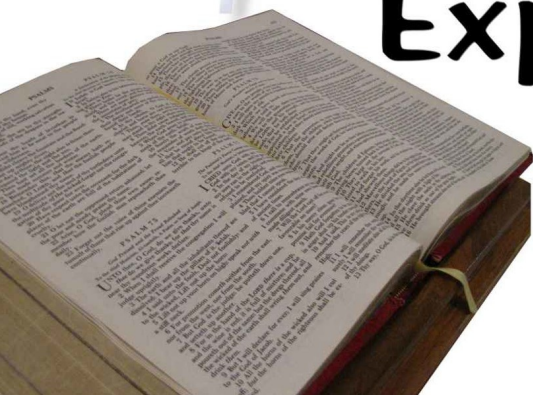


The Gospel Explained



by Donovan Neal

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Chapter I

What No One Wants To Hear

There is none righteous, no not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth Good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes...for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:10-18, 23

The above scripture is a scathing condemnation. With this proclamation, the Lord of Heaven and Earth desires to pronounce that the whole world lies guilty before God. To understand what the world is guilty of, it is necessary that we discuss the topic of sin.

What is sin? (1 John 5:17; 3:4; Rom 14:23; James 4:17)

Unless one has a clear understanding of what sin is, it is impossible to understand the message of the gospel.

My personal experience has shown me that people do not like to discuss the topic of sin. The very subject makes people feel uncomfortable, and causes individuals to shy away. However, it is from sin which Jesus was sent to save us (Matt. 1:21) Therefore, it deserves discussion.

What is sin? The Bible states that sin is the transgression of the law, (1 John 3:4), all unrighteousness is sin, (1 John 5:17) and that anything done apart from what you feel is right is sin (Rom. 14:23 TLB). Let me try to illustrate the idea of sin by giving you an example.

I am a resident of the state of Michigan, and under the laws of the state of Michigan to drive under the influence of alcohol is a crime. Therefore, if the local law enforcement agencies were to find an individual in such a condition they would arrest that person because they had violated the law.

Have you ever heard of the phrase "it's against the law?" This phrase states: that whatever "it" is: it is condemned and should not be done. To do so is to "break the law." Likewise, any act of breaking God's law is sin according to the Bible. The state of Michigan has criminal laws and calls someone who has broken one of these laws a criminal. Likewise, God has laid down laws, and the Bible states that we are all lawbreakers. (Rom 3:10,23)

Now what I have just explained is a concept that some theologians call "outward sin". Outward sin relates to the acts of a person. Yet there is another aspect of sin that is far more important, and that is inbred or "inward sin".

By inward sin, I mean to say that people are sinners by nature. By nature, I mean to say that a person is a sinner by birth, and not primarily, because of what he or she does. The Bible states that it is not just our actions that are "messed up" but that we are messed up, and that our actions are merely by-products of who we are. (Matt 12:34; 7:16-20)

To give an example, a dog barks because it is the nature of a dog to bark. A cat meows because it the nature of a cat to meow. In the same way, we sin because of *who* we are. Stating things differently, it is our nature to sin or to break the law of God.

Using another illustration; as an African-American I am of a dark complexion. I would possess this complexion regardless if I were to become the President of the United States or if I were to become a janitor. My skin color will never change. If I were to become a priest, my complexion would not change. And if I was to become a convict on death row, my complexion would remain the same. My skin color has nothing to do with how "good" or "bad" I am. I am African-American because of my ancestry. Moreover, God's law is still enforced so that everything will reproduce after its own kind (Gen 1:24).

Consequently, when two cats breed they have kittens. When two dogs mate, they have puppies. When two sinners have sex and conception takes place, they have sinful children. And the children are sinners before they have *any knowledge* of right or wrong.

If you can understand this: then you are on your way to understanding why there is nothing that you can *do*, good or bad, to save yourself. Your actions are not what are *primarily* wrong with you; *you* are what's wrong with you. By understanding that we are all sinners by birth, one can begin to understand why Jesus said, "You must be born again."

(John 3:3)

How did we become sinners? (Gen 2:15-22; Rom 5:12-21)

Now I would imagine that right now you might be thinking along these lines. "So you mean to tell me that I'm a sinner because my mom and dad were sinners?"

That's right; but not quite. We are all sinners not just because of our parents, but because of what Adam did long ago in the Garden of Eden.

Now that statement could cause someone to think along these lines. "It would seem that God is unfair to judge me just because I exist! Why do I have to suffer because of what someone else did?"

Do not feel bad. I have thought about this question too. However, it is a good question; so let me share what the Lord shared with me.

When God made Adam, he created him perfect. In fact, God had a few words that he said about Adam that he did not say about the rest of his creation -- "behold...*very* good." (Gen. 1:31) However, despite His praise God prohibited Adam from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The penalty of breaking this command was death. Adam was the first human, so all people derive their origins from him. The Bible uses the term "in Adam" to describe this union. (1 Cor. 15:22)

For example, if you trace back to your roots ultimately you will find one person from which everybody descends. When you trace back all of humanity there has to be a "first person" whom we can attribute our being here. The Bible states that this person was Adam.

In addition, when God gave his commands to Adam he was speaking to him as the representative of the whole human race. In this way, God held the whole race accountable for Adam's actions. If Adam obeyed God, he and his posterity would reap the blessings of obedience; but the converse held true if Adam disobeyed.

To understand how we were "in Adam" when he sinned try to think along these lines. If an alcoholic mother drinks while carrying a baby, she could cause the baby to become an alcoholic. The same can be said of a woman who is addicted to cocaine. Her child while still in the womb: will become addicted to cocaine, and this addiction is based solely upon the actions of the mother, and has absolutely nothing to do with the actions, or character of the child; in this way the child suffers from the actions of the mother.

The same can be said concerning sin. Even though none of us were physically born, we were all "in Adam" (i.e., in his loins) when he sinned. And when he "fell" we all fell. For this, reason and this reason alone, the Bible declares us sinners'. Sinners who are in rebellion against God, and hence are under condemnation of death.

Why did Jesus have to sinless? (2 Cor 5:21)

Because all of us were "inside" Adam when he sinned, we all were condemned by God as sinners. As a result, Jesus could not be 'in Adam' or else he would have been under the same penalty as well. In addition, he would have been in no position to free us from our sins.

Now remember that I stated earlier that all living things reproduce after their own kind. (Gen 1:24) As a result, if Jesus' father was a sinner he would have inherited all the traits, characteristics and ultimately the very nature of his father and it is for this reason that Jesus had to be born of a virgin. You see sin is passed down from the father to his offspring not the mother. The scriptures virtually always indicate in genealogies that a father *begets* a child. Very seldom does it ever mention the mother. For instance, Abraham begot Isaac, and Isaac begot Jacob, etc.

In addition, we can conclude that since Jesus wasn't conceived by a human father, but was birthed by a human mother due to the process of elimination; it seems to infer that sin is passed from the father to the offspring.

Consequently, Jesus could not have had a human father or else he would have been no different from the rest of us. However, by being conceived by the Holy Ghost, Jesus inherited the traits, characteristics and very nature of his heavenly father; which would include his sinless nature. (Matt 1:23)

Keep in mind that just because Jesus was sinless does not mean that he was incapable of sinning. Remember Adam he too was sinless yet was capable and eventually did sin. Now think about this -- Jesus had to be taught right from wrong, and yet never sin. Just like Adam would have discovered directly from God what was right and wrong and presumably would have continued under God's tutelage of this knowledge if he had never sinned. This inference can give one insight as to why Jesus had to be tempted of the Devil.

The Adversary desired to see if Jesus would overcome that which made Adam to fall. Thus, Jesus had to endure forty days of intense fasting and bombardment from Satan. After three and a half years; serving both God, and man. Jesus could say with full assurance that "the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." (John 14:30)

When God gave Adam a choice to eat of either the fruit of the tree of life or the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: God presented Adam with the opportunity to either obey or disobey him.

Likewise, Jesus was presented with this opportunity as well, and unlike Adam succeeded in obeying God his entire life. (Phil 2:8) Jesus showed himself qualified to bear the sins of the world. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. If Jesus had yielded to any of the temptations, he would have disqualified himself from being our sacrifice.

Remember that Jesus, in order to redeem us, had to be born sinless, and remain sinless until he was to be offered as a sacrifice. With this foundation laid we can proceed to the question of why Jesus is the only way to receive salvation.

Why is Jesus the only way to receive salvation? (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)

There are at least four reasons that the scriptures give for Jesus being the only route to salvation. They are as follows.

1. Only Blood Atones For Sin.

The scriptures state that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission." (Hebrews 9:22) Scripture states that when a person sins: he must pay with his own life. (Ezk 18:20; Rom 6:23) In a later chapter, we will look at the magnitude of what it means to die.

There is only one way to escape this sentence of death, and that is by the life of the guilty party or an innocent party who receives the punishment due the offender.

Leviticus states that the life of the flesh is in the blood. (Lev 17:11) Only the expiration of that life, and hence the blood can satisfy the righteous claims of God. However, any individuals can choose to pay the penalty themselves: but God has provided an alternative sacrifice to pay the price in all of our stead. There is only one person who has chosen to freely shed his blood for people's sins; and that is Jesus. (Col 1:14; Eph 1:7)

2.A Sacrifice Must Be Without Blemish.(Deut 15:21)

Throughout the Bible one notices a pattern regarding the sacrifices that are acceptable to God. They must all be "without blemish." A blemish represented impurity and not the perfection of an unflawed creation. Since the time of Cain and Abel, God has given humanity a criterion as to what constitutes an acceptable sacrifice. There is only one person that God acknowledges as being acceptable to be our sacrifice and that is Jesus. (1 Pet 1:19; Matt 3:17; Jhn 1:29; Is 53:10)

3.Only Man Can Atone For Man.

Man is one of the only beings that possess a free will. Consequently, God holds man accountable how he utilizes that will. If man violates the will of God, then man must suffer the consequences. Each of us are ultimately responsible for our own actions, and we are the only ones who can satisfy the penalty for these actions.

Normally, if a person commits a murder you do not jail the murderer's mother, or haul his father into prison; you jail the murderer. Likewise, God holds each of us responsible for our sins (Ezk 18:33) and we are the only ones who can satisfy the penalty. Since it was man that sinned, man can only pay the price. Jesus definitely was a man and was willing to atone for our sins. (1 Tim 2:5)

4. Only God Can Atone For Mans Sins

When a criminal is committed for, doing a crime it is natural to expect the criminal to pay the penalty for that crime. Likewise God must see to it that when a sin is committed the proper consequences of said sin are meted out -- the death to the trespasser. However, the Bible indicates that God is more eager to establish his purpose in our lives than to just have us suffer the consequences for our sin. (Rom 5:8) We find that in Genesis chapter one that it was never God's design for man to die or sin. (Rom 5:12) On the contrary, God wants to see man fulfill his purpose of having a love relationship with man.

Therefore, God has made provision to satisfy both the requirements of his own law and his original plan for our lives. It is important to understand that God is not a heavenly miser out to prevent us from enjoying life.

Nor, is he interested in merely sending people to Hell. If God wanted to simply fulfill his justice there would be no need of an alternative sacrifice. He would just simply take his payment from man, and allow him to pay. Unfortunately, man was not in the position to fulfill God's purpose for him, *and* satisfy his righteous requirements.

Consequently, God was the only one who could redeem man by actually becoming man himself, and taking man's place. The result is that God satisfied his own requirements and freed man to also fulfill his purpose. Since Jesus was God (John 1:1), Jesus meets that criterion.

In conclusion, we find that Jesus is the only one that is qualified to fulfill all the above conditions. Keep in mind that neither Buddha, Mohammed, or Moses have ever claimed to be God and those less famous figures that have made such claims have not provided the evidence necessary for us to place our faith in their word and consequently in their ability to deliver us. Again only Jesus passes the test, and only Jesus is able to provide salvation.

Food for Thought

What do you think sin is? Is your view different from the Bible's? Please explain.

Does the Bible claim that you are a sinner? (Ecc 7:20; Rom 3:10, 23; Is 53:6; Gal 3:22)

What do the following scriptures' say about the consequences of your being a sinner? (Rom 6:23; Ezk 18:4; Jhn 8:24)

What is it about sin that make it so terrible? Or to rephrase the question, what makes God so upset and make “all the fuss” over sin? For a hint see scriptures (Is 59:2; Jer 5:25; Rom 6:23 and De 30:19)

Chapter II

Let's Talk About Death

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Genesis 2:16, 17

"Thou shalt surely die." Never before had Adam heard these words. Yet it is God who understands the concept of the words' usage and it is God himself who uttered it into the atmosphere of existence. Because the word originates with God, it is important that we like Adam gain an understanding of what this word means. Therefore, in this chapter I'd like to discuss what death is, its origin and types, and finally why Jesus himself had to die.

What is death?

Since we are seeking a definition, let us confer with Webster for a possible understanding. Webster defines death as the act or fact of dying or the state of being dead. Hmmm: not too helpful of a definition here. On a side note, it is interesting that man's authority on definitions seems a little vague about the subject, but this should not surprise us. Since God originates this word, we need to look to the words' originator to gain its understanding.

Man often tries to syncopate words. However, the Bible is often in conflict with such attempts because it defines words in terms of their characteristics; an excellent example of this can be found in first Corinthians 13, where Paul describes love. In this passage, Paul states that love is kind and gentle etc. Paul says that love looks like this, and thus consequently when you see the behaviors he lists that is love. Likewise, the Bible has no Webster-like definition or one sentence definition for the word “death”.

However, due to the many characteristics associated with death I do believe that we can come up with a simple yet biblical definition. I would define death as the separation from one state to another. The essence of death is separation. I believe this idea lines up with scripture and let me explain why.

In Romans chapter six we find the apostle Paul dealing with the subject of sanctification. In giving his reasons as to why we can live a life free from sin, Paul gives some interesting points. He says that we are free from sin's dominion because we have died. Jesus states that sin is a slave master, (John 8:34) and as with any slave master, sin cannot make you serve it, if you are dead. Paul goes on to say in the book of Romans that the separation from the slave master is for the purpose of joining you to the Lord (Romans 6:4, 10, 11, 13, 18, and 22).

Paul uses the term "dead to sin," and "dead unto sin" to describe the severed relationship that the believer has to sin. I believe the scripture further supports the idea that death is a separation in such scriptures like Luke 15:11-32 -- the story of the prodigal son. In the parable, a son leaves his father. During the sons' absence, the father states some interesting things in relation to his wayward son, namely that his son is dead. However, in the story, we can clearly see that the young man is alive; he has a job, lives a riotous life, etc. So what does the father mean? Surely in verses 24 and 32 he doesn't mean his son is dead physically?

What the father means is that their relationship had been severed. As far as the young man was concerned, his father was dead. We can see this attitude by the mere fact that the son demanded his share of his father inheritance before his father had passed away; something unheard of at that time and I would imagine would even be taboo today. As long as there was, no interaction between them each was dead to the other. This idea of being "dead" while you are still alive may sound a bit strange to our "western" ears.

However, this is an eastern and middle-eastern concept, which was accurately, depicted in the motion picture the "Karate Kid II". During one scene, the hero of the movie goes to rescue a young girl who is stranded on an electrical pole during a storm. A father admonishes his son to help the young hero and he refuses due to his hatred and possible fear. The father tells the young man that, "You are dead to me." He effectively cut the relationship that existed between him and his son. The son then ran out into the storm not to be seen again until the conclusion of the picture. Upon his return, he maliciously began to provoke the hero. When his father admonished him to stop, he reminds him that he cannot hear him because he is "dead to him".

Once again, based on Isaiah 59:2; I would conclude that death is primarily a separation. In this verse, the writer claims that, your iniquities have separated between you and your God." This state of separation is called death.

When one talks of death, one must also describe the different types of death that exist. There are several differing states or types of death.

Physical Death

Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body (James 2:36, Genesis 25:8, 35:29, 49:33 Luke 23:46). This death is the one death common to all people; the death that most individuals are familiar with. It is also the first death. This is implied from Revelation 2:11, 20:10.

Spiritual Death

The second and most terrifying type of death is called spiritual death. Spiritual death is the separation of the man from God. This death is characterized by a spirit that is unregenerate. Hostility exists between God and man, and the things of God are not readily understood. (1 Cor 2:14) This is the death that is referred to in Genesis 2:17 and Romans 3:23. This death can be either temporal or eternal in its duration. It becomes eternal if a person physically dies while in a state of spiritual death.

If this occurs, the Bible describes it as having "died in your sins." (Jhn 8:21, 24). This condition is called the second death in Revelations 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8. Until physical death occurs, the state of spiritual death is a condition that is temporal because one can become "born again" and receive spiritual life.

Did you know that it is not God's will for people to die? Well just read Ezekiel 18:23, 33:11, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9. Now one might be tempted to ask that if this is true, why do we even have death in the first place? That is a good question so let me explain.

In Genesis chapter two we have the first occurrence of any mention of the word "death". Also, notice that God mentions this word and not Adam. God told Adam he could eat of all the trees in the Garden except one in particular. This tree was called the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, and God clearly told Adam that if he was to eat of the tree that he would "surely die." Unfortunately Adam did eat and with his eating allowed death to enter into the world. (1 Cor 15:21, Rom 5:12)

When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, his relationship with God was severed - he died spiritually. Observe how he hid from God and blamed God when confronted with what he had done. (Gen 3:8,12)

When Adam sinned, he died spiritually and began the process of decay: which would eventually lead to his physical death. So it is important to remember that death in all its forms is a direct result of sin, and that without sin there can be no death. (Rom 3:23, 5:12, 6:20, 21; Jas 1:15)

This helps one to understand that if Adam and Eve had never eaten from the tree, they would never have died.

The reason for this is that the results of sin breed death, (Rom 6:23) and since it was definitely not Gods intention, nor desire for man to sin, we can conclude that it was never his intention to have man reap the wages of sin - which is death. Not only that but God also gave man the option of eating from the tree of Life so we find God extending life to man and not death. (Deu 30:19)

Why did Jesus have to die?

The Bible says that the soul that sinneth it shall die. (Ezk 18:4, 20) Yet the Bible also says that Jesus "did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth." (1 Pet 2:22). Yet Jesus died. - Is there a contradiction here?

The answer is no because Jesus did not die for his own sins but for yours and mine. (1 Cor 15:3). In the Bible, there exists a principle known as substitution. Substitution is the act of replacing one person or thing for another. We find an early indication of this in Genesis 22:13. In this passage of scripture, God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son. When Abraham arrived to the spot where he was to do the sacrifice, God provided a ram as a replacement for his son. By doing, this God provides us with an example of his own sacrifice of his son later. We see countless other examples of this in the Old Testament such as in the book of Leviticus where God tells the people that if, and when they sin what type of animal they were to bring to atone for their sins. (Lev 16:21, 22 4-5:18, Is 53:4-6; 1 Pet 2:24)

Food for Thought

Are you spiritually dead or alive to God?

What will happen to the soul that sins?

Are you under the penalty of death per the scriptures?

What do you think the Bible means when it says, “the wages of sin is death?”

Chapter III

God Has A Gift For You!

...whosoever believeth in him should not die but have everlasting life.

John 3:16

I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

John 10:10

...the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:23

Do you know why Jesus came? It was to provide you with life. Whatever life is God believes that it is so important that He allowed His son to leave the glory of eternity, live on this planet for over thirty years and die a horrible death on the cross to give it to you. Something that is this important is something that we should not be ignorant of. Consequently, in this chapter I will seek to explain what life is, its origin and types and finally why Jesus had to be resurrected from the dead.

What is life?

Life can be defined in virtually the same way that I earlier defined death. I stated in chapter two that death is primarily a separation from something to something else.

Life is the converse yet similar. It is the union of something to something else. Although you will not find these definitions in the Bible I firmly believe that one can see the principles.

In Genesis chapter two when God creates man He breathes into man what is called the “breath of life”. Man was a lifeless, inanimate shell until this breath united with man to make him a living soul. This breath is sometimes referred to as the "the ghost" or the "spirit". As stated in chapter two the separation of these two things result in physical death while the union of these two things result in physical life.

Therefore, physical or biological life is the union of the spirit with the body (Jas 2:26). This life as with all types of life originates with God for He is the source of life (Col 1:16). The Greek word for physical life is “BIOS”; the root from which we get the English word “biology”. Spiritual life is the union of the man with God. This life is also referred to as eternal life (Jhn 17:3). The Greek word for this type of life is called ZOE, and is the type of life that Jesus was sent to provide (Jhn 10:10).

It must be understood that God's design was for man to live in eternal union with him. It was never His intent that there would be any degree of separation as it relates to man's relationship with God. One can find this out simply by observing the fact that God placed a tree of eternal life within the Garden of Eden.

A tree, that although was barred from man after his fall, will be restored to man in the future (Rev 22:2). Unfortunately, because of the fall, physical life is temporal, and unless the Lord Jesus Christ quickens his return, all of us will return to the dust. The same can be said about spiritual life. This life can be temporal as well because an individual can be in relationship or union with God, and later sever that relationship.

But rest assured there is quickly coming a day when death shall be swallowed up in victory and we shall die no more (1 Cor 15:54; Rev 21:4).

Why did Jesus have to rise from the grave? (Acts 2:24)

In Acts chapter two verse twenty-four. The scripture states that it was not possible for death to hold Jesus. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that the scriptures claim that the wages of sin is death. The word wages means earnings or compensation. Since Jesus did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth, he did not receive that which was deserved him. Death can only lay claim to a person where there is sin. Since Jesus did not sin it was impossible for death to contain him.

Also Hebrews 9:27 states that it is appointed unto all men once to die. Well one needs to understand that Jesus was not any mere man. He was God in the flesh, and since we know that God is life and as the eternally existent one (Ex 3:14) it is impossible for God to cease to be, because He is.

Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." If Christ did not rise from the dead, it would have signified that the claims that he made for himself were false. Jesus claimed to be many things. The most important of which was his claim to be God (Lk 5:19-24, Jhn 20:28, 29).

However, by rising from the dead his claims were verified and we can have confidence in his promise that because he lives we will live as well (Jhn 14:19). It was also necessary for Jesus to fulfill the scriptures that were written in the Old Testament that prophesied his resurrection (Lk 24:25,26,44,46; 1 Cor 14:4; Hosea 6:2, Ps 16:10, Ps 49:15).

The reality of life is that God desires to add or join things to us; whether that would be a relationship with Him; long life, health, prosperity, communion with believers, peace, and joy. I could go on and on. The simple truth is that God desires to add things to our lives: to enrich us. This is a powerful truth! Hallelujah! I am getting excited thinking about it. The original world that God created held everything we needed but due to sin, the world now has lacks, degeneration, voids, and corruption. However, God has moved through his son Jesus Christ to restore all things. The most important restoration or lack to be filled is our relationship with Him.

Think about that. Whatever level of life you enjoy or are experiencing now or in the past is merely a small portion, and actually incomplete in comparison to what you were designed to experience. Moreover, God has been moving all this time to restore us back to our proper place in him.

Understand the life is a driving force in doing all that God does. He has no pleasure in death but that people live. “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?” Ezekiel 18:23.

How about this scripture? For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

Moreover, let us add one more for good measure. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: John 11:25

Are you beginning to see a theme here? God highly values life! He is life! He wants you to have life and all the fullness that life has to offer! John 10:10

I think that our concept of life and how important it is and how much God wants us to have it has been too small!

Food for Thought

Based on what you have learned are you currently in a state of spiritual death?

If you answered yes, do you realize that it is not Gods will for you to be in this state?

If God were to ask you why you desire to live in such a state what explanation would you give Him?

In light of the above answer, do you think it is a justifiable one?

Explain your answer.

Chapter IV

Decisions

...the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Acts 11:26

...If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

Luke 9:23,24

...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead thou shalt be saved

Romans 10:9

In the last chapters, I stated what the scriptures had to say about sin and its resulting consequences. In addition, I explained in chapter three what life was, and why Jesus had to rise from the grave. In this chapter, I would like to ask whether you are prepared to become a Christian?

However, let me explain what is entailed in being a Christian. What are the requirements? Are there any advantages and disadvantages? These questions and others are what I will answer in this chapter. For starters let me say the word “Christian” means "Christ like." or in other words to be like Christ. The word ‘Christian’ is only found three times in the scriptures. However, it is how the term is first used in the scriptures that I believe has its most important usage.

Acts 11:26 states that the *disciples* were first called Christians. This is important to know because many may call themselves Christians, but in actuality are not disciples of Jesus Christ. Let me explain. The word “disciple”, according to Webster means a pupil or follower of any teacher or school. This is a pretty good definition and parallels passages in the scriptures that speak on this same subject.

In the Bible we find the qualifications and the characteristics of a disciple. Firstly, in accordance to John 15:8 disciples bear fruit. That is they are to reproduce themselves and they are to produce results.

Secondly, they consistently continue in Jesus' word (John 8:31). Disciples do not simply start one day with an attempt to obey Jesus' words, but they consistently ask themselves how would Jesus act in this present situation? What words might he use? What would be the best way to honor him in this situation?

Thirdly, they exhibit a love that distinguishes them as belonging to the Lord. (John 13:35) This love is characterized by a selfless attitude. This attitude allows Christians to not retaliate, and even to recompense good in the face of evil.

Fourth, a disciple strives to emulate or copy his master, yet never tries to usurp his place as teacher. (Luke 6:40) In other words, a disciple of Jesus does not desire to take the place of Jesus. They merely want to reproduce in themselves those teachings, behaviors, and attitudes that the Lord himself possesses.

Fifth, the disciple of Jesus must prefer Jesus above all other relationships; even his relationship to himself. (Luke 14:26) The Lord Jesus calls for complete devotion to himself. The love that Jesus desires is so powerful that in comparison to the love that you might have towards a spouse, mother, father etc. It can be likened to hate.

Sixth, the person who would seek to follow Jesus must forsake all that he has (Luke 14:33). There must be not one thing that would hinder you from following Jesus. One must be willing to give up any and, all things for his sake.

Seventh, the disciple of Jesus must deny himself and take up his cross. A disciple of Jesus can expect many things from a variety of sources. Parents might not understand the newfound belief. Friends may ridicule you for not participating in old activities. Certain things might not even be sinful, but simply hinder in the ability to spend time with God. These things must be denied. To take up the cross means to endure suffering to the point of death (Matthew 16:24, 25). And although none of us desires to die, we must ultimately be willing to sacrifice our lives, if called upon to do so.

Lastly, Jesus requires of his disciples that they keep his commandments. (John 14:15) These are all the qualifications that the scriptures list for one who would seek to follow Jesus. Now, after all of these qualifications I ask the question - "Can you take it?"

Do not answer yet. There are still some things that I must point out to you: namely, the advantages and "disadvantages" of becoming a Christian.

These are the disadvantages:

You are no longer your own boss.

You will be talked about

You will no longer be in "style" with modern trends.

You will have angered Satan, who will target you for the following:

He will try to rob you of happiness, joy, peace, financial, familial, psychological, and physical well-being.

He will seek to kill you, those related to you, your dreams, goals, and visions. He will try to kill your friends, and anyone else that you might love.

He will seek to 'destroy you'. (In all the fullness of the word)

These are the advantages

.

Adoption into Gods family

Access to Gods throne as his child

Access to all that God possesses

You will possess the authority and have access to the very power of God

Opportunity to live free from addictive habits, sins, and the like.

Every need supplied

The fellowship of millions of Christians

A sharing of the inheritance that God gave his son Jesus.

The knowledge that can lead others to a life with God

Total forgiveness of all sins

Eternal life

Peace, joy, and happiness and all that those words imply

Angels watching and protecting you from harm

Understanding of the Bible as never before

A place in Gods kingdom when he establishes it on the earth

A multitude of crowns and rewards when the Lord returns

All these things and many more will and can be yours if you make the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

I do not want to sugar coat the magnitude of the decision that you are about to make. So let me state quite clearly, that there may be certain habits and activities that you may have to forsake.

You might have to deny yourself some of the listening and reading pleasure that you now enjoy. There will be time invested, energy, and money that must be given for the person of Christ - he asks no less.

Before I lead you to the Lord let me address some of the excuses that Satan is using to convince you that you should not make this decision now. Your excuse will probably come under one of the following headings:

1. I am not a sinner.

Please go to the first chapter of this book. Your belief in the truths explained will determine your eternal destiny.

2. I have no encouragement at home.

That may be true, but you cannot allow the lack of encouragement to keep you from making Jesus the Lord of your life. For every person that will not encourage you at home, God will grant new relatives within the family of God who will encourage you. Be not afraid, only believe.

3. I am good enough as I am.

The question is, “good enough for what?” If you speak of Hell then that is a very accurate statement. But if not go back and read the first page of this book.

4. I am as good as others.

That is another true statement. But the problem is that God does not accept your goodness or anyone else's for that matter. Only Jesus was good *enough* so it would be best to compare yourself to Him: then take another look at your goodness.

5. I have no feeling.

God is not asking you to make this decision based on how you feel, but on what he is commanding you to do: in addition, to his promise to fulfill his word. (Numbers 23:19) No one ever feels like doing everything they are asked - present writer included. However, that does not mean that it should not be done.

6. I am so weak.

No problem. God will give you strength and be the source of your strength. All things are possible with God.

7. I am doing the best that I can.

You could do a lot better if you accepted the fact that your best isn't good enough and that God is asking you to come up higher by accepting his son Jesus Christ.

8. I am too big a sinner.

So what does that mean? That your sins are so big that God is not capable of saving you? Your idea of God is too small. Paul claimed to be the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15) If God can save a man who persecuted his children to the point of death, and threw them into jail, God can forgive your sins.

9. I want to get established in business first. After that I'll become a Christian.

Read Matthew 16:25, 26. Why can't you become a Christian and then start your business? It takes seconds to become a Christian.

10. There are too many hypocrites.

You must be smaller than that which you hide behind. Therefore, to hide behind the excuse of someone who either was or was not a Christian means you are worse than the hypocrite is. Besides, Jesus is not calling hypocrites. He is calling you! Let those people answer to God. You come and follow Jesus!

11. A professing Christian wronged me.

I am sorry, but do not get mad at Jesus. He died for you. He left the glory of Heaven to give you life. Jesus loves you.

12. There is too much to give up.

I suppose you think that you have a lot to gain or keep by not accepting Jesus. Read Matthew 16:25, 26.

13. I cannot understand.

God wants you to understand and will help you. Please read John 7:17; 8:32.

14. God is unjust.

Well if you call the fact that you are not burning in Hell at this present moment, but are being presented with the opportunity to come to Jesus, 'Injustice'; then you better thank God he's 'unjust'.

15. People would laugh.

True they might. However, whose face would you rather see pleased with you, peoples or God's?

16. Not now.

Now is the acceptable time, today is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2) Do not put off tomorrow what you can do today. Besides - you might not be here tomorrow. (Proverbs 27:1)

17. I think you are making too big a fuss about this.

That is because *you* are nobody to be taken lightly; and where you will spend, your eternal welfare is the biggest thing you could ever make a big fuss about.

18. I will take my chances.

OK. Since you are a betting man let me help you with the odds.

Odds of going to Hell without Jesus. 100%

Odds of going to Hell with Jesus. 0%

Source: Matthew 16:25; John 8:24; 3:36

19. My friends mean so much to me.

Are they worth losing your soul over? If they are really your friends, they will support you no matter what. Even if you decide to become a Christian, Jesus is the greatest friend you could ever have! Why not make friends with him?

20. I am going to have a good time today and let tomorrow take care of itself.

Please read Ecclesiastes 11:9.

21. Please do not talk to me about it.

How would you feel if I knew that someone was about to rape your wife, daughter or girlfriend, and I did not tell you? Moreover, if I withheld information that could cause you to be debt-free, what would

you think of me? I cannot hold my peace.

You will die in your sins and go to hell, if you do not accept Jesus as your savior and Lord. You will miss out on all the blessings that God has in store for you. I must tell you. (Ezk 3:18, 19)

22. I am my own boss.

True. However, every boss has to evaluate if they have done a good job in running their division. Have you done a good job of running your life? Have you ever committed a sin? If so, you have bankrupted yourself and God has supplied the necessary capital to make you solvent in the person of his son Jesus. Have you thought that maybe someone could run your life a lot easier and more to your benefit than you can? Why not try Jesus?

23. Frankly, I am skeptical about the whole matter.

Are you honestly looking for answers? If so, I dare you to disprove that the resurrection of Jesus Christ did not occur. You must use the same criteria that one would use in a court of law. If you are still skeptical, contact me personally.

24. I want to be neutral on this.

There exists no neutrality with God. Matthew 12:30

25. I believe God is too good to damn anyone

God does not damn people. People damn people. Your rejection of Jesus Christ is what damns you. (John 3:18) However, God does not make you reject Jesus. On the contrary, God is doing everything. He can so that you will accept Jesus. (2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 18:23) God merely affirms your right to be damned, if that is what you want.

26. I can't reconcile the doctrine of Hell with the Christian's God of salvation.

Then you have rejected plain statements in the scriptures as being false. (Matthew 25:41, Luke 16:25, Matthew 23:33; Matthew 10:28). Jesus talked about Hell more than any other individual in the Bible did. Do you believe Jesus?

27. I am religious.

However, are you related? The Pharisees were religious, but Jesus had some harsh words for them (Matthew 23:33). The question is if you have a personal relationship with Jesus?" This is the only thing that

matters.

28. I am trying to be a Christian.

It is not about trying. It is about trusting. Are you trying to obey God your way or His way? There is an extreme difference. God can and will give you the power to succeed in your walk with Him.

29. My sins are so small, why worry?

Why? Because *any* sin is enough to damn you. (1 Corinthians 6:9) Any sin will separate you from God. (Isaiah 59:2) Adam and Eve sinned once and that one sin brought ruin to the entire world. Any sin can enslave you (John 8:34). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

30. I will not be punished for eternity

Please do not be a fool. Read the Bible (Matthew 24:41, Revelations 20:10-15, Daniels 12:2).

31. I am too old to become a Christian.

Hell does not respect age. And you are never so old that God cannot change you. Get saved today! (2 Corinthians 6:2)

32. I am too young to become a Christian.

If you can make this statement, then you are old enough. Do not think that you can squander your youth and there not be some kind of consequence (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

33. I intend to before I die.

Wait until the last minute huh? Well how do you know when you are going to die? These days you could be shot dead before you have any chance of even thinking about Jesus. What if you die in your sleep? Will you dream your confession to the Lord? (Proverbs 29:1, Job 34:20) Now is the best time to make this decision (2 Corinthians 6:2; Isaiah 55:6; Hebrews 3:13).

34. I am afraid I cannot hold out.

If God saves you, He promises to finish the job (Philippians 1:6).

35. I am afraid of persecution

God is able to see you through any trial, test or tribulation. He promises that He will always be with you and that you will be able to overcome with His help (Romans 8:31-39; Matthew 28:20b, Philippians 4:13).

36. Jesus was only a great man - nothing more.

Jesus claimed to be God. (John 10:30-33, 5:17, 18, 8:58)

The Bible claims he is God (John 1:1).

37. Why does God allow evil?

It is important to know that God did not create things, as they exist now and that originally all things were good. Moreover, God does promise that He will make things right with the world again. (Revelation 21:5) However, let it show for the record that man brought evil into this world by disobeying God. All that has transpired today is merely the repercussion of past and present decisions on the part of man against the will of God.

38. There is too much suffering.

You can help God eliminate some of the suffering by being an agent of His to propagate His will in the world today.

39. Does this have to be done publicly?

Yes. Jesus died publicly for you. Jesus desires for you to declare him publicly. It is the least you can do after all he has done (Matthew 10:33).

40. I do not want to be baptized.

Then you are in essence stating that you do not desire to follow the commands of Jesus. He clearly indicates baptism as something all Christians are to partake in. Matthew 28:19

41. I see no harm in worldly amusement

Hear the word of the Lord O man. Read Ecclesiastes 11:9

42. I am not respectable enough to be a Christian.

True. However, thank God your being a Christian has nothing to do with your ability to be respectable (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

43. I am afraid Jesus will not receive me

Impossible! Please read John 6:37.

44. I have tried before and failed.

Do not rely on your ability to live for God. Rely on His ability to live through you. God will accomplish His purpose in your life (Philippians 1:6).

Have I dealt with all your excuses? If so, let me lead you to the Lord. It's real simple. Go get a Bible and turn to Romans chapter 10 verses nine and ten. To become a Christian, one need merely do what is written on this page. In fact, it's as easy as ABC.

A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner

Tell God that you have sinned and that you are sorry. Admit to Him what he has been trying to say to you and the rest of mankind all along. Acknowledge that you are a sinner in need of his forgiveness.

B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins

Thank God for allowing Jesus to die in your place. Invite Jesus to come into your heart and to be your Lord.

C. Confess verbally that Jesus is Lord, and that he is now your Lord.

Tell God that from now on He is the boss of your life. Congratulations! If you have made this confession, you are a saved, born again, regenerated, child of God!

If you did not make this confession, please stop reading right here, go back, and read the excuse section of this chapter.

The next chapter will go into detail about what has just happened to you spiritually, what to do next, and how to live out your new Christian life.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What excuse can you think up as to why you should not become a Christian?
2. Do you think there is a valid excuse to not become a Christian? If so, can you find a scripture that supports your view?
3. Which excuse do you most closely identify with? Or have identified with in the past?
4. In light of what God has to offer, what is currently or was in your past so compelling that you would say *no* to God. In addition, do you really believe you were giving up more than you were getting?
5. What do you know now that you did not realize or know before you made your decision to accept Christ?

Chapter V

Ok. I Did It...So Now What?

Praise God! You have been born again! Congratulations on the biggest decision of your life. Now what?

Now that you have entered into the kingdom of God, there are some things you need to know, and some things that need to be done.

Let us begin by explaining what you just did. If you already possess salvation, the information I am about to present will help you as well.

First, if you followed the steps given at the end of chapter four you have pledged your allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me elaborate. When you confessed that Jesus Christ was Lord, you confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord of all things. That would include all of heaven, earth and everything in between. You also submitted yourself to his lordship, which means that you plan to serve him as master and king as opposed to something or someone else.

When you confessed that God raised Jesus from the dead, you admitted that Jesus is alive. You did these things. Now let me explain what happened to you.

First, God the Father forgave you of every sin, every wrong thing that you have ever done. God has given you a clean slate upon which to start over.

Secondly, using the illustration of grafting, I want to show you how God changed you so that you are now able to live a life that is pleasing to Him. Imagine two trees. One is a cherry tree and the other is an orange tree. Imagine the cherries that come from the cherry tree - bright, red with a nice, single seed at the center. Now imagine an orange off the orange tree: bright, orange, juicy and cold. Now let us say I cut off a branch from the cherry tree and stick the branch into the side of the orange tree. Do you know that the cherry tree branch would produce oranges? Interesting huh? Well that's a natural law of grafting.

The cherry tree represents Adam or what we might call our parentage. The orange tree represents Jesus. The branch represents you and the fruit represents your actions, thoughts, etc.

Have you ever seen a branch tear itself off a tree? Did you ever see one take its 'hands' and break or cut itself off? No, I suppose you have not, because a branch cannot cut itself out of a tree. It takes someone or something other than the branch itself to remove it.

Likewise, you could not save yourself. You could do nothing to change yourself; it took something other than yourself to remove you from a life of sin. That someone is God. He is the One that cut you out of Adam and placed you into Jesus Christ. God is the One that transplanted you from one state to another. God is the One who placed you into Jesus.

Before, you were "in Adam" and could not do anything, but produce evil works. No matter how hard you tried, you could not stop from producing cherries. Now you have been placed into the orange tree and are *still* a cherry tree branch. But a miracle has taken place. Instead of producing cherries, now you produce oranges. In addition, the life of the orange tree sustains you. Now you can bring forth the fruit of the Spirit; instead of the works of the flesh (Gal 5:20-25). All because you have been placed in a different tree!

The Bible says that you have become a new creature, old things have passed away- behold all things have become new. (2 Cor 5:17) You have been crucified with Christ, buried with Christ and risen with Christ. You now live with Christ in heavenly places.

Furthermore, you have been transplanted from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. You have also been placed into a new family. God is now your adopted Father and you are His child. You possess the authority of God because God has authorized you to do everything in His name.

Even now, the Devil might be speaking to you that you are not saved. However, I want you to be assured that, if you followed through on fulfilling the requirements of Romans 10:9, 10, you are indeed born again. To show you, let me ask you some questions. In addition, I want you to read the following scriptures *aloud* to yourself.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life.
John 3:15

Have you believed on Him? If so according to the scripture what do you have?

John 3:36 says

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Let me ask you the question again, “What do you have?”

John 5:24 says,

Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Have you believed that God has sent Jesus? If so, according to the scripture you passed from death unto life.

Understand that your being saved is not based on how you feel. It is based on what you did in response to God's Word. If I told you to call my home, because I promised that when you did. I would give you some good news, and then you called and I picked up the phone. My promise to answer is not predicated on how you feel. The point is that my word is what makes the promise to pick up the phone good, not your feelings. I'm the one who can fulfill the promise, and therefore the promise is as good as my word. So rest assured that if you fulfilled the requirements of Romans 10:9, 10, as of this very moment you are saved!

How to Continue As a Christian

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Colossians 2:6

This scripture gives the two keys necessary to continue as a Christian. Those two keys are faith and obedience. Faith and obedience to the word about Jesus is how you “received” Jesus, and therefore how you must continue. You see, when you fulfilled the part of the promise of Romans 10: 9, 10. You expressed faith that God would save you. This allowed you to move past all the excuses that prevented you from making a commitment earlier.

In essence, you expressed that you believed what God said was true. When you did that, you showed your faith and trusted in God instead of yourself. This act of faith caused you to obey what God said was His requirements to save you.

1. Admission of being guilty of sin, and thus a sinner.
2. Belief that Jesus died for your sins.
3. Confession that he is Lord, and your Lord in particular.

These two elements: faith & obedience are the two keys that unlock the doors to all that Christianity holds. As you walk this walk, you might find that there are some commands of God that are easier to obey than others.

Some commands may cause you to drawback with fear.

It is in these circumstances that faith is needed that God knows what is best for you. It is in those situations where your faith will be tried to determine whether or not you really believe God's words. If you succeed in exercising faith in what God has said, you will continue to grow ever stronger in your walk with the Lord.

Moreover, those commands that you find difficult will allow you the opportunity to submit your will to God. They will bring out your loyalties and obedience to God and obedience is ultimately the only expression of love that will satisfy Him.

Obedience and faith - that is the ticket. To succeed as a Christian, look for opportunities to obey and believe God, and I guarantee that you will grow strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

Before I close this chapter let me delve into some of the activities, which will most cause you to be a strong and growing Christian. Practice these activities on a regular basis and I guarantee that you will be a strong Christian that can go the distance.

Prayer

Prayer is talking and listening to God. In fact, the Lord himself encourages us to pray (Matthew 7:7, 8, Luke 11:1-10, Hebrews 4:16).

Here are some tips about prayer:

Pray regularly and often. (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Be specific in your prayers (Matt 7:7-11).

Pray Gods word (1 John 5:14, 15).

Ask God for specific things and pray believing that you will receive them. (Matthew 7-8, Mark 11:24, 1 John 5:15)

Pray for others (Ephesians 6:18b, 1 Timothy 2:1-3, Philippians 2:4).

Pray simply (Matthew 6:7).

Pray thankfully (Philippians 4:6).

Here is a model the Lord gave us on how to pray. This model can be found in Matthew 6:9-13.

V.9.

First begin your prayer with thanksgiving and praise

V.10.

Submit your desires to His approval. (Thy Kingdom come thy will be done)

V.11

Pray for the needs of your family, church, nation world). (Give us this day our daily bread)

V.12

Ask for forgiveness regarding any sin and forgive others during this time. (Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that have sinned against us.)

V.13

Ask God to show you the way out of temptation and to deliver you from evil. (Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.)

V.13

Close out with thanksgiving and praise. (For thine is the Kingdom and power and glory forever)

Bible Study

Let me make this as simple as I can. If you do not read the Bible on a regular basis, you will wither spiritually. There must be a consistent intake of the Word on your part. Reading the Bible is like eating food. Without food, no one can expect to survive long. It must be more important to you than your natural food (Job 23:12b). A good discipline tactic is - no Bible, no breakfast.

During these next brief moments, I want to give you some basics about how to study the Bible. Therefore, it will be important that I address four important questions: Why should we study the Bible? Where should we study the Bible? When should we study the Bible? How should we study the Bible?

I. Why We Study the Bible (John 8:31, 32)

Before Jesus left this earth He told his followers that if we continue in his word - then are we indeed his disciples. This is one of the main

reasons that we study the Bible. *To become familiar with Jesus' word, in order that we may continue in it.*

How could we continue in his word, if we are not familiar with what he has said? The only way to become familiar is through the means of Bible study.

We are commanded to study the Bible (2 Tim 2:15, Jos 1:8). Jesus studied the scriptures and we should desire to follow his example (Matt 22:23-40). The study of the Word of God helps us to grow spiritually (1 Pet 2:2).

II. Where We Study the Bible (Mark 1:35)

When Jesus went to spend time alone with God we usually notice that he went to a solitary place to pray; like a mountain. Likewise, try to find a place of solitude and quiet where you will not be disturbed.

Wherever we study, the Bible should be a place of both quietness, and solitude; so that we may focus our attention on what God would like to say to us through His word.

Here is a listing of possible places to study the Bible.

A library

A den

A closet

In the bathroom (for some it's the only place in the house where they can truly be alone!)

III. When to Study the Bible

There are two good rules that you should apply to the timing of your Bible study.

1. Do it in that part of the day or night when you are most alert.
2. Don't take time out for Bible Study - *make* time for Bible Study!

If you gave God just 10% of your time or let's say an hour a day, by the end of the year you would have studied the Bible some 365 hours; not including any mid-week Bible Study or Sunday morning worship service that you might attend. That is an awesome amount of time to spend in the Word, and I guarantee that you will shoot up spiritually if you do so.

IV. How to Study the Bible

The general principles when studying the Bible are threefold.

1. Seek to understand it.
2. Seek to explain it.
3. Seek to apply it.

When we say, “seek to understand it,” the goal should be to understand what does the passage say? You can do that by asking some of the following:

What do the words mean?

What is the context of the passage?

Why was the passage written?

These questions will help you in your journey to understand the Bible.

Another goal in studying is to find out what does the passage mean?

This answer can be derived by asking some of the following:

How did the original hearers interpret the events that you are reading about? To determine this you can take note of how the hearers then reacted to what was said and or done. That will give you a strong indication of how those that experienced what was written viewed what was being done at the time.

What is the main point of the passage?

A rule of thumb: You know you understand it when you can explain it to someone else.

Your third goal should be to relate the scripture to yourself and see if it is applicable today. Here are some of the questions you could ask yourself to find out:

What would be a similar situation today?

Is there an example, warning, or command that I should adhere to?

Different methods of studying the Bible

There are three methods that I would like to share with you for studying the Bible.

1. Book Studies

In a book study, you are attempting to gain an understanding of a book of the Bible. This understanding can be partially realized by answering these questions:

Who wrote the book?

When was it written?

Where was it written?

To whom was it written?

What is the purpose of the book (why was it written?)

What are its major themes and characters?

What verse or verses seems to summarize the message of the book?

2. Topical Studies

In a topical study, you are attempting to gain an understanding of a particular topic or theme. For example, if you were studying the topic of sin you might begin this way:

What is sin?

Where is sin first mentioned in the Bible?

What is so important about sin?

How does sin affect me?

What does God and man think about sin?

Character Studies

In a character study, you are attempting to gain an understanding of a particular person in the Bible. Here are some typical questions you might answer in studying a character:

Who were they?

Where did they live?

What was their occupation?

Who were their relatives and contemporaries?

What were their strengths and accomplishments?

What were their weaknesses and mistakes?

What lessons can be learned from their life?

In summary

Study the Bible to understand Jesus and what he would have us to do.

Study the Bible in quiet and solitude.

Study the Bible when you are alert and do not give God leftover time.

Study the Bible to . . .

A. Understand scripture

B. Explain scripture

C. Apply scripture

Fellowship

One of the most powerful things you can do if you are a new Christian is to join a church that will teach you the Bible.

Jesus expects us to fellowship with other believers.

“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Matthew 18:15-20

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. 13by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 14For the body is not one member, but many. 15the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 16if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 17the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? 18now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 19if they were all one member, where were the body? 20now are they many members, yet but one body. 21the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. 22, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: 23those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. 24our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: 25there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. 26whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Hebrews 10:24, 25

There are many scriptures that point to our need to fellowship with other believers. Many of these scriptures just assume that believers will assemble together. However, they all point to the reality, that as a new member of the family of God: it is important that you get to know and draw from the experience of other believers.

No child is able to raise itself. In addition, no new babe in Christ is able to do so either.

There is much you can learn and much God wants you to experience by fellowshiping with the members of a local church. Choosing which church to go to will be one of the most important decisions you can make now that you are a Christian.

Do not be “put off” by the members you find. Remember they are as imperfect as you are! However, they have all arrived at the same point that you have as well. Each one understanding that they too need Jesus to help them. From the day Jesus gathered disciples together they have had some sort of problem with each other. It is normal and nothing to be afraid of. Nevertheless, jump into the waters of fellowship and

experience how much fun it is to experience Jesus with others and you will get a small glimpse of the love God has wrapped up for you in his people!

Well we have come to the end of our journey together in covering some basics of the faith and it is my sincere hope that you have been blessed, encouraged and strengthened as a result.

Remember that God loves you, and He that has started this work with you is capable of following through to its completion.

If you have been blessed by this work or simply need a word of encouragement please E-mail me at donovanmneal@yahoo.com

About the Author



Donovan Neal M.S.N.P. is an ordained minister with the Church of God In Christ and a graduate of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and has a Masters from Walden University.

Serving under his Pastor Dr. Charles Hawthorne for over 20 years, Donovan has functioned within his churches' School of Ministry, teaching on a host of subjects ranging from Apologetics, to Leading Different Personalities.

Donovan is a prolific songwriter and singer having written over 50 different songs of praise and worship for the local church, and has performed in various schools and churches in the Ministry of Christian rap. Donovan has just completed his first draft of his new novel: The Third Heaven: the Rise of Fallen Stars.

Donovan's heart for ministry has carried over in his secular pursuits and he has worked with countless abused and neglected children and adults with developmental disabilities. Donovan has functioned in non-profit management and leadership both with his employer and in his local church.

Donovan has three saved children Candace, Christopher and Alex: each is involved in ministry. They currently reside in Michigan.