselors that you have placed in my life.

I want to trust you in every decision. I want to follow your will with wholehearted obedience.

Thank you for wanting the best for me.

Amen



## LESSON 5 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Study Proverbs 3:1-12. Write about the priorities, attitudes, and character described here. Write about how you personally can develop those characteristics. (You should write 1-2 pages in all.)
2. Examine James 4:13-17. Notice God's sovereignty over circumstances. What is the evil—the "arrogance"—that is referred to in verse 16? Write a paragraph explaining what this passage tells us about planning for the future.
3. Write two paragraphs explaining the relationships between prayer and decision making. Answer these questions:
  - How should prayer affect our decision making?
  - What are some mistakes to avoid related to prayer and decision making?



## LESSON 6

# THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Embrace God's design and purposes for marriage.
2. Understand the value of women from God's perspective.
3. Commit to personal obedience to God's principles for Christian marriage.

### HERNANDO CORTES: A COMMITTED MAN

Hernando Cortes is not an example that we should follow in his character and ambitions. However, one of his actions demonstrated total commitment to his goals. In the spring of 1519, Hernando Cortes led an expedition to conquer the territory that is now called Mexico. The governor of Spain sponsored the mission with 11 ships and 700 men. After months at sea Cortes and his men finally reached the shores of Mexico. The next challenge was to travel across land to the capital city. Cortes knew that the travel on land would be difficult and dangerous. He wanted his men to realize that turning back was not an option, so he burned all the ships. He made a return to Spain impossible and at the same time created a powerful motivation to succeed. Likewise, every person entering marriage should be absolutely committed, realizing that when he is married there is no other option.

### INTRODUCTION

Biblical marriage is a beautiful thing.<sup>8</sup> But couples who want to experience its beauty and taste its goodness must examine what the scriptures teach about it, and then pursue obedience to what they learn. A satisfying marriage requires effort and sacrifice.

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8 This lesson was written by Tim Keep.

- » Would someone like to share about how he/she entered marriage expecting benefits but not realizing the commitment necessary?

To begin to understand marriage we must go back to its beginning—back to Genesis. The creation story teaches us about marriage.

## **BIBLICAL MARRIAGE**

### **Biblical Marriage is for Fellowship**

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’” (Genesis 2:18).

Just as God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in fellowship, God designed us to be social. We were made for conversation. We were created for intimacy and fellowship. God said that being alone is not good!

Every part of the Genesis description of events gives dignity to marriage. God took a rib from the man and made it into a beautiful woman, another person, equally made in God’s image, equal in value, but different in design, who completed the man. She “is brought with special honor to the man as the Creator’s last and most perfect work.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Marriage is to be a joyful union.**

When Adam said, “This at last is bone of my bones” (Genesis 2:23) he was expressing respect and delight. Adam didn’t say, “Finally, a slave! Now I have someone to do my laundry, cook my food, massage my back, and do my chores!” No, Adam said, “At last, a helper who completes me!”

### **Marriage is to be a union of equals.**

“...a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18). God designed woman to perfectly match and complete man.

Matthew Henry reminds us, “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved”.<sup>10</sup> Woman was neither inferior nor superior to man, but was comparable to him.

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9 *Ellicot’s Commentary for English Readers* (Notes on Genesis 2:22). Retrieved from <https://biblehub.com/genesis/2-22.htm> on December 29, 2020.

10 *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*

## **Marriage is to be a covenant union.**

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Strong marriages don’t depend upon romance, (romantic feelings come and go), or pleasure, (though healthy marriages bring joy), or personal fulfillment (though strong marriages are indeed fulfilling). The wonderful benefits of marriage do not cause a strong marriage; they are the result of a strong marriage. Marriage is established on the unshakable foundation of covenant—one man and one woman exclusively committed to one another for life.

Marriage is to be a transparent, trusting, accepting relationship—”And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). Because sin had not yet corrupted the innocence of the first couple, their marriage was without judgment, without shame, and without fear. The New Testament tells us, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled” (Hebrews 13:4).

A strong marriage does not exist where there is insecurity, distrust, suspicion, or fear, where spouses are not sure of one another’s commitment to the marriage. Strong marriages require a steadfast pledge that only ends when one spouse dies (Romans 7:1-2).

God’s intention is that marriage be a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman (Matthew 19:3-6). Paul said that believers are not under bondage when their unbelieving spouses separate from them (1 Corinthians 7:15), but a believer should not seek separation from an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-14, 16). Paul had previously written that the Lord said the same: believers are not to choose to leave/separate from their spouses, but if they do, they must not marry someone else (1 Corinthians 7:10-11, Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:9).

Covenant love is self-giving, respectful, and beautifying even when the relationship is difficult (1 Corinthians 13). Weak commitment produces tentative effort, emotional disconnection, withdrawal, and temptation.

A husband is living out covenantal love when he never gives up on his bride even when she is unresponsive, or disrespectful, or sick. A wife is living out covenantal love when she chooses to respect and obey her husband, for Christ’s sake, even when her husband isn’t loving her.

His love wins her respect, and her respect wins his love. And they continue to grow!

- » What problems result if people marry while thinking that they can change their decision later if they are unhappy with the marriage? What difference does total commitment make—when a person believes that his marriage is permanent?

## Biblical Marriage is the Place for Creation: *Procreation*

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Psalm 127:3).

Children are a gift from God, but in a sense they are also the parents’ gift *to* God. “Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth” (Malachi 2:15). God desires godly children from the union of a believing husband and wife.

Some people prefer to follow a lifestyle that does not include children, but the Bible teaches that God is pleased when parents have godly children.

It’s important to note that it is not reproduction alone that God wants, but godly children. Parents are called by God to teach their children to follow Christ.

## Biblical Marriage is for Christ

In Ephesians 5:30-32, the Holy Spirit reveals a deeper meaning of marriage, hidden until Jesus came. Marriage is an earthly picture—a reflection—of the relationship between Jesus Christ and his church.

Paul begins this section by exhorting believers to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). It is in this context that he offers the following instruction on marriage:

**The Spirit-filled bride** will *submit* to her groom (her “head”) in the Lord, in the same way that believers submit to Jesus (Ephesians 5:24, 32; see also 1 Peter 3:1). This is the way she shows respect to Jesus and her husband.

It is important for every wife to have the Lord in mind in her submission. It is to him and for him that she submits and not just for her husband. Her eye is on Jesus, who alone is without fault. A wife’s willing submission to her husband is an act of worship to Jesus.

Biblical submission, like love, cannot be forced. Biblical submission is a gift which wives offer their husbands out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:33). Submission in everything, is an act of worship to Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

The submission of a wife to her husband is an act of respect (verse 33) for him, as part of the Spirit-filled life (Ephesians 5:18-21). This honor, coming from a gentle and quiet spirit, is very precious in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:4-5).

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11 For further exploration of the topic of biblical submission, see Lesson 10 of *Spiritual Formation*, available from Shepherds Global Classroom.

**The Spirit-filled groom** will love his bride as Jesus loves his church (Ephesians 5:25). The groom must love her as he loves his own body (Ephesians 5:28-29). He must manifest the same Spirit-filled self-sacrifice as Jesus manifested toward his church when he gave himself up for her. This is his act of submission (Ephesians 5:21). One commentator put it like this:

As he (Jesus) gave himself to suffer on the cross to save the church, so we are to be willing to deny ourselves and to bear the toil and trial, that we may promote the happiness of the wife. It is the duty of the husband to toil for her support; to provide for her needs; to deny himself of rest and ease, if necessary, in order to attend on her in sickness; to go before her in danger; to defend her if she is in peril; to bear with her when she is irritable; to cling to her when she is pushing him away; to pray with her when she is in spiritual trouble; and to be ready to die to save her. Why should this not be? If they are shipwrecked, and there is a single plank on which safety can be secured, should he not be willing to place her on that, and see her safe at all hazards to himself? But there is more... a husband should feel that it should be the one great object of his life to seek the salvation of his wife. He is to furnish her all that she may need for her soul... And he is to set the example; to counsel her if she needs counsel; and to make the path of salvation as easy for her as possible. If a husband has the Spirit and self-denial of the Savior, he will regard no sacrifice too great if he may promote the salvation of his family.<sup>12</sup>

The groom is to seek the purity of his bride as Christ purifies his bride, the church, “that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her... [and] present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:26-27).

In ancient times the brides of monarchs were physically purified with costly beauty treatments—“six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women” (See Esther 2:12). In this way a virgin was prepared for her husband.

In a spiritual sense, the husband is to provide every means necessary for the flourishing of his wife—faithfulness, unconditional love, understanding, prayer, counsel, teaching and kindness.

When the husband treats his wife with such love, he will be repaid with happiness. Paul says, “He who loves his wife loves himself” (Ephesians 5:28). Husbands who love their wives in this self-sacrificing way will be more than repaid by the Lord, and most likely by the respect, affection, and faithfulness of his wife.

- » What are specific things a husband should do to provide spiritual support to his wife?

## WAYS COUPLES CAN STRENGTHEN THEIR MARRIAGE

### 1. They must celebrate God's original design and appreciate their unique roles within the marriage.

A husband must remember that his wife is a gift from God, a helper who completes him. He must lay down his life for her security and her spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. He must choose gratitude for her and love her even when she is least deserving, realizing that only God can change what needs to change in her. God will honor his obedience and faith.

A wife must honor God's choice of her husband as her head, show him respect in every way she can, and honor his leadership. She must choose submission and respect even when he makes mistakes and is least deserving, praying that God will change what needs to change in him. God will honor her obedience and faith.

### 2. Married couples must cultivate true spiritual and physical intimacy.

They must seek to *know* each other without fear, criticism, comparison to others, abuse, lust, self-gratification, or degradation. They must live with transparency and integrity before God and one another.

### 3. Married couples must follow the example of God's grace when they fail to measure up.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin and felt shame and regret, God revealed his power to redeem their failures. God sacrificed an animal to make coats for Adam and Eve for the covering of their nakedness (Genesis 3:21). This loving act of God was a picture of grace and of God's promise of redemption through Christ. Christ enables us to be forgiven and restored. Through Christ, married couples can return to intimacy without shame even after they've failed.

## JESUS' EXAMPLE OF RESPECT FOR WOMEN

Women were considered inferior to men in the first-century Roman world and in Judaism. A low view of women is still prevalent in many cultures around the world, and in many homes. Women are disrespected, used as sexual objects, and abused. But Jesus's high regard for women should serve as our example.

For Christ, women have inherent dignity and value equal to that of men. Jesus said, "He who created them from the beginning made them male and female" (Matthew 19:4, Genesis 1:27). Women are created in the image of God just as men are. Like men, they have self-awareness, personal freedom, a measure of self-determination, and personal responsibility for their actions. Females are seen by Jesus as genuine persons, not simply as the objects of male desire. He viewed them as persons for whom he had come into the world (Luke 8:1-3).



James Borland, with John Piper and Wayne Grudem, offers these clear examples of Jesus' high view of women and his respect for women as found in the four Gospels:

**1. Jesus regularly addressed women directly while in public.**

This was unusual for a man to do in Jesus' day (John 4:27). The disciples were amazed to see Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar (John 4:7-26). He also spoke freely with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:10-11). Luke notes that Jesus spoke publicly with the widow of Nain (Luke 7:12-13), the woman with the bleeding disorder (Luke 8:48, Matthew 9:22, Mark 5:34), and a woman who called to him from a crowd (Luke 11:27-28). Jesus addressed a woman bent over for 18 years (Luke 13:12) and a group of women on the route to the cross (Luke 23:27-31).

**2. Jesus showed his respect and high regard for women by how he spoke to them.**

He spoke in a thoughtful, caring manner. Matthew, Mark and Luke record that Jesus addressed the woman with the bleeding disorder as a "daughter" and referred to the disabled woman as a "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16). By calling them "daughters of Abraham" Jesus places them on an equal spiritual status with "sons of Abraham."

**3. Jesus shows the inherent value of women by holding them personally responsible for their sin.**

This can be seen in his dealings with the woman at the well (John 4:16-18), the adulterous woman (John 8:10-11), and the sinful woman who anointed his feet (Luke 7:44-50). Their sin was not ignored but confronted. His action showed each woman had personal freedom, was responsible for her choices, and must personally deal with the issues of sin, repentance, and forgiveness.

## **How Jesus' Value of Women Should Guide the Church Today**

The ideal biblical role of women in ministry and in the home is being discussed in many churches and denominations today, as it should be, yet the value and equality of women as persons made in the image of God should **never** be questioned. Jesus continually showed the worth and dignity of women as persons. Jesus commissioned women as the first heralds of his resurrection (John 20:17). He valued their fellowship, prayers, Christian service, financial support, testimony and witness. Jesus honored women, taught women, and ministered to women in thoughtful ways.

## Respect for Women Shown in The New Testament

Jesus' example of respect for women is seen in the life of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on both sons and daughters, and menservants and maidservants (Acts 2:17-18). The Holy Spirit showed no partiality.

In Romans 16, Paul commends a woman named Phoebe as a servant of the church (verse 1), both Priscilla and Aquila as his fellow workers in Christ Jesus who risked their necks for his life (verses 3-4), Mary as one who worked hard (verse 6), Junia as one well known to the apostles (verse 7), and other women also.

In 1 Thessalonians Paul commends the God-designed tenderness and maternal love of women when he writes, "But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7). In Ephesians he commands husbands to love their wives, "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," and as their own bodies (Ephesians 5:25, 28). Peter appeals to husbands to, "live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman" (1 Peter 3:7).

Clearly, women were considered valuable in the early church, and men were taught to be respectful of women. It's time for spiritual leaders everywhere to stand up for women and to stand against their mistreatment in every culture. It's time for us to treasure women as persons uniquely designed by their Creator in his image. Any teaching of male and female role distinctions in the church or home must begin with this foundation, or our teaching becomes a pathway for abuse.

## CONCLUSION

Marriage is God's creation, not man's. Therefore, we must go to God for instruction, not to the world or culture. He alone knows how to make our marriages strong, enduring and rewarding. But we will never be the spouses we ought to be without the Holy Spirit!

## FOR GROUP SHARING

- » Explain the principles that the church should teach in order to strengthen marriages. What understanding is especially lacking in your environment?
- » How does your culture treat women differently from men?
- » How do churches in your country treat women differently from men? Is there a difference between churches and the culture?
- » Based on the example of Jesus, what customs should change?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for giving us the wonderful gift of marriage. Help us to make the commitment necessary for us to experience marriage the way you planned.

Help us to demonstrate a love that is like the love between Christ and the church.

Help us to go beyond the assumptions of our culture in our respect for one another.

Thank you for the work of the Holy Spirit that makes joyful, strong relationships possible.

Amen

## LESSON 6 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Describe in writing the distinctions between men and women that are practiced in your culture. How would those distinctions be reformed by careful application of biblical truth?
2. Choose two principles that were new to you from this lesson. Write a paragraph explaining each of them in your own words.
3. Prepare a brief presentation on one of the topics listed below. (The class leader will assign a topic to each student.) Share the presentation at the beginning of the next class time.
  - God's design of union in marriage
  - Biblical purposes for marriage
  - Ways to strengthen one's marriage
  - A biblical view of women
  - God-given roles in marriage and the importance of being filled with the Spirit in order to fulfill those roles



## LESSON 7

# THE SACREDNESS OF MARRIAGE

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Understand God's plan for marriage and the rules for marriage that protect from problems and provide for blessings.
2. Explain scriptural directions for families.

### ROBERTSON MCQUILKIN, A PROMISE KEEPER

Dr. Robertson McQuilkin served as a missionary in Japan for 12 years. He later became president of Columbia International University. He was well known as a writer, speaker, and educator. His wife Muriel suffered from Alzheimer's disease. When the disease progressed to the condition where Muriel needed constant care, Dr. McQuilkin resigned from the presidency of the university to take care of his wife. He said he was keeping the promise that he made to her when they married. He believed that caring for his wife was more important than keeping the position of university president.

### GOD'S INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage was instituted by God for the first man and woman he created.

- » A student should read Genesis 2:21-24 for the group. What do these verses tell us about marriage?

Marriage was designed by God to be exactly what people needed. It was designed exactly for human nature. In everything God designs and in everything he requires, he always wants what is best for us (Deuteronomy 6:24). God knows that his plan for marriage will provide each spouse with the best emotional, relational, and spiritual well-being.

Marriage is also designed to be a reflection of God's character and his relationships. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have always been and will always be in relationship with each other. Each is unique in his role, but all persons of the Trinity are permanently One and are of One essence. In the relationship between the persons of the Trinity, we see unity, intimacy, faithfulness, and steadfast love. Biblical marriage is patterned after this amazing relationship. God's plan is for each husband and wife to be pure in their love and committed to each other for life.

God said that in marriage a man and woman leave their parents and join together. Marriage puts two people into a friendship and partnership that is stronger and closer than any other human relationship.

Marriage is not just two people together in a limited partnership. Their lives have been merged so that in a sense they are like one person. This is not an obliteration of their individual personalities, but a special unity.

## THE PERMANENCE OF MARRIAGE

God designed marriage to be permanent. In marriage, a man and woman promise to be faithful to each other for as long as both are alive.

The Bible records Jesus' words about marriage, spoken in a conversation with the Pharisees.

- » A student should read Matthew 19:3-8 for the group.

Jesus said that God intended marriage to be permanent. He said that divorce was instituted for people who are not following God.

There are many reasons that God designed marriage to be permanent, some of which we talked about in the last section. Another reason marriage is to be permanent is for the sake of children. Obedience to God's plan for marriage creates the very best environment in which to raise children. As parents honor God by obeying his principles in their marriage and family, they will be able to raise godly children (Malachi 2:15).

God designed human life in such a way that children take several years to grow to adulthood. During this time, children are dependent on parents for protection, provision, and training. This is different from animals that grow to maturity in a year or two. People need more time to develop mature character. God designed the family as the means of raising children. Many of the problems in society come from a lack of families that have faithful parents.

Marriage requires people to make a promise committing their whole lives to each other. Every culture has forms and a ceremony to show that marriage is a serious commitment.

The ceremony is a way for the man and woman to state publicly that they are making this lifelong commitment.

Most governments maintain records of marriages. Laws about marriage affect the ownership of property, the custody of children, and inheritance.

Here is an example of wedding vows that have been used for many weddings:

I take you to be my wedded [husband/wife], to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge myself to you.

Romantic feelings will not be constant all of the time. A marriage cannot be based on personal feelings that are changeable. Marriage vows mean that a man and woman are promising to be faithful to each other as long as they both live, and that promise does not depend on any conditions.

## **MARRIAGE AS CHRISTIAN PARTNERSHIP**

- » A student should read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 for the group.

These verses tell us that a believer's commitment is hindered if he is too closely connected with unbelievers. Just as a believer cannot worship with a person who worships Satan, he cannot follow the lifestyle and priorities of unbelievers. The warning could apply to various kinds of relationships, including business partnerships.

Marriage is the closest human partnership. A believer should not even consider marrying someone who is not a committed believer (1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). A believer married to an unbeliever will experience much sorrow and many hindrances in raising children and making lifestyle decisions.

If husband and wife are both believers but come from different churches, they must make sure they are in agreement about important spiritual issues. They should plan to be part of the same local church after they are married.

- » Why does a marriage begin with vows and not just a statement of love?

## GOD'S MORAL STANDARD

- » A student should read Hebrews 13:4 for the group.

This verse tells us that marriage is supposed to be highly respected. Sexual sin is a disrespect of marriage. God will judge sexual immorality.

Sexual sins include lustful fantasies, fornication, adultery, homosexual activity, and use of pornography. To have lustful fantasies is to willingly imagine sexual activity with anyone who is not your spouse. Fornication is sexual activity between people who are not married. Adultery is sexual activity that includes a person who is married to someone else. Homosexual activity is sexual activity between people of the same gender. Pornography includes writing, pictures, and videos designed to cause sexual reactions by showing nudity or sexual activity. All of these are violations of the marriage relationship.

Remember—every hunger that entices us in the flesh is an exploitation of a need that can be better met by God. The only context for godly sex is marital sex. Illicit sex is... immediately sweet, but something that will poison our spiritual appetite until we crave that which will ultimately destroy us. Illicit sex will do nothing but diminish our sensitivity to holiness, righteousness, and God's presence in our lives.<sup>13</sup>

In many passages, Proverbs warns that sexual immorality destroys a person's life and leads to death (Proverbs 2:16-19 and Proverbs 6:24-29, 32-33 for example).

Robertson McQuilkin writes that God's purposes for human sexuality

...are violated mentally almost as severely as they would be by the act itself. He did not simply create male and female; he created them for one another in an intimate, permanent bond of marriage, a oneness patterned after his own nature. For this high purpose to be fulfilled, the intimacy must be exclusive and the commitment permanent or it is no oneness. Faithfulness is most importantly of the mind. Exclusive intimacy, permanent commitment, and mutual trust are violated first in the mind.<sup>14</sup>

- » Students should read 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Matthew 5:27-30 for the group.

Every society has cultural views of relationships between men and women. These cultural views have lower standards than the standards of biblical morality. Many cultures have only the rules necessary for maintaining an orderly society. They tolerate sexual sin if it is managed carefully enough to avoid bad consequences or scandal. The biblical standard of morality is different.

13 Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 210

14 Robertson McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (2nd edition), (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1995), 216



Sadly, some churches follow the morality of their culture instead of the morality of the Bible. They punish people whose sins have become obvious and careless, but they tolerate the same sins by people who are more careful.

These verses tell us that people who are committing these sins are not believers and will not go to heaven. Some of the Corinthian believers had committed these sins in the past but had been saved from them.

Any doctrine that excuses any of these sins for a person who professes to be a believer is a false doctrine. If a person claims to be a follower of Christ yet commits sexual sin, the church is required by scripture to remove him from the church and not consider him a believer (1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

Church leaders should set a good example of behavior. When a church allows worship leaders to dress immodestly or allows sensual forms of dance in the church, they imply that wrong sexual desires are normal. They imply that sexual sin is not serious.

The dress styles of a society may imply that a person is not well-dressed without physical exposure to cause sexual attraction. Church members sometimes fall into this error, especially for special occasions. They think they are not well-dressed unless they follow the fashion of their society. The church must teach that this is wrong. A believer should not want to cause wrong desires in others. 1 Timothy 2:9-10 tells us that believers should dress and act in such a way that anyone who sees them knows they are living careful, pure lives and are unwilling to sin or cause others to sin. Christians should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control.

## **Help for the Sinner**

Galatians 6:1 says that the church has a responsibility to try to restore a member who has sinned. That does not mean that a person should keep a ministry position or be quickly put back into a ministry position after he has sinned. Restoration means to be accepted back into the fellowship and care of the church. If the member truly repents, he is forgiven by God and the church. The church should provide spiritual accountability to help him maintain victory and become spiritually strong.

If an unmarried girl becomes pregnant, the church should not exclude her from the fellowship and care of the church without attempting spiritual restoration. If she repents and submits to spiritual accountability, she is forgiven. Her sin is not worse than the sin of the man who was involved. Sometimes the girl is treated severely simply because the results of her sin are so visible.

In some societies, parents who feel shame because of their unwed daughter's pregnancy are tempted to kill the unborn child to save face for their family. But there is never a good

reason for murder (Exodus 20:13). Every unborn child is made in God's image (Genesis 9:6, Psalm 139:13-14). The girl's baby must be protected, loved, and nurtured.

The church is a family of faith. It is not enough for the church to condemn sins. The church must take care of its members. For example, a person being supported financially by sinful activity may need help to develop alternative financial support.

*A real situation...*

Several girls were attending a large church and singing in the choir. Their families were poor. The girls were in immoral relationships with men in order to earn money to help their families. What should the church do in that situation?

- » What should your church do to help people leave sinful lifestyles?

## **Pornography**

Pornography is writing, pictures, or videos designed to cause sexual reactions by showing nudity or sexual activity.

The internet is making pornography easily available around the world. The widespread use of technology makes pornography a temptation to people who have not been taught to apply Christian principles to the issue. Many mature pastors and leaders never faced those temptations because the internet was not available when they were young. They may barely understand what the younger generation is facing.

**Pornography is wrong** because it is designed to cause a person to take pleasure in imagining actions of fornication, adultery, and many forms of sexual perversion. It is attractive to a person who has sinful desires. Pornography invites and enables a person to take delight in immoral actions that God condemns.

**Pornography is addictive.** The person who uses pornography feels a strong need for it. He can hardly imagine living without it. It seems to him that life would be empty and uninteresting without the imaginations he gets from pornography. Like every other addiction, the desire becomes consuming, and the user begins to sacrifice the good things in his life.

**Pornography is progressive.** The user needs material that is increasingly explicit and perverted. He will begin to take delight in imaginations that would have disgusted and horrified him before.

**Pornography is damaging.** The user becomes less capable of enjoying a normal relationship. His desires become so unnatural that they can never be satisfied. He becomes insensitive to the abuse of others.

Pastors and parents must warn young people of the danger of addiction. Parents should not give their children unrestricted access to the internet when they lack the maturity to resist temptation. Anyone who struggles with the temptation to use pornography should regularly give a report of victories or failures to a trusted, godly person. Regular checkups with this mature believer can help the struggling person to maintain a commitment to purity and gain consistent victory.

- » What practices should you recommend to people to help protect them from the addiction of pornography? How can the church help?

## **Homosexual Activity**

Some societies that reject biblical authority also reject the biblical description of marriage. They say that people are free to choose a same sex relationship.

The Bible condemns homosexual activity.

- » The group should look at Romans 1:26-27, 1 Timothy 1:10, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 together.

These three passages in the Bible include homosexual behavior in a list of some of the worst kinds of sins. The people who follow these sins reject the authority of God.

Some people claim that they naturally have homosexual tendencies. They say they should not be blamed for their behavior because they did not choose to have those desires.

The Bible teaches that every person has followed a natural tendency to sin (Isaiah 53:6). God calls us to repent of our own willful sin (Isaiah 55:7). Because we are born with a sinful nature, our natural desires cannot be trusted to lead us. A person may feel a strong natural tendency to commit fornication, or be violent, or steal, but the natural urge does not mean the desire is right.

## **Self-Sex**

Because of sexual desires, some unmarried people masturbate. To masturbate is to stimulate one's genitals for sexual pleasure or to relieve sexual tension.

To use pornography or have willing sexual fantasies is sinful (Matthew 5:27-28, Matthew 15:19-20). The Bible does not specifically condemn masturbation itself as immoral. However, self-sex may lead to lustful thinking, pornography use, and fornication.

Masturbation is unwise also because it is addictive: the more you do it, the more you feel like you have to do it.

Compulsive masturbation also often points to a deeper issue, such as having emotional or relational problems, or having been sexually abused in the past.

- » Students should read 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, 18-20 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 for the group.

God designed physical oneness in marriage to help unite a husband and wife emotionally and spiritually (1 Corinthians 6:16-20, Malachi 2:15).

Many... assume that masturbation can help them deal with being single until they get married. They fail to realize, however, that when the practice becomes habitual, it may threaten the beauty and intimacy of marital sex in the future.

Self-sex provides a sexual experience that misses the essential purpose of sex: the joining of two to become one flesh, physically and emotionally.... Masturbation should not be used as a substitute for healthy, normal sexual activity in marriage.<sup>15</sup>

What should an unmarried person do if masturbation is a problem in their life? Even if someone is masturbating only for the purpose of relieving sexual tension, it is still best to avoid it, because of the temptations that are present and because self-sex does not accomplish God's purposes for sexuality.

- If there is any kind of immorality in their life, they must confess and forsake that sin. They should regularly and frequently give account of victories and failures to a godly older mentor who will pray for and advise them.
- If the masturbation is the result of emotional or relational problems, or past sexual abuse, getting counseling from a professional Christian counselor is appropriate.

A follower of Christ will be helped by:

1. **Being confident that Jesus cares (Psalm 139:1-3, 1 Peter 5:6-10).** He cares about your faith, your physical needs, and your purity. In his humanity, he victoriously endured the physical and mental temptations we face, and he has the grace we need to be victorious (Hebrews 4:14-16).
2. **Not believing the devil's lies (John 8:44).** The devil may tell you that Jesus doesn't care, or Jesus would take away the sex drive that is so frustrating to you (1 Peter 5:7-8). The devil may accuse you of being sinful because of having sexual desires (Revelation 12:10).

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15 Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Diane Langberg, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Counseling Women*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 185

3. **Focusing on Jesus Himself and praising him for who he is (Psalm 105:3-4).** The devil would love to destroy your faith and your relationship with God through this test (John 10:10). But Jesus' purpose for this test is that your faith will be strengthened, and that you will better be able to glorify him (1 Peter 1:5-9). When you focus on worshipping Jesus, he will be present to help you (Psalm 46:1).
4. **Meditating on God's Word (Psalm 119:9).** Reading, listening to, and meditating on God's Word will help you to stand victorious in time of temptation. When Jesus was tempted, he used scripture to overcome (Matthew 4). We must do the same.
5. **Staying accountable to at least one mature and godly person (Galatians 6:2).** Being open and honest with someone (your same gender) who is farther along the journey of faith than you are will be incredibly helpful. They will be able to pray for you and advise you. Talking with them about your struggles will help you to maintain purity and keep encouraged in your faith.
6. **Serving others and focusing on their needs (Philippians 2:3-5).** Fight against excessive concern about your own needs and desires by serving other people.
7. **Getting married to a godly person in God's time (Proverbs 5:15, 18-19).**

## PRINCIPLES FOR HONORING GOD WITH MORAL PURITY BEFORE MARRIAGE

Young people face strong temptations before they are married. It is important for them to remember that they need a life partner who can be faithful.<sup>16</sup> They should not consider a relationship with a person who wants to have short-term pleasure without marriage. They should not consider having a relationship with a person who is not a committed believer (1 Corinthians 7:39). They should consider only someone who will be a faithful marriage partner and a good parent.

A young person who wants to have a good marriage should be a faithful, committed follower of Christ so that the right kind of person will be attracted (Proverbs 3:4-8). A person demonstrates good character with appropriate behavior and modest dress (1 Timothy 2:9-10). People who behave carelessly with people of the opposite gender imply that they are willing to have a relationship based on the wrong desires (1 Thessalonians 4:1-7). A person who dresses in a way that causes wrong desires attracts the wrong kind of person (Proverbs 7).

God has given young people parents, pastors, and other Christian leaders to provide guidance in behavior, dress, and relationship choices. As young people submit to these leaders

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<sup>16</sup> See Proverbs 31:11-12, 1 Timothy 3:11-12, Malachi 2:14-16, Proverbs 2:16-17.

in obedience to God, they will have God's greatest blessings and will be protected from much harm and temptation.

- » A student should read 1 Peter 5:5 and Hebrews 13:17 for the group.

It is the responsibility of children and young people to submit to the wisdom and leadership of their parents and spiritual authorities. It is the responsibility of these leaders to help young people live victorious over temptation.

- » A student should read Romans 13:14 and 1 Corinthians 10:13 for the group.

God does not allow believers to be in situations of temptation beyond what they are able to resist and escape **if** they are willing to. Young people are responsible to flee temptation (2 Timothy 2:22). However, parents should prevent their youth from experiencing unnecessary temptation as much as possible. There are at least three ways parents do this:

**1. By giving specific instructions about what the children should and should not do, who they should be with, and where they should go (Ephesians 6:1-4).**

Parents should not allow their children to be in situations where their maturity will not be sufficient to protect them from temptation. For example, if a young man and young woman are alone in a private place, they will likely be tempted to wrong behavior.

**2. By keeping their young people accountable in areas of temptation.**

**3. By giving young people biblical advice.**

Parents should be helping their young people learn to consider situations with biblical principles in mind (Proverbs 4:1-9, Proverbs 7:1, 4-5). They should talk with their youth about the dangers that they see. They should help their youth consider the various choices that they will need to make. They can help their youth think ahead of time about how to avoid temptation and what to do when they do have temptations.

The church must be distinct from its culture when it defends biblical morality. Many cultures do not consider sexual sin to be serious. They expect young unmarried people to have sexual relationships before marriage. The church must not compromise with sin. The church should not assume that sexual sin among young people is normal. God says those who are immoral have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ.

- » Students should read Ephesians 5:3-7 and Hebrews 13:4 for the group.

The period of time when a relationship exists before marriage is not a time for a sexual relationship to begin. Instead it is a period of time when the man and woman make sure that they share the same spiritual and biblical priorities. It is a time when they develop



an understanding of each other that enables them to trust each other enough to make a permanent commitment to one another. If they are not able to come to this trust of each other's character, they should end the relationship and not marry.

People in some societies delay marriage because their culture expects marriage to be an elaborate, expensive ceremony. Many times, couples live together for years and have children while delaying marriage. For some couples, the expense of their wedding hurts them financially for long afterward because they spend everything they have for the wedding event and maybe even borrow money. The church should be a community of faith that provides a different model of marriage. Christian marriage is for a man and woman who are committed to each other and to God and should not require great expense that delays the wedding or hurts the couple's future.

- » What are some ways that Christian marriage should be different from the marriage customs of society?

## PEOPLE WHO NEVER MARRY

Marriage is God's plan for most people. However, the Apostle Paul described some reasons that people might not marry. In 1 Corinthians 7:26 he mentioned "the present distress"—difficult conditions of life that may have included persecution. He said it might be better not to marry in such conditions.

The same passage (1 Corinthians 7:32-35) says that an unmarried person has a special advantage. The unmarried person can focus on serving God without the concern of taking care of a spouse. When a person is called by God to focus on ministry without being married, he can be remarkably effective and blessed in his ministry.

There may be other reasons also that God may choose for a person to remain unmarried (Matthew 19:10-12). We should not assume that this is an unnatural situation. We should not assume that every unmarried person needs to be matched with someone. We should not assume that happiness and fulfillment depend on marriage (Psalm 107:9).

A person who is not married must be careful to avoid forming wrong relationships because of emotional and physical needs. God gives joy and contentment to the person who is fully devoted to him.

## BIBLICAL DIRECTIONS FOR MARRIAGE

- » Read 1 Peter 3:1-7 and Ephesians 5:22-33 together. The group should keep these passages open for examination during this discussion.

**The man is told to love his wife as Christ loved the church.** Jesus gave himself as a sacrifice for the church. The husband is to sacrifice his own benefits, comforts, and desires in order to meet the needs of his wife. 1 Peter 3:7 says that he should live with his wife in an understanding way, meaning that he is to do his best to understand her. He should study her in order to understand her needs.

The woman is called “the weaker vessel” in this passage. A wife needs consideration from her husband. He should protect her not only from physical harm but also from worry and emotional stress.

**The wife is told to submit to her husband and to respect him.** The wife is supposed to accept the leadership of her husband, even if the husband is not a believer. If she does this, her unsaved husband is more likely to become a believer.

It is important to remember how the commands in these verses are given. The husband is not told to enforce authority over his wife. The wife is told to obey her husband, but the husband is not told to make her obey. He is told to love his wife and sacrifice as necessary to take care of her. Likewise, the wife is not told to demand care from her husband; she is told to respect him.

The priority of the husband should not be to maintain his authority but to provide loving care. The priority of the wife should not be to demand care for herself but to respect her husband.

The apostle warns the husband that his prayers will be hindered if he does not care for his wife properly. That tells us that **our behavior in marriage affects our relationship with God.**

The Apostle John said that if a person does not love his brother, neither does he love God (1 John 4:20). Likewise, from the words of Paul and Peter we can see that a man who does not care for his wife as he should does not love God as he should. A woman who does not respect her husband does not respect God as she should.

» A student should read 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 for the group.

These verses tell us that one purpose of marriage is to satisfy sexual desires. The husband and wife have given themselves to each other and have given up their claim of ownership of their own bodies. That means that a married person should not expect to engage in sex only when he chooses but should also be responsive to the desires of the spouse. The verses do not tell us that a person can demand satisfaction against the will of the spouse. Instead, the verses are telling each to be responsive to the needs of the other.

This passage tells us that married people should not deprive each other of this privilege. A short time of sexual abstinence along with fasting is legitimate, but prolonged separation



will cause temptation because of unsatisfied desires. Sometimes couples choose to be separated for several months or longer because one goes to work or study in a distant place. Before making such a decision, they should consider whether or not such a plan fits the plan of God. They may suffer problems because of the long separation.

One purpose of marriage is to create families that provide for their members.

- » A student should read 1 Timothy 5:8 for the group.

This verse comes in a passage describing the responsibility of church members to take care of each other. A person's first responsibility is his own family. A parent should make sure his child's needs are provided, such as shelter, food, clothing, and education. A parent should do what he can to provide instead of leaving this responsibility to others.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

The topics in this lesson will cause much discussion.

The students should try to apply the scriptural principles of this lesson to their situations.

- » What is a truth about marriage that many people seem to forget?
- » How could the church help young people who are struggling with the temptations of the world?
- » How could the people of the church work together (beyond having Sunday school) to help with the challenge of training children to follow Christ?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your wonderful design of marriage. Help me to be faithful to your will in every stage of my life. Help me to be a good example of Christian faithfulness. Help me to encourage others to follow your will.

Help me to cooperate in the church to help families, youth, and children to be strong in faith and obedience.

Thank you for the privilege you give us to have relationships that you bless.

Amen

## LESSON 7 ASSIGNMENTS

1. If you are unmarried, write two paragraphs of commitment to obeying God's principles for your premarital relationship and your future marriage. If you are married, write two paragraphs of commitment to obeying God's principles for your marriage.
2. Choose one or more topics from this lesson and write a page describing how a person would apply scriptural principles in your society.

Examples:

- Describe a Christian relationship between a man and woman who plan to marry in your society.
- Describe the behavior of a man or woman who wants to show faithfulness to a marriage in your society.

## LESSON 8

# CHRISTIAN ECOLOGY

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Understand why God created all things and how humanity is unique from everything else that God created.
2. Understand that God has given humankind stewardship of the rest of creation.
3. Know several ways that he can rightly manage God's creation.

### GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER, AGRICULTURAL SCIENTIST

George Washington Carver was born into slavery in America around 1860. After slavery was abolished, he wanted an education. Education was not easily available for black children at that time, but one kind woman told him, "You must learn all you can then go back out into the world and give your knowledge back to the people." George prayed, "Lord, show me the secrets of the universe," and said that God responded, "You are too small to understand the secrets of the universe." George then prayed, "Then Lord, show me the secrets of the peanut," and said that God consented. The peanut was important because it was the main crop raised by many poor farmers. George knew that inventing more products from peanuts would increase the value of peanut crops. George discovered 300 potential products from the peanut and 100 products from the sweet potato. He taught agriculture at the Tuskegee Institute for 47 years and found ways to teach new methods to farmers, helping them improve their land and get better crops. George Washington Carver was a great blessing because of his faith in God and his confidence that God's creation, managed properly, could bring great benefits to humanity.

**Ecology is the study of the ways living things relate to each other and their environment.**

## HUMAN AUTHORITY OVER NATURE

- » A student should read Genesis 1:1, 26-28 for the group.

Human responsibility for the earth is based on the fact that God created the earth for His praise (Psalm 148) and placed humans as managers over it. As people created in the image of God, we are made to rule as God would. The Psalmist said, “Yet you have made (man) a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (Psalm 8:5-6). Humans have a special role in the world. They are not animals. God gave humans the role of dominion over the earth and the animals that live there.

God told Adam and Eve to multiply and fill the earth. He told them to subdue the earth. The process of subduing the earth would be continued by their descendants. The work of subduing the earth includes exploration, learning to inhabit new areas, discovering and using minerals, domesticating animals, and developing technology.

Everything was good when God created it. Man’s work of taking care of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15) was enjoyable work in harmony with nature. After sin occurred, nature was affected by the curse, and man’s work became difficult (Genesis 3:17-19). The earth does not have its original perfection (Romans 8:18-23), but it still shows the glory of God in its amazing design.

After the flood, God said that people could eat animals (Genesis 9:3). The law given by God to Moses restricted people from eating some animals, but the New Testament tells us that we are now allowed to eat any animal that is good for food (Mark 7:19, 1 Timothy 4:4). Animals do not have rights that put them on a level comparable to humans.

## Human Responsibility to Manage Resources

Though people were given authority over the earth (Genesis 1:28), they are not the supreme authority. All people are accountable to God. The earth and its produce still belong to God.

- » Students should read Psalm 24:1 and Psalm 50:10-11 for the group.

God owns the earth. God designed the earth to reveal his glory (Psalm 19:1), meet the needs of humans (Genesis 1:29), and be a pleasant place for them to live. He intends for us to enjoy the earth and the things it produces. We must not worship the earth, because it is the work of God’s hands (Romans 1:25). Nor should we exploit the earth in destructive ways.

Sometimes people take benefits from the land but destroy the land at the same time. People may mine the minerals but leave the land useless and ugly. People sometimes take all of the trees from an area, letting the rain wash away all of the good soil. Sometimes people have

hunted the wild animals for food until there are no more remaining in the area. People put garbage into rivers until the water is not safe for use.

God designed the earth to be productive. It is wrong for people to use land in a way that destroys it. God is dishonored by a destructive use of the land.

God designed the earth to serve many generations of people for thousands of years. We should feel responsible to manage and improve the environment for the next generation. A person who destroys the land for a quick benefit is not loving his neighbor and the next generation.

Would you like to think that 20 years from now someone will rob your children? Of course not. Yet people rob their own children by destroying the environment where their children will live. If you do not have children of your own, you should still care about the children of others who will someday inherit the land.

Many people are careful with the land that they own but they care nothing for public land. Believers should set an example of care for the environment, because we know it belongs to God and because we care about our neighbor and the next generation.

Sometimes people think, “This land is not mine, so I can leave my trash here,” or “I can cut all of the trees, even the very small ones.”

» A student should read Deuteronomy 22:6 for the group.

In the part of the world where the book of Deuteronomy was written, there were birds that could be easily captured while sitting on a nest. If people always took the mother and the eggs or babies, those birds would soon cease to exist. God told them to release the mother so that the species would not be destroyed. Our rules today in different places will not be exactly the same, but the verse tells us that we should be careful to conserve the resources of public land.

## **APPRECIATION OF NATURAL BEAUTY**

When God made plants, he did not create only vegetables and fruit, he made flowers and many beautiful things. That tells us that God does not care only about the practical use of the land; he also cares about beauty (Luke 12:27). God created the beauty of nature in order to provide a beautiful environment for people to inhabit.

Mountains, deserts, rivers, plains, and forests all have natural beauty. Sometimes the people who were born in a particular place don't really see the beauty that is there because it is ordinary to them.

- » Imagine that you are an artist. Imagine that you spend much time producing a beautiful painting then give it to a friend. Then one day when you visit him you see the painting on the floor damaged from people's footsteps. How would you feel?

There are many communities where the people throw all of their trash on the ground. They clean their own yards but leave trash everywhere else. The streets of their neighborhood are full of trash.

- » What do these people need to understand?

We should care about the areas we share with others, for their sake and for our own sake.

- » What could a church do to change its neighborhood?

## THE USE OF ANIMALS

Animals are distinct from humans. They are not made in the image of God. Thus, they do not have immortal spirits (Ecclesiastes 3:21) and they do not have human rights.

God gave permission for people to eat animals, which implies that it is permissible to hunt wild animals for food and to raise domesticated animals for food.

For most of human history it has also been common for people to have animals for pets or for getting work done.

- » Does God care how people treat animals?
- » A student should read Proverbs 12:10 for the group.

This verse tells us that one characteristic of righteous people is that they take good care of their animals. Cruelty is a characteristic of a wicked person.

A person who owns an animal should make sure it has the food, water, and shelter it needs. There is something wrong with people who do not care about the needs of their animals.

Remember that all animals belong to God (Psalm 50:10-11). They are all designed and created by God. He made them with great variety. He could have made only a few to serve for food and work, but he made thousands of species of animals, besides insects and microscopic forms of life. God's amazing creativity is demonstrated in the variety of animals.

Some animals are capable of showing loyalty and appreciation of their owners. They enjoy attention from humans and learn to respond. They are intelligent enough to learn many things. It is obvious that God designed them for interaction with people. God gave animals a special respect for people (Genesis 9:2).

God created animals with intelligence and natures that respond to people. To abuse them is to disrespect God's purposes. In addition to that fact, there is something wrong and perverted about a person who enjoys causing an animal pain.

Scripture uses the illustration of a shepherd many times. David was a shepherd before he was king of Israel. David wrote Psalm 23 comparing God to a shepherd. David realized that God takes care of his people the way a shepherd takes care of his sheep. In the New Testament, pastors are compared to shepherds (1 Peter 5:2 and many others). This comparison would not make sense if God did not expect people to care for their animals.

David's care for sheep was part of his training to care for people. In the same way, our care for the land and animals God has entrusted to us will prepare us to care for humans.

## **THE VALUE OF GREEN**

Green is the most common color in nature except in places that lack water or good soil. It is the color most restful to our eyes.

Many people who live in cities feel refreshed when they get out of the city into a more natural environment.

Many city environments have almost no plant life. Much of the ground is covered with concrete or blacktop. Some societies have started making the effort to provide parks and other green areas in the cities. People in every community should work together to provide places for trees and other plants to grow. They should reserve green areas for people to enjoy and especially for children to play. Families can have their own green spaces in their yards and houses by raising plants.

## **DISTINCTIONS OF A CHRISTIAN ECOLOGY**

At the beginning of this lesson is a definition of ecology.

» Why should believers care about ecology?

Some people think we can save the earth by preventing pollution. We humans cannot save it, though we should do our part to preserve it for as long as we can. Believers know that we cannot ultimately reverse the decline of the universe. God will ultimately renew the earth (Revelation 21:1). Therefore, we know that we cannot save the earth.

Some people believe that humans are not more important than animals, and that we should respect animals because their rights are equal to ours. Believers know that God gave humans dominion over the earth. We know that humans are distinct from animals because

we are uniquely created in the image of God and have eternal souls. Therefore, animals do not have rights comparable to human rights.

Believers care about the earth because

1. It belongs to God.
  2. Humans have a God-given responsibility to care for the earth.
  3. We care about the next generation of people.
- » What common practices in your nation or community show that people do not have a consistently Christian understanding of ecology?
- » Tell the students to close their eyes and describe what they always see when they leave their church yard. What does the area look like in front of the church? Is there trash on the ground? Does the area look as if someone cares for it? Who should care for that area? Describe how the people of the church could change it. Why should they consider caring for the area? What influence could their care have on others? Students could think similarly about the areas around their houses.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

- » What habits should you change?
- » How could your church make a difference in its community by example and teaching?
- » How could your community improve its environment if the people of the community cooperated?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for creating a world with beauty and resources. Thank you for trusting us with the responsibility of caring for the world that you made.

Help us to live with appreciation of your wonderful creation. Help us work together to protect the earth's resources and beauty.

Amen



## LESSON 8 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a paragraph describing your plan to change your habits because of the truth you learned in this lesson.
2. Write a page describing the wrong practices of your society. Then go on to describe how you would explain to someone *why* the practices should be different. Base your claims on specific scriptures and a biblical worldview.



# LESSON 9

# MONEY

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Commit to obeying God's principles for proper use and management of money and resources.
2. Understand the spiritual dangers associated with improper beliefs about and use of money and how to avoid them.

## JOHN WESLEY, GENEROUS GIVER

John Wesley lived in England from 1703-1791. He preached the gospel outdoors to poor people who would not be welcomed in churches. He lived carefully, seeking to honor God in every detail of life, including his use of money. He taught that when believers have earned money, they should save all they can and give all they can. He was a faithful example of using disciplined financial habits. He reduced his yearly expenses, so that he would have more to give away. Then, when his income increased, he kept his expenses the same, and gave away the extra. Although he earned much wealth over the course of his life, at his death he only had a few coins in his possession. Wesley knew that God trusts people to manage money for him, and taught that believers ought to follow God's principles for dealing with money.

## INTRODUCTION

The New Testament mentions money more than most other subjects, not because money is so important to God, but because people have so many problems with money.

As the Creator, God is the owner of all people and the wealth that they have. As believers, we belong to God in a special way, because he has redeemed us. We should consider ourselves the managers of possessions that should be used for God's glory.

It is not wrong to enjoy good things. God is pleased to bless us if we receive everything with thankfulness and humility.

But money is a spiritual danger for most people.

## **WARNINGS AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE RICH**

- » What does it mean to be rich?

There are different reasons a person may be considered rich.

If you have money to buy more than your basic necessities, you are richer than at least half of the people in the world. Many people work each day for the food they will eat that day; if something happens to prevent their work, they do not have food.

People usually consider a person rich who has more wealth than most of the people in his own society. His lifestyle shows that he spends more money than most people. People consider him to be of a higher social class. He can enjoy luxuries that most people cannot buy. He has influence with people in authority. People are ready to serve him because of his resources.

The Bible has special directions and warnings for rich people.

A very serious warning is Jesus' statement that it is very difficult for a rich person to get to heaven (Matthew 19:24).

We can get some understanding of the danger of riches from a message of the Apostle Paul for rich people.

- » A student should read 1 Timothy 6:17-19 for the group.

Paul warns the rich to not consider themselves of higher class than other people. There is a temptation for rich people to think themselves better than others. James warns the church not to make the same mistake, honoring people because of their wealth or social status (James 2:1-4).

The rich person should not feel secure because of his wealth but depend on God. It is harder for a rich person to feel the need of God's provision when he has financial reserves. There is a temptation to become spiritually careless because of not feeling the need of God's help (Deuteronomy 8:6-18).

Rich people should be generous givers and accomplish good things with their money.

One of the condemnations of worldly rich people in James 5:5 is that they lived in pleasure while others suffered. Much good can be accomplished with wise giving. Money cannot buy happiness, but it can relieve much misery. It is wrong for a person to ignore the suffering of others while living in luxury.

Through the prophet Amos, God expresses his heart for human justice (mercy and compassion on the poor and oppressed) with these words: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). God pronounced judgment on prosperity when prosperity led to ease, self-indulgence, and indifference to the plight of the poor (Amos 6:1, 3-6; Amos 8:4-7, 11-12).

Every believer should sacrificially give to help the poor and oppressed, should tithe to support his local church, and should give to support missionary work for the spread of the gospel. John Wesley said that there were three reasons why the church of his day was making so little impact in the world:

1. Lack of sound doctrine
2. Lack of accountable discipline
3. Lack of personal sacrifice

## THE LOVE OF MONEY

» A student should read 1 Timothy 6:8-10 for the group.

The warnings about money are not addressed only to rich people. Many poor people feel that they can never be happy because they are poor. The Bible tells us that the love of money causes all kinds of evil. That warning applies to everyone.

The love of money can never be satisfied. A person who loves money will not be satisfied with any amount of it (Ecclesiastes 5:10). The Bible tells us that we should avoid the love of money and be content with our basic needs (Hebrews 13:5).

The person who eagerly wants to be rich has many temptations to compromise his character. Through the process of trying to get rich a person may leave his faith and gain many sorrows instead of the joy he expected.

Sometimes religious leaders attract followers by promising them wealth. They say that a person with faith should have wealth. Many people in poor societies are attracted by these promises because their lives are difficult. These leaders talk and preach about money constantly and are proud of being able to show the same signs of financial success that people in the world show.

The Bible says that godliness with contentment is a great value (1 Timothy 6:6). A person who pursues wealth by religious means has the same dangers as any person of the world who pursues wealth. Churches that promise wealth attract people who have not been converted by appealing to their personal desires. However, these churches are filled with hopeful people who never receive what is promised. The only people who get rich with the gospel of wealth are the preachers who collect offerings from people who believe them.

- » A student should read Philippians 4:10-13 for the group.

Paul was thankful that the Philippian believers had sent an offering for his support. He told them that he had learned to be content in whatever condition, even hunger. This statement shows us that Paul did not always have an abundance of money. He said that with God's help he could do everything. The context of that statement shows that he meant that in any condition he could be content and faithful to God.

## HONESTY

- » A student should read Proverbs 11:1 for the group.

This verse is talking about scales that are used to sell something by weight, like fruit or vegetables or meat. Sometimes people have scales that are designed to give a false weight in order to take extra money. This verse says that God hates dishonesty.

Many people do dishonest things for money. The next lesson in this course is on the subject of honesty.

## TRUSTING GOD

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian believers and promised that God would provide their needs. This is a wonderful promise. We should look at the passage where it occurs to see the situation that existed.

- » A student should read Philippians 4:15-19 for the group.

The church sent financial support to Paul. He said it was a sacrifice to God. He promised that God would supply their needs. He did not promise a great multiplication of their money.

This promise was not for people who had been irresponsible or wasteful. It was for people who had managed their money according to spiritual priorities.

- » A student should read Matthew 6:25-33 for the group.

Jesus talked about how God feeds the birds and beautifies the flowers and promised that he would take care of us. He tells us not to be worried about our survival. He promises that if we put first the kingdom of God our needs will be provided.

People usually do not worry about *today* but about the *future*. God has not promised to provide everything long in advance. Remember in the Old Testament when the manna fell, it came each day (Exodus 16). Likewise, Jesus said we should pray for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11). God wants us to trust him daily.

James said that God has made the poor rich in faith (James 2:5). Poor people have a better opportunity to depend on God than people who think they have financial security.

Trusting God does not mean that we should be irresponsible. God normally provides for us through our work (Ephesians 4:28). If a person is not willing to work, he should not expect God to provide for him, and other people should not be obligated to give to him (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

We should not expect God's provision to make us rich. God blesses a few people with riches, but riches are not God's plan for everyone. A person who strongly desires wealth will have spiritual problems.

## FUNCTIONING RESOURCES

Functioning resources are things people have that help them produce. Examples are land, a set of tools, or a computer. A person can use a functioning resource to make profit, but he must maintain it and cannot sell it, or the production will stop. A biblical reference to a functioning resource is Proverbs 14:4, "Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox."

A poor person may not understand the concept of functioning resources. For example, he may assume that his friend has plenty of money because he has an expensive set of tools, or a computer, or a vehicle. He thinks that his friend or relative who has something like that should be able to give him money when he needs it. However, any of those things may be a functioning resource that cannot be sold without making the person lose his income.

» What are other examples of functioning resources in your environment?

If a person does not understand how functioning resources work for others, he probably does not know what resources would similarly work for him. He may not be able to say exactly what he most needs or what kind of help would change his condition. He may describe help in terms of an immediate, brief boost in his daily efforts, rather than a real change of life.

One aspect of poverty is having a lack of functioning resources. Unless the person in poverty can learn the necessity of acquiring, maintaining, and reserving functioning resources, he cannot be brought out of dependence.

In some cultures, it is difficult for a person to save money and develop functioning resources, because the people around him expect him to share everything. They do not understand why he is accumulating money while someone else needs money. They expect to share what he has even if they have been irresponsible.

A follower of Christ must respect the expectations of his culture but also apply biblical principles. Scripture tells us that we are not obligated to help a person who will not do what he can (2 Thessalonians 3:10). If a person gives away his functioning resources to help a person who is irresponsible, they will both remain poor.

Scripture implies that the kind of prosperity God gives is for people to have their own functioning resources. The prophet Micah said that in a blessed society, every person would securely possess his own vine and fig tree (Micah 4:4). That refers to privately owned property and the means of producing something. In some places, agriculture may not be the best form of production, but the principle is that blessed people should have what they need to produce resources.

Often poor people who become believers begin to prosper more, not only because of God's direct blessing but because of their better lifestyle. They stop wasting money on things like alcohol, gambling, and wrong forms of entertainment. They become better workers and get a better reputation. God blesses their support of ministry. Often the second generation of a believer's family is in a much better situation than the first generation.

- » What are ways that people in your environment can work and save to improve their financial situation?

## **GAMBLING**

Gambling is risking money in an attempt to gain money freely. Each person who wins is taking money from someone who loses, without giving anything in return. Many people become addicted to gambling, waste their money, and fail to take care of their families. Many people have used money that belonged to someone else to gamble, hoping to win and be able to pay it back. There are many people in prison for stealing in order to gamble. Many people in poverty gamble because they feel that they have no hope of changing their situation except to get lucky and win money.



Gambling is contrary to many Christian principles:

1. The principle of gaining wealth through work (Ephesians 4:28)
2. The principle of contentment (1 Timothy 6:6)
3. The principle of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7)

Also, God wants us to provide service or products for profit rather than taking money from someone else by luck. Gambling is harmful because it is addictive and increases crime.

Gambling is contrary to depending on God. A person should ask, “Do I believe that God is taking care of me?” “Can I pray that God will provide for me?” “Do I believe that the way God wants to provide for me is by risking money to gamble, hoping to take money from someone else?” “Do I think that God will reward me for gambling by causing me to win a large amount?” A person who gambles is not trusting God in his financial situation. When we truly trust God, we obey his clear instructions to us, knowing that he will faithfully supply our needs as we obey.

## DEBT

When a person borrows money, he assumes that he will be able to pay it back from money he gets in the future. Therefore, to borrow is to spend money from the future even though the future will bring new needs also.

The Bible says that the borrower is a servant to the lender (Proverbs 22:7). A borrower creates obligations that limit his freedom.

Some kinds of borrowing are worse than others. When a person borrows money for basic needs such as food, he is getting into a worse situation. The food will be consumed, and the debt will remain, and he will be poorer than before.

When a person borrows money for something unnecessary, such as personal adornment, unnecessary clothing, entertainment, or home decoration, he is spending his future money. He is limiting his future freedom; in the future he will not be able to choose to buy things because the money is already spent.

Some businesses loan money at a high interest rate. People who borrow from them soon owe much more than they originally borrowed. Some stores sell things on credit at a high interest rate. People ultimately pay much higher prices for the things they buy on credit because they are not willing to wait until they have enough money to pay the normal price.

Sometimes people borrow money to provide the expensive wedding event expected by their culture. They begin their marriage with a large debt. The church as a family of faith

should help its members by developing new traditions or by finding ways to make a wedding beautiful without being excessively expensive.

» A student should read Romans 13:7-8 for the group.

These verses tell us to give what we owe to others. We owe respect and obedience to authorities. We owe taxes to the government. The first sentence of verse 8 summarizes the statements in verse 7. We should not be failing to give anyone what we are supposed to give. This does not mean that we should never borrow, because if we pay back as we have agreed with the lender, we are not failing to give what we are supposed to give.

It is wrong for a person to borrow without intending to repay, or to borrow and decide later not to repay (Psalm 37:21).

The laws of the Old Testament are mostly addressed to the nation of Israel as a primitive agricultural society. Most people lived by farming and by producing what they needed in their households. Families owned the same land for many generations. Therefore, it was rare for someone to borrow money to buy land or start a business. If a person borrowed money, it was because he was in a bad situation and needed money for basic needs. God wanted Israel to be a family of faith that cared for its members. God told them to loan money to people in need without charging interest (Exodus 22:25). One of the characteristics of a righteous man described in Psalm 15 is that he does not loan money at interest (Ezekiel 18:5-9 is similar to Psalm 15).

It is not wrong for an investor to charge interest when he loans someone money to help him start a business (Matthew 25:27). The interest is the investor's reward for making the business possible.

People who do business with the poor should not only be thinking about how to make a profit (Proverbs 22:16a). It is wrong to sell low quality products or charge unfair prices, because the poor do not have other options. It is wrong to make loans or sell things on credit for the purpose of taking high profit from people who are borrowing because of difficult situations. A businessman should look for ways to improve the situation of his customers.

The Prophet Ezekiel said that the sin of Sodom was not only sexual immorality but that the people lived in luxury and did not aid the poor and needy (Ezekiel 16:49). God calls us not only to give to the poor, but to help in a strategic way to make them stronger.

God's laws for ancient Israel show us his priorities. Today our nation's laws are not the same as the laws that God gave to Israel, but God's concerns are the same and the principles are the same. The church should find ways to strengthen the poor, first caring for the family of faith, then making a difference in the community.

## BUDGETING

Some people spend all their money as soon as they get it. They often suffer from needs before they have money again. They are not able to take responsibility for others.

A budget is a plan to manage routine spending. Most people have expenses that they can expect at certain times, and they should reserve money for those needs ahead of time. For example, a person may be renting a house. He may pay monthly or annually. He needs to consistently save a portion of his income so he will be able to pay rent when the time comes. If his rent is annual, he will be holding some of the money for a long time, and there is a temptation to use it, but he should reserve that money and consider it already spent.

The first money reserved should be tithe (Proverbs 3:9-10). You should commit to giving 10% of your income to support ministry. Don't wait to see if you have extra money for tithe after your spending. God will bless your faithfulness.<sup>17</sup>

After the basic needs are covered with his remaining income, a person should reserve money for emergencies. He should reserve some money for improving his situation, such as saving money to buy his own home. He should also try to invest some money into increasing his income. An example of a small investment might be to buy tools that allow him to be paid more for work.

A person who has a functioning resource (something that helps him produce) such as a vehicle or building should budget money to maintain the resource. If a person makes profit with his car but does not reserve money, he will not be able to pay for major car repairs or buy another one, and his profit will eventually end.

A person who does not budget may often be unable to take care of his responsibilities. He may depend on others for help and be unable to help others. His situation never improves because he does not invest in any way.

Jesus told about the Good Samaritan who helped the wounded man (Luke 10:25-37). Notice that the Samaritan had some money and a donkey to use to carry the wounded man. What if the Samaritan had already sold his donkey and spent all his money? Even if he had a good desire to help, he would have been limited in his ability to intervene in the situation.

Budgeting enables a person to prepare for his needs, take responsibility for those who depend on him, invest in his future, respond to emergencies, and support ministry.

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17 A thorough case for tithing is made in the Shepherds Global Classroom course *Doctrine and Practice of the Church*, available at <https://www.shepherdsglobal.org/courses>

## THE FAMILY OF FAITH

In the early days of the church, soon after Pentecost, believers were so committed to the family of faith that they made sure everyone's needs were met. They shared their possessions, and nobody said anything was his own. Many of them sold property and gave the money to the church (Acts 2:44-45). Though we may not expect life in the church to always be exactly like that, we see that when the church is at its best there is generosity and a commitment to taking care of the family.

The Thessalonian believers were making sure that all members were fed, but some were not working. Those people were living in leisure, depending on the generosity of the church. Paul did not tell the church they were wrong to take care of the family members but said a person should not be given food if he were unwilling to work (2 Thessalonians 3:10). For some, the work might not be employment for wages, but helping other believers as needed. Some people are not able to be employed, but almost everyone can do something to help.

In other letters Paul gave directions for helping widows and supporting pastors (1 Timothy 5:3-18, Galatians 6:6).

Every believer should be part of a local family of faith and should commit to helping the needs of the members and the support of the ministry.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

- » How can the people of the church work together to care for needs in the church while requiring people to take responsibility?
- » What opportunities exist in your environment for the church people to work together to develop functioning resources?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your promise to meet my needs. Help me to be faithful in my responsibilities to provide for myself and for others who depend on me. Help me to be generous with what I have. Help me to wisely meet the needs of others.

I pray for your financial blessings, but most of all I want to keep spiritual priorities and be content because of my relationship with you.

Amen

## LESSON 9 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Prayerfully consider the scriptural principles given in this lesson. Answer each of the following questions in writing:
  - What temptations have I faced when it comes to money and resources?
  - How do I currently gain money and/or resources?
  - How do I use and manage money and/or resources?
  - What does it mean to trust God with money and/or resources?
  - What functioning resources do I have?
  - Are there functioning resources I should plan to get in the future? If so, how will I do this?
  - In what ways have I misused money and/or resources?
  - How will I correct any misuse of money and/or resources listed above?
2. Write a one-page presentation of principles from this lesson, making specific applications to your environment. What do the people in your environment need to understand about the Christian understanding of money?
3. Memorize Proverbs 3:13-17 and write a one paragraph reflection on it. At the beginning of the next class time, write this passage from memory and give the paragraph to the class leader.



# LESSON 10

# HONESTY

## LESSON OBJECTIVE

By the end of this lesson, the student should commit to being completely honest in all situations at all times.

## ABRAHAM LINCOLN, HONEST MAN

Abraham worked in a store. One day he realized that he had not given a customer the correct change. The woman had already left. She lived several miles out in a rural area, and Abraham knew he would not see her again soon. Even though the amount of money was small, he was concerned that she might need it. He also wanted to make sure she did not think he had purposely kept her money. When the store closed for the day, Abraham walked several miles to return the money. Because of his carefulness in that situation and at other times, his friends called him “Honest Abe.” He later became a lawyer, then got involved in government. His honesty was respected, and he eventually served as President of the United States.

## THE NATURE OF GOD

The Bible tells us that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18). His nature is always consistent and unchanging (James 1:17). God does not tell the truth only when it gives an advantage. He does not lie to get good results. We can have confidence that the Word of God is absolutely true and dependable. His truth gives us security (Psalm 40:11, Psalm 91:4).

- » How would your relationship with God be affected if you did not trust him to always tell the truth?

Think about how truth is important to our relationship with God. God calls us to devote ourselves to him completely. We could not do that if we did not trust him completely.

## GOD'S STANDARD OF TRUTH

God wants us to always tell the truth. A person who tells lies is not righteous in God's eyes (Proverbs 12:22).

Sometimes people use lies to win cases in court. People with money can pay a judge to accept lies in order to take property from others (James 2:6). Wealthy people escape justice and condemn innocent people by paying bribes to establish lies (James 5:1, 6).

It is sin to witness falsely, even if you think your cause is right. The Bible condemns false witnesses and does not allow exceptions (Exodus 20:16; Proverbs 6:16-19, Proverbs 14:25, Proverbs 19:5, 9). Many people think they can lie if the lie will accomplish good and not cause harm, but the Bible does not give that option. We are never told in scripture that there are times when we should lie.

Believers should speak truth without exception. Truth is essential to our relationships (Ephesians 4:25).

Ephesians 4:15 says that speaking truth is necessary for growing to spiritual maturity.

Colossians 3:9 says that lying is part of the sinful life that we have put away.

God will judge and condemn liars. Liars are included in a list of terrible sinners condemned by God's law (1 Timothy 1:10, Revelation 22:15). All liars will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). Liars will not enter God's city (Revelation 21:27).

## APPLYING TRUTH TO BUSINESS AND RELATIONSHIPS

» A student should read Proverbs 11:1 for the group.

This verse is talking about scales that are used to sell something by weight, like fruit or vegetables or meat. Sometimes people have scales that are designed to give a false weight in order to take extra money. This verse says that God hates dishonesty.

It is wrong for a person to sell something while lying about its condition or hiding its defects. It is wrong to lie when telling someone how much you paid for something in order to sell it for a higher price.

It is not right for a person to sign his name to something that is not true in order to avoid paying money. It is not right for a person to help his employer deceive people for profit.

» What are various forms of dishonesty you have observed?



The Bible says that wicked people borrow and do not repay (Psalm 37:21, Proverbs 3:28). Some people borrow then feel no obligation to pay their debt. The Bible says we should make sure that we are not failing to give others what we owe them (Romans 13:7-8).

Honesty means that you keep your promises and commitments. Psalm 15 describes the person who is in a good relationship with God. One characteristic of this type of person is that he keeps his promises even if it is costly to him (Psalm 15:4).

It is dishonest when a person does not work as he should for a person who has hired him (Ephesians 6:5-6).

It is wrong for a worker to steal things from his employer (Titus 2:9-10).

It is wrong to give false receipts to say that something cost more than it really did. It is wrong for an employee or agent to lie about the price of something so that he can keep some of the money.

It is wrong for an employer to withhold promised wages from workers (James 5:4).

It is wrong to keep something that someone else has accidentally misplaced. You should return it to its owner if you can (Deuteronomy 22:1).

If you are managing the resources of someone else (like an employer or a ministry), it is wrong to use money or things for yourself if you have not been given permission.

## **AN ILLUSTRATION OF CULTURAL CHALLENGES TO HONESTY**

In some communities people live under the care of a chief. The people are loyal to the chief, and the chief is expected to help them with every need. In these communities most people do not have much personal property. The most important resources, such as land, belong to the community. Leaders are supposed to manage the resources for the benefit of everyone. When a person has a need, he feels that he has a right to take what he needs from the resources of the community.

Gideon was born in a jungle village. His family and the families around them raised food on the land that belonged to the village. They found resources in the jungle. None of them owned personal land, even where their houses stood. Families helped each other when they had problems. The chief was like a father to the village. The people expected him to care about their needs.

When Gideon became a young man he found employment with a company that was cutting logs for lumber. He left the village to live near the work area. He was paid a salary each month. Sometimes he did not have enough food because he was not accustomed to budgeting a salary. He expected the boss to provide food for him, and was surprised when

the boss said that it was Gideon's responsibility to buy everything with his salary. When Gideon's sister needed a doctor, Gideon asked the boss for money for her. Gideon was angry when the boss did not help. Gideon thought the boss was supposed to help him with his problems, but the boss said that the salary was his only responsibility for Gideon. When Gideon left the job, he stole some of the tools to take to the village, because he felt that the boss had not helped him enough.

Gideon later moved to the city with his wife and child and found a job in a large grocery store. Gideon asked his boss to pay for his child's school fees, but the boss did not. Sometimes Gideon did not have enough money to buy everything his family needed. Because he worked in a store that sold food, he thought he should be allowed to take food from the store to his family. He knew that the boss would not agree, so he took food secretly.

Some workers do not understand the limits of the employer's commitment. They think the employer is responsible for all of their needs. They ask him for many forms of help besides the wages for their work. If he does not give them what they need, they feel justified in stealing, because they feel that he owes them the things they need.

» A student should read Titus 2:9-14 for the group.

These verses tell us that a worker must not steal from his employer. Verse 10 says that honesty makes the doctrines of Christ beautiful. The next few verses describe the life that a person lives if he is transformed by grace.

## RELIABILITY

Honesty is not just about money and possessions.

Caleb promised his coworker that he would meet with him at 8:00 in the morning. However, he slept late and took time to eat breakfast and was more than an hour late. He told his coworker that the driver came late to get him. The coworker was not surprised. All of Caleb's friends know that he never keeps his commitments.

Caleb was dishonest two ways:

1. He did not keep his promise.
2. He lied about the reason he was late.

Can people believe you when you say you will do a job or be at a place? Do you believe yourself when you say it? When you promise something, you are also promising to make the effort necessary to fulfill it. It is wrong to promise something then make no effort to keep your promise.

If you fail to keep a promise, you should apologize. You should not lie about the reason that you failed.

It is wrong to blame others in your organization for your mistakes. Your team will not trust you if they know you will lie about mistakes.

A trustworthy leader does not get people to follow his idea by telling them things that are not true. Stephen Covey wrote that “Leadership is getting results in a way that inspires trust”.<sup>18</sup>

## THE RELATIONSHIP FACTOR

Many people believe it is wrong to lie to friends or relatives but okay to lie to other categories of people. Some people steal money or materials from their employers because they think they deserve to be paid more. Some people steal from wealthy people, especially wealthy foreigners. Some people make unfair transactions with people from a different ethnic group or social class.

Jesus said we should love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31). Remember the question a lawyer asked Jesus? “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). The lawyer wanted Jesus to specify the category of people that we must love, so Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). The story is about two people of different ethnicities who met for the first time. They had no previous relationship, and there was conflict between their ethnic groups. The Samaritan helped the needy man, even though he was not obligated by any relationship. One of the points Jesus made with this story is that no person should be excluded from our love.

We are not supposed to decide who deserves our honesty. We are not supposed to be honest only with selected people. Even if we think a person would not be harmed by our dishonesty, we want to please God by being honest (Acts 24:16, see also Philippians 1:10, 2 Corinthians 5:9).

What kind of person do you want to be? What kind of person does God want you to be?

Someone may not deserve your courtesy, but God wants you to be a courteous person. Someone may not deserve your honesty, but God wants you to be an honest person. Someone may not deserve your love, but God loved you when you didn’t deserve it, and God wants you to be a loving person.

- » Students should read 1 Peter 2:21-23 and 1 Peter 3:8-12 for the group.

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18 Stephen M. R. Covey. *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*. (New York: Free Press, 2006).

Don't let the character of others determine your character. A person may lie to you, but you should not become a liar. A person may steal from you, but you should not become a thief. A person may be rude to you, but you should be a person of respect.

## ILLUSTRATIONS FROM LIFE

The illustrations in this section are all real cases, but names and details have been changed. They are examples of stealing or lying or both.

*Note to class leader: Make sure students understand what happened in each illustration. Ask students to explain why the action in the illustration is wrong.*

1. Jacob worked in a factory. He often took home cleaning supplies, tools, and small items because he knew the factory could replace them.
2. Peter was a truck driver for a large company. Sometimes when he was driving the company truck he would see a sign beside the road that said "We buy diesel." He sometimes stopped and sold them a small amount of diesel fuel from the truck, knowing that the company would not know that a small amount was taken.
3. Esther was trusted to buy computer equipment for the office where she worked. She bribed the salesman at the store to write receipts showing higher purchase prices so she could keep some of the money.
4. In a park in a large city is a man selling burnt-out light bulbs. The people who buy them know that they do not work. They buy them to take to their offices where they will steal good bulbs, replacing them with old ones.
5. Amos was a school principal. One day the father of a student came to him and demanded that his son get a good grade in algebra. He gave Alex money. Alex ordered the algebra teacher to give the student a good grade.
6. Andrew was a university professor. His salary was small. He told his class that the test would be very difficult and that no student would do well on the test without buying from him a page with the answers.
7. Aaron was the principal of a government school. One day Philip, a friend who worked for a mission organization, asked if the mission could rent some rooms in the school building. Aaron gave a price, and Philip brought the money for Aaron each month. Aaron kept the money and never reported the income.
8. Philip worked for a mission that needed to rent some space for classrooms. Philip went to his friend Aaron, a principal of a school. They agreed on a price for rent, then

Philip told the mission a higher amount. Each month Philip delivered the money to Aaron but kept the extra amount.

9. Seth worked for a ministry that needed a new building. The ministry told Seth to find a construction company to build for them. Seth talked to several construction companies. Instead of choosing the company that would give the best price, he chose one that promised to give him some of the money they got from the ministry.
10. Benjamin needed to license his car, but he knew it would not pass inspection because some of the lights didn't work. He took his car to the licensing department and saw a long line of people waiting to get their cars inspected and licensed. A man near the gate told him that for a price he could get the license for him quickly with no inspection. Benjamin paid the price and was soon on his way home with the license.
11. Simon came to take his car from the parking place. The parking attendant told him the price for parking. Simon gave the attendant less but allowed him to keep the parking ticket to give another customer so the attendant could keep the money Simon paid.
12. Anna did not study enough for the test. When she came to class she sat near a friend who was a good student so she could copy answers from her friend's test.
13. Isaiah drove a tractor pulling a plow for a large government farm. He wanted to finish early. He lifted the plow so that it would not dig deeply, letting him drive the tractor faster. The field appeared to be ready, but did not grow a good crop because it was not plowed properly.
14. Pastor Michael was sent by a mission to pastor a church. The mission sent him a monthly salary. Because Pastor Michael wanted the church to pay him also, he told the people of his church that the mission did not support him.
15. A thief came into Elizabeth's house and stole money. When she told her friends about it, she said the thief took other things also even though he hadn't. Her friends sympathized and gave her money to replace the things they thought were stolen.
16. Jason was the chief of a small village. He was also a leader in the village church. His people were primitive, uneducated, and poor, but the village owned much land. Businessmen from the city asked to buy land for farming projects. Jason sold all of the village land and used the money to build a house for himself in the city.
17. Each year the Fairfield Community Church selects a mother to honor as "Mother of the Year." They selected Rachel, not because she was a good example of a mother, but because they knew she would make a donation to the church. After they honored her, Rachel donated money for the church to buy new gates for the property. The

next year, the church decided to select Rachel as “Mother of the Year” again, even though she had moved to another city.

18. Bartholomew was a driver for a ministry. Every evening he took the ministry car to park in a secure place. Sometimes before parking the car he used it to carry passengers or cargo for his own customers.

## THE NATIONAL TRAGEDY OF DISHONESTY

This story is fictional but describes what has happened in many places.

Believers in the city of Borol found out that there was a large community of people in the next county who were living in poverty. The people of that county were of an ethnic group called Ibanese. For generations the Ibanese people had lived in primitive homes without access to much medical care or education. Many did not have enough food, and some were starving.

The Borol believers started giving money to help the Ibanese. They sent representatives to churches in other counties to ask for contributions.

The believers in Borol began sending truckloads of food to the Ibanese. They depended on Ibanese church leaders to distribute the food.

The Ibanese leaders set up markets to sell the food to their people. Only the people with money could buy it, so none of it reached the people who were starving. The church leaders and their friends kept the profit. Some of the food was sent to be sold in another county where people could pay more.

The Borol believers insisted that the food should be given freely to the people who needed it most. The Ibanese church leaders developed a budget for the distribution that included renting trucks with drivers and paying people to help. They set the prices higher than the normal prices and kept the extra money. When the Borol believers required reports of the spending, the Ibanese wrote false reports.

Every time the Borol believers discovered dishonest actions, they were frustrated and discouraged. They tried to find other Ibanese leaders to help them but had the same problems. Many Borol believers stopped giving. Some continued to give. A few Ibanese pastors soon had cars and good houses because of the Borol support. Other pastors envied them and wished for connections with Borol givers. Most of the starving people in remote areas never received help.

## A CLOSING ILLUSTRATION

Warren Buffet was CEO of a company called Berkshire Hathaway. He wanted to buy a company called McLane Distribution that was owned by Walmart. The purchase was worth 23 billion dollars. Normally this purchase would require months of inspections so that the buyer could check everything. Buffet met with the leaders of Walmart and made an agreement in one meeting. He did not send anyone to make sure the properties and other assets were okay. He said later, “We knew that everything would be exactly as Walmart said it would be, and it was.” This enormous deal was finished quickly because the leaders trusted each other.<sup>19</sup>

Now think about the people described in the previous illustrations. None of them would be able to make an agreement like this, because they are not trustworthy. Everything would have to be inspected, which would require much time and expense.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

- » What are some dishonest practices that are hard for people to avoid in your culture?
- » What is a practice that you need to change?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

We praise you for being a God of righteousness and truth. We thank you for always being truthful in your dealings with us.

Help us to follow the standard of honesty you have for us. Help us to apply the principles of honesty to everything we say and do.

Thank you for being our Father who provides and guides us. We want to trust you to take care of us.

Amen

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen M. R. Covey. *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*. (New York: Free Press, 2006), 15

## LESSON 10 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a paragraph about each of the following:
  - Explain the relationship between God's character (truth) and God's standard for us (honesty). Explain why God requires us to be honest in what we say and in all of our dealings.
  - Summarize what the Bible says about honesty. Use at least three scriptures in your summary.
  - Explain at least four ways dishonesty/honesty affects our relationships with others.
2. Prepare a biblical presentation about honesty that you could share with a group of people in your culture. Give a biblical basis for God's standard, then apply it to specific situations.



# LESSON 11

## HUMAN VALUE

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Believe that every person is valuable and deserves to be respected because of being made in the image of God.
2. Take responsibility for performing acts of justice and mercy for those who are mistreated in his area.
3. Commit to treating all people with dignity, no matter what the situation.

### DALE CARNEGIE, A MAN WHO VALUED PEOPLE

Dale Carnegie was famous for his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. He believed that all people deserve attention and respect because they are inherently valuable as people. The Dale Carnegie Institute was established to teach his principles.

Once the Dale Carnegie Institute taught an evening class for business professionals, teaching them how to be friendly and make connections with people. When the students took the test, they were surprised by one question. The unexpected question was, “What is the name of the woman who is always cleaning in the lobby when you leave class?” The students had passed her many times as they left class to go home, but they did not consider her important enough for attention, even though they were coming from a class about how to be friendly and make connections. They had assumed that they should use their new skills only to make connections with important people.

### THE CHRISTIAN VALUE OF HUMANITY

All humans who put their faith in Jesus Christ are members of one body—the body of Christ: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

The gospel of Luke tells about a conversation when Jesus quoted the commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” A lawyer asked him, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). The question was significant because the lawyer assumed that he did not have to love everyone. He thought that the commandment only required him to love people of a specific group.

People of all cultures have a very similar morality. They know that stealing, murder, and oppression are wrong. However, they do not feel that everyone deserves fair treatment. Maybe they would not steal from a friend, but they would steal from a stranger. Maybe they would not kill a person of their own nation, but they would kill a foreigner. Maybe they would not oppress their own relatives, but they would oppress people of an ethnicity that they despise.

Followers of Christ believe that every human is made in the image of God, with infinite value.

Whenever an angel appeared to people, as recorded in scripture, his first words were “Fear not,” because his very presence was overwhelming and amazing. Sometimes people fell down in front of angels with an urge to worship.<sup>20</sup> But humans are more important than angels (1 Corinthians 6:3).

You may meet a person who is a beggar of low class, uneducated, unintelligent, of bad character, lacking in skills, with no influence, of disgusting appearance, and a repelling personality, yet he is making decisions with eternal results. If he is redeemed by God, he will become a being greater than any we have seen on earth.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, he deserves respect.

» A student should read Galatians 3:28 for the group.

This verse mentions three ways that people are often classified—ethnicity, social class, and gender. Social class includes economic level. We could add other classifications such as age, educational level, and skills. None of these classifications affect God’s value of a person.

» Can someone be more valuable than other people? Explain.

A person with high intelligence, education, skills, physical strength, leadership experience, or money is more valuable *for accomplishing certain things*. However, it is wrong to consider a person more valuable *as a human* because of those characteristics. Those characteristics

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20 One example of this is Revelation 22:8-9, “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’”

21 1 Corinthians 15 explains the wonderful transformation of Christians’ bodies that will take place at the time of the Resurrection.

have practical value, but the essential nature of humanity made in the image of God has infinite and eternal value.

## PREJUDICE

People tend to think that the people of a certain ethnic group all have certain characteristics. Sometimes these statements are made with reference to skin color, such as “White people always \_\_\_\_\_” or “Black people are all \_\_\_\_\_.”

Sometimes the statement refers to a nationality, like Haitians or Germans or Japanese. Sometimes it is more specific, like a tribal name or an ethnic group within a nation.

The statements people make about categories of people are sometimes complimentary, but often they are critical. The statement may say that everyone of that group has a certain fault.

Here are examples of critical statements people make about ethnic groups or nationalities. The names of various ethnic groups would go in the blanks.

- \_\_\_\_\_ are lazy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ get drunk frequently.
- \_\_\_\_\_ will steal if they have the opportunity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ fight frequently.
- \_\_\_\_\_ never finish the work well.
- \_\_\_\_\_ are not smart enough to do well in school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ get angry quickly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ always lie.

It is obvious that ethnic differences exist, and these differences are more than physical appearance. An ethnic group may excel at certain sports or types of work because of their physical and mental abilities.

A people group has cultural characteristics. Culture teaches people to respond to certain situations in certain ways, so we learn to expect certain actions from people of certain cultures.

It is not wrong to notice physical and cultural characteristics of a group. However, it is wrong to judge a person's character because of his ethnicity or culture. A person from any ethnic group may be godly, honest, and kind. It would be wrong to treat him as though he has bad character when you don't know him as an individual.

Our personal experiences affect the way we see other people. If a person is treated badly by people of another ethnic group, he may begin to feel that everyone of that ethnic group is the same. That impression is strengthened if the person is repeatedly treated badly by someone of that ethnic group, or if the bad experience happens while he is young.

Long-term conflicts between two ethnic groups can produce generations of people who have prejudices against each other.

When a child hears his parents and other adults talk about people of an ethnic group, his opinion of that ethnic group is formed.

A believer should examine his own attitudes toward ethnic groups and pray that God will help him to show fairness and love. We should remember that God cares about others the same way he cares about us and is not pleased if we treat them unfairly.

## PREJUDICE IN MINISTRY

The Old Testament story of Jonah is instructive. Jonah tells us why he ran from God:

And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:2-3).

Jonah ran from God because of his deeply embedded hatred for the Assyrians and because he knew that God’s call for him to work among the Ninevites meant that there was a strong possibility that God would be good to them.

The social concept of race is not a biblical concept. The Bible teaches that all humans are *one race*—the *human race*: “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26).

God calls the church to reach out with the gospel to every ethnic group on the earth (Acts 1:8). The value of a human soul is the same no matter what the ethnicity.

## DISRESPECTING CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE

Because people tend to accept earthly, worldly priorities, they tend to use a wrong way of setting the value of people. Many societies categorize some people as less important and treat them as if they are less than human.

Below is a list of examples of ways that various societies have treated certain categories of people with disrespect. Some of these practices are historical; others are still practiced.

Real examples of disrespecting categories of people:

- Elderly people are no longer useful, so they are left in an isolated place to die.
- People own people from a different ethnic group as slaves and can sell them or treat them however they choose.
- Businesses post signs saying they will not hire people of a certain ethnicity.
- Women are considered the property of their husbands, to be treated however the husbands choose.
- Baby girls are left to die because the families wanted sons instead.
- The government of a nation sends soldiers to a certain region to kill everyone of a certain ethnicity.
- Children are abandoned because they have mental or physical handicaps.
- A nation has laws that forbid a woman to drive a car or get a university education.
- People who speak the common national language but not the language taught in school are not allowed to speak for themselves in a government office.
- People are hired because of having English names rather than African names.
- Girls can be sold into slavery or prostitution by their fathers.
- Babies are killed before they are born because the mothers are not ready to have children.

Some philosophies and religions support the mistreatment of categories of people.

Atheistic evolutionists do not believe that people are specially created in the image of God. They believe that modern humans developed by competing and destroying weaker and less intelligent variations of humanity. They believe that the “survival of the fittest” has produced us. If that were true, it would be appropriate for people to continue to destroy weaker forms of humanity. But we know that all people were created in the image of God and thus are special to God.

Many nations of the world allow doctors to kill babies before they are born. Some governments have even required the killing of babies because of an excessive population. In many countries, mothers ask doctors to kill their babies before birth because they are not in a good situation to have a baby. When unborn babies are murdered, they are treated as if they were not made in God’s image and do not have value. Their rights are being violated, and they cannot speak for or defend themselves.

Religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism believe that people suffer because of their own wrong actions in previous lifetimes. They believe that oppressed people deserve the status they have. They believe that if a person endures suffering and oppression well, he may

have a better life next time. Those religions give little reason to help an oppressed person, because they think the person is going through a necessary process.

Wrong philosophies and religions cause people to tolerate horrible mistreatment of classes of people. Societies accept conditions of extreme social injustice as normal. Believers are different. The biblical doctrine of special creation in the image of God provides the only adequate basis for human value.

- » What disrespect of a category of people is normal in your society?

## THE GOOD NEIGHBOR

Like many of Jesus' parables, the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) was shocking to his listeners. When he told how the priest and the Levite went past the injured man without helping him, nobody was surprised. The priests and Levites were part of the religious establishment, but people thought they were corrupted by money and power.

The listeners expected the third person to be the hero of the story, but they were shocked and disappointed that it was a Samaritan. Samaritans were ethnically mixed, and they were confused in their religion. Jews despised them for both traits.

Remember, a Jewish lawyer had asked Jesus the question, "Who is my neighbor?" He had wanted Jesus to specify the people he had to love, setting a narrow category. Like most people of the world, he thought that his moral obligations were only for a select category of people, and that he did not have to care about others.

Jesus answered the question by showing that we should care about any person we encounter. Any person we meet is our neighbor. But Jesus also answered a question that nobody had asked, "Who is a good neighbor?" or "What kind of person shows this love?" He showed that a person who is not respected by society can be a person who pleases God and shows the love that God wants to see.

The Apostle James warns the church not to honor people by the world's standard.

- » A student should read James 2:1-9 for the group. What have you seen churches do that was similar to this?

Many people who are considered important on earth are not people honored by God. Many people who please God are not honored on earth. Jesus said that in eternity the statuses of many people will be reversed (Matthew 19:30).

When Christian brothers get together, the poor person gains a status that he does not have in the world, because he is respected as a Christian brother. The rich person loses the status

that he has in the world, because his money does not put him above others in the church (James 1:9-10).

## **SLAVERY**

A slave is someone who is owned as the property of another person. In most nations that allow slavery, the slave has no rights as a human. The owner can do what he wants with the slave as if the slave were an animal or machine. The slave's own desires and ambitions are subjected to the owner's will. A husband and wife may be separated by their owner, and children can be taken from their parents.

In the Old Testament, God restricted slavery and protected certain rights for the slave (Exodus 21:1-11, 26-27). Concern for the rights of a slave was very unusual in those times. In the New Testament, God said that he is the master of all people, does not favor anyone because of status, and that the master of slaves should be kind and fair (Ephesians 6:9). The principle that a slave should be treated with the consideration deserved by every human ultimately led to the abolition of slavery in the nations most influenced by the Bible.

Slavery still exists in many places in various forms. For example, in some places, children are sold by parents for work or sexual use. Sometimes children are given to pagan temples in payment for deliverance from sickness or curses. Sometimes women are kept in prostitution against their wills. Sometimes people are smuggled into another country for the purpose of being enslaved.

## **ECONOMIC OPPRESSION**

In a place that lacks economic freedom, conditions may partly resemble slavery. People do not have the freedom to operate their own businesses. There is little opportunity for a person to change his employment for something better. Some people work for wages that barely feed their families. They rarely buy anything except basic food. They cannot afford medical care. No matter how hard they work, they will never be able to live in a better house, because the money is never enough for their needs. Their employers do not pay more because they can always find people to work for low pay.

Economic oppression is complex and is not only the fault of employers. In some nations there are many available workers but few factories and large businesses. If a government is corrupt, it may prevent large businesses from starting by demanding high taxes and bribes. If many businesses were allowed, wages for workers would be higher because workers could choose where to work and businesses would have to attract them with better wages and conditions. Because few businesses are allowed, and workers have few options for employment, employers can pay their workers low wages. Workers cannot earn enough to meet their financial needs.



The purpose of government is to serve the people by protecting them from attack and by guarding their freedoms. Basic human freedoms are: the right to speak opinions, to practice religion, to work for profit, and to own property. A person not allowed to do those things is not treated as fully human.

Sometimes believers in a place accept conditions as normal, and do not try to help people who are economically oppressed.

Julia lived in a small village where no employment was available. She left her three children with their grandmother and went to the city to work as a servant in a pastor's house, earning only a little every month. She rarely saw her children. Most people would not consider it good for a mother to be separated from her children like this, but even believers hire someone in Julia's situation. They wonder why they should pay more, when someone is willing to work for a small amount? Why should they be concerned about her separation from her children if she makes the choice to leave them and work?

» Do believers have an obligation to intervene in Julia's situation? How?

The book of Amos speaks of economic oppression several times. In Amos 5:11-12 the prophet speaks of bribes that cause judges to take the side of the person with money and that make justice inaccessible to the poor. In Amos 8:4-6 the prophet condemns people who use false measurements to cheat poor people. In Amos 4:1 he said that women are also guilty if they live in luxury that their husbands gained by oppressing the poor. The prophet said that justice should pour out like a river (Amos 5:24), meaning that it should be abundant and available for everyone.

## HUMAN VALUE AND AUTHORITY ROLES

The fact that every person is infinitely valuable does not mean that there should be no authority structure among people. Equal value does not mean equal authority. For example, though every person of the Trinity is fully and equally God, the Son is submitted to the Father (John 6:38). God has ordered a wife to obey her husband; that does not mean she is inferior to him (Ephesians 5:22). God has told children to obey their parents; that does not mean they are inferior to their parents, except in development (Ephesians 6:1).

God has instituted government (Romans 13:1-5). He has also instituted authority in the church (Hebrews 13:17).

All leaders should remember that they are servants (Matthew 20:25-28). To serve by leading means to lead for the benefit of those who follow. The leader does not lead for his own profit but sacrifices his own benefit in order to serve those who follow him.



- » How would you explain the fact that in a sense some people are more important than others while in another sense all people are of equal importance?

## APPLICATIONS FOR BELIEVERS

Make sure that all people are cared for by the church family.

- Are elderly people remembered and helped as they need to be?
- Are children valued and given teaching and encouragement designed for their level of maturity?
- Are poor people welcomed and made comfortable in your church?
- Do you avoid honoring people in the church for their wealth or status in society?
- Are people of all ethnic groups welcome to fellowship and participate in the life and ministry of the church?
- Is there an ethnic group in your area that needs to be evangelized?
- Are there people who are oppressed in your neighborhood who need someone to advocate for them?

A godly family should demonstrate the value of all people. Both the husband and wife should be respected. Their needs should be considered. Children should not be ignored or treated as insignificant. Children should be disciplined properly. You do not have the right to be violent with your child or wife any more than you have a right to treat your neighbor that way.

We should help the poor in a way that strengthens their dignity. Do not give in a public way to honor yourself while humiliating the poor. If you offer a poor person a fair way to earn what he needs, his dignity is protected because he can make a choice, and he can work in exchange for profit. The best help gives the poor an opportunity to change their situation.

The Old Testament prophets emphasized that God wants his people to set free the oppressed (Isaiah 58:6).

The New Testament emphasizes the fact that Jesus came among the poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). He was born in a place where animals were kept (Luke 2:7). Most of his friends and followers were working people and poor people. Jesus showed care for people who were unimportant in his society: the poor, lepers, widows, foreigners, and children (Luke 7:22). He said he came to bring good news to the poor. He said that the gospel would free the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19).

Since the early days of the church, believers have been active in their societies. They have taken abandoned children into their homes, delivered slaves, and helped the sick. They have cared about people whom their societies considered worthless.

Jesus said we should pray that God's kingdom would come and that his will would be done in earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). We know that all oppression will end when God's kingdom fully comes on earth. In the meantime, we should pray for God's intervention for oppressed people everywhere.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

For most groups, this topic will cause much discussion. Some students may have strong feelings about what they have experienced or observed.

- » How will your attitude toward other ethnic groups change if you remember the value that every person has to God?
- » What is something you wish you had done differently because of what you now know about human value? Encourage students to share their own commitments more than expressing anger about what others have done.
- » How should human value affect the ministry of a church?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for making us in your image. Help me to respect all people. Help me to repent of any prejudices and resentments I have against people.

I pray that you would bring justice for those around the world who are treated wrongly because of their ethnicity, gender, age, or other characteristic.

Help me to defend oppressed people and work to make my society fair to all. Help our church and each individual believer to show your love for the world in specific ways.

Amen

## LESSON 11 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write about the church's God-given responsibility to change the treatment of people in its society.
  - What should your church be doing?
  - What should individual believers be doing?
  - What will you do?
2. Study Deuteronomy 24:10-22. List the commands that show the value of people. Explain the intention of each command.



# LESSON 12

# GOVERNMENT

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the responsibilities and limitations God has placed on government.
2. Obey scriptural instructions and principles for relating to government.
3. Commit to being an influence for righteousness in society.

## WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, DEFENDER OF HUMANITY

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was a member of the British Parliament who became a believer and began to oppose slavery, child labor, and mistreatment of the poor. He worked for 20 years to pass a law that would end the slave trade that took captives from Africa to be sold throughout the British Empire. He was often frustrated that others did not seem to care about the issue. Once he got a majority of parliament members to agree to support the law, but opposers got some of the members to skip the parliament session by giving them theater tickets, and the law did not pass. A law ended the slave trade in 1807, but slavery itself was not yet illegal. Wilberforce continued to campaign for the complete abolishment of slavery. Slavery was ended throughout most of the British Empire in 1833. Wilberforce died just three days after getting the news that the law would pass.

## INTRODUCTION

There has been great variety in the relationships believers have had with their governments. At some times and places in history there was a national church that was allied with the government. At other times and places, the government has made the church illegal and persecuted it. There are nations that allow people to freely practice any religion, and their governments claim not to favor any particular religion.

The relationship between believers and government causes many difficult questions. Sometimes the church in a place develops a relationship with the government that cannot exist in other parts of the world where government is very different.

This lesson will not answer every question or explain what a follower of Christ should do in every case, but we will look at some biblical principles about a believer's relationship to government.

- » A student should read Romans 13:1-7 for the group. What statements about government do you see in this passage?

The Bible tells us that God instituted human government. God wants government to exist, and a person who refuses to obey human government is rebelling against God (Romans 13:1-2).

- » What is the purpose of government, according to these verses?

One purpose of government is to punish bad behavior by enforcing laws (Romans 13:3). The ruler serves God and fulfills God's purposes when he punishes lawbreakers (Romans 13:4).

- » A student should read 1 Timothy 2:1-2 for the group.

We are supposed to pray for the people in government so that we can live quiet and peaceable lives. That tells us that when a government functions as it should, it protects the peace of society.

## CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE

- » Read Matthew 5:13-16. What did Jesus mean when he told us to be like salt and light?

Some people believe that followers of Christ should not vote or hold government positions, because the governments of the world do not rule by Christian principles. Some Christians believe that the church should be a separate community that does not get involved in society because society is too corrupt.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote to Jews who had been taken from their own country to live in a pagan society. They were not there willingly. If any believers in God ever had reason to abstain from participation in society, surely these Jews did. They were there against their will, the religion of the society was pagan, the government was oppressive and had destroyed their nation, and the Jews were waiting for the day when they could leave.

But listen to the message God gave the prophet for these people:

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:7).

*Shalom*, the Hebrew word used in this verse refers not only to peace itself, but the blessings that accompany peace. It refers to the blessings of God. These worshippers of God would find God's blessings as they tried to bring those blessings into a sinful society that knew nothing of him and had persecuted his people!

People who serve God should influence their society to respect God's will so that their society can be blessed. They should not only share the gospel, but also apply God's principles to every condition and every decision.

Government and society should be shaped by God's Word. From God's revealed truth should come ethics (rules for right actions), from ethics should come politics (government for justice and freedom), and then economics (managing resources). So the right order is truth, then ethics, then politics, then economics.

1. Scripture
2. Ethics
3. Politics
4. Economics

The natural tendency of human society is to reverse that order. People make their personal economics the priority, then support leaders and laws that will give them what they want even if they must lose justice and freedom, then form their ethics to match what they do, then design religion to approve their behavior. So the usual order is economics, then politics, then ethics, then religion.

1. Economics
2. Politics
3. Ethics
4. Religion

That kind of religion has been shaped so much by wrong principles that it lacks much truth.

The church should stand for biblical truth, not only by rejecting the sins of society, but by explaining and demonstrating what society should be like. If believers cannot explain and demonstrate what society should be doing, we should expect that people who are ignorant of biblical truth will fail to apply it.

Believers should not only critique their society. Believers should be part of their society. Believers should actively involve themselves in their communities and be advocates for justice. Believers should always be ethical in all of their dealings and thus influence others for righteousness. They should participate in government and organizations that influence society as long as they can do so without violating Christian principles. If allowed, they should vote and support candidates for office who are the closest to having Christian character.

- » What is an example of society's pressure on the church to make decisions for the sake of economic well being rather than to make decisions based on scriptural truth?

## **BELIEVERS AND THE LAWS OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT**

Believers throughout history have struggled to know how to follow Christian principles when their government follows different principles. Sometimes the conflict is severe, and believers suffer for their convictions because they cannot do the things the government requires.

The Bible tells us to pay the taxes that are required by the government (Romans 13:7, Matthew 22:21).

The Bible tells us to obey the laws of our nation (Titus 3:1). However, the Bible also tells us that we must obey God whenever God's commands contradict the laws of man (Acts 5:29).

Government may demand that people fight as soldiers for an unjust cause. Government may demand the death of babies to reduce a surplus population. Government may demand that the population cooperate with the enslavement of an ethnic group.

Sometimes the issues are about worship. Followers of Christ may be persecuted when they do not worship the gods of their family or tribe. Believers may be persecuted when a different religion is favored by their government.

Some nations have laws against evangelism and Bible teaching. Believers are persecuted when they share the gospel. Some nations punish parents who teach their children about God.

We have biblical examples of people of faith who disobeyed unjust commands by rulers. Daniel continued to pray even when prayer was made illegal (Daniel 6:10). Daniel's three friends refused to worship the king's idol (Daniel 3:16-18). The Israelite midwives disobeyed Pharaoh when he ordered them to kill Israelite babies (Exodus 1:17).

Throughout history, believers have evangelized even when it was illegal. Believers have illegally taken Bibles across national borders. Believers have gathered to worship in secret. Believers have—without violence—blocked clinics that do abortions. Believers have helped escaped slaves.

Most believers would prefer to live their lives in peace and not be confronted with such decisions. However, if believers face an ethical dilemma they must do what is right even if it requires sacrifice. If they have an opportunity to prevent injustice or share the gospel, they are making a serious decision when they decide whether or not to act.

- » Can you describe a legal dilemma that could occur for a believer in your country?



## BRIBERY

A pastor was traveling through a foreign country. He had the proper documents, but several times policemen stopped him and asked him for small amounts of money. If he did not give them money they would delay his journey and give him trouble.

» What should the pastor do in this situation?

A bribe is money paid to a person in authority to influence him to permit something. It is wrong to bribe a person to do something he should not do (Deuteronomy 16:19). For example, if a building or automobile does not meet proper requirements, it is wrong to bribe an inspector to sign something that is not true. It is wrong to bribe a judge or policeman to judge unjustly.

Sometimes a person in authority demands a bribe to do what he is supposed to do. In that case, the person who pays is not paying him to do something wrong. It is wrong for the official to demand it (Luke 3:14), but the person who pays may not have a choice. Examples would be to get permission for something that should be allowed or to get the freedom of an innocent person. Sometimes a bribe is like robbery. Robbery is wrong, but we do not blame the victim.

A careful look at scripture shows that God condemns those who take a bribe but is merciful to those forced to pay it (Exodus 18:21, Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 10:17, Deuteronomy 16:19, Deuteronomy 27:25). Believers should never pay bribes for convenience, but they are not guilty when they are forced by corrupt officials.

» What is an example of a wrong bribe?

## MILITARY SERVICE

Many followers of Christ believe it is wrong to serve as a soldier for their country. They base their belief on certain scriptural statements. Jesus said that we should turn the other cheek when someone strikes us (Matthew 5:39). Jesus said that his servants do not fight, because his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). The Apostle Paul said that our weapons are not physical (2 Corinthians 10:4). These Christians believe that any violence against other people is wrong. Many of them live in countries where the government does not allow freedom and has persecuted believers.

Other Christians believe that we should be willing to defend our country as soldiers. Scripture says that God established government and that the government can use weapons to punish wrongdoers (Romans 13:4). It seems obvious that God designed a man to protect his family, and therefore it seems natural that men should be organized to protect their families from attack in the form of an army. When a soldier asked John the Baptist how

to repent, John told him to not take bribes or do personal violence but did not tell him to leave the army (Luke 3:14). When Jesus said to turn the other cheek, he was not saying that we should not protect ourselves from attack, but that we should not avenge ourselves of offensive actions, like a slap in the face. He said that his servants do not fight to establish an earthly kingdom for him, because he will not establish a kingdom that way. If government is God's idea, and if a government should defend its people, then it is right for believers to serve their government to help it fulfill its responsibilities.

Through the centuries of church history, many believers in many nations have served in the military, even in combat, because they believed they must do their part to defend their nation from evil attack.

Christians around the world do not agree on the issue of military service. It is important for a person to prayerfully consider scripture and reason, then faithfully follow his conviction.

- » How do churches in your country answer the question of military service?

## FOR GROUP SHARING

Most believers have strong opinions on these issues. It is important to understand that followers of Christ in various times and places have not all agreed about these questions. We should avoid judging the motives of others because of their opinions.

- » How should we evaluate the usual relationship between churches and government in our country? Should something change?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for designing government to provide protection and freedom. Help me to be faithful to you in spite of the imperfections of human government.

Help me to fulfill my responsibility of protecting others and influencing my society.

We anticipate the coming of your kingdom in its fullness.

Amen

## LESSON 12 ASSIGNMENTS

1. The Bible contains many accounts of God working through government officials to accomplish his purposes in the lives of his people. Proverbs 21:1 says, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” Choose one of these accounts to study:

- Genesis 41:14-49, Genesis 42:1-3, Genesis 45:4-7
- Esther 4, 7-8
- Nehemiah 1-2

Write about your observations:

- What needed to happen in the lives of God’s people?
- How did God use an ungodly ruler to accomplish his purpose?
- How did God use a godly person to accomplish his purpose?

2. Choose one of these topics:

- Christian influence
- Christians and human laws
- Bribery
- Military service

Look at the scriptures found in this lesson relating to your topic. Write a page explaining what you think is a scriptural approach to this subject.



# LESSON 13

## THE CHRISTIAN'S BODY

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Understand how physical issues affect spiritual health.
2. Dedicate his body to God and learn new habits that honor the Lord.

### MARTIN LUTHER, SERVANT OF GOD

Martin Luther became a monk because he thought it was the best way to commit to serving God. The disciplines of a monk's lifestyle included diet restrictions, fasting, simple clothing, limited possessions, and celibacy. Martin's zeal to submit his body to God caused him to also punish his body with whipping. After Martin understood the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, he realized that he could not earn grace by afflicting his body. He renounced his monastic vows as unscriptural. He married Katherina, a former nun, and had six children.

### INTRODUCTION: CONFUSION IN CORINTH

Some people in Corinth did not believe that followers of Christ would be resurrected. They thought that the body is discarded at death and that only the believer's spirit goes to heaven.

Some said, "Since the body will die and be discarded, it doesn't matter what we do with it now. Sinful use of the body doesn't matter, because the body has no ultimate value."

Others who denied the resurrection said, "The body will be discarded because its desires are bad. In heaven we will not have any physical desires. Because physical desires are bad, we should not follow them now. We should not eat good food, wear comfortable clothes, or even have sex in marriage. We should suppress the body every way we can until we leave it."

Both of those views were wrong. They were both based on a mistake. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explained why the doctrine of the resurrection is important.

Though it is right for us to talk more about spiritual life than physical issues, our bodies affect spiritual issues. God created us not just as spirits but as spirits with physical bodies. We are not mere animals, yet we are not only spirits temporarily living in bodies.

## DEDICATION TO GOD

- » A student should read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 for the group.

These verses tell us that our bodies belong to God because he has redeemed us. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and should not be used for sin.

The Bible tells us that the physical body should be submitted completely to God.

- » A student should read Romans 12:1 for the group.

This verse tells us that our bodies are to be holy and that they belong to God. The worship that God wants from us is complete obedience.

We cannot serve God consistently if we are controlled by the desires of our bodies. Any habit of sin is like an addiction.

Imagine an animal that has two masters. One master gives orders, but the animal cannot obey because the other master has the animal on a chain. The master with the chain pulls the animal wherever he chooses. The animal may love the other master more, but he cannot obey him. This is what an addiction is like. A person may want to serve God, but the addiction is a chain that he cannot resist.

Addictions and most forms of sin damage a person's body and mind. Because our bodies belong to God and are dedicated to serve him, it is wrong to damage them. The verse we read from Romans tells us to give our bodies as a sacrifice to God, but we cannot do that if we do not have control of ourselves.

- » A student should read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 for the group.

Your body is your servant, but you must keep it under control. It is very good as a servant. If it gets out of control, it becomes your master, and the body is a terrible master. Paul said that he refused to let any desire dominate him (1 Corinthians 6:12).

- » A student should read Romans 6:13 for the group.

The body is like a set of tools that belong to you. The tools are under your control. You are no longer to use them for sin but for God.

## NATURAL DESIRES

Some people think that we cannot avoid sin because of our natural desires. It is true that we are born with a sinful nature that takes us into sin. That nature includes not only physical desires but also desires of the mind and a will that is bent toward sin. A person who has not been regenerated by God's Spirit cannot keep from sinning, though he may successfully resist some sins. An unbeliever who has not experienced God's grace may not believe that he could ever live in victory.

Natural desires are not the problem. God created natural desires. Adam had natural desires but was not sinful until he made the choice to disobey God. These desires are part of what God designed humanity to be. They are not sinful in themselves, but they make temptation possible.

» What are some examples of natural desires?

The following chart is not thorough, but provides some examples of natural desires, some usual and proper expressions of those desires, and some ways that they make temptation possible.

Notice that natural desires are not necessarily desires of the body. They are natural because they come from human nature, but they are not all physical desires.

CATEGORIES OF NATURAL DESIRES	EXAMPLES OF PROPER EXPRESSIONS OF NATURAL DESIRES	POTENTIAL SINS
Self-preservation	Taking safety precautions	Cowardice
Human approval	Dressing carefully, showing courtesy	Pride, envy
Physical satisfactions	Eating, sleeping, and having sex in marriage	Sinful indulgence
Social enjoyments	Fellowshipping with others	Gossip, snobbishness
Physical comfort	Preferring ease	Laziness, materialism
Financial security	Being thrifty, making investments	Greed, dishonesty

» Is there any natural desire that you can always obey?

No natural desire can be allowed to rule without question. There is no natural desire that you can always follow safely because a desire does not limit itself to the things that are right for you. For example, the desire of hunger does not distinguish between one's own food, another person's food, or food that one cannot afford.

There are times when even the proper expressions of a desire must be suppressed. Just because a person is hungry does not mean that he can take someone else's food. It is natural to desire rest, but sometimes a person will have to work even when he is tired. It is natural for us to want to avoid danger, but a person must resist the urge to run from danger when he is responsible for someone else's protection.

Natural desires can become so distorted and misdirected that they take unnatural and inhuman forms. That's why some people do extremely perverted or cruel actions. Natural desires become distorted or misdirected by incorrect teaching, the development of bad thought patterns, being in a sinful environment, or one's own sinful actions.

Every believer should expect to have temptations because of natural desires. Grace does not usually remove natural desires, but it does give a person the power to control his actions and direct his desires toward legitimate objects.

Natural desires make spiritual disciplines necessary for maintaining spiritual victory. Grace does not free a person from the necessities of obeying the instructions of scripture, attending worship, keeping the body in subjection, and practicing prayer and Bible study. A believer who is serious about maintaining spiritual victory may also set personal restrictions to protect his areas of weakness.

Temptation will appear attractive, but if the heart is established to desire God's will, the person can truly reject temptation from the heart (1 John 5:3). He won't think he is giving up what would really make him happy. By faith he knows that God does not forbid anything that is harmless, even if he doesn't see the harmfulness of something that is forbidden (Deuteronomy 6:24). By faith he knows that nothing contrary to God's will would really satisfy him, because his satisfaction is in God (Psalm 16:2, Psalm 84:11).

## **DIET AND EXERCISE**

» What does the Bible say about food?

The Bible does not specifically forbid anything for food. The dietary restrictions of the Old Testament were not required of New Testament believers (1 Timothy 4:4, Mark 7:19). There was an issue of food offered to idols, but that was not because the food itself was wrong, but because some people ate the food as part of worship to the idol (1 Corinthians 8).



Diet is important for the sake of physical health and strength. Because we are servants of God, we should want to be in good physical condition. We should try not to damage our bodies or shorten our lives with bad diets. Many people do not have many choices of diet, because they must eat what is available and what they can afford, but they should make the best choices they can. They should also teach their children to make good choices of diet.

People who have money to spend for food sometimes eat too much food for the taste they like rather than choosing the food that would give them the best nourishment. People are also tempted to spend too much money on unhealthy food. Some people feel unable to buy a book for ministry training, but they spend that much every week for candy and Coke.

Physical exercise is necessary for a person to stay in good physical condition. A person should not allow lack of exercise to cause him to lack strength or have excess body weight that hinders him from doing his best for God. If a person's employment requires physical labor, he may not need additional physical exercise; otherwise, he should discipline his body to be in good condition.

A believer should consider diet and exercise because he belongs to God. However, specific directions about diet and exercise are not in the Bible. People must find ways to apply the principle of dedication to God in their own situation. We must avoid judging and criticizing others. These details should not be made rules of spiritual living unless a select group of people commit to specific disciplines.

» A student should read Romans 14:4 for the group.

We must each apply scriptural principles in specific ways, but we must not judge people who apply them differently, when the specific applications are not in scripture.

## MIRACULOUS PHYSICAL HEALING

» A student should read Romans 8:18-23 for the group.

Disease is a result of the curse that came on all creation when the first people sinned. God's plan of salvation will ultimately restore creation and end all suffering. However, these verses tell us that this restoration does not all happen immediately. Though we are saved already, our bodies will continue to suffer aging and disease until God's plan of salvation is finished.

God does miracles in the world already. Many miracles of healing are recorded in the Bible. God promises to heal in response to prayers of faith by the church (James 5:14-15). It is not necessary that the sick person have faith for his own healing; the church can have faith for him. Therefore, a sick person should not be accused of lacking faith.<sup>22</sup>

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22 Jesus healed the paralyzed man because of the faith of his friends (Mark 2:5).

We cannot expect that a person with faith will never suffer sickness. God allowed Job to suffer physically for a period of time though Job had been faithful to God (Job 2:8).

Paul said that God allowed a “thorn in his flesh” to keep him humble and dependent on God. Paul prayed three times for deliverance, but finally realized that God wanted to give him strength for endurance rather than healing (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). It seems likely that the “thorn in the flesh” was a physical affliction, though we do not know that for sure.

Paul suffered a physical affliction while he was evangelizing the Galatians (Galatians 4:13-15). Apparently he had a problem with his eyes, because he said that the Galatians so loved him that they would have been willing to give him their eyes. We don’t know if Paul was healed of this problem later, but obviously he was not healed immediately. It is obvious that Paul did not teach that every believer should be always free of sickness, and the Galatians did not think his sickness contradicted the gospel he preached.

» A student should read Philippians 2:25-30 for the group.

Epaphroditus was sick and in danger of dying. He became sick because he was working so much to help Paul. Paul said that Epaphroditus deserved honor because he risked his life for the work of Christ.

The examples of Job, Paul, and Epaphroditus show us that we should not accuse people of a lack of faith when they are sick. We should not assume that they are being punished for sin. Only God knows if there is a spiritual cause for someone’s suffering. Some of the greatest Christians in history, people of great faith, suffered sickness for long periods.

The Bible does not forbid the use of doctors and medicine. Even though we pray for health and healing, it is not wrong to use the help that is available.

It is wrong to seek healing from people who claim magical power or serve spirits that are not from God. We do not serve Satan, and we should not seek benefits from him. Our loyalty is to God, and we should be content with his blessings. If he chooses not to heal, we should pray for grace and strength to be faithful.

## HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

Some people use substances that give their body pleasure but have bad results.

While narcotics are sometimes needed to treat medical problems, they should never be used for pleasure. They can damage the body, damage the mind, and cause addiction. In many places it is illegal to use narcotics without a doctor’s prescription and supervision.

Except in very small amounts, alcohol affects a person’s perceptions and causes him to act in ways he would not act if he were not affected. Alcohol is also addictive. In large amounts

it damages health. It is used excessively in places of worldly, immoral entertainment. The Bible does not forbid alcohol directly, but many churches forbid it because it affects behavior and judgment, is addictive, and often accompanies immoral behavior. Many believers are concerned that if a person does carefully use alcohol while avoiding the dangers, he may influence others harmfully, especially young people.

» A student should read Proverbs 20:1 and Proverbs 31:4-5 for the group.

Tobacco, smoked or chewed regularly, is addictive and tends to shorten life by several years. The user has a high risk of cancer.

The Bible does not forbid narcotics, alcohol, or tobacco specifically. However, most people who understand their harmfulness believe that a follower of Christ should not use them. That has not always been the case everywhere, in times before people knew the full effects of these substances.

The greatest danger of these substances is their tendency to make the user addicted. Addictions take control of a person's life. They consume his resources. They affect his perceptions, making him irrationally justify them. He makes sacrifices that harm his family and work. The addiction demands loyalty that is similar to a religion and conflicts with loyalty to God.

Ephesians 5:18 tells us that believers should not get drunk, but rather be filled with God's Spirit.

## **CLEANLINESS AND APPEARANCE**

The believer should have habits of physical cleanliness that are at least as good as the normal customs in his culture. He should not be noticed by others for having an unpleasant odor, hair that is unattended, or clothes that are dirty or in bad condition. A person in poverty may have some difficulty keeping a good appearance, but he should do what he can.

You should listen if your friends criticize your appearance or hygiene. Parents should teach good habits to their children.

Believers should not follow the pattern of the world, using dress and adornment to show that they are superior to others. However, a careless appearance can imply that a person has little respect for the people he meets. For example, if you are careless about your appearance when you go to a meeting, it may seem that you think the meeting and the people are not worth respect. Christians should demonstrate how to honor God and show respect to others with a good appearance.

People who do not have spiritual and eternal priorities often emphasize the body by dressing in a way to get attention. A man may want to show his muscles. A woman may want to

be physically attractive to men. Believers should not want to show pride or get the wrong kind of attention with their clothing.

## FOR GROUP SHARING

Encourage the students to think about how dedication to God should make changes in their lifestyles.

- » How do your habits show that your body belongs to God?

Avoid lengthy arguments that are intended to impose rules of diet or similar restrictions as requirements for believers.

- » How would you explain to a person why you do not use certain substances?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the wonderful design that you gave us to live first on earth and then in heaven.

Help me to live in complete dedication to you, knowing that you created me and redeemed me.

Help me to live in freedom from anything that would hinder my service to you and worship of you.

Thank you for the great privilege I have to be a temple of your Holy Spirit. I want to live in a way that honors you.

Amen

## LESSON 13 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write your answers to each of the following questions in a personal journal entry. (You should not turn this in to the class leader.)
  - Have you fully dedicated yourself to God? What does that mean to you?
  - What natural desires most often lead to temptation in your life?
  - What two or three scriptures should you memorize to help you consistently overcome these temptations?
  - What changes has God talked to you about making as you have studied this lesson?
2. Study 1 Corinthians 15. First divide it into sections that each cover a smaller topic. Write a paragraph for each section explaining the message of that section. What are the practical directions that should be based on this chapter?

# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

To learn more about the subjects explored in this course, please see the following resources.

## Lesson 1 - Christian Integrity

McDowell, Josh, and Bob Hostetler. *Right from Wrong*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1994.

Sider, Ron. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005.

## Lesson 2 - The Practice of Obedience to God

Keep, Tim and Becky. *It's All about Obedience*. Shoals: Whispering Pines Publishing, 2016.

*Spiritual Formation* (course from Shepherds Global Classroom). Available online or in print at: <https://www.shepherdsglobal.org/courses>

## Lesson 3 - Work

McQuilkin, Robertson. *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*. (Second Edition). Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1995.

## Lesson 4 - Relationships

Chapman, Gary. *The Five Love Languages*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2015.

Carnegie, Dale. *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. New York: Pocket Books, 1936.

## Lesson 5 - God's Guidance

Duewel, Wesley. *Let God Guide You Daily*. Greenwood, IN: One Mission Society, 1988.

## Lessons 6-7 - Marriage

Drescher, John. *For Better; For Worse*. Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 2012.

Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love and Respect*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004.

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Marriage*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

## **Lesson 8 - Christian Ecology**

Schaeffer, Francis, Udo W. Middelmann, Lynn White Jr., and Richard Means. *Pollution and the Death of Man*. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1970.

## **Lesson 9 - Money**

Ramsey Dave. *The Financial Peace Planner*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.

Wesley, John. "The Use of Money" (a sermon). Available online at <https://holyjoys.org/john-wesley-on-the-use-of-money/> (as of October 12, 2022).

## **Lesson 10 - Honesty**

Covey, Stephen M. R. *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything*. New York: Free Press, 2006.

## **Lesson 11 - Human Value**

Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man*.

Colson, Charles and Nancy Pearcey. *How Shall We Now Live?* Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999.

## **Lesson 12 - Government**

Schaeffer, Francis. *A Christian Manifesto*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1981.

## **Lesson 13 - The Christian's Body**

Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978.

# RECORD OF ASSIGNMENTS

**STUDENT NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

Initial when each assignment has been completed. All assignments must be successfully completed to receive a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom.

LESSON	ASSIGNMENT 1	ASSIGNMENT 2	ASSIGNMENT 3
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11			
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13			

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# **SHEPHERDS GLOBAL CLASSROOM COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

## **DOCTRINAL FOUNDATIONS COURSES**

### **Christian Beliefs**

This is a systematic theology course, describing the Christian doctrines about the Bible, God, man, sin, Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and last things.

### **Romans**

This course teaches the theology of salvation and missions as explained in the book of Romans, discussing several issues that have been controversial in the church.

### **Eschatology**

This course teaches the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation along with other sections of prophetic scripture and emphasizes essential doctrines such as the return of Christ, the final judgment, and the eternal kingdom of God.

### **Doctrine and Practice of the Holy Life**

This course gives a biblical description of the holy life that God expects and empowers for a Christian.

### **Doctrine and Practice of the Church**

This course explains God's design and plan for the church and biblical subjects such as church membership, baptism, communion, tithe, and spiritual leadership.

## **BIBLE SURVEY COURSES**

### **Exploring the Old Testament**

This course teaches the essential content and teachings of the 39 books of the Old Testament.

## **Exploring the New Testament**

This course teaches the essential content and teachings of the 27 books of the New Testament.

## **Principles of Biblical Interpretation**

This course teaches the principles and methods of interpreting the Bible properly in order to guide our life and relationship with God.

# **EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP COURSES**

## **Introduction to Apologetics**

This course teaches the scientific, historical, and philosophical basis for a Christian worldview, and shows how the Christian faith is consistent with reason and reality.

## **Faith Traditions of the World**

This course gives the evangelical believer an understanding of the teachings and proper responses to 17 religious groups.

## **Biblical Evangelism and Discipleship**

This course presents the biblical principles that guide evangelism methods. It describes forms of evangelism and provides lessons to use in discipling new converts.

## **Spiritual Formation**

In this course students learn to have the attitudes of Jesus, to relate to God the way Jesus related to his Father, to humble ourselves as Jesus did, to practice the spiritual and personal disciplines of Jesus, to endure suffering as Jesus did, and to engage in the Christian community (the Church) formed by Jesus.

## **Practical Christian Living**

This course applies scriptural principles to the use of money, relationships, the environment, relations with the government, human rights, and other areas of practical living.

## **Christian Marriage and Family**

This course gives a Christian perspective on human development through the stages of life and applies scriptural principles to family roles and relationships.

## **CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP COURSES**

### **Ministry Leadership**

This course emphasizes Christian character while teaching leaders to guide organizations through the process of discovering values, realizing purpose, sharing vision, setting goals, planning strategy, taking action, and experiencing achievement.

### **The Life and Ministry of Jesus**

This course studies the life of Jesus as a model for ministry and leadership in the 21st century.

### **Principles of Communication**

This course teaches the theology of communication, methods for effective speaking, and methods for preparing and presenting biblical sermons.

### **Introduction to Christian Worship**

This course explains how worship impacts all aspects of the believer's life and gives principles that should guide individual and congregational practices of worship.

## **CHURCH HISTORY COURSES**

### **Survey of Church History I**

This course describes how the church fulfilled its mission and protected essential doctrine through the period from the early church to the Reformation.

### **Survey of Church History II**

This course describes how the church expanded and faced challenges through the period from the Reformation to modern times.