

Charles Stanley Institute
Course: Christ and the Cross
T1_CD_L1: Who is this Christ? (AR058)

Introduction: One of the most important tasks of the Holy Spirit, as we'll see throughout *Faith Foundations*, is equipping us to live the surrendered life. That means that, when the Holy Spirit enters into us, He then lives out the Christian life for us as we surrender our lives completely unto Him. And friend, that surrendered life was made possible only through the shed blood of Jesus. It's my prayer that you begin to see the Cross as the ultimate symbol of victory, freedom, and God's supremacy over sin and death. So let's begin.

Lesson 1, Section 1

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

- A. Understand the impact Jesus' death and resurrection had on mankind's view of God.
- B. Recognize common misconceptions about Jesus and identify Scripture passages that clarify the truth.

Scripture

Read Colossians 1:15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Lesson 1

Jesus never minced words, did He? He always seemed to say exactly what He meant in the most relevant, straightforward way possible. Clearly, this is the case in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

The question we want to explore in this lesson is: *Who is this Christ who can make such a bold statement?* Many, many people in the world hear this claim and remark, “Now, that sounds like a narrow-minded, egotistical, bigoted statement. Why should I believe it?” In this lesson, you will see how we as believers should respond to this common—and understandable—question from our unbelieving friends.

In his letter to the church at Colossae, the apostle Paul answers arguments of confused believers being misled by false teachers. The issue at hand was the sufficiency of Jesus. The young church had become wrought with controversy because many had begun to believe that Jesus—in and of Himself—was not *enough* for salvation. So, the misguided believers began to “add to” their faith in Jesus. They developed a “Jesus *and*” faith, whereby they combined Jesus with other beliefs and actions, hoping to find the right combination of things that would lead unto salvation. At the root of their problems was a basic misunderstanding of who Jesus Christ is.

This is something that still happens today. Every single cult and every other religion in the world has one similarity: an error in the way they perceive Jesus Christ. They may believe in Jesus as *one* way to be saved, or they may admit the historicity of Jesus as a simple teacher or prophet; some discount the existence of Jesus altogether. Of all the doctrines in the New Testament, the one that Satan will attack most is the deity of Christ, that is, Jesus’ claim to be God.

J1: Take a few minutes to consider the influential people in your life. Do they adhere to false religions or false ideas about who Jesus is? Ask God to give you an understanding heart to identify specific misconceptions that your friends have about Jesus. Write each person's name and the related misconceptions God reveals to you.

Now, you may hear people argue that Jesus never actually claimed to be God Himself. This is simply not true. Over and over in the Gospels, Jesus places Himself on equal footing with the Father and the Holy Spirit. (John 10:30; 14:6-14) If you are unsure about this vital part, I encourage you to stop and review the first three lessons of Course 3, in which we studied the Trinity and how each Person of the Trinity relates to the others.

Paul undeniably accepted the full divinity of Jesus, and he worked to counter the false teachings that had been circulated in his churches. In Colossians 2:8-9, he pleads, “See to it that no one takes you captive

through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” For Paul, there was no question. *Who is Jesus?* He is God Himself.

Jesus did something for all people that had never been done before: He enabled men and women to see God in a new way. In Colossians 1:15, Paul explains that Jesus is the “image of the invisible God.” No one has ever looked upon the face of the Almighty. In the Old Testament, some people were confronted with God, but they were never able to look fully upon His glory. For example, even Moses, who is described as God’s friend (Exodus 33:11), could not look directly at God. At best, Moses had the opportunity to look upon “God’s back” as He passed by, but never His face. (Exodus 33:18-23).

Jesus, however, who is “the image of the invisible God,” came to bridge the gap between God’s pure, holy glory and mankind’s sinful nature. What does Paul mean by this word “image,” anyway? In Greek, the word is “eikon,” but you may recognize it better in its English form, “icon.” Just as an icon on your computer screen directs you to the main program, so does Jesus direct believers to the fullness of God’s glory. As the “icon,” Jesus is the exact, flawless replica of God. He is the perfect reflection of Him. Therefore, Jesus could say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

J2: In the first journal, you identified some clear—and most likely common—misconceptions about Jesus. Take a moment to go back over the Scriptures we’ve read in this lesson so far. How can these be used to clarify your understanding of Jesus? You can refer to these Scriptures when opportunities arise to share your faith in Jesus with others.

Q1: Why would it be accurate to claim that Jesus' death and resurrection on the cross was the single most significant event in world history?

- A. Because it meant that fallen men and women could now look upon the face of God.*
- B. Because it meant that sin no longer held the powerful position as a chasm eternally separating holy God and an unholy people.*
- C. Because the world's view of God would be forever magnified and transformed by getting to see and know Jesus.*
- D. All of the above*
- E. None of the above*

Lesson 1, Section 2

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

- A. Recognize the significance of Colossians 1:15.
- B. Understand why Jesus is the only means to know God.

How do we know what God is like? By knowing Jesus. He is God's only explanation. He is God's only full expression. To know Jesus is to know the Father. Conversely, failure to know Jesus means that we do *not* know the Father. It is only through Jesus Christ that we can come before the throne of God.

Q2: True or False? Jesus is the only way to God because He is the only true, perfect reflection of the Father.

Colossians 1:15-16 also describes Jesus as the “firstborn of all creation” and as the agent of Creation. Calling Jesus the “firstborn” does not mean that He was the first thing to be created. We know from John 1:1 that Jesus was *always* present with the Father. As God, there was never a time when Jesus did not exist. The term “firstborn” instead ranks Jesus' preeminence, not His order in Creation. This means that He is over and above Creation. There is no one equal to, higher than, or comparable to Him.

J3: Read Colossians 1:15. Knowing that the term "firstborn" refers to Jesus' preeminence, not His order in Creation, how has your view of Jesus'—and the Father's—sovereign authority been magnified?

A final hard question in this lesson is: *If Jesus really is all that we have said, why doesn't everyone place their faith in Him?* That is an excellent question. The answer, I'm afraid, is heartbreaking. According to 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, people fail to accept the reality of Jesus Christ because Satan (the “god of this world”—v. 4) has blinded them to the truth.

If we remain blind to Jesus, then we place a tremendous responsibility upon ourselves. Rather than being forced to see God through Christ, we have the opportunity to see God through our own lives. That means we get to make God into whatever we desire. Is there

something I like? Well, God must like it, too! Is there something I hate? Surely God doesn't like it, either.

Do you see what this means? Without Jesus to point us to the Father, we make ourselves the authority on what God is really like. However, our own fallen, sinful natures cannot be trusted and we end up missing God completely. Only Jesus is the perfect reflection and expression of God. All others fall short. (Romans 3:23)

Do not underestimate the importance of a clear understanding of who Jesus Christ actually is. If we falter on this one point, nothing else we do in our Christian lives will matter. Jesus is our cornerstone; we must strive to know Him more and more as He really is, not necessarily as we would like Him to be.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we exalt You, we praise You, we bless You, we honor You, we thank You, we give to You, we bow down before You, we prostrate ourselves before You and pray, we worship You, understanding that no human tongue can describe adequately, and no spirit can ever express perfectly, all that we feel of who You are. I pray that Your spirit, Lord Jesus, would prevail in our hearts, a spirit of submission to the Father, the desire to express that beautiful image in our life by our conversation and our conduct and by our character. We praise You for who You are. And I just want to thank You that these old marred images You said, one of these days when You would come back, we shall see You as You really are, and that we will be like You. Hallelujah and praise to Your precious name is my prayer. 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.

1 Timothy 2:5-6a

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all.

J4: Study the following verses and write what each verse says about Jesus in your journal:

Hebrews 1:1-4

John 10:24-30

Colossians 3:1-4

Colossians 2:6-9

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Transcript of Teaching Audio/Video Clip

So far we've looked at Colossians chapter one, verse fifteen together. If you'll recall, it says "And He (speaking of Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation."

Now when you consider that Jesus is the very image of God, what kind of implication does that have on you and me? How does Jesus being God apply to our daily lives?

You see, God has done something in us, and if we get a glimpse of what He's up to in our lives, then our lives will not be the same.

Let's face it. Most of us spend the majority of our time focusing on our lives, our business, our family. We think about what we want to do and what our plans or goals are.

But listen, if my mind is taken up with me, with my goals and dreams and all the rest, then God's purpose of reflecting Himself through Jesus Christ in me is not happening at its fullest.

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, we get Him all. To the degree to which you and I submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, to that degree He expresses the Father's character through us. Through our countenance, our actions and behavior, and our character.

Do you understand what that means? It means you and I have no rights of our own. We're to live in submission to the one who is in absolute control, the sovereign Lord.

Whenever you and I choose to act independently for ourselves, what we're saying is, "Yes, I know that Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord of the universe and that He is the image of God the Father. I know He knows best and will provide all my needs, but in this moment, I am going to have my way and do what I want to do."

My friend, that is idolatry. When we choose to act independently of God, then we have decided to act like we are God.

What we like to do is cover all that up and say, "Well, nobody's perfect. Everybody sins." I understand that. I'm not saying none of us will ever sin. I'm saying that when you and I defy the Lordship, the very deity, of Jesus Christ, we should be smitten in our hearts with conviction, and repent of that sin.

If you can go on in sin, then you don't have a right understanding of who Jesus Christ is. When you received Jesus Christ as your Savior, you were stamped with a stamp of His image on the inside. That image can never be removed. You are God's purchased possession, and He wants to express Himself through you.

Charles Stanley Institute

Course: Christ and the Cross

T1_CD_L2: The Cross: Symbol of Supreme Love Part 1 (MD080)

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 2, Section 1

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

- C. Recognize the relevance of Galatians 1:4 to your view of Jesus Christ and the cross.
- D. Understand the significance of Jesus' voluntary act of death on the cross as payment for the sin of all mankind.

Scripture

Read Galatians 1:1-5

Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

Lesson 2

People everywhere have conflicting ideas about the cross. To some, it is just an ornament or a decorative piece of jewelry. To others, it is just a simple symbol of some religion they don't understand. For Christians, though, there is something emotional about the cross, and for good reason. All of us who know Christ as our Savior know that the heart of everything we believe is symbolized in the cross.

How would you respond if someone asked, "What does the cross mean to you personally?" The answer to that question is what we will explore throughout this and the next lesson.

In today's Scripture passage, the apostle Paul clearly sets forth what the cross means to him. Speaking of Jesus, he says, "Who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4). For Paul, the cross was a shining symbol of the supreme love of God poured out upon the earth.

A key point you need to notice here is that Christ sacrificed Himself voluntarily. Galatians 1:4 clearly states that Jesus "gave Himself"; that is, Jesus never saw Himself as a victim. We may think of Him as the victim of threatened Jewish leaders or of cold Roman politics, but Jesus never saw Himself in such a way. Instead, He knew that each step of His life was firmly rooted in the will of God the Father. In John 5:19, He says, "Whatever the Father does, these things the Son does in like manner."

J1: Read Galatians 1:4 and respond to this question in your journal: Knowing that Jesus wanted to give His life for you, how does that change your view of Him and the cross upon which He died?

Some may even suggest that Jesus was a victim to the will of God the Father. This simply is not true. Not only is it not true, but it cannot be true. As you'll remember from previous lessons, there is no division between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each exists in complete and perfect unity. If it was the will of the Father, it was clearly the will of the Son as well.

Jesus wanted to be sure that we understand His sacrifice was voluntary. In John 10:9-18, Jesus explains His role as the Good Shepherd. He reveals, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . . I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. . . . No one has taken [my life] from Me, but I lay it down on my own initiative" (vv. 11, 14-15, 18). His sacrifice was not an unforeseen consequence or assault; it was the perfect will of God.

Q1: Multiple Choice: Jesus' voluntary death on the cross demonstrates that He . . .

- A. was the ultimate expression of God's love for each of us.
- B. wanted to die.
- C. was fairly confident that this is what the Father wanted Him to do.

Lesson 2, Section 2

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

- C. Understand Jesus' joyful motivation even in the midst of suffering.
- D. Evaluate your own attitude towards times of personal suffering and hardship.
- E. Answer the question: what does the Cross mean to you?

It is also important to note that Jesus did not approach the cross begrudgingly, but rather with joy. Hebrews 12:2 describes Jesus as “the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.”

We may read this passage and ask, What is the joy? There was certainly no joy in having His hands and feet pierced with nails, bearing the agony of a crown of sharp thorns, or in suffering the shame of such a brutal public trial and execution. Rather, the joy was because Jesus was able to look beyond the cross and see the glorious results for every man and woman on earth. He rejoiced because He would be the final, atoning sacrifice for all mankind.

J2: As you understand the source of Jesus' joyful motivation in the midst of His suffering, do you think that will change your own response to personal inconvenience, hardship, and suffering? If so, how?

Although this was a “source of joy” for Jesus, we must never forget that it was surely a painful, costly sacrifice. Oftentimes, people will excuse the pain Jesus endured by asserting that His divinity gave Him some edge—a way to avoid the horrific pain of the ordeal. I respond to this by saying that Jesus actually suffered far worse than any other human would have.

First, the physical pain would have been immense, almost unbearable. He was beaten over and over again with whips that had pieces of rock and glass embedded in the straps. His flesh was torn to shreds, to the extent that some accounts indicate the recipient of such a lashing would hardly be recognizable as human. Then He was forced to carry the weight of His own cross, to which He was nailed by his hands and feet with long, dull metal spikes. Finally, He was hoisted high in the air where He hung in the hot sun. The weight of His own body prevented breathing, so He would have to push up with His pierced feet to allow air

into His strained lungs. There He hung, bleeding, gasping, reeling in pain, and dying slowly. Because He was fully man as well as fully God, Jesus felt every bit of the physical pain.

Aside from the physical duress, Jesus experienced an unprecedented time of spiritual anguish. Remember, Jesus had existed for all eternity in perfect unity with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. There had never been a time in which Jesus and the Father were not One. But, on the cross, Scripture reveals that all of the sin of the world—every single sin by every single person from the beginning to the end of time—was placed upon Jesus. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

All of that sin was concentrated and placed upon this one man, the only truly innocent man in human history. At that moment, Jesus experienced total separation from God for the first time. It was then that He cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34). Surely the pain of this separation was more intense than you or I could ever imagine.

Jesus was certainly not a victim. He knew what He was doing, and He knew why it needed to be done. In the last lesson, we studied Colossians 1:15-20, in which Jesus is shown to be the creating force and sustainer of all of Creation. My friend, anyone who could create, sustain, and judge the world itself can never be a victim. He did it voluntarily, and more importantly, He did it for you.

J3: Before moving onto the next lesson, answer this question: what does the Cross mean to you?

Prayer

Father God, I thank You for sending Your Son Jesus Christ to rescue me from my sin. I cannot image the pain that He experienced both physically and spiritually, and I praise You that because of His sacrifice, I will never have to know the torture of complete separation from You. Remind me every day of the true joy of my salvation, and of the price that Jesus gladly paid for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory

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

1 Timothy 2:5-6a

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all.

Charles Stanley Institute

Course: Christ and the Cross

T1_CD_L3: The Cross: Symbol of Supreme Love Part 2 (MD080)

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 3, Section 1

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

- A. Understand the significance of Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross.
- B. Support that understanding with Scripture memory.

Scripture

Read 1 Timothy 2:5-6

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

Lesson 3

In the last lesson of this course, we saw that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was a completely voluntary act. Now, let's take some time to explore the reasons *why* He made this beautiful sacrifice.

Galatians 1:4 reveals that Jesus "gave Himself (voluntarily) for our sins so that He might rescue us from the present evil age." The little phrase "for our sins" is immensely important. This means that Jesus died a substitutionary death on our behalf. As we have seen before, we are the ones who deserved to suffer on the cross; however, Jesus bore this burden for us, *in our place*. He was our substitute.

To be a substitute is to take the place of another person, to perform some duty or bear some burden that was meant for the other person. This is exactly what Jesus did for every one of us.

This idea of substitution is central to the Christian life. If we leave out this concept, what we have left is simply a “religion,” not Christianity. “Religion” is cold and lifeless; “Christianity” is based on a living, active, vibrant relationship with a person: Jesus. It is vital that you understand the significance of Jesus' willingness to die in your place. For this reason, take your time on the next journal assignment, and ask God to reveal Himself to you through the Scripture references.

J1: Read the following Scripture passages. Record your thoughts about each in your journal. Focus on the recurring theme of Jesus serving as our substitute on the cross. After you've reflected on each of the passages, choose the verse that most impacted you and memorize it.

- *Isaiah 53:4-6*
- *John 1:29*
- *Matthew 20:25-28*
- *Romans 5:6-11*
- *2 Corinthians 5:21*
- *1 Timothy 2:5-6*
- *1 Peter 2:21-25*
- *1 Peter 3:18*
- *1 John 2:1-2*

Lesson 3, Section 2

Objectives: As the student, at the end of this section of Lesson 3, you should be able to:

- A. Understand the correlation between God's mandatory penalty for sin and His character.
- B. Recognize three reasons why the Cross of Christ reflects God's love.

Fairly often, I come across people who ask, “Well, if God can do anything He wants, why couldn't He have just looked at us and said, ‘You're forgiven'? Why did His only Son have to die?” This is a good question. After all, God certainly does have the right and the authority to make such a declaration. So, why didn't He?

God is a God of righteousness and holiness. Say that out loud: *God is a God of righteousness and holiness*. This is an important point that we will repeat several times. His righteousness demands a penalty for sin, and that penalty, according to Scripture, is death. (Romans 6:23)

For Him to simply ignore the sinfulness of man would be for Him to act contrary to His own nature, which is something He cannot and will not

do. God cannot sidestep His righteousness; it is an important aspect of His very character. After all, if He denied His own character, He would change, and Scripture tells us that He remains the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. (Hebrews 13:8) Therefore, His righteousness required that the appropriate price be paid for our sin.

Q1: True or False? Because God is righteous and unchanging, He was not willing to declare forgiveness without a penalty for sin, even at the expense of His own Son.

Now, where did God's penalty for sin—death—leave us? It left every single one of us in serious trouble, because we are all completely guilty and helpless before God. Every person who has ever walked the earth—with the exception of Jesus—is guilty of sin. If anyone says he is not a sinner, Scripture clearly states that he is deceiving himself. (1 John 1:8)

So, we know that we are guilty and unable to do anything to merit our forgiveness and salvation. In order for God to save any one of us, somebody who had never sinned—who had no penalty to pay for himself and who was therefore sinless and perfect—must have been willing to bear the sin debt of the entire world. Therefore, Jesus Christ, God's holy and perfect Son, voluntarily offered Himself.

Hanging on the cross, Jesus Christ took all of our sin upon Himself and stood alone as the bearer of our punishment. God's full wrath was poured out against Him, thereby leaving no condemnation for anyone who has accepted Jesus as Lord. (Romans 8:1-2)

My friend, do not ever think that salvation is cheap. All we have to do is call upon the name of the Lord Jesus to be saved. However, just because we did not pay the price ourselves does not mean that it was not costly. In fact, salvation is the most expensive item man has ever known; it cost Jesus everything.

What was the result of Jesus' act of substitution? The Bible testifies that Christ's sacrifice offered universal forgiveness and salvation to all mankind. Anyone can be saved; all they have to do is place their faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 10:9 teaches this important point, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:13 states it plainly, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

I think I most like the way the apostle Paul states it in Galatians 1:4, "[Jesus] gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age." Did you realize that your salvation was a rescue

operation? This is a striking image, because we can all identify with heroic rescue workers who place themselves in danger in order to save those who cannot help themselves. In a very basic way, this can help us understand Jesus' actions: we needed help, we could not help ourselves, He was the only one who could rescue us, and so He voluntarily acted on our behalf.

Why is the cross the symbol of supreme love? It represents the man, Jesus Christ, surrendering His life and His perfect union with God. It represents the pain He experienced. It represents the value and worth with which He saw every man and woman. It represents the burden that we should have borne ourselves. And, it represents Christ's willingness to take that punishment so that we would not have to. The love of the Cross is the salvation and substitution it offers. He surrendered everything so that you and I could be saved. That's love.

Q2: Which of the following is NOT a reason that the cross symbolizes the love God has for you and all humankind?

- A. Jesus stood in the place of every man and woman and bore the punishment for sin on their behalf.*
- B. Jesus was a victim of the cruel punishment of unbelievers.*
- C. Jesus died so that all who call upon Him and believe might be saved; it provided salvation universally to all who accept it.*
- D. Jesus voluntarily suffered emotional and physical pain to pay a debt He did not owe.*

Prayer

Lord, it was I that deserved to hang on that cross. It was my sin that put Jesus there. Thank you for the loving, gracious, saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who bore the weight of my punishment so that I could know you intimately as my heavenly Father. It's in the precious name of my Savior Jesus Christ that I pray this, Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory

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

1 Timothy 2:5-6a

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all.

Charles Stanley Institute
Course: Christ and the Cross
T1_CD_L4: The Cross: Debt Paid in Full (MC289)

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 4, Section 1

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

- E. Recognize the significance of Jesus' actions described in Colossians 2:14.
- F. Understand the relationship between Jesus' death on the cross and your debt of sin.

Scripture

Read Colossians 2:13-14

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.

Lesson 4

All of us have probably been in debt at some point in our lives. Whether it is a mortgage, car loan, or other type of material debt, we understand the idea of owing money or services to someone. In its simplest form, a debt is an obligation. If we cannot pay, we not only get into trouble, but the debt seems to increase as well with interest rising and late fees accruing. We know that it is very important to pay back our debts.

Do you realize that each of us owes a serious debt that we *cannot* repay? It is a debt that we have incurred all our lives, but it is not financial or material. I'm talking about a spiritual debt. This is the result of sin in our lives and no one—except Jesus—has lived a life without sin. (Romans

3:23) The result is that we are all debtors to God, and we have no way to pay what we owe. How, then, do we deal with the sin-debt that we have?

In this lesson's Scripture passage, Colossians 2:13-14, we see the apostle Paul explaining this matter to the Colossians in a powerful, relevant way. He used the language of commerce to bring this important point into vivid detail.

In New Testament times, there was an understood procedure for dealing with one's debt. When a person incurred a debt that he could not pay, the lender would write out the details of the debt and the debtor would sign the form. Then, that list was posted on the doorpost of the debtor's house so that everyone could see that they were in debt. When the debt was paid, the lender would either wipe away the list or drive a nail through it to cancel out that certificate of debt.

Now, in light of this insight, take a few minutes to re-read Colossians 2:14 in a different translation. Memorize the New Living Translation of this verse: "He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross."

Q1: True or False? Because Jesus Christ's death canceled the debt of sin that we owed, we can infer that strongholds over our lives—and the guilt residues they leave—have also been lifted.

Essentially, God saw our certificate of debt, listing the commandments that we have broken and the sin in our lives, and He wiped it away. He canceled our sin-debt by driving a nail through it, leaving it empty and void on the cross.

J1: What sins, failures, and shortcomings would be listed on your Certificate of Debt? Create your own Certificate of Debt to God and praise Him for canceling out what you owed but could not repay.

Lesson 4, Section 2

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

- F. Understand the relationship between Christ's death on the cross and the sins of your future.
- G. Understand how the Cross reflects God's loving and just nature.

Some people think that when someone becomes a Christian, God only forgives him for the sins committed up to that point. My friend, it is vital that you understand your *complete* forgiveness in Christ Jesus. In the original language of the New Testament, the verb form translated as “taken it out of the way” (Colossians 2:14) indicates that it was an action in the past that has continuing results in the future. This means that God does not just forgive you up to a point; He wipes away your sin and gives you a clean state. You are forgiven, both now and forever. (1 John 1:9)

J2: How does knowing that God provided long ago for the forgiveness of sins you've not yet committed change your view of His character as your Father?

If I were to ask you for God’s motive in sending Jesus as a sacrifice for our sin, you would probably answer, “love.” And, you would be right. God was certainly motivated by His great, unending love for every single one of us. John 3:16 makes this point abundantly clear: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

However, there is a second motive that we often overlook: God’s justice. God is holy and righteous, and He had to act in accordance with His own just nature. We discussed this in the previous lesson as we addressed the question, “Why couldn’t God simply say, ‘You’re forgiven’ without having to send Jesus?” If you do not remember the answer to that question, go back and review Lesson 3 of this course right now.

With God’s love and justice in mind, we see that He had three choices in how to deal with our sin. First, He could have allowed His justice to completely override His great love for us. If this had been the case, then there would be no mercy, no help, and no salvation. We would only be left with eternal punishment because of our sin. As Romans 6:23 states, “The wages of sin is death.”

Second, God could have acted completely out of love with no regard to His justice. If this had happened we would have been forgiven, but at what cost? If God had gone against His own righteous nature, then the result would have been a complete loss of moral law in the universe. There would be no consequences for our actions, because there would be no penalty for our sin. Then, the world would be a hellish place because every individual would only be seeking his own good, his own glory, and his own pleasure. And, this would be perfectly acceptable, because no real reason to act otherwise would exist.

Q2: Which one of the following statements correctly describes the way in which God handled our sin-debt?

- F. God's love stamped "wiped away" on our sin debt without making anyone pay for the debt, because if He did, we would all have to die.
- G. God's love stamped "forgiven" on our sin debt by transferring the payment of our sin debt to His Son.
- H. God's justice stamped "hopeless" on our sin debt and left no way for us to find forgiveness.

So, we see that it could not have been *only* love or *only* justice. Therefore, God did the only thing that He could have done. That is, to act out of both His love and justice by sending His only perfect Son, Jesus, into the world for the purpose of taking the debt of our sin upon Himself and paying it in full. God's decision to heap such payment on His own Son was just because a price was paid for our sin, but it was also loving in that God Himself paid the price on our behalf.

Clearly, our sin left us in horrible trouble. We owed a debt that we had no hope of paying ourselves. The Good News of Scripture, though, is that God already paid that price for us. (1 Corinthians 6:19-21, 7:22-24) If you miss this point, you've missed the heart of the Bible.

Prayer

And Father, how very grateful [we are] that You loved us beyond our comprehension and that You love us still, love us unconditionally. How I pray with all of my heart, Father, that every single person who hears this message, that You would bear witness in their heart [that] they've only heard the Truth—not my opinion, not some story, but the Truth. The Story of all stories of the Crucifixion of Christ: why You sent Him, what You did to Him because of Your love for us. Would You grant them the freedom, Father, to pray in their own words that simple prayer of confession? Confession of their sinfulness, confession of their faith in Christ at Calvary that paid for their sins, and confession of their faith that they believe that You indeed will forgive them if they ask. I pray the Spirit of the living God will sink this message so deep that even those who reject it now, that deep in their heart, it will penetrate. That one day, somehow, somewhere before it's too late, out of their mind, out of their spirit, this message will be resurrected. And they will remember the Cross and the debt that was paid, and receive You as their personal Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory Review

Fill in the blanks to complete this course's memory verse.

*For there is _____, and one _____ also
between _____ and _____, the man _____
_____, who _____ Himself as a _____ for all.
1 Timothy _____ : 5-6a*

Conclusion

I often hear people talk about what they call a “cheap grace.” That is, they look at the amazing gift of salvation that God provides and think that God makes it too easy for men to come unto Him. I pray that now, as you consider the tremendous sacrifice and significance of Christ’s work on the Cross, you will recognize how costly your salvation truly was. It cost Jesus His life. It cost God His only Son. Just because you didn’t pay the price yourself doesn’t mean it was “cheap” at all. It is the most valuable gift ever given, and your heavenly Father gave it to you.