

**FAITH REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**

**SUNDAY SCHOOL**

**CURRICULUM PROJECT ©**

**\*\* Grades 7-8, Year II \*\***

**Robert C. Walton, Editor**

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# **PERSONAL CHRISTIANITY**

**by Robert C. Walton**

**Grades 7-8  
Year 2  
Quarter 1**



# **THE NEED TO BE PART OF GOD’S FAMILY**

## **Lesson Aim**

To impress upon students the serious condition and helplessness of the human race and its need for salvation through Christ.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:1** - “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.”

## **Lesson Background**

This quarter we will be dealing with the subject of “Personal Christianity.” Christianity is essentially a personal relationship with a personal God, and through Him a relationship with other Christians. We will begin by discussing the fact that everyone needs to have a relationship with God, then look at how that relationship may be obtained. Once one becomes a child of God, he is part of a family, and that connection involves great privileges as well as clear responsibilities; we will spend time examining many of these. Finally, we will consider what the Christian life looks like by discussing internal character, service to fellow Christians, and witness to the unbelieving world.

Today’s lesson focuses on the condition of those who have no relationship with God. The problem here is that those who are in desperate trouble often are unaware of their own state. Like a spider hanging by a thread over a devouring flame, they are on the verge of death, but like a patient whose cancer has no outward symptoms, they see no reason to seek out a physician. We must therefore make those who don’t know Christ aware of their need and encourage them to seek Him.

In order to do this, we must first discuss who God is. He is the Creator of all things, and as such has the right to determine how His creatures ought to live. He deserves their worship and their obedience and may justifiably punish them when they refuse to give it. He is much more than a holy Judge, however. He is a merciful sovereign who seeks the return of those who have rebelled against Him.

The problem, of course, is that all human beings have rebelled against God and are thus subject to His just judgment. Only those who see the reality and seriousness of their own sin will have a reason to turn away from that sin and seek God's remedy in Christ. We must therefore spend much of today's lesson underlining the problem so that unbelieving students may see the truth of their condition and believers may understand the peril of those around them who don't know Christ.

## Lesson Procedure

Introduce the lesson by talking with your students about how advertising works. The main job of advertisers is to create needs - to convince people that what a particular company is trying to sell is something the viewer or reader cannot do without. Ask your class to list some of the ways advertisers seek to do this. They should be able to come up with a substantial list, including exaggerating the quality of the product, comparing it favorably with competitors, associating it with universal needs or desires (success, popularity, pleasure, sex . . .), or appealing to the desire to conform or the desire to be different. The problem with these approaches is that they tend to be misleading or deceptive, creating needs where no such needs exist. Because of constant exposure to such appeals, we learn to take such things with a rather large grain of salt; when someone tells us that we *really need* something, wise consumers tend to be skeptical.

Sadly, people today often respond in the same way with regard to their relationship with God. After all, is religion something we really need, or is it simply one lifestyle option among many, and a not very attractive one at that? In order to separate Christian faith from the fog of deceptive advertising with which your students are surrounded, they must be made to understand two basic truths - who God is and who we are. Only when these are rightly comprehended can the reality of our need for Christ have the powerful impact it needs to have in their lives.

### 1. Who God Is

Most of the Bible is written for people who already know who God is. God spoke through the prophets, through His Son, and through the apostles to communicate truth to His people, thus most of the Bible is based on certain assumptions about God that the readers already share. One passage of Scripture, however, is directed toward listeners who had no idea who God was. It is thus a helpful starting point for us as we consider the fundamental nature of the God with whom we have to do.

Have your students turn to Acts 17:24-31. In this passage Paul is in Athens, the intellectual center of the Roman world. The city was known for its great philosophers and famous schools, but the people there had no knowledge of God, Jesus, or the Gospel. The citizens were polytheists, worshiping many gods in numerous temples scattered about the city; they were so fearful that they might have left out some powerful deity that they even erected an altar to the "Unknown God." Paul was given the opportunity of speaking to a crowd of Athenians who wanted to hear about the new philosophy he was promoting. Because of their ignorance, he had to start with the basics. Have your students read through the passage and list what Paul told his listeners about the true God. They should be able to come up with the following:

- The true God is the Creator of all things (verse 24).
- He rules over everything He has made (verse 24).

- He does not live in a man-made building like the idols they worshiped (verse 24).
- He does not need anything from His creatures (verse 25); note that the gods of the pagan religions were thought to need the sacrifices of their followers in order to survive.
- He is the source of life to everything on earth, and especially to all human beings (verse 25).
- All human beings descended from the first humans made by God (verse 26).
- All nations are under His control (verse 26); God is no local or regional deity.
- God wants His creatures to seek Him (verse 27); this implies that they are separated from Him and that ending that separation is important.
- God is present with His creatures, not remote like the gods on Mount Olympus (verses 27-28).
- God is not like the images Paul's listeners worshiped, which are the products of man's imagination and the results of his artistic skill (verse 29).
- God has been patient in the past, but now commands His creatures to repent of their sin (verse 30); seeking a relationship with God is not a "take it or leave it" proposition.
- God will judge all of His creatures (verse 31); they cannot afford to ignore Him.
- Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who will judge the world; God has confirmed this by raising Him from the dead (verse 31).

The picture Paul paints is of an all-powerful God who made everything, rules over His creation, and demands that his creatures acknowledge Him. Because He made all things and rules all things, He has the right to require submission and worship and to judge those who do not give it. As we will see next week, however, this same omnipotent Creator and Judge has graciously made a way for His creatures to return to Him and become part of His family.

## 2. Who We Are

The awe-inspiring picture of God painted by Paul would have been a great comfort to his listeners if they had known the God of whom he spoke. They did not, however, and his message to them implies that this separation was a serious condition that needed to be remedied. Scripture has much more to say on this subject, of course, and we need to spend the rest of our lesson today looking at what the Bible teaches about the human condition in relationship to this great God described by Paul to the Athenians.

Start this section by asking your students how bad a person has to be to go to hell. Their answers will tell you a lot about their understanding of sin, its seriousness, and the nature of salvation. In the book of Romans, Paul lays out God's plan of salvation in great detail, beginning with a description of the human condition in chapters 1-3. He shows that all people - those who have never heard of God, those who seek to live good moral lives apart from God, and the Jews who had the great privilege of having received God's Word but sought to gain salvation in their own way - are separated from God and subject to His judgment. This applies to open idolaters (1:18-32), moral unbelievers (2:12-16), and religious people who think they can earn God's favor by living good lives (2:17-29). The bottom line is that no one is righteous in God's sight (3:9-20); "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). God's standard is perfection (Matthew 5:48), and no one measures up.

How did this dreadful situation come about? According to the Bible, mankind arrived in this state of affairs because of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When they sinned, they were separated from God and under His judgment, and all of their descendants have been born into the world with a sinful nature and in a state of rebellion against God (Romans 5:12-14). Your students may look at this and think it is unfair. Why should they be judged for something Adam did? Paul responds that Adam was the representative of the entire human race when he sinned, so that his sin was each of ours; furthermore, we sin by choice as well as by nature - even the youngest baby acts selfishly and tries to manipulate his parents to get what he wants. The result is that we sin because we are sinners; we are not sinners simply because we

sin. In fact, this idea of a representative acting on behalf of others is a good thing, because Paul goes on to explain that Christ was also a representative for all who trust Him, so that His perfect life and sacrificial death applies to every one of them. If this were not the case, no one could be saved.

The human condition is thus summed up by Paul in Ephesians 2:1-3. Those who have no relationship with God are spiritually dead, following the dictates of Satan, and choosing every day to live lives of disobedience, seeking their own desires, and are thus justifiably deserving of God's judgment. Those outside of Christ are "children of wrath." No matter how unbelievers may view themselves, this is the reality of their condition before a holy God. If nothing occurs to change this situation, eternal death is the result. Faced with this reality, is it any wonder that the Philippian jailor cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30)?

Man's condition is thus what theologians describe as *total depravity*; every aspect of who he is - his intellect, emotions, and will, his body, soul, and spirit - is polluted by sin (see Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Proverbs 22:15). Because man's will is corrupted by sin and in a state of rebellion before God, he does not even want a relationship with God and could not obtain one even if he wanted it; he is in a state of *total inability* (see John 6:44; 8:34-36; 15:4-5; Romans 7:18, 24; 8:5-8; Ephesians 2:8-10). He can do nothing to please God or to save himself. What is the solution to this horrible problem? We will look at God's answer next week.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the basic ideas of the lesson and emphasizing that this is a condition that students cannot afford to ignore. Because of the uncertainty of life, only a person who is very foolish indeed would postpone the matter until a later time. The problem is real, the condition is desperate, and the solution is beyond the reach of our abilities. God is real, He is in charge of all things, and He will judge those who are in rebellion against Him. But thankfully He has mercifully solved this serious problem that man is incapable of solving.



## **FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT**

## **THE NEED TO BE PART OF GOD'S FAMILY**

How would you respond to or evaluate the following statements?

1. "Everyone is a child of God."
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. "God loves everyone and would never punish people who try to be good."
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. "Religion is fine for some people, but I can live a good life without God."
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. "Most people are basically good at heart."
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. "The reason people are sinners is because they do bad things."
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. "Only people like dictators and mass murderers are totally depraved."
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. "Bad people are capable of changing if they try hard enough."



# **BECOMING PART OF GOD'S FAMILY**

## **Lesson Aim**

To impress upon the students the necessity and nature of salvation in Jesus Christ.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:2** - "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

## **Lesson Background**

We left the class at the end of the last lesson in a deplorable condition, guilty and helpless before a holy God, unable to do anything to earn His favor and avert His wrath. But what man could never do, God did through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. This is the Good News in response to last week's bad news.

We will therefore today talk about the Gospel - God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ. The essence of the Gospel is that God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves through sending His Son into the world to die for sinners. He took on human flesh so He could identify with those He came to save, He lived a perfect life so that His righteousness could be imputed to those for whom He came, He died on the cross to pay for the sins of those who trust Him, and He rose from the dead so that those who are in Him could have eternal life with Him in heaven.

If He did all this, what must we do? If we are incapable of doing anything to earn God's favor, how can we in fact do anything? The answer is that we must repent and believe - turn away from our sins and put our trust in Christ, who died for us. But how can we do these things if we are dead in sin, as we saw last

week? The answer is that God gives new life to those He has chosen, and this new life enables those who were dead to forsake their sin and turn to Him. Thus repentance and faith are things that we do, but they are also gifts; we do them only because God, but His grace, has enabled us to do so. This in no way minimizes the call for sinners to repent and believe, however, and your students should be challenged with the universal invitation of the Gospel.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by reviewing with your students what they covered last week, emphasizing the holiness and sovereignty of God and the reality and seriousness of man's sin. If people are spiritually dead, unwilling and unable to please God, what hope do they have? Ask your students what must be done for people to escape the horrible position in which they find themselves. If they have had significant experience in a Christian family or a sound church or Christian school, they will probably respond that sinners have to believe in Jesus, "trust Jesus as their personal Savior," or some such answer. But how can a dead person believe? How can one who is totally depraved gain favor with a holy God? Today's lesson will answer those questions.

### **1. What God Has Done**

The first part of the answer is that, if anyone is to be saved, God must do for us what we could never do for ourselves. If we are to be righteous in His sight, the righteousness must come from Him because we simply do not possess what is required. How did God accomplish this? The simple explanation is that He did it through His Son. What did Jesus do to fulfill what otherwise would have been impossible?

#### **A. His Incarnation**

Christmas is usually associated with Christmas carols, Christmas trees, and Christmas presents, along with cute scenes of a baby in a manger, shepherds, and wise men. But the birth of Christ played an important role in God's plan of salvation. The Son of God became a human being so that He could identify with those He came to save, experiencing sorrow, pain, and temptation (Hebrews 4:15-16). Also, only a human being could pay for the sins of mankind.

#### **B. His Life**

Jesus lived a perfect life on earth. His perfect record did far more than set an example. After all, how can an evil person follow the example of a good one, and how can a dead person follow *anyone's* example? No, the perfect life of Jesus provided the basis for a great exchange described in II Corinthians 5:21 - His perfect righteousness was credited to the account of those who trust Him, while He at the same time took our sins on Himself and paid the full price for them. He also served as the ideal prophet, not only speaking the Word of God as He traveled around and taught, but also being in Himself the very Word of God (John 1:1). He is thus the most complete revelation of God to man.

#### **C. His Death**

Because Jesus lived a perfect life, He did not deserve to die. Yet He did so, and in the process paid for the sins of those who could never have satisfied the demands of a holy God. The Bible uses a number of words to describe how the death of Christ on the cross accomplished this:

- Expiation - Like the Old Testament animal sacrifices, Christ's death was a sacrifice to provide a covering for the sins of His people (cf. John 1:29; I Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 9:23, 26; 10:10, 12, 14; I Peter 1:19). He died so that we didn't have to die, but His death was far more than a covering. It actually removed the sins from those for whom He died.
- Propitiation - This means "the removal of wrath." God's justice required the shedding of blood as a penalty for sin, but Christ, by shedding His blood on the cross, satisfied God's requirement (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 9:5; I John 2:2; 4:10).
- Reconciliation - The separation between God and man that resulted from the Fall was removed so that the two were no longer alienated (Romans 5:8-11; II Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 2:11-19).
- Redemption - This term involves the payment of a price; it was often used to describe liberating a slave from bondage. Jesus' death paid the price needed to release His people from slavery to sin and death (Mark 10:45; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:12).

## **D. His Resurrection**

Christ's resurrection from the dead was God's seal of approval on the saving work He had accomplished on the cross. As Paul argues at some length in I Corinthians 15:12-28, His resurrection means that those who belong to Him will also be raised from the dead, be given new bodies, and live forever with Him in heaven. In fact, He ascended into heaven, is there interceding for those who are His Hebrews 7:25; 9:24), and is preparing a place for them to join Him when they die (John 14:1-3).

## **2. What We Must Do**

All of this sounds great, but how can one who is dead benefit from this Good News? The central truth here is that God takes those who cannot do good, who cannot even respond to His invitation, and makes them alive, giving them both the desire and the ability to answer His call. Repentance and faith are actions that people perform, but they are first and foremost gifts of God. Without the gift of new life, faith and repentance would not be possible.

### **A. Repentance**

The word *repentance* refers essentially to a change of direction; someone who is going south suddenly turns around and begins heading north instead. In biblical terms, repentance is a change of mind and will, turning away from sin and toward God. It involves sorrow for sin (II Corinthians 7:10), but, like the criminal who is only sorry because he got caught, sorrow is not enough; repentance also involves forsaking sin (II Corinthians 7:11; I Thessalonians 1:9). While it is commanded, it is primarily a gift from God (Acts 5:30-31; 11:18; II Timothy 2:25). It is also necessary for salvation; one cannot truly turn to God unless he at the same time turns away from sin.

### **B. Faith**

Faith and repentance are thus inseparable, two sides of the same coin. One who seeks to forsake his sin without turning to Christ is engaging in an exercise of futility (cf. Matthew 12:43-45); sin cannot be purged through human effort. On the other hand, one who says that he believes in Jesus but does not forsake his sin is fooling himself. How can a person say he loves God if he does not keep His commandments (John 14:15)?

Faith, like repentance, is a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Only one whose heart has been changed by God is able to take the step of trusting Him for salvation. Faith involves not only knowing and believing the truth

about Jesus and what He has done, but also placing yourself entirely in His care, refusing to trust anything you have done or could ever do. Without such faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

## **Conclusion**

The fact that repentance and faith are gifts does not in any way eliminate the responsibility of the sinner to repent and believe. The Gospel is good news, but one must respond to the invitation Christ offers to all (Matthew 11:25-30; Acts 2:37-40). Encourage your young people to repent and trust Christ if they have not already done so. They should not worry about whether or not God has chosen them; concern about such matters indicates that the Holy Spirit is at work, and if they indeed do turn away from their sin and trust Christ, they can be assured that they have done so because God has worked in their hearts to bring them new life.

## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## BECOMING PART OF GOD'S FAMILY

In the book of Acts, the apostles obeyed Jesus' command to preach the Gospel wherever they went. Look up and read three of the sermons in Acts and describe what they have to say about the saving work of Christ and about repentance and faith. Then fill in the chart below:

	Acts 2:14-40	Acts 3:12-26	Acts 13:26-40
What does the sermon say about the saving work of Jesus?			
What does the sermon say about repentance?			
What does the sermon say about faith?			





# **FAMILY PRIVILEGES - RELATIONSHIP TO GOD**

## **Lesson Aim**

To leave the students with an understanding of and an appreciation for the blessings of salvation.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:3** - "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

## **Lesson Background**

Salvation is the free gift of God's grace. We can do nothing to earn it and nothing to deserve it. In fact, we deserve exactly the opposite of what we get from God when we trust Christ. What is true of salvation is also true of the privileges associated with it; they are entirely gifts of grace on God's part. We should never view them as rewards for our repentance and faith.

In today's lesson we will look at the key words the Bible uses to describe those privileges. They extend from the electing grace of God in eternity past to future glorification in heaven. They have to do with the way God views us and the way God changes us. They also demonstrate the involvement of the entire Trinity in the work of salvation, since believers were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. These theological terms may be difficult for middle school students to grasp, yet the ideas represented by these words give us great insight into what it means to be a child of God and the nature of the believer's relationship with God. Remember, of course, to let your students know that these privileges belong only to those who are in Christ.

## Lesson Procedure

In 1925, the makers of a phonograph advertised their product as “the gift that keeps on giving,” meaning that someone who owned a record player could get pleasure from it over and over again. In the century since then, many advertisers have made the same claim. But no man-made gift can claim to be “the gift that keeps on giving” more justifiably than God’s gift of salvation. Today we will explore different aspects of God’s gracious gift by looking at key words in the Bible used to describe the relationship to God that results from being brought into His family by the saving work of Christ. Ask your students to pay attention to the scope and nature of this relationship that belongs only to those who by faith have come to know Jesus.

### 1. Election

One of the blessings of salvation is the knowledge that, before you were even born, God chose to place His love on you and save you from your sin. This means that God, before time even began, loved you as an individual and decided to save you (Ephesians 1:4 among many other verses). Those chosen by God were also determined ahead of time by Him (“predestined”) to become like Jesus, separate from sin (Romans 8:29). The fact that God loved His children before time began should be a great comfort to them because they can be sure that nothing can separate them from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39).

Many, however, react negatively to this teaching. Is it fair that God chose some people and not others? Couldn’t He have chosen to save everybody? The answer to the first part of this question is that, no, the fact that God chose to save some is not fair. If God had been fair, He would have condemned everyone to hell because that’s what everybody deserves. As far as the second part of the question is concerned, we don’t know why God did not choose to save everyone; the Bible doesn’t tell us. What it does say is that God, the sovereign Creator of all, has the right to do as He pleases with His creation (Romans 9:14-24); the clay has no right to dictate to the Potter what kind of vessel He will form with it.

### 2. Regeneration

As we saw last week, God acted on His eternal choice by sending His Son into the world to die for those He has chosen. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty for the sins of everyone who belonged to Him. All of this was accomplished before you were even born. Once you enter into the world, however, God carries out His planned work of salvation in you as an individual. This begins with the work of *regeneration* - what the Bible calls being born again (John 3:3-8). This involves God changing the heart of the sinner so that he no longer wants to rebel against God, but wants to trust Jesus and follow Him. This is the work of God in the heart (Titus 3:5). God makes us new creatures (II Corinthians 5:17) and gives us life from the dead (Ephesians 2:1-7) in order to enable us to believe. We should never think that we as sinners decided to believe and that God then responded by changing our hearts. Regeneration is the cause of faith, not the other way around.

### 3. Forgiveness

Because Jesus paid for the sins of Christians when He died on the cross, God no longer holds those sins against those who trust Christ; those sins are forgiven, washed away, removed as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 1:18; Acts 3:19; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 10:17). This applies not only to the sins of the past, but also to the sins we continue to commit (I John 1:9).

## 4. Justification

God gives those who trust Christ a new heart and forgives their sins, and the result of this is that, before the divine and holy Judge, we are declared to be righteous - this is what *justification* means. This goes beyond the forgiveness of sins, removing the bad record from our account. It also involves the righteousness of Christ being credited to us (II Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 2:9). Think of it as a bank account. We were deeply in debt because of our sins - a debt we could never repay. God not only wiped out the debt completely, but put an unimaginable fortune into our account - a fortune that came from the righteousness of Christ. When God looks at us, He thus sees, not our sins, but Jesus' righteousness.

## 5. Adoption

Salvation involves not only being declared innocent in the heavenly court, but goes a step further. Those who trust Christ are not only declared legally innocent, but also are adopted into the family of God, with all the privileges that entails. In *Annie*, an orphan girl is adopted by the fabulously wealthy Daddy Warbucks, and her life is changed completely. For the Christian, the change is even more drastic. Instead of being "children of wrath," we now have the right to be called children of God (John 1:12) because God has adopted us as His children and heirs (Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5).

## 6. Sanctification

Forgiveness, justification, and adoption all speak of our new standing in the eyes of God. We all know, of course, that just because we have been declared righteous in the court of heaven does not mean that we no longer sin. Another one of the blessings of salvation is that the Holy Spirit, who lives inside all Christians, works to make each person what God has declared him to be - holy. This process, called *sanctification*, is a gradual one that takes an entire lifetime. It is only completed when we go to heaven; until then, we will always struggle with sin (Romans 7:15-25), but we can have the comfort of knowing that the Spirit of God is at work within us to help us fight sin, grow in our faith, and become each day a little more like Jesus (John 17:17; I Thessalonians 4:3; I Peter 1:14-16).

## 7. Perseverance

While sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian, this does not in any way imply lack of responsibility on the part of the believer to live a holy life and obey God's commandments (John 14:15). This ongoing effort to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12) is what theologians call *perseverance*. One who is truly saved will have a desire to obey God; this in itself is evidence of the reality of his faith. This too is the work of God in the life of the believer (Philippians 1:6). Christians can be sure that their desire to serve God is evidence that they have been changed and that they have already received the gift of eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24) and thus may be confident of God's love for them (I John 5:11-13). God will never release His hold on those He has chosen before the beginning of time and has saved through the work of His Son (John 10:27-30). Note, however, that if you show no signs of wanting to follow Christ and obey God's Word, you have no right to call yourself a Christian and can have no confidence in your standing before God (Matthew 7:21-23; I John 2:19).

## **8. Glorification**

Everything we have discussed so far is the present experience of those who are saved - they have been chosen by God, redeemed by the work of Christ on the cross, had their hearts changed by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, been declared righteous in God's court and had their sins forgiven, were adopted into God's family and are persevering in the faith by seeking to obey God and become more like Jesus. As we have already seen, however, this process is never complete in this life. Only in heaven will the work of salvation be finished. There sin will be completely removed from all who are children of God; this is what theologians call *glorification* (I John 3:2; I Corinthians 15:54; Romans 8:17-18).

## **Conclusion**

What a glorious privilege it is to be a child of God! Conclude the lesson by contrasting the descriptions of the Christian in today's lesson with the picture painted in the first lesson of the quarter. God has done all this for His people, not because they deserve it, but because He loves them! Be sure also to challenge any in your class who do not know Christ, reminding them that all this can be theirs as well if they turn from their sin and turn to God. The truth of God's choice need not be a barrier. The door of heaven has written over it, "Come all who would enter here," while the inside of the same door bears the inscription, "Chosen from the foundation of the world."

## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## FAMILY PRIVILEGES RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

1. Match the terms below with the corresponding definitions:  

<input type="checkbox"/> Election	A. Sins are remembered no more
<input type="checkbox"/> Regeneration	B. Made a child of God
<input type="checkbox"/> Forgiveness	C. Trying each day to obey God's Word
<input type="checkbox"/> Justification	D. Chosen by God before time began
<input type="checkbox"/> Adoption	E. Becoming completely perfect in heaven
<input type="checkbox"/> Sanctification	F. Born again
<input type="checkbox"/> Perseverance	G. Gradually made more like Jesus
<input type="checkbox"/> Glorification	H. Declared righteous in God's court
  
2. If God were to inspect your life today, what would be some of the sins with which you struggle?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How can we be sure that our sins have been forgiven?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. True or false:  
 When a person is saved God only takes cleans away past sins.  
 God justifies the wicked who trust in Him.  
 A person with a new heart is careful to follow God's laws.  
 When God has adopted someone, He can later change His mind if the person sins too much.



# **FAMILY PRIVILEGES - RELATIONSHIP TO CHRISTIANS**

## **Lesson Aim**

To emphasize to students the blessings of sharing this salvation about which we have been studying with other believers.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:4** - "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."

## **Lesson Background**

Those who have grown up in the United States are part of what is perhaps the most individualistic society in human history. Everywhere we turn we are told to find our own path in life, seek what is best for us, pursue self-fulfillment, and decide for ourselves what we want out of life. Most societies in the past (and many in the present) are not like this at all. They value the identity and welfare of the group above that of the individual and make life choices accordingly.

When God chose those He intended to save, He sent His Son to redeem each one individually, but they were saved in order to be incorporated into a group, the Church. Scripture uses a number of analogies to underscore this point. It describes the people of God as a family, a building, and a body. Each of these analogies emphasizes different aspects of the corporate identity of those who have been born again. Today we will look at these three images and discuss the privilege that God has given to His children by bringing them into the Church.

## Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students why the Church is important. Why do they think Christ established the Church before He ascended to heaven? Is it necessary for a Christian to be part of a church? Why or why not? Talk to them about the emphasis on individualism in American society and ask them for examples of this powerful influence in the media. Explain to them that our culture is unique in the history of the world in seeing life in this way, and that today we will see why that emphasis on individual fulfillment is contrary to God's will. We will also examine the blessings of living together with others in the context of the Church by looking at three analogies used in Scripture - a family, a building, and a body.

### 1. God's People as a Family

In last week's lesson we talked about adoption as one of the privileges associated with salvation. Those who are Christians have been adopted by God, and may therefore be called the children of God. This picture speaks, not only of our relationship to God, but also of our relationship to all of the other people who have been adopted by God. If we are all children of God, this implies that we are all part of one family, and therefore one another's brothers and sisters. What is the significance of this?

Have your students turn to Mark 10:29-31. Go over the context - Jesus speaks these words after His encounter with the Rich Young Ruler, who refused to part with his material goods in order to follow Christ. Peter then reminds Jesus that he and the other disciples have left everything behind and asks what their reward will be. These verses are Jesus' response. In what sense are these words true? We all know that Jesus is not promising His disciples that they will be rich in material goods in this life, yet the promise clearly refers to what precedes eternal life in heaven. Help your students to understand that the large number of brothers and sisters promised here refers to fellow Christians, and the references to things like houses and lands speaks of the way Christians willingly share with one another to meet one another's needs (in Acts 4:32-37, the early Christians put this into practice in a very literal fashion). Other verses that speak of the family relationships among Christians include Romans 16:13; I Corinthians 4:14-15; I Thessalonians 2:7-9; I Timothy 1:2; I Peter 5:12.

The fact that Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ has practical implications. It means that Christians should love and care for one another. Have your students look up I John 3:11-24. What do these verses say about how brothers and sisters in Christ should act toward one another? What does this kind of love look like? Be sure to point out that the love described here is the result of God's work in the hearts of Christians. Are the other Christians you know people you would love under normal circumstances? Sometimes yes, but often because of differences in background, interests, education, and personality we would not normally be drawn to those who are our fellow believers. The fact that we love them in spite of these differences is an indication that the Spirit of God is at work in us. Note, too, that the love described here means putting others first (cf. Philippians 2:1-4), even to the point of sacrificing material possessions for those in need.

Ask your students for specific examples of how they have seen this kind of love at work in the church and been touched by it themselves. How have they seen believers reach out to those who were hurting, give to those in need, comfort those who were grieving, pray for those who were suffering, show hospitality to visitors or people new to the church, and work together for the benefit of the entire group? No church does all of these things perfectly, but the love of God should be evident wherever His people gather in local bodies.



## 2. God's People as a Building

Begin this section of the lesson by asking students what is involved in building a building. They should mention preparing architectural plans, gathering materials, and assembling those materials in an appropriate way. What kinds of materials are needed? Students should easily come up with a lengthy list. Point out to them that these materials are very different from one another, yet all play an important part in the final structure, making it both beautiful and useful.

In Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul, after addressing the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the Church, describes the Church as a building. What does he say about the nature and purpose of that building?

- The building has Christ as its cornerstone. The cornerstone of a building is that around which the rest of the building is oriented. Without Christ, the Church would not exist, and it takes its direction from Him.
- The building is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. What does this mean? Your students should realize that the prophets and apostles were the men through whom God gave us His Word. The Scriptures are the foundation of the Church because they tell us what we ought to believe and how we should live and tell us about God, ourselves, and God's plan of salvation.
- The parts of the building fit together. Any building of which this was not true would not stand for long, but God has designed the Church to last forever (Matthew 16:18), so the parts fit together perfectly. We will discuss this idea more in the next section when we look at the Church as a body.
- The building is not like man-made buildings in that it *grows*. Buildings don't normally do that unless later additions are made, like rooms added above the garage or a new wing added to a hospital. How does God's building grow? This happens in three ways - individual Christians grow in Christ, becoming more mature spiritually; the Church as a body grows as people edify (the word comes from the word for *building*) one another; and the Church grows as God continues to add new people by saving them.
- The building God is constructing is a very special kind of building; it is a temple in which God lives. The Holy Spirit not only lives in individual Christians, but also inhabits the Body as a whole. The Temple in the Old Testament was only a symbol of this living Temple that God has been building throughout time.

Now have your students turn to I Corinthians 3:10-17. When we think of the temple of God, we usually think of the importance of caring for our bodies (cf. I Corinthians 6:15-20) and keeping them from immorality. In this chapter, however, the temple to which Paul refers is the Church. What does he say that can help us understand the Church as a building?

- God is the one who builds the Church, but He uses human instruments to carry out the work Paul originally brought the Gospel to the Corinthians, so he laid the foundation by introducing them to Christ. Others continued to preach the Word, and thus added to the building.
- Paul tells the Corinthians that they all are builders in some sense as they interact with other believers and live out their Christian profession. Those who live godly lives and seek to serve others and build them up are contributing gold, silver, and precious stones to the temple God is putting together, but those who waste their time and their gifts on useless pursuits are adding nothing but wood, hay, and straw that will be burned up in the end.
- Your contribution to the building will not determine your salvation - after all, salvation is by grace - but it will matter. Service for Christ is rewarding in itself; selfish pursuits are in the end empty and worthless.

### **3. God's People as a Body**

A third analogy used in the Bible to describe the Church is that of a body. Have the class turn to I Corinthians 12:21-27. We will look at this passage again at the end of the quarter when we discuss spiritual gifts, but today we will consider what it has to say about the Church as a Body.

- Just like a human body has many parts and all are different, so the Church has many members, all different from one another, yet all part of the same Body.
- All parts are equally valuable, though some may be more visible than others. No Christian should think that he has no role to play in the Church, nor should anyone look down on others because their roles may not be quite as visible.
- The Church benefits from the differences of its members, since each is unique and can provide the Body with something that no other part can supply.
- Just as the human body does not normally harm or abuse one of its parts, so the Church should be diligent in caring for each individual part of the Body of Christ; none should be left out or left behind, none should be injured or harmed.

### **Conclusion**

The fact that God has saved people and put them into a family, a building, and a body is a great blessing. One of the consequences of living in an individualistic society is that people often feel isolated and lonely. In the Church, this should never be the case. The people of God are intended to minister to one another, care for one another, and build one another up (the New Testament is filled with verses exhorting believers about how to treat "one another"). Christians should learn to depend, not only on God, but also on one another; each one will be enriched in the process. Ask your students to consider how they might become more contributing members of the Body of Christ and how they might benefit from the contributions of others.

**FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT**      **FAMILY PRIVILEGES  
RELATIONSHIP TO CHRISTIANS**

1. What are some of the ways the world around us encourages us to think and make decisions as individuals without considering the needs or desires of others?
2. What did Jesus mean when He said His disciples would get mothers and sisters and brothers because they had followed Him?
3. What did Jesus mean when He said His followers would have fields and houses if they followed Him? Did He mean that all His followers would be rich, that they would all own everything in common, or that they would all share with one another in times of need?
4. What are the three images used to describe God’s people that we studied in this lesson? Describe how each of the images helps us understand how God intends His people to live.
5. Why is the fact that God intended His people to be dependent on one another a blessing and a privilege?
6. True or False:  
 God brings together only people in His church who would naturally be friends.  
 The church contains people with varying levels of Christian experience.  
 A church should try to have people come to it from the same background so they can fit in.



# **FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES - WORSHIP**

## **Lesson Aim**

To help students understand the centrality of worship in the life of the Christian and see how it provides the foundation for Christian service.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:5** - "It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."

## **Lesson Background**

Worship is to a large extent a lost art today, not only among young people, but among American evangelical Christians in general. We are much better at speaking to one another than we are at speaking to God. It is important, therefore, that your students gain some understanding of the nature and importance of worship. In today's lesson, we will focus on the corporate aspect of worship; private worship will be handled in the weeks to come.

The word "worship" means "telling God how worthy He is" or "ascribing greatness to God." But the worship of the church involves more than talking to God. It also includes acknowledging God's greatness by listening to what He has to say to us. He speaks to His people, not in some mystical or mysterious sort of way, but in His Word. Worship can thus be thought of as a conversation with God. The people in the church speak to Him in words, songs, and prayers, and He answers through His Word as it is read and preached.

Your students also need to understand that God requires a certain attitude of those who worship Him. In John 4:24, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that God expects His worshipers to worship “in spirit and in truth.” This tells us that not all worship is equally acceptable to God. Those who worship Him must say things about Him that are true (God is not honored by lies or misrepresentations), and must be motivated to do so by the Holy Spirit who indwells all Christians.

As with the other topics discussed in this unit, worship is a family activity - one in which the family of God is to engage together. Personal worship is good, as we will see in the coming weeks, but it cannot replace corporate worship. God’s people gain something when they worship together that they cannot possibly experience when they worship alone. [NOTE: Be sure to bring a supply of old church bulletins with you for use during this lesson.]

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin by asking your students what it means to worship God. If they are typical middle schoolers, their answers will be rather nebulous. Like most adults, they rarely are conscious of the fact that worship involves communication with God, though they may know intellectually that this is the case. Explain to them that the word “worship” comes from the word “worth,” and that one who worships God is simply telling God how great or worthy He is.

### **1. We Speak to God in Worship**

Have your students turn to Psalm 150. After they have read through the psalm, ask them what it has to do with worship. They should immediately be able to respond that the praise described in the psalm is worship - telling God how great He is. Then ask them how this praise is carried out. Quite clearly, the psalmist is talking about praising God through music. (Make sure the students understand that the instruments used in worship vary greatly from culture to culture, but that all are to be used to praise God, not draw attention to the musician. In addition, clarify the fact that the dancing spoken of here is probably group dancing, though individual expressions of worship such as that practiced by David when he danced in front of the processional when the ark was brought into Jerusalem could be in mind also. In any case, it is not the dancing commonly practiced by American young people today, nor is it any kind of performance.)

What is going through the minds of your students when they sing in church? Are they consciously singing to God? Are they even thinking about the words they are singing? Or do they think only of whether or not they like the music, or, worse yet, allow their minds to wander onto some subject utterly unrelated to God? Emphasize that the major reason for hymn-singing is not to benefit the congregation. Although Ephesians 6:19 indicates that those who sing are in some sense singing to one another and thus edifying one another, the main purpose for singing in church is to glorify God; He is the one we should be trying to please, not ourselves. (Prayer, of course, is another form of worship in which people address God, but it will be covered two weeks from today.)

### **2. God Speaks to Us in Worship**

Next have your students turn to Psalm 85 and read it together. The psalm is an example of the kind of dialogue that is to take place during worship. In verses 1-7, the singers speak to God; in verses 8-13, they expectantly wait for God to speak to them and relate what He has said. How did this conversation take place? Did God speak in an audible voice, or through a vision? At times in Scripture God did those things, of course, but today God speaks to His people in worship in a different way. Ask your students if they know

what that way is. They should be able to figure out that God speaks to us today through His Word. This occurs during the worship of the church when the Scriptures are read to or by the congregation and when the Word of God is preached.

Again have the students think about their own attitudes during the Scripture reading and sermon. Are they acting like they would if God were speaking to them directly? Are they expecting to hear what God has to say to them on that particular day?

Pass around the church bulletins you have brought with you to class so that each student has one in front of him or her. Have each member of the class mark on the order of service those things that involve the congregation speaking to God, and those that involve God speaking to the congregation. Discuss their conclusions. Where, for instance, does the offering belong (the first category - we are offering to God a symbolic portion of all that He has given us)? Are there any elements of the service that cannot in any sense be called worship (e.g., announcements)? Encourage your students to be conscious of the fact that they are speaking to God and God is speaking to them when they go into the worship service this morning.

### **3. The Proper Attitude in Worship**

By this time your students should have gotten the idea that a big part of worship is the attitude with which we approach it. God is not pleased with the mere performance of ritual. When Jesus was speaking with the Samaritan woman in Sychar, she asked Him about the appropriate place for worship, and He responded by saying that the place is not the issue, but rather the attitude of the heart. He said that the kind of worship that pleases God is worship that is offered “in spirit and in truth.” Ask your students what they think Jesus meant by this. After allowing them to discuss it for a few minutes, point out that worship “in spirit” is not some sort of higher emotional plane (as opposed to worship in body, for instance), but a reference to the role of the Holy Spirit in true worship. Though God deserves worship from all, only those whose hearts have been changed by the Holy Spirit can offer worship with which God is pleased. We are thus not to get the idea that the quality of our own efforts is what determines whether or not God is satisfied with the worship we offer. Only those empowered by the Spirit of God can please God.

Worship in truth, on the other hand, involves worshiping God as He really is, not offering praise to some man-made notion of God. When we describe the greatness of God, our words of praise ought to be based on what God has told us about Himself. Thus the words of Scripture play a prominent role in the songs we sing. Help the students to understand the difference between a hymn of worship that speaks of God and a hymn of personal experience that talks more about the worshiper than it does about God Himself. Illustrate by using examples familiar to your students. While either kind of hymn can be a vehicle for worship, the hymn of personal experience means little if the person doing the singing has not shared the experience of the hymn-writer. Hymns which describe God, however, are universal in the sense that they are true no matter who sings them.

### **4. Worship as a Family Activity**

A common question asked by many people is, “Why does a person have to go to church in order to worship God?” The obvious answer is that he doesn’t. God may be worshiped anywhere, at any time. On the other hand, the Bible makes it clear that there is something both special and necessary about God’s people worshiping God together. Have your students turn to Hebrews 10:19-25. Why does the writer of Hebrews say it is important for Christians to worship God together? The main value of corporate worship is the ability of Christians to encourage one another to love and good deeds and minister to one another in

the context of public worship and interpersonal relationships. Worship is something that God intends for His family to do together.

## **5. Worship as the Foundation for Service**

The final aspect of worship that we want to consider today takes us to Luke 10:38-42. Here we find Jesus having dinner in the home of Mary and Martha in Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem. Martha is busy preparing dinner, while Mary is in the other room (if indeed there was another room) talking to Jesus. Martha gets upset with Mary for not helping with dinner and asks Jesus to tell Mary to pitch in with the preparations. Instead, Jesus tells Martha to leave Mary alone because what Mary is doing is more important.

This little story should tell your students something about the importance of worship. Martha was serving the Lord - something we all are constantly being encouraged to do. Yet Jesus tells her that Mary's conversation (remember how we defined worship at the beginning of the lesson?) is more important than her service. Make sure your students understand that a person who does not know God, speak to God, and listen to God, can never serve God. Jesus is not suggesting that service is wrong, or that it should be pushed aside into a lesser place. He is saying that service cannot be carried out rightly unless it is based on the foundation of worship. We cannot serve a God we do not know.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the nature and importance of worship. Be sure to encourage the Christians in your class to worship God "in spirit and in truth" and to put what they have learned into practice in the service to follow. Remind any unsaved students in your class that they can only offer worship to God that is acceptable to Him if they first give themselves - they must turn from their sin and trust Christ to make them acceptable in the eyes of God.



## **FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES WORSHIP**

1. Pick five psalms at random. Read each one, and list the parts of each that involve man speaking to God and the parts that involve God speaking to man. Were all the psalms you chose psalms of worship?
2. Think of your church service as a conversation between God and the congregation. Who speaks first? Why? Who speaks last? Do you think there is a reason for this?
3. In your church service this week, what were some of the things you said to God? List as many as you can think of.
4. Name one thing that God communicated to you through your worship service this week. Why was it important for you to hear this?
5. What does it mean to worship God in spirit and in truth?
6. Why does God want His people to worship Him together as well as individually?
7. In what ways does worship prepare God's people to serve Him better?



# **FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES - KNOWING THE WORD**

## **Lesson Aim**

To show the importance of the Scriptures in the life of the Christian and to motivate the student to make a place for the Word of God in his life.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:6** - "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."

## **Lesson Background**

The approach taken in this lesson is based on the approach taken by Solomon in the book of Proverbs. In that lengthy book, Solomon spends nine chapters motivating his sons. We could say that the difference between chapters one through nine and the rest of the book is the difference between the sales department of a company and the training department. The sales department is interested primarily in a person acquiring a product. This is the emphasis throughout the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. "Acquire wisdom, get wisdom, buy understanding" are commands heard time and time again. The value of wisdom is also extolled. The benefits it brings are repeated. Then, beginning with chapter ten, the book is like the training department of a company. This section assumes that a person has already decided to acquire wisdom. Now the task is to give specific training in the use of that wisdom. In the same way that a person who buys a computer needs then to be trained in the specific use of his new equipment, the final chapters of the book of Proverbs shift from a general call to "get wisdom" to specific, detailed instruction in the use of wisdom.

The first few steps of this lesson are more designed to give motivation to the students by showing them the importance, value, and usefulness of the Word of God. Then the later sections deal more with the specific handling of the Bible in the daily life of the Christian. The students are challenged to make reading, listening, memorizing, and meditating part of their lives. A final exercise is added to drive home the importance of finding, or better yet, making time for the Word of God in their lives.

Don't feel awkward about "selling the Word" to the students; the writer of Proverbs does nothing less than this (you can easily see this by reading several sections from the first nine chapters of Proverbs on your own). Convince them to acquire the product, then use it. Share from your personal experience with the Word of God. They need flesh-and-blood examples, not just ideal principles; even Solomon does this.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by having the students name the most expensive car in which they have ever ridden. Then ask them to name their favorite desserts. Why are these things considered valuable or enjoyable? Then have your students turn to Psalm 19:7-11.

### **1. The Value of the Word of God**

In these verses, David describes the Word of God as being more valuable than gold. When something is described as "worth its weight in gold," that means it is very valuable. For example, a person who weighs 160 pounds would be worth almost three million dollars under those circumstances. David also indicates that the Word of God is enjoyable. He describes it as sweeter than honey. Look back at the lists your students compiled at the beginning of the lesson. Make sure they understand that, to David, the Word of God was more valuable than any of the cars on the list and more enjoyable than any of the desserts.

Notice also that in these verses David uses words like "perfect," "trustworthy," "right," "radiant," "sure," and "righteous" to describe the Word of God. He sees it this way because of the things it has accomplished in his life. He has experienced the fact that it revives the soul, makes wise, gives joy, gives light, and gives warning. Take time to clarify each of these for your students to make sure that they understand what David is saying. Also be sure they understand that having the Word of God alone is not enough. They also must keep God's commands.

Continue your emphasis on motivation by telling the students to imagine that they are going on a two-week wilderness survival hike. In addition to clothes and food, they are only allowed to bring ten things with them. Have each student take a couple of minutes to write a list of the ten things he or she would choose to bring in order to be properly equipped for a two-week adventure in the wilderness.

After the students have compared their lists, have someone in the class read II Timothy 3:14-17. Paul obviously believed that the Bible should be right up at the top of Timothy's list of necessities for survival in the wilderness of this world. Why are the Scriptures so important? Paul tells Timothy that the Bible makes him wise for salvation, is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, and would thoroughly equip him for every good work. Like a well-packed backpack on a wilderness journey, the Scriptures provide everything a person needs to live a life of good works.

What makes this book so useful? Why is it so special? Paul tells us that it is God-breathed. This means that what God says, the Bible says. Give the following verses to different students and have them tell what each one says about the benefits of the Bible for the Christian: Ephesians 6:17; Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11; I John 5:13.

## **2. The Uses of the Word of God**

### **A. Reading**

A person who has been born again by God the Father becomes a child of God, and as a result needs spiritual food to make him grow up, just as a child needs physical food to grow. As a class, work together to make up a perfect menu for a day (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) - perfect in the sense that it is nutritious and each meal contains something from each of the major food groups (meats, dairy, fruit, and grains). Then make another “perfect” menu. Let the students go wild and suggest a menu for a day that includes what they would eat if they could eat anything they wanted. Needless to say, the two menus are unlikely to have many similarities.

God doesn’t give His children “junk food” to live on, but gives them well-balanced meals. The spiritual food He gives is the Word of God. Read I Peter 2:1-3 to the class. The “spiritual milk” about which Peter talks is the Word of God. By craving that milk, Christians grow spiritually in the same way that milk helps children to grow and develop strong bodies. The Word of God provides a balanced diet, giving us all that we need, whether what we need is teaching, encouragement, rebuke, or correction. In order to gain the benefits of this food, of course, we must read God’s Word. Food does no good as long as it remains on the plate.

### **B. Listening**

Get serious for a few minutes with the students. Ask them what their attitude is toward family devotions or as they come to listen to the Word of God in Sunday School or the worship services. Don’t elicit a verbal response, but let them think for a few minutes about how they really approach God’s Word. Then have them look at Acts 17:10-12. What was the attitude of the Bereans toward the preaching of the Word? Luke tells us that they were eager to hear it. This does not mean, however, that they were gullible and ready to believe anything anyone taught them. They examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul told them was true.

The Christian is to be an eager listener. Challenge the students by asking them if they are really eager to hear the Word of God. Are they enthusiastic or bored? Do they ever question the things they are taught? Do they ever check out what they hear for themselves by looking things up on their own? The Bible commends the Bereans for listening carefully and checking out what they heard against the Scriptures.

### **C. Memorizing**

Have each of the students write his or her phone number on the board. Tell the class to take a minute to try to memorize all the phone numbers. Then erase the board or cover the numbers. Have the students write down as many of the numbers as they can remember, even if they make some mistakes. Then have them check their results. In all likelihood, most of the students will get their own numbers right but have trouble remembering any of the others after such a short time. They remember their own, of course, because they use it so often. They couldn’t remember the others because they had only been exposed to them for a short time.

It takes time and effort to memorize. The more we use something, the better chance we have of that information staying in our heads. This is also true of God’s Word. In Psalm 119:11, the psalmist talks about something more strenuous than reading Scripture. In order for the Word of God to remain in our minds and

be available for help at any moment of our lives, it is necessary to memorize it. What benefits come from memorizing Scripture according to Proverbs 6:20-23?

Spend a few minutes talking to the class about memorizing Scripture. Those who memorize verses, then don't continue to look at them, are like students who cram for a test. They remember what they've learned the next day, but within a few days after that it has completely gone from their minds. Such memorizing does not lead to the benefits described in the passages above. What is necessary is the type of prolonged, continual exposure that makes the words of Scripture as easy to remember as the multiplication table. If you don't use it, you lose it.

#### **D. Meditating**

Ask the class what comes to mind when they hear about someone meditating. Perhaps it suggests the mental picture of a guru sitting in the lotus position, swaying backward and forward while chanting some Indian syllable. Explain to the students that Christian meditation is quite different from the Hindu variety. While Hindu meditation involves disengaging the mind, Christian meditation requires the active use of the mind.

One way that meditating has been explained is that it involves taking a portion of Scripture, usually a verse, and thinking of as many ways as possible to apply it to one's life. Knowing what a verse means is not enough - it must also be applied. That kind of thinking is something that a person can do throughout the day, even when involved in other activities. Read Joshua 1:6-9 to see how meditating on the Word of God was a key to success in the life of Joshua.

#### **Conclusion**

Are we too busy to make time for the Word of God in our lives? Conclude the lesson by having the class list some of the things that take up their time during the day. This list should include such things as eating, sleeping, school, sports, TV, computer games, social media, music, travel, and recreation. While such things are good in themselves, they should not be permitted to crowd out the Word of God. Do we have time to read, listen, memorize, and meditate? End the lesson by reading Luke 10:38-42. Your students must never allow the good to crowd out what is far better.

## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES - KNOWING THE WORD

Each of the following statements is wrong. Match the statement to the verse from the list below that demonstrates it to be wrong.

- \_\_\_ 1. "If I ever need to know a Bible verse, I'll just look it up."
- \_\_\_ 2. "Those people believe anything the preacher tells them."
- \_\_\_ 3. "The Bible just teaches you how to live a better life."
- \_\_\_ 4. "To meditate the right way you need to take yoga classes."
- \_\_\_ 5. "My body does fine on junk food; so can my soul."
- \_\_\_ 6. "I'd trade my Bible for good if I could only get a BMW."
- \_\_\_ 7. "I can get along with people just by common sense."
- \_\_\_ 8. "I've got better things to do than to listen to preaching."

- |    |                    |    |                 |
|----|--------------------|----|-----------------|
| A. | I Peter 2:1        | E. | Acts 17:11      |
| B. | II Timothy 3:16-17 | F. | Psalm 119:97    |
| C. | Psalm 19:10        | G. | II Timothy 3:15 |
| D. | Psalm 119:11       |    |                 |





# **FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES - PRAYER**

## **Lesson Aim**

To familiarize the students with biblical prayer and provide practical help in establishing their own prayer lives.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:7** - "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

## **Lesson Background**

Some say praying just comes naturally for the Christian, but that is only part of the picture. While it is true that the Holy Spirit makes the Christian cry, "Abba, Father!" to God, Jesus' disciples did come to Him asking, "Teach us to pray." Jesus didn't brush their request aside. Instead, He gave them a model on which Christian praying has been built for centuries, what we commonly refer to as the Lord's Prayer. Our lesson today takes this prayer as its starting point. The students are exposed to the different elements of this prayer and the priority of God's glory and kingdom in it.

Through a survey of many biblical references, the students will be familiarized with the many kinds of requests that are included in praying. Jesus and the apostles not only give us the content of prayer, they also give us principles that apply to prayer. Persistence is taught by Jesus in Luke 11. When Jesus says "ask, seek, and knock," the tense He chooses emphasizes that the kind of asking, seeking, and knocking we are to do is continual. Earnestness, however, may not always get us what we ask for. Prayer is answered when it is according to the will of God and asked with the right motives.

Perhaps the most vital section of this lesson for your students is the one dealing with their Quiet Time with God. This is so because it is the most personal. Encourage input here and show appreciation for comments, but remember that you are not looking for right or wrong answers, but planting the seeds of thought that, Lord willing, will produce fruit in the prayer lives of your students.

Prayer, of course, is more than asking for things. The familiar acrostic used in this lesson can be of lifelong value to your students in helping them remember the elements that are to be involved in God-honoring prayer. The lesson also will show your students how the different members of the Trinity are involved in prayer, thus making prayer communion with the Godhead as a whole.

For this lesson, you will need to come to class prepared with tape, a dictionary, paper, and your wallet. Make sure also that the room is equipped with chalk and an eraser for the board.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by having your students imagine that they had all the money they needed to build the house of their dreams. Ask them what would be the first step in the construction of that house. They should recognize that they would need to start off with a floor plan, or blueprint. Then ask the students to spend several minutes drawing up floor plans for their own dream houses. Give them one restriction. The house is only allowed to have one floor - no split levels allowed. When they are finished, tape their work up on the board or wall and compare their efforts. How are they different? How are they the same? The principle you want to convey is that, despite their differences, all of the homes have something in common. Each has bathrooms, bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room, and closets, among other things. Then tell them that prayer is like their floor plans in the same way. The prayers of all Christians will have certain things in common, while at the same time each Christian will pray differently.

### **1. The Pattern for Prayer**

In order for a family to get along well together, communication is necessary. The same is true for the family of God. That is why Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray. Jesus gave His disciples a model prayer to follow (we usually call it the Lord's Prayer). He was teaching them that, like your students' floor plans, certain things should be included in the prayers of all Christians, despite the fact that some may pray longer than others or use a bigger vocabulary.

Read Matthew 6:5-15 together as a class. In verses five and six Jesus is teaching that, for a Christian, a certain kind of prayer is important. Your students should be able to recognize that private prayer is what Jesus had in mind here. He also wants people to realize that the kind of prayers that are spoken largely to make a good impression on others are not pleasing to God.

In verse seven, Jesus makes the point that meaningless repetition of words accomplishes nothing. Your students have probably heard people chanting, the way those who practice certain Eastern religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam) pray. Even some "Christians" say the same words over and over when they pray (e.g., the rosary of the Roman Catholic Church). Such prayer is like a house with all one kind of room. How would your students like to live in a house with nothing but bathrooms?

The prayer Jesus taught His followers contains many different kinds of rooms. Draw a larger floor plan on the board containing a variety of rooms, big enough and numerous enough to write in the petitions of Jesus' model prayer. Have the students fill in the rooms as you read through the prayer.

Make sure as you go through the Lord's Prayer that your students are aware of the fact that God's concerns are to take priority over the concerns of the one doing the praying. Take the dictionary you brought to class and look up the word "hallowed." If some of the words in the definition are still obscure to your students, look them up as well. Make sure the students understand all of the key words in the prayer, using the dictionary whenever needed.

## **2. Petitions in Prayer**

It is easy enough to say that a Christian should pray, but it is also important that he be familiar with the proper contents of prayer. Looking at the Lord's Prayer gives us a good start, but the Bible gives us many things to pray about. Prayer is like a wallet - it is designed to hold many different things inside of it. Have the students list as many things as they can think of that might be found inside a wallet. Have yours handy after they're finished to help confirm some of their guesses. You will probably have things such as cash, credit cards, a driver's license, pictures, receipts, business cards, checks, a library card, an ID card, an automatic teller card, etc.

Again stress that just as many kinds of things fit into a wallet, so many kinds of requests fit into praying. Have the students look up the following verses and pick out the different requests mentioned in each one: Romans 10:1; I Timothy 2:1-2; Matthew 9:37-38; Ephesians 6:18-20; II Thessalonians 3:1-2; Psalm 19:14; Psalm 51:2; James 1:5; Matthew 5:44.

## **3. Persistence in Prayer**

One of the most important principles Jesus taught about praying was persistence. The Christian is told to "keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking . . ." The word game "Hangman" may help this teaching stick in the minds of your students. Have the students explain to you how the game is played. Underscore the fact that a basic part of the game is asking. A person must keep on asking in order to get the answer. Play a round with the students using the word "persistence." Keep adding parts to the body until they get the word. End the game by making the point that someone playing Hangman will eventually get the answer if he keeps on asking long enough. That, of course, is what persistence is all about.

Look together at Luke 11:5-10. What does Jesus' parable teach about persistence? Does this mean we can expect God to give us anything for which we ask if we only keep asking long enough? There are some other passages that show us that this is not necessarily the case. Have the students look up James 4:3 and I John 5:14. What else is required, besides persistence, in order for our prayers to be answered?

## **4. Personal Prayer**

Give each of the students a piece of paper and have them write out the answers to the following questions:

- When would be a good time for you to pray each day?
- Where would be a good place for you to pray? Why?
- How long do you think you could pray each day?
- Would you write down prayer requests before praying? Why?
- What kind of interruptions could you expect?
- Would you sit, stand, kneel, or walk around? Why?
- Would you close your eyes or keep them open? Why?

Before the class shares their answers, stress that you aren't looking for right or wrong answers to these questions. There is room for difference. The important thing is that the students seriously consider each of these questions and make plans to have a time and place to pray. Use this time to challenge the students. Praying is one of the marks of the Christian. If some of your students aren't Christians, tell them that they still are required to give God thanks for all the goodness He shows them, and that God is a friend of sinners who is willing to listen if they ask Him for salvation. Use the model prayer in the pamphlet *How Can a Person Become Right with God?* [available through Faith Reformed Baptist Church, Media, PA] to give them some help in knowing what to pray to God.

## **5. A Plan for Prayer**

Not only should a person plan the proper time and place to pray, but it also is helpful to plan his praying. One of the helpful plans used by many is based on the acrostic ACTS:

Adoration  
Confession  
Thanksgiving  
Supplication

Psalm 103 is an example of a prayer filled with adoration or praise to God. Have the class work together to find fifteen things for which the psalmist praises God. Daniel 9:4-11 is a good example of a prayer of confession. Note what Daniel says about God and about the people. Notice especially that Daniel includes himself in the confession by the use of the pronoun "we." Thanksgiving differs from adoration in that it involves speaking to God about what He has done rather than what He is in Himself. Supplication is simply asking, and we have covered that topic earlier in the lesson.

## **6. The Persons of Prayer**

Finish the lesson by explaining to the students how each Person of the Trinity has a place in prayer. Prayer is to be addressed to God the Father, through God the Son, in God the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father . . ." The Bible teaches that the prayers of God's people come to Him through Jesus Christ. He is the go-between for men to God. Also, the Holy Spirit is given to believers, and He causes them to pray (Galatians 4:6) and helps them in their praying (Romans 8:26-27). Sometimes we can't put our feelings into words, or we're not sure what is the right thing to pray. God hears the sincere "groanings" of His people, and He answers them.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson with a final exhortation to your students to pray - regularly, biblically, sincerely.

**FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT**

**FAMILY  
RESPONSIBILITIES - PRAYER**

1. Find words used in the Lord's Prayer in the following puzzle. Words appear vertically and horizontally, but not diagonally.

t e h d r o t l y a r p  
e g r e a t e v i l a l  
k i n g d o m i n w o i  
c v a o e v p r a y k l  
k e m n w e t e m w s f  
s r e e o r a d a i l y  
u e s r l r t e s l c a  
o h o w l o i l a l s t  
i t e n a u o i e i t s  
v a a c h y n v s a b o  
b f o r g i v e u k e r  
o t h e r l b r e a d e

2. Eleven words from the Lord's Prayer appear in the puzzle above. Once you find them, list them in the order in which they appear in the prayer without looking at a Bible.
3. Is the following statement true: "We pray to the Spirit, through the Father, in the Son." If not, fix it.
4. The following letters stand for the different kinds of prayer that we should include when we pray to God. Write in the word that should follow each letter.

A -  
C -  
T -  
S -



# **FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES - LIVING THE WORD**

## **Lesson Aim**

To impress upon students the importance of putting into practice the teachings they profess to believe and remind them of the uselessness of an unlived faith.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:8** - "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away."

## **Lesson Background**

In John 14:15, Jesus told His disciples, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." In much the same way that a child in a human family has the responsibility of obeying his or her parents, so a child in the family of God must obey the commands God has given. These commands, of course, are found in the Bible. One of the big changes that the Holy Spirit makes when He enters a person's life is that He makes that person want to do what God says. A Christian is a new creation - he is not the same person he used to be, at least in terms of his basic desires. Your students must understand, therefore, that for a Christian, obedience to the law of God is not an option. A Christian has no more right to live as he chooses than a child in a family has to structure his own life.

In today's lesson, we will be focusing our attention mainly on two passages in the book of James. In James 1:19-27 we will see the importance of putting what we hear into practice, and also take note of some specific instructions James gives with regard to Christian living. We will then move on to James 2:14-26, where we will see the importance of a life of obedience for confirming the reality of one's faith.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by telling the students about the shock experienced by children who have been adopted and never told about it until they are older. Such children often have a great deal of difficulty dealing with the surprise of finding out that the people by whom they have been raised are not their biological parents. A shock far worse than this, however, will be experienced by those who are mistaken in their thinking about where they stand in relationship to God's family. All of God's children (except His only-begotten Son, of course) are adopted, so that is not the root of the problem. Instead, the real difficulty lies in the fact that many people who are not a part of God's family think they are. They have what James calls a "dead faith." Since it is vitally important to discover whether or not one's faith is real, today's lesson will be devoted to examining the tests James gives to help us find out.

### **1. What Does It Mean to Live the Word?**

Ask the students what it would be like to try to comb their hair without using a mirror. Obviously, it would be difficult (unless someone's hair is very short and never gets out of place) because, without a mirror, a person cannot tell whether or not the hair is where it belongs, nor can he or she see what parts of the hair need further attention. Have the students read James 1:22-25. In this passage, James compares the Bible to a mirror. He says that someone who reads the Bible without obeying it is like a person who looks in a mirror, sees the dirt and disorderliness, and then proceeds to turn away without doing anything to correct the problem. This familiar statement is made in the context of a series of instructions that indicate what Christians are to do in order to live the Word of God. In the two paragraphs preceding and following the mirror image, James tells us what it means to be a doer, and not only a hearer of the Word.

#### **A. A Controlled Temper (verses 19-20)**

Part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. A Christian is one who consciously works on controlling his temper. All of us find it easy to get angry when things don't go our way. One mark of a Christian, however, is that he makes an effort to restrain the anger when it wells up inside him. Though no one succeeds perfectly in this life, the Holy Spirit helps Christians make progress in this area. One practical result of obeying God's Word is keeping anger in check.

#### **B. Moral Purity (verse 21a)**

James doesn't go into detail here, but I'm sure your students don't need a great deal of elaboration on this subject. They know fully well what sorts of immorality surround them, both in the field of entertainment and in the lifestyles of some of their non-Christian friends. Obeying the Word means rejecting these kinds of immorality, no matter how popular they may be in the world around us.

#### **C. Humility (verse 21b)**

Our world values assertiveness. People are told to stand up for themselves and demand their "rights." Those who meekly submit to authority are dismissed as "wimps" or "nerds." Yet James indicates that submission to authority - particularly God's authority - is a vital part of obeying the Word. James also tells his readers why this humility before the authority of the Word is so important - it is, as we will see in the next passage we examine, at the heart of the assurance of salvation.



## **D. A Controlled Tongue (verse 26)**

This is another self-control issue, and, like the temper, it is one with which we all struggle. Make sure the students understand that “I didn’t mean it” or “It just slipped out” are not sufficient excuses for unkind or impure language. Those who say that “sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never harm me” have either never felt the power of a vicious tongue or are fooling themselves. Words hurt, and uncontrolled words are an offense to God. James puts it very strongly when he says that, if a person cannot control his tongue, his religion is worthless. Why is this true? Uncontrolled speech not only destroys a person’s testimony before the world, but also shows that the Holy Spirit has never changed that person’s life.

## **E. A Life of Service (verse 27)**

When God needed to convince Peter of the need to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, He sent him a vision of a sheet filled with all sorts of unclean and disreputable animals, then invited Peter to have lunch. Peter objected, but God made it clear that nothing is unclean if God has made it clean. In this final verse of James 1, James makes it clear that living the Word involves dealing with those who may be viewed as unclean. Widows and orphans were at the bottom of Roman society, not because they were morally disreputable, but because they were economically needy and often unable to help themselves. Service to God is not an abstraction. As Jesus made clear in Matthew 25:31-46, one serves God by helping those who are in need. Spend a few minutes talking with the members of your class about ways in which they could help needy people in the congregation or in the neighborhood.

## **2. Why Is It Important to Live the Word?**

As we saw earlier, living the Word is not an option for a Christian. In James 2:14-26, James makes it clear that one who does not live the Word can make no claim to being part of the family of God. Go through the passage with them, noting the following as you go:

In verses 14-17, James says that a faith that does not show itself in a changed life is not the kind of faith that can save anybody. Someone who does not try to live God’s Word is not part of God’s family.

Verses 18-19 show that believing the right things is not enough. True faith, saving faith, is more than knowing and believing facts. The demons know who God is and trembled before Christ when He confronted them, but that did not save them.

In verses 20-25, James gives two positive examples - Abraham and Rahab. Both demonstrated their faith very clearly by putting God’s Word into practice. In Abraham’s case, this meant obeying God by sacrificing his son; for Rahab, it meant risking her own life by hiding the Israelite spies when they came to Jericho.

James’ final analogy appears in verse 26, where he says that faith that does not show itself in obedience is like a body without a spirit. A corpse may look very good, but if it is not breathing, it is dead. Faith, too, may look very good from the outside, but if it is not producing change in a person’s life, it is not true faith.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by challenging your students to assess their own faith using the measures that James sets forth in his book. Self-deception in this area is fatal. Also encourage any students in your class who are not believers to commit themselves to Christ.

## **FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES LIVING THE WORD**

1. How is the Word of God like a mirror? How is a Christian supposed to use that mirror in his own life?
2. Why is self-control an important part of being a Christian? Why does James say that control of the temper and the tongue are such strong evidence that a person is part of God's family?
3. List some of the things you have said in the last week that have hurt someone else. Then ask God to forgive you for those things. When you see the people you have hurt, ask them for forgiveness also. Pray to God and ask for His help in controlling your tongue this week.
4. Who are some people you know who have needs that you might be able to meet? How can you help them, and thus practice what James calls "pure religion"?
5. Why does James say that faith that does not produce obedience is dead? Is it possible for a person to be a Christian and not obey God, or even want to obey God?



# **FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES - GIVING**

## **Lesson Aim**

To communicate to students the principle of stewardship and give practical suggestions for its application in their own lives now.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:9-10** - “For we know in part and we prophecy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.”

## **Lesson Background**

Giving is not a subject about which middle school students often concern themselves, largely because few of them have much of an income. Probably some in your class will have been taught principles of stewardship by their parents, and will consequently have begun to give a portion of whatever allowance or payment for chores they may receive. The important thing about this lesson is to teach these young people the principles behind giving while they are still young, so that when they get to the point of being responsible for incomes of their own, they will already know how they ought to handle their money.

Giving is often a very touchy subject, especially because of the abuses rampant among many alleged preachers on the airwaves and elsewhere. Such abuses are nothing new. Paul lived in a day when the Roman Empire was full of traveling charlatans who would line their pockets with the offerings of the gullible. Thus when Paul was called upon to collect an offering for the aid of the suffering believers in Jerusalem, where a famine was going on, he carefully guarded himself against misunderstanding or misrepresentation. In II

Corinthians 8-9, he writes to the church in Corinth about an earlier promise they had made to contribute to the famine relief fund. In so doing, he lays out many of the basic principles behind Christian giving.

The most basic of these principles is stewardship, of course. A Christian gives because all that he has comes from God and belongs to God. We have what we have only because of God's grace, and we are responsible to use it for Him. Paul also points out that the giving of money is only an extension of the giving of oneself. It is in the context of offering oneself to God that giving becomes meaningful. The lesson will also deal with several practical issues (to whom? how much? how soon?). Although the biblical mandate on these matters is less clear, we will look at some biblical precedents and try to help the students to understand that these matters are not purely arbitrary. The main thrust of the lesson, however, should be to help the students see giving as an exercise of stewardship and an extension of self-commitment, while at the same time encouraging them to begin giving regularly now if they have not already done so.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the class by asking your students how many of them give some of their own money to the church on a regular basis. Then ask them why. Their answers should give you an idea of how well your class understands the subject of this lesson and provide a foundation upon which you can build in developing the lesson. Tell your students that giving is another one of the responsibilities associated with being part of the family of God. Illustrate the place of giving by talking about a father who takes his son with him to work on the car. The father does not really need his young son's help. He includes him in the project so that the son can learn something about cars, while at the same time gaining a sense of satisfaction from having participated in the repair work. Giving is much like this. God does not need our gifts, but when we give, it teaches us important lessons and allows us to participate in the work God is doing.

Have the students turn to II Corinthians 8-9. Explain the context, telling them about the famine in Palestine and the collection Paul had been asked to make. Explain also about the crooks throughout the empire who were making money from phony religion, making it essential for Paul to be very careful that his motives were not misunderstood. By looking at what Paul says in these chapters, we will be able to gain a better understanding of the principles of Christian giving.

### **1. Why Should Christians Give?**

At the heart of Christian giving is a principle known as stewardship. A steward was the manager of an estate. As the chief servant, he was given responsibility for the other servants and generally oversaw all financial transactions (cf. Joseph's responsibilities in the house of Potiphar). While the steward often had large amounts of money pass through his hands, none of it belonged to him. In fact, when he treated it as if it were his own, he quickly found himself in big trouble (cf. Luke 16:1-9). Every person on this earth is in the same position as that steward. All that we have comes from God and belongs to Him by right of creation. Our possessions are not our own, but are held in trust for the God who made them (and us, needless to say). Thus any understanding of giving must be rooted in the fact that what is ours is not really ours, but God's.

A second important principle is found in II Corinthians 8:5. If everything we have, including ourselves, belongs to God, then all should be offered to him. This is what Paul told the Romans in Romans 12:1-2. When a Christian gives his money to God, it is only a small part of the complete self-giving that is to characterize the Christian life. Unless we give ourselves to God, giving our money means little.

Thirdly, in II Corinthians 8:7 we see that giving is called a grace. This means that the ability and desire to give are both gifts from God. It is God who has enabled Christians to give by providing them with substance from which to give, and it is He who has given them new hearts, filled now with love for God and others rather than selfishness. Christian giving is thus a sign of a changed life, similar to those we discussed last week.

The fourth principle associated with giving is found in II Corinthians 8:9. Here we find that Christ is the supreme example of giving. He gave His life for the salvation of sinners. How can those same redeemed sinners refuse to give everything to Him? Giving is thus a matter of gratitude. It is one way of showing God that we are thankful for what He has done for us.

## **2. To Whom Should Christians Give?**

Any Christian who manages to get on a mailing list soon becomes the target of all kinds of appeals for money. Preachers, missions, schools, Bible societies, social agencies all claim they need your support if they are to survive the latest financial crisis and keep their vital ministries afloat. Where does a Christian's responsibility lie in the face of so many appeals for money?

What we find in the Bible is that Christian giving is always rooted in the ministry of the local church. I Corinthians 16:1-3 indicates that money for projects in distant lands was collected in the local church, then administered by representatives of that church. The same pattern appears in II Corinthians 8-9. Christ has established the church as His body on earth, and its leaders have been given the responsibility for overseeing the funds given by God's people (see Acts 5-6). Thus the primary giving of Christians should always be to the local church. This does not mean that extra donations may not be given to other worthy organizations (if your church differs on this issue, treat the subject accordingly), but there can be no question that the local church is God's intended administrator of money given by Christians.

## **3. How Much Should Christians Give?**

This is a touchy subject. Paul does not specify an amount or percentage, but in II Corinthians 9:6-7 talks about giving generously and cheerfully according to whatever God has laid on their hearts. The example of the Macedonians in II Corinthians 8:3-4 indicates that they were not thinking in terms of "how much," but were eager to give, even beyond what their meager means allowed.

The Old Testament specified a tithe, or ten percent. While the New Testament never gets into specific figures, it is important to note that the tithe in the Old Testament did not indicate that "ten percent belongs to God and ninety percent is mine." Instead, the tenth given to God was symbolic of all. In other words, it was simply another way of expressing what we talked about earlier, namely that giving comes from a heart totally dedicated to God, and indicates an acknowledgment that all we have belongs to Him. Thus while the New Testament does not explicitly demand a tithe, most Christians today consider it a minimum guideline for giving.

## **4. How Does the Church Use the Money that is Given?**

Bring a copy of your church budget to class. Ask your students what the church does with the money that goes into the offering plate. After they have given various suggestions (they probably know about salaries and missionary support), tell them some of the other things on which the church's money is spent. This will give them an understanding of why giving is important. Be sure to stress the variety of ministries

that are supported by gifts to the church. Talk about foreign missionaries, home missionaries, Christian organizations, church workers, and ministries within the church itself.

## **5. When Should Christians Begin Giving?**

Conclude the lesson by having the students turn to Mark 12:41-44. Read the story of the widow and her offering. Make the point that a small income did not keep the widow from giving. Then encourage your students to start giving if they have not already done so, even though their incomes may be small. Stress that such giving is one way of expressing commitment to Christ, and that habits established now can more easily be carried on into adulthood.

Be sure to explain to any non-Christians in your class that giving can never earn a person favor with God. Giving is an outgrowth of God's grace, not a way of earning it. Stress that God wants them, not their money. It is only after they belong to the family of God that they will come to understand the blessing of giving and participating in His work.



## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES - GIVING

1. What is a steward? In what sense are all people in the world stewards?
2. How is giving connected to the idea of stewardship?
3. In what way is giving a demonstration of gratitude?
4. Why does Paul call giving a grace?
5. List some of the things your church does with the money that goes into the offering.
6. Why is it important for Christians to give money to God's work?



# **SPIRITUAL FRUIT**

## **Lesson Aim**

To impress upon students that the fruit of the Spirit is a natural outgrowth of the Christian life and help them to understand what this fruit involves.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:11** - “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”

## **Lesson Background**

For the last five weeks, we have been talking about the responsibilities associated with being part of the family of God. On the basis of these considerations, it would be very easy for your students to get a shallow idea of what the Christian life is all about. A Christian is not ultimately defined by what he does, despite the importance of worship, Bible study, prayer, good deeds, and giving. Much more fundamentally, a Christian is defined by what he is. It is in the area of character that the radical change made by the Holy Spirit becomes most evident. The character of the person who has been renewed by the Spirit of God is described most succinctly in Galatians 5:22-23, a familiar passage that describes the Christian as a tree through whom the life of the Spirit flows, producing beautiful fruit.

Certain aspects of this familiar passage need to be emphasized. For instance, the choice of fruit as an image is not accidental. Jesus told His disciples that a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. He also said that a tree is known by its fruit. The characteristics described in Galatians 5:22-23 are not natural. Sinful human beings don't act the way Paul describes Christians here (in

fact, to see how they do act, look up a few verses, to Galatians 5:19-21). It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that a person can produce the fruit of the Spirit.

Secondly, it is important to note, not only that the fruit can only be produced by the Spirit, but also that one who has the Spirit will always have the fruit. This does not mean, of course, that all Christians will display the fruit of Christian character to the same degree or in the same way. It does mean, of course, that one who lacks this fruit has no business claiming to be a Christian.

Thirdly, the fruit in these verses is singular. Paul does not say that “the fruits of the Spirit are . . .” Thus, while a Christian may be stronger in some of these areas than in others, all Christians should manifest all of these traits to one degree or another.

In today’s lesson, we will examine the various aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, one at a time. Use these to encourage your Christian students about what God is doing in their lives. Do they see this fruit being produced within them? If so, this can give them confidence that the Holy Spirit is at work. The passage can also be an encouragement because it shows them the direction in which the Spirit is moving - what He wants to accomplish in their lives. For the non-Christians in your class, be sure they understand that these qualities may be counterfeited, but never duplicated apart from the presence of the Holy Spirit. This list does not show how to come to God; it shows what happens in a person’s life after he submits to God.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the class by asking your students which is more important, what a person is inside or what a person does. If they are on their toes, they will remember that, two weeks ago, we looked at James 2:14-26, which indicated that a person who claims to have faith, but doesn’t show it by his works, is fooling himself. Some also may remember (and you can point it out if they don’t) that Jesus criticized the Pharisees for being like whitewashed tombs - they looked good on the outside, but inside they were as rotten as could be. The obvious conclusion is that a person must be right both inside and out; he must have a godly character and live a godly life (remembering that these are both results, not causes, of membership in God’s family).

Next ask the students what inner traits are to characterize the Christian. If James told us what the outer life of a Christian should be, who tells us what the inner life of a child of God should look like? Hopefully, someone in the class will come up with the passage that is the subject of today’s lesson. If no one does, point them to it and have them turn to Galatians 5:19-26. Note the contrast that Paul makes between the inner life (and its outer manifestations) of the unbeliever and that of the Christian. Tell the students that the change is the result, not of superior effort on the part of the Christian, but of the work of the Spirit in the Christian’s life. Thus such character traits should never be a source of pride or dissension among Christians (verse 26).

We now turn to an examination of the nine facets of this beautiful fruit produced by the Spirit as His life flows through the Christian. Before looking specifically at the fruit, however, summarize for the students the three general truths noted in the Lesson Background.

### **1. Love**

As Paul says in I Corinthians 13, love is the greatest of Christian virtues. John notes in his first epistle that it is an attribute of God Himself. The love of which Paul speaks here is not a mushy feeling, but an attitude of selfless concern that expresses itself in action on behalf of another person. Christ showed His love by giving His life for His sheep. Christians show their love, as James indicated in our study two weeks

ago, by serving others, particularly those who are lowly and in need. Note, however, that an outward show of service is much simpler than an inner attitude of love toward others. Many serve because they feel it is their duty, but cringe inwardly while doing it. Only those who are changed by the Spirit of God can truly love others while they serve them. [Try to make this practical. Talk with your students about ways in which they can show love, perhaps by reaching out to someone at school who is unpopular, shy, or the brunt of mockery from the other students.]

## **2. Joy**

Joy does not involve going around all day with a phony smile plastered on your face. Joy is something that a Christian can have even when he is unhappy because of difficult or trying circumstances. Paul gives us a helpful discussion of joy in Philippians 4:4-13. Joy comes, not from blissful ignorance of the troubles in the world, but from a deep-seated contentment that has its roots in faith. One who trusts God can retain a positive outlook no matter how bleak the circumstances. Joy looks at the big picture and is able to be positive because God is in charge and will ultimately be victorious. Like a person who reads a thriller for the second time, the narrow escapes and tight spots through which the hero must go do not produce anxiety because he already knows how the story ends.

## **3. Peace**

A Christian enjoys peace in two ways. The first is the inner peace or contentment mentioned above, while the second is peace with God that is the result of salvation (Romans 5:1). The second kind of peace is the cause of the first. Because the Christian is at peace with God, he is able to be at peace with himself. Furthermore, this gives the Christian the equilibrium that makes it easier, though not always possible, to be at peace with other people (Romans 12:18). As Christ told His disciples, a Christian should be a peacemaker. His own inner tranquility allows for peaceful relationships with other people, even those who are hard to get along with. Are your students people who are known by their ability to get along with others?

## **4. Patience**

In a sinful world, we will always be the victims of unfair treatment in one way or another. How a person responds to unfair treatment says a lot about his character. Paul indicates here that a Christian is one who is able to deal with bad treatment without losing his composure. Ask your students how they react when a teacher at school gives an unfair assignment or test (teachers rarely do such things, of course - being one myself - but students often perceive them as being unfair). Do they get upset, angry, or lose their tempers? How should a Christian respond in such a situation?

## **5. Kindness**

Kindness is a virtue often associated in people's minds with young children and elderly women. But Paul considered it important enough to exhort the Ephesians to practice it in Ephesians 4:32. In that verse, he associated the trait of kindness with the practice of forgiveness. A kind person does not hold grudges or retaliate meanly against those who hurt him. Your students need particularly to be encouraged in the practice of the virtue of kindness. Middle school students are notorious for their cruelty to one another, and many adults can look back on the middle school years as the most traumatic of their lives because of the treatment they received from their peers. While such vicious behavior may be "typical" of the adolescent years, it is not typical of Christians. Your students need to know that God expects them to be different from those around them when their peers treat others cruelly. The family of God should be marked by mutual kindness.

## **6. Goodness**

The word used here for “goodness” is the word for beauty, but Paul is not saying here that Christians should be preoccupied with their external appearance. In fact, most of your students are probably far too concerned about how they look. Paul is talking here about the same kind of beauty advocated by Peter in I Peter 3:3-4 - an inner beauty that has nothing to do with hair or clothing. The standard for such beauty is Christ Himself, and your Christian students should be encouraged to use Him as the model for their lives and attitudes. As Jesus Himself told the Rich Young Ruler, no one but God is good. But the task of the Holy Spirit is to transform Christians to make them like Jesus - a task that will only be completed in heaven.

## **7. Faithfulness**

Part of a Christian’s character is that he is dependable. When he says “yes” he means “yes,” and when he says “no” he means “no.” He is faithful to God, being a responsible steward of what God has given him (see last week’s lesson); he is faithful to other people, keeping his word and being honest; and he is faithful to his work, carrying out what he has been assigned, whether at home or school, in a prompt, responsible manner.

## **8. Gentleness**

Gentleness is another virtue that is widely neglected. Isaiah described the Messiah as one who would not break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick. A gentle person is one who encourages others who are weak while not striking back at those who oppose him. Though the term is translated “meekness” in the King James Version, it should never be confused with weakness. It takes a strong person to return good for evil, or to refrain from retaliating in kind when someone strikes out at him or does something cruel.

## **9. Self-Control**

When someone says or does something foolish, he often responds that he acted “without thinking.” A person who possesses the trait of self-control does not respond impulsively, but thinks before he speaks or acts. When Paul commands the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit” in Ephesians 5:18, control is the issue. In the same way that a person who is drunk is said to be “under the influence” of alcohol, so a Christian possesses self-control only because he is under the control of the Holy Spirit.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the three basic principles with which you started the class. Then encourage and exhort your students as indicated in the Lesson Background. Make sure your students understand that the fruit of the Spirit is not the result of individual effort, nor is it a way to earn salvation, but is part of the gracious gift God gives to those who become part of His family.

## FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

## SPIRITUAL FRUIT

1. Why does Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 talk about “fruit” rather than “fruits”?
2. Why is the fruit of the Spirit only to be found in Christians?
3. List the nine character traits that make up the fruit of the Spirit, and next to each one list a way you can put it into practice at home or at school this week.





# **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

## **Lesson Aim**

To give students a basic understanding of the nature, purpose, and variety of spiritual gifts and encourage them to make use of the gifts God has given them to serve other Christians.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:12** - “Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

## **Lesson Background**

In the fourth lesson of this quarter, we talked about the great privilege that Christians have in being part of a family. God blesses His people and ministers to them through other Christians. Today we will look more closely at the same idea from a different perspective. Paul uses the analogy of a body to discuss the interrelationships of church members in I Corinthians 12. The different body parts are distinguished and compared to different spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit to members of the church. Though the concept of spiritual gifts is in general a familiar one, it may not be familiar to students of the age of the members of your class. We will therefore spend the lesson time going over the basic teachings of Scripture with regard to spiritual gifts and building on this to encourage your Christian students to find and use their gifts for the benefit of the entire congregation.

When Paul wrote I Corinthians 12, he did so because of rampant jealousies in the church at Corinth over the matter of spiritual gifts. Those with more visible or spectacular gifts (especially those who possessed the gift of tongues) were looking down on those whose gifts were more mundane, and those other

brothers and sisters were in turn getting discouraged and coveting the more overtly noticeable gifts. The purpose for the chapter provides the opportunity for us to spend some time talking about a problem that creates major difficulties for teenagers, and in a different way for all Christians. That problem is the matter of comparison. Too many Christians evaluate themselves, either positively or negatively, by comparing themselves with others. Such a process cannot help but produce either pride or discouragement. Either way, the individual and the church are damaged. Middle school students are at the stage where they are beginning to evaluate themselves more and more by comparison to their peers and less and less by the standards of their parents. This change can be traumatic for some. It is important for your students to understand the damage that they can do to themselves and others when they evaluate themselves and others by comparison. Paul tells the Corinthians that differences must be accepted as part of God's plan, and that the church derives strength from the variety of gifts that God has given. The members of your class must learn that differences in people are marks of strength, not weakness. It is not necessary for each one of them to be the same. They should not try to be just like others, nor should they expect others to conform to their own sets of preferences.

## **Lesson Procedure**

In Charles Schulz' comic strip *Peanuts*, we occasionally find Snoopy as the victim of a spirited argument among the parts of his body. For instance, if he is taking a hike at the head of his bird-scout troop, his feet will often argue for a rest, while his stomach contends that they should go on until they find some food. In such circumstances, the stomach almost always wins the argument. Give your students pieces of paper and ask them to draw their own cartoons in which parts of their bodies are arguing. What situations do they find themselves in where such "arguments" occur? Who wins? Have them share their cartoons with one another. Then spend some time talking about a rather obvious fact, namely that no matter who might win a given argument, the body ultimately must act together. Snoopy's stomach could not go and look for food while his feet stayed behind to rest. Furthermore, if the same body part won all the arguments, the body would be in trouble. If the stomach always won, the feet would eventually give out; if the feet always won, the poor dog would die of hunger.

Have the students turn in their Bibles to I Corinthians 12. In this chapter, Paul compares the church to a body. Like a human body, the church is made up of parts that are very different, perform different functions, and have different needs. Like a human body, those needs sometimes conflict in isolated situations. But also like a human body, the welfare of the body depends upon cooperation, mutual help, and concerted action among the parts. In the same way that the different parts of the body contribute to the overall welfare by performing different functions, so the members of the church contribute to the health of the church by doing different things. The capacities that enable them to fulfill these different ministries are called spiritual gifts.

### **1. What Are Spiritual Gifts?**

Spiritual gifts, as already indicated, are capacities for service. Have the students read verses 8-10 and 28-30 of I Corinthians 12. What gifts are mentioned in these verses? Explain what each gift refers to and note that this list is intended to be representative rather than exhaustive (other lists in other places include different gifts). Mention that some of the gifts of a more miraculous nature were unique to the apostolic period, but don't elaborate or get bogged down on something that has little direct relationship to the point of today's lesson.

## **2. Who Has Spiritual Gifts?**

According to I Corinthians 12:7, spiritual gifts are given to all Christians. Presumably, this occurs at the time of conversion. It is one of the blessings that accompany the indwelling of the Spirit in the life of a Christian. These gifts, of course, do not immediately become evident. The only way that a person can find out what gift or gifts God has given him is to get busy in serving others in the church. It will become obvious soon enough in what areas God blesses that service. When God uses a person in a particular area, it is generally a strong indication that He has given a gift suitable for that particular type of service.

## **3. How Are Spiritual Gifts Given?**

Spiritual gifts are called “spiritual,” not because they are somehow intangible, but because they are given by the Holy Spirit. I Corinthians 12:11 tells us that the Spirit of God gives these gifts “as He determines.” In other words, the gifts are sovereignly distributed. God chooses the gifts He wishes to give to each person. Because God loves to use human weakness, these gifts are often given without regard for natural ability, though God sometimes chooses to use natural skills. For instance, neither Peter nor Paul could have been called a natural preacher - Peter was an ignorant man, while Paul was physically frail and vocally unimposing. Yet God used both men greatly. Thus no one who is used by God in an area of service can claim personal credit for what has been accomplished. God provided the gift, used the gift, and produced the results. Thus there is no room left for pride.

## **4. How Are Spiritual Gifts to be Used?**

I Corinthians 12:7 tells us that spiritual gifts are to be used “for the common good.” This means that no person is to use his gifts for his own self-aggrandizement, but rather for the benefit of others. Jesus told His disciples that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven would be those who served. Spiritual gifts provide an example of this principle at work. Those who have the greatest gifts are those who are called to the greatest service. When Jesus talked about giving in Matthew 6:1-4, He told His disciples that those who give in order to gain praise or recognition from others are not really giving - they are simply exchanging money for social approval and esteem. Similarly, one who exercises spiritual gifts is not to do so with an eye toward gaining approval or recognition from others. Service is the goal. If God is pleased, that is sufficient.

## **5. How is the Body to Work Together?**

Have the students read I Corinthians 12:14-26. Remind them of the Snoopy cartoon with which the lesson began. Jealousies and arguments within the body are terribly destructive and wind up hurting everyone. It is therefore important that Christians learn to appreciate one another and value rather than disparage the differences among them. Take time now to talk to your students about the matter of comparison that was mentioned in the Lesson Background. Apply this both to spiritual matters and to the mundane affairs of daily life in school. Comparison with others can be deadly, producing not only either pride or discouragement in the individual, both of which are harmful, but also fragmenting the body and destroying its effectiveness. The alternative is learning to benefit from differences. The strengths and weaknesses that God has given to each of us mean that all of us have something we can do for the benefit of others, and all of us have needs for which we require the help of others. A hand is very useful, but quickly dies if it is separated from the rest of the body. Similarly, Christians need one another, and need one another to be different. The quest for sameness, even sameness in that which is different, which seems often to dominate the lives of teenagers, is spiritually counterproductive, and your students, if they are Christians, need to realize that they cannot afford to fall into the pattern so common in the world around them.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reminding your students that in any family, all members must pull their own weight in order for the family to prosper. The same is true of God's family. Every member of the family needs every other member. Encourage your Christian students to get involved in service so that God is able to show them the gifts He has given to them, and so that they can begin to fill the niches God has prepared for them in the church. Teenagers are not exempt from being functioning parts of the body.

Also remind your non-Christian students that the mutual ministry that has been the subject of today's lesson is something from which they are excluded. Christ's church, however, is a growing body. He is adding cells all the time. Those who turn to Him in faith can quickly find themselves part of this beautiful body, serving others and being served in their areas of greatest need.

## **FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT**

## **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

Draw a picture of a body on this page, large enough to fill most of the paper. Think about the people in your church and the jobs they do. Write the names of some of the people in your church next to the appropriate body parts (be serious, now - no mockery!). For instance, a person who often fixes things around the church might be a hand. A person who preaches or teaches frequently might be the mouth. Someone who helps with transportation might be a foot, while someone who encourages those who are sick or suffering might be the heart. Where would you put your name on the picture? What do you do now to serve others in the church? How do you think God might use you in the future, when you reach adulthood, to fit into His body?



# **WHY SHARE YOUR FAITH?**

## **Lesson Aim**

To encourage the Christians in your group to share their faith with others by the words they speak and the way they live.

## **Memory Verse**

**I Corinthians 13:13** - “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

## **Lesson Background**

The question concerning the motivation for spreading the Gospel is for those of a Reformed theological persuasion both extremely simple and somewhat complex. It is a simple question because it is a scriptural command. On the most fundamental level, then, Christians are to spread their faith because Christ told them to do so. What makes the issue complex is that secondary motivations used so prevalently among evangelical Christians almost always imply that the salvation of the sinner is dependent upon the one bearing the Gospel, which simply is not biblical. Consequently, the task before you as a teacher today is to motivate your Christian students to share their faith, and to do so for the right reasons. Spending time along the way to help them see why reasons often cited are not good ones will also enhance their understanding of the doctrine of salvation if it is done in such a way that it does not dampen their zeal.

When we get to the topic of evangelism, the family image that we have been using throughout the quarter breaks down. Families do not under normal circumstances go around recruiting new members. Membership in the family of God is not based on biology, however, but on the free offer of salvation to all

who repent and believe. It is thus the responsibility of those in God's family to spread the good news, realizing that it is God who produces results. The three major passages on which we will be concentrating our attention this week are Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, and Luke 5:1-11. These three will illustrate the command for evangelism, the plan for evangelism, and the results of evangelism.

## **Lesson Procedure**

Begin the lesson by asking your students why Christians are supposed to witness to those who are unsaved. The answers they give will probably reflect the training they have had in this area, whether at home, at church, or perhaps in a Christian school. Make a mental note, as they give their answers, of whether the thrust of what they say is God-centered or man-centered. This will let you know how much emphasis you need to give in the last section of the lesson to the fact that God is the one who saves. Having allowed them to express their thoughts on the subject, tell them that today's lesson will be devoted to finding out what God has to say about that question. Evangelism is the method He has established for bringing people into His family. In the last two weeks of the quarter, we will look at the "why" and the "how" of evangelism.

### **1. The Command for Evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20)**

When Jesus was on earth, His disciples did very little in the way of evangelism. He did send them out on two preaching tours, but for the most part He kept them at His side in order to prepare them for the work He had for them to do. Shortly before He ascended into heaven, He spoke to them about their responsibility to spread the Gospel. Thus the first and most basic reason why Christians should witness to unbelievers is because Jesus told His disciples to do it. We now turn to a more detailed examination of the passage.

It is generally believed by commentators that Jesus was here speaking to a large group of His followers (perhaps the five hundred mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 15:6). Before He tells them to spread the Gospel, however, He assures them that the power for the task will not have to come from them. His power will energize the work of witnessing. Why is this important? Too often people think that the salvation of sinners depends upon their own skillfulness or persuasiveness. They must understand that without the power of God, no one will be saved. In fact, Paul saw the power of human persuasion as a hindrance to the Gospel (I Corinthians 2:4-5). This does not mean that those who present the Gospel should be unprepared, lazy, or offensive, but it does mean that no one should expect that he is capable of arguing anyone into the Kingdom.

The command itself is found in Matthew 28:19. The wording of older translations often obscures the fact that the main verb of the command is "make disciples" rather than "go." Ask your students to define the word "disciple." They will probably tell you that it means "follower," which isn't a bad definition. But note that it also carries with it the connotation of "student" or "learner." Thus the making of a disciple is not a one-shot deal. In fact, the other participles supporting the main verb tell us that discipling is accomplished in two ways - by baptizing and teaching. Baptizing symbolizes the entrance of a person into the family of God, while teaching refers to the ongoing instruction that produces growth and maturity. Thus, though God uses so-called "cold turkey" evangelism, the need for discipleship underscores the importance of an ongoing relationship. This is where God's family comes into the picture. One who comes to Christ must be brought into a community of believers in order to receive the necessary teaching and ministry from other Christians that produces growth.



Christ closes this well-known command by promising His presence. The one who seeks to make disciples has Christ with him as he goes. Thus the feeling of loneliness that sometimes intimidates those who try to witness can be overcome by a confidence that Christ Himself is there.

At this point your students should easily understand that witnessing is a command. But they may not understand why it is necessary. If God is the one by whose power the work is done, and if He will surely save all whom He has chosen, why does He need us? The fact of the matter is, of course, that He doesn't need us. He has chosen to use human instruments to accomplish His work, not because He couldn't do it on His own, but in order to give us a share of the blessing, the joy of participating in His work. Remember the body image we looked at last week? The church is Christ's body, through which He spreads His Word in the world.

## **2. The Plan for Evangelism (Acts 1:8)**

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples that they would be His witnesses. It is not so much a command as a statement of fact. Anyone who claims to be a Christian is a witness for Christ. The only question is, of course, what kind of witness is he? Some deny by their actions the same Lord they claim with their words. Such people are not useful witnesses. Instead, they turn people away from the Gospel with their own hypocrisy. Others live in such a way that those who watch them come to understand that a Christian is different, but not in the sense of being odd. Rather, the Christian has in his life a certain power, a certain joy, that the unbeliever has never experienced. It was not Jesus' intention, however, for His disciples to be witnesses only by the way they lived. They were to speak the Word as well as living it.

This verse also indicates that Jesus intends for His followers to start their witnessing right where they are. The eleven remaining disciples were to begin in Jerusalem, and only later move out into the rest of Judea, north into Samaria, and finally throughout the known world (a good basic outline for the book of Acts, by the way). What this means for your students is that they should not expect to be used by God to spread the Gospel in Africa if they have never learned to speak to their friends at school or their neighbors. One who is faithful in small things will be given greater responsibility. The same is true in the realm of evangelism. The place to begin is right where you are. Those who learn to be faithful witnesses at home are the ones God will use to spread His Word to the far reaches of the world.

## **3. The Results of Evangelism (Luke 5:1-11)**

The first time Jesus spoke to His disciples about evangelism was when He first called them. In this passage, He told them to leave their fishing business and promised to make them fishers of men. But before He gave that command and promise, He performed a miracle to illustrate how they would be able to accomplish the titanic job with which He entrusted them.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John were experienced fishermen. They were good at their job, but they had had a bad night. There simply weren't any fish to be caught. Yet when Jesus told them to lower their nets, they obeyed, almost as if to humor Him. Much to their amazement, they caught so many fish that their nets could not take the strain. Ask your students what Jesus was trying to teach His newly-called disciples about evangelism by means of this object lesson. The key point is that the person who spreads the Gospel is responsible for obedience, not results. Peter and the others simply lowered their nets. All their skill had caught them nothing. Yet the combination of their obedience and Jesus' power produced an overwhelming response.

It is the same with the work of evangelism. God uses obedient servants to spread His Word, and His Holy Spirit works in the hearts of some who hear and produces fruit. The parable of the sower in Matthew 13 is another good illustration of the same point. The Word is sown in obedience to God, some respond positively while many do not, but God produces the fruit.

Why is this important? Anyone who thinks the work of evangelism rests on his shoulders is setting himself up for either pride or discouragement. When people do respond to the Gospel, such a person begins to chalk up notches on his spiritual gun belt. On a church level, this attitude results in publishing figures of number of conversions, number of baptisms, etc. If people do not respond, on the other hand, such a person tries to find a new method that will be more effective. These “new methods” often amount to little more than clever salesmanship and bear little relationship to the message of salvation.

This brings us to another important point. Those who are “saved” by clever persuasion or slick methods often are not really saved at all. Because they have been brought to the point of decision by intellectual or emotional manipulation, their lives have never really been turned over to Christ. In other words, they are in worse condition than they were to begin with. They are still on their way to hell, but now they think they are saved, so they stop worrying about eternity.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the main points you have gone over. Witnessing is something Christians do because Christ has told them to do so. While God does not need our help, it is a privilege to participate in His work in the world. Most importantly, remind your students that the work of salvation is accomplished by the power of God, not by clever arguments or emotional manipulation. The Christian is responsible to obey; results are to be left in the hands of God.

For the non-Christians in your class, remind them that the family of God is an open family. All are invited to join. What is required, however, is the same repentance and faith of which the early lessons in this quarter spoke.

## **FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT WHY SHARE YOUR FAITH?**

1. What is a disciple?
2. Why is it important to know that Jesus promised power to His disciples as they spread the Gospel?
3. Why does true evangelism require the establishing of a relationship with the person being evangelized?
4. In what sense is it true that all Christians are witnesses?
5. How did the incident with the miraculous catch of fish illustrate the way in which God intended to save people?
6. What are some of the dangers associated with evangelistic techniques that emphasize manipulation of people's emotions?



# **HOW TO SHARE YOUR FAITH**

## **Lesson Aim**

To show students from examples in the book of Acts how they can effectively share their faith with those they know.

## **Memory Verse**

Review **I Corinthians 13**.

## **Lesson Background**

Many Christians do not share their faith because they simply do not know how to do so. They quickly get tongue-tied, not really knowing what to say, even when a clear opportunity presents itself. The Bible, of course, gives us many useful examples. The best model is Jesus Himself, but since we are going to spend the entire summer quarter looking at missions and evangelism, and during that time examine in detail several of Jesus' contacts with unbelievers, we will focus in this lesson on several examples from the book of Acts. By looking at these examples involving Peter and Paul, we will see not only the content of the message to be shared, but also some practical helps for presenting it. Further help for you and your students can be found in books such as Paul Little's *How to Give Away Your Faith*, and pamphlets such as *How Can a Person Become Right with God?* [available from Faith Reformed Baptist Church, 110 Old State Rd., Media, PA 19063].

## Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students what they would say if one of their friends in the neighborhood came up to them and asked, “How does a person become a Christian?” Hopefully, in the course of the discussion, many of the ideas covered earlier in this unit will come out, especially the need for repentance and faith. Next, find two volunteers in the class who are willing to do a brief role play. Have them pretend that they are Christians and that you are an unbeliever who has just asked them about their faith. As they try to explain what it means to be a Christian and how one goes about joining the family of God, ask questions that draw them out further, but be careful not to embarrass them or make them look foolish. After all, the idea of this lesson is to encourage students to witness, not scare them away from it. Hopefully, the conversation will include some weaknesses of presentation that you will be able to capitalize upon and refer back to as the lesson progresses. Move on next to the examples God gives us in His Word to show us how to present the Gospel.

Divide the class up into three groups. Assign one group to read Acts 2:14-41, the second to read Acts 10:24-48, and the third to read Acts 17:16-34. Ask the groups to answer two questions about their passages: What did the speaker communicate as the content of the Good News? What did the speaker tell the listeners they had to do?

### 1. The Content of the Gospel

Your groups should note the following as they go through their respective passages:

The Acts 2 group is dealing with a passage where Peter is speaking to a religiously literate audience. They are Jews who know the Word of God, but are not Christians. Peter speaks briefly of the experience that the crowd has just witnessed, but concentrates on what Jesus did - His miracles, death, and resurrection. By holding his listeners responsible for Christ’s death, he also makes them aware of their own sin and need of a Savior. Thus we see that the content of the Gospel is that Jesus has come to earth, lived a sinless life, died for sinners, and has been raised again. [Needless to say, this is a far cry from “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”]

In Acts 10, Peter is speaking to a Gentile, Cornelius, who was what the Jews called a “God-fearer.” This means that he worshiped the Jewish God and involved himself in the synagogue to some extent, but had never fully converted to Judaism by being circumcised. Peter here speaks of the same three basic facts - Jesus’ godly life and miracles, death, and resurrection. The only difference is that he emphasizes by the words he uses the fact that Jesus did what He did for all, not just for the Jews (see, for instance, verses 34-36, 38, and 43). He also mentions the fact that Christ is the judge of all.

In Acts 17, Paul is speaking to a group of intellectual unbelievers. They knew little of the Word of God, but they prided themselves on their knowledge of the popular philosophies of the day. Because of their ignorance, Paul found it necessary to tell them much more than Peter had had to explain to the Jews at Pentecost or to Cornelius. He begins by explaining that God is the Creator, that He is a spiritual being, and that He holds men accountable for their behavior. He then goes on to talk about human sin and the salvation demonstrated by the resurrection of Christ.

Thus we see that the basic content of the Gospel message is the work of Christ. Man is God’s creature, man is a sinner, Christ has come to earth to save people through His death and resurrection. This is the Good News.

## **2. The Demands of the Gospel**

Your Acts 2 group should have no difficulty finding what Peter told his listeners to do. In verse 38, he tells them to repent and be baptized. They must turn from sin, for there can be no salvation without forsaking sin. But they also must turn to Christ. Baptism was a public testimony of identification with Christ. One who was baptized was declaring to the world that he was trusting Christ for salvation and turning away from his former life. Be sure your students understand that while baptism is important, it should not necessarily be the topic of discussion when witnessing to a person for the first time.

In Acts 10, Peter hardly had a chance to say anything about what God required. Before he finished his sermon, the Holy Spirit fell on the listeners and they were converted. Peter did allude to the need for repentance and faith in verse 43, however.

In Acts 17, the demand again is for repentance. Paul does not mention faith in Christ, but the probable reason for that is that most of the crowd dispersed when he mentioned the resurrection, a notion thought by the Greeks to be foolish (they believed in the immortality of the soul, but thought the body was a prison that the soul would be better off without, and therefore scoffed at the notion that the body should continue to exist after death). We find later that some who continued to listen did believe.

Thus the basic demand of the Gospel, as we saw earlier in the quarter, is for repentance and faith. A person who is witnessing should not tell someone that “Christ will solve all your problems,” or that “God has a wonderful plan for you,” or even that “God loves you.” Unbelievers must be told to turn from their sin and put their trust in Christ for salvation.

## **3. Practical Hints from Biblical Examples**

Now go back to the three passages and give your students the following practical hints about witnessing that can be derived from these examples:

In Acts 2, Peter’s audience knows the Word of God, so Peter uses it to communicate the Gospel. He had the advantage of speaking to an audience that had already been prepared for the coming of the Messiah by the prophecies of the Old Testament. Your students may have non-Christian friends who have nonetheless been raised in religious homes and have learned to respect the Bible. When talking to such people, make full use of the Word as the authoritative source for the information being shared.

Note also that Peter did not dwell on his personal experience. He mentioned it only twice. At the beginning he used it as a jumping-off point to focus the attention of the crowd, which had been amazed by the display of power by the Holy Spirit, onto the work of Christ. At the end, he mentioned that he had personally experienced the things he was talking about, having been a witness of Christ’s resurrection. Make sure that your students understand that witnessing should focus on Christ, not on themselves. It is the work of Jesus that saves, not some personal experience.

In Acts 10, there are two useful things to notice. The first is that this conversation took an enormous amount of preparation on God’s part. Peter had no inclination to preach to Gentiles, and Cornelius had no idea to whom he should turn to get answers to the questions that filled his mind. God miraculously brought them together. While in this case God’s behind-the-scenes work was evident to the people involved, often it is not. God may put you in a position to have a casual conversation with a total stranger for which He has been preparing both of you for months. Do not be afraid or hesitant - God knows what He is doing, and prepares those He is planning to use.

The second point to be made from this story is that God's Spirit does not require clever arm-twisting on our part to bring a person to the point of salvation. Peter never finished what he was planning to say. God saved Cornelius without any sort of invitation on Peter's part (notice, too, that the crowd in Acts 2 asked Peter what they should do before he could tell them).

The most important practical hint to be found in Acts 17 is that Paul brought them from where they were to where he wanted them to be. His listeners knew nothing about God or His Word, yet he was able without the use of specific Scripture passages to communicate the basic truths about God that they needed to know in order to understand the Gospel. Even though a person may be very intelligent, he may be very ignorant of the simplest of spiritual truths. Such a person may indeed turn away scoffing when the basic facts of Scripture are explained, but not all will turn away. Some, like Dionysius and Damaris, will believe.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the lessons learned from the three passages in Acts. Remind the students that the content of the Gospel is the work of Christ, that God's demand of repentance and faith must be made clear to anyone with whom we speak, and that the examples in Scripture give us some very useful methods for presenting the Gospel to people of different backgrounds.



## **FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT**

## **HOW TO SHARE YOUR FAITH**

1. How were the three audiences addressed in Acts 2, 10, and 17 different from one another?
2. What is the basic Gospel content that appears in all three passages?
3. What do all three passages indicate about the response that God demands of men when the Gospel is presented?
4. How should each of these passages serve as an encouragement for Christians to share their faith?