

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE LESSONS 1&2PETER, 1,2&3JOHN, JUDE



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Cover: Designed by Daniel Webster – Photo is magnification of Acts 17:11

Bible Quotations:

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

RADIO SERIES

DEVELOPED BY: DANIEL WEBSTER (2010)

Torah scroll - on sheepskin dating from 1155-1225



Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna

KEY VERSE:

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND

SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES

DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.

ACTS 17:11

THEME:

AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME,
WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

JEREMIAH 29:13

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Preface

The lessons from Matthew to Revelation have been prepared through personal study of the New Testament. As an on-going part of our radio ministry in Ghana, it was decided to broadcast a series of teachings that would provide one lesson for each of the two hundred and sixty chapters of the New Testament. This work was completed over a five-year period from 2010 to 2015. These lessons are not intended as a commentary, or as an in-depth exegesis of each chapter. The lessons were written to be a concise, and consecutive teaching of the chapters of the New Testament, while providing practical instructions in Christian living. There is a strong emphasis in these lessons on the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The author's intent is not simply to help people learn the teachings of the New Testament, but more importantly, he desires that all would come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Each lesson contains a section entitled "Today's Bible Question". This section is designed to address a relevant question, pertaining to the chapter lesson, or with a view to the present spiritual climate. The lessons will serve many purposes for those interested in the teachings of the New Testament. I envision this work helping various bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders who wish to use a consecutive approach to presenting the scriptures to those whom they teach. Each lesson has been kept to a standard of two typed pages, or between 1500 to 2000 words. This will allow the lessons to be easily adapted into a regular teaching schedule. Each lesson, including the bible question section, can be read in less than 15 minutes, leaving time for group discussions, or further commenting, during a 30 to 45 minute bible teaching class.

It is my hope that this work will serve many in the Christian community with a greater appreciation of the teachings of the New Testament, and also be used by God to bring people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This work is dedicated to the glory of God, and the expansion of His kingdom both now and forevermore.

Daniel Webster
Oct. 2015

LESSONS IN 1PETER

Interior of Colosseum in Rome where Christians were reportedly killed for entertainment



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“AND WHO IS HE WHO WILL HARM YOU IF YOU BECOME FOLLOWERS OF WHAT IS GOOD? BUT EVEN IF YOU SHOULD SUFFER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS’ SAKE, YOU ARE BLESSED. AND DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THEIR THREATS, NOR BE TROUBLED. BUT SANCTIFY THE LORD GOD IN YOUR HEARTS, AND ALWAYS BE READY TO GIVE A DEFENSE TO EVERYONE WHO ASKS YOU A REASON FOR THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU, WITH MEEKNESS AND FEAR.”

1PETER 3:13-15

LESSON 223
Salvation Revealed

1PETER 1

In our last lesson we finished a study in the book of James, which provides instructions for practical wisdom in the Christian life. Today we begin a study of 1Peter, written by the apostle Peter. Peter will encourage believers to live a godly life, and willingly suffer as a Christian in view of the hope of glory. Chapter one will speak of the glorious revelation of the gospel foretold by old testament prophets, and revealed by Jesus Christ and His apostles.

Peter is writing to Christians, whom he calls strangers, because Christians are only passing through this world, and their real home is in heaven. The Christians were spread throughout the regions of modern Turkey, where much of the early Christian church had been established. The Christians are referred to as elect, because they had been sanctified by the Holy spirit when they obeyed the gospel in faith, and had the blood of Jesus applied to their account. Election means to come into the all the blessings of salvation that God has promised to those who accept Jesus as their Savior. It is not, as some think, a special class of people God has chosen to save, though many teach this. The bible teaches us plainly that God loves all, and offers salvation freely to all. You are elect if you are a Christian, and anyone else can become elect by simply receiving Jesus as their Savior.

Peter begins with a word of praise to God, thanking the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for His abundant mercy in bringing forth the believers in Christ to enjoy a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The living hope is an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled and that does not fade away. This inheritance is reserved in heaven. The inheritance may speak of Christ Himself, or the rewards he will give to God's children when they enter heaven, or the wonder of the salvation God has provided to us. The salvation is something that we have received, but it is also something that will be culminated in the resurrection body Christians will receive when Jesus comes to rapture His church unto Himself. God keeps us for this final stage of salvation through his own power, so we need not worry that we shall lose our salvation, for only if God's power fails, can our salvation fail, and God never fails. Because of the great hope we Christians have of obtaining this future inheritance we rejoice greatly. The Christian's joy cannot be diminished by the trials we suffer in this world, for we know that these sufferings are God's means of testing our faith, so that when it is tried in the fire, it will come out shining as refined gold, when Jesus appears, and our faith brings glory, honor and praise to Him. Christians also love Jesus, even though we have not yet seen him with our physical eyes. Through our faith we have seen Him dying to save our souls, and so we have an unspeakable joy that is full of glory, because we know we are saved and our souls will be with Jesus forever.

This wonderful salvation is something that was foretold by prophets. Though they wrote about it they did not fully understand the extent and scope of this salvation. They only knew the gospel would bless a future generation. They searched diligently through the Spirit of Christ when this Savior would come, suffer and then be glorified. Now through the gospel this wonderful revelation has been brought to us by the Holy Spirit. Even angels desire to learn more of this great salvation which God has given to men. In view of such a great revelation of God's grace through the gospel, we are to be sober, with minds ready for action, hoping for the grace that will come at the appearing of Jesus Christ. This hope for the appearing of Christ, will result in a change in conduct so that God's children obey the righteousness of God, not allowing the lusts of the world to govern their behavior as it once did when they were ignorant of God's grace. Christians are supposed to live holy because God is holy, and walk in reverence and fear. Peter calls Christians sojourners, which means we are strangers passing through this world. This is the proper way for Christians to see themselves in this world. Christians are to understand the serious cost of their redemption, which was purchased through the precious blood of Christ, who was like an unblemished lamb, perfectly sinless. God had planned before the foundation of the world to give Christ as our redeemer, and He was manifest in the last times, the commencing in the days of the apostles. Christians have placed their faith in God, who raised up Jesus from the dead, and gave Him glory, in whom they have their hope and faith fixed. Because our souls have been purified by obedience to the gospel, Peter calls on Christians to love one another fervently from the a pure heart. Having been born of God, we are now to reflect God's character of love towards others. It was God's word that was planted like a seed, and brought forth life, when we trusted in Jesus. That word is something that is living and will abide forever. God's word will never corrupt, and it has power to bring forth life to those who will place their trust in Jesus. God's word is not like man, who only enjoys a temporary life in this world. We are like the grass of the field, and all of man's accomplishments and glory are like flowers among the grass. Just as the grass and flower will quickly die and their glory fade, so it is with man, he dies and all his accomplishments fade away after his death, quickly to be forgotten. If you are not sure of this, visit a graveyard and read the many tombstones that are there. You will be reminded that those who lie beneath the stones, are gone, and their accomplishments have been quickly forgotten. We need to remember that someday it will be our name on one of those tombstones, and our life will only be represented by the dash that is between the date of our birth and death. All of our life will quickly fade from the memories of those we leave behind. They might remember you for a couple of years after you are gone, but eventually even your memory will only be marked by a weathered tombstone. Any that happen to pause to look at and read your tombstone will know you only by that dash between the dates. It is only God's word that shall endure, for it is eternal, and it is this word which brings to us the glorious news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Take this opportunity to believe in Jesus as your Savior, so that your life will amount to more than a dash on a tombstone, but

will abide forever with Christ in heaven. When all is said and done, the only thing that will really matter in life is what you have done about Jesus Christ. Either He is your Lord and Savior, or He will be your judge as you are cast into the lake of fire. Give your heart and life to Jesus now, and He will receive you as God's child.

"having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of god which lives and abides forever." 1Peter 1:23

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned the gospel is a revelation which the old testament prophets wrote about, but were only given a glimpse of the glories that would be given to those who would trust in Jesus. We learned that Christians have an unfading inheritance waiting in heaven for them, and that their hope in Jesus should cause them to walk in holiness before God, and with love for the Christian brethren. Someone might ask the question, "Why does Peter speak of a salvation that will be revealed in the last time?"

In verse 5 of the 1st chapter of 1Peter we read that we are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. This might confuse some readers into thinking that salvation is something we must wait for in the future, as though it was something we did not already possess. However the scriptures make it abundantly clear that we are saved the moment we trust in Jesus as our Savior. This is what is meant by being born again, when the Holy Spirit comes to live inside the believer, and sanctifies the believer for God. The difficulty for us is in understanding that salvation was never intended to be a one time event in our experience, but an on-going process throughout the Christian life. Salvation occurs firstly in the sense of being saved from the penalty of sin. This happens, as we have said, at the very moment we trust in Jesus to be our Savior. When this happens the Holy Spirit will take up permanent residence within the believer. From that day forward the Holy Spirit will help the believer to live the Christian life, and to be transformed into the image of Christ. This daily process of changing the believer to become like Jesus is known as sanctification, and is also part of salvation. This stage of our salvation is saving us not from the penalty of sin, but saving us from the power of sin working in our lives. Once we have been born again, we are sealed eternally with the Spirit, and can never be lost. We can, however, struggle with getting rid of sin, because we still have an old sin nature that will often lead us in the path of temptation to do wrong, and away from God. God allows this to test our faith and prove us as children of God. We are to overcome the temptations through the work of the Holy Spirit, and through daily attention to the word of God, and a healthy prayer life. There will always be battles in the Christian life, as we fight against sin, but do not lose heart, and do not think that your sin will cause you to lose your salvation. Salvation is God's free gift to us, and He will never take away what He has freely given. He will, however, chasten us when we misbehave. He might even take us home to heaven early if our sin is that severe. He paid the ultimate price for your sins, so you need not worry about having to face a penalty for your sins, because Christ has paid for them in full.

The Christian life will be a battle as we war against sin, but victory is assured already, because Christ is our Savior and champion in the battle. We trust in Him to save us from the penalty of sin, but we also trust in Him when we are battling against temptation. He can give us grace to help us in the battle, and forgiveness when we fail. He will provide an escape when we face temptation, but we must chose the escape route to cooperate with Him in the process of sanctification.

Finally there is yet another stage in our salvation. This happens when at last the Christian will be taken out to this world and into heaven's glory. This is the salvation of which Peter is speaking. It is a salvation not from the penalty or power of sin, but rather from the very presence of sin. When Christ takes us home to heaven, he will transform our bodies and give us a glorified body like His. In the glory we shall be removed from the earth, with all of it's attractions to sin. We shall also be changed to conform to the image of Christ, without any desire to sin. This final stage of salvation is what we are longing for, as we hope for that resurrection body by which we can glorify God, and live in His presence forever. God's salvation was not intended simply to bring sinners to heaven, but was intended to make sinners saints, and then glorify them in His presence. So salvation is a process and work which God has begun, and will complete. And just as sure as He has started that good work in us, He is faithful to complete His work, and to bring us to our intended purpose.

I wonder if you have this hope in you? The hope of being with Christ and like Christ? Are you looking forward to that new resurrection body in which you will no longer be associated to sin, or even be capable of sin? Sometimes when we look into our own hearts, we see how wretched we are, because we know that we still have some attraction to sin, and find pleasure in things which God hates. Salvation is intended to change us and make us love righteousness and hate all evil. So lets be sure that we are not simply trusting in God to wash away the penalty of our sin, but also allowing Him to conquer the power of sin to rule over us.

"being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Philipians 1:6

LESSON 224
Priesthood of Believers
1 PETER 2

In our last lesson we heard about the gospel foretold by prophets, and how this great message was of great interest to the prophets and even angels, redeeming sinners by the sinless sacrifice of Christ, bringing regeneration through the power of God's life giving word. This great salvation Peter said was to transform us, and cause us to love others. Today we shall see that we are also to grow through the word, and act as God's royal and holy priests.

Salvation has an impact in the lives of those it touches. The first response of the new Christian is to hunger for God's word. Peter says that just like newborn babies desperately desire for their mothers breast milk, so the new Christian should be seeking passionately to take in God's word. The desire is stimulated by an encounter with Jesus through salvation. Once we meet our gracious Savior and have understood what He did to save us, we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and that compels us to learn more about Him in the word, and this brings spiritual growth.

Peter has a number of different ways to identify believers, calling them strangers, sojourners, and in this chapter Christians are called living stones, royal and holy priests. These are all important titles for they teach us the unique place God has given to us in this world as His children. As living stones we are part of a house that God is building, with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. He is the one who holds the whole house together. He was the rock of offense and stone of stumbling, because many of his own countrymen rejected Him as their Messiah. They did not recognize Him for who He really was, but He will be the one who judges them. We are not dead stones in an earthly temple, but living stones that comprise the dwelling place of God. We also have the distinction of being called priests for God. A priest is a representative for God to man, but also a representative of man to God. In these roles priests make offerings before God, and also deliver God's message and reflect God's mind and love towards men. The sacrifices of a Christian priest are not physical offerings like in the Old Testament, but they are spiritual sacrifices, which include praise, sharing in the needs of others, and being a faithful witness of the gospel. Peter says that Christians are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people who proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. There is much to learn in each phrases, but we only have time to briefly touch on each one. As royal priests we represent our Lord Jesus to the world, we are His royal ambassadors. We are also holy priests, in which role we intercede on behalf of men before God, such as when we pray for others. Chosen, holy, and special helps us to understand that God has made us into something very significant and important to the to Himself. We are not mistakes, forgotten, or of no value. In God's sight we are his very precious possession. We were once not the people of God, but when we trusted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we were shown mercy. Based upon this truth Peter appeals to Christians, again calling them sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain for fleshly lusts. These lusts, which any serious minded Christian knows full well in his experience, are said to war against the soul. The lusts lead us away from God down the dirty and dark pathway of sin. God has called us out of darkness and into light, which means we have a responsibility to walk in that light. This means we learn what God hates and stay away from it, such as lying, stealing, and mistreating others. Christians have to convey a message to the world, and they should see that our conduct is good and honorable, because as priests we represent God to them. The world may hate Christians and speak evil about them, but when Christians behave wisely and show good conduct, it will be a rebuke to those who oppose Christians, so that one day they will have to admit before Christ, that these were indeed honorable and true. So in an effort to honor the Lord and be His witnesses we are to obey the ordinances of man, for the Lord's sake, whether kings or governors, or their officials. When Christians honor and follow the civil authorities and laws, they demonstrate God's work in them, and silence the ignorance of foolish men. Christians have liberty, but should not use their liberty as a cover for bad behavior. They should rather submit themselves to the service of God. Christians are therefore responsible to honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God and honor the king. This shows excellence of character and nobility of heart, making Christians stand apart from the rest of the world. Christian servants are to submit to their masters, whether they treat them well or not, because this is commendable. It is better to suffer wrongfully because of a conscience towards God. There is nothing honorable about suffering when you have done wrong and are punished for it. However if you should be wrongly judged, and you endure it patiently, it shows a depth of character, a godly patience that is commendable before God. This higher calling of noble character is what God's requires of those who represent Him to others.

Christ suffered wrongfully, but with a purpose to offer us salvation. He has set forth an example for us to follow. Jesus committed no sin, nor did he ever deceive anyone with his words. When others reviled Him, he did not return the same. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to his righteous Father who would judge His case in the proper time. Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It was by His stripes that we were healed. Like sheep going astray we all were far from God, but then we turned to Jesus for God's forgiveness of sin, and he saved us. He is our shepherd and the overseer of our souls.

As priests for God we must learn to represent the message of God, and His character to the world. This is a high calling for it means sometimes suffering wrongfully for a higher person, allowing others to misunderstand and even mistreat us while we seek their good. Sharing the gospel message can certainly bring opposition and persecution, but it is a cost we should be willing to pay, because of the greater good that can come when people trust in Jesus as their Savior and receive the free gift of eternal life. I hope you have recognized that Jesus sufferings were for you, and

designed for your salvation. Why not answer His call today, and trust in Him for the salvation He wants you to give you. Just call on Him to forgive your sins, and invite Him to be Lord and Savior right now.

"who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness, by whose stripes you were healed." 1Peter 2:23

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned Christians should desire God's word for spiritual growth with the same desperate hunger of a baby crying for his mother's milk. We also saw that as Christians we have a twofold priestly ministry of serving God's people, and ministering to the Lord, which means conducting ourselves in a honorable way, with a willingness to suffer for the Christian faith. Someone might ask the question, "Why does Peter teach us that suffering is commendable?"

The book of 1st Peter has the underlying theme of Christian suffering. Christians are called on to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel. Suffering is not a popular subject, and we want to run as far away from suffering as possible. However the Christian message includes a willingness for believers to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered for us. Suffering is not pleasant, and not something we will naturally desire. However, in life we are going to meet with suffering at some point or another. This is simply because we are fallen creatures that live in a fallen world. This will include all sickness, human conflict, and troubles that come our way. The Christian can look at his suffering in a different light than an unbeliever. The Christian understands that as a stranger in this world his suffering is only temporary, and that life is not always about what we can enjoy in the present moment. Suffering for the sake of just suffering has no meaning, and no one, including Christians should find any joy in meaningless suffering. In fact, most Christians are going to try to alleviate suffering wherever they find it because of the compassion working in their hearts. The point that Peter is teaching us, is that as Christians it may frequently be the case that we have to suffer for doing good. When we behave in a godly manner, not everyone is going to agree or like it. Sinners will feel ashamed and convicted about their own bad behavior when they see Christians do what is right. This causes the sinners to become convicted about their own sin, and instead of repenting their pride causes them to justify themselves, and so they persecute those who are trying to do what is right. You have likely seen this before, when a Christian tries to tell the truth, even when he knows it may hurt himself or others. Those who suffer from the truth will hate the Christian for his honesty, and wish that he had told lies to keep them from being exposed. This leaves the Christian in a bad light to those who love their sin, and do not appreciate being exposed. I recall one man who for some reason choose not to greet me when he saw me, and often spoke rudely to me. I wondered why he was behaving this way, but only later discovered that not only did he hate Christianity, he was living sinfully, and my presence was a conviction to him about his sinful behavior. His conscience was troubled when he saw me, and that caused him to act badly towards me.

When a Christian encounters persecution because they are a Christian, they are called to patiently endure and suffer the wrong. The reason for this is not because there is merit in suffering, but because we believe in a higher purpose. We believe we need to love others at all times, because God loves them, wants to forgive them and give them life. Therefore we cannot treat them like enemies even when they do wrong to us. We must demonstrate God's love be willingly enduring suffering from those who do not know God, and in their ignorance resist God's grace. Jesus did that for us, so that we could be with Him in heaven forever. Therefore we are to take the same mindset. The suffering we are called to endure is a suffering that has a good spiritual result in view. Some have wrongly interpreted the sufferings of Christ as a glory in and of themselves. There is nothing, however glorious about a tortuous and shameful crucifixion, unless it serves a higher purpose. The purpose of Christ suffering was to pay the penalty for our sins, so we could be forgiven. That is what makes it glorious and precious. When a Christian is living for God, and trying to represent His love to the world, and must suffer because of His stand for Christ, he can willingly endure that suffering, knowing that it serves a higher purpose of helping others to hear the gospel and believe in Christ. In fact, Peter and John went away rejoicing after they were beaten by the religious authorities for their preaching of the gospel. They felt it was a great honor to be identified with the Lord Jesus in His suffering, by also suffering for the same cause.

We need not go out looking for opportunities to suffer for Christ, but when God allows us to face some opposition or persecution as Christian believers, we should not fear, but stand true for Christ, and count it joy to suffer for his name sake. It is this glorious secret joy in the life of the believer, in spite of his adverse circumstances, that allows the gospel to shine through, and others to know that God is real. When a Christian suffers the light of his faith will shine most brightly, and afford greater opportunity for a witness, and souls to come to Christ in faith. Don't be afraid to face suffering, for it is a gift from God for good in us and others.

"for to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake."
Philippians 1:29

LESSON 225
Good Christian Conduct
1 PETER 3

In our last lesson we learned that to grow in Christ we need to hunger for God's word. We also learned that, as Christians, we are both royal and holy priests. Today we shall see several areas where Christians are to show godly behavior which gives glory to God, and includes following the example of Jesus in suffering.

The instructions for Christian conduct begins with how Christian wives are to be submissive to their own husbands. Her gentle and chaste conduct is that which the Lord can use to win her husband to follow Christ, when he has not been obedient to the faith. She does not need to preach with words, but let her actions reveal the spirit of Christ in her. Also Peter reminds wives to be careful about how they dress. The most important part of their appearance is not an outward display of their hair or clothing, but is found in the beauty of their character. God values gentleness and quietness in a god fearing woman. These qualities are very precious in God's sight. Then He uses the Old Testament example of Sarah, the wife of Abraham, as an example of how Christian wives should respect and obey their husbands. Sarah called her husband "lord", which was a title of dignity and respect.

The next instruction is for husbands, who are to treat their wives with understanding and honor as a weaker vessel. The wife is normally physically weaker than her husband, but she can also be weaker emotionally, or be more gullible than her husband. This is the way God has designed the softer of the two genders, so she can be gentle and nurturing to raise children. The husband needs to recognize her God given qualities, and dwell with her with understanding. He must be careful how he treats his wife, or his prayers can be hindered. This shows us that in marriage the health of the relationship between the man and his wife will directly affect their relationship with the Lord. They are both heirs of the life that God has given, and so they must respect and live in appreciation and understanding of each other. Peter's comment about being heirs of the grace of life, reminds us that we have all received the gift of life freely from God, by His grace. Sometimes we live selfishly and forget the wonder of the life that has been granted to us freely. We should thank God every day for our life, knowing that He does not owe us anything.

Christians are to show compassion and love, to be tenderhearted and courteous. These reveal the character of God to others. Notice that the instructions to Christians are mostly centered around how they behave. This shows us that the Christian life is all about character, and not just about what we do. God is far more interested in who we are, than what we do. Sometimes we mix this up, and focus much more on the doing, rather than the being, and then make excuses for our lack of love, gentleness, or grace. We must not return evil for evil, or insult those who insult us. Instead we should bless our enemies, for this is our calling, and how we shall be blessed of God. Good Christian behavior will result in our enjoying a good life that is blessed of God. This includes the careful use of our tongue, not speaking lies, and seeking to live peacefully with others. When we live righteously before God He hears our prayers, and opposes those who do evil. If we always do good, we are less likely to upset anyone or bring harm upon ourselves. However sometimes we may suffer for doing what is right, and when that happens we should not be upset or confused, but rejoice because we are reflecting Jesus' heart to others.

In dealing with others in this world, Christians need to sanctify the Lord in their heart, and be ready to defend their Christian faith in a gentle and respectful manner. This means the Lord should be the one who governs our hearts and guide our conversation. We should always be true to His word and character, and focus on His aim, and His glory. If we maintain a good conscience, then those who try to make us look bad as a Christian, will one day be ashamed, when they see how God has blessed us and approved us as His beloved children. Peter says it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. We have seen this earlier in our study of 1st Peter, and it is repeated here; Christian suffering being an underlying theme of this book. He now sets forth our Lord Jesus Christ as our great example, as He who suffered to put away our sin. He was just, but died for we who are unjust. He did this to bring us to God. He first had to suffer and be put to death in the flesh, but later he was made alive by the Spirit through His resurrection. As Christians we are to realize that love can be very costly, and painful. To follow the example of our Lord, means a willingness to be misunderstood, ridiculed, and persecuted. Our love for Christ will be measured by how much we are willing to suffer for Him and for the cause of the gospel.

While speaking of Christ's example, Peter makes an interesting allusion to the days of Noah, when Christ had preached through Noah to that disobedient generation. Only Noah and his family were saved on the Ark from God's judgment with the flood waters. This passage has led to some confusion about when Christ preached to these people who are now spirits kept in prison. Some believe that Christ descended into hell and preached to this former generation offering them another chance to repent and be saved. This however would create many doctrinal difficulties to solve. If we understand that Christ preached to Noah's generation through Noah's preaching, and that the ones to whom he preached are now reserved in hell, awaiting God's final judgment, then the text makes sense, and does not contradict any other teachings of the bible. Peter says that Noah's salvation through the floodwaters, is a type of baptism, which does not wash away sin, but is the answer of a good conscience toward God. It is important to see and understand that when Peter calls this an antitype, he means that salvation through the water as Pictured in Noah's flood helps us to learn about baptism. Baptism does not remove sin, but symbolically represents our

salvation through water. When baptized, a person is symbolically buried and resurrected when they sink into the water and then emerge out of the water. Figurative language can so easily be misunderstood, so we must take care to understand the authors intent, which here teaches that our salvation rests upon Jesus suffering God's judgment, and then being raised from the dead, showing God's acceptance of His sacrifice for our salvation. Now Christ is in heaven with all angelic powers and all authorities subject to Him.

"but sanctify the lord god in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." 1Peter 3:15

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we considered the good conduct expected of believers in Christ. Wives submitting to husbands, husbands understanding and honoring their wives, and all believers showing godly character. We learned that suffering as a Christian helps the world to see Jesus in our lives. Someone might ask the question, "When did the spirit of Christ preach to souls in prison?"

Though we touched on this in today's lesson, it is worth our time to look more closely at this controversial passage, to protect us from doctrinal error, while learning lessons about speaking for God. Because of the difficult wording of this passage, some bible scholars have interpreted it to mean that Jesus, after his death on the cross, descending into hell. While in hell, he fought with Satan, and delivered some souls held as captives, and brought them with him to glory when he was raised from the dead. This teaching not only comes from Peter's words here in chapter 3 of his first epistle, but also on a text in Ephesians 4 where Christ is said to have descended into the lower parts of the earth, and led captivity captive. The teaching that Christ went into hell and fought with Satan, is certainly not found in any passage of the bible, and must be inferred from these two text in Ephesians and 1Peter. However in context these passages will show a different understanding. The Ephesian passage does not teach that Christ descended to Hell, but rather to the earth, and specifically came through the womb of a woman (Mary), which is elsewhere is scripture referred to as the lower parts of the earth. His purpose in descending was to affect our salvation through his death, burial and resurrection. We are the captives, who were once slaves to Satan, who have been released by Christ, who will lead us one day into His glory in heaven. So we are the captives that are lead captive by Christ. In the 1Peter passage we read in our lesson today, we have the spirit of Christ, who preached to the spirits in prison. We know that these spirits refer in context to the disobedient generation that God judged through the worldwide flood. The bible tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, and it is clear that he preached to his generation, likely calling on them to repent of their wickedness, since God would bring about a judgment upon them if they failed to repent. This makes perfect sense according to the wording of the passage, for we hear of the divine longsuffering in the days of Noah. God was patient, and used Noah to testify of coming judgment through his preaching, and the construction of the ark. It was the spirit of Christ that was in Noah that was pleading with that generation to repent of their sins. The spirits in prison to which passage refers can be easily explained if we understand that those who did not repent at the preaching of Noah, ended up in hell where they are held in prison until the final judgment when God will cast them into the lake of fire. So to answer the question when did the spirit of Christ preach to these souls, the answer is clear. It was during Noah's time, and through the preaching of Noah, that these people heard the message of Christ. But how can we prove this point to those who think otherwise. Let us consider if the scripture anywhere teaches that Christ is preaching through his servants. This should confirm that it would be a fair understanding of this text to see Noah's preaching as being directed by the spirit of Christ. In 2Cor 5:20 Paul wrote, that "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." It is clear from this passage that Paul is teaching that the apostles, including himself, were instruments for God to preach to unbelievers, calling on them to repent. This proves that God speaks through his servants, not just providing them with what to say, but it can actually be said that God is pleading through the voice of those preaching. In 1st Peter chapter 4 Peter instructs those who speak in the church to "speak as the oracles of God". By this he means to speak to represent God, as though you were His voice. The preacher must understand that his message is really God's message, and so when he is faithful to preach God's truth, God can speak to men's hearts. Therefore preachers do not need to work at being clever, funny, or innovative in their preaching, they simply need to speak God's words. When a man preaches, He should pray that God will speak through Him, and seek to properly and accurately convey God's word in the spirit in which it is written. This is precisely how God blesses and teaches his people, so long as the preacher understands and makes himself available, and spiritually prepared for God to use. All this being said, we should not find it difficult to understand Peter's meaning, when he refers to Christ preaching in the days of Noah. Christ did speak, and it was through the voice of Noah's preaching, and Christ pleaded for that generation, who now are in the prison of hell, and await final judgment. It is Christ who preaches to all men, in all ages, to repent of their sinful ways, and turn to God in faith. He uses prophets, pastors and preachers, but they are all His servants, and should speak His words, and plead with His heart of love and compassion.

"Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." 1Peter 1:11

Suffering as a Christian

1 PETER 4

In our last lesson we learned about good Christian conduct, how wives are to submit to their husbands, and husbands are to understand and honor their wives, and how all Christians should show godly Christian character. We also learned more about following the example of Jesus in suffering for the sake of the gospel. In this chapter we shall hear more on this important subject as Peter encourages believers not to be surprised or ashamed of suffering for Christ, but rather rejoice to partake in the spirit of glory and of God.

The chapter carries on from the last chapter's example of Christ's suffering, saying that we should arm ourselves with the same mind, since suffering for Christ means you are finished with sin. Arming your mind is an interesting thought, and teaches us the importance of protecting our minds from false doctrine or bad attitudes, and equipping and disciplining our minds for spiritual battles. When the mind is properly equipped and the heart established, then it will affect how we live day by day. Rather than live to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, we will choose rather to do the will of God. Christians can recall a time when they gave way to all their sinful desires, feeding sexual appetite and lusts, drinking, partying, and idolatrous behavior that is associated with degrading sinful practices. We may not have all experienced these things, but it is certainly something true of unbelievers in the world. This proves a vivid description of their sinful lifestyle. God has saved the believer out of, or from such behavior. Then when our old sinner friends see our change in interest and behavior, they wonder why we don't go in for all the drinking and partying anymore, and they tend to speak badly about us, for they feel a bit convicted about their own sinful choices. They will have to give an account someday for their wicked behavior, especially since they had a Christian witness that showed them a better path, but they choose their sin over obedience to the gospel. These sinners are spiritually dead and when the gospel is preached to them, it can bring them out of that spiritual separation from God, when they realize God's judgment against the sins of their flesh. The gospel gives them life by the power of the Holy Spirit, and God will separate those who have life in Christ, and those who are dead in their sins when He comes in judgment.

Peter warns the believers that their behavior must be different from the world, and as Christians we need to be sober and watchful in prayer, having a great love for our Christian brethren. Love is God's answer to our sins, and this same love works in us to forgive those who offend us, and so covers many sins. This instruction to Christians to live soberly, watchfully, and with love is in view of the end of all things being at hand. This means the culmination of the age when Christ will judge the wicked, and reign in righteousness. One of the ways that Christians demonstrate love to others is through hospitality, which means opening our homes and our hearts to strangers to show them the love and care of Christ. We should be able to show this love without grudging, which means we should love with a sincere and pure heart, and not simply because we feel obligated, or others have forced us to comply.

Peter now speaks about ministry in the church, and the spiritual gifts that God has bestowed on His people. We learn from this passage that every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. The gifts that Peter has in mind are speaking and serving gifts, which are very helpful to the spiritual health of the church. When a man speaks for God, he is to speak as the oracles of God. This means he should convey God's word accurately, but also in the spirit and intent of the word. A preacher must be so careful to speak as the Holy Spirit leads, so that the message comes from God, and is not distorted by man's desire for popularity or personal recognition. Servants should minister according to the ability God has given them, not trying to impress others with their own powers or accomplishments, but simply humbly serving in God's strength and making sure all the glory goes to God and not to man.

Peter returns to the subject of Christian suffering, saying that we are partakers with Christ in His sufferings. Though we never felt the pains of Calvary's cross, yet because we identify ourselves with Christ, and are willing to bear His reproach when others mistreat us as Christians, we shall also share in Christ's glory and be given the greatest joy. So if we, as Christians, are persecuted, then we can be happy, for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. Though Christ is hated in this world, yet for us He is glorified because we are joined with Him in His patient suffering for the spiritual good of others. There is no advantage to suffering for doing evil things, like murder, stealing, or meddling in the business of others. However the Christian suffers because He is a Christian, he does not need to feel ashamed. He can glorify God for the privilege of having fellowship in the sufferings of Christ.

Again Peter reminds us of the coming judgment of God, saying that the judgment will begin with the household of God. He asks a troubling question, when he says, if God begins his judgment with his own people, what will be the end of those who obey not the gospel of God. In other words if God finds it necessary to even judge those to whom He has issued a free pardon, then certainly when He turns His attention to the wicked rebels who rejected His grace, then His judgment will be very severe. Peter tells us that the righteous are scarcely saved, so where will the ungodly and sinner appear? These words should invoke a sense of holy fear of the ominous coming of God's judgment. When Peter admits that the righteous are scarcely saved he does not mean that those who are Christians might not make it to heaven unless they behave well, for this would make salvation dependent on our own performance. The thought here is that even the righteous were very close to receiving the judgment of God, but it was only by the grace of God that they were spared, because Christ bore their penalty for them.

Finally he reminds Christians to commit their souls keeping to their faithful creator when they are called upon to suffer according to the will of God. Suffering in the will of God is not something you and I would naturally expect, but it certainly is part of the Christian experience, and if we arm our minds to accept it, and see the good of it, then we will find joy in our trials, and strength to endure the hostility of those who oppose our Lord Jesus Christ.

"but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." 1Peter 4:13

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that Christians are sometimes targets of persecution by the ungodly because they are surprised that Christians don't go after all the sin that they enjoy. Living godly in this world involves being prayerful, serious minded, loving and hospitable. We are also expected to use our spiritual gifts as stewards of grace. Someone might ask the question, "Is it righteous to cover up another's sin?"

In our lesson today we read that "love covers a multitude of sin". We might read this and understand that when we want to show love to others, we can overlook their sin without attempting to turn them away from sin. In a sense, we can excuse their sin, by overlooking it and not holding them accountable. But is this true Christian love? Love wants what is the best for others, so covering up another's sin does not seem like a good way to show them love. I think if we understand the spirit of what Peter is saying, we should consider that when it comes to sin, we are all guilty before God, and showing grace and understanding is important in reflecting God's love to others. Jesus was not ready to condemn an adulterous woman in John chapter 8, while others had picked up stones and were ready to stone the woman. Jesus condemned their hypocrisy, for they too were just sinners in need of forgiveness. He said to the woman, "neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more". In this Jesus beautifully balances justice and mercy. He did not condone her sin, but challenged her to stop sinning. This shows his attention to righteousness and justice. But when he said neither do I condemn you, wouldn't that be the same as allowing sin to go without judgment, and therefore unrighteous? In fact, Jesus could only say these words if he were prepared to pay for her debt of her sin himself. This would mean he was still upholding God's righteousness, while in mercy not wanting the woman to have to face her judgment. Mercy finds away to escape judgment and still uphold righteousness. This is how love works. James says that mercy rejoices against judgment. We are to uphold God's righteousness always, but also look for ways to express the mercy and forgiveness of God to the repentant sinner. When dealing with sin in others, so much will depend on their attitude towards the sin. If they are genuinely sorry and repentant, then we should recognize that God is always ready to pardon and forgive freely. We can issue forgiveness to others based on the love of God shown at the cross. Jesus paid the penalty for all of our sins. This does not excuse us, or give us license to sin. How do we uphold God's righteousness and still show mercy and compassion to guilty sinners? Well I suppose we could ask whether the person has understood they have sinned, and feel sorry for their sin. If they can admit their sin, and feel broken and grieved by it, then it is important to reveal the love and grace of God that desires to forgive sin. Therefore we can help the person find the pathway of restoration to the Lord, without making them suffer more than they already have. Often sin brings great pain, sorry and reproach into a person's life, and they may have to feel the consequences of their sin for a long time afterwards. It is not our job as Christians to inflict more injury, and make the sinner feel so badly about their sin, when they have already confessed, and are seeking to make it right with those who have been hurt or offended. Another question we can ask when dealing with sin, is how can we work towards the best spiritual outcome. Take for instance if someone is caught doing something wrong, like stealing, or telling lies. When you catch them at it, and they admit their fault, and beg for mercy what should we do? Should we condemn them, and expose their sin, so that they will be shamed before their family, friends and church? That would not be a loving thing to do, if the person expressed their deep sorrow, and was willing to restore any damage they may have caused. When we see a genuine spirit of repentance, we should open our hearts wide to the avenue of forgiveness, and try to cover the sin, rather than expose it. When Mary was found to be pregnant with the baby Jesus, Joseph assumed she had behaved wickedly, but instead of publicly humiliating her, his love lead him to want to put her away privately, so she would not have to face the shame of sin. This is how love works, when it cares for the sinner, and the damage sin can bring upon them. Love wants to reduce the damage and harm of sin, while calling the sinner to repent. Often sin can be dealt with in private way, with some loving counsel. Those who really care about the sinner, will do all they can to help them overcome the sin, and reduce the potential harm caused by sin.

Peter calls us to good steward of the manifold grace of God when discussing spiritual gifts. So we need to learn what our gift is, and use it for the purpose God intended. A stewardship, means God will hold us accountable for how we used the gifts He gave to us. Do you know your spiritual gift, and having you been stirring it up and using it for the benefit of the church? Today I am challenging you to love your Christian brothers and sisters by covering their sin, when it is the right thing to do. Also be sure to use your spiritual gift to benefit others.

"love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth." 1Corinthians 13:4-6

LESSON 227
Shepherding the Flock
1 PETER 5

In our last lesson we learned about following the example of Christ in suffering. We are not to be surprised when unbelievers speak against us because they see our good behavior, and are convicted by their sin. Today we will complete 1 Peter, and think about the responsibility of elders to shepherd God's flock, and how all Christians should be clothed with humility.

In this short chapter that ends Peter's 1st epistle, Peter will address the elders, and then the rest of the congregation with various exhortations. Peter addresses elders, as a fellow elder himself. This is very important for us to notice, for it tells us that Peter did not put himself in any higher position or authority than any of the local elders who were responsible to shepherd the local assemblies to which they belonged. Some have believed that Peter was the head of the church, and considered the first pope. However, this passage makes it very clear that this was not the case. Peter could have used his office as an apostle to add strength to his exhortation, but he chooses rather, with humility, to set forth an example, and put himself on equal level with the elders. He calls on elders to shepherd the flock. Shepherding has many aspects to it, including teaching God's word, providing biblical counsel, visiting the saints, and setting an example for other Christians to follow. However Peter's focus is not so much on the details of shepherding, but rather on motives for doing their work. They should not be forced into it by others, but serve with a willing heart. They also should not be motivated by making money dishonestly, but give themselves eagerly to God's work. These important instructions are worth our time to consider, for the church has almost totally ignored these words, or misapplied them, as seen in the practice of churches today. Today pastors are hired for a stipulated salary to oversee and teach a congregation. Many even refer to the church as their church, stealing from the Lord Jesus Himself. Elders are servants of Christ, and look after His sheep. They are always mentioned in the plural in scripture, meaning that every assembly was to have a group of men that were responsible to care for the church. To give the responsibility to one man has many underlying spiritual difficulties, besides not being taught in the scriptures. It is clear that elders likely received some financial assistance from the church to help them carry out their work, but we should view this as gifts, or honorariums, to support those who labor for the Lord, and not as a negotiated salary. God's people should feel a sense of responsibility to help those who labor to feed and nurture them, but elders should do their work from a heart to serve, and not to make money. Jesus said you cannot serve God and money, so when a man's heart is concerned with how much money he will make, then he is unfit to serve in the local church. The call to serve must be evident by his eagerness to help others, and not for any self-interest. Shepherding is of the greatest importance to the heart of God, and therefore will be richly rewarded by the chief shepherd, with crowns of glory which do not fade. The allusion is to crowns given to athletes at the Olympic games, which were crowns made from leaves, and which would quickly fade away. The crowns of glory which God will give to his faithful servants shall last forever.

Younger people should submit to those who are older, and in particular to their spiritual leaders in the assembly. Every Christian has the responsibility to submit in humility to one another. In fact, Peter says Christians are to be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. To be clothed with humility carries the idea of being completely surrounded with humility, carrying it with us wherever we go. Humility is not to be displayed only when it seems suitable or convenient. Humility is our greatest Christian virtue, and should be so embedded into our character, that we would find it most difficult to act in any other way. When we humble ourselves, then God will exalt us in due time. We see this in the example of our Lord Jesus, who humbled himself to death on a cross, and afterwards was exalted to the highest place in heaven. When we walk in humility, it means we will not always be able to defend ourselves or our cause, but often must give way to others. When this happens we may feel discouraged or defeated. However, we are encouraged to cast all our cares upon our Lord Jesus, because He cares for us.

Not only are Christians required to display humility at all times, they are warned here to be sober and vigilant. The devil is prowling about like a lion, seeking to devour a weak Christian, or one that has gone astray. Some animal groups travel in herds, with the younger and more vulnerable ones in the middle and being surrounded by the older and stronger ones. This protects them from predators. The Christian must realize that they are safest from the attack of the devil, when they remain close to their Christian fellowship, where they can receive the spiritual protection they need. To resist the devil, we have to be active and steadfast in our faith, by nurturing our Christian lives. This means we need to gather with the church, and hear the teaching and instruction of the elders of the church. This is our protection from the devil. If we are not careful he will find us straying from the flock, and devour us. We need to be aware that all Christians face trials and temptations from the world or from the devil, as encouragement for our own trials.

Peter is now going to finish his letter with a prayer, and personal notes and greetings. His prayer for the believers, is that the God of grace, who called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered for a while, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you. And his prayer ends with the desire that God be given glory and dominion forever and ever. He mentions that Silvanus was the scribe by which this letter was composed, whom he calls a faithful brother, and by whom he testified about the true grace of God. He sends greetings from the Christians in Babylon (likely Rome), and Mark his son (likely John Mark). He says they should greet each other with a kiss of love,

wishing peace to all who are in Christ Jesus. May the Lord help you to partake of the true grace of God, walking with humility, and staying close to the fellowship where we are best protected from the attack of the devil.

"shepherd the flock of god which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly." 1Peter 5:2

Today's Bible Question:

In our study in 1st Peter we have been learning about suffering as a Christian, and realizing that after a Christian endures suffering for Christ, he will be rewarded in glory. Today we thought about the responsibilities of elders to shepherd the flock, and the importance of being clothed with humility. Someone might ask the question, "What is the Christians relationship to the devil?"

This question might seem a bit strange to ask, but it is important to consider since Peter mentioned how the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Remember that Peter was writing to Christians, and the implication from this is that the devil can devour Christians. That is not to say the devil can ever snatch us away from Christ, for we know that is impossible. Jesus said "neither shall any one snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). What Peter must have in mind, is the damage that Satan can bring into our lives, when we leave ourselves vulnerable to his attack. The devil is very clever, and we are no match for his strength. Peter says we are to resist him. By this he does not mean we should try to fight against the devil, or bind him in prayer, as so many seem to be trying to do. To resist him means not allowing him to tempt us, and by remaining steadfast in our faith. We must keep close to the Christian assembly, be earnest and faithful in our prayer life, and attentive to God's word daily. The devil is on the prowl like a lion. Now think about the image that is given to us of the prowling lion. If you have ever seen a lion stalks it's prey, you will notice that the lion remains out of sight, and creeps up slowly on it's prey and pounces unexpectedly. How can you protect yourself from such a stealth predator? The key is to know that He is out there and actively seeking our ruin. The safest place is among the Christians; just as the safe place for a young one in the herd is close to the herd, and in the center where there is protection. Preparing for the danger before it comes is necessary. The devil will use different devices to allure us away from the protection of the flock, enticing us into choices for sin. Sometimes he uses music, movies, or other worldly entertainment to entice us to think about sin, or into sinful places. We might think the entertainment is harmless, and this is just what Satan is hoping for. We need to be aware of the devils tools, and understand that often the worlds entertainment is his means of drawing people away from the Lord. No one generally jumps straight into the devils trap, they are usually are drawn one step at a time, like little compromises. Perhaps it only starts with a look, then a touch, then seeking more, until the sinner is caught fully in the devils trap. Lets look at the example of David in the Old Testament, when he sinned with Bathsheba. First David was looking from his roof, and saw the woman bathing. At that moment, he had to make the choice to stop looking, for he should have known, that if he continued to gaze at her it could only bring disastrous sin. But David kept looking, and the devil got the upper hand. David let the look turn into an inquiry, and then a visit, and then full fledged adultery. That led to murder and deceit. The devil did not steal David's salvation, but certainly took away the joy of his salvation, bringing much damage to his own life, and also to his family.

Do not underestimate the power of the devil. Peter calls him a lion for good reason, for lion's are perhaps the most feared predator in the animal kingdom. Satan has the power to bring great harm and disaster into our Christian experience. The Lord wants to shelter us from Satan, but He may at times allow Satan to test us, so that He can prove our faith and obedience to Him. This is what happened with Peter himself, and perhaps why he brings the subject up in his writings. He knew well the cunning of Satan. Jesus had told Peter that Satan wanted to sift him as wheat. Jesus said that he had prayed for Peter, that his faith would not fail, and when he is restored to strengthen his brothers. Satan did tempt Peter to deny the Lord, and in his weakness Peter failed his Lord, denying him three times. The devil must have been laughing with glee at this, but Peter was a broken man, feeling grieved to have failed his Lord. Perhaps the Lord will also allow us to face the devils temptation as well, and so we need help to resist him. We like Peter or David are weak in the face of such a foe. Remember that David was mighty against Goliath by his faith, and Peter on the day of Pentecost also shone victoriously through his faith. Faith is our great weapon against the devil. It is when we stand strong in faith, and identify ourselves with the name of the Lord, that we shall overcome the devil's temptation.

When you feel tempted by the devil to do wrong, then call upon the Lord. The Lord is faithful, and will come to your rescue. Also seek to proclaim the Lord to the world, and His wonderful salvation. We are never stronger then when we engage ourselves in the battles of the Lord, and build His kingdom. Satan will hate it, and resist us, but then the Lord will send us forth with great power to win the victory, because we have obediently, and by faith, sought His kingdom and glory.

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Ephesians 6:11

LESSONS IN 2PETER

Noah's Ark (full scale) Theme Park, Hong Kong



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“KNOWING THIS FIRST: THAT SCOFFERS WILL COME IN THE LAST DAYS, WALKING ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN LUSTS, AND SAYING, ”WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING? FOR SINCE THE FATHERS FELL ASLEEP, ALL THINGS CONTINUE AS THEY WERE FROM THE BEGINNING OF CREATION.” FOR THIS THEY WILLFULLY FORGET: THAT BY THE WORD OF GOD THE HEAVENS WERE OF OLD, AND THE EARTH STANDING OUT OF WATER AND IN THE WATER, BY WHICH THE WORLD THAT THEN EXISTED PERISHED, BEING FLOODED WITH WATER.”

2PETER 3:3-6

Partaking of the divine nature

2PETER 1

In our last lesson we finished our study of 1Peter where we learned about suffering as a Christian with a hope of glory. Today's lesson brings us to the 2nd letter written by Peter, which deals with the final days before Christ will return and how there will be many false teachers, and scoffers who deny the coming of Christ. The first chapter teaches about partaking in the divine nature through knowledge of Christ, and by developing Christian character.

Peter's second letter is addressed generally to all those who have obtained like precious faith through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. He refers directly to Jesus as God here, declaring his deity. He desires that grace and mercy be multiplied to his fellow believers in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Knowledge of Christ is the key to, not only receiving multiplied blessings of grace and mercy, but also all things that pertain to life and godliness. Through the glory and virtue of Christ calling us, we have been given exceedingly great and precious promises, which allow us to partake in the divine nature, since we have escaped the corruptions of this world through lust. Peter does not fully explain himself, but we could understand him to mean that the promises include the gift of eternal life, and forgiveness of sins, a home in heaven with Christ, and to be made like Christ. When he says we can partake in the divine nature, we must be very careful not to take this to mean that we shall be as God, for that was the lie of the devil back in the garden of Eden. We can become more like God in our character, since we have been born from God as His children and now are to bear His image in the world. This means we can show His love, mercy and grace to others. We cannot take on all of God's nature, for there are some things that belong uniquely to God alone, like His omnipotence, or omniscience. We can however grow in our Christian character by adding to faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. When these areas of our Christian character abound in us it means that our Christian life will not be unfruitful or barren in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in knowing Christ that we should become more like Him. If we do not see changes in our character then we are empty and fruitless Christians, being shortsighted, blind, and forgetful that we were cleansed from our old sins. With this in mind Peter exhorts us to be even more diligent to make our calling and election sure. By this he does not mean that a Christian is in jeopardy of losing his salvation, or that he somehow must earn his way to heaven by his good conduct. The Christian will need evidence to prove to himself and to others that he is indeed one of God's elect children. How can anyone tell that you are a real Christian and on your way to heaven? Is it simply because you say so, or because there are evidences in your character that you have been changed to become more and more like Jesus. Be sure you know your calling and election is real, because of the evidence you find in your life, otherwise you have every reason to doubt whether you are really a child of God. When we demonstrate these aspects of Christian character that Peter mentions here, then we shall have an abundant entrance supplied to us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord. This is another great promise of God for His children, who are faithful, and walk in His ways.

Peter has shared these teachings with the church previously, but now he wants to remind them again, for he knows that it is good to stir them up, and remind them of these important things. Soon he will have to leave this world, as foretold by the Lord Jesus Christ. He describes his departure as putting off his tent. He likens his earthly body to a tent, which is just a temporary dwelling place. We live in our bodies, but they are only going to house us for a short time, and then we have to put them off, when they grow weary, sick, or too weak to carry on. It is good to remind our hearts of this truth, thank God for the life He gives, but make sure we are ready to meet our maker, by accepting His salvation through Jesus Christ. Peter's writing was intended to ensure that Christians would always have this reminder once he was gone. Peter's words were not cunningly devised fables, as some might suppose, when he spoke of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He, John and James were eyewitnesses of Christ's glorious majesty, when they saw Him transfigured and heard God speak. The voice of God declared "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". Peter, James and John had heard this voice come from heaven, however, Peter says that he had been given a more sure word of prophecy that believers need to give heed to. This prophetic word is like a light shining in a dark place, waiting for the day to dawn, and the morning star to arise in hearts. This beautiful poetic expression tells us how God speaks to the sinner in his ignorance and darkness, shining the light of the gospel into his heart. When the light shines in, and the conscience is awakening, and faith quickened, then it is like the dawning of the sun, when the new morning glory shines, and fills the whole earth. When a person first comes to faith in Christ, it is not uncommon to hear them say, "I see", or "I now understand, and believe". There is a moment of revelation, when the lights come on within a man to whom God is revealing Himself, and he can see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is an extraordinary moment, and many Christians can testify to that kind of experience when they first came to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Peter says that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation, because prophecy does not come from man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. This is perhaps the most important verse in the bible explaining the mechanism by which the scriptures have been delivered to us. Many people doubt the bible as a text just written by men. Indeed men did pen the words, but only as they were given those words as the Holy Spirit moved them. The bible is more important than our experience, for it is God's infallible revelation to man. We are helped by the Holy Spirit to understand the bible as we seek humbly to hear, receive and obey God's revelation. I

hope you have allowed God's word to shine a light into your heart, so that you can know Christ by faith, and enter a new day, a new hope, and a new life. May God grant this to you by His Spirit.

"and so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." 2Peter 1:19

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we thought about growing in Christian character and how that lets us share in the divine nature, by showing what God is like. We also thought about the more sure word of prophecy given to us by the apostles in the New Testament which was a more powerful testimony than even their experiences of seeing and hearing the glory of God. Someone might ask the question, "How does the knowledge of Christ allow us to become partakers of the divine nature?"

As discussed in the lesson today, we shall never become God, but we can certainly become more and more like God in his communicable attributes. That means His attributes that we also may share in. God has many attributes in which we cannot share, for they belong to Him alone, but there are several attributes of God's character that we can share in as His children, such as grace, goodness, mercy, faithfulness, honesty, and love. Love would be the greatest attribute, and give us the greatest resemblance to God, for God is love. The Christian life must be a life of growth and advancement. As we learn the bible and put it into practice then we shall become more and more what God's wants us to be, sharing in His divine nature.

Peter provides us with a list of Christian qualities which are to grow and abound in us. This means they are not simply something we learn about, but things we increasingly learn to adopt as our normal practice, so that they become part of our own character. We begin with faith. Faith is the means by which we enter the Christian life, but also the means by which we live the Christian life. We must trust the Lord day by day in our circumstances, using faith to help us make decisions of obedience to God, while saying no to the ungodly practices of this world. To faith we are to add virtue. Virtue here means goodness. A disposition to perform good things in the sight of God and men. Is this something that people can say about you? Do they say you are good? We are to add to virtue knowledge. This is not just general knowledge, but a knowledge of God as we learn the scriptures. Not all knowledge is helpful, and sometimes it can be hurtful, dangerous, and wasteful, because it robs us of the time to learn the knowledge of God. In our very busy and computerized world, how easy it is for us to spend our time learning things from the TV and internet, but neglect the real important knowledge found in God's word. To knowledge we should add self-control. As we learn more about God, we will recognize that sin is a powerful force that wants to take us away from God, and so we must exercise ourselves with discipline to control our desires, choosing to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us closer to God. This is very difficult battle for most Christians, for we all tend towards sin, and the slide downwards is so easy to give into, whereas the climb upwards to God's righteousness is continually strenuous. Only through prayer and determination can we maintain a life of self-control. To self-control we also need to add perseverance. This is remaining faithful especially when we face challenges to our faith and Christian walk. When we face trials, we will be tempted to give way to sin, or just relax in our spiritual life, so that we do not attend church, or we spend less time in prayer or the word. However in the Christian life we must realize that the journey will often be difficult, and so we must be ready to press on and persevere. Added to this we are to also grow in godliness. This means to allow God to rule our thinking and behavior. When people encounter us they should be aware that we belong to God, and live to please Him. Do people know your relationship to God, when they meet you? Is this the first and most important characteristic they see in you? The more you hide your relationship to God, the more you will fail to live godly. Let God be seen in your conversation and all your actions.

The Christian life is also to be marked by brotherly kindness. This means the church is very important to us, and we spend much of our efforts and time ministering to the people of God. This might also involve caring for all people in general, but the first place we are to show godliness and brotherly love is to our own Christian family. Do you know the people you go to church with? Have you been taking time to minister to them in some way. Perhaps you can not preach or teach, but maybe you can make them a meal, or help them with some practical needs. The last and greatest attribute in the Christian life is love. Many times the New Testament exhorts us to love. Love is the most reflective of all of God's attributes, for people will immediately sense the hand of God at work when they see genuine love. Love is not just saying words, it is sacrificing for others, and demonstrating through action that others are important and valuable to us. Sometimes making sacrifices is very costly, and we find it difficult to suffer the loss, but the greater our willingness to suffer and feel the loss, the greater God's love shine through us. When we want to partake in the divine nature we must learn to let all of these things grow in our lives, faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. This will cause us to be fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior.

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Philippians 3:10

False Teachers in the church

2PETER 2

In our last lesson we learned about partaking in the divine nature through knowledge of Christ, and developing Christian character. Today we enter into the main concern that Peter was writing about, and that was the false teachers that will arise in the church.

This chapter is a detailed look into the character and conduct of these false teachers that would arise in the church. Since Peter's time there has been false teachers and doctrines that have infected the church. However in the last days false teachers will abound in the church, and this is exactly what we are seeing in our present time.

These false teachers bring their evil heresies secretly into the church, even denying the Lord that bought them, and so they will be brought to swift destruction. These teachers gain many followers, and cause Christianity to look bad in the eyes of the world. They take money from people through their deception, and judgment is ready to fall on them. We certainly see evidence today of supposed men of God using the church as a means of getting rich. God's anger burns against these wicked men, who exploit others, and bring Christianity into reproach. Just as he cast angels into Hell, binding them in darkness until the day of judgment, so these false teachers will also receive God's coming judgment. Peter sites two other judgments by God as examples of how God will deal with these false teachers. He mentions the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah which turned to ashes after God rained fire and brimstone upon them. Then there was the judgment of Noah's day when only eight souls were spared from God's judgment with a flood. In both of these judgments very few escaped. Lot was a righteous man, and escaped from Sodom since he was troubled by the wicked behavior of those living in Sodom. Without this reference about Lot, we may have wondered if he was a righteous man, though the Old Testament record does not give much evidence of his being righteous. This teaches us that in many cases the true condition of a man before God, is not easy to determine just by his outward circumstances. Righteous men, like Lot, are tormented by the evil that men do; but God is able to deliver the godly out of temptation, while reserving the wicked for the day of judgment. There is nothing we do that escapes God's notice, and if we persist in sin and rebellion, we will most certainly meet God's judgment someday, and answer for all of our wicked behavior. That is why it is so important to seek mercy from the Lord and salvation today.

Speaking of the ungodly false teachers, he further describes their conduct, as those who walk in the flesh, with lusts that make them unclean. They also despise authority, are presumptuous, self-willed, and speak against dignitaries. Even angels, who are much great in their power, do not speak evil as they do. These men are like vicious and senseless beasts who must be caught and destroyed, since they speak evil of things they don't understand. They will utterly perish in their corruptions, receiving the wages of unrighteousness. They enjoy their evil pleasures so that all can see, and they are a disgrace to the church fellowship as they delight in telling their lies while eating together with the Christians. The condition of these men is so bad that their eyes are said to be full of adultery, and they cannot stop sinning. They love to cheat weaker and gullible people, having trained their hearts to go after money. They are cursed children, having turned away from what is good, because they love to follow after the riches they gain by their evil schemes, just like Balaam did long ago. Even his donkey could not stop Balaam from his madness when he spoke with a man's voice. When greed gets into a man's heart, it seems nothing can stop him from wanting to gain more.

Peter describes these men's speech as great swelling words of emptiness. How often have you heard a preacher shouting with authority, but when you really listen you find that he is not saying anything of any value. They use lust to entice others to participate in their evil. They promise freedom to their followers, but they are slaves of corruption, having been overcome by their greed. We must be so careful, and take warning today to stay away from such evil imposters, who present themselves as men of God, but are just evil men full of greed, taking advantage of those who lack discernment. If we fall prey to them, we will support them in their corruptions, and be caught away with their evil doctrines. Perhaps we heard the truth of the gospel, but one of these false teachers enticed us to follow him, and so we have gotten away from the truth. Perhaps we once wanted to follow the Lord faithfully, but the false teachers have drawn us into their world of greed and lust, and we think we are actually following the Lord, when we are only serving the devil and his deceptions. If we have known about the truth, and then turn from it, our condition is worse than at the beginning. Peter describes this condition with an analogy of a dog that returns to his own vomit, or a pig that was washed and then returns back to play in the mud. When a person has understood the simple gospel message, and salvation through faith in Christ, but then gets sidetracked with these false teachers, who teach greed instead of the gospel, then our faith becomes fruitless, and our salvation is brought into question. Religion becomes a means of getting rich in this world, rather than the means of receiving God's mercy for a lost sinner.

Today this false Christianity abounds everywhere we look. We see men promising healing, or riches, and building big churches and ministries around certain big name preachers. These men are making merchandise of the church, and getting rich from their exploitations of God's people. We need to be more discerning in these perilous times, so that we do not get swept away with all the wickedness that has crept into the church. Be careful when you hear the preacher talking about money, and be sure to take notice when he is living well from all the money he collects from the church. Is money from the church be used to help the needy? Or are the poor filling the pockets of the rich pastor? Be careful Christian friend, for there are false teachers and preachers deceiving many today.

"but there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction." 2Peter 2:1

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard Peter warning us about the false teachers that would corrupt the church with all their greed and evil behavior. We learned that God is ready to judge these evil imposters with the same kind of severe judgments that were in days of Noah, or days of Lot. Someone might ask the question, "Why would anyone dare to use the church as platform for deception and greed?"

As we listen to Peter's graphic description of these evil false teachers, who bring wicked teaching into the church, deceiving the people into giving them money, we must try to imagine why they would be so bold as to enter God's house to do such evil things. We may not believe someone could act so wickedly towards God's people, and our confidence in men is that which makes it much easier for them to get away with it. But do these men not fear God? Surely they must realize that they will bring upon themselves the wrath of God when they deceive God's people and steal their money. It is very hard for any true Christian to imagine how someone can behave like this, because the Christian believes God will judge the wicked. But for those who are not true believers, they might not even believe in God, or believe that God really cares. They can deceive the church, because they don't believe God will judge them. They are deceived themselves by the darkness of their unbelief. This could explain those who are knowingly deceiving people, for they must somehow rationalize their behavior. In the world men use greed and deception to get ahead, and so the false teachers, are simply using the church as an easy target to get rich. Now there is another category of false teachers, who might not believe that they are doing anything wrong? They really believe they are God's servants, and serving His kingdom. They fail to see the inconsistencies in their own greed and selfish living. They still think that God is using them to help others. They justify themselves by thinking it is okay to get rich from God's people, because they are doing God's service, and they deserve God's favor. The bible tells us the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Some men do not even realize that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, while they take in all their profits from the church. You see if they wear a nice suit and preach a nice message, holding their bible high for all to see, then they convince themselves they are God's anointed. However God's chosen vessel is not seen by whether he holds a bible or wears a nice suit, for the devil can disguise himself this way. God's man is seen by his good works, and the people who are coming to Christ and growing in the Lord, because of his labors. He is not someone who trusts in man for support, or even likes to talk about money, for his trust is in the living God. Let us not be deceived by these men who use the church for their own greed and gain. When the focus is on themselves, or on money, you can be sure there is a spirit of deception at work.

But why would anyone distort God's truth, and make the gospel into a means to get rich? Well, it is not surprising since Paul wrote to Timothy and said in the last times, men would be lovers of themselves more than lovers of God. Money is a very powerful motivator to the heart of men. Men have traveled thousands of miles, and risked their lives if they can smell or taste opportunity to get some gold. Men kill each other to get more money. Men will deceive and cheat, even close family and friends, if they can just get more money. Why does money captivate the heart so much. The Devil convinces us that we need it, and if we can just get more of it, then it will answer all the things we want in life. If we had more money, then we could buy a nice car, get a big house, travel, or make others serve us. If we had more money then we could feel like someone important, and eat in nice restaurants, and live among the rich and famous. This is something our hearts are attracted to, but many do not think of all the problems that come with having more money, such as more responsibility, more people begging for help, more problems with money leaving as fast as it is coming, and more thieves trying to steal it. As Christians we need to be aware of the dangers of the love of money, which the bible says is the root of all kinds of evil. If we hear preachers begging for more donations for the Lord's work, and we also notice how they are living well off of the money that people give to the church, then we should be aware that they are likely false teachers. The Lord does not require, or instruct, His servants to beg for money from the congregation. People will give to the Lord's work as the Holy Spirit directs them for the care of God's people, and for the furtherance of the gospel. Too much money should never be entrusted to just one man in the church, for money corrupts the heart, and fills a man with pride. When it comes to the love of money, it is very real, and an ugly truth that is all too common in the church today. Money is a tool by which God's work can be carried out, and those entrusted with the Lord's money need to be wise in their stewardship, so that the work of God does not come under reproach. Men are bold to take advantage of the generosity of Christians, because they can get away with it, so it would seem, and because their hearts are blinded by greed. In the end they will face God's judgment, as Peter has clearly warned in our study today. Don't be too surprised when you find men in the church robbing the congregation so that they can live well in this world.

"The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." 1Timothy 6:11

The Promise of His Coming

2PETER 3

In our last lesson we learned about the character and conduct of false teachers that would arise in the church. And in today's lesson we will finish the 2nd letter of Peter with warnings about the Lord's promised return.

Peter explains that the purpose of his writing this second letter was to stir up the pure minds of Christians to remember what had been spoken by the prophets, and the commandments given through the apostles of our Lord and Savior. Here Peter emphasizes the importance of remembering the scriptures where the words of prophets and commands of the apostles were written. The Bible is essential protection for the Christian living in these last days, so he can be aware of those things that will happen before the Lord returns.

Peter tells us that in the last days scoffers will come, who walk in their own lusts. They will question the coming promise of our Lord, arguing that everything is continuing on as it always has from the beginning of time. However these scoffers are willfully ignorant, forgetting how God judged the world with a flood. The truth of the flood is still evident today through the geological features of the earth, and the huge fossil graveyards, which all attest to a worldwide flood in the past. But men do not wish to acknowledge this truth, because if the bible history is true, then they know they will one day have to face God's judgment. So they push the truth out of their minds, and make up false ideas about the history of the earth, and the universe, so they can enjoy their life of sin.

Peter reveals to us that, just as the world was once destroyed by the flood, God will once again destroy the earth and the heavens, but this time he will destroy it with fire. The day when God is coming to judge the earth is called "The Day of the Lord", but extends over a long period of time. It begins with Christ gathering His church unto Himself in the rapture, then there will be judgments on the earth which is called, "The tribulation". After this the Lord appears visibly, and returns to rule and reign on the earth. It is at His second appearing that judgment will fall on the ungodly. After reigning for 1000 years, Christ will destroy the devil, and cast all demons and sinners into the lake of fire. He will then destroy the earth and make a new heaven and new earth. Peter mentions the destruction of the earth that will take place at the end of Christ's reign, when the elements will melt with fervent heat, and the earth will be burned up. But the scoffers will mock and say that we keep talking about His coming, but nothing ever changes. So Peter explains why the Lord has not yet come, even though the situation grows worse, and sin abounds everywhere. He tells us that the Lord is not slack about his promise, but He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, wanting all to come to repentance. God will judge the earth someday, and it could be very soon, but he is waiting for sinners to repent, and that could include you. Perhaps you will be the final one to repent and believe the gospel, before the Lord says, now it is time, and He comes in judgment. Don't delay; turn to the Lord while He patiently is waiting to hear your cries of repentance.

In the Lord's patience we are to also remember that time is not the same for us as it is for God. God is not restricted by time, and so 1000 years are to him as a day, and a day as 1000 years. So The Day of the Lord will be a reign of 1000 years. Some have noted that biblical history has been just around 6000 years, or six days, similar to the days of creation. The seventh day we know was God's day for rest after creation was completed. We also know that Christ's reign for 1000 years will also be a day of rest for God's people, as the land will produce abundantly, and peace will prevail. Nothing can be determined from this, but it is certainly interesting to note. If there is any correlation between Peter's words that "a day is as 1000 years", and the history of the world as given to us in the bible, then this may indicate that we are on the verge of the "Day of the Lord", when judgment will fall upon the earth. This is sad and frightening news for those who have not repented and trusted in Jesus, for they will perish. For Christians the "Day of the Lord" is nothing we need to fear, for the Lord will bring us with Himself to dwell in heaven.

The Day of the Lord is said to come upon us as a thief in the night. A thief certainly does not make an announcement of His coming, for he sneaks in, and is gone before anyone notices. This is what will happen when the Lord comes for His church. The event will happen so quickly, that everyone will be left wondering at what just happened. The Day of the Lord is certainly a warning to the ungodly, but is also for believers to consider, so they will live in holiness and godliness, as we wait eagerly for his appearing. We are not looking for the judgment that is coming, but we look forward to dwelling with God in righteousness in a new heaven and new earth. So Christians should live in peace and be blameless, remembering that the Lord's longsuffering means salvation for more souls. Peter mentions the writings of Paul, as being included with other scriptures, proving that Peter considered Paul's NT letters as inspired scriptures, and part of God's revelation in the bible. He admits that some of Paul's writing were not easy to understand, and those who were untaught were distorting the meaning of Paul's writings to their own destruction, as they did with other scriptures. Men who misuse the bible will be most severely judged by God, for the truth was in their hands, but they did not receive it as they should have. This seems to be another reference to the false teachers that Peter had been talking about in the previous chapter. Realizing that Christians can easily fall prey to these false teachers, he warns them to be careful not to fall away from their own steadfastness, and be led away with the errors of the wicked. His final exhortation is to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory both now and forever. Growing in the Lord is vital to our spiritual health, and finding protection from the false teachers and their evil doctrines. Growth is to be both in grace and knowledge, meaning that we must allow

God's word to impact our character and conduct, as we learn more about Christ. Knowledge alone will only build up our pride, but knowledge that is put to good use, is the manner in which Christians must learn and apply God's word. May the Lord use this message to help you place your trust in Jesus as Lord and your personal Savior.

"but the day of the lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." 2Peter 3:10

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we considered the promise of the Lord's return, which men may mock, but Christians know will come, but only after the Lord has patiently waited for more souls to repent. Someone might ask the question, "Why is the flood an important testimony to the present world of God's coming judgment?"

In Noah's day, he undoubtedly had many scoffers as well, who thought he was a bit crazy building such a huge boat on dry land. After all, it took Noah 120 years to prepare the ark. In all that time, men must have been laughing at him and saying, "Noah, where is this judgment you have been talking about, for you have been working on this project for many years, and nothing has happened yet?" It is important for us to notice this point from the flood story. God gave men 120 years of time to repent, and instead of repenting they just laughed and mocked Noah for building such a large boat. There was plenty of room in the ark for more passengers, but they decided not to believe Noah, and they all perished when God's judgment came very suddenly upon them. Peter is using this story, and the lessons from it to warn the unbeliever, and encourage Christians. Christians also might grow concerned at the mockery of men, when they know the Lord should be coming to judge the world with all of its' wickedness. But Peter reminds his Christian friends, that God is not in a hurry to judge, for he would rather show mercy. He endures the wickedness of men in hopes that more will repent and find salvation. However when judgment does fall, there is no time to rethink the situation. The flood teaches us that in one day the floodwaters came upon the earth, and for the next forty days and nights the rain did not stop until the waters covered the earth. If anyone was still alive outside of the ark, they did not survive very long, before the waters consumed them, and they were drowned. Peter tells us when the day of the Lord comes, it will be similar in the sense of being a total surprise to many. Just as the thief who sneaks into the house in the middle of the night, and then out again before anyone notices, so will the Lord's judgment be. If you have ever had someone steal from your home, you know how you feel so violated, because they snuck in unnoticed. You feel angry with yourself for not being more careful. How will you feel when the judgment of God falls upon this earth very suddenly, and you were not prepared? You will likely be angry with yourself for not repenting, and following Jesus while you had the chance.

The flood also teaches us that God judges the wicked. Though God is patient, He is a God of justice, and will eventually execute His judgment on wicked people. The judgment of the flood covered the whole earth. No one was exempt from God's judgment. When the Lord comes again, there will be no place to hide from Him. In Revelation it talks about the leaders and captains hiding themselves in caves, and calling on the rocks to fall upon them, so that they do not have to face the wrath of God. It is quite fitting that Peter should remind us about the flood and God's judgment on the world, so that we may fear and prepare for His coming.

Peter mentioned those who are willfully ignorant. Here are people who will twist history, so that they do not have to think about God's coming judgment. Today there are many who claim that science can prove that the earth is billions of years old, and that man developed over millions of years from simpler life forms. This is commonly called "Evolution". However this is just willful ignorance. These people who believe and teach this are trying to live life without God, and prefer to believe there is no God, so they don't have to answer to God's authority. It troubles their minds to consider the possibility of a greater power and intelligence in control of all the universe, so they find explanations that leave God out. When you collect all the evidence they will discover their theories are flawed, and cannot answer the larger questions of where life came from, or how the universe began. They try diligently with their little minds to push God out of their thinking, but they are forced to confront the reality of God's power and authority through the evidences of creation. The flood is used as the great evidence that they ignore. The evidence for the flood is everywhere on the planet, and geologists who are honest with the data will have to admit that there appears to have been a world wide catastrophic flood in the past. Men may choose to ignore the plain facts that are staring them in the face, but when the Lord comes in judgment, they will have no excuse, for the evidence was all around them. A recent film called "Noah" was published by a Christian organization, demonstrating how people today do not believe in the historic story of the flood, even though much evidence is available to support it. The movie also helps people to understand that God hates our sin, and is coming in judgment against all the wicked of this world. It explains how only through faith in Jesus Christ we can escape God's coming judgment. You can find this film at "livingwaters.com", or contact us at the end of this program for a copy of the movie. Take this warning seriously, believe in Christ as your Savior today, and be spared from God's soon coming judgment upon the earth.

"And said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb." Revelation 6:16

LESSONS IN 1JOHN



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“BUT IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT, WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST HIS SON CLEANSSES US FROM ALL SIN.”

1JOHN 1:7

LESSON 231
Walking in the Light
1JOHN 1

In our last lesson we finished a study of 2Peter where we learned about the last days before the Lord returns, the character and conduct of false teachers, and how some will mock the promise of Christ's second coming. Today we begin a study of 1John, where we will learn how to discern if we really have found eternal life through Christ.

The letters of the apostle John, as well as his gospel and Revelation, were the last writings to be added to our New Testament around 90AD. Even though long after the days when he knew Jesus in the flesh, John recalls the details of Christ's ministry and teaching, as the Spirit of God leads him to warn us also about the spirit of antichrist that will invade the church. He will also warn us about false professions, false teachers, and corrupt spiritual leaders.

1John is not so easy to follow, for the thoughts seem a bit unconnected as one reads through this letter. However there is much for us to learn from this important letter of the New Testament. This book can help a person discern whether they have genuinely found eternal life that comes by faith in Christ. John will test us by a series of proofs that demonstrate whether we really know God, or not. For John there is no middle ground, either a person has God's salvation, or they do not, and that is based on how faith has been manifested in their conduct.

In the introduction John begins abruptly into his discourse with no formal greetings. Similar to his gospel, he begins immediately speaking of Jesus. He says He was from the beginning, speaking of his eternal existence. He mentions that we have heard, seen, looked upon, and handled him who is the Word of life. John's words are simple, but the thoughts are quite profound. Jesus came into this world as one who existed from eternity, and is the Word which communicates life to those who have come to know him. John and the other apostles made him known, for they had personally seen and heard him, even touching and handling him. This confirms the eternal divine nature of Christ, as well as his authentic humanity, having come into the world through virgin birth. John declares, as God's witness, that Christ was that eternal life that was manifested to us from the Father in heaven. John's purpose in writing is stated early, and is confirmed at the end of this writing also, which is that those who read will also enter into the fellowship with the apostles, believers, and with God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ. Additional to this purpose of finding fellowship with God and believers, is the desire that we may find a full joy.

John's message to us is that *'what they have heard of Christ, they declare'* which is that *'God is light and in him is no darkness at all'*. John uses the metaphor of light to describe God's truthfulness. God is full of truth and reveals truth. So if we want to walk with God we must also walk in the light, that is in the truth. If we walk in truth then we have fellowship together with one another, that is all believers, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. Acknowledging the truth here means to admit that we are guilty sinners and deserve God's judgment. If we say we have not sinned, then we are not walking in the light of God's revelation, and we are only deceiving ourselves. This is the first test that John gives us in this letter of how we can tell if we have eternal life. The test is do we confess that we are sinners, and guilty before God? It is only when we recognize this fact, that we can, and must, come to God and ask for the forgiveness of sin. Christ can offer forgiveness to those who acknowledge their sin.

It is important to understand that there are two types of forgiveness that God offers to us. The first forgiveness, is judicial forgiveness. This means that God as judge over us, can forgive our sins, and free us from the penalty of sin, through the blood of Jesus Christ. This happens when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and means that the eternal judgment for our sin, has been paid for by Jesus, and we will never have to face that judgment. This judicial forgiveness is what is needed for anyone to become a child of God and enter into heaven. I hope you have sought forgiveness from God through the death of Jesus, and you can confirm that you are now a child of God. The second kind of forgiveness, which God offers to us, is parental forgiveness, and this is issued to believers, who are related to God through Jesus Christ. Once we become God's children then we still need forgiveness from our sins. Though we have been forgiven from the eternal penalty of sin, we still have a sin nature and commit sins against God. When we become aware of our sin, we can come to our Father in the name of Jesus, and confess our sins. When we confess, John will teach us the liberating truth, that God will forgive us of our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This is parental forgiveness, and it is something that every Christian should be seeking from God on a daily basis, due to our constant tendency to sin.

While we speak of these two different kinds of forgiveness, it is essential to understand the difference between the two, so that we are not confused, into thinking that we could lose our status as God's children. God forgives us just once in the judicial sense. When we look to Jesus as our Savior, God is so satisfied with what Jesus has accomplished for us through his own sacrifice, that he can grant us a full and free pardon, which is eternal, and can not be withdrawn. Thank God today for that wonderful grace that saves us from the penalty of sin forever. When we, as Christians, sin we might be inclined to think we have lost our relationship to God. Some people teach that you can lose your salvation, but that is not supported by the teaching of the New Testament, when properly understood. John wants us to know that when we acknowledge and confess our sins, we are simply walking in the light, and agreeing with God that sin is bad, and we want to live righteously. John will talk more in this letter about sinful practice as a further test of whether we are truly God's child or not. Here in this chapter we can rejoice that forgiveness is available to us as God's children when we confess our sins to him. Have you received the judicial forgiveness that comes from

God? If you want to be saved today, then come to God confessing your sins. Admit to Him that you are guilty and deserve His judgment. God wants you to be honest about your sin, and when you look to Jesus in faith, He promises to forgive you, and give you eternal life. Just ask Him today to save you and cleanse you.

"but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin." 1John 1:7

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson John begins his first letter with testimony of the eternal Son of God manifested to men, from those who have seen, heard and handled Him. We also considered what it means to walk in fellowship with God and his people, by being honest about sin and confessing our sins to God. Someone might ask the question, "Should we confess our sins to God alone?"

John clearly teaches us that confession is necessary in the Christian life, if we want to have God's forgiveness and cleansing. Some churches call on their members to confess their sins to a priest, but is that what John had in mind when he wrote these words? It is clear from this context, that God is the one who has been offended by our sin, and it is to Him we should make our confession. It is important to understand that all sin is against God, and He alone can issue forgiveness to us. Thus our confession can be made to God directly. We know that we all have access to the Father through our Savior Jesus Christ. We do not need any other mediator between us and God. The bible says *"there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"*, 1Timothy 2:5. There is therefore no need to confess our sins to a priest before we can have them absolved.

There is a sense though, in which it is important to be honest with others about sin, and confess our struggles with sin. In James chapter 5 we learned that we should confess our sins to one another. It is not that we have to disclose all of our sins to everyone else in the church. There are matters which are deeply personal, and are to be confessed to God alone. However Christians should not hide the fact that they struggle with sin. If we try to hide our struggles, then we are not presenting a fair and honest image of Christianity. Every Christian will struggle with some sin, at some point or another. As a person matures in Christ, and is walking close to the Lord, they will become especially sensitive to sins in their life. It is important when counseling other believers, to let them know that struggling with sin is not unusual, since all believers have similar struggles. Paul wrote, "No temptation has overtaken you, except such as is common to man", 1Corinthians 10:13. This helps us to understand that sin is our common problem, and we are all tempted to do what is wrong. This does not excuse our sin, but helps us to understand we are not alone, and that others are struggling with sin just as we are. Confession should be carefully done, and not just to anyone, for it might even cause some to stumble in the faith. A young person might look for someone older in Christ, that knows them well, and in whom they can put their trust. Confession to another is not just about informing others that we are also struggling with sin, but to request their spiritual help and prayers. When we tell someone of a battle with sin we are dealing with, they can advise us what to do, or read some relevant scriptures to instruct us. Most importantly they can see we are trying to deal with the sin, and want others to pray and hold us accountable for our actions. So in this sense of seeking spiritual aid from mature believers, confession can be a very healthy and positive thing to do in order to win the battle against sin in our life.

Do not feel you must confess all of your sins to others. Some people would likely not handle this information well. They might even gossip about you, and bring much more damage to yourself and others. Though we do not want to hide the fact that we are guilty sinners, we also need good judgment so that we do not make sin into something worse than it has to be. We need the help and encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we sincerely care about each other's spiritual well-being, we will want to help each other battle against sin, by praying for each other, correcting each other, or counseling each other to turn away from sin.

A good rule of thumb to use when deciding when and how to confess sin, is to remember that public sin, that is sin that has been openly committed and everyone knows about it, should be publicly confessed. This helps the person repent and be held accountable in a public manner, so that shame and reproach do not fall upon a family, or church. When sin is private, it need only be confessed privately to God, or to the one who was personally hurt or offended by the sin. Also depending on the person's position in life, they might be held to greater accountability, if a greater trust had been given to them. A school teacher who abuses a child, should be held to account because of their constant influence upon children, and potential harm to them. A church leader is also to be publicly rebuked when he commits some public sin, so that others will fear.

Ultimately we must remember that all sin is against God and must first be confessed to God. It may also be necessary to confess to men, but in many cases this might not be edifying or helpful. We do not want to give the impression we are more righteous than we really are, but we also do not want to give the Devil opportunity.

"confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." James 5:16

LESSON 232
Abiding in the Light
1JOHN 2

In our last lesson we learned about walking in the light by being honest about our sin, and confessing our sin to seek God's forgiveness. Today we move into the 2nd chapter, and will learn about abiding in the light as proof of our being children of God.

This chapter continues from the previous discussion in chapter one about being honest about sin. He addresses Christians as my little children, which is an endearing expression from John who by this time was an old man. He tells them he wrote so that they would not sin, but if they did sin, they should be aware that we have an advocate with God the Father, namely our Lord Jesus Christ who is righteous. An Advocate is a helper, something like a defense lawyer defending our case. Jesus can plead our pardon based on His sacrifice, which made propitiation from our sins, and for the whole world. Propitiation means that God is satisfied that our sin has been paid for in full.

John uses three more tests in this chapter to prove our relationship to God and Christ. The first in this chapter is the test of obedience. If someone says they know God, but does not keep God's commandments, then he is a liar. Those who keep God's word have God's love working in them, and this gives evidence of belonging to God's family. If someone says they belong to Jesus, then they are to walk as Jesus walked, that is in truth. The second test in this chapter has to do with our love for other Christians. Again, our words must match our conduct. If we say we belong to the light, and yet hate our brother in Christ, then we are still in darkness. If we love the Christians then we are abiding in God's light, and there is no cause for stumbling. This means that no one will have any reason think less of Christ and the Christian religion because of our Christian profession, since we are shining the light of Christ well. Loving our brothers in Christ is not a new commandment introduced by John, but was taught by our Lord from the beginning of the church age.

In verses 12 to 15 John addresses Christians of various maturity. He writes to those called little children, which means all Christians, for we are all dependent on God for our spiritual needs. He writes to young men, which is those who have matured somewhat and have found victories in their battles with sin and Satan, by being strengthened in God's word. He also writes to fathers, which are the spiritual leaders who have walked with Christ over many years, and have remained faithful to Him, and found Him to be faithful to His word.

All Christians need to hear and heed these exhortations he will put before us. He calls on us to not love the world, or the things of the world. This forms another test of whether we belong to God's family, namely that we do not love the world, for if we did, then the love of the Father is not in us. The things of this world are described as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, which do not come from God the Father but are of the world. The world will pass away, and all its' lusts, but those who do the will of God will abide forever. At this point it would be good for each of us to ask ourselves what is guiding our lives, is it the lusts of this world, such as getting money and comfort in this life, or is it a desire to accomplish God's work and His will? It is important to see that when we call ourselves Christians that means abandoning our comforts and goals in this world, for the hope of entering a better life in heaven. If we have not made this exchange then John spells it out clearly for us, and says the love of the Father is not in us, and thus we are not God's children.

John will speak to his readers and warn them that they are now living in the final hour. This is the age when Christ builds His church, but Satan opposes the work of Christ. This opposition will come in the form of the antichrist. Antichrist, refers to a specific person in the future who will be used by Satan to oppose God's people. However, antichrist also has a more general sense in which it refers to the spirit working in the false teachers that will enter the church and lead many into heresies and away from Christ. So John tells us there are many antichrists, referring to these false teachers that teach lies. Some of these had departed from the Christian faith, becoming apostates, and therefore proved that they never really belonged to the church. One evidence of genuine salvation is to continue steadfastly in fellowship with God's people.

In order to discern false teaching and teachers, God has anointed us with the Holy Spirit, who gives us discernment. If anyone denies that Jesus is the Christ, he is antichrist, and also denying God the Father and His Son. Anyone who acknowledges the Son of God, proves they are in a right relationship with God the Father also. Since we have the Holy Spirit's help to discern those who are false, and the word of the apostles to guide us, we are to be diligent to keep God's word in our hearts, so we will not be diverted away from Christ through false teachers. He promised all who believe in Him the gift of eternal life, and we must not allow any false teacher to corrupt this teaching, and hope of believers. Though Christians were subjected to the deceptions of false teachers, they were protected by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would show them the truth through the scriptures, when they were careful to stay close to Christ by always learning of Him in His word. If we continue to abide in Christ, by reading the bible daily, then when Christ appears to take us home to heaven we will have confidence and not be ashamed before Him. This shows us the importance of maintaining our Christian lives through daily nurturing our souls in the bible and through prayer, so we are not ashamed before Christ at His coming. Think of this carefully Christian friends, remembering that it is quite possible to be ashamed in the presence of Christ by our lack of spiritual maturity. Our spiritual growth is not simply a matter of learning of Christ in the word, but also practicing what we learn. As we learn about the

righteousness of Christ, we are also to practice righteousness, and this will further prove our being born of God. I hope you have confidence in your relationship to Christ, by the evidence of your obedience, love for Christians, not loving the world, discernment by the Holy Spirit, and righteous living. If these things have unsettled your confidence, then ask Jesus to come into your life today, so that you will have eternal life through faith.

"he who says, "I know him," and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1John 2:4

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson John shows us several tests that we can use to discern whether or not we are really God's children. We learned that obedience, Christian love, separation from the world, discernment by the Holy Spirit, and righteous conduct bear evidence of our relationship to God. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to be anointed?"

John mentions to his readers that they had received an anointing by which they did not need anyone to teach them. He says the anointing was from the Holy One, and abides in you. The anointing is also said to teach concerning all things, is true and not a lie, has taught us, and in Him we are to abide. This clearly reveals to us that the anointing who dwells in us is the Holy Spirit. He is the one who teaches us and abides in us. This is revealed in other scriptures confirming the identity of the one whom John is speaking of as 'the anointing'. Anointing was the means by which a priest or king was identified as God's chosen vessel, thus Aaron was anointed as high priest, and David as king over Israel. These men were specifically chosen by God for their unique roles and service for God. The word "Christ", is equivalent to the word "Anointed", or Chosen one. The same meaning comes from the word "Messiah". Anointing was done by pouring a fragrant oil on the priest or king, and this was the physical means of revealing whom God had chosen. So the term Anointed is both a physical ritual, and a spiritual reality. Jesus was not officially anointed to be a king or priest, however he was anointed by Mary with costly perfume to prepare for his burial. While Jesus never was officially anointed, He was however God's chosen vessel, and thus called the "Messiah, Christ, or Anointed one".

Now here in John's letter when he refers to Christians being anointed, he is not speaking of a physical ritual they went through, but rather a spiritual reality that took place when they became a Christian. At the moment of conversion, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside the believer, and from that day forward the person is sealed with the Holy Spirit, so that He will never be taken away from them. This was the anointing the John refers to, and it is something that every Christian has experienced. Some Christians grow quickly, and are more sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit than others. That does not mean that anyone has more or less of the Holy Spirit. We all have the same Holy Spirit if we belong to Christ. The question is how much of us does He have? In other words, do we listen to, and obey, the instructions and promptings of the Holy Spirit, or quench the spirit by our lack of spiritual discipline?

It is important for us to make a distinction between the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the filling of the Holy Spirit, as these can be confused, leading to strange ideas and practices.

1. The anointing of the Spirit happens the moment a person trusts in Jesus, and refers to the Holy Spirit coming to live permanently inside the body of the believer in Christ, and this is true for every Christian.
2. The baptism of the Holy Spirit happened only once on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and filled the church. Every person who trusts in Christ, comes into the good of that baptism, but the baptism itself has already taken place as an historical event at the beginning of the church age.
3. The filling of the Holy Spirit is when believers give over control to the Holy Spirit's direction and teaching, and is synonymous with being filled with God's word, producing joy, thankfulness, submission, and generosity.

Some people are talking about certain individuals as if they were God's specially anointed servants. This is an unfortunate misunderstanding of scripture, which sets up some men above other believers, as though they had special approval by God to lead, teach, or prophecy. John says that we need no one to teach us, for we all have the anointing. What he is saying is, that because we all have the Holy Spirit, we are not dependent on men who have special revelations from God. The Holy Spirit is sufficient to teach us, and protect us from false teachers. That is not to say we do not benefit from godly teachers, who faithfully proclaim the word of God. It is just that we do not need to depend on men for spiritual food and discernment, since that comes from the Holy Spirit. When we refer to someone as being God's anointed servant, we have to be very careful. We don't want to deviate from the meaning of scripture, exalting people above others in the church as though God is working through them in a special way that is unavailable to others. Remember that all Christians are anointed, or indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Now some Christians foster their spiritual advancement, by careful attention to God's word and obedience to it, and thus the anointing appears more evidently in their experience. May God help us to all show forth evidence of our being anointed by God, through our godly conduct and gracious speech.

"now he who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is god." 2Cor 1:21

LESSON 233
Walking in Love
I JOHN 3

In our last lesson we were challenged by several tests that are intended to reveal whether we really are God's children or not. These tests included our obedience, love for Christians, our separation from the world, discernment given by the Holy Spirit, and our righteous behavior. In today's lesson we will discover more of the tests which help us to determine if we really possess eternal life, particularly the test of walking in love.

The last chapter ended talking about righteous behavior as evidence of someone being born of God. This thought continues into this chapter, as the author considers the love of God which purifies us. He asks us to look intently at God's love for us, because God has called us His own children. The world does not know us, because they do not know Him. Since we are God's children we have a hope of being with Christ, and being transformed into his glorious likeness. We do not see this now, but we know when He is revealed we shall be transformed into His likeness. This hope keeps us pure, so that we do not desire to sin against our God.

Those who commit sin are law breakers, and Christ came to put away our sins, for in Him there is no sin. Those who abide in Christ do not practice sin, and those who practice sin have neither seen or known Christ. We can better judge a person by their actions, then just their words, so that we are not deceived by conduct does not match their profession. Those who practice sin are of the devil, that is they are subject to him. The devil has rebelled against righteousness from the beginning of time. Jesus came into this world and was manifested to us, so that the works of the devil would be destroyed. Those who are born of God have forsaken sin, because Christ now lives in them, and so they cannot sin, because they are born of God. This does not mean a Christian is sinless, but it does mean that he has turned his back on sin, and chosen to stand with God in His righteous judgment against sin. So this is an important test of whether a person has been born of God or not, namely that those who practice righteousness identify themselves as God's children, while those who practice sin identify themselves as belonging to the devil.

The next great test of our relationship to Christ is our love for our brother. God's command from the beginning has been that we should love one another. Cain however did not obey God, and chose to hate and kill his brother Abel. Cain's works were evil, and his brother's works were righteous, and it was this that motivated Cain to kill his brother. Realizing there is hatred within the heart of man, even for a brother, we should not be surprised as believers when the world hates us because of our righteous works. The evidence that we have passed from death to life is that we love our brothers. Those who do not love their brother are spiritually dead. To hate your brother is to be the same as a murderer, and no murderer has eternal life in him. We can test whether our love is real, because just as Jesus laid down His life for us, we should be willing to lay down our lives for our brethren. To explain this further, John says, that if we see a brother in need, and we have enough to help them, but we close our heart to him, then the love of God is not in us? This is something that should cause us to stop and consider, for how many times have you seen your neighbor or friend in need, and had the ability to help, but chose to ignore their need. This shows that our hearts are not abiding in God's love, indicating that we have not been born of God. We are to love both in words and in deeds. This means our Christianity must affect our wallet, or it is not genuine. When the Spirit of God leads us to help others with their needs, then our hearts will not condemn us and we will have confidence before God. John here aims at reinforcing our faith, so that we have good reason to believe that we have eternal life. When a person comes to faith in Jesus, it must produce some real evidence otherwise we may have doubts about our salvation. One thing we can learn from this is that it is important for each one who calls themselves a Christian to examine their own life to see if there are signs of being God's child.

When we behave in a manner that pleases God, by keeping His commandments, we will be granted the things we ask for from God. That is not to say God will give us just anything we happen to ask for, since we must be careful to always ask for things within the will of God. God will not grant us something that is not good for us, or do spiritual harm to others. However John does share an important truth about the relationship that God has with his beloved children, namely that God delights to help those who are his obedient children. This is not surprising, for we know that any Father will delight in his son who obeys him, and will give him any good thing his heart desires when he knows it is good.

When it comes to being obedient to God, the first and most important commandment to obey, is to believe on the name of God's Son Jesus Christ, and to love one another. The one commandments leads to the other, and they compliment each other, for God is love, and when we come into relationship with God, His love is manifested in us. Jesus commanded us to love one another, for this was the means by which the world would know that we are his disciples. Thus we are learning that we need to have confidence in our being God's children, and if we want others to also believe that we are God's children, then we also must walk in love.

When we keep this commandment to love one another, then we are abiding in our Lord Jesus Christ, and He abides in us. How can we know that Jesus abides in us? We can know this by the work of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit of God leads, teaches, corrects, and gives us discernment we identify Christ's presence with us. When the Holy Spirit leads us to love one another, act godly by putting away sinful behavior, then we can be assured of God's work in us. However if our behavior is hateful, selfish, vengeful, proud, and evil, then we must ask what spirit is at work in us, for it

certainly is not the Holy Spirit. We shall learn more about testing spirits in our next lesson. I hope you are testing yourself as you listen to these messages from 1John, as to whether you really are God's child, for it would appear that many have put confidence in their Christian profession without the evidence to back it up. Make sure you have passed these tests, and that you really do possess eternal life.

"in this the children of god and the children of the devil are manifest: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of god, nor is he who does not love his brother." 1John 3:10

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson John shows us more tests that we can use to discern whether or not we are really God's children. These tests include living righteously, walking in love, the obedience of faith, and the Holy Spirit's presence in us. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to lay down our life for our brethren?"

In John's treatise on Christian love, he stated that "we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." He clearly intends that all Christians, should be willing to give their lives for their brothers in Christ. Does he mean by this, that we should all be willing martyrs for the sake of our Christian brothers and sisters? He uses the example of our Lord Jesus who laid down his life for the sake of all men, as that which should motivate Christian love to the point of laying down their lives also. Well this statement certainly will make us stop and consider the price we are willing to pay to be a faithful follower of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What we should consider, is that this does not necessarily mean that we will have to die for others in the cause of Christ, for he says we ought **to be willing**. So the heart condition is what is important here. Are we willing to make sacrifices to benefit others who know Christ? We can apply this in a general sense to all our acts of kindness and care extended to God's people. For instance a Christian couple that decides to use their home as a place of hospitality for traveling Christians, or any that need help with accommodations. They decide to do this in service to the people of God, because of their love and obedience to Christ, and make much sacrifices to offer this hospitality. This in one sense is laying down their lives for the brethren, since they are offering their home and resources to care for God's people. Then we might have an older sister in Christ that has some wealth at her disposal, and determines that she will use the money to send out regular support to assist missionaries. She too is laying down her life for the brethren, because she has determined to use the money she has to advance God's kingdom, by serving the practical needs of missionaries.

While these examples of service to other believers prove at some level to be what is meant by laying down our lives for the brethren, surely the meaning also goes much deeper. Someone who dedicates their life to serving Christ, is also laying down their life for the brethren. Perhaps someone is called to a foreign mission, and serve the Lord for many years selflessly in order to win converts to Christ. Those who come to faith in Christ, would be most grateful for the sacrifice of that missionary for their spiritual welfare, and admit that they had laid down their life for the brethren.

Ultimately a Christian maybe called to die in the cause of Christ, such as a missionary serving in areas that are hostile to Christians, where they are persecuted or even killed. Those who bravely put their lives at risk to spread the gospel, are certainly laying down their lives for the brethren. So we have seen that there are different levels at which we might be said to lay down our lives for the brethren. However what we should understand from this instruction, given by John, is that it does not concern our personal circumstances, as much as our attitude of heart. If we really love God, and value our brothers and sisters in Christ, then we shall be obedient to the this call to lay down our lives. It may look much different in each of our lives. One might be called to serve the Lord in their church by ministering to the saints, and teaching the word. Another will be called to enter into hostile territories, where there life is at risk for the gospel.

While we think about what it means to lay down our life for the brethren, it would be good to clarify that there is no greatness in seeking to be a martyr for Christ, just for the sake of vain glory. The greatest sacrifice may not be throwing ourselves into the flames of persecution, but rather dedicating our life for the service of others. The quiet and sincere Christian who labors daily for the spiritual and physical well being of others is showing a willingness to make that sacrifice for Christ each day of their lives. This is truly laying down our lives for the brethren. In Romans 12, we are exhorted to present our bodies as **living sacrifices**. This means that we are not looking for martyrdom, but rather how to use our lives in God's service, since we are grateful for the mercy God has shown to us through Christ. Do you see yourself as a slave for Jesus? If you see this truth, embrace it, and apply it, then laying down your life, as Christ laid down His life, will not be a difficult choice to make, and the only reasonable thing to do. It will also bring much joy into our lives, for there can be no greater joy than to know we are fulfilling the purposes for which Christ died, and sharing the eternal blessings with those who trust in Him.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of god, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to god, which is your reasonable service." Rom 12:1

LESSON 234
Abiding in Love
1JOHN 4

In our study of 1John we have uncovered several tests that can help us in knowing whether we are God's children. There were many false teachers at the time John was writing, and he wants to help true Christians to have confidence in their salvation through Jesus Christ, and so he provides these various tests of spiritual life. Today John continues with his theme of testing ourselves and the spirits, also speaking about abiding in love.

John gives us some insight into the spirit world which have control over false prophets. Christians have the Holy Spirit to guide and teach them, and provide discernment as to whether a spirit is from God or not. As a believer listens to a preacher talk, he should be evaluating them by comparing their words and actions against what the scriptures teach. The Holy Spirit helps us to discern if a man is a false prophet, by whether his actions line up with what the bible says. A good test of whether someone is God's spokesman, is by what they confess about the person of Jesus Christ. If someone denies that Jesus came in the flesh, or that Jesus was a real man, they display the spirit of antichrist. John here exposes the heretical Gnostics who were teaching that all flesh was evil, and that Christ never came in the flesh.

John recognizes that the Christians were able to overcome this spirit of antichrist through their faith, because greater was the Holy Spirit who was living in them, then the deceptions of the devil, who is at work in this world. Here is an important teaching for all Christians, specifically that we are protected from the devil by the greater power of God who dwells within us. This can certainly help us when we face difficult spiritual battles, and feel the devil is breathing down our necks. John also testifies that those who truly belong to God would hear and receive the teaching of the apostles, and those that did not receive their teachings belong to the world, and to the spirit of error. Here then is another important test for those who profess to be a Christian. Do they agree with the teachings of the bible, or not? The answer to this question will show us whether they belong to the truth, and to Christ.

John calls on believers to love one another, since love comes from God, and those who love show that they are born from God, and know God. Someone who does not love, does not know God, since God is love. This verse teaches us that love is not simply an attribute that God assumes at times, but it is His very essence. God's love was demonstrated by sending His only begotten son into the world, so we could find life in Him. John refers to Jesus as the only begotten Son, which is a title expressing his uniqueness, and helps us to appreciate the sacrifice God made. Love finds its source in God, for any love that we have was initiated by God first loving us and sending his son to pay for our sins. When the bible says he was the propitiation for our sins, it means that God was fully satisfied with the price paid for our sins. Since God loved us to such a great extent, we are also to love one another.

So here we have another way to confirm if a man knows God, or is known by God, and that is the love test. No one has seen God, but we can experience God's indwelling power in our lives, when God's love has been perfected in us. This happens when God's love is actively working through us by sharing the gospel message with others. As we testify of how the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world, others will hear the gospel message, and also trust in Jesus. This sharing of the gospel message sincerely and effectively is a demonstration of faith, and of God dwelling within us, and therefore of being God's child. Love is made perfect, or complete, when we are just like Jesus in this world. That means we are willing to love people enough to bring them to heaven, without loving the sin and corruptions of this world. We should take time to ask ourselves if we are just as Jesus was in this world. Remember Jesus did not seek after the riches of this world, or fame and success. He lived a poor life, and was relatively unknown to his own countrymen while growing up. His ministry involved serving the needs of others, and he went about all the towns and villages tirelessly serving the will of His Father. Then he willingly gave up his life to a cruel death, being misunderstood and despised. Not that he had done anyone wrong, in fact the reason they despised him was because He was so good, and others envied Him, because the people chose to follow Him. So if we are to be as Jesus was in this world, it should look something like the life of Jesus, where we spend our days in the service of others, not seeking our own wealth, comfort or popularity. We should also be willing to suffer and be misunderstood for the sake of the gospel, and be known for our kind and righteous works.

When we set our heart on loving others, then we overcome fear. True love is not concerned with self, but only with the welfare of others. Fear can cripple us in life and torment us, but when God's love fills our hearts then fear is cast away. This is another evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers, signifying they are God's children. Our love for God is the result of His loving us first, which should always make us humble and grateful that He choose to love us. If someone says they love God, and yet hates his brother then the bible says the man is a liar. It is not possible to hate a brother whom you can see, and yet love God whom you can't see. These two cannot coexist. This then reinforces what John has been saying in this chapter about the love test. Love is the key to telling whether someone has been born of God or not. Hatred is also evidence that someone is not born of God, for we cannot hate our brother, and have any claim on loving God. God loves everyone the same, and willingly gave His Son for their eternal welfare. How can we, who are sinners, offer less grace to our brother than God does? The one who loves God will also be a lover of his brethren. By brethren we mean all people, and specifically those who are nearest to us, and especially our family and fellow church members. It is with those we come in contact with daily that test the truth of our love. Do you profess to love God? Do you love all people? Test yourself here, and know that loving others, reveals

the truth of whether you love God, and are born of God. Today would be a good day for you to confess your sin to God, and to receive the free gift of eternal life through placing your faith in Jesus Christ.

"and we have known and believed the love that god has for us. god is love, and he who abides in love abides in god, and god in him." 1John 4:16

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned from the bible how to discern the spirit of antichrist, the importance of abiding in love, and loving our brother to demonstrate that we belong to God. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to be *'of the world?'*"

When referring the false teachers in this passage, John says that they were of the world. These false teachers used worldly speech, and the world listened to them. The distinction made in this chapter between what is false and what is true, is with respect to discernment about bible preachers, and whether they belong to God or not. The way we can discern their true identity is from their speech, and who is listening to them. If they are popular in the world among unbelievers, they are demonstrating that they belong to the world, and not to God. To be of the world is the opposite of being a child of God. We are either a child of God, or we belong to this world. We either live for ourselves and gain in this world, or we are living for God, and for our hope in heaven.

When preachers use worldly talk, or speak of worldly things, then we can discern that they belong to the world. If the preacher only talks about the things of time and sense, things of wealth, comfort and ease in this world, then we have every reason to question by what spirit he is speaking. A true servant of God is not preoccupied with the material world, or how well we shall manage in this life. His primary concern is whether a person has received God's salvation, and is bound for heaven. It is true that we have to live in this world, but this world is not our home, and we are only passing through. When preachers talk about getting rich, and living successfully, and being freed from every sickness and sorrow in this life, they are teaching a false message. The gospel is not about our gaining health and wealth in this world, but the gospel is about being rescued from the condemnation of sin, and living at peace with God.

Many people who profess to be Christian, are in fact living for self and for what they can achieve and gain in this world. They do not take time to concern themselves with heavenly things. Therefore worldly people are more interested in how to make money, then to reach souls for Christ. They are more ambitious to get a good job in this world, then to find a place of service in the church. They spend their spare time with things of this world. Men often find themselves preoccupied with sports, while ladies with another hairdo or new clothes to wear. Even gospel singers often look like they are more interested in their own fame and fashions, then the message of their songs, demonstrating their worldly character. To be of the world, is to love the fashions and fancies of this world. It is to be preoccupied with the physical gain we can have now, rather than the spiritual gain we will have in glory. Now I suppose we will all find ourselves a bit convicted by this evaluation, for we all tend to want some success in this world. But lets use today's message to challenge our hearts to be more occupied with heavenly things, then with the passing things of this world. Let us resolve not to be those whose superficial relationship to Christ, is overshadowed by a life with hopes and ambitions focused on this present world. Let us show by our heavenly mind that we have forsaken the riches in this world, by putting them on the alter of sacrifice, so that we may have a better inheritance with Christ in heaven.

Lets remember the story of Lot in the Old Testament, who proves a good illustration for our purposes in this message. Lot had his eyes downwards towards the green pastures of the valley, near to the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham by contrast had his eyes looking upwards towards the city whose builder and maker was God. Because Lot had set his eyes on earthly gains, it took him in a direction towards those evil cities. It was not long before Lot was found to live in one of those wicked cities, and even sat as a judge at the gate of the city. If we remember the story, we will recall that Lot's wealth and wife were destroyed when God's judgment fell on those wicked cities. His daughters committed incest with their father, and gave birth to two nations which would become enemies of Abrahams descendants in the future. The lesson we can learn from the story of Lot, is that when we set our eyes on the riches and comforts of this world, we will find ourselves neighbors with the wicked, and suffer the judgments that God will bring upon the ungodly. Lot, as it turns out, was a righteous man, and was himself spared from judgment, but he lost everything he hoped to gain. He would have been better to stay closer to his uncle Abraham seeking after spiritual riches, then worldly gain. Don't let the world riches corrupt your heart, and draw you into the snare of the devil, but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. So are you of the world, or have you through faith in Christ separated yourself from the world for a better inheritance? Do not compare yourself with other professing Christians to justify all your wealth, or ambitions. Think of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who plainly told us that "you cannot serve God and money".

"but what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." Phil 3:7

Knowing I have eternal Life

I JOHN 5

In our previous lessons we were uncovering the tests of spiritual life presented by John in his 1st epistle. While there are several important tests for spiritual life, perhaps the greatest is the test of love, which John has discussed in the last couple of chapters, and continues on this subject into this chapter. We shall also find John's purpose in writing this letter was to confirm believers in their faith, so that they would know and be assured that they had eternal life.

Again we are reminded that spiritual birth takes place when a person believes that Jesus is the Christ. When someone loves God the giver of eternal life, then they will also love all those who have been born of God. If loving God equates to loving God's children, then the evidence that our love is genuine for others will be seen by our obedience to God's commandments. Love and obedience work together in harmony, so that love always produces obedience, and disobedience reveals the absence of love. To love God then is to keep his commandments which should not be a burden to us. If you find obedience to God too difficult of a burden, then you do not really love God. If God says that, we are supposed to forgive, preach, or witness, then we must obey Him, or we cannot claim to love Him.

John further tells us that those who are born of God overcome the world, and it is our faith that gives us this victory over the world. Every child of God has placed his trust in Jesus as his Savior, and by this has overcome the world. So every true Christian is also an overcomer, according to the bible. However there is a sense in which we are to practically live out what it means to overcome the world. Jesus called upon the seven churches of Asia to overcome by returning to their first love and labors, being faithful under persecution, removing false teachings, removing immorality, strengthening a dying church, keeping God's word, and seek spiritual riches through righteous living and spiritual insight. These are areas we also need to pay attention to if we are to be overcomers.

Jesus came to us by water and blood. The Spirit of God testified that Jesus was God's unique Son when He came upon Him in the form of a dove at his baptism. Also when Jesus died on the cross, and his blood was shed, it gave testimony to the sacrifice that the Son of God had made for us. These three come together in agreement about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, namely that at His baptism He was announced to be God's Son. At His death He gave up his life by shedding His blood to redeem man to God. The Spirit testifies to the truth that Jesus is God's provision to us as our Savior. If we are willing to receive the testimony of men, then we should realize that God's witness is greater, and God has testified that Jesus is God's Son who gave His life for us.

Now John will come to the climatic section of his writing, by stating his purpose clearly, and confidently asserting the truth of eternal life for those who belong to God. Those who have believed on the Son of God have a witness within themselves that they are God's child. But those who do not believe, are in essence calling God a liar, for they refuse to believe God's testimony about His Son. God has testified that the gift of everlasting life is in His Son. So He who has the Son has this life, and He who does not have the Son does not have life. These things John had written so that those who have believed on the name of the Son of God, may know that they have everlasting life, and will continue to believe on the name of the Son of God. This passage in first John joins with other New Testament passages to teach us that we can know for sure that we have, as a present possession, the gift of eternal life. It is important for all believers to have confidence in their salvation, so that they will not be striving to gain or keep salvation. Salvation is a free gift to all those who place their faith in Jesus, God's Son, looking to Him for the forgiveness of their sins.

As Christians with confidence in salvation, we can also, by faith, seek God in prayer with confidence that He hears and will answer our prayers. However, we must be careful to understand what to expect when we pray. John points out that when we pray **according to His will**, He hears us. This means that God is not obliged to give us everything we ask for, especially when God sees that it would not be for our good. God will answer us and grant us everything we ask for, when it is according to His will. Prayers often focus on the welfare of others, and so John provides us an example of how we could pray, and see God working for others. He suggests to us that we might know of a man who is sinning, and we pray for that man, because we have seen the hand of God's judgment because of his sin, even to the extent that the sinful brother is dying. In this case we can pray for the sinning brother, and ask God to spare his life, and God will be gracious to preserve the life of that brother. However there is a sin which leads to death, and we are not encouraged to pray for that person if we know that he has committed such sin that warrants the righteous judgment of God by way of death. Many commentators have understood this sin that leads to death as the sin of apostasy, though it is not specifically mentioned what sin the man committed. John further explains the nature and extent of sin, saying that all that is unrighteous is sin, and some sin is not so serious as to lead to death. Those who are God's children do not continue to practice sin, for they guard themselves, and the devil has no power to touch them. The believer has the protection of prayer, the indwelling spirit, and a new righteous nature to combat Satan, and therefore does not need to fall prey to the temptations of the evil one. One more way that we can know we belong to God, is that we see the world through God's eyes and recognize that all the world is controlled by evil. The Son of God gives us understanding, and we know the truth is in Him, and that we belong to Him. He is the true God and eternal life, testifying clearly of the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He finishes this letter by calling on all Christians, whom he affectionately calls "little children" to keep themselves from idols. All those things that can steal away our hearts affection and worship from God are idols, and we must be careful to destroy all competing affections.

I trust this study in 1John has helped to build your confidence in your salvation, or perhaps has left you in doubt. Take this opportunity to call upon the Lord Jesus to save your soul, and forgive your sins.

"And this is the record, that God has given to us everlasting life, and this life is in His Son." 1John 5:11

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that eternal life is assured to all those who have believed on the Son of God, and that we have several witnesses which verify the truth that is in Jesus, namely the water, blood, and Spirit of God, as well as an internal witness within us. Someone might ask the question, "What is the sin that leads to death?"

While John does not specifically tell us what the sin that leads to death is, it would be important to consider what it might be, as this is something all of us would certainly want to avoid. There is a wide variety of opinions about what this sin might be, so let us examine some of these views to see which one fits best with the whole counsel of God, as revealed in the New Testament.

- 1. Some feel that the **sin leading to death** refers to sin persisted in by a believer and unconfessed by him. In 1 Corinthians 11:30, we read that some had died because they partook of the Lord's Supper without judging themselves.*
- 2. Others feel that the sin of murder is referred to. If a Christian should, in a moment of passion, murder another person, then we should not feel at liberty to pray for his release from the death penalty, because God has already stated that it is His will that "whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed."*
- 3. Still others feel that the sin referred to here is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus said that those who attributed His miracles which were done in the power of the Holy Spirit to Beelzebub, the prince of demons, had committed the unpardonable sin, and that there was no forgiveness for this sin either in that age or in the age to come.*
- 4. Others believe that it is some special form of sin such as that committed by Moses or Aaron, Ananias and Sapphira, and which God visits with summary judgment.*
- 5. A final explanation is that the sin of apostasy is in view, and we believe that this is the explanation which fits in best with the context. An apostate is one who has heard the great truths of the Christian Faith, has become intellectually convinced that Jesus is the Christ, has even made a profession of Christianity, although he has never been truly saved. After having tasted the good things of Christianity, he completely renounces them and repudiates the Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 6 we learn that this is sin leading to death. Those committing this sin have no way of escape, since "they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." In this entire Epistle, John has been speaking with the Gnostics in view. These false teachers had once been in the Christian fellowship. They had professed to be believers. They had known the facts of the faith, but then they had turned their backs on the Lord Jesus and accepted a teaching which completely denied His deity and the sufficiency of His atoning work. A Christian cannot have liberty in praying for the restoration of such because God has already indicated in His word that they have sinned unto death. (from BBC 1John5)*

Having reviewed these various arguments about what the sin leading to death is, we can assure our hearts, that we have not sinned to such an extent that would warrant a prohibition on prayers to rescue us from God's certain judgment. I think we can learn from this that when someone tampers with the teachings concerning the person and work of Christ, they are in grave danger. The Gnostics wanted to add something to salvation, and said it was necessary to believe a deeper knowledge about Christ in order to acquire salvation. They went above and beyond the revelation given to us in the New Testament by the apostles, By denying the Lord, they were confessing that they had never really known Him. They certainly had some knowledge, and based on that knowledge professed to be followers of Christ, but then set about to make their own beliefs, rather than submit to the teachings given by the apostles. They set themselves as an authority, and thereby refused God's authority in the scriptures. This departure from God's word will bring God's judgment, and has no remedy. God could, and would, save any who come to Jesus in faith. When men reject God's only way of salvation, and claim they have some other way to reach God, they condemn themselves, and leave no other course than God's certain judgment upon them. Salvation is only possible to those who see Jesus as God's Son, and as God's only answer to their sin. Apart from Jesus there can be no salvation, only judgment. Praying for men to be saved is certainly always within the will of God, but praying for men to be spared from judgment who have openly refused God's Son, and turned others away through a different gospel, is to pray outside of the will of God. We must stand with God in His righteous condemnation of wickedness. Remember we have no obligations to those who have heard the gospel clearly, and have defiantly refused to bow to the authority of God, and obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can and should always pray that men would turn from the folly of their sins, and repent and believe Jesus as God's only remedy to pay for our sin. May the Spirit apply these truths to our hearts, as we labor in prayer for our friends and loved ones.

"And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." Heb 6:11

LESSON IN 2JOHN

John the Apostle on Patmos by Jacopo Vignali



Image courtesy of [Sailko: Wikipedia.org](#) (PD-1996)

“I REJOICED GREATLY THAT I HAVE FOUND SOME OF YOUR CHILDREN WALKING IN TRUTH, AS WE RECEIVED COMMANDMENT FROM THE FATHER.”

2JOHN 1:4

LESSON 236
Doctrine of Christ
2JOHN

In our previous lesson we finished a study of John's 1st letter, where we discovered various tests of spiritual life. Today our lesson will cover the shortest book of our New Testament, John's second letter. In this short letter John will warn about those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ, and how we are to respond to such people.

John, who calls himself the elder, addresses this letter to the "elect lady and her children". We are not sure who this elect lady was. Some have thought the words are meant to represent a local church, or perhaps the church at large. But most would contend that this letter was written to a particular woman and her household. This would be the simplest explanation, and fit well with the context of what John has to say to her. Though this is a personal letter to one woman and her children, the letter certainly proves to have a broad application for all Christians.

John, in his greetings to his Christian friend, speaks of his love for her in the truth. He qualifies his love as that being ***in the truth***. For a Christian man writing to a Christian woman, he would not want anyone to get the wrong impression, and think his words might reflect some romantic interest. He therefore qualifies his love as that which is common to all Christians, a love which binds together all believers in their common faith in Christ. The love of which John speaks was not just his own personal love for her, but a love which encompassed all that have known the truth. It was clear that her character and works, had set her apart to all Christians as one admired and loved. This love might have been the result of her showing hospitality to traveling Christians, as this seems to be implied by the context of the letter, though we cannot be certain of this.

The love that was known among believers, was for the sake of the truth. When Christians demonstrate the love of God, by the love they have for one another, it will promote the truth of the gospel. The truth of the gospel dwells within every believer, and will be with us forever. We shall forever remember and reflect upon the love of God shown to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, who went to the cross to bear away our sins.

As with most New Testament letters, God's blessings of grace, mercy and peace are desired upon those to whom the letter is addressed. These blessings flow both from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, and are administered in truth and love. God's blessings are the best, and that which we should most desire.

John expresses his joy in discovering that her children were walking in the truth, according the commandment of the Father. The way this is worded makes us think that John was referring to these children demonstrating love to their fellow Christians, because this is what John often mentions as the commandment of God. The gospel is not simply to be understood, it must be obeyed, and that means it will reflect in our conduct towards one another. John further confirms this commandment, which had been given to the church from the beginning, that Christians are to love one another. Defining again for us what Christian love is, he equates it with walking after His commandments. The commandment, he reinforces again, by saying it was from the beginning, and that we should walk in it. The whole letter has only 298 words, and yet love and God's commandments are repeated several times to emphasize the importance of this relationship between our obedience and love in our walk as believers.

Now that John has emphasized the need for love among believers, he moves onto the subject that is at the heart of his letter. He tells her that many deceivers have entered into the world. These deceivers could be identified by their doctrine, for they were denying that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. Those who promote such evil doctrine are called the deceiver and the anti-Christ. He certainly is not mincing his words here. When it comes to love in the Christian community, we must remember that love must never be at the expense of truth. Actually true love is when we adhere firmly to the truth, so that others can know and be assured of the truth. Those who distort the truth, must be labeled as deceivers, and anyone who distorts the doctrine of Christ, is by definition, the anti-Christ. This comes as a warning to the elect lady and her children to be sure they watch out for themselves, lest they should, in the spirit of love, entertain those who held such false doctrine. To do this would jeopardize their full reward. The rewards of Christian service will be issued according to their spiritual merits. Doing good is great, but doing good to those who oppose Christ, is to work contrary to the purposes of God, and will thus mean some loss of reward. Those who sin by not abiding in the doctrine of Christ were demonstrating that they did not have God, meaning they were not God's children. Those who are true Christians will abide in the true doctrine of Christ taught by the apostles, and have both the Father and the Son. Therefore John must warn the elect lady to be aware of these false teachers, who were moving about, and not to offer them hospitality or even bid them God speed. We cannot wish God's blessing upon those who have false doctrine concerning Christ, for by doing so we become partakers of their evil deeds.

Therefore, Christian friends, when you are talking with a Jehovah Witness, or a Mormon, who do not hold to the doctrine of Christ, but teach a false Christ not found in the bible, you should be warned not to show hospitality or wish them God's blessing. It is always appropriate to speak with gentleness and respect, but let us be careful not to partake in the sins of others, who hold evil doctrine concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. We must defend the truth of the gospel, and give full credit to the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son and our redeemer.

John closes the letter with a desire to visit in person with this dear Christian lady, so that he did not have to write with paper and ink, but rather to have the joy of speaking face to face. He also sends greetings from the children of another Christian sister, whom we have no other information about. This letter from John warns us how to handle

people who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ, and it is important that each of us be sure we are trusting in Jesus for our salvation, so why not pray today and ask Jesus to cleanse you, and give you the free gift of eternal life.

"whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have god. he who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the father and the son." 2John 1:9

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about the important relationship between obeying God's commands, and loving our Christian brethren, as well as how to properly deal with those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. Someone might ask the question, "Why does John refer to himself as The Elder?"

It would almost seem against proper Christian decorum for John to present himself as "THE ELDER". Perhaps if he had said that he was also an elder, and did Peter when writing his first letter. But here John does not call himself an elder, but "THE ELDER". Did not Jesus say that men should not take to themselves titles such as Rabbi, or teacher? John in writing his epistles has adopted a particular style by which he conveys spiritual truth. He often refers to "little children". In our study of his 1st letter we discovered that John identifies different levels of maturity in the Christian church, with these terms, of children, young men, and older men. He classifies in order to speak and teach each group according to their maturity and needs. When John wrote these letters, he was himself an old man, perhaps in his 80's or 90's himself. He was also likely the last living apostle at the time of this writing, and one of the few remaining eyewitnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. These distinctions would warrant John being identified as "the elder", but we could also understand that John was conveying a spiritual truth in his writings. He was an older brother, and guide and teacher to God's people over many years, and without apology He may refer to his station in life as the elder, for indeed he was older and with much more experience. He could with authority speak of Christ due to his age and experiences with Him. It may have also been the case that John had been commonly called "The Elder" by fellow Christians, as his advanced age and wisdom were recognized and appreciated by others. Much the same way we would call someone "father, Papa, or Dad", not because they are necessarily our biological father, but we recognize their age and relationship to us as a father figure. John was not simply *an elder* to those who knew him in his advanced years, He was *their elder*, or *the elder*, because they looked to him more than any other for spiritual instruction. John tends to be quite personal in his writings, which is very evident in His gospel. He refers to many individuals by name, and tells us their unique personal encounters with Jesus. He also calls himself 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. This again might at first appear to be an almost boastful thing to say. However, I think we should understand that John appreciated the Lord's individual love of people, so that to him, he never saw Jesus as one who loved people in some collective sense, but he saw how Jesus loved each individual and dealt with each of them in such a personal way. Thus when thinking of his own relationship to Jesus, he first thinks of Jesus' personal love for him, and thus identifies himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. This does not diminish John's appreciation of Jesus' love, for say Peter, James, or others. Everyone of us should be able to say along with John, that we are the disciple whom Jesus loved. This is because each of us can experience Jesus' love in a very personal way. This helps us to understand that John's writings, and the way he addresses himself, are not meant to set him apart as more important than others, but rather to appreciate the unique role that Christ had given to him to serve the body of Christ.

I work with many young people myself, and I am called 'Papa' by most of these young people. I understand that in my role of service for Christ, and his people, I am fulfilling that fatherly role to many, and I am glad to be known as 'Papa' to the children. I will often sign an email with this term, simply to remind the young person that I am writing to of our relationship to one another. This helps to convey my love for them, and my interest in helping and guiding them as a good father would. I suppose if others saw me as their elder, and choose to call me "elder" then I would be glad to accept the term, so long as it was not meant as simple flattery, but was actually a true reflection of who and what I was to them.

Let us be warned here though that the term elder, which is certainly a biblical term, should not be misused in the church. There are lots of young men walking around today, who wear a badge on their shirt, that identifies them as "elder so and so". This to me is quite a far stretch from the biblical use of the term. An elder clearly conveys a sense of maturity both in physical age, but more importantly in spiritual things. A man who has raised children, and nurtured the church over many years, would be well suited to hold the name of an elder in the church. We want to avoid using any term that has been misused as some kind of title or status. We should know these mature servants of Christ through their character and labors, and affectionately refer to them as our elders, without their having to wear the title as a badge of honor on their clothing. How easy it is for men to fall prey to pride, when they are given special titles, so let us be careful how we adopt, and use such names.

"the elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed." 1Pet 5:1

LESSON IN 3JOHN

Statue of Saint John the Evangelist by Donatello, Florence, Italy



Image courtesy of Richardfabi~commonswiki at [Wikipedia](#) (BY-SA 3.0)

“BELOVED, YOU DO FAITHFULLY WHATEVER YOU DO FOR THE BRETHREN AND FOR STRANGERS, WHO HAVE BORNE WITNESS OF YOUR LOVE BEFORE THE CHURCH. IF YOU SEND THEM FORWARD ON THEIR JOURNEY IN A MANNER WORTHY OF GOD, YOU WILL DO WELL.”

3JOHN 1:5,6

LESSON 237
Receiving brethren
3JOHN

In our previous lesson we looked at the 2nd letter of John, and learned how Christians should deal with those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. Now we move onto John's 3rd letter, which he sent to another Christian friend, commending him for showing hospitality to the brethren, and warning about a man who loved preeminence.

Third John, like John's 2nd letter is rather brief, but also contains some very important teaching for the New Testament church, particularly with regards to reception of fellow believers into the church fellowship.

Again John refers to himself as "the elder", which is a title that we discussed in our last lesson. The letter is written to a Christian friend called Gaius, whom he calls beloved, and whom he loved in the truth. This is the same kind of warm Christian love and greetings that were expressed to the elect lady of this previous letter. He also wishes God's blessing on his friend Gaius. He desires him to prosper and be in health, just as his soul was prospering. This is a lovely blessing to share with any of our Christian friends, for we wish them to be in good health, along with experiencing God's mercy in salvation. Perhaps Gaius had experienced some sickness, which John alludes to here. If his friend Gaius was sick, and likely he had experienced some health issues, we will notice that John does not ask for divine healing, but rather wishes that he should be in good health. If the great apostle John could only go so far as to wish for good health for his friend, then we have to wonder how so many of these so called prophets today are assuring everyone of God's healing. Are they greater than John the apostle? Just something for us to consider in light of all the claims for divine healing going on in various churches today.

John found great joy knowing that Gaius' children were walking in the truth. John says he had no greater joy than hearing of the spiritual health of his children. John refers to Gaius' children as his own children. He might have called them his own children, because he loved them as his own, Gaius being such a dear friend to him. But it is more likely that John had lead this family to faith in Jesus Christ, and so they were his spiritual children. What great joy it is to be an instrument in the hand of God to bring others to salvation. The greatest joy, however, is to know that those we lead to Christ, go on well and walk in the truth. Many people profess salvation, only to later fall away from a steadfast walk with the Lord, proving that they likely never experienced God's salvation. The proof that someone is saved, is their continuing in the faith, and showing spiritual progress.

John commends Gaius for being faithful in his ministry to the brethren and strangers. Those who had received help from Gaius, or hospitality, were giving witness to his kind charity. John tells Gaius that if he would bring them forward on their journey in a godly manner, he will be doing very well. By this John means that some of these men who had been traveling around and visiting churches to minister the word of God, and preach the gospel, would need help financially and perhaps a place to stay, and food to eat, while visiting in Gaius' hometown. Gaius was doing well is meeting the practical needs of these servants of Christ, and John tells him to continue in this good ministry. He reminds Gaius that these servants of Christ went out in faith, not looking to the people of this world for their support, but trusting in the living God to supply their needs, as they labored in the gospel. They would not tarnish their ministry by looking to ungodly people to support God's work. Today, things would change dramatically in the church if all those who serve Christ, should follow the same principle of trusting in God alone for their support. When Gaius, as a Christian host, would receive such faithful servants into his home, and tend to their needs, he became a fellow-helper of the truth. Those who love the Lord understand this, and it why they are willing to sacrifice and support those missionaries who have left all, trusting in the Lord to bring the gospel to the nations.

John now has the unfortunate task of exposing the corruption of power within the church. A man named Diotrephes, was a man who was exalting himself, wanting to have preeminence in the church. How often we have seen this same spirit in the church, where men love to be in the lime light, getting all the applause, or holding onto control of everything, so that the church is stifled. Jesus is the true head of the church, and it is a great evil for men to assert themselves as head over God's people, and insist that everything be done their way, and that all attention must focus on them. Today's pastors are plastered over billboards, and figure so prominently in church advertisements on radio and TV. Why can't we give the glory to Jesus, and be like John the Baptist who said "He must increase, I must decrease". Diotrephes was trying to control who could join with the church in their meetings, even denying John, one of the apostles, access into the fellowship. Those who are brethren should have been received, but Diotrophes said they could not join them, and even cast some out of the church. This was a great evil, and Gaius is warned not to follow such wicked behavior. There are some churches that refuse fellowship to believers, because they are not from their own group. Let us be sure we do not participate in this evil practice, but show love to all brethren in Christ.

John concludes that those who practice such evil have not seen God, in other words, they are not God's children. John mentions a brother called Demetrius, who was well reported of by all, giving testimony to his belonging to the truth. John also bears record about this man, and Gaius knew that John's testimony was true. John has many things to discuss with his friend Gaius, but would prefer to see him face to face then to communicate with ink and pen. This letter reads so closely to his 2nd letter to the elect lady, that we might wonder if he penned the writings at the same time. Of this we can not be certain, but we can be glad that these letters are included in our NT canon so that we can be better equipped to deal with false teachers, and those who use the church for their own promotion. John

concludes this letter with greetings from those with him, asking that Gaius greet all his friends by name. To be received into Christian fellowship, trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior today, and you will be added to the church.

"We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth." 3John 1:8

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that Gaius was caring for Christian servants in practical ways, perhaps extending hospitality to them, and financing their travels. We also learned about the wicked practice of seeking fame and promotion in the church, as Diotrephes did? Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to be received by the church?"

When we read about the behavior of Diotrephes, who was casting some out of the church, and not receiving others, even to the extent of refusing John, an apostle of Jesus Christ, it raises the whole issue of church reception. Perhaps this is not something you have given much consideration to, for like many, you have attended the same church for a long while, and somewhere along the way, you considered yourself part of the church. Many do not receive any formal reception into the fellowship of believers, since many church services are simply run like a public general meeting. This might account for why so many Christians consider their attendance at meetings as optional. However the New Testament would show us quite a different picture of what it means to be received into the fellowship of the church. We need to point out that every child of God, belongs to the universal church, comprised of all believers from the whole church age. This being true, it is also important to understand that the universal church finds expression in the various local churches that are established, and to which believers may attend. Many denominations have various requirements to become a member of their denomination, and find a place in their church. This however is not taught in our bible, since denominations were never Gods intention. Men have divided up the body of Christ into all these factions, and then put in place various requirements for belonging to their particular group. By joining with the Methodists, I suppose I divide myself from my Pentecostal brothers, and to be a Presbyterian, I suppose I must thereby be separating myself from my Baptist brothers. This is all so wrong, and far from what scripture would teach us. Each local church, while remaining autonomous in it's functioning and ministries, should also be free to enjoy fellowship with all believers everywhere. When we divide the body of Christ, this creates barriers to the fellowship of God's people.

Now going back to the subject of reception, if we are to see things as God does, the only distinction we should recognize between people, is whether they are God's children or not. If we know someone is a child of God, they should be welcomed into the Christian church, and received as a believer. No need to ask if they belong to the Baptist, Pentecost, or Methodist church, just whether they know and love Jesus as Lord and Savior. Based on someone's faith in Christ, they are a Christian and ought to be received into the church.

We must remember that reception of a visitor, or new member, is based on their life in Christ. However each local church will also have an understanding of the bible and it's teaching, so that they can ensure that the church doctrine is maintained in harmonious fellowship. This means that is wise for the leaders of the church to agree on a statement of faith and practice for their local church, and provide this to those who would seek fellowship with them. This will serve as a courtesy to visitors, who are unfamiliar with the church and it's practice. It might just turn out that the visitor does not agree with all that the church is practicing. This affords them a chance to discuss the matter with the leadership to see if the matter can be resolved, or the person might feel happier seeking fellowship elsewhere. It is important for the church to seek unity and peace among believers, by providing some clear understanding at the time of receiving new believers into their fellowship. Young believers who have grown up in the church will also need to be instructed about the churches beliefs and practices and agree to adhere to this, to ensure that the church can function peacefully, and convey the truth accurately to others. Elders should sit down with each person who seeks fellowship in the church, to teach them the importance of joining the fellowship of believers, since they will be held accountable for their Christian walk. Some churches do not practice any formal reception, and therefore everyone is essentially a visitor to the church, and does not feel the need to be accountable to the church leadership for their behavior. Under this system it would not be surprising to learn of so-called believers, living immorally, having sexual relationships outside the confines of marriage. The church is not to tolerate sin, and therefore must have a clear reception into the church, so that the believers can be held to account for their Christian testimony and conduct.

In conclusion we must remember that the church is one church, and all believers ought to be permitted reception into the fellowship of any local Christian church. The church should be careful to receive believers who are in agreement with the doctrine and practices of the church, in order to promote holy living and maintain harmony among believers.

"And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." Acts 21:17

LESSON IN JUDE

Statue to William Tyndale, martyred for translating the Bible into English, London



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“BELOVED, WHILE I WAS VERY DILIGENT TO WRITE TO YOU CONCERNING OUR COMMON SALVATION, I FOUND IT NECESSARY TO WRITE TO YOU EXHORTING YOU TO CONTEND EARNESTLY FOR THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS.”

JUDE 1:3

Contending for the Faith

JUDE

In our previous lesson we completed a study of John's third letter, and today we will look into the letter written by Jude. Jude was likely the biological brother of Jesus, and thus he would have had first hand knowledge of Jesus. He has written to warn against ungodly men who creep into the churches and pervert the grace of God.

Jude calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother to James. This would be the same James that wrote the letter by his name, and was also a brother to Jesus. It is important to notice that both Jude and James do not refer to their physical relationship to Jesus, but rather to their roles as disciples and servants of Jesus Christ, which is by far the most important relationship anyone could have to Him.

He asks for God's blessing to his readers, namely that God should multiply mercy, peace and love to God's people. He was desiring to write to them about their common salvation, perhaps to encourage their hearts, but then found another matter more pressing, and in need of his writing. He wanted the Christians to contend for the faith, which was once delivered to the saints. By this expression he is calling on Christians to recognize the need to engage in serious debate and defense of the Christian faith. This is due to the fact that if error is permitted to creep into the church, it could corrupt the gospel message, and lead many souls astray. He also points out that the faith, by which he means the body of Christian doctrine given by the apostles, was delivered once to the saints. This helps us to appreciate that the Christian doctrine delivered by the apostles in the first century was to be only given to the church once for the entire church age. This should help us to discern, that those who claim any further revelations from God, are false prophets. Plenty of these false prophets have plagued the church since the time of Jude writing this letter, and we are still much in need of Christians who are well equipped to defend the Christian faith.

Jude will now speak at length about these ungodly people that have crept into the churches. He says that they pervert the grace of God and change it into sensuality, and deny our only Lord and Master Jesus Christ. Jude reminds us of how the Jews who escaped judgment in Egypt, later faced their own judgment due to their lack of faith. He then uses some illustrations of God's severe judgments. He mentions the angels that left their privileged places of service, and were judged, being eternally bound in darkness, awaiting a final day of God's judgment. He also mentions the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah that were destroyed because of their practice of immorality. The judgment on these cities was intended to be an example of God's judgment with eternal fire. These ungodly people who creep into churches, are characterized as filthy, defiling the flesh, who despise authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Michael the archangel, when in confrontation with Satan about the body of Moses, dared not to speak a railing accusation, but said, "the Lord rebuke you". This is very important to notice, and to learn from. If the greatest of the angels did not think it was his right to speak with authority against Satan, then we, who are of a much lower rank, should be all the more careful to speak with humility and grace. We are not in any position to judge others, but we know the Lord who will judge all men one day, and can simply refer men to Him for justification. Let us not use our tongues to accuse others, for we are not adequate judges, and do not have the authority to speak against others in judgment, except by the words and directives of our Lord Jesus.

Jude has many ways to describe these ungodly people. He says they are brute beasts. He also likens them to Cain, Balaam, and Korah. Of these three, one murdered his brother, another sought to curse God's people for financial reward, and the other tried to overthrow God's chosen leadership. These men demonstrated envy, hate, greed, prideful ambition, and selfishness. Such is the character of those who corrupt God's people, and use the church for their own agenda. They are described as those who defile the church when they take advantage of the churches charity to feed themselves. How many men today are doing precisely the same thing, by using the church offerings to fill their own pockets, and indulge themselves. Jude uses more illustrations to describe them. They are clouds without water, fruitless dead trees pulled out by their roots, raging waves spewing out foam, wandering stars. To these the judgment will be the blackness of darkness forever. These vivid word pictures reveal their emptiness as far as being of any spiritual value. While perhaps appearing to be agents of the water of life, they have nothing to give, and only blow over like an empty cloud. They give the appearance of producing something for God, but when looking more closely we will find they are utterly fruitless and dead. They can preach with much noise and seeming power, but they only produce foam that quickly vanishes away. They are also likened to wandering stars, for they might catch our attention and admiration while they blaze across our lives, only to quickly fade out of sight. Enoch, the 7th generation from Adam, prophesied about these, saying the Lord would return with his saints to execute his judgment upon them all, revealing their ungodly conduct and words. These men murmur, complain, and walk according to their lusts. They speak great boastful words, and use flattery and admiration to gain advantage over others.

Jude now exhorts his dearly beloved friends to remember the words of the apostles of Christ, how they had spoken of these scoffers, who follow their own lusts, causing divisions, worldly men, devoid of God's Spirit. He calls on his dearly beloved friends to build themselves up in their holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping themselves in the love of God, while waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ who gives us eternal life. He also calls on the Christians to show compassion, and pull sinners out of the fire, hating even garments that are defiled by sin. Pulling out of the fire means to rescue sinners from God's judgment, by pointing them to Jesus Christ. Jude ends this letter with perhaps

one of the most sublime doxologies found in the bible, when he says, 'Now to him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever, Amen'. Make certain that your Christian profession is not marked by the same lifeless, fruitless vanity that we read about in today's lesson. Receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior today, allowing Him to transform you into one of God's dearly-beloved children.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Jude 1:21

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we considered the warnings by Jude concerning evil men who creep into churches and take advantage of God's grace to fulfill their own lusts, and line their own pockets. We learned that these false brethren could be known by their lifeless and fruitless Christian walk. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean pray in the Holy Spirit?"

There is potentially much harm that could come upon the church when this phrase is misunderstood. Every prayer should be offered under the directing influence of the Holy Spirit. However, many times our prayers are only made in the flesh, according to our selfish desires, or lack love for others. Praying in the Spirit, means to pray in agreement with the desires and work of the Holy Spirit. We know that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control. If we are filled by the Holy Spirit, and thus under his control, He will always lead us to exhibit these fruits in our conduct. When we pray these fruits should also be evident in our words and attitudes. If I am praying for someone, then my attitude should be one of love and peace, gentleness and goodness towards that person. To pray that God would strike someone down in anger, because I feel offended by them, is certainly not praying in the Spirit. It is quite possible that our prayers can become self-focused, or even exhibit pride and selfishness. Think of the Pharisee who prayed, and thanked God that he was not like other men, and proceeded to tell God about how good he was. This was not praying in the Spirit, but was entirely of the flesh. Now by contrast the other man, who beat his breast, and would not lift his eyes up, but said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner", Jesus said it was he that went home justified. His attitude was in complete agreement with the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, and this was praying in the Spirit.

Today some churches will have people stand in front of the congregation while praying in loud ecstatic utterances, claiming they are speaking in the language of angels, and praying in the Spirit. Be very cautious about those who make such claims, for speaking or praying in a way that puts a person on display for all to see, is precisely what Jesus spoke against. He said when you pray, do not stand on a street-corner, and make long prayers for others to see, but rather go into your closet, and pray in secret. Making a display of our prayers caters to man's pride, and is not indicative of the Holy Spirit's work. Some churches encourage everyone to pray at the same time. In these settings you can hear everyone mumbling something, and it all sounds so intense, but it appears that the whole scenario is being contrived and manipulated, by someone, who is demanding or instructing everyone to pray in a specific way. This is coercion, and not praying from our own hearts to the Lord. Praying in a group can be mutually encouraging, but we must be careful that the praying is sincere, and for the Lord, and not so we appear more spiritual before others. Also we must avoid vain repetition. This is another characteristic we see when everyone is praying in tongues, or being manipulated to pray at the same time. It is though we have convinced ourselves, that when I say something with intense passion, by repeating it again and again, that somehow this will break through barriers, and reach God, and cause Him to answer us. Again Jesus told us not to pray this way. Our prayers do not need to be a series of words repeated again and again, for that would insult God's ability to listen or answer our prayers. A simple and sincere request is heard by God, and will be answered according to His will and His timing. We cannot manipulate God, in the same manner as a child tries to manipulate his parents to get something he wants. We have all seen how children will beg their parents, by repetition, drama or emotions. "Oh mommy, please, please, please, please may I have another piece of cake". If a child were to use the same antics that people often use in prayer, the mother would soon lose her patience and chastise the child for such foolish behavior. Why should we think that God in heaven, who is all wise and all powerful should entertain our repetitious prayers made in the presence of others to show how spiritual we are. This is a false spirituality, and that which God despises. God loves to hear us pray, but finds no pleasure in our contrived prayers, and displays of spiritual pride.

We cannot expect to pray in the Spirit, if we are not walking daily with the Lord. We cannot expect to show up at church on Sunday morning, and Suddenly turn on our spirituality, like turning on a light bulb switch. It is when we take time each day to hear God speaking in His word, and living a godly life, seeking to obey all that we learn from God's word, that our prayers will be guided by the Holy Spirit, and be answered by God. Praying in the Spirit means to pray in harmony with God's ways, and His word.

"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Matt 6:6