

~Lesson Three~

God's Love and the Death of Jesus Christ

The foundation of God's love is Jesus Christ! To know Jesus is to know God's love. This is because God's unfailing love is shown to you through Jesus Christ and His death. Romans 5:8, 10 says,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (NASB)

Could you truly love an enemy? Would you sacrifice your son's life for your enemy? If your enemy deserved to die, would you take their place? God's Son, Jesus Christ, dying on the cross for us certainly shows us God loves us so very much!

This week we will learn who the Jesus of the Holy Bible is, why we need to believe in Him, and why He clearly shows us God's love. Many of you are already Christians, so use this week to strengthen your knowledge of Jesus and how to be a better witness for Him. As Peter the leader of the Apostles said in 1 Peter 3:15,

... but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence... (NASB)

Day One When Are You a Sinner?

Some of us have disobeyed man's laws, such as speeding in our car or stealing something, but all of us have disobeyed God's laws. This makes us sinners. Sin is everything we do that God's Word tells us not to do, or everything we don't do that God's Word tells us to do. To put it simply, sin is disobeying God.

Sin also includes our thoughts. If we think thoughts that are against what God desires, it is sin. In reality sin starts in the mind and if we don't deal with those sinful thoughts they become sinful actions. You might be thinking, "Where did you get that one?" Jesus Himself stated this in Mark 7:20-23,

And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit,

sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (NASB)

- 1. Read Psalm 51:1-5, Matthew 5:21-48 and James 2:10 & 4:17.** What do these passages say about sin? What is God's standard, and how hard is it for us to live up to it? How often do you think you sin? The difficult truth is, even if we only have sinned once in our life, (I have sinned so much there is no way I could even start to count), because of that one sin we would deserve to be punished. Remember one sin brought death and punishment into the world. If we are honest with ourselves, disobeying God is our natural way of life. It is supernatural for us to desire what God wants in our lives.

- 2. When Adam and Eve sinned, God still loved them. When we sin, God still loves us. God still wants to be in an intimate relationship with us, but remember there is a separation between God and us because of our sin. Read Isaiah 59:1-2 and Ephesians 2:1-5.** What did God do to take care of our sin? How did God show His love for us even though we were sinners?

Day Two and Three Who is Jesus Christ

Jesus is God

It is very important that we know who the Jesus is that we are putting our faith in. This is because to be saved from our sins we need to believe in the Jesus Christ of the Holy Bible, not some human author's invented or imagined Jesus, and not a religious leader's opinion. To know Jesus Christ gives you eternal life (John 17:3).

The Bible calls Jesus Christ God. In the gospel of John as well as in many other places in the Bible, Jesus calls Himself God, God the Father calls Jesus God, and the Spirit teaches us Jesus is God.

How can Jesus be God? There is only one God, isn't there? God's Word teaches us that God is One God, but He exists eternally in three persons. He is God the Father, God the Son (The word "Son" in the Greek language is an expression of character not birth.), and God the Holy Spirit. This principle is called the Trinity. The word Trinity is never used in Bible, but it explains one of the most important principles in the Bible about God - that He is three persons in one.

I think the idea of the trinity is hard for us to understand, because our reasoning is from an earthly perspective. It is the teaching where most off-shoots from Christianity get misguided and become cults. We need to remember God is God! His ways, His thoughts, His reasoning, His knowledge, His power, His justice, and His love are so far above ours. Why wouldn't He be three persons, since He is so much greater in all ways than we are? God said, in Isaiah 55:8-9,

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. (NASB)

1. Look up each of these passages from God's Word that describes the fact of the Trinity.
 - God is One God: *Isaiah 45:5-6, 21-22 also Mark 12:29-30; Deuteronomy 6:4-5*
 - Jesus is God in the OT: *Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 7:14 also Matthew 1:23 (Immanuel means "God with us")*
 - Jesus is God in the NT: *John 1:18; John 14:7-11; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:1- 3*
 - The Holy Spirit is God: *Exodus 31:3; Isaiah 11:2; Acts 5:3-4*
 - The distinctiveness of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: *Matthew 3:16-17; Matthew 28:19*

In John 8:24b Jesus said, "...unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins."(NASB) (Note that "I am" is God's proper name from Exodus 3:14). What Jesus is saying is, if you don't really believe I am the One true God then your sins will not be forgiven! So, if you don't believe that Jesus is God then you do not believe in the Jesus of the Bible! In other words, you believe in a false Jesus and your sins aren't forgiven. Jesus said, in John 14:9-10

Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works." (NASB)

C. S. Lewis explained in his book *Mere Christianity*, "Jesus didn't leave it open for us to believe He is just a good man or a great moral teacher because Jesus claimed to be God in the gospels". I know some of you are struggling (probably right now) with who Jesus is; but do not try to fit Him into a warm and fuzzy title, such as a great moral teacher. You should either call Him God, because He claimed to be God. Or you must think of Him as the most evil liar in history or a very dangerous nut case because He asks all of us to believe in Him for eternal life and if He isn't God you are doomed to hell for eternity.

Jesus Rose from the Dead

Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. However, He did not remain dead, but rose from the dead three days later. Romans 1:4 explains to us that Jesus' victory over death proved that He is God, and that He had, and still has, the power to pay for our sins.

...(Jesus) who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord...(NASB) (note - the title "Son of God" means Jesus is God)

The statement, Jesus rose from the dead causes different reactions in people. Some people think, "Who cares." Some may react with the statement, "I sure don't believe anyone can come back to life." Some people, like the Apostle Paul, staked their entire life on the phrase, Jesus rose from the dead.

As a Christian, belief in Jesus' resurrection is very important. This is because it proved His sacrifice for our sins was an act from the God of the universe, not just a man's good intentions. Only the God of the universe could satisfy His own just anger against sins that we commit against Him. (This is what the word propitiation means. 1 John 4:10) If Jesus had not risen from the dead, His death would have been just like the many thousands of other people who were crucified on a cross throughout history. Without Jesus' resurrection there would have been no victory over sin and death. We would still be held in the slavery to sin that resulted in our eternal death. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17,

...and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.... (NASB)

Jesus' resurrection also gives us the hope that in eternity, as Christians, we will rise bodily, just like Christ. Our resurrection gives us an imperishable body that is just right for a life with God in heaven.

I do not know about you, but at my age, an imperishable body sounds awfully good. My perishable body here on this earth is starting to get spoiled we could say. I fight one wrinkle with supposedly a miracle cream and when I think I see some improvement (maybe it's just the placebo effect), two more have appeared. No amount of anything seems to do much to stop the slippery slope of aging that is a part of our state of death. When you look at your body and feel the physical, psychological and spiritual distresses of that body (I know some of you are in awful pain and are crippled in this earthly body), don't forget the promise of our new one. It certainly gives a beautiful new meaning to the old phrase, off with the old and on with the new. Doesn't it? Paul talks about the resurrection of this new body in 1 Corinthians 15:49-54,

And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. (NASB)

Jesus' resurrection gives us a glimpse of God's characteristics in Jesus. Jesus is all powerful and the source of all life. In John 10 He says that He is able to give up His life to death and take it back again. Jesus is all-knowing because He predicted His

resurrection from the dead (Matthew 20:17-19). He is all loving because He was willing to die for us and conquer death through His resurrection (John 11:25-26).

2. God's Word in 1 Corinthians 15 talks about how important it is to believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It also tells us about the resurrected body we will have because of Jesus' death and resurrection. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.** What does it mean to you that Jesus rose from the dead? Does Jesus' resurrection give you hope? How do you feel about the fact you will someday get a new heavenly body, in eternity?

Jesus is both God and Man

What has always surprised me was not that Jesus is God but that Jesus Christ was willing to leave heaven, take on flesh and blood, and become one of us. Let's try to understand what it means that the God of the Universe became Man, if that is possible! I have this rubber ball that looks like the world. I can easily hold it in my hands, and crush it if I want to. I can do what I so desire to that rubber ball. God has much more power than that over us, and over the entire universe. His power, knowledge, and ways are so beyond ours! He spoke the world and everything in it into being. I can't even begin to comprehend how He could have created perfection, diversity, beauty, and the science of everything. God's creation is so beautiful even with the effects of sin upon it! I guess what I am trying to stress (and not doing a very good job), is that God is so above us, yet He was willing to step way, way down to our level, out of love for us and become one of us.

Why did Jesus become Man? He did this so He could represent us on the cross. In other words, as a man, he could be our substitute and die in our place. Have you ever thought about how awful it must have been for the God of the universe to step out of eternity to become one of us: to deal with sinful people and to die by one of the most tortuous deaths wicked humans could invent? And if that wasn't enough, God whose character is completely absent of sin, whose whole being instinctively abhors sin, took our sin upon Himself! 2 Corinthians 5:21 paints this beautiful expression of God's love for us.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (NASB)

Day Four What Makes You a Christian

The most important piece of knowledge you can have is the knowledge of what makes you a Christian. This is because that knowledge enables you to choose whether you want eternal life or eternal death. Let me go over with you what some people might think makes you a Christian but *doesn't*. Loving God and others doesn't make you a Christian. Going to church or doing godly or good things doesn't make you a Christian. Reading the Bible doesn't make you a Christian. Praying a certain prayer doesn't make you a Christian. All these things God very much wants you to do but they *don't* make you a Christian!

So what truly makes you a Christian? To become a Christian, you must believe, in the Jesus Christ of the Bible. That's what makes you a Christian, nothing else can. Let's summarize Jesus of the Bible: He is the One True God who died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead. That He became a sinless Man so He could be your substitute and die on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Believing is Defined

You might be wondering what believing means? Did you know that belief and faith mean about the same thing in both the English and Greek languages? Faith is the noun and belief is the verb. Faith is being firmly convinced or completely sure about someone, so that you are able to rely on, or trust in them. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as,

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (NASB)

Faith is not a feeling. If it was, we women would be in big trouble, because of our vacillating hormones. One minute nothing feels wrong with our life, then suddenly everything feels off. Beware! Just because you are feeling good or even spiritually high doesn't mean you are living by faith in God. It might mean whatever you are experiencing is just encouraging or even exciting to you. The opposite can also be true. Just because you are feeling anxious (anxiety presents itself for different reasons and not always from lack of trust in God) or out of sorts or even in pain, doesn't mean you *aren't* living by faith in God.

Faith in God is based on His Word, not on some person's imagination. Just because we hear or read something that sounds spiritual doesn't mean we should rely on or trust in that idea. God only asks us to have faith in what His Word, the Bible, says!

1. Our faith in God needs to be based on: Who God is, what He has done for us, and His Words. **Read Romans 10:17 and Hebrews 11:6** and summarize what you learn about faith.

2. **Read John 3:14-18** watching for the word believe. Who should we believe in?

Why do we need to believe in Jesus Christ to become a Christian? Let me share some of the reasons that Jesus needed to die for us, which is why we need to believe in Him. God created Adam and Eve with a free will so they could choose to do what was right, which was to obey God. However they chose what was evil by disobeying God and their choice brought spiritual and physical death into the world, and made us all God's enemies. Their disobedience put us all in the state of sin because we are related to them.

Because of our sinful state we are separated from God since He is holy and can have nothing to do with sin. (Ephesians 2:1-3 makes it very clear we enjoyed this state of separation or death from God. How sad!) We were headed to eternal punishment in hell, without the hope of eternal life. Nevertheless, He kept pursuing us with His love, because He never wanted to punish us and be separated from us. His love for us drove Him to come down from heaven to take the punishment for our sins upon Himself when He died on the cross. The only thing God asks us to do to be saved from our sins and have eternal life is to believe in Jesus Christ.

Because of the awful fix we were in as sinners, it's pretty evident salvation had to be a gift from God to us! That gift can only be accepted through belief in what Jesus did for us. Romans 6:23 says,

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NASB)

We receive the gift of being saved from our sins like we would receive any gift, we take it. However, instead of using our hand to take the gift of salvation from God, we take it by belief, or faith in the knowledge that Jesus Christ paid for our sins

on the cross. Wouldn't you agree that God's gift of salvation is far beyond our comprehension and reasoning? It is hard to grasp that type of sacrificial love! I think that is why we struggle (at least some of us) with doubting God instead of believing in Him.

3. Read Romans 3:9-26

4. **Read Ephesians 2:1-9.** From these verses, what did God do for us when we were dead in our sins? How are you saved from your sins? How do these verses show God's love for you?

5. **Read John 3:16** and rewrite this verse in your own words. What is this verse telling you to do to receive eternal life instead of eternal death?

I need to emphasize this as I end "What Makes You a Christian:" It's very important that you realize you are a sinner! If you don't, then you really don't believe you need Jesus' death on the cross to pay for your sins. Ask yourself, and be truthful, do you believe you are a sinner who needs a Savior? Do you really believe in the Jesus Christ of the Bible, that He is God and that His death on the cross is the only means by which you can have your sins paid for? If you do, then you are a Christian.

And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:11-13 (NASB)

If you just became a Christian, share it with some people who are Christians. (Welcome to His family. Please let me hear from you too!) If you answered no to those questions, thank you for being honest. Please keep doing this study, reading God's Word and asking Him to show you His truth about Jesus Christ and yourself. God tells us that if we truly seek Him we will find Him. Remember life is an eternal journey with the most important part being the part that is in eternity!

Day Five Undeserved Mercy from God through Jesus Christ

God's mercy is a characteristic that fits well here in our study. God knew we were helpless to save ourselves! He knew our sin and its consequences could be taken care of only through His mercy, so He sent Jesus Christ to this earth to die for us. He did this so He could show us His love instead of His wrath. Let's do a little study on God's mercy, given to us even though we don't deserve it.

God is merciful means that He takes loving action to alleviate our misery from the consequences of our sin

1. **Read about God being merciful from 1 Timothy 1:15-16, Hebrews 2:17-18 & 4:15-16, and James 5:11.** Write down any insights and applications the Spirit is giving you from these verses.

2. What does God being merciful mean to you? Use a Bible verse in your answer. (Example: When I need mercy, shouldn't I call to the God who died so that I could obtain mercy? (1 Timothy 1:16))

3. None of us deserve God's mercy, but He abundantly gives it to us. We all have people in our lives that we need to show mercy to. **Read James 3:13-18** and ask the Spirit to empower you to give that person love and mercy, and to show you how you can specifically do it. (If you are having trouble giving that person mercy, just remember the rich mercy God has given you through Jesus, even when you were His enemy.)

4. **End of the lesson application:** Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind one thing you learned from this lesson that He wants you to remember and make a part of your life. Be quiet before God and wait on Him to tell you. Write it down and ask Him to help you to do it!

Jesus being crucified for us is quite soul wrenching to think about, but we must if we are to recognize the ultimate of all love gifts. We need to keep foremost in our minds that Jesus' crucifixion is God's love gift to you and me. It is His way of winning us back to Him. The author of Hebrews in Hebrews 12:2b tells us that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him. You are His joy! **Read Hebrews 12:2b** each day this week and thank God that He was willing to endure the cross for you. A good way to remind yourself to thank God for what He has done for you is to get a beautiful thank you card for God. On this card write Hebrews 12:2 and put it where you can see it. If you are doing this study in a group, bring your card in and share it.

Bibliography

My ideas on the following topics come from the following sources.

On Jesus Being God

C. S. Lewis, **Mere Christianity**, p 40-41 – as quoted in Josh McDowell, **The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict**, p 157.

Faith/Belief

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Definition of Son (as in Jesus being the Son of God)

Spiros Zodhiates, **The Complete Word Study New Testament**, definition of the Greek word *Huios* (Strong's Word 5207), p 962.

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