

Life Principles Center

Course: Now That You Believe

T1_CA_L1: God Loves You Just as You Are (AS051)

Introduction

Throughout my ministry, I have pastored men and women at all levels of spiritual maturity. I've been with those who have walked faithfully with God for over 70 years, and I've been with those who have just begun their journey with the Lord. And something I've learned throughout these experiences is that there is never a time in our Christian life when we outgrow the basics of our faith. There are some key truths that lie at the heart of Christianity—truths that may appear to be simple and yet have an unmistakable impact on how we live our lives, understand Scripture, and interact with God.

In this course, I want to emphasize some of these essential truths, as we discover God's amazing love, and how that love has brought us forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation with our Holy God.

Lesson 1, Section 1

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 1, you should be able to:

- A. Understand what it means to describe God's love as complete, unconditional, unmerited, unchanging, personal, and radically life changing.
- B. Recognize areas where you have believed something false about God as the eternal Lover of your soul.
- C. Evaluate areas in which you've falsely tried to gain or earn more of God's love.
- D. Recognize times you've doubted God's complete, unconditional love.

Scripture

Read Romans 5:1-10

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of

God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Lesson 1

One of the most difficult things to accept when we first come to know the Lord Jesus Christ is that God loves us just as we are. We humans have a tendency to strive to “deserve” what we have. Monetary wealth, loving families, solid careers . . . these are the things that we strive to *earn*. God’s love, however, can never be earned by human effort. There is *absolutely nothing* that we can do to *make* God love us, or to make Him love us *more*. (Romans 5:8) You may understand this intellectually, but have trouble believing it deep down in your heart. Sometimes we don't even realize our struggle to fully believe in God's free, unchanging love.

J1: Have you ever tried to make God love you more by serving Him in some way or by striving to live a "better" life? Asking God for personal insight, list two ways you have tried to earn more of God's favor.

No matter what your past has dictated or what you feel right now, God's love has always been freely given to you. God pours His love upon us with no exceptions—no ifs, ands, or buts. My Christian friend, God did not begin to love you at the moment you invited Him into your life. He did not begin to love you when you first started going to church. He did not begin to love you when you rose from the baptismal waters. In truth, God never “began” to love you at all; He simply always has. From the creation of the world, God knew you and loved you. (1 John 4:19; Psalm 139:13)

A foundational truth in exploring this aspect of God’s character is that His love never wavers one degree to the left or right. It is always exactly the same, never changing, for all eternity. (1 John 4:16-17)

This may be shocking news for you. Have you ever been so remorseful for something you have done that you honestly believed that it made God love you less?

J2: In your journal, write about a particular experience you had when you felt as though God could love you less because of something you did or said. What happened, and how did you feel?

Most of us have had this fear at one point. No matter how we've felt before, however, we have the assurance of Scripture that God's love does not change. He loves us no matter what we may do. In fact, He was well aware of our sinfulness from the beginning. As we investigate God's love, let us honestly examine the way in which He sees us.

Lesson 1, Section 2

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 1, you should be able to:

- A. Understand the implications that Adam and Eve's sin had on God's view of all men and women.
- B. Recognize how your sinful nature has been expressed in actions, thoughts, attitudes, or words.
- C. Understand your need for the Savior by memorizing and concentrating on specific Scripture verses.

First, consider Genesis 1:26, in which God makes man in His own image. What is this "image?" It is the likeness, countenance, and radiance of God that permeated Adam and Eve. However, when sin entered the world, it blotted out this divine image. Therefore, people are not born with the image of God today; instead, we are born into a world of sin and rebellion. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Second, because of the sinfulness of the world, Scripture calls every person born into sin "ungodly." (Romans 5:6) Our "ungodliness" is evident in the fact that the image of God has been defaced in each of us, so that we no longer radiate God. In this, we are helpless to save ourselves or to reestablish a proper relationship with God.

Third, God sees each of us as sinners. (Romans 3:10-12, 23) "Sin" is a word that is used a great deal in different ways, which often makes it difficult to discern the true meaning of the term. The original Greek word (the language of the New Testament) for sin means "to miss the mark."

This means that the sinner has stepped beyond the boundary of what God allows. As one “missing the mark,” a sinner is helpless to redeem himself.

Q1: True or False: Sin covered up the godly image of all humans when Adam and Eve disobeyed God.

J3: Take a few minutes to reflect in your journal on your sinful nature. What are some ways—attitudes, thoughts, words, or actions—that your sinful nature has expressed itself? In other words, what are some ways you have “missed the mark”?

Fourth, Romans 5:10 clearly describes all people as “enemies” of God. You may object, “Well, even though there was a time when I did not know Jesus as Lord, I certainly don’t think that I was God’s enemy.” This is a misconception. If you declare by your actions that you do not need the redemption that Christ offers, then you have set yourself against God, even if you are a “nice” person. God does not judge men the way we judge each other; a person can only evaluate one’s outward actions, but God judges the innermost being. (Hebrews 4:12)

Finally, Romans 3:10-18 paints a heartbreaking picture of man’s true nature. It begins, “There is none righteous, not even one.” This is an indictment against the notion that one’s good works can make him a good person. In short, there is *nothing* that we can do to earn God’s favor and approval.

This is the bad news. However, there is joy in understanding our true, dark condition. Only by coming to terms with the depths of our depravity can we fully appreciate the extreme grace and love with which God has saved us. In the next lesson, we will examine this radical forgiveness that God has offered us.

Prayer

Father, I know that I am a sinner. I know that despite my best efforts, I have continually fallen short of your glory. Lord, I know I don’t deserve your favor, your grace, or your love, and yet I know that you pour them out on me anyway. I could never earn my way to salvation. You have brought me into your eternal presence through no work of my own. Thank you for loving me even though I don’t always seem to be able to love you and for offering me the wonderful gift of eternal salvation. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory:

The Scripture memory assignment for this course is given below. Be sure to commit this passage to memory before moving on to the next lesson. Then, practice reciting it over and over throughout this course.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

J4: As you think about the significance of your own helplessness before God, do you understand how deeply you need Jesus Christ? How does Romans 5:8 change your view of God as not just being loving, but as embodying love itself?

Life Principles Center

Course: Now That You Believe

T1_CA_L2: God Loves You Just as You Are (AS051)

Introduction: Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." For that reason, we encourage you to complete each assignment before progressing to the next lesson. This lesson is structured with two separate sections to help you maximize your study time.

Lesson 2, Section 1

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 2, you should be able to:

- Understand how Romans 1:24-32 defines your personal need for God's forgiveness.
- Distinguish between God's role and your role in the process of forgiveness.

Scripture

Read Romans 5:1-10

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Lesson 2

In the previous lesson, we saw that it is impossible to “make” God love us any more or any less. His love remains constant; our attempts at good works cannot impress Him into favoring us, and our sin and failures cannot cause Him to stop loving us. Therefore, we can never take credit for the way God sees us. Instead, all honor and praise for His love are due to God alone.

In order to fully appreciate His love, we need to understand the depths to which sin has corrupted humanity. Romans 1:24-32 presents an unsettling description of mankind, showing that we are prone to idolatry, violence, unnatural passions and lusts, unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, and evil. As horrible as this portrayal is, this describes exactly whom it is that God loves. And, although we do not often realize it, these characteristics describe each and every one of us.

You may review this passage and argue, “Well now, wait a minute! I’m nothing like that! I’m not perfect, but I’m a pretty good person.” That may be true, but there are a couple of things that you must consider. First, the potential for every one of these corrupt, disturbing behaviors resides within every man, woman, and child on earth. We cannot escape it; this is our destiny as part of a sinful world. Second, the “good person” defense falls far short of God’s perfect holiness. Scripture describes even our best attempts at righteousness as merely “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). In short, we cannot “work our way up” to God’s favor.

J1: Take a few minutes to look up the underlined words above that are referenced from Romans 1:24-32. Which word and its definition most pierces your heart? How do you see evidence of that definition in your own life and daily habits? Record it in your journal.

It is not up to us to work ourselves up to God’s level. Instead, He reached down and expressed His love to each of us not because of what He saw within us, but because it is in His nature to love with no limits, boundaries, or conditions. (Romans 5:8, John 3:16).

Q1: True or False? Forgiveness is initiated by God; man's responsibility is receiving God's forgiveness.

Lesson 2, Section 2

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 2, you should be able to:

- A. Recognize God's motivation for forgiveness.
- B. Understand and reflect upon how your habits and attitudes may reflect resistance to God's love.
- C. Grasp and process the extent of the love God has for you.

Many people hold off on making a commitment to the Lord because they want to wait until they “clean themselves up” a bit. You may hear them say things like, “I want to follow Jesus, but I need to quit doing this first.” Friend, I want you to know that God loves every single one of us just the way we are. He did not wait for us to “clean up.” Instead, “*While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8, emphasis added). Knowing that we could never improve our situation, God reached into our pit of despair and pulled us up into His presence through His Son Jesus Christ.

You do not have to improve yourself; in fact, it is not even possible to improve the old self—that is why Almighty God sent His only Son. The message of the Cross is that we needed deliverance, not improvement. This deliverance means that even God is not interested in attempting to *improve* us; instead, He completely removes the old self from us and replaces it with Himself. In this, we truly are a “new creation” in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Q2: *What was the motivation behind God's forgiveness through His Son's death on the cross?*

- *He wanted to make us better people.*
- *He knew we could not improve upon our sinfulness.*
- *He loved us, even in the midst of our sinfulness.*
- *He wanted to motivate us to try to live better lives.*

Both B and C

- *Both C and D*

Because God is love (1 John 4:16), you may think that providing this loving deliverance was effortless for Him. However, this saving work came at a high price. It required God the Father to send His only Son to die on a cross. Jesus was betrayed, broken, beaten, humiliated, and murdered. However, the physical pain was only part of the torture; we can best see the price paid for our salvation in Jesus’ cry from the cross, “My

God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). At that moment, Almighty God separated Himself from His Son, with whom He had lived in perfect union for all eternity. There, apart from the Father, Jesus Christ tasted hell for every single person who had ever been or would ever be born.

That is the most profound demonstration of God’s love for us—not that He allowed Jesus to die, but that He turned His back on Jesus so that He could taste eternal death in place of all men. If we resist this love even by striving to earn God’s favor for ourselves, then we are in effect telling Him that His sacrifice was not enough. Friend, I assure you that it was indeed enough.

J2: In your journal, answer the following question: People who fail to understand God’s love as completely unconditional often try to “work their way up” to Him. What are some ways in which you have tried to earn God’s favor? (Think about your motivation behind good works, service in the church, setting spiritual disciplines such as prayer and Bible study, or putting pressure on yourself to live up to a certain standard.)

If you have trouble accepting the unconditional love of God, I would encourage you to prayerfully think about the price paid for your forgiveness. Did you pay the price? No. Could you have paid the price? No. Only God could have done it, so He did. Why? Because He loves you . . . just as you are.

Now that we have taken a serious look at *why* God acted to deliver us, we will spend the next several lessons examining the results of that saving work. I look forward to seeing you back for the next lesson, titled “You Are Forgiven.”

Prayer

Father, as I think about that beautiful song, "Oh love that will not let me go / I rest my weary soul in Thee," (Baptist Hymnal, *O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go*, George Matheson, 1882), how would we pray today that somebody weary from running, weary from struggling, weary from worrying and fretting—full of fear, anxiety, loneliness, frustration, and hurt—that today in the name of Jesus Christ and through His precious blood, responding to Your infinite love, oh Lord, my God, would You draw

[that] somebody to the Cross? For surely there's room at the Cross today. There was yesterday, there will be tomorrow, there will be until Jesus comes. Would You speak to that somebody, drawing them to the Cross, confessing and repenting of their sins, falling upon their face before You, oh God? And then, Father, all the rest of us, who at times are prone to doubt, going by our feelings rather than by the facts of Your relationship to us. I pray that even while we stand right here that there may be some, dear God, who would be willing to say to You right now:

Oh, my Father, today I accept once and for all—and forever—that You love me just the way I am. Working on me, yes. Pruning me, yes. Having replaced me, yes.

Oh Lord God, would You speak to that somebody's heart and bring them to the place that they're willing to accept Your unconditional love of them, that whatever may be going on in their life, it will always be an expression of Your love. And I'll thank You for that in Jesus' name and for His sake, Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory

Be sure to review your Scripture memory assignment for this course!

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

***J3:** As you prayerfully consider Romans 5:8 and the content of the first two lessons of this course, how has your view of God's love been strengthened or deepened?*

Life Principles Center

Course: Now That You Believe

T1_CA_L3: You Are Forgiven (AS121)

Introduction: What makes a successful student? The Lord answers, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it" (Joshua 1:8). Divided into two sections, this lesson contains assignments that you are encouraged to finish before continuing to the next lesson.

Lesson 3, Section 1

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 3, you should be able to:

- Understand Colossians 2:13 and recognize its significance on your forgiveness of past and future sin.
- Understand the enduring depths of your forgiveness in Christ.

Scripture

Read Colossians 2:9-15

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Lesson 3

Last time, we saw that God really does love each of us just as we are. We do not have to try to clean ourselves up before we can accept God's gift of salvation; rather, God's grace reaches down into our darkness and pulls us up to Him. In understanding our salvation, it is essential here at the beginning to clearly see that if we have accepted

Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior, then we have been forgiven of all our sin—past, present, and future.

Q1: Consider *Colossians 2:13*:

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.

Identify the significance of the word **all** in relation to your own life.

Choose one.

- A. *It means every sin I committed before coming to know Jesus has been forgiven.*
- B. *It means every sin I committed before coming to know Jesus, and every sin I've committed up to this point in my Christian walk, is forgiven.*
- C. *It means every sin I recognize in the past, present, and future is forgiven.*
- D. *It means all my sin—that I know of and don't know of—has been forgiven for all time (from the past, in the present, and even my future sin).*

People tend to boast about the things in their lives that they are proud of. For some, it is money; for others, it is prestige. For a disciple of Jesus Christ, however, there is only one thing in which we should boast, and even that is not of our own making. The apostle Paul said it best, “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (*Galatians 6:14*). This means that a Christian’s greatest, most valuable possession is the free gift of forgiveness that was won by Christ on the cross.

We will never be the free, liberated people God wants us to be until we begin to realize the radical depths of our forgiveness. Scripture clearly and boldly proclaims that every believer lives under the canopy of God’s continual, unending forgiveness. Take a few minutes to review these vital passages in the Word:

Colossians 1:13: “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.”

Romans 8:1-2: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

John 5:24: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

These Scriptures reveal that a specific historical event in the past—Jesus’ death and resurrection—has present day implications. Not only that, but it also has future implications. Two thousand years ago, God placed the sin of the world—all sin past, present, and future—on the cross with Jesus and that sin died then and there. When Christ arose, our sin did not. Therefore, that act relieves the burden of our sin still today. When we accept Jesus as Lord, we enter into that forgiveness and every sin we have ever committed—or *ever will commit*—is washed away.

Every sin you have ever committed or could ever commit (every impure thought, bad attitude, wrong action, and lie you believe) has been buried, washed away, removed "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12) with one painful act.

J1: How does the paragraph above change the way you view yourself and God?

Lesson 3, Section 2

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 3, you should be able to:

- A. Understand the meaning of repentance.
- B. Distinguish between the punishment *for* sin and the consequences *of* sin.
- C. Examine your heart to recall when you repented of your sin and received God's gift of forgiveness.

In His wisdom, God knew that there would never be a way for us to atone for our own sin. He knew that we could never be pure enough, good enough, or righteous enough to make up for our own shortcomings. Therefore, He acted to provide this salvation for us through Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:7 explains, “In Him [Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.” This reveals that we have been *redeemed*. In this sense, “redemption” means that we were once held captive by sin, but God paid a ransom to free us from our bondage.

The last part of this verse explains the motivation behind this saving act—God’s grace. This grace is His unmerited favor that is expressed through love. As we have seen, God loves each of us passionately, and He therefore acted on our behalf to rescue us from the chains of our sin.

While God’s saving work delivered us from the curse of sin, it is still a gift that must be received. There is absolutely nothing any of us can do to *earn* salvation; however, we do have a responsibility to repent of our sin and accept that which Christ has given. Repentance is a change of attitude that results in a change of action. It is turning away from sin and turning toward God.

When we step away from sin and toward Jesus Christ, we enter into the forgiveness that God offers. Salvation is available to everyone; however, we live in a world where it's popular to refuse God's gift because of our own pride or negligence.

Q2: Choose the correct statement below:

- E. Repentance begins when we change our course of action.*
- F. Repentance begins when we change our minds about a particular course of action.*
- G. Repentance can be defined as being sorry for our sinful decisions.*

Many people fail to understand the full impact of their forgiveness because they still suffer from the consequences of their sin. They may argue, “Well, I must not be forgiven because I’m still suffering the effects of my sin.” It is important to realize that there is a difference between forgiveness and consequences. Scripture has promised that God has forgiven all sin through Christ; however, our specific acts of sin may still have consequential results in our lives.

Rather than being seen as God’s punishment for sin, these results must be seen as the natural, expected outcomes of certain acts or behaviors. Just as jumping out a second-story window results in falling to the ground, our decisions to sin have consequences.

J2: What are some consequences you've had to endure because of your sin?

We must understand that *believers cannot be punished by God for their sin*. This is because the punishment for our sin has already been

borne by Jesus Christ. Since the penalty has been paid already, God will not send the punishment again.

Q3: *True or False? God will never punish us for our sinful choices, because He has already punished Jesus Christ in our place.*

Rejoice! Despite our sinfulness, we know that God can look at us as redeemed because Jesus has won our freedom from the chains of sin. Moreover, the sins we will commit in the future have been forgiven as well. In the next lesson, we will examine this issue of redemption further as we take a look at the price Jesus paid and the results of that sacrifice.

Prayer

Our Father, we thank You and praise Your holy name for Your forgiveness. When we think about the fact that if we worked a thousand years or ten thousand, we could never do anything to merit the remission of our sins, the forgiveness of our sins, the cleansing of our life, writing our name in the Lamb's Book of Life; we could never do anything to be worthy of that. So we just have to come today, helpless before You, to thank You for Your forgiveness and recognize in our heart were it not for the atoning death of Jesus Christ, we'd all be helplessly and hopelessly and eternally lost. I praise Your holy name for Your forgiveness. I thank You, Lord God Almighty, for what You've provided, and ask that today somebody, many somebodies, would receive right here and now the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior by acknowledging You, repenting of their sin, being willing to confess to You, Father, their sinfulness and then, in an act of repentance, turn from that, allowing You to change their attitude, their affections, and their actions, and receiving by faith Jesus as their Savior, their Lord, and their Master. Then, Father, I pray that many people right now would be willing to pray this prayer:

Heavenly Father, because of Jesus Christ's death on the cross and [because] He bore all of my penalty, all of my punishment, I accept Your everlasting forgiveness as mine today and forevermore. Praise Your name Jesus is our prayer this morning. Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory

Be sure to review your Scripture memory assignment for this course!

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

J3: *Can you pinpoint a particular time when you accepted God's gift of forgiveness? Even if you don't know exact dates, write about your salvation experience in your journal before moving on to Lesson 4.*

Life Principles Center

Course: Now That You Believe

T1_CA_L4: You Are Redeemed (AS191)

Introduction: This lesson is divided into two sections to help you complete the entire lesson at your convenience. In order to renew your mind with God's Word and give you an accurate view of Him, it's very important that you take time to complete each assignment before moving on to the next lesson.

Lesson 4, Section 1

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 4, you should be able to:

- Recognize God's plan of redemption in its entirety and become familiar with Scripture references to support it.
- Understand the significance of Jesus Christ as our Redeemer from bondage to sin.

Scripture:

Read Ephesians 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.

Lesson 4

In the previous lesson of this course, we focused upon the complete forgiveness for our sins provided for us through Jesus Christ. It is vital to our Christian growth, though, that we not only see ourselves as forgiven, but also as redeemed. This is a word that is often used in Christian discussion, but do we really know what it means? Let us spend some time examining the concept of redemption as we strive to understand how Jesus' sacrifice on the cross affects our lives today.

Until we understand the message of the Cross, we will never understand who God is and what He is like. Before the Cross, there

seemed to be a conflict between God's love and His justice. His love longed to provide unconditional salvation for all sinners, and yet His justice demanded that a penalty be paid for sin. Although He lovingly yearned to embrace mankind, His righteousness would not allow Him to look upon our sin. At the Cross, justice and love became one, as God remained holy and yet provided a way for sinful men and women to join Him forever.

Rather than simply being contained within the pages of the Gospels, the story of God's redemptive plan spans throughout all of Scripture. In the first two chapters of Genesis, the creation of an earthly paradise and the first man points toward the fact that God planned our redemption. The next several chapters of Genesis (3-11) describe the Fall of Man and reveal that redemption was not an option, but rather a requirement for all human beings seeking a right relationship with God. The remainder of the Old Testament, which establishes the history of Israel and points toward the coming Redeemer, demonstrates that God prepared us for His redemption plan. Then, in the Gospels, Jesus' life on earth marks the evidence that God's redemption of man is real and alive. In the book of Acts, when the disciples go into the world to spread the Good News, we see the fulfillment of God's plan to share His work of redemption with all people. The epistles have been recorded and included in the Bible to explain what redemption is, and finally, the Revelation brings the story to a close as God's redemptive plans, preparations, and works come to completion. While the books of the Bible aren't compiled in chronological order, they all fit together like puzzle pieces in time to tell one story—God's redemptive love for you, me, and every other person who has lived or will ever live.

J1: As you examine this truth in the light of God's Word, what thoughts come to mind, and what emotions are evoked? Record them in your journal.

In the New Testament, there are two words that are used to describe the redemption that Christ offers. The first word is translated "ransom" and indicates a price paid to secure someone's freedom. The other word is a term that was used in ancient business, and refers to purchasing something in the market place. The idea that the New Testament writings convey is that our redemption in Christ is much like the redemption of a slave in the first century.

Occasionally, a wealthy man would come to admire or respect a slave and developed a desire to help him. There was only one way to secure that person's freedom, however: the free man had to pay the cash value for the slave—or *buy* him—and then, once the slave was in the possession of the other, the buyer had the right to free him. We can see the meaning of the two terms in this scenario: the buyer paid a *ransom* to *buy* the slave, thereby securing his freedom.

This is what Jesus Christ has done for each of us. Whether we realize it or not, we were once in complete enslavement to our sin. When we talk about redemption, we are referring to the fact that a price has been paid to free us from sin's slave market. The price that was paid—the *only* thing that was sufficient to secure our salvation—was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

- Q1:** *Multiple Choice. To be freed from enslavement to sin means . . .*
- D. *We are like slaves set free from the slave market.*
 - E. *We are no longer "slaves" to our old slave masters.*
 - F. *The price of our freedom, or our deliverance, from the captivity of sinful habits and attitudes has been paid by someone else—Jesus Christ.*
 - G. *None of the above.*
 - H. *All of the above.*

Lesson 4, Section 2

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 4, you should be able to:

- A. Understand the difference between *being* redeemed and *experiencing the blessing* of that redemption.
- B. Identify redemption as not just forgiveness but also freedom and examine how your life reflects your response to this freedom and forgiveness.

In the Old Testament, the Jewish Law stated that sins must be atoned for with a blood sacrifice—that is why we see so many instances of animal sacrifices in those days. However, these sacrifices needed to be repeated often, both for individuals and for the entire nation of Israel. In John 1:29, Jesus is described by John the Baptist as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Therefore, from the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry, He was pictured as the ultimate sacrificial lamb,

the only sacrifice that could make atonement for sin once and for all. (Hebrews 9:11-14)

Now, let us step back for a moment and look at this process in simple terms. Who was the one that *should* have paid the debt for our sin? We should have. Who was the only one that *could* have paid the debt once and for all? Only God had the power to do that. So, the only possible solution was for God to break into human history through Jesus—who was fully God and fully man. Jesus bore *our* punishment and *our* death. He was our substitute and, therefore, the ransom that delivered us from the bondage of sin.

It is crucial that we realize this sacrifice was very personal. Sometimes, we look at John 3:16—“For God so loved *the world*”—and lose ourselves among the immense crowd that the term “world” implies. However, a truth that many people miss is that God would still have sacrificed His only Son if you were the only person alive. God wanted to save *you* specifically from your sin, and so He sent Jesus.

The flip side of that coin is that, although God acted for you specifically, He also acted for every other individual on earth. Jesus did not die only for Christians but for *everyone*. (John 3:16, 12:32; Matthew 18:14) Unfortunately, though, not everyone will experience the blessing of that redemption. Unless a man *receives* the redemption offered by Jesus, he will not be a part of the blessing. Anyone who rejects the Redeemer (Jesus) is in effect saying, “I don’t need Jesus to redeem me. I can redeem myself.” As we have seen, however, only Christ was able to free us from our sin; therefore, those who reject the redemption already established cut themselves off from God’s plan to save all mankind.

Q2: True or False? Everyone has been redeemed through Christ, but not every person has chosen to experience that redemption.

Our forgiveness—our very *redemption*—came at a high price. Left to ourselves, we never could have earned our own righteousness. However, we can rejoice that God took the initiative and paid the price Himself. We can never repay that act of grace, but we can thank God for it by seeking to know Him more and living according to His Word.

J2: How does your daily life reflect your gratitude to God? Respond in your journal.

In the next lesson of this course, “You Are Reconciled,” we will examine the way in which our relationship with God has changed in light of our union with Christ.

Prayer

Lord, I know that I was once a captive to the bonds of sin. I know that I was helpless and couldn't free myself from my chains. In every way, I was a slave to sin and I deserved only your wrath. However, in Your all-surpassing love, you saw my dire condition and rescued me. You redeemed me through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and now I stand free from my former prison of sin. Thank you for redeeming my life. Please help me to use my newfound freedom to serve you with a joyful heart. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory

Be sure to review your Scripture memory assignment for this course!

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

J3: Consider Ephesians 1:7:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.

Write how the riches of God's grace have changed your perspective of what God is like.