

LESSON 11

THE CHURCH – GOD’S FAMILY & THE TRAINING COLLEGE FOR CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

Now that you have been born-again and become a Christian, your life has taken on a completely different meaning and direction. God is in the process of preparing you to live with him forever and he has a plan and a purpose for you to fulfil now.

Colossians 3:1-4 says

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Your destiny is an eternal one. You must change your whole perspective in life – your hopes, dreams, desires and goals – from an earthly one to a spiritual and heavenly one. Jesus said in John 14:2-3: *“I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* The place Jesus is speaking of is his heaven. You are destined to be a citizen of that realm, where he is the King and Lord of all. God has designed the church as the means by which we would learn how to function as a citizen of heaven. It is the place on earth that reflects the place we are going to in heaven.

Moreover, heaven is a spiritual domain. We are being trained in the affairs of the Spirit, therefore, so that we will be wholly spiritual beings fashioned in the image of God, fit to dwell with him forever

in his spiritual realm. John 4:24 says “*God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*” Again, it is in and through the church, that God will train you spiritually.

You have been placed by God into a very special group of people. Colossians 3:12 says the church is “*God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved...*”. You have been set apart by God and loved by him and he has included you in his “*family*”[1] which is the church. The church is not a building nor an organisation. It is the group of people who “*have been raised with Christ*”,[2] who function together as a very special and unique community.

Now the church *universal* is made up of all believers who are on the earth, people from every nation, plus those who have already gone before us and are now in heaven with Christ, plus those yet to come whom God foreknows. But, very importantly, God places each of his children while they live on the earth into a *local* church. This is an assembly of believers in a particular location. The local church is where we grow together to spiritual maturity, where we are trained in spiritual matters and we learn how to be a member of God’s family with him as the active head – just as it is in heaven.

The church is the place where God’s will is done on the earth as it is in heaven. The church meets under the authority of God whereby his kingdom is experienced. The rest of the world – its governments and peoples – are “*under the control of the evil one*”. [3] They do not submit to God nor obey him, so they remain under the wrath of God. [4] Nevertheless, God is patient for out of the world will yet come others who will accept Christ and so too will escape this evil age and be accepted by God into his family, the church.

So you see, it is an extraordinary privilege to be placed by God into a local church. It confirms that you are called and chosen by him. The church is a taste of heaven upon the earth.

BODY, FIELD, BUILDING & FAMILY

The Bible uses a number of analogies to explain the nature of the church. When we take up each of these ideas they have common themes and they help us to understand what God expects and requires of a local church.

*“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink... Now you are **the body of Christ**, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27

*“And **he is the head of the body, the church**; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”*

Colossians 1:18-19

*“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are **God’s field, God’s building**.”*

1 Corinthians 3:9

*“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom **his whole family** in heaven and on earth derives its name.”*

Ephesians 3:14-16

THE BODY

- *Unity and diversity* – Though we are all different we are all united together. We are not independent of each other but we are interdependent. We work together as a whole unit just as a body does. We see one another as members together with a common cause – one direction, one hope and one mission – each element contributing its part towards that end.
- *Parts form one complete body* – We need each other to be complete. There are no ‘Lone Rangers’ in the church. We are supernaturally joined together by God, bound by the love of God for one another. We help each other, supplying what others lack.
- *The body submits to the “head”* – We all receive instruction and direction from the head who is Jesus. The body moves and functions in a co-ordinated manner. Although, there are leaders in the church, we all have access to God through the same Spirit who lives in each of us. The Spirit directs everyone in unity. Therefore, no-one can exercise their own authority without agreement by all; for we have one Lord and one Master. We are not to call anyone “Father” except for God.[5] We are all “priests”. [6]
- *Feed and nourish* – The body requires food and water to survive. God provides his Word, and his Spirit works amongst us, in the environment of the church. We grow and become strong spiritually through the church.
- *Free from toxins and drugs* – The body must be kept pure. There must be no accommodation for sin. 1Corinthians

5:11-13 says “...you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat...” “Expel the wicked man from among you.”” Worldliness must be kept out of the church. It is like a cancer that eventually makes the whole body sick. The church is to reflect heaven, not the world.

- *The body goes to work* – The church fulfils God’s plan in the earth. We work together with him to complete his purposes. God uses the church to bring his love, his wisdom and his power into the world. The church is a divine blessing both inside and outside the church. The church is charged with the responsibility of communicating the message of redemption – the gospel (i.e. good news) of Jesus Christ – and making disciples. [7]

THE FIELD

- *The field is owned by a farmer* – We are owned by God. He bought us with the incredible price of the blood of his own dear Son.[8]
- *The farmer is the husbandman* – God works in the church; ploughing, sowing and reaping. God sees ahead the crop that his work will produce with anticipation and delight.
- *Receives rain and fertiliser* – God supplies the nutrients necessary to produce a healthy and robust crop.
- *The farmer watches over the field and removes pests and weeds* – God will not allow Satan’s influences to bear upon

his church. He warns and protects.[9] (This does not mean that there will not be false Christians, false teachers and false churches. The Bible warns repeatedly about those and we must be ever vigilant. Nevertheless, there are real Christians who are a part of the true church that are loved by God and protected by him. They hold fast to the truth, they submit to God and resist the devil, so he flees from them.[10])

- *The farmer harvests the crop and stores it in his barn* – The church is the crop that God harvests and takes into heaven as his own:

“Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

“An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

“No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the

harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”

... His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

THE BUILDING

- *The building has an owner and a builder – God is both the owner and the builder of his church.*
- *The building is constructed to be lived in – God builds the church for himself as a dwelling. The church is no ordinary building. This is a holy temple in which God resides:*

“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Ephesians 2:21-3:1

“As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 2:4-5

- *The building is made, as in Bible times, of stones – We are “living” stones that are placed into the building by God. We are all part of the building, bonded together and providing support for one another.*
- *The building is constructed by different trades-persons – God uses apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and pastors as craftsmen in the construction of his building:
“It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*

Ephesians 4:11-13

- *The building provides shelter from the elements* – The world is a hostile place for Christians. The church is a sanctuary and a shelter. It is the place on earth believers call home.

THE FAMILY

- *A family comprises parents and children* – God is our one Parent, our Father, and we are his children. God is the Head of his household and everyone respects and obeys him. He is our Provider, and our Rock and source of all Wisdom.
- *A family experiences life together* – We are engaged with each other, caring for one another, accepting one another, helping one another, submitting to one another, encouraging one another, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, admonishing one another, being devoted to one another, offering hospitality to one another, honouring one another, living in harmony with one another and loving one another.[11]
- *A family comes together and stays together* – The church meets regularly. It is a priority and a highlight of our week when we come together as a church family. We are ever watchful to preserve the unity of the Spirit,[12] and will not allow a bitter root to grow up to destroy us.[13]

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

Ultimately, God is going to overthrow the present world system when Jesus Christ returns. Subsequently, the world is going to be remade, like new and what it was like at the very beginning; and, God is going to bring heaven down to be united with the earth.[14] God will dwell with the redeemed – all those who believed on the Son and were born of the Spirit – in a perfect world forevermore. This is God’s design and his final objective.

With this in mind, you must understand that God is preparing you to live with him in that realm. You are being trained in order to function as a citizen of heaven. Philippians 3:20-21 says “... *our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...*”

When you emigrate from one country and move to another and apply for citizenship, you have to study and prepare to sit a citizenship test. That test usually requires you to know the law, the history and the language of the new country. This is done so that a new citizen can function as a member of their newly adopted nation. Similarly, you are being equipped to be a citizen of Christ’s kingdom, which is a spiritual kingdom where perfect righteousness and perfect love exist.

Before we consider aspects of that training, it is important to emphasise that becoming a Christian is so much more than just changing a person’s country of residence and citizenship. That does not require a person to change their nature, they only need to adopt certain practices of a new culture. Becoming a Christian is not merely becoming religious or changing your religion. When you become a Christian, God changes your very nature.

YOUR NEW NATURE

When we were born again, God performed a most remarkable act – he recreated our nature changing it from a worldly, sinful nature to a righteous, holy nature, just like himself. 2Corinthians 5:17-18 says *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ ...”*. The purpose of this was to permit our reconciliation to him, i.e. that we could enter into an eternal relationship with him, beginning now in this world but only being fully completed in the next.

Now a real relationship can only be experienced with beings of the same kind. Their identities must be identical. A man cannot have a real relationship with a budgie. It is just not possible. That is why Eve was created. Adam was a different entity altogether to the species of animals which God had created. Another person after Adam’s own likeness was necessary.

But here is the point: in order to experience a real relationship with God, a person must be of God’s own kind. Not that this is to convey the idea that they must also be God, rather that they only be like God. And this is of course exactly what Adam was like. He was made like God, in God’s exact representation. In and only through this state of being could Adam know God.

However, when Adam and Eve sinned their natures were supernaturally changed. They became sinful, not holy. They became worldly not spiritual. They were no longer like God. That is why they were expelled from the Garden of Eden and the presence of God.

Note, the skins God made for them to cover them was an act of kindness by God which prefigured the law of Moses with its system of ritual animal sacrifices. It however was insufficient to change them such that they could re-enter the Garden. The nature of a man and a woman had to be changed back to its original state. And this is exactly the reason why Jesus came and was sacrificed as the Lamb of God. Only through him can a person be born again, and become like God. Jesus said:

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

John 3:3-8

Before we were born again our spirits were dead. We were incapable of knowing God, or of being righteous. We were like foreigners and aliens to God's kingdom. We were outsiders with no ability in ourselves to enter that realm. We were citizens of a dark and sinful world. But God made our spirits alive when we believed on Jesus Christ, so that we could enter the kingdom of God. Ephesians 2:1-5 says:

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the

spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ..."

And Colossians 1:13 says that God

"... rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves..."

In this kingdom, we can know God and live as citizens of heaven. Therefore, the result of being born again is extra-ordinary! You were sin and darkness (like your father Adam), now you are the righteousness of God and light (like your new Father, Jesus). You have been granted fullness in Christ who reflects the fullness of God. You are a participant in the divine nature therefore you are like him. And you have the right to enter heaven, as a legalized citizen of heaven:

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."

Colossians 2:9-10

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

2Peter 1:3-4

*“In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because **in this world we are like him.**”*

1John 4:17

Now, citizens of heaven are righteous, like Jesus, they are not sinners. No sinners are permitted into heaven. Only people who are born again, can genuinely live free from sin and are, therefore, permitted and received into heaven:

*“**No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.**”*

1 John 3:8-10

Only people who are truly born again, have access to heaven for they have been made citizens of heaven and they are no longer citizens of this world. There are only these two categories of people. You are either a citizen of heaven – a child of God – or a citizen of this world – a child of the devil. 1 Peter 2:11 says *“I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires...”*. We prove our citizenship of heaven by the way we live now in this world. No longer like the people of this world, but like people of heaven. No longer as sinners, but as saints. There are no persons in heaven who have shunned God, rejected the blood of his Son, and remained in their sin. They are locked out of heaven by their own choice. The only people in heaven are the redeemed born-again sons and daughters of the living God.

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Although our nature is supernaturally changed when we are born again, and we are granted citizenship immediately into the kingdom of heaven, the Bible emphasises that in this life we have to grow up spiritually. It is best described like becoming a new spiritual baby when you are born again and then a transformation occurs by which you become spiritually mature as an adult, fully reflecting the image of God. A baby doesn't look exactly like their mother/father but they will grow and become like them as they mature.

Various passages of scripture show that there are three stages of spiritual development. Once a believer completes these stages they will have become mature, and reflect the very nature of their father God. These stages identify the essential elements of growth which are necessary to bring a person into the lifestyle of normal Christian living, i.e. to fully function as a citizen of heaven.

THE THREE STAGES – ROBE, RING, SANDALS

The pattern of Christian development is portrayed in the three items given to the prodigal son upon his return:

“Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen

of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

*“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! **Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found...’”*

Luke 15:11-24

The three stages are arranged in an important and vital sequence: first the robe, secondly the ring and only after these two elements comes the last, the sandals. The robe represents righteousness, which is our identity in Christ. The ring represents our authority over Satan. The sandals represent Spirit-led and selfless

servanthood, which is the mark of true Christlikeness. A mature Christian has progressed through each of these steps. Their lives reflect the very life that Jesus modelled upon the earth. They live in intimate relationship with God and bear much fruit. They have been prepared to function as citizens of heaven.

CHILDREN, SONS, FATHERS

Another passage that reveals the three-stage pattern of spiritual development is contained in the Apostle John's first letter:

"I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

I John 2:12-14

The analogy of natural development – children, sons and fathers – illustrates the stages of spiritual growth and parallels exactly the same sequence of robe, ring and sandals. It adds these further insights:

The *children stage* relates to our relationship with God. This is determined by the image we have of God as a loving Father and the perception we have of ourselves as his children. Our experience of God and our relationship with him is to be personal, intimate, affectionate, instructive and submissive.

The *sons/daughters stage* deals with our relationship with our adversary – Satan. We are to walk in total victory over Satan and his schemes. The level of victory we experience over his power and influence is directly related to what we believe to be true. Our mind is the principal arena of spiritual warfare. Our beliefs and attitudes must be adjusted according to the truth of God’s Word. We defeat Satan by rejecting his lies, and accepting and walking in truth as revealed by the Holy Spirit and defined by God in the Bible.

The *fathers/mothers stage* concerns our relationship with others. How we practically live out our lives in Christlikeness, serving others as we walk in intimate relationship with the Father. Just as, in the natural, a parent takes on the responsibility of care for a child, this level of spiritual maturity is determined by our willingness to bear the burden of caring for others, regardless of personal cost.

The sequence of development is first children, then sons/daughters and finally fathers/mothers. That again is the normal pattern.

What the Bible plainly reveals to us is that first we must know and embrace the truth about the identities of God, ourselves and Satan, the relationship God wants to have with us and the power and authority granted us to defeat Satan. Only then can we begin to talk about how we should practically conduct our lives. Why? Because *what we believe determines our behaviour*. Our public world is the product of our private world. Our beliefs and attitudes direct our actions and words. The two core beliefs concerning our relationship with God, and our position with regard to Satan, govern and control our inner spiritual lives which, in turn, determine our outer conduct and experience.

BELIEF DETERMINES BEHAVIOUR

The Bible consistently presents the principle that belief is the cause, and behaviour is the effect. Proverbs 4:23 summarizes it in this way: *“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”*

What you believe to be true about God and true about yourself will ultimately determine how you relate to God and others. No person can behave in a manner which is inconsistent with what they believe to be true. Belief always determines behaviour.

Romans 12:2 says: *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...**”* In other words, don’t follow the behavioural practices of Godless people in the world, but change your lifestyle by changing what you believe. Don’t think and live like a citizen of this world, but rather think and live like a citizen of heaven.

This truth is repeated in Ephesians 4:22-24 *“... with regard to your former way of life ... put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ... **be made new in the attitude of your minds**; and ... put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”* A person’s change of lifestyle, from the old to the new, is dependent upon the adjustments they make to their pattern of thinking.

When a person is first saved their structure of beliefs – about themselves, God, Satan and the world at large – is mostly flawed. This pattern of core values and beliefs has developed through their own worldly experience, and is inconsistent with the truth as revealed by God. These core values and beliefs remain intact and will continue to dominate a believer’s life, despite the fact that they

are saved, unless they are consciously and deliberately led to choose to reject the false set of beliefs and to embrace the truth.

For instance, many come to Christ with an image of God which is simply incorrect. This occurs because we normally and naturally build an image of God, *before* we come to Christ, upon our own father. Given the breakdown in families in the present generation, that image is largely a distorted view of who God really is and what he is like. If a person's own father was distant, disinterested and uncaring, then that person is likely to project the same image upon God. Even though they are saved, that improper image of God will effectively lock them out of intimate relationship with their heavenly Father. They will never sense his presence, nor his care and concern for them, because their own belief as to what he is like will not allow them to enter into that experience.

Therefore, you must enter the school of the Holy Spirit. Taking up what he reveals to be true according to the Bible, especially about who God really is. It is his job to "*guide you into all truth*"; [15] you must submit yourself to him, accept what he reveals to you and hold fast to it:

*I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, **may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.** I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*

Ephesians 1:16-19

*For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God **to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding**. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, **growing in the knowledge of God**, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*

Colossians 1:9-13

*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more **in knowledge and depth of insight**, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.*

Philippians 1:9-11

*I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way — in all your speaking and **in all your knowledge**— because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Corinthians 1:4-8

As we grow in spiritual knowledge, wisdom and understanding, we are transformed and take on the practices of a mature Christian, prepared to be a citizen of heaven.

APPENDIX

FOUNDATIONAL BIBLICAL TRUTHS

You are ruled by what you regard to be true. The course of your life, your reactions to events and your choices amongst various opportunities are determined by your set of beliefs. Out of the heart flow the issues of life.[16] Our heart is the repository of our set of beliefs. This set of beliefs is framed around answers to the primary questions of life.

The fundamental questions of life include:

- Who is God?
- What is he like?
- Can I know him?
- How did the universe come into existence?
- Who am I?
- What is my purpose here?
- What happens when I die?
- Why do bad things – disease, pain, suffering, murders, rapes, wars – happen?
- How did the nations and their different cultures originate?
- Why are there so many religions?
- Where can I find truth?

It is imperative that we purposely adopt the Bible's answers to these questions. We must consciously and deliberately build a belief system that accords with the truth contained in God's Word. We must now disbelieve things we held true in the past which we can now identify as falsehoods and set our minds only to accept that which is contained in the scriptures. We must turn our backs upon what the world says is true (for example, billions of years and evolution) and turn to the truth revealed by the living God and his Word (for example 6,000 years and creation).

Truth does not lie within us. We all believe things that others have told us. We are born as babies with a clean slate. Truth is external to us and enters our thinking as ideas which we can retain or reject. *Truth only comes from God:*

"For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding."[17]

Therefore, we must reject the lies of Satan that we were subject to and that we absorbed into our belief system. We must see things as God sees them. We must believe what God says is true. The Bible has very clear and specific answers to the big questions of life that are not shared by any of the false religions of the world – Naturalism (i.e. the belief that all there is is nature and there is no God), Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Shintoism – nor the major cults – Catholicism, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses.

THE BIBLE'S ANSWERS TO THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS OF LIFE

- Who is God?

There is one God who is a triune being – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are perfect in unity. He alone is God, there is no-one else. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present although distinct from his creation – he is not *in* everything. He is the Creator of all that comprises both the natural and supernatural realms. Nothing came into existence without his express command. He has always existed – he is eternal and lives outside of time. God is spirit and therefore invisible in the natural world. The second person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, took upon himself flesh and became visible. He was both 100% God and 100% man. While upon the earth, he set aside the attributes of his own divinity and relied solely upon the power of the Holy Spirit, and the authority and guidance of the Father.

- What is God like?

God is perfect in every way. Regarding his character, the Bible shows us that God is patient, considerate, compassionate, caring, tender, gracious, forgiving, just, good, holy, self-sacrificing, steadfast, unchanging, committed, truthful, listening, watchful, faithful, righteous, kind, merciful, sympathetic, generous, strong, wise, mighty and loving.

- Can I know him?

God has revealed himself in nature, his Word, his Son and his Spirit. I can discover things about him through the world and his Word. I can know him personally through his Son and his Spirit – I can experientially know him when I am born-again and he makes my body his temple and he unites his Spirit with my spirit. The God-

head – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – offers to make his home in every person who loves him. This has been made possible through the sacrifice of the Son and the new birth.

- How did the universe come into existence?

God made the universe by his express command and his power. He made everything during a period of just six days, around six thousand years ago. Before the world was created God alone dwelt in eternity. Everything that is visible was created by him who is invisible.

- Who am I?

I am a descendant of the first man and woman God created. They were made perfect, in the image of God himself, so that they could know God and live in a relationship of harmony and love with him. They were each created a spirit being, that possessed an individual identity and will, and were housed in a body made of flesh, male and female. They broke relationship with him choosing instead to live independently from him and became subject to the authority of Satan. They became fallen beings possessing a sin-nature. Therefore, as a descendent of Adam and Eve, I am a living person, a spirit-being that has a mind and a physical body. I am born with a sin-nature and, therefore, I am at enmity with God.

- What is my purpose here?

I am made expressly for relationship with God, and with others. I can choose that role as designed by God, or I can continue in rebellion. God has made a way possible for me to enter into (covenant) relationship with him. If I choose to respond to him and connect with him, he makes it possible for me to rightly connect with others. He wants me to live in community with him and other believers – the church. (If instead I choose to remain disconnected,

I live with selfish motives my whole life, and am unable to truly relate with others.)

God wants for me an abundant life, full of peace, joy and love, as I live with him and for the benefit of others. He has commissioned me to present his gospel – to tell of his offer of forgiveness and salvation, and warn of his judgement upon sinners – and to make disciples. As I fulfil this role I will face persecution. (If I remain separated from him, I will have neither peace, nor joy nor love. I will pursue self-gratification and the pleasures of sin that are momentary. This sin temporarily nulls my pain of hopelessness, despair and shame.)

- What happens when I die?

When a person dies their spirit and soul is released from their body, and they enter into one of two eternal states. Without believing in Christ, a person enters immediately into hell. There is no remedy and no second chance. It is final. Hell is described in the Bible as a perpetual place of torment where the worm does not die nor the fire quenched. In hell, there is the absence of God and everything that is good. It is the haunt of demons.

A believer in Christ, enters immediately into heaven forevermore. Heaven is described as a wonderful place of great joy and peace. It is filled with God and all that is good. It is the home of multitudes of angels, and people from every race. (Upon the return of Christ, new bodies are given to believers just like the resurrected body of Jesus. Subsequently, the earth is renewed to God's original plan and believers live in a paradise with God forevermore.)

- Why do bad things – disease, pain, suffering, murders, rapes, wars – happen?

When Adam and Eve sinned, the earth, which they had been given dominion over, came under a curse, and Satan became the ruler of the earth. Before they sinned, everything in the world was described by God as good. There was no bloodshed, no pain, no disease, no enmity etc. Now, violence erupts upon the earth. The very first child of Adam and Eve – Abel – is murdered by his brother – Cain – and by just the ninth generation people had become so evil and corrupted that God destroyed everyone except for Noah and his family.

Unregenerate people, sin and Satan are the source of all that is wicked and evil upon the earth. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and bring life – and life in abundance – to those who would turn to him and believe in him. However, most people reject Christ and, therefore, Satan remains the dominate influence in the world.

The world is a hostile place for believers, they are in enemy territory, and Jesus specifically said that believers would face persecution. He suffered pain, torture and a horrible death at the hands of his persecutors. Everyone who chooses to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, to one degree or another.

- How did the nations and their different cultures originate? The event of the Tower of Babel forced the separation and dispersal of the different people's groups throughout the world. This created the conditions for distinct racial features to appear and to be preserved throughout the generations. Different cultures arose as the people's groups abandoned the knowledge of God and

adopted falsehoods to explain themselves and the world in which they lived i.e. religion.

- Why are there so many religions?

All religions are based in human philosophies which in turn find their source in doctrines taught by demons. Satan is the father of all lies. When people abandon the knowledge of God and persist in rebellion against him, they still need to find answers to life's big questions. Satan offers them those answers via the invention of religion. Every religion is composed upon claims of truth statements. We are all created with the capacity for faith, and everyone has a set of beliefs i.e. religion.

Most people will adopt that set of beliefs which is consistent with the culture in which they live. Culture is essentially defined by the religion of each people group. All religion teaches a path to knowledge, enlightenment, freedom, peace, prosperity, salvation, heaven, perfection, Nirvana, Brahma, oneness, god-status etc., as defined by the particular religion. All human religions are based upon lies.

There are essentially two groups of religions. First, as occurred in the Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel, it is reaching up by personal effort to become 'god'. Or secondly, it is an endeavour to appease/please a 'god' (including a guru, idol, spirit or ancestor) in order to obtain their favour for selfish desires, again through personal effort or sacrifice. Therefore, it is either worshipping self or worshipping Satan (who is represented in the god(s), guru, idol, spirit or ancestor). Both groups have fallen captive to Satan's lies. Christianity is unique teaching that God reaches down to sinful man through his own work and his own sacrifice. Salvation is a gift

received by faith not earned through personal effort, merit or sacrifice. God alone, therefore, is exalted.

- Where can I find truth?

God alone is the source of all truth. He communicates his truth through two principal means. First, the Bible is his gift to the world which contains the answers to all of life's big questions. Secondly, he has given the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who would turn to him. The express role of the Holy Spirit is to lead them into all truth and enable them to distinguish truth from error. Unbelievers are blind to the truth. They are incapable of knowing truth. They reject the truth and live in darkness, slaves to sinful passions and Satan.

LESSON 11 FOOTNOTES

[1] Ephesians 3: 14

[2] Colossians 3:1

[3] 1John 5:19

[4] Romans 2:8, Ephesians 5:6

[5] Matthew 23: 9

[6] 1Peter 2: 9

[7] Matthew 28: 19-20

[8] 1Corinthians 6: 20

[9] 1 Corinthians 10:13, James 4:7, Romans 8:37-39

[10] James 4: 7

[11] Romans 12:10, 16, 15:8; Ephesians 4:2, 32, 5:21; 1Peter 1:22-23, 3:8, 4: 9-10, 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13-14, 24-25; Galatians 5:13

[12] Ephesians 4:3

[13] Hebrews 12:15

[14] Revelation 21

[15] John 16:13

[16] Proverbs 4:23

[17] Proverbs 2:6