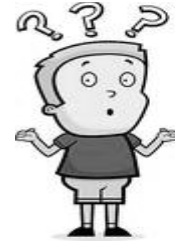


Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson One: Understanding Truth



Unfortunately, many people have accepted a number of myths about Christianity, with the result that they never respond to Jesus as he really is. They reject the gospel on the basis of half truths and lies rather than with a clear understanding of Christ's message. While some teach that it doesn't really matter what one believes as long as they believe in Jesus, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter." Matthew 7:21. This series of lessons will list some of common misconceptions of our day and examine them in the light of God's Word.

Here is a list of what we will study in this quarter:

Lesson One: Introduction: Truth and It's Power

This lesson will serve as an introduction and discuss the fact that we must be guided by an unchanging and ever present truth—the gospel of Jesus Christ found in the Bible.

Lesson Two: Jesus Was Only a Good, Moral Teacher

While some believe Jesus was only a philosopher on the same level as Plato or the Buddha, we find by examining the evidence that Jesus is much more than just a teacher of morals—He is our Savior.

Lesson Three: Science is in Conflict With Christianity

While many attempt to alter the teachings of Scripture to fit the current scientific model, we learn that Scripture must be the basis of our world view and that throughout history it has served as a superior standard compared to all the scientific models of the past.

Lesson Four: All Religions are the Same

Many people believe that all religions are just different pathways to the true God and that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. However, the bible tells us that in order to please God you must know who he is and what he wants you to do.

Lesson Five: Christianity is Only a Crutch for the Weak

Marxist (and mush modern) through lists Christianity as "opium for the masses." That is, only the weak minded and hopeless are susceptible to religion. Actually we find out, as Jesus taught, he who humbles himself before God shall be exalted.

Lesson Six: People Become Christians By Social Conditioning

Ever notice how people tend to believe the same thing their parents, community or social group does? Some believe that religion is primarily based on cultural and social conditioning. Yet the Bible teaches us that we must lay aside our past and follow Jesus.

Lesson Seven: Christianity Stifles Personal Freedom

Many refuse to follow after Christ because they are unwilling to surrender their freedom to choose to do anything they want. Actually Christianity is the pathway to true freedom. No one can truly experience freedom unless they become a slave to Christ.

Lesson Eight: Christianity is Irrelevant to Today's World

Some think that because the Bible is based in an Ancient Near East culture two thousand years ago, it is irrelevant to our modern lifestyle and problems. However the Bible teaches us that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Lesson Nine: The Bible Cannot Be Trusted

Many people teach that the bible is no more than a collection of fables or mythology that cannot be taken literally. Other people believe that there are contradictions in God's Word that renders it untrustworthy. We will study whether or not we can trust the Word of God (the Bible) today.

Lesson Ten: Suffering Proves There is No God

The strongest argument the atheist has is that a good God would never allow the righteous to suffer. This lesson will ask the question of suffering and answer it according to God's Word.

Lesson Eleven: A Loving God Would Never Send Anyone to Hell

If God is love, how can He allow people to suffer for all eternity? If God is good, how can He allow the ignorant (those who have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel) to be lost? We will study God's Word to find the answer to these questions.

Lesson Twelve: We Are Still Under the Ten Commandments

Are we still under the authority of the Old Testament? What role do these 39 books play in our lives? What of those who teach that God's plan of salvation was the same for Abraham and Noah as it is today?

Lesson Thirteen: I'm Not Good Enough To Be A Christian

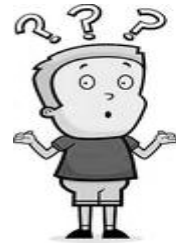
We all make mistakes. We all fall short. What do we say to those who, in light of their sinfulness, believe they could never be a Christian or live the Christian life?

Notice that for each of these lessons, while we may discuss current opinions or events, our basis for truth will be the bible, God's holy word. Many of these questions are rooted in the mindset of Postmodernism. Christian differs from the world view of Postmodernism (seen in Acts 17 and John 18:38). In fact the audience of John's gospel was very similar to our postmodern world today in attitudes and thought. That is why John wrote of Jesus as the logos (Word) and the Truth (John 1:17, 8:24, 14:6, 17:17). God's Word is truth and that is what we must hold on to today regardless of what our ever changing culture teaches today.

As we study these lessons, examine your own mindset and world view and see if any of these misconceptions are held by you or by someone you know. Learn how these misconceptions differ from the truth and prepare yourself to defend the faith. Look for opportunities to share the pure gospel with those in this world who are lost.

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Two: Jesus Was Only A Good Moral Teacher



People marveled at the teaching of Jesus. Whether He spoke in interesting parables (read Luke 15) or gave more straightforward discourses (read Matthew 5-7), people followed Him everywhere, hanging on His every word (Matthew 7:28). “No man ever spoke as this man!” His listeners remarked in John 7:46. And they were right. Jesus was a master teacher and communicator. Moreover, beyond simply teaching the highest moral and spiritual principles ever known, Jesus actually lived them. After He told people to love their enemies; He forgave those who crucified Him. After he told people to lay down their lives for others; He laid down his life for the whole world. After He told people not to worry about material possession; He owned no more than the clothes on his back. Jesus’ example makes Him the most remarkable of all teachers.

And yet that legacy makes it almost too easy for people to dismiss him, ignoring both His message and his person. They say, “Oh Jesus? Yes, He was a great moral teacher.” What they mean is that, for them, Jesus was only a teacher—a greater teacher, perhaps the greatest the world has ever seen, but a teacher and nothing more. That is, instead of being “The Way,” he is placed by these people on the same level as Plato, Aristotle, Ghandi or even Benjamin Franklin.

Neither he nor his followers would allow for that. Jesus was either very much more than a great teacher or else very much less than one. For in addition to his great moral precepts, he made astonishing claims that no other person has ever made, and behaved in ways that no other decent human being has. For instance:

- He claimed to forgive people’s sins, Matthew 9:2, Luke 7:47-48
- He accepted people’s worship, Matthew 8:2-3, Matthew 9:18-19, Matthew 14:33
- He said that he alone was the way to God, the truth of God and the life of God, John 5:40, John 6:44, John 7:16-17, John 14:6
- He said that he had come to seek and save the lost, Luke 19:10
- He promised that he would rise from the dead, Matthew 20:19, Matthew 27:63

- He claimed that humanity would ultimately be accountable to him, Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 25:31-46
- He claimed to be God and allowed others to call him God, Matthew 16:15-16, Matthew 26:63-43, John 8:58

These are astonishing claims. Any teacher who would make them had better be telling the truth or else he would be the worst of all liars and neither great nor moral.

The evidence suggests that Jesus was telling the truth. For in addition to his explicit claims are the implicit claims of fulfilled Old Testament prophecies and the performance of supernatural miracles. And there is also the fact that countless others who have examined his words and actions have come away convinced that he was not merely a great moral teacher, but the very Son of God. Among them have been determined and supposedly unshakeable skeptics like the Apostle Thomas and adamant opponents like the brilliant Saul of Tarsus who ended up becoming his most ardent follower.

To believe that Jesus was simply a great moral teacher is untenable. As C.S. Lewis put it,

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is the son of God: or else a mad man or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

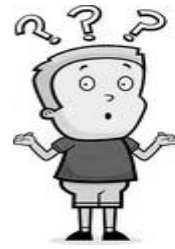
C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 52

Christianity is the most moral and logical of all world views. There is no better life to live than that of a Christian. Yet, if Jesus was just a man; if he was not God; if he was just another teacher or philosopher, then what does that leave for us today? Then what of the Apostles who were beaten, crucified and beheaded for his sake? What about those early Christians who were unmercifully? What of those who have suffered through the centuries for the sake of “The Name?” Yes, Christ is the master teacher, but he is so much more than just that! He’s the very Son of God who is risen from the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.

Jesus cannot be placed on the same level as other world-views or religions, Matthew 6:24. He either must be rejected out of hand or accepted as our Lord and God. What is your choice today?

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Three: Science Is In Conflict With Christianity



The people of Jesus' day demanded miraculous signs as a condition for belief (John 4:48). Yet even though Jesus performed astonishing miracles, his Jewish brothers and sisters by and large rejected him as their Messiah (Jon 1:11). Today many people reject Christianity on similar grounds. *"We live in a natural world,"* they say, *"A world that can be explained by science. Since Christianity relies on faith, it no longer applies to our modern, scientific world."* In fact, Christianity and science conflict." The interesting thing is that while many top scientists do not make this claim, many untrained people do. They have bought into a number of myths, including:

Science can be proven by empirical evidence, Christianity cannot. The truth is both science and Christianity deal with evidence. Science examines evidence about our world from things we can see, touch, measure and calculate. Christianity is based on evidence about our world from the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, John 20:30-31, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. Both deal with matters that are very much open to examination.

Of course, it is a misconception that science can be "proven." The heart of the scientific method is to allow the evidence to lead where it will. But in that case, one cannot prove a scientific hypothesis, but only support it with evidence. In fact, one of the fundamental tenets of science is that it only takes one contrary instance to bring down a hypothesis. For centuries Newton's theories of gravity seemed irrefutably proven. Then along came Einstein. Today even his thinking is given way to new discoveries. Add to this the examples of philosophies help in the past concerning egocentricity, spontaneous generation and the medical practice of bloodletting.

While Christianity does involve a measure of faith, like science, it also includes a measure of dealing with evidence. With an honest examination of the evidence, the Christian world view provides a superior answer to the question of origins, the question of innate morality and the question of the world view of man.

Science is progressive; Christianity resists progress. There is some truth to this—but only some. In times past there have been those who have worn the name Christian who have not lived or acted in a way that brings glory to Christ (i.e., the Crusades, Anti-Semitism, the Dark ages). At certain times in history, Christianity has opposed ideas that seemed to challenge its worldview. Yet at other times Christianity—that is to say, Christians—have been (and still are) on the vanguard of scientific progress. Indeed modern science is largely the product of inquiring believers.

Science is logical; Christianity involves a leap of faith. Without question there is a logic and an order in scientific inquiry. But the same is true for the philosophical, historical, ethical and theological disciplines of Christianity. Our faith is not opposed to reason. While at points it may go beyond reason, it is still a reasonable faith. It hangs together logically. God, who created our minds, expects us to search out the evidence regarding matters of faith and truth, Acts 17:11.

At the same time like Christianity, science demands an element of faith. Faith is not, as one schoolboy defined it, “Believing what you know is not true;” faith involves self-commitment on the basis of evidence. In science, one must commit oneself to the belief that the world we see and touch is real, that nature is uniform, and that it operates according to the principle of cause and effect. Without these prior “leaps of faith,” reasonable though they are, one cannot undertake scientific inquiry.

Science deals with the laws of nature; Christianity thrives on miracles. If science involves a closed, physical universe with fixed, unalterable laws, then the concept of miracles, which involve the local, temporary suspension of natural laws, will prove intolerable. But that is a nineteenth-century view of science. Few scientists of stature support such a view.

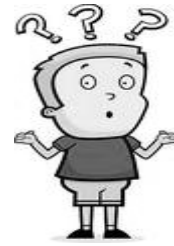
Moreover, the so-called “laws of nature” are not prescriptive but descriptive. They do not determine what may happen; they describe what normally does happen. Therefore, science can legitimately say that miracles do not usually occur in nature. But it would be illegitimate to claim that miracles are impossible. Such a claim speaks outside the limits of science. If God has really come into this world in Christ, is it so surprising that he would perform miracles, as the Gospels report? After all, the whole purpose of miracles was to prove that God is greater than man’s view of the universe

Science is not in conflict with Christianity. To be sure, some scientists are. But other scientists are passionately committed Christians, just like people in other walks of life. There are reasons why people chose for or against Christ, but those reasons are found elsewhere than science.

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Four:

All Religions Are Basically The Same



Peter describes the exclusiveness of Christianity by claiming that “there is no other name” that can save (Acts 4:12). That doesn’t play well in our pluralistic society where tolerance is a chief virtue. Indeed, many people feel that an exclusive commitment to any one religious system is pointless, since they assume that all religions are basically the same. Most of us would never apply such reasoning to any other realm of life. Imagine a student in High School saying, “It doesn’t matter what answer I give in Algebra, Latin, history or Geography. They all come to the same thing in the end.”

Why do so many apply the same shaky reasoning to religion? Perhaps one motivation is the strong desire to see everyone getting along in our global village. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism—all kinds of faiths drive the peoples of the world. If one system claims exclusivity, it’s bound to create hostility among the others. But the fact is, religion is already one of the greatest sources of national and international conflicts—which seems incredibly odd if “all religions are basically the same.” Obviously they are not. With such diverse tenants and world views, at least some must be wrong—there is no way all of them can be correct.

Another reason why people accept this myth is because they think that faith itself is what really matters. “One can believe anything,” they reason, “as long as one believes in something.” But they misunderstand faith. Faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed. Like a rope, it matters enormously what one attaches to it. One can believe in anything—but not just anything will reward one’s commitment. Only what is true. While “faith alone” may be a somewhat calming salve of this world’s trials and punishments here on earth, blind faith will not lead on to truth. That is, blind faith may be effective in enduring this world’s trials, but it alone cannot lead people of all faiths to heaven.

A third reason why people adopt the all-religions-are-the -same line of thinking is that it helps them avoid a decision. Like the stereotypical politician, they seek to please all of the people all of the time. By claiming to find truth and good in all religions, they avoid the ‘messy’ business of questioning each movement’s tenants and making a commitment that may be unpopular to others throughout the world. If all religions are the same, they don’t have to choose any one. In other words, they can avoid religion all together. How convenient!

But they are committing themselves to a deception. The assumption that we are all looking for God and will find him in the end is false both to the nature of people and to the nature of God. In the first place, we are not all looking for God. Many people today have absolutely no interest in god or religion. They are not atheists, just committed secularists. Moreover, there are far more motives behind the practice of religion than a search or desire for God. Political power, tradition, standing in the community, a desire for increased fertility or wealth, even sexual gratification are among the forces driving countless people back to the centers of worship. Looking for God? Hardly! They only seek to please and fulfill themselves.

Nor is there any guarantee that people will find him in the end. If there is a God at all, he obviously lives in the realm above us. Otherwise all of us would already know him from birth. But the religions of the world, including today's New Age systems, recognize that people do not instinctively and naturally know God, which is why they promise their followers access to him. The problem is, they offer competing and often conflicting versions of who God is and how we can know him.

Christianity is unique in that it claims that instead of people gaining access to God, God has made himself known to the people. His ultimate self-disclosure was in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3). No longer is he the unknown god (Acts 17). Although "no one has seen God at any time," Jesus has "declared him" (John 1:18).

So does Christianity claim that all other religions are totally wrong? Of course not. Most have some measure of truth in them. Islam and Judaism in particular have substantial portions of truth contained in their teachings. They are like candles that allow a small bit of light into a dark world. But notice the oftentimes it is the teaching that is closest to the truth that presents the most danger to those seeking God. In fact when man fell, the serpent changed only one word of God's command (Genesis 2:17, 3:4). Yet the resulting disobedience brought sin into this world and is the root of the pain and suffering we endure today. While many religions claim to be truth and to provide access to God, Christ himself claimed to be the exclusive source of truth (John 1:14, John 8:32) and as the exclusive way to the father (John 14:6). All religions pale into insignificance at the dawn that has come with Christ. He fulfills the hopes, the aspirations, the virtues and the insights of whatever is true and good.

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Five: Christianity Is Just A Crutch For The Weak



The believers at Corinth tended to think more highly of themselves that they ought to have. The result was conflict and division in the church. So Paul pointed out that most of them had little of which to boast (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). On the whole they were weak, sinful people saved only by the grace of God. Today the grace of God still reaches out to the weak, the downcast, the broken, and the oppressed (Titus 2:11). Perhaps for that reason, people who pride themselves on their strength and self-sufficiency have little use for the gospel. Indeed, some despise a faith that resists the proud but promises hope to the humble.

Karl Marx, one of the intellectual founders of Communism, labeled Christianity as “opium for the masses.” In his view, religion was little more than a salve to placate the hoards of the underclass people who had no hope of true freedom or fulfillment. But this view of Christianity as “useless dreaming” is not just limited to the outdated philosophy of Communism. Many today see “Church” as something just for children or weak minded folks who really have little understanding about the real world. Jesse Ventura, former pro wrestler and former Governor of Minnesota, made news once by claiming that “Christianity was only for the weak minded.” In the eyes of many, the mature and strong no longer stand in need of the help of Christ.

Is Christianity just another crutch for people who can’t make it on their own? In one sense, yes. “Those who are well have no need of a physician,” Jesus said, “But those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” Luke 5:31-32. Jesus bypasses those who pretend to be invincible; those who think they have it all together. Instead he reaches out to those who know something that is wrong, that their lives are “sick” with “illnesses” such as greed, lust, cruelty and selfishness.

Jesus knows that no one is spiritually healthy outside of Christ. No one is righteous enough by their own works to stand before a holy God (Isaiah 59:1-2). That’s why he came into this world, to restore people to God. The good news is that Christ gives us power to overcome sin and the ways it pulls us down time after time.

What happens to the “weak” who avail themselves of this “crutch?” Notice how the majority of our heroes of the Bible were weak until they were strengthened by God. Think of Gideon, the coward who was emboldened by God to face the vast Midianite army with just three hundred men, Judges 6-7. Or recall Ruth, the young widow whose loyalty earned her a place in the lineage of the Messiah. Think about Abraham, the wandering nomad who no children, who by God’s grace became the father of many nations, Genesis 12:1-3. In the New Testament we see Peter, the impetuous man who became the first gospel preacher. Saul of Tarsus was the chief of sinners until God made him the Apostle to the Gentiles. Each of these characters was weak and helpless in the eyes of the world. Yet God takes those who are weak and empowers them to become something they could not have been on their own. The same is true today. God takes those who have broken marriages and heals them by his teachings, Ephesians 5. God takes those who are caught up in addictions and bad habits and makes them whole once again, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Christianity is not for those who think they can make it on their own; it is for those who know they need a Savior. Until we reach the point where we need a Savior, we will not recognize the true need for Christianity in our lives.

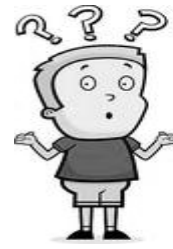
The idea of our relationship with God being based on the recognition of our weaknesses is really the very root of Christianity. While many people regard money as being the root of all evil (read carefully 1 Timothy 6:10), it would be more accurate to think of pride as being the root of most problems in life. Whether it be our personal relationship with God (Saul, 1 Samuel 15:12) or our relationship with others in the church (Diotrephes, 3 John 9), or our relationship with those who are apart from God (note the Pharisees opinion of Zacchaeus, Luke 19:7), pride is the root cause of many problems in the Lord’s church.

Jesus taught that those who desire to be great or strong must first admit their weaknesses (Luke 22:24-33). In fact the Bible tells us repeatedly (James 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:5-6) that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. In order to become what God would have us to be in this life, we must realize our inadequacies and become servants to others.

In one sense, Christianity is a crutch for the weak. But those who dismiss it for that reason usually do so only to deny their own inadequacies. They use that excuse as a way to evade the claims that God has on their lives. They cannot accept that he takes wounded, fractured people and makes them whole.

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Six: People Become Christians By Social Conditioning



Paul's statement that he persecuted the church prior to his conversion (1 Corinthians 15:9-10) is a strong piece of evidence against the commonly held belief that religious preference is mainly a result of upbringing. Without question, cultural circumstances play a part in people's religious beliefs. A Hindu background would tend to predispose a person towards Hinduism, a Christian background towards Christianity, and so forth. We should keep in mind that our social conditioning does affect us (1 Corinthians 15:33, Matthew 5:13-16). But can social conditioning alone explain why people behave and believe as they do? After all, a Christian upbringing is no guarantee that a person won't someday abandon the faith. In a survey done in the early 1980's, churches of Christ in Oklahoma were found to have lost approximately 45% of their young people to the world. Christianity Today, an ecumenical magazine, claimed a few years ago that of those who develop a relationship with Christ, 78% did so before their 20th birthday. On the other hand, countless people who have had no exposure to Christianity in their youth nevertheless convert as adults.

The fact is, Christian conversion is much misunderstood. It is often regarded as sudden, irrational, selective and even illusory. But what are its essential elements? Paul's experience is instructive. While certain aspects of his conversion were unique, four elements stand out that are present in every authentic conversion:

- (1) His conversion touched his conscience. He recognized that he had been fighting God and that his vicious treatment of Christians was wrong (Acts 26:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:13). If our relationship with Christ is to be real and effective, it must be a truly personal experience.
- (2) His conversion touched his understanding. He discovered that the Jesus he was persecuting was no less than the risen Messiah, the Son of God (Acts 9:22). While rational thought is much maligned in today's religious circles, rote emotionalism will not stand long against the rigors of daily temptation and life struggles every Christian will face.
- (3) His conversion touched his will. He gave in to Jesus and began following him (Acts 26:19-20). For Paul, Christianity consisted of more than the classic "mountain top" experience—it was a daily life experience (Philippians 1:21) of maturing and bringing others to Christ.

(4) His conversion produced notable change in his life. His ambitions, his character, his relationships, his outlook—everything changed as a result of his encounter with Christ (Philippians 3:7-11).

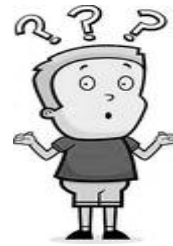
But suppose, as some have, that it all amounts to nothing more than an illusion? Three tests can be applied to determine whether religious experience in general and Christianity in particular is illusory. *First, there is the test of history.* Christianity makes historical claims. Are those claims valid? Does history bear them out? Yes it does. There is nothing illusory about Jesus or his impact in the world. Even the opponents of Christianity in the First Century recognized the power and influence of Christian thought on their society (Acts 17:6). Nor are his claims illusory. Likewise his death and resurrection are well attested. During the First Century over five hundred witnesses could attest to the fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:6). Nor is there any doubt about the reality of the church. Faithful saints throughout the centuries have lived and died according to the power and historical reality of their faith. In short, Christianity is rooted in historical fact. *A second test is the test of character.* When drunkards become sober and crooks become honest, when animists give up their mysticism and people enslaved in black magic are set free, when self-centered people become generous and unbelievers become giants of the faith, it is very difficult to explain it away as an illusion. A quick summary of the Apostle's lives will show the amazing power of Christ to change people. Even many of our modern psychological methods and terms are influenced by Christian principles. Changed lives are not the only evidence of Christianity's authenticity, but they are certainly an impressive one. *Finally there is the test of power.* Delusions and neuroses tend to destroy people's character. While humble men may begin with noble goals and intentions, the principle applies that 'absolute power corrupts absolutely.' Power can produce an unbalanced behavior and actually keep people from achieving their goals. Christianity has precisely the opposite effect (Matthew 5:38-42). It makes people whole. It even enables people to face death—a time when delusions are usually stripped away—with confidence and courage.

History, character, power: these cannot be attributed to social conditioning. Rather they strongly suggest that something far deeper lies behind Christianity, something good, powerful and alive.

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Seven:

Christianity Stifles Personal Freedom



Freedom is the prevailing cry of the world today, the overwhelming preoccupation of individuals and nations. Yet even though Scripture speaks of a liberty that Christ offers, Galatians 5:1-12, some people resist Christianity itself as an obstacle to freedom. Is this view of faith justified?

On the face of it, it seems strange to identify Christianity as an enemy of freedom. After all, Christians have historically stood up for the poor, the oppressed, the captive, and the underprivileged. Likewise, liberation from ignorance, disease and political oppression has invariably resulted wherever Christian faith and principles have been adopted. Christian people tend to be the most kind, generous and forgiving people on the face of this earth. Why then, would some view the faith as repressive?

Perhaps part of the answer lies in the problem of legalism. Whenever Christianity is made into a list of do's and don'ts, it becomes intolerant and restrictive. Instead of enjoying an intimate relationship with a loving God, the legalist is obsessed with rules and regulations, as if God were a celestial policeman just waiting to catch us out of line. Like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, the legalist spends his day pointing out who is right and who is wrong. Their religion is based more on proving themselves superior than on bringing anyone to Christ.

To be sure, Christ does make demands on us that sometime limit our autonomy. If we are to belong to Christ there will be things we must give up and practices we must avoid. But true Christianity sees this as part of a relationship based on love and grace, not unlike a healthy marriage in which both partners sometimes sacrifice their own desires to serve one another. Yes the Christian does give up some things, but he receives much, much more in return, Ephesians 1:3.

But even if there were no legalists, many people would still resist Christianity because they resist any standards that would place absolute claims on them. To them, freedom means pure autonomy—the right to do whatever they want, with no accountability to anyone else. But that leads to irresponsibility and license rather than freedom. Nor do people really love that way. Sooner or later they choose one course of action over another, based on some set of values. In other words, they surrender their will to standards, whether good or bad, and act accordingly. No matter what life decisions someone may make, those choices will limit that

person in some way. So it is not just the values of Christianity that “stifle” personal freedom, but values in general.

Some are so concerned about the ‘stifling’ effect of Christianity; they deemphasize any obligation or necessity for following God’s commands. An example of this occurrence is parents who refuse to make their children come to church services while they are young because they don’t want to ‘force’ them to become Christians. Yet these same parents have their children vaccinated against disease, make their children go to school and even get a job without ever asking the child if he wants to do these things! Some churches refuse to preach or teach anything that might be construed as negative. Such doctrines as an eternal hell, divorce, sacrifice and separation from the world are never heard in these churches because those teachings do not draw large crowds, John 6:66-68.

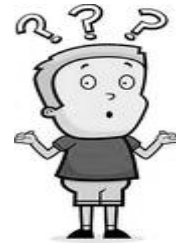
The real question, of course, is what kind of people are we? What is our character? Christians try to mold their character after the pattern of Jesus. He was the most liberated man who ever lived. His ultimate standard of behavior was, “What does my father want me to do?” John 8:29. Did that code stifle his freedom? Hardly. He was utterly free of covetousness, hypocrisy, fear of others, and every other vice. At the same time he was free to be himself, free to tell the truth, free to love people with warmth and purity, and free to surrender his life for others. While Christianity may limit our choices in sinful behaviors, it truly frees us of most of the bad things of this world!

Some see Christianity as stifling and think it is wrong to point out what God’s Word clearly teaches. We see the Bible clearly teaches that the plan of salvation is to hear the Word of God (Romans 10:17), have faith in God to keep his promises (Hebrews 11:6), to repent or turn away from sin (Luke 13:3), be willing to confess Christ to others (Matthew 10:31-32) and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:16). While many people accuse New Testament Christians of being narrow minded or stubborn, following the simple commands found in the word of God will lead to everlasting life and true freedom.

True freedom is Christ-like freedom. There is no hint of legalism about it. It accepts absolute moral standards that are well known and proven, and it takes its inspiration from the most liberated human being who ever lived, Jesus of Nazareth. What is stifling about that?

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Eight: Christianity Is Irrelevant To Today's World



The writer of Hebrews encourages us to live with an eye toward the “cloud of witnesses” who watch us from heaven and look to Jesus who sits at God’s right hand (Hebrews 12:1-2). Perhaps it is images such as these that cause some people to think of Christianity as detached from the world. They prefer a worldview that seems more relevant to everyday life. There are those who claim to believe only in the things that they can see or touch with their own eyes and hands (John 20:25). They demand everything in this world to be proven and refuse anything that requires faith—even a rational faith (Romans 1:20). Others may have the thought that Christianity seems too old-fashioned for their modern-day world. They have new gadgets in their homes and they, like the Greeks in Acts 17, are always looking for the newest thing to fit their need. Others view Christianity as irrelevant because they are really only concerned with themselves. Perhaps they are so busy dealing with problems and situations in life that they ignore the possibility of any greater thing existing. They might say, “Unless Christianity fits my needs, I don’t have time for it.”

To these people, true Christianity that puts others first and calls us to serve will seem very irrelevant. Others who are enamored with the modern way of life and the scientific progress of the last century say, “What can a religion that was founded in a backward society on the other side of the world two thousand years ago have to say to modern man who can walk on the moon and cure heart disease?”

Yet God will always be relevant to mankind. After all he is the ultimate creator of the universe and of all that we see or know. It is he who made man (Genesis 1:27) and sustains him (Colossians 1:15-17). It is he who provides for our every need (Matthew 6:25-33). And he will be the one who judges us on the last day (Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 25:11-15). In light of these things, really it is the one who trusts in his possessions (Matthew 6:19-21) and in the physical world around him (2 Peter 3:10) that has the irrelevant world view!

So what is it that makes Christianity seem so irrelevant to many in today’s world? One source of this problem is man’s ignorance of true Christianity. For too many in today’s world, Christianity is no more than an old pope who sits on a stage and can’t talk, or a homosexual bishop who claims he is more godly than the Bible, or a televangelist who asks the poor and the widowed for money to finance his new yacht. An emphasis needs to be made concerning the true nature of Christianity to today’s world. A return to the true Christ of the Bible and the

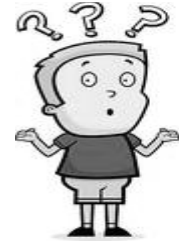
true church of Christ must reverberate from our teachings and from our everyday lives. People must be able to see Christ in us and hear of Christ from us. Far too often man has been a poor reflection of what Christianity truly is supposed to be in the world.

Another reason why some see Christ as irrelevant to modern day living is pride. Some are so caught up in their world view that they scoff at biblical Christianity (Acts 17:32). Of course any philosophy that demands we surrender ourselves and serve others will be unpopular with some. But when you really get down to it, what worldview is as relevant as Christianity?

Is Christianity Relevant In Today's World?	
What is the meaning of life? Ecclesiastes 12:13	Secret to contentment Philippians 4:11-13
Where did life originate? Genesis 1:1	True happiness, Philippians 4:13
Does God exist? Psalm 19:1	Is there an afterlife? John 14:1-6
How to resolve conflict, Matthew 18:15-17	Am I important? John 3:16
The use of money, Luke 12:13-21	True love, 1 Corinthians 13
Alcohol and drugs, 1 Corinthians 6:12	Dealing with guilt, 1 Timothy 1:15
Racism, James 2:1-9	Young people, 1 Timothy 4:12

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Nine: The Bible Cannot Be Trusted



Is the Bible a trustworthy document? Are the Scriptures true as written? Or are they full of myths that may have symbolic value but little if any basis in fact? People have been questioning the Biblical record almost from its beginnings. Peter, for instance, encountered skepticism as he presented the gospel in the First Century. His claims about Jesus were nothing but cleverly devised fables, some said—a charge he vehemently denied (2 Peter 1:16). Today the Bible's credibility and authority are still attacked. Yet how many critics have carefully studied its teaching? How many have even looked at the story of how it came to be written?

A careful reader will recognize that the Bible is not so much a single book as a library of sixty-six books. It contains a variety of literary genres: history, poetry, narrative, exposition, parable and apocalyptic. Its many authors wrote over a period of some two thousand years using three languages-Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Probably all but one (Job) were Jews. Remarkably, the writers tell one unified story:

- In the midst of cultures who worship rocks, wood, metals, mountains and dreams, they offer the same understanding of God throughout. He is one God, creator, savior and judge. He is all powerful, all knowing and eternal. His character is holy, good loving and just. Regardless of the world view of the time of writing, the Biblical writer's view of God all match.
- In cultures that considered some people such as Pharaoh to be deities and others to be property as slaves, the Biblical writers offer the same understanding of human nature. People are made in God's image and are capable of great good. Yet they are also sinful and capable of great wickedness. The need of humanity is to be reconciled to God and to each other.

- They offer a common understanding of Jesus Christ. He is both God and man. He became a real human in order to show the world the God it could not otherwise perceive. Something deeply significant happened as a result of his death on the cross, making it possible for God and humanity to be reconciled.
- They offer the same hope; God will accomplish his purpose for his creation.

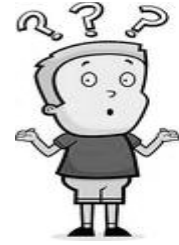
Aside from the internal evidence that Scripture is what it claims to be—the very words of God—is a growing body of external evidence that supports its reliability as a document. For example, scholars have found many contemporary sources that parallel the scriptural record. For instance, Jesus is mentioned by two Roman writers of the First Century, Tacitus (Annals 15.44) and Pliny the Younger (Letters 19.96), as well as by some Jewish writings of that period, including Josephus (Antiquities 18:3.3) and the Mishnah, a collection of traditions under compilation in Jesus' day.

Another body of research that proves invaluable for Biblical studies is archeology. Countless discoveries have helped to verify the text of Scripture, most notably the Dead Sea Scrolls. Likewise digs throughout the Mediterranean have supported biblical references to various places and people and the events of which they were a part thousands of years ago. Sir William Ramsey was a noted archeologist of the 19th century who set out to prove that Christianity was false. After deep study of the lands on the Middle East, Ramsey was convinced of the authenticity of the Bible. In fact, his classic commentary on Acts is one of the greatest documents in several centuries proving the Bible to be accurate.

The more one examines the evidence, the more one becomes convinced that the Bible is more than a cleverly devised tale. It has the ring of authenticity. But in that case, readers ought to pay attention to its message. That is the ultimate issue. As Mark Twain aptly put it, "It is not the things in the Bible that people can't understand that prove troublesome, but the things they can understand." Even if people are convinced that the Bible is true from cover to cover, will they heed its message?

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Ten: Suffering Proves There Is No God



Few studies offer a more dramatic or thrilling climax than the closing chapters of Revelation. The scene of finally and ultimately destroying Satan and his hosts (Revelation 20:1-10) brings a bright, joyful conclusion not only to the Revelation of John, but to the entire Bible. Once for all, evil will be banished, never again to trouble God's creation. Yet while Christians look forward to that day with hope, many other people reject God and the gospel precisely because of evil in the world. Their reasoning goes something like this:

- (1) A God who is good and loving would not allow evil and suffering in the world.
- (2) Yet evil exists in the world.
- (3) If God is all-powerful, he would remove evil if he wanted to.
- (4) Yet evil remains. In fact, at times it seems to grow worse.
- (5) Therefore, a good and powerful God must not exist.

This is a powerful argument, and there can be no question that evil and pain are a massive problem to both belief and behavior. While Christians are not immune to the world's problems, the bible does give us ground to stand on as we try to live in a world where suffering is real.

- (1) The bible teaches that God did not create evil. The world he made was utterly good (Genesis 1:31). Where, then did evil come from? The record finds people themselves turning against God, using his gift of free will to rebel against him. With that moral rebellion, the perfection of God's world came tumbling down and people began to suffer.

The bible also claims that behind human weakness lies a great outside influence, Satan. The devil hates God and everything to do with him. He is out to destroy humanity and the environment and does everything he can to attack God and his purposes. To that end he promotes much of the evil and suffering that we see.

(2) The Bible teaches that even though God did not create evil, not does he will it, he nevertheless uses it to accomplish his purposes. For instance, God sometimes uses pain in a profound way to draw people to himself, especially when they otherwise would not respond to him, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Likewise the struggle against evil has led many to strive for what is good, Philippians 3:14. Like an irritating grain of sand in an oyster, it pain has produced pearls of character in countless people-courage, endurance, self-sacrifice, compassion.

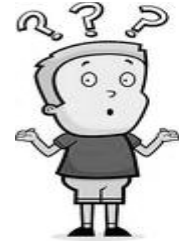
(3) Why then, if God is all powerful, does he not remove evil from the world? The question assumes, of course, that he has done nothing. But in fact, he has, and will be active. First God himself came into this world with all its sorrow, pain and wickedness, and lived as a man, Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus was well acquainted with suffering, Isaiah 53:3. He knew poverty, thirst, hunger, injustice, physical abuse, heart break and betrayal. He ended his life in excruciating pain, 2 Corinthians 5:21. So God certainly understands our condition. He has personally experienced it.

In the process, God dealt with the problem of evil at its root. On the cross, Jesus took upon himself the wickedness of every man and woman who has ever lived in order to do away with it, Genesis 3:15. We may never fully understand what happened in that incredible act of self-sacrifice. But we know that Christ broke the grip of evil that holds the world captive. Already we can see among God's people a glimpse of the new life that he has brought about (Romans 8:4, 11).

(4) That brings us to God's final solution to evil, which John describes in Revelation 20. In the end, God will triumph by doing away with evil itself and those who promote it. He will restore his creation and his creatures to their original purpose, to the original relationship they enjoyed with him. Suffering will only be a memory. Goodness, justice and peace will characterize the moral climate of God's new heaven and earth.

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Eleven: A Loving God Would Never Send Anyone To Hell



One of the more comforting passages of all scripture is found at the end of 1 John 4:8, "God is love." It is wonderful to know that we have a God who loves sinners (Romans 5:8), loves those who have strayed (Luke 15:11-32), and even still loves those who have hearts hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Matthew 23:37). We must always emphasize to this world that doesn't understand love that as long as one lives, one cannot outrun God's love.

However there are some who misconstrue the love of God into a doctrine of licentiousness (Romans 6:1). They believe that a person can believe anything they want to believe, do anything they want to do and live anyway they want to live and still be assured of a heavenly mansion because, "God is love." They seem very much like a spoiled child taking advantage of a generous and naïve parent. Anytime someone points out a command of God or the possibility of eternal judgment, they cry out with the mantra, "God is love!" Let's take a look at the teachings of the bible to see if this is the true nature of God.

While the Bible does say God is love (1 John 4:9), it also contains other titles for God that display other facets of his nature. For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:24 states God is faithful. That is, God will not abandon people in times of crisis. Since God is faithful, no temptation will be presented to us that cannot be escaped (1 Corinthians 10:13). The bible also defines God repeatedly as being "holy" (Leviticus 19:2). The word holy means simply, "set apart." That is, God must set himself apart from sin and evil because of his very nature. In the Old Testament, the Israelites once were complaining that God had abandoned them in the face of danger. The prophet Isaiah pointed out that it was not God who abandoned them but it was they who abandoned God through their sinfulness (Isaiah 59:1-2). When man sins, he automatically separates himself from the fellowship of God, for God must be holy due to his very nature. A third description of God found in the bible is "righteous" (2 Timothy 4:8). While God will be our judge, he has promised to be a righteous judge that will not be swayed by the varying opinions and whims of man. He will judge with righteous judgment.

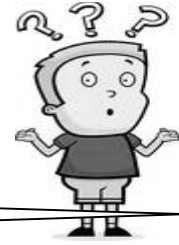
While some think of God's love as an excuse to do evil, take a few moments to study the testimony of the Scriptures. In the days of Noah (Genesis 6-9), man had become very evil. God used the life and preaching of Noah and his family to give ample opportunity to the world for repentance. When repentance did not come, the world perished except for eight souls. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) had an opportunity to see the example of Lot and benefitted from the intercession of Abraham. Yet due to their unrelenting sinfulness, these twin cities were consumed in righteous judgment. Israel felt the sting of God's wrath after they forgot God's blessings and sinned while in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9), while in the Promised Land (Lamentations 2:1-3), and even in the days of Jesus (Matthew 23). Each of these judgments is recounted in Scripture to remind us of the need to live our lives correctly before God (Romans 15:4).

Some today can find no room in their theology for a God who judges and condemns sin. They ask, "If God will send people to hell, how can he be considered a loving God?" Remember the blessings God has given to keep all nations out of torment's flames. First of all, God has given us the beauties of creation (Romans 1:20). By seeing creation, we are given a glimpse of the invisible attributes of God. No one can look at the mountains, the trees of fall and the face of a sweet innocent child and not know that God is love. A second gift God has given man to teach us of his love is companionship. Whether it be family, friends or even the church, we can see the gift of friendship and love flowing from God to man (Hebrews 10:24-25). Third, God has given us time. While this earth deserves to be destroyed right now because of its sin, God will not rush to judgment but instead is waiting until the last moment to give man just a little more time to come for salvation (2 Peter 3:9). The greatest gift God has given mankind is his son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16). Jesus bore the express image of the father on this earth in order to show us the compassion, knowledge and love of the father. We will never be able to fully comprehend what God has done for us through the cross. While many seem to still be waiting for an additional blessing or command from God, God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Yes God is love. No one can look at all the blessings and grace which has been given to man and fail to see a loving God behind it. However, God is not mocked. Since God is faithful, righteous and holy, we must live according to the plan God has given to us today. God has given us ample opportunity to save ourselves through his gospel. On that final day, no one will fault God for what he has done—our blood will be on our own hands if we are unfaithful. God's love draws us to follow the path to eternal life.

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Twelve: We Are Still Under The Ten Commandments



Members of the Lord's church are often accused of not believing in the Old Testament since we preach New Testament Christianity. However, Christians must believe in the Old Testament for it is part of the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Exodus 34:1, 27, Deuteronomy 6:1-9). The question we must ask ourselves is, "What's the purpose of the Old Testament?" Is it a law for us to follow today? Must we still sacrifice a first born lamb or must we still keep the Sabbath (Saturday) holy? These questions were hotly debated in the 1st Century church. In the book of Galatians Paul warns his readers to beware of false brethren who secretly try to put others in bondage (Galatians 2:4) and try to cause Christians to obey the laws of the Old Testament (circumcision, Galatians 5:1-2). As we study the Bible we see that God intended for the Old Testament or Covenant to pass away (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The writer of Hebrews tells us that the First Covenant has been removed in order to make room for the second to take its place. (Hebrews 10:9-10). Paul also wrote that the New Covenant is much better than the fading Old Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:2-18). The matter of how we should view the Old Testament is made clearer when the Scriptures are studied to show us the three purposes of the Old Testament for today:

1. In Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:6-11 we learn that "these things were written for our learning"—"to be an example" to us. When we read of God's dealings with man in the Patriarchal and Mosaic AGES, we learn that sin must be punished and righteousness will be rewarded.
2. The Old Law served as a tutor or teacher to bring us to Christ. "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come we are no longer under a tutor." (Galatians 3:24-25). The Old Law prepared the way for Christ which was grace and truth, John 1:17.
3. Galatians 3:19 teaches that another purpose of the Old Covenant was to temporarily check sin until the seed of Abraham (Christ) should come. God never intended for the Old Law to be permanent (Jeremiah 31:31-34). In Hebrews 8:6-7 we read that the New Testament was ushered in because God found fault with those who were under the "law of commandments contained in ordinances." (Ephesians 2:15).

Some will agree that we are no longer under the Law of Moses but they still make a distinction in saying that we are under the Law of God found in the Old Testament. That is, we no longer have to fulfill the ceremonial requirements such as sacrificing animals or holding feasts (such as Pentecost or Passover) but we do still have to follow the moral requirements such as the Ten Commandments (which includes the Sabbath Day). Notice that the Bible does not make a distinction in the Old Testament between Moral Law and Ceremonial Law. Study the following two Scriptures:

1. Luke 2:22-24 In this passage referring to purification and cleansing, the inspired writer refers to these things as being the Law of the Lord and the Law of Moses. By using these two terms interchangeably, it is proven that God sees no distinction in the Old Testament between the Moral and Ceremonial Law.

2. Romans 7:1-7 In this passage, Paul states that we have become dead to the Law of Moses by the offering of Christ. Which Law was this that we have become dead to? Paul tells us that it is the Law which contained the commandment, "You shall not covet." Which one is that? It is the Ten Commandment Law known by some religionists as the Moral Law! This Law is nailed to the cross and put to death forever (2 Corinthians 3:7-17, Colossians 2:14-16, Hebrews 10:9-10).

One important point to remember when studying the fact that we are no longer under the Old Law is that we are now under the Law of Christ. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated under the New Law, that is, the New Testament. The only one not repeated is the command to keep the Sabbath (Saturday) holy. Therefore, though we are technically no longer under the Ten Commandments, we do have the obligation to obey them except for Sabbath Keeping. Praise God for allowing us to live at a time when we can know God's will and have the opportunity to worship him in fullness (1 Peter 1:10-12).

What The Old Testament Teaches Us
(Romans 15:4)

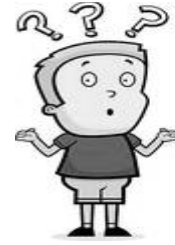
The justice of God (Lev 10:1-3, Josh 7:25-26, 2 Sam 6:6-11)
 The Love of God (Deut 7:7-8, Hosea 3:1)
 The Power of God (Gen 1-2, Gen 7, Exodus 7-14)
 The faithfulness of God (Gen 12:3, Gen 26:4, Gen 28:14)
 The Origin of Man (Gen 1:27, Gen 2:22)
 The Purpose of Life (Ecclesiastes 12:13)
 The Beauty of Jesus (Isaiah 53)
 The Power of Faith (Hebrews 11)
 The Atrocity of Sin (2 Samuel 11)
 The Meaning of Sacrifice (Lev 4:1-12)

The Ten Commandments

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. No other Gods are before God | Mark 18:29-30 |
| 2. Do not make carved images of God | 1 John 5:21 |
| 3. Don't use God's name in vain | Ephesians 4:29 |
| 4. Keep the Sabbath day holy | ----- |
| 5. Honor Your Father and Mother | Ephesians 6:1-3 |
| 6. Don't murder | Matthew 5:21-22 |
| 7. Don't commit adultery | Matthew 5:27-28 |
| 8. Don't Steal | Ephesians 4:28 |
| 9. Don't Bear False Witness | Revelation 21:8 |
| 10. Don't Covet | Hebrews 13:5 |

Misconceptions Concerning Christianity

Lesson Thirteen: I'm Not Good Enough To Be A Christian



According to the Scriptures one of man's greatest problems is the sin of pride (1 John 2:15-17). There is definitely no shortage of bible verses that warn of the dangers that excessive pride can produce in the Christian (Proverbs 11:12, Proverbs 16:18, James 4:6-8, and 1 Peter 5:5). In Matthew 23, Jesus condemned the Jewish leadership of the day for their excessive pride in their own religion. The Pharisees were often guilty of thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to have done.

While pride is a great danger to the Christian today, there can also be a danger at the other end of the spectrum. A number of people are not obedient to Christ because of feelings of excessive guilt. Guilt can be a useful tool in helping a person to live in the way God and society desires him to. But sometimes guilt can be misplaced to the point that the person is paralyzed in a way that prohibits him from doing the things he should do. This is evident in such statements as, "I'm not good enough to be a Christian." Or "God could never love me because of the things I have done." It has been said that guilt is the crucial factor in the problems that people bring to Christian counselors. When studying guilt it is important to differentiate objective guilt and subjective guilt.

In his book called *Christian Counseling*, Gary Collins lists three reasons why people feel misplaced guilt. First they must deal with past experiences and unrealistic expectations. Secondly they might be dealing with feelings of inferiority or social pressure. And lastly, perhaps they must face faulty conscience development. All people who compare themselves as sinners to the majesty and holiness of God will feel a sense of guilt (Isaiah 6). What is paramount though is our reaction to the guilt we face. In Matthew 27:3-5 Judas realized the gravity of his sin of betraying Jesus and tried to make amends by returning the money to the chief priests and elders. When he saw that he could not atone for his sin and could not find forgiveness in the places he sought it out; he went and hanged himself. Judas suffered from what can be called the "Martyr Complex." Some who find themselves in sin and do not see an available means of escape punish themselves and do not avail themselves of the opportunity of God's forgiveness (2 Corinthians 7:8-10). This is the root of those who refuse to become Christians because of their sinfulness and shortcomings. Note that just as in the case of Judas, condemning and punishing ourselves does nothing to justify us of our sin. Contrast this to

Peter's experience in Matthew 26:69-75. While Jesus' was left alone in the trial before Pilate and Herd, Peter stood nearby and denied his friend and Rabbi three times. When he realized his sin, he went out and wept bitterly. But instead of destroying himself because of feelings of guilt, Peter returned to the resurrected Christ and sought forgiveness. Notice that it was probably easier for Judas to end his life than it was for Peter to find forgiveness before Jesus (John 21:15-19).

While we see the sinfulness and shortcomings of our lives, we must remember that God has always taken those who are weak and made them strong (2 Corinthians 12:9). Notice the examples of Gideon (Judges 6:15), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-7) and Paul (1 Timothy 1:5). God will not help the prideful man but will help those who see their needs through their weakness and God's strength. God has equipped his saints to fight in the battle of salvation (Ephesians 6:10). Notice the tools he has provided for us (Ephesians 1:3). He has given us a Savior to take away our sin (2 Corinthians 5:17), he has given us a plan to inherit eternal salvation (Ephesians 1:4-6), he has established the church to place us in the body of Christ and to provide encouragement to each of us as we live upon this earth (Matthew 16:18, Hebrews 10:24-25), he has provided strength to carry us through our trials and labors (Matthew 6:33) and he has provided a source of wisdom to each one of us (James 1:5).

In his book called Personal Counseling, Bill Flatt lists three things that the person burdened with guilt should remember. First, remember that God loves you. He knows you better than you know yourself (Matthew 10:30). He sent his son to die for you on the cross because he wants you to be saved (John 3:16). And as long as you live on this earth, you cannot escape God's love (Romans 8:31-39). Secondly those burdened with guilt must remember that God will forgive. God forgave the murderers of Jesus (Acts 2:37-38) and God forgave a murderer of Christians (1 Timothy 1:5). That is proof that God will forgive every sin that is repented of properly (1 John 3:20-21). Thirdly when we are forgiven we must then become productive members of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 15:58, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Ephesians 3:20). There is great difference between just asking for forgiveness and changing our lives to live as God would want us to live (compare 1 John 1:9 and 2 Corinthians 7:8-10).

Those who want to live productive and godly lives must know how to deal with the problem of guilt. Proper thinking is necessary for us to attain a sense of peace (Philippians 4:8). Remember that God never excuses sin but he is willing and able to forgive sin (Psalm 103:12). Much like the father of the prodigal son in Luke 15, God is waiting for us to return to his presence to be cleansed and made whole again.