

REVISED EDITION

a  
first book  
of  
christian doctrine

by  
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## LESSON 1

# The True Religion

In this book we will be studying the great truths of the Christian religion. These are found in God's Word, and they are taught and preached in his church, to which we belong.

Do you know what the word "religion" means? *Religion is the way we worship and serve God.* When God created man and placed him on earth, he intended for man to love and serve him as Father in heaven. God wanted man to be happy living with him and working for him every day. We are created in such a way that we cannot be satisfied without God. Just as a plant cannot grow and blossom in a dark cave without sunlight, we cannot have true life and happiness without the sunshine of God's love and companionship.

But what did man do? Instead of serving his heavenly Father, man sinned against God. He listened to the temptation of Satan. Purposely he turned away from God to follow Satan and do what is evil. When man fell into sin, darkness filled his heart. The light of God's love was taken away from him. No longer could he know and serve God.

The condition of sinful human beings is indeed a sad one. Because of sin, pain and sorrow and death came into the world. The hearts of all persons are filled with evil. As Paul told the Ephesian Christians (chapter 2:12), sinful man has no hope and is without God in the world.

Man had forsaken the one true God. Still, he was not able to live without worshiping. So, when man no longer knew the true God who had created heaven and earth, he began to worship *things* as though they were gods. Some people bowed down to worship the sun and the moon and the stars; others prayed to mountains and rivers and trees and stones; still others made images out

of wood or metal and built temples for them, believing that somehow there were gods living within.

You see, every person needs something to worship. We are created that way. If we have lost the true God, we worship false gods. Have you ever seen a white flower with its stem in a bottle of red ink? The stem of a flower is created in such a way that it draws moisture up from the root of the plant and sends it to the flower. After a flower has been cut, there are no longer any roots for it to draw moisture from, but it still needs something moist. If it is placed in red ink, it will greedily draw up the poisonous liquid. Very shortly the white petals will turn completely red. Then it will die.

Sinful man is like that. He is separated from God because of his sin, but he feels the need of worshipping something. So he makes idols to worship and serve. His thirsty soul drinks in greedily all the poison of sin and falsehood because it is cut off from the living God.

The worship of false gods is called *false religion*. Millions of people in many parts of the world follow false religions because they do not know the one true God. Missionaries who bring these people the glad message of salvation through Jesus Christ face all kinds of difficulties and dangers.

Many years ago our ancestors also worshiped idols. But God sent missionaries to teach them about the true God and his Son Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world. How joyful and grateful to God we should be for his great love in bringing us the light of the gospel! It was his will not to leave us in the darkness of idol worship to perish forever without him. Even after we sinned, God wanted us. He did not want us to remain without him but to have everlasting life and happiness with him.

Because God wanted us he sent his own Son Jesus Christ to us in order to save us from sin and death and to bring us back to him. Jesus came to earth to live and suffer and die because God sent him for us. There is no

other way to return to God and to be saved than through the Savior Jesus Christ.

These are some of the important truths of the Christian religion. We learn them from the Word of God (which is also called the Bible or Holy Scripture). There God tells us who he is and how we may again be his children through Jesus Christ. If we did not have the Bible it would be impossible for us to know God. We would be in the same darkness as the heathen people are without the Word of God, which David calls a lamp to his feet and a light on his path (Psalm 119:105).

To this precious Word we will turn again and again in these lessons in Christian doctrine. The Bible is like a great treasure house. In each lesson we will go to it for new riches of knowledge and of faith in our God. If we are to make use of these riches, we will have to look up and study the passages mentioned in the lessons. We must not forget to pray that as we study the wonderful truths about God's love, we will learn to love him more and serve him better. We will find out more and more how wonderful a book the Bible is!

### **QUESTIONS**

1. What is religion?
2. What is a false religion?
3. Why do many people serve idols?
4. What is the only way we can be truly happy?
5. What is the way of salvation that the Bible shows us? If you do not know the answer, see what Acts 16:31 says.
6. What should we do about people who do not know God?

## LESSON 2

# Three Things the Bible Teaches Us

1. What must we know in order to live and die happily?  
*We must know God and his way of salvation.*
2. Where is the way of salvation taught?  
*In the Bible, which is the Word of God.*
3. What three great truths does the Bible teach us?  
*First, how great our sins are before God.  
Second, how God saves us from our sins through Christ.  
Third, how God wants us to live thankful lives for him.*

In the first lesson we learned that God has given us the Bible, which is his Word. The Bible teaches us everything we need to know in order to be saved and to live the right way before God. When we study what God tells us in the Bible, we see that there are three very important truths taught there. Every Christian should know these truths: (1) how great our sins are before God; (2) how God saves us from our sins through Christ; and (3) how God wants us to live thankful lives for him.

The first great truth is something people do not like to hear about themselves. The Bible tells us that we are all so sinful and guilty before God that we deserve nothing but God's anger and punishment. Because of sin man has heaped on himself all kinds of misery in this life. Because of sin he deserves everlasting suffering in the life to come. Man is not able to save himself any more than a dead person is able to arise out of the grave by his own power. Look in your Bible to see how seriously Paul talks about sin in Ephesians 2:1.

Perhaps this seems like an unpleasant thing to talk about. But if we do not know and believe that our sins before God are that great, we will never turn to God and ask him to help us and save us.

That brings us to the second great truth. God goes on in his Word to tell us what he has done to save

persons in this terrible condition. God sent his own Son Jesus to take all our sins and guilt away and to give us everlasting life.

We sometimes call Jesus the Great Physician. When he was on earth, he healed sick people and restored sight to the blind and made it possible for many who were lame to walk again. On a few occasions he even brought a dead person back to life. But the great reason for Jesus' coming to earth was to take away the terrible disease of sin from our hearts and to give us everlasting life and joy. That is the story of the gospel, the happy news of salvation which God proclaims to a lost world.

We can never repay God for that saving love. And God does not ask us to repay him. But the third great truth of the Bible is that he wants us to show our thankfulness to him by loving and obeying him. The main thing that God wants is neither our money nor any earthly treasure we might have. He wants us to bring him gratitude and praise.

If we truly believe in Christ and love him for his saving mercy, we will also study the Word of God carefully and prayerfully, so that we may know what our Lord and Master wants us to do.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Why must we know how sinful and wicked we are?
2. How did David feel about his sin? Look at Psalm 51:3.
3. How did Peter feel about his sin? Read Luke 22:62.
4. Do you think Cain was truly sorry for his sin?
5. Think of some of the diseases that Jesus cured, and show how these diseases are like sin.
6. What did Jesus do to take away our sin and guilt?
7. Did God owe it to us to save us from our sin and misery?
8. Look in your Bible to find out how these people responded to what God had done for them: the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19); the Gadarene man (Luke 8:38); Mary of Bethany (John 12:3).
9. Name some different ways we may show our thankfulness for God's love and kindness to us.



## LESSON 3

# How We Can Know Our Sinfulness

1. What is sin?  
*Sin is disobedience to God.*
2. What other name for sin do we find in the Bible?  
*Unrighteousness.*
3. Where can we truly learn to know our sinfulness?  
*From the law of God.*
4. What is the law of God?  
*It is God's rule for our life.*
5. Where has God given us this law?  
*In the Ten Commandments, which are found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.*

The Bible teaches that all people are sinners before God. What do we mean by sin? Sin is disobedience to God. Sinning means following our own will instead of doing God's will. It means setting up ourselves as masters, instead of acknowledging that God alone is our Master and King. It means living in revolt against God and his holy law. Sinners are rebels against God.

Sin is also called unrighteousness. Sinning means doing that which is not right. Another way to think about this is the idea that sin is crookedness. We call a person who cheats and robs others of what belongs to them a crook. Everyone who sins — which means every one of us — is crooked, because every sinner is robbing God by taking what belongs to him and spending it in the service of Satan. Because of this unrighteousness, God's curse rests on man. You can read what God says about this curse in the last book of the Old Testament — Malachi 3:9.

In Lesson Two we saw why it is necessary for us to know how sinful we really are. Only when I realize the wickedness of my heart can I be truly sorry for my sins, and only then will I come to Jesus so that he may save

me. But how can we look at our heart to see how sinful it is? If we want to see whether our face is clean, we look in a mirror. God tells us that there is something like a mirror that will show us what our heart is like.

God's mirror for our hearts is his holy law. In that law God tells us what he wants us to be like and how he wants us to live. If we look carefully at that law of God and then look carefully at what we do and how we think and feel about people and things, we will see clearly that our sin is very great.

The law of God is not only like a mirror. It is also like a guide that shows us the one way we must go. Think about a ship sailing through the sea on a dark and starless night, without any instruments to guide it. If the wind were to change, turning the ship in a new direction, no one on board would know about the change, for there would be nothing from which the sailors could get their bearings. Not until morning, when they would see the sun rise in the east, would they discover that they were sailing on an entirely different course.

In the same way, many people are going in the wrong direction and leading a life of sin without knowing it, because they do not know God's Word as their guide. The law of God is for us like the sun for those sailors. It shows us the way we should go, and when we see the way we should be going we realize that we have been going the wrong way, away from God and from everlasting life with him.

The law of God is found throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. There are many verses where God tells us how he wants us to live for him. God gives us his law in brief form in the Ten Commandments, which he gave to Moses and the people of Israel when they were camped near Mount Sinai. These commandments are written down in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and we will be studying them in the next lesson.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why has God given us his law?
2. Why does God have the right to tell us what to do and what not to do?
3. When God told King Saul to destroy the people of Amalek, Saul decided to do something else instead. What was that? Why do you think he did it? What was God's reaction? Read I Samuel 15:9-19.
4. What are some of the things God's law tells us to do? What are some of the things God's law tells us not to do? (Remember that the law is found throughout the Bible, not just in the Ten Commandments.)
5. Why did God give the Ten Commandments on stone tablets? What was done with these? Read I Kings 8:9. Do you think people today take God's law that seriously?

## LESSON 4

### The Law of God

1. How are the Ten Commandments divided?  
*Into two tables.*
2. How many commandments are there in the first table of the law?  
*Four commandments.*
3. What does God ask of you in the four commandments of the first table?  
*That I love the Lord my God with all my heart.*
4. How many commandments are there in the second table of the law?  
*Six commandments.*
5. What does God ask of you in the six commandments of the second table?  
*That I love my neighbor as myself.*

6. Can you keep this law of God perfectly?

*No. By nature I am inclined to hate God and my neighbor.*

God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tables of stone and gave them to Moses. On the *first table* there were four commandments telling us how to love God and live for him. On the *second table* there were six commandments telling us how to live for our fellow human beings.

In Jesus' time the religious leaders — the Pharisees and Scribes — often argued about the law. One of the Pharisees once came to Jesus to ask him, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus told the people around him that any commandment of God is as great and as important as any another. Then in a few beautiful words Jesus told them the real meaning of the whole law. He told them that God wants us to love him first of all and above all things, and that he wants us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In the four commandments of the first table God tells us that we shall

1. not serve other gods;
2. not worship images;
3. not take his name in vain;
4. keep the Sabbath day holy.

Taken together, these four commandments teach us that there is only one God, and that we belong entirely to him. For this reason we should serve and obey God.

God requires us to love him with our whole heart. We cannot truly love him in any other way. We cannot love God with half of our heart and love sin with the other half. We cannot serve God with half of our time and serve Satan with the other half. This is what Jesus meant when he said the words we read in Matthew 6:24. Look this verse up in your Bible. What God wants of us is our whole heart, all of the time.

In the six commandments of the second table God tells us that we shall

5. honor our parents;
6. not kill;
7. not commit adultery;
8. not steal;
9. not tell lies;
10. not covet the possessions of other people.

Taken together, these six commandments teach us that we should always think of other people and love them as much as we love ourselves.

If we truly love God, we will also love people — not only our parents and brothers and sisters and friends, but everyone. Jesus tells us to love even the people who are trying to harm us. We must feel kindly toward other people, helping them when they are in trouble, sharing with them what we have when they need it, and trying in every way we can to make them as happy as we ourselves like to be.

Ask yourself this question: Do I do what God wants me to do? Do I love God with my whole heart? Do I love other people as much as I do myself? Sometimes we have the idea that we are pretty good people. When we feel self-satisfied like that, we should look to God's law and see how sin and selfishness and hate are still very much with us.

That is exactly what God wants us to see. He wants us to know ourselves, not as others know us from the outside, but as he knows us, for he sees our heart. Nothing is hidden from his eyes.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. There are a number of places in the Bible where we read about people who loved God with their whole hearts. How did Abraham show this? Daniel's three friends? Jesus?
2. How did Lot try to do what Jesus tells us (in Matthew 6:14) is impossible? Did Lot succeed?

3. What was the rich young ruler's problem? What did Jesus tell him to do?
4. How will we feel about other people if we truly love God?
5. How did Jesus show his great love for other people?
6. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37. What does this parable teach us about true love for other people? What are some ways in which we can show the same love as the Samaritan did?
7. The Bible teaches us that we must love even our enemies. How did David show this? Jesus? Stephen?

## LESSON 5

### How Sin Came Into the World

1. Did God create man sinful and disobedient?  
*No. God created man good and in God's own image.*
2. Then how did man become sinful?  
*Through the fall and disobedience of Adam and Eve in Paradise.*
3. In what way did Adam and Eve disobey God's commandment?  
*They ate fruit from the tree that God had forbidden them.*
4. How did it happen that Adam and Eve became disobedient?  
*They listened to the temptation of Satan instead of the command of God.*
5. Who is Satan?  
*Satan is a mighty angel who rebelled against God and was banished from heaven.*

It is very difficult for most of us to admit that it is our own fault when we do something wrong. Instead, we try to blame someone or something else for what we

have done. Why do we always want to put the responsibility for our wrongdoing somewhere else? First of all, it hurts our pride to confess that we are in the wrong. Second, we do not want to be punished for what we have done.

People have always tried to shake off the blame for the sinfulness of their hearts. Even though God tells us in his Word how sinful and guilty we all are, people do not want to confess their faults. They make excuses. Some people even say something like this: "Well, I can't help it that I am sinful. I didn't make myself, so I am not to blame." People who say this are actually blaming God for what they have done, for it was God who made us all.

Is God to blame for our sinfulness or are we? To say that God is at fault for our sin is the most wicked thing a person can do. It insults God, who is perfect and holy and just. We read in the Bible that God created man good and in God's own image. After God had made the earth and all the wonderful things on it — the plants and animals — he created man to be different from every other creature. Man was given a soul. He was made sinless like God himself, without the least shadow of evil in his heart. God made him to be his child, good and pure and holy, completely able to love and serve him. Read in your Bible what God said after he had created man (Genesis 1:31). From those words we see how a person is deceiving himself and insulting God if he tries to blame God for his sinful nature.

No one but man himself is to blame for the fall into sin. The story of that fall is told in Genesis 3:1-6. God had placed Adam and Eve in the wonderful garden of Eden and provided richly for them. All the fruit in the garden was theirs to enjoy except what was on the one tree. But Satan, God's greatest enemy, came along and tempted man into sin. Though Satan had once been a mighty angel near God's throne, he and many other angels had rebelled against God and been banished

from heaven. Since that time he has hated God with his entire being, and he has always tried to lead people away from God into everlasting destruction.

Satan told Adam and Eve that they would be much better off if they would listen to him instead of God. He suggested that they disobey God. Although they did not have to do what God told them not to do, they wanted to. And from that moment on, sin and wickedness came to dwell in the hearts of people. Human nature became evil. That is why we love to do *wrong and dislike doing what God has commanded us to do.*

What God wants us to learn to say, humbly and sorrowfully, is this: "Lord, my heart is evil. My sins against thee are many and great, and it is my own fault. Please forgive me."

### **QUESTIONS**

1. In what way was man created in the image of his Father in heaven?
2. Why did God forbid Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?
3. Why did Satan want to tempt man into sin?
4. What should Eve have done when Satan spoke to her? What did she do?
5. What should Adam have done when Eve gave him the fruit? What did he do?
6. Whom did Adam blame for his sin? Show that he was really trying to blame God. Read Genesis 3:12.
7. Whom did Esau blame when he lost his birthright? Who was at fault in this case?
8. What did David say when he truly confessed his sin? Read Psalm 51:3.
9. What are some of the reasons people give for their actions when they do something wrong but do not want to admit it?



## LESSON 6

### The Sad Results of Sin

1. Why does the sin of Adam make us sinful too?  
*Because Adam is the father of us all.*
2. Are all the people in the world sinners before the face of God?  
*Yes, everyone is born with a sinful nature.*
3. What does God's Word tell us about our sinful nature?  
*That all kinds of wickedness come out of a person's heart.*
4. Does God punish people for their sins?  
*Yes, God punishes sin both in this life and in eternity.*
5. Why must God punish sin?  
*Because he is a righteous God.*

If a farmer planted thistle seeds in his land, what kind of crop could he expect? Certainly he would not get a crop of wheat when harvest time came. Paul says that people's lives are something like farmers' fields. Read what he tells the Galatian churches in chapter 6:7 of his letter to them. That verse gives us a lesson that is very important to learn. Sinning is like planting evil seed. The only harvest that we can expect from it is a harvest of misery and suffering.

Many people try to fool themselves. They think they are enjoying themselves while serving Satan and living a life of sin, and they imagine that things will turn out fine in the end. They do not believe that they will reap what they sow. This shows how people can be made blind by sin. People may even fool others into thinking that they are getting along fine although they are disregarding God and disobeying his laws.

But even if we succeed in fooling ourselves and fooling other people, we cannot fool God for one moment. He is a holy and just God, and his laws do not change. One of those laws is that sin brings forth a harvest of evil and misery in our lives.

When Adam and Eve in the garden listened to Satan and disobeyed God, the entire human race fell into sin. Adam is the father of all of us, and from him sin passed on to everyone who is born into the world. Sin is universal. Wherever people live, throughout the world, we find sin and suffering and misery. Every child that is born has a sinful nature, and that sinful nature shows itself as soon as the child begins to grow up.

Sin has brought terrible results into the lives of everyone. In the first place, it makes everyone's heart corrupt. The hearts of sinful human beings are so evil that no one can do anything but sin against God unless God gives him or her a new heart. Wicked desires and thoughts have taken possession of the soul. These evil ideas and wishes lead to sinful words and deeds. That is why so much evil is found in the world — so much hatred, dishonesty, cruelty, and injustice. All this evil springs forth from the sinful heart like impure water flowing from a polluted stream.

But that is only part of sin's sad results. More than this, sin has made all human beings guilty before God and brought God's righteous anger and condemnation upon them. God must punish sin because he is a holy and righteous God. Part of the punishment for sin comes in this life. The suffering and misery that people endure on earth and finally death itself are part of the harvest that results when people forsake God and disobey his law.

But even this is not the worst punishment. Most fearful of all is the punishment of the sinner after this life. It is an everlasting suffering without hope. Human words cannot describe the awful suffering of hell. The worst part of it is that everyone who is lost will have to admit that it is his own fault, and will realize that there is no longer any hope of being saved.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. How is sin like bad seed?

2. Show how these people, about whom we read in the Bible, reaped what they sowed: the people who watched Noah build the ark; Joseph's brothers; Saul; Ahab; Judas Iscariot.
3. Think of some of the end results these sins have in your life: selfishness; untruthfulness; disobedience.
4. How did God punish these people? A young man who did not honor his father (II Samuel 18:9-15); a man who stole something when he thought no one was looking (Joshua 7:19-26); a man and woman who told a lie to the Apostles (Acts 5:1-10).
5. What punishment did the rich man receive for his heartlessness? Read Luke 16:23-24.
6. What does Jesus say about eternal punishment? Read Matthew 13:42.

## LESSON 7

### Christ Our Mediator

1. Can we save ourselves from sin and from the punishment we have earned?  
*No. Instead, we increase our guilt because we keep sinning every day.*
2. How can we be saved?  
*Only by God's own Son, who is our Mediator.*
3. What does it mean when we call this Son of God our Mediator?  
*As Mediator, he stands between God and sinful man.*
4. For what reason does he stand between God and man?  
*To bring man back to God.*
5. Does man choose God to save him?  
*No. We do not choose God, but God chooses us.*

Let us sum up in a few sentences the sad truths we have learned in the lessons so far. Man was created in God's image to worship and serve God and be happy in that service. But man purposely disobeyed God. He listened to Satan and rebelled against his Creator. His heart became evil and corrupt. Ever since, the whole world has been filled with wickedness and misery.

We have also learned that because God is holy he must punish sin. This punishment comes both during life on earth, where there is much suffering and sorrow and misery, and after death, when the lost sinner will have to bear forever the sufferings of hell that he has brought upon himself.

Now comes the most important question. Is there any way to escape that terrible punishment? Can anyone help us? If you were on a ship in the middle of the ocean, and the ship was sinking fast, what would your first question be? You would ask if there was any way to get off the ship to safety. In the same way, once we realize how great are our sins and the punishment that we deserve, we will also ask, "Is there anyone who can help me escape such punishment and be saved?"

The first thing we must learn is that we cannot save ourselves from our sin and from the punishment we have earned. Sin has such great power over us that we could never free ourselves from it. Every day we disobey and grieve God and make our guilt before him even greater than it was.

Would it be possible for someone else to save us? Our parents love us dearly. Could they do anything to save us? The answer is No. Our parents, our teachers, our minister, and our Christian friends can do many things for us. They can help us learn about God and pray for us and tell us when we have done something wrong. We can never be too thankful for what God gives us through other Christian people. But none of them is able to save us from sin or God's wrath. No matter what other people would be willing to do for us, it would not

be enough to save us. The fact is that even the very best of Christians on this earth are sinners before God. They, too, have been saved not because of their own goodness but by the grace of God.

It is clear from the Bible that our salvation has to be the work of God alone. If God had not decided, because of his mercy, to save lost sinners, all the world's people would have been lost forever. God's people are saved, not because they first chose God, but because God first chose them.

A Christian may never say, "I am saved because I am better than other people." A Christian will always humbly confess, "I am just as guilty and unworthy before God as the very worst of sinners. I am saved, not because I looked for God, but because God first looked for me." You can read Paul's words about this in his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1:4.

How did God bring about this salvation for his people? God gave his own Son as Mediator to bring his people back to him. A mediator is a person who stands between two people who are separated from each other or disagree about something. The mediator tries to bring the two sides together. Today we often hear about labor mediators, who bring employers and employees together when there is a disagreement about wages or working conditions on the job.

The great Mediator is Jesus. He stands between us and God. When two persons quarrel, both are usually at fault. Both must confess and forgive each other before the quarrel can really be settled. But in the separation that sin has caused between us and God, God is not at fault in the least. All the responsibility is on our side, and we deserve God's righteous anger. Still, Jesus came to stand between us sinful and unworthy creatures and the holy God who created us. It is this great Mediator who brings God and sinners together again, so that God pardons our sins and accepts us as his beloved children, and so that we learn to love and serve him with our whole heart.

How does our great Mediator do this? By taking all our sin and punishment away and earning eternal life for us. We will be learning at another time how Jesus does this.

Our Mediator is truly God. He is the Son of God who left heaven to save us. But he is also truly man. God's own Son became man when he was born as a little baby in Bethlehem. He did not merely look like a human person; he truly was man. He was like us in every detail except for one. He did not sin. That is why he could take our sin on himself and carry it all away.

### QUESTIONS

1. What does I Timothy 1:15 tell us about the work of our Mediator?
2. How was Abraham like a mediator for his nephew? Read Genesis 18:16, 22, 23.
3. Did Lot deserve to have a mediator plead for him? Why did Abraham do it?
4. How was Moses like a mediator when the children of Israel were at Mount Sinai? Read Exodus 32:30-32.

*The next questions have to do with the story of Joshua the High Priest, which you can read in Zechariah 3:1-5.*

5. What do we read about Joshua's clothes in verse 3? What do you suppose that means?
6. What does Satan try to do?
7. Who does verse 2 tell us is the Mediator for Joshua?
8. What is taken away from Joshua and what is given to him? What do you think this all means?
9. Is this also what our Mediator does for us?

## LESSON 8

### All Who Believe Are Saved

1. Will everyone be saved by the Mediator Jesus Christ?  
*No. Only those who receive him by a true faith will be saved.*
2. What does it mean that we believe in Christ?  
*It means that we truly know him and sincerely trust him.*
3. Is it enough to know what Christ teaches us in his gospel?  
*No. We must also trust the promises of Christ with our whole heart.*
4. What has Christ promised to those who believe in him?  
*Everlasting life.*

We have seen that we are sinners who need salvation. Only Christ, who came to be our Mediator, can save us. He came to stand between God and us, and to take away all our sin, so that we will not be punished.

We learned earlier that all persons are in need of salvation, because all have sinned and earned God's wrath. When Adam sinned against God, all men became sinful, because Adam is the father of us all. There is not anyone who does not sin and who does not deserve punishment from God. Now we want to know whether all persons will be saved by Christ.

There are many people who would like to believe that all people, no matter what kind of lives they lead on this earth, will be saved at the last day. But the Bible tells us that this is not true. People who believe that everyone will be saved are simply deceiving themselves. Jesus Christ saves only those who feel sorry for their sins and who believe in him as their Savior. The Bible teaches very clearly that there is only one way of salvation. If you look up Acts 16:31 in your Bible you can read what this way is in the words of the Apostle Paul.

If we want to be saved by Christ, we must have *faith* in him. What does it mean to have faith in Jesus Christ? It means that we completely trust him and everything that he has promised us.

Imagine that there is a house on fire. Inside a young boy is trapped on the second floor. The only way the child can escape is through a second-floor window. But though he is standing by it, he is afraid to jump down. A stranger calls up and promises to catch him if he jumps. Still the boy hesitates. He does not know this stranger, and so he does not trust him. Then the boy's father appears. He calls up, "Jump, son! Don't be afraid! I'll be able to catch you!" When he sees his father the child no longer hesitates. Without any fear he jumps down into his father's arms.

Why was the boy ready to listen to his father's call but not to jump into the stranger's arms? The reason is this: he knew his father and so he trusted him. Christ wants us to trust him in the same way, completely. And we may trust Christ without any fear. No one who puts faith in Christ the Savior will perish.

Our faith in Christ must be a true faith. We must trust in him with our whole heart. It is not enough to know many things about Christ and what he has done. Certainly it is important for us to study carefully what the Bible teaches about God and his way of salvation. We must be thoroughly at home in the Word of God. Knowing the Bible and what it teaches will be valuable for us as long as we live. We should be thankful that God has given us Christian parents and teachers to help us learn these truths from childhood on. Thousands of children do not have that privilege.

But we must never think that our knowledge of the Bible is enough by itself to save us. We must have faith, a humble trust that God is our God, that Jesus is our Savior, and that he is so merciful that he has taken away all our sin and guilt.



There is a kind of faith that is sometimes called *historical faith*. A person can have historical faith without having any true, saving faith. Someone with historical faith agrees that the Bible is true, and that what is told there about Jesus actually happened. He believes that these things are true in the same way as he believes what history books say about George Washington. But if our faith is nothing more than that, it is not a true faith. Then we are believing with our head alone, and not with our heart.

There is also a kind of faith called *miraculous faith*. Jesus and his apostles did many miracles when they lived on earth. Those who performed these miracles had to have faith in the power of God. The people who came to be healed of their diseases also had to have faith in order to be cured. By itself this faith which could cause sickness to be taken away is not enough to save a person from sin. Many who performed miracles and many who were healed by these miracles did not truly believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You can read what Jesus says about such persons in Matthew 7:22 and 23.

It is sad that many people do not put their trust in Christ the Savior. They know that all of us will die some day, yet they keep on trusting in themselves, in their own good deeds, and in anything and everything except Christ, the only Mediator. For all these people there is no salvation no matter how good they may seem to be or think they are. The joyful news is that there is salvation even for the very worst sinner who repents of his sin and puts his trust in the Savior. That is why Christ came to earth, to seek and save those who are lost.

### QUESTIONS

1. Are all people saved by the Mediator? Who are saved, according to John 3:16?
2. Did all those who heard Jesus preach truly believe in him? Read Mark 6:6.

3. Acts 26:27-28 tells of a person who believed the Scriptures yet was not saved. Who was this person? What kind of faith did he have?
4. Matthew 10:1-4 tells of some persons who did miracles in Jesus' name. Mark 14:18-21 tells us that one of these persons was not saved. Who was that person? What kind of faith did he have?
5. Did the rich young ruler truly trust Christ? What did he have faith in? Read Luke 18:18-23.
6. Read Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:9-14. On what did the Pharisee put his trust? What was the difference between the Pharisee and the Publican?
7. Read Matthew 14:28-31. How did Peter show that he had little faith? Now read Matthew 16:15-16. How had Peter's faith changed?
8. What Gentile showed complete trust in Jesus? Read Luke 7:2-9.

## LESSON 9

### What Christians Believe

1. What does God command us to believe?  
*Everything he tells us in the Holy Scriptures.*
2. Why must we believe all that the Bible contains?  
*Because it is the Word of God himself.*
3. Where can we find a short statement of everything God commands us to believe?  
*In the Apostles' Creed.*
4. What do we confess in this creed?  
*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.  
And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord,*

*Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary;  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell;  
The third day he rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit.  
I believe a holy catholic church, the communion of saints;  
The forgiveness of sins;  
The resurrection of the body;  
And life everlasting. Amen.*

Not all people are saved by Jesus Christ because not all people believe in him. Jesus once told a story about a wide road and a narrow one. Many people are traveling down the broad way, which leads to everlasting destruction, because they do not want to put their trust in God's Word. They would rather depend on themselves, or on their money, or on their talents, or on their friends, but they do not want to turn to God.

Those people who walk along the narrow way that leads to everlasting life may have a difficult time. These persons are the ones who believe God's Word and put all their trust in Christ as their Savior. That is the only way in which a person can be saved.

What does God want us to believe? He wants us to believe the whole Bible, because that is his Word, his message to humanity. In that book God tells about himself and about the great things he has done in creating the world and in saving man from the sin into which he had fallen. He talks about us and our sin and our need of a God. He tells us how we may again become his children through Jesus Christ. Without the Bible it would be impossible for us to know God truly, and we would be in darkness. With the Bible we have light for our path and a lamp for our feet.

The Bible is made up of sixty-six books. These were written by many people, among them Moses,

David, Solomon, and many prophets and apostles. As these men were writing the books of the Bible, they were being guided by the Holy Spirit of God. It was the Holy Spirit who led them to write just what God wanted written. That is what we mean when we call the Bible an *inspired* book. In a very special way it is the work of God's Spirit.

The Bible teaches us the *complete* way of salvation. Everything we need to know in order to be saved through Jesus Christ and in order to serve God in the right way can be found in the pages of the Bible. The Bible is also *infallible*. The Bible does not have mistakes in it, and it will never lead us astray. We may always be certain that what it teaches us is right. If we believe and do what God tells us in his Word, we will never be deceived.

Sadly, there are many persons who do not believe the Bible. And there are many people who think that it does not make any difference whether they believe it or not. The Bible tells us, however, what may happen to those who will not listen to the Word of God.

In the first part of the Old Testament we read about Noah. His neighbors watched him building a large boat to save his family and the animals from destruction by the flood that God had said would be coming to punish man for sin. But they did not believe the message that God was bringing through Noah. They laughed at Noah's words, and they kept on living and enjoying themselves. You remember what happened. When Noah had finished the boat, he and his family and the animals entered in. Immediately, the rain started falling. The flood that resulted from days of rain brought death and destruction to the whole world. If the people had believed God's Word and repented of their sins, they would not have perished.

Just as God's Word came to the world of that time through Noah, so it comes to us today especially through the Bible. That Word is his message to us. It tells us that we are sinners and that God is angry with us

because of our sins. But it also tells us how we can be saved and escape eternal punishment by repenting of our sins and believing in the Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Bible is a large book, with hundreds of pages. Yet the early Christian church was able to write down its greatest truths in twelve short statements. These statements together form the Apostles' Creed, which has been recited in Christian churches all around the world every Sunday for many hundreds of years. In these statements we find in a short form what the Bible teaches us to believe about God and what he has done for us.

Why did the church want such a summary of the faith? You will remember that Jesus sent the Apostles into the whole world to preach the gospel to everyone. That continues to be the great work of the church today, to preach the Word of God so that people who believe the truth may be saved. But throughout the history of the church false teachers have led people away from the true gospel of Jesus Christ. So the early church wrote the Apostles' Creed to set down in short form the truths that all Christians have always believed. If we know and understand this creed, we will be able to know whether anyone is teaching true or false doctrines.

In the Apostles' Creed the church confesses its faith in the Triune God — God the Father, who created us; God the Son, who saved us; and God the Holy Spirit, who works in our hearts to make us more holy. We will be learning more about the Triune God in the lessons ahead.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Why must every Christian believe the whole Bible?
2. Why do we call the Bible an inspired book? a complete book? an infallible book?
3. What are some things in which people put their trust when they do not trust God? Think of some biblical persons who did not always trust God — Eve in the

Garden; Samson; Nebuchadnezzar (read Daniel 4:29-30); the foolish farmer (Luke 12:16-20).

4. How did the Israelites in the desert show that they did not believe God? Did it make any difference? Read Numbers 14:1-4 and 32-33.
5. To whom was Jonah sent? Did the people there believe God's message? What was the result?
6. Why did Jesus send his Apostles into the world? What would happen to those who believed? To those who did not believe? Read John 3:18.
7. What are the three parts of the Apostles' Creed?

## LESSON 10

### What the Bible Teaches About God

1. What does the Bible teach us about God?  
*That God is Spirit, full of love, perfect in every way.*
2. Does God ever change?  
*No. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*
3. What does the Bible tell us about God's knowledge and power?  
*That God knows everything and can do everything.*
4. Why does the Bible call God holy?  
*Because he loves all good and hates all evil.*
5. What do we mean when we say that God is triune?  
*God is one God, but he consists of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

We cannot truly believe in God unless we know him. We have learned that it means two things to believe in God: to know him as he really is and to trust him fully. We cannot trust and obey God unless we know him as he truly is.

Have you ever wondered why Daniel trusted God even when he was thrown into a den of lions and had to spend the night with those hungry animals? It was because Daniel knew God. He was certain that God was able and willing to help him even in the hour of greatest need.

There is only one way in which we can truly know God. That is from the Bible. In that book God tells us who he is and what he has done to save us from our sins.

Imagine that a girl is lost when she is very young. She is carried far away from home by strangers. For many years she lives in a strange place, where she is treated badly. She has never seen her parents, and she does not know anything about them. But her father finds out where she is, and he sends her a long letter, telling her all about himself and her mother. He tells her about all they have done to save her from her miserable life. He promises to come to bring her back home again soon. When this girl reads that letter, she will know a great deal about her parents even though she has never seen them. We can imagine that she will read the letter over and over again, hardly able to wait for the time when the family will be reunited.

In the same way, we can think of the Bible as God's letter to lost sinners. In his Word God shows himself to us, so that we may truly know him as he is and love him for his great love for us.

The Bible tells us many things about God. First of all, we learn that God is *perfect* in every way. This cannot be said of any person on earth. Even the best man or woman could be much better; the wisest person could be much wiser; the most capable person could do even more things well. Human beings always fall short of perfection. No matter how good a person is, there is always room for much improvement.

Could God improve himself and become better than he is? Not at all. God is perfect in every way. He does not fall short in anything. When we truly realize

that God could not be more loving and kind, wiser, stronger, or more faithful than he is, we will want to worship him with our whole heart and long to become more and more like him. We know that this is what Christ wants us to do: you can read his words about this in Matthew 5:48.

Another thing that the Bible teaches us about God is that he is *eternal*. God never had a beginning and he will never have an end. He lives for ever and ever. The Bible also tells us that God is *unchangeable*. In this he is different from people, who change all the time. Think of how a child grows up. If you do not see a baby for a couple of years, you will hardly recognize it. As time goes by, children become young people, young people become adults, adults become older people. The last change that everyone goes through is the change from life to death.

But change does not only touch persons. Change touches everything in the world. Over a period of many years the sun and wind and rain will change the shape of mountains. Rust eats away steel. Trees burn and become charred stumps. The mighty pyramids of Egypt have stood for thousands of years, but they are being worn away by time. But our God never changes. He is always the same. How does this comfort God's people? They know that no matter what happens they can always trust God, because his power and wisdom and love are always the same.

We also learn from the Bible that God is *almighty and all-knowing*. He knows everything and can do everything. Nothing is hidden from the eyes of God. He knows the secret thoughts of our hearts, which we do not share with even our closest friends. He knows everything that has happened and everything that is going to happen. More than that, he works out his plans with his almighty power. Nothing is too difficult for him. When we realize how great God is, we will also feel how small we are. You can read what David has to say about God's greatness in II Samuel 7:22.



The Bible also teaches that God is a *holy* God. This means that he loves all good and hates everything evil. God is the source of all that is good and pure and beautiful. There is not the least speck of evil found in him, and his holy anger is directed at everything evil in the heart of man. Because God is a holy God, he wants to make us holy as well. He will love and reward those who truly love and obey him, but he will righteously punish all those who follow the way of evil.

The Bible tells us that there is only one God of heaven and earth. Yet we also learn that this God consists of three *persons*, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons form only one God. That is what we mean when we say that God is a *triune* God. This is very difficult for us to understand. Indeed, even the wisest person cannot understand it completely. But it is the way God has revealed himself to us, the way he wants us to know him and to love and serve him with our whole heart.

### QUESTIONS

1. Do the mountains and rivers and stars tell us anything about God? What do you think they tell us?
2. Can we learn from looking at the world around us that we are sinners who can only be saved by the Son of God? Where do we learn that?
3. Can we make a picture of God?
4. What did God do after the children of Israel had been slaves for many years? How did this show that God does not change?
5. Can you think of other things that prove God does not change?
6. There are some people in the Bible who learned that God knows all things. How did Cain learn? Achan (Joshua 7:10-24)? Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:25-30)? The lame man whom Jesus healed (Luke 5:17-25)?
7. How do these Bible stories show that God is holy? The flood; Joseph and his brothers; Ananias and Sapphira.
8. What does it mean that God is a triune God?

## LESSON 11

# God the Father, Creator of Heaven and Earth

1. Why is God the Father called the Creator of heaven and earth?  
*Because he made heaven and earth and everything in them out of nothing.*
2. How did God create heaven and earth?  
*God spoke, and all things came into being by his almighty will.*
3. Does God take care of what he has made?  
*God upholds and rules everything by his providence.*
4. What does Jesus teach about the providence of God?  
*That God takes care of all his creatures, even the flowers in the field and the little birds in their nests.*
5. For whom does God care and provide most of all?  
*For us his children.*

We said in the last lesson that the one God is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. By his almighty power, everything that exists was made out of nothing.

Stop for a moment to think about all the marvelous things which this creation of God contains. All around us is the earth where we live, with its mountains and rivers and seas. On the earth we find millions of trees and plants of every kind. These growing things make the earth beautiful by spreading over it a carpet of living green, dotted with flowers of many colors. Thousands of kinds of animals live on the earth — tiny insects, fluttering butterflies, tiny creatures in the fields, dogs and cats, and many large animals that roam through the jungles and plains of Africa and Asia. Most wonderful of all, the earth is the home of man, who was created in the image of God himself.

But the earth is only a small part of God's creation. When we look up above us, we see the sun shining by day and the moon and stars by night. All of these bodies move through the universe in paths that God has set for them. He knows and guides each one of them. We read that he counts the number of the stars and calls them by name. Each of those millions of stars is in God's hand and obeys his will. It is not surprising that David sang about the stars as he did. When he looked up in the sky at night, he could not help thinking of the wonderful God who created all those twinkling lights. It was as though the stars were telling him what a great and glorious God is watching over everything.

Still, there are some people who believe that this world came into being all by itself without God. Does this seem possible? Have you ever seen what makes a watch work — the jewels and tiny springs and cogs and gears that are inside the case of the watch, usually hidden by the face? When you see that, you know that the watch could not have come into being by itself. Someone made it. Someone designed all those works to fit together so that together they will move the hands of the watch.

The same thing is true of the world in which we live. All things in the world are made so that they fit together. The grass in the field could not grow without the sunshine and rain. Plants and animals are created so that man may have food and clothing. God created the fishes to swim in the water, the birds to fly in the air, and animals and man to live on the land. There is a familiar song which talks about God the Father, the Creator:

All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful—  
The Lord God made them all.

The Bible also tells us how God created these things. He made everything come forth out of nothing

by the word of his mouth. When we want to make something, we begin by making a plan; then we have to get the material for it; finally, we have to work hard at putting it together the way we want it. That is not how God created. All he had to do was to say the word, and all things came into being. God could do this because he is almighty. Read what Psalm 33:9 says about the way the world was created.

God created everything in six days. After these six days God did not create anything more. And yet, even today he is at work in his creation all the time. What is this work of God, from which he never rests? It is what we call the work of God's *providence*. This means that God keeps his creation in being and that he cares for it all the time.

How different this is from the work of human beings! After we have made something we are finished with it. When a carpenter has finished building a table, or when a jeweler completes a watch, he may move to another city and never look at his work again. That is not the way with God. Every moment of every day God protects the things he has created. What is around us today is there only because God wants it to be so. We are alive only because God sees to it that we are. Without his almighty will, everything would simply stop being.

Not only does God keep all things in being, but in his providence he also rules over all things and cares for his creatures all the time. He sends sunshine, wind, and rain. He makes every blade of grass to grow and every flower to bloom. Jesus tells us that God not only takes care of the big and important things but also watches over the smallest parts of creation.

If God is watching over the flowers and the birds, we know that he will be taking care of his children most of all. It is good to know that we have such a Father in heaven. He knows all we need. He can and will provide for us. What our heavenly Father wants us to do is to

trust him and ask all things from him in the name of Jesus Christ.

### QUESTIONS

1. Which Person of the Triune God is the Creator of all things?
2. Why did God create all things? Read Psalm 19:1.
3. What did God create on each of the six days that we read about in Genesis 1?
4. Why do you think God created man last of all?
5. Not everything we make turns out right the first time. What did God say about his creation (Genesis 1:26)?
6. Show how God does even more for his people than a father does for his children.
7. Think of some people in the Bible who learned about God's providence. How did Joseph learn? Jonah? Can you mention any others?

## LESSON 12

### The Son of God, Our Savior

1. Who is Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord?  
*He is the eternal and only Son of the Father.*
2. How did the Son of God become our Savior?  
*By coming to earth as a man.*
3. How did he become man?  
*He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.*
4. Was Jesus truly man?  
*Yes. He became like us in everything, except that he did not sin.*
5. Was he then still God?  
*Yes. Our Mediator is God and man in one person.*

In this lesson we will talk about Jesus Christ and his coming to earth so that he could suffer and die for

sinners. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. From eternity he was with God the Father. You remember we learned that God is a triune God — one being who consists of *three* persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Son of God is sometimes called the Second Person of the Trinity.

The Second Person of the Trinity is the Son of the Father; yet he is God in every way, just like the Father. He knows everything, just as the Father does, and he is perfect and holy like the Father. You sometimes hear people say about a boy that he is the "*image* of his father." What is meant is that the two look and perhaps talk or act very much alike. Jesus Christ is the perfect image of the Father in heaven. He is so perfectly the image of his Father that when one of his disciples once asked to see the Father in heaven, he was told that anyone who sees Jesus *is* seeing Jesus' Father.

From all eternity the Son lived with the Father and the Spirit in perfect love and happiness. Everything was good and holy and glorious. All around were the holy angels praising God. The Father poured out his wonderful love on his Son.

Things were completely different on earth. There, where men and women had fallen into sin, sorrow and evil and suffering and death had come. The lost sinners served Satan, and God's wrath rested on them all. Before the sinners lay the everlasting punishment which their wicked deeds had earned for them.

Did God want to see things happen that way? Was he pleased to see people who had disobeyed him enslaved to sin and suffering for it? Not at all. In his great kindness and mercy, he wanted to save those lost sinners. He wanted them to be led back to him, so that they could find eternal life and happiness. And so God sent his own Son to earth to save them. One of the most familiar verses in the Bible — John 3:16 — tells us this story in just a few words.

In order to save lost sinners the Son of God had to come to earth and live as a man. He had to take our sin

and sorrow on himself, and suffer and die in our place. The Son of God was perfectly willing to do that, for he wanted to do the Father's will and he wanted to save the lost sinners whom he loved.

No one loves us as much as Jesus does. Just try to think of what he gave up for us. Imagine how much love it would take for the son or daughter of a very wealthy person to sell every single one of his or her possessions and give all the money from the sale to the poor people of the world, thus becoming a poor person too. That is a great sacrifice, which only a few persons in the world ever make. But the love of Christ for sinners was even greater than that. He left the glories of heaven, which were much more grand than anything on this earth; he left the joys of life with his Father, which were much greater than any happiness on earth. He gave these up to come to a world full of wickedness and hate to be our Savior. And he did this not for people who loved him, but for people who hated God and everything good. It is only because of his sacrifice that we are able to love him.

The story of how Jesus, the Son of God and our Savior, was born is a very familiar one. All over the world even the youngest children hear about the trip to Bethlehem by Joseph and Mary, the birth of the Savior in a little stable, and the visits of the shepherds and wise men. Jesus' entire life was like this beginning. All the time he was on earth Jesus was a poor man. He had no wealth. Often he did not even have a pillow to lie on. Find out what Paul says about Jesus in II Corinthians 8:9.

When Jesus became man, he was like us in everything, except that he did not sin. He never had an evil thought or spoke a wrong word or did a sinful deed. He was perfect in every way. Still, he was made to suffer all his life. He did good deeds wherever he went. But there were many people who did not want to see the good done. These persons hated and persecuted Jesus.

Often they talked about killing him. Finally the leaders succeeded in having him put to death on the cross.

All of these things Jesus suffered in obedience to the Father in order to save us from sin and to earn us a life of joy and glory with him.

### QUESTIONS

1. Do you know what it means when Jesus is called the "only-begotten" son of God?
2. Why did God the Father send his Son to earth? Why was his Son willing to leave his heavenly home for our world?
3. Tell the story of Jesus' birth.
4. What do we know about the life of Jesus when he was a young person, before he began preaching?
5. Who baptized Jesus and where? What did his Father say about Jesus? Read Matthew 3:13-17.
6. Think of some stories in the Bible which show that Jesus was like us. What is the important way he is different from us?
7. Why did Jesus say he had come to earth? Read Luke 19:10.

## LESSON 13

### The Names "Jesus" and "Christ"

1. What are the two names of our Mediator?  
*Jesus and Christ.*
2. What does the name "Jesus" mean?  
*Savior.*
3. Why was he given this name?  
*Because he saves his people from their sins.*
4. Is he the only Savior?  
*Yes. The only name under heaven through which we can be saved is "Jesus."*



5. What does the name "Christ" mean?  
*The anointed one.*
6. How was Jesus anointed?  
*By the Holy Spirit.*
7. Why was Jesus anointed?  
*In order to be our chief prophet, our only high priest, and our eternal king.*

Our Mediator has two very important names. These names tell us what he is and how much he means to us. In this way, his names are different from ours. Our parents gave us a name when we were only a few hours or days old. It may be a name they had chosen long before we were born. Perhaps it was a name that once had a special meaning. But not everyone with such a name will in fact be the kind of person described by the name's meaning. Our names do not always fit us. That is how they are different from the names of our Mediator. These names fit him perfectly and tell us what he is.

The two names we are talking about are "Jesus" and "Christ." The name Jesus means "Savior." It tells us that our Mediator saves us from our sins and leads us out of slavery into freedom.

Perhaps it is difficult for us to understand how important that is. Long ago men and women who were captured in war were made slaves. During the day they had to work long, hard hours for their masters. They were often beaten and mistreated. At night they were given little to eat before being fastened with chains and thrown into some dark and miserable hole. Life was so terrible for them that most died within a few years. Imagine, now, that some of these poor slaves had a powerful friend who overcame the enemy, broke the chains, and set them free. How joyful these slaves would be! They would scarcely know how to show their thankfulness to their friend for freeing them.

Jesus the Savior has done much more than that for us. When man sinned against God, he fell into Satan's

power. There is no enemy stronger or more cruel. The evil one keeps men and women enslaved in sin. Satan wants to destroy not only our bodies, but also our souls. By our own power we could never break out of Satan's prison or escape from the slavery of sin.

Jesus Christ came into the world to make it possible for us to do just that. He conquered Satan and broke his power over us. He tore apart the chains of sin and set us free. That is why we call him our Savior. God himself gave the name Jesus through his angel who appeared to Mary. You can read what the angel told Mary in Matthew 1:21.

The other important name which tells about our Redeemer is Christ. This name means "the anointed one." You may remember that people in the Old Testament who were called by God to do special work for him were first anointed with holy oil. This was true of the prophets, the priests, and the kings. The holy oil was a sign of the Holy Spirit. As it was poured out on the heads of these servants of God, the people recognized that this was a sign that God himself had called persons to do his work and that he would give them his Holy Spirit so that they would be able to do it.

Now we can see why Jesus the Savior is also called Christ. More than anyone else he is God's anointed one. The Son of God came to earth as the *servant* of God. He came because the Father sent him. He came to do the work the Father had given him to do. He came to make the great sacrifice the Father asked. For this great work of salvation Jesus was anointed by the Father. But holy oil was not poured out on him as it was on Aaron and David and Elisha. Jesus was anointed directly by the Holy Spirit, whom the Father sent upon him. This happened when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. What took place on that day is described in Mark 1:10.

So the name Christ tells us that our Savior is the one anointed by our heavenly Father. It means that the Father sent him to be the Savior of sinners. It also

means that the Father gave him the Holy Spirit, so that he would be able to preach and do miracles, to suffer and die on the cross, and to work out a complete salvation for us.

Christ was anointed by the Father for three different kinds of work necessary for our salvation. First, he was anointed to be our great prophet, to teach us God's truth. Second, he was anointed to be our only high priest, to take away our sin. Third, he was anointed to be our eternal king, to rule over our hearts and lives.

### QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of any other names for the Mediator besides the two important ones that we discussed in this lesson?
2. The Old Testament name "Joshua" means the same thing as the name "Jesus." How was Joshua's work similar to that of Jesus?
3. What happened when David was anointed king? How was this anointing different from that of Jesus?
4. What did Jesus' anointing by the Holy Spirit make it possible for him to do?
5. Can you think of ways in which Jesus performed each of the three different kinds of work for which he was anointed?

## LESSON 14

### Jesus' Suffering and Death

1. What did Jesus do to save us?  
*He took our human nature, suffered for us, and died on the cross. He was buried and descended into hell.*
2. What does it mean that Jesus descended into hell?  
*He suffered the torments of hell on the cross.*

3. In which of his natures did he suffer this?  
*In his human nature, that is, in soul and body.*
4. Why did Jesus suffer all this?  
*He stood in our place and took our sin and punishment on himself.*

Jesus did not come to earth in order to become rich or famous. When he came to earth, he left everything in order to do the Father's will. After visiting the tax-collector Zacchaeus, Jesus explained why he had come to earth: to look for those who were lost and save them. Though he was entirely without sin, he took our sin and the punishment for it on himself when he suffered and died in our place.

Jesus suffered a good deal when he was on earth, not only in the last hours before his death. The greatest cause of suffering for him was the hatred of the many people who refused to believe the good news he was announcing. This filled Jesus' heart with sorrow. Sometimes, the Bible tells us, he cried because people rejected him and the salvation he was offering freely.

When we think about Jesus' life and what he did for people, it is hard to imagine how anyone could have hated him. The leaders of the people were angry with Christ because he told them the truth about their religion and life. The priests, the Pharisees, and the scribes thought that certain religious forms were very important, but many of them had no true love for God or other people in their hearts. They were self-righteous and proud. Over the rest of the people, whom they despised, they had a great deal of power and influence.

Jesus was not afraid of the Jewish religious leaders. He scolded them for their pride. He spoke sharply to them about their empty ceremonies. He said that they were leading people astray with their own religious ideas. He called them hypocrites for worrying about the admiration of other people instead of the will of God. On the outside they may have appeared to be very righteous people, but because of their pride and contempt

for others they were full of corruption and sin. Not surprisingly, when Jesus told them this they became even more angry. They began to plan how to kill him.

Another reason why the leaders of the Jewish people hated Jesus was that he spent much of his time with the poor people, with the tax collectors whom everyone hated, and with people who were known to lead sinful lives. To such people Jesus brought the message of God's forgiving love. He taught them the way of salvation. Many of them believed in him and followed him. This made the Jewish leaders envious. They accused Jesus of being wicked, too, because of the type of people he associated with. Jesus told the religious leaders, "These tax collectors and sinners will enter the kingdom of heaven before you do."

Shortly before his death Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew that he would have to die soon. A terrible sorrow filled his heart, and drops of sweat poured from his face like drops of blood. He prayed that the Father would spare him the suffering that lay ahead. But at the same time he was willing to do the Father's will and to give his life for the salvation of sinners. You can read what Jesus said in his prayer in Luke 22:42.

When the party of soldiers came into the garden to arrest Jesus, his disciple Judas was with them. With a kiss Judas pointed out to the soldiers which one of the men in the garden was Jesus. For that he was paid thirty pieces of silver, which he never had the chance to spend because he killed himself soon afterwards, when he realized what he had done.

The soldiers tied Jesus up, and he was taken to Pilate, the judge. All the disciples had run away out of fear, leaving Jesus alone in the hands of the angry crowd. Pilate, knowing that Jesus had done nothing wrong, wanted to let him go free. But he was afraid of the crowd, who began chanting: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Finally, Pilate gave in to the people and sen-

tenced Jesus to death on a cross, a horrible, painful way to die.

Before he was crucified Jesus was mistreated by the soldiers, who mocked and taunted him. Then he was placed on a cross between two criminals. There he suffered, for our sins, the punishment we would otherwise have had to suffer eternally in hell. We cannot imagine how great that suffering was. But we can get some idea of how alone Jesus felt from the words of Matthew 27:46.

Before nightfall Jesus died. His last words were, "It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Two of Jesus' followers, Joseph and Nicodemus, took Jesus' body from the cross and placed it in a new grave. They rolled a large stone in front of the opening to the grave.

Jesus came into the world to suffer and die for us, to carry away our sin. We must never forget how great a price had to be paid by God's own Son to save us. There could be no greater love than that of Jesus, who gave his own life for us. How thankful we ought to be!

### **QUESTIONS**

1. What are some of the things that made Jesus suffer even before he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane?
2. What happened to the disciples while Jesus was praying in the Garden?
3. Did Jesus know that the soldiers were coming to arrest him in the Garden? Did he know who had told them where he was? Why did he not try to run away? What did Peter do to try to help? What did Jesus tell him? John 18:10, 11.
4. Judas caused Jesus suffering by betraying him. How did the other disciples hurt Jesus? How did Peter add to the Lord's suffering?
5. How did the soldiers treat Jesus?
6. What did the prophets foretell about Jesus' suffering and death? Read Matthew 27:9; John 19:23, 24; John 19:36, 37.

## LESSON 15

# Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension

1. Did Jesus stay in the grave?  
*No. Death could not hold him, and he arose on the third day.*
2. Why was it impossible for death to hold Jesus?  
*Since he had paid for all sin, he had destroyed the power of death.*
3. For how long did the risen Redeemer remain on earth?  
*After forty days Jesus ascended into heaven.*
4. What does the resurrection of Christ mean for us?  
*That Christ will raise us up in the last day.*
5. What does the ascension of Christ mean for us?  
*That the Lord will take us to meet him in heaven and be with him forever.*

When Jesus was laid in the grave by Joseph and Nicodemus, the disciples were very sad. It seemed as if they had lost their Master forever, and evil had won the victory. The disciples had either forgotten or not understood Jesus' promise that he had to suffer and die, but would then arise on the third day.

Those who had crucified Jesus remembered these words, however. They did not believe that Jesus would arise out of his grave, but they were fearful that his disciples would steal his body in the night, and then tell everyone that Jesus had arisen. So they stationed soldiers to watch at the grave of Jesus. They watched from Friday evening until early Sunday morning. During that time they did not see or hear anything. The soldiers probably made many mocking remarks about Jesus and his promise that death would not hold him.

What happened early on Sunday morning was something they had not expected. Angels came from heaven and appeared before the tomb. They rolled away the stone, and Jesus came out of the grave. When the soldiers saw the angels, they ran away frightened.

That same day Jesus appeared to Mary and to Peter and the other disciples and spoke to them. The disciples rejoiced that Jesus was with them again. Now they realized that their Savior was stronger than death and the grave.

Jesus stayed on the earth nearly six weeks after his resurrection. Much of this time he spent talking to his disciples about the great work of spreading the good news of salvation, which they would have to do after he left them. At the end of forty days Jesus was walking with his disciples on the Mount of Olives. He stopped and spread out his hands to bless the disciples. Then he ascended from the earth. The disciples looked at him for a short while, but a cloud came between them and the Lord and they could no longer see him.

While the disciples were still looking into the sky, two angels appeared to tell them that Jesus would come again as they had seen him go. This made the disciples very happy. They went back to Jerusalem rejoicing that they had a Savior who died for them, who had arisen from his grave, who had now gone to heaven to make ready a place for them, and who would come again some day to take his people to him in heaven.

This is the kind of Savior we need. If Jesus had died and remained in the grave, he could not have saved us from the power of death. He would be remembered as a good man and a wonderful teacher, but not as Savior. But Jesus did arise from the grave, and this is a sign that he destroyed the power of death for us. Death had come into the world because of sin. But when Jesus paid the penalty for our sin on the cross and was laid in the grave, he destroyed death's terrible power. Because of that, death was not strong enough to hold Jesus in the grave, and he came forth victorious on the third day.

Why do we rejoice that Christ rose again? Because we realize that death has no lasting power over us if we believe in Christ. If our sins are forgiven for his sake, we do not have to be afraid of death when it



comes. Death has become the servant of Christ. No longer does it destroy us, but it takes us away to be with our Lord.

Our Savior is now in heaven. Yet he is always close to us. Jesus returned to his heavenly home to make a place ready for us, so that we may be with him forever. If we are truly Christians, we will long to be in heaven with Christ. There we will see no sin and sorrow. Instead, we shall live in eternal joy with our Savior. In Philippians 1:23 Paul tells his readers what he as a Christian desires to do. Paul's hope is the hope of all Christians.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why did the women go to the place where Jesus was buried on Sunday morning? Do you think they expected him to arise from the dead?
2. What happened to two of Jesus' followers who were walking home on Easter Sunday? Read Luke 24:1-35.
3. Did Jesus conquer death for himself alone?
4. When will God's people arise from their graves? Does any person know the date when that will happen?
5. What was the commandment that Jesus gave his disciples before he left this earth?
6. Why do Christian people long to be in heaven with Christ?

## LESSON 16

### Jesus in Heaven and with Us

1. Where is Jesus today?

*Since his ascension he has been in heaven, sitting at the right hand of his Father.*

2. What does it mean when we say that Christ is sitting at God's right hand?  
*That God has given Christ all glory and power in heaven and on earth.*
3. Why has God given all power to our Savior?  
*To rule and protect his people on earth.*
4. What else does our exalted Savior do for us?  
*He is constantly praying for us.*
5. Is Jesus with us on earth, too, as he promised?  
*Yes. With his Spirit, love, and power, he is never absent from us:*

The disciples saw Jesus ascending, but they could not see him enter heaven. No one can see heaven now, but we know that Jesus is there. We also know what he is doing for us, because God has told us that in the Bible.

Jesus in heaven sits at the right hand of God the Father. He is always next to the Father on his heavenly throne. This is a position of honor, and it means that the Father has given his Son all power and glory to rule as King. Christ received this honor from his Father because of his obedience when he was on earth.

During his years among people on earth, Jesus had a great longing to be with his Father in heaven. A little while before he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was walking with his disciples one day when this longing became very strong. He prayed that his Father would glorify him. You can read this prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John, chapter 17, verse 5. That prayer was not answered until after Jesus' work of salvation was finished, and he ascended into the glory and joy of heaven at the Father's right hand.

Luke, who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, tells us what happened until the moment Jesus disappeared from the disciples' sight, hidden by a cloud. Imagine that there had also been someone in heaven writing what it was like when Jesus returned to the place of his Father after his years on earth. No words could be

found to describe the joy of the angels and saints or the songs of praise they sang, which must have filled heaven. Nor could words express the great joy that Christ must have felt. He was coming back to his Father. He had finished all the work he had been given to do. His suffering and his death on the cross were behind him. Endless joy and glory and power at God's right hand were ahead of him.

This joy of Christ was not a selfish one, such as our happiness often is. Christ does not for a moment forget about his people on earth. He always has us in his heart and mind. His greatest longing now is for the day when we also will be with him in heaven to share in his power and glory.

Even before he died Christ had told his disciples that he would be returning after his resurrection to his Father. He would be going there in order to prepare a place where his people might spend eternity. Our Savior in glory cares for his people. Let us see what he is doing while he waits for the day of his return to earth to take us to heaven.

First of all, as our King he is ruling over us. This means that it is Jesus who tells us what we have to do to serve God and live in true happiness. It means also that he protects us from the power of Satan, who is always trying to harm us and lead us into sin. Each day Christ our King gives us the strength we need to turn away the many temptations that face us. He makes it possible for us to serve and obey God.

We do not always appreciate how wonderful it is that we have a Savior who rules all things. The Father has given him all power in heaven and on earth, and he made Jesus King over the whole earth and over all people. But many of the people in the world do not believe that Jesus is the King. They do not wish to honor and obey him. Someday those who do not believe now that Christ is King will learn what a terrible mistake they have made.

There is another thing that Jesus is doing for us. Besides ruling over us, he is always praying for his people. We know what it means to pray for someone. Our parents ask God to give us happiness and protection from harm because they love us. Our minister prays for the sick and the sorrowing. We pray for those who are hungry or lonely. God has promised to hear such prayers from his people. But Jesus' love is even more wonderful than our love or the love of our minister or of our parents. He gave his life for us. Now he is praying to the Father that God's love and mercy may be on us and that God may look at us as his children.

These prayers the Father listens to, because Jesus followed his Father's will and carried away our sins. Therefore, even when we pray to God, we do it "in Jesus' name" or "for Jesus' sake." When we say those words in our prayers, we are asking God to listen to us because of what Jesus has done for us. Because Jesus in heaven is praying for us, God will also hear the prayers we make on earth.

There is another wonderful thing about our blessed Redeemer. He not only lives *for us*, but he also lives *with us*. Although he ascended into heaven and is now sitting at the right hand of God, he is at the same time with his people on earth. He told his disciples that he would not leave those who follow him. You can read the words of that promise in Matthew 28:20.

Jesus is both God and man. As man he is not now with us on earth. But as God he is with us through his love and Spirit. So we must never think of Christ as a faraway person. We must think of him as one who is always near to us, who loves us and protects us, and who makes his home in our own heart.

### QUESTIONS

1. One of the Soviet cosmonauts who circled the world in a satellite claimed he was not able to find God or heaven. Should this upset the Christian?

2. What does it mean that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God? What was Jesus doing when Stephen saw him (Acts 7:56)?
3. Name some ways that we can honor Christ as our King.
4. How is Christ a different kind of King from those we read about in the Old and New Testaments?
5. Why do we need someone to rule over us? If Jesus is ruling over us, does this mean we are free to disobey our parents if we wish? or to pay no attention to the laws of the state or country we live in?
6. What does Jesus ask his Father for when he prays to him?
7. Why is it important for us not to think of Jesus as someone far away?

## LESSON 17

### The Judge of the World

1. What did the angel tell the disciples after Jesus had ascended and disappeared from their sight?  
*That Jesus would some day return in the same miraculous way.*
2. How will Jesus come again?  
*In great glory on the clouds of heaven.*
3. Why will Jesus come again?  
*To judge the living and the dead.*
4. How will Jesus judge all the people?  
*According to what they have done, whether good or evil.*
5. What will be the result of that great judgment?  
*The wicked will be punished eternally, and God's people will be received into everlasting life.*
6. Do we know when Jesus is coming again?  
*No. Only the Father knows the day and hour when Jesus will return.*

When Jesus was with his disciples on earth he often mentioned that he would have to suffer and die and then arise from the grave and return to his Father. But he also told them that one day he would come back to this earth. On that great day, he said, he would come in great glory on the clouds of heaven, surrounded by holy angels. All the world would see his greatness and majesty.

Why is Jesus going to come again? Will it be to preach the gospel to sinners one more time? Will it be to do more miracles of healing? No, when Jesus comes again, the end of the world will be here, and the time for preaching the gospel and doing works of mercy will be past. The next coming of Jesus will be to judge the people of the world.

The people to be judged will be not only those living at the time Jesus returns, but also the dead, whom he will call out of their graves. All the people who have ever lived on this earth will stand before the Savior to be judged. Why must all appear before Christ's judgment? Paul gives the answer to this question in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 10.

Christ will be a righteous judge. He will make no mistakes. We will not have to tell him what we have done, because he will already know all about it. Our actions, our words, even our thoughts are written in his book. On the great judgment day that book will be opened, and Christ will judge according to what is written there.

People often try to hide their sins from others. But if they cannot keep others from finding out, they try to make excuses for what they have done. On the great judgment day, when Christ returns, that will be impossible. Nothing will be hidden from the great Judge, not even things we have forgotten about. That is why it is important for us to ask ourselves, "What will that great day of judgment mean for me?"

For those who have not believed in Christ and who have lived evil lives, the day of judgment will be a

terrible day. We are told that they will even call out to the mountains and ask the hills to fall on them and hide them from the face of Jesus. They will know that they have deserved God's anger because of their sins, and they will realize that it is too late for them to look for salvation. It will be a most fearful day for those who are not saved by Jesus Christ.

But all those who have truly repented of their sins and who have turned to Christ for their salvation need not be afraid of that day of judgment at all. For all of God's people, who believe in Christ and who have lived to love and serve him, that day will be a blessed and joyful one. That will be the day when Jesus comes to take his people to be with him forever. You can read in Matthew 25:34 the wonderful words that Jesus will say to his followers.

In the kingdom of Christ there will be no more sin or temptation or suffering. Christ's people will always live with him in heaven. Their happiness and holiness and glory there will never end.

When is that great day of judgment coming? God knows the day and the hour, but he has not told us. We do not need to know that. God tells us only that we must always be prepared for that day. He wants us to believe in Christ the Savior *now*. He wants us to live in such a way that we will be ready to meet him on the great day of judgment, whether it comes tomorrow or a hundred years from now. If we live that way, if we truly love God and serve him, we do not have any reason to be afraid of dying or of the day of judgment. Instead, we will look forward eagerly to the day when Jesus will take us to that eternal home he has been preparing for us.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Think of Jesus' first coming as a baby born in Bethlehem. Can you think of ways in which his second coming will be different from that?
2. Read the parable that Jesus told his followers which is

- recorded in Matthew 25:1-13. What is the lesson of this story?
3. How is Jesus a different kind of judge from earthly judges?
  4. Will there be many disappointed people on the great day of judgment? Read what Jesus says in Matthew 7:21-23 about this. Who else will be surprised on that day? Read Matthew 25:34-40. Why will they be surprised?
  5. How do you think people would live if God had told us the exact day and hour when Jesus is returning to judge the world?
  6. Do you think it is easy for people who live a comfortable life to look forward to the great day of judgment?

## LESSON 18

### The Holy Spirit

1. What did Jesus do ten days after he ascended into heaven?  
*He poured out his Holy Spirit on his disciples.*
2. Who is the Holy Spirit?  
*He is the Third Person of the Trinity, one with the Father and the Son.*
3. Why did Christ send his Spirit to his church?  
*To dwell in the hearts of his people.*
4. What is the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts?  
*He gives us a new heart, leads us into all truth, and comforts us in times of sorrow.*
5. Will the Holy Spirit ever leave God's people?  
*No. The Spirit of God stays with us forever.*

A short time before Jesus was arrested and crucified, he had many long talks with his disciples. He realized that his death would be very difficult for them



to bear. And he knew that after he arose from the dead he would be with them for only a few weeks before ascending into heaven. So he told them some good news about the time after he had left this earth and returned to heaven. He would pray to his Father, he told them, and the Father would send someone else to be with them, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus kept his promise to the disciples, as he keeps all his promises. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples returned to Jerusalem. There about 120 followers of Jesus, both men and women, began to meet together to pray and worship God. Ten days after the ascension the Jewish feast of Pentecost was celebrated. It was then that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his disciples, as he had told them he would.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was a much more spectacular event than the coming of Jesus at Bethlehem, which was witnessed by only a few people. The 120 people were praying in the room when strange things began to happen. There was suddenly a sound like a mighty wind, which filled the whole house. On the heads of each of the persons tongues of fire appeared. People began to talk in other languages. One moment all was quiet; the next moment there were marvelous signs.

What is the meaning of these signs that came along with the Holy Spirit? The sound of the mighty wind tells us of the great power of the Holy Spirit. The power of a windstorm is very great, as anyone knows who has seen the destruction caused by a hurricane or a tornado. But the power of such a storm is small compared to the power of God's Spirit.

Nothing can stand in the way of the work of the Spirit. When he takes hold of our heart, he carries us along. He tears us loose from the sins we enjoy. He gives us power to overcome the temptations that are all around us. Even Satan with his great power cannot stand up to the Spirit of God. This should comfort us very much. We are weak, but the Spirit of God is all-

powerful. He will give us the victory in every battle with Satan and make us strong enough to do the right thing.

What was the meaning of the tongues of fire that appeared on the heads of the followers of Jesus? The fire tells us that the Holy Spirit gives us light and warmth in our hearts. Imagine what it would be like to try to live through the winter without the heat that comes from our furnaces. Imagine what it would be like at night if the only light we had was that of the sun. We would not be able to see things very clearly at all.

Our hearts are like that before the Spirit comes to bring us to Christ and show us his way of forgiveness. Without Christ we wander in the dark and cold, away from God, miserable and unsatisfied. The Holy Spirit changes everything. He brings us the light of true knowledge and joy and makes our hearts warm with love for Christ. Great changes take place when the fire of the Spirit is kindled in our heart.

The miracle of speaking in other languages means that the joyful message of salvation in Jesus Christ is for people of all lands and all languages. God wants the good news preached to everyone.

Christ has given us the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts. What makes this gift so wonderful is that the Holy Spirit is God, just as the Father is God and the Son is God. The Holy Spirit is eternal and almighty and all-powerful. Yet he is happy to come to live in the hearts of each of us and to stay there forever. Paul told the Christians in Corinth what a marvelous thing it is to have the Spirit dwelling in us. You can read what he told them about this in I Corinthians 3:16.

Let us give a short summary of what the Holy Spirit does for us while he is living in our heart. First of all, he *regenerates* us. That means that he gives us a new heart, so that we can truly love God and hate sin. Another thing the Spirit does is to *lead us into all truth*. He teaches us to know God's Word and to understand what God is saying to us there. Also, in times of trouble,

the Holy Spirit *comforts* us. He tells us that God has promised to care for us.

The Holy Spirit will stay with us forever. He will never leave us. Throughout our lives he gives us strength and leads us. At the time of our death, he gives us the grace to leave this world gladly, knowing that we will be with Christ forever.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why did the disciples return to Jerusalem after the ascension? Read Acts 1:4.
2. What was one of the things the disciples did in the room before Pentecost? Read Acts 1:15-26.
3. Describe what happened on Pentecost. How did some of the people who saw these miracles explain them?
4. Tell how the Holy Spirit changed the hearts of these people. Look up the passage of Scripture if you have to. Paul (Acts 9:1-6); the jailer in Philippi (Acts 16:25-34); Lydia, the seller of purple dye (Acts 16:14).
5. The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. Do you think this means that God's people never make mistakes?
6. Another name for the Holy Spirit is the Comforter. Tell how he comforted David in his troubles (read Psalm 23). How did he comfort Paul (II Corinthians 12:9)?

## LESSON 19

### The Church of Christ

1. Who belongs to the church of Christ?  
*Everyone who believes in Christ and serves him.*
2. Does Christ himself belong to his church?  
*Yes. He is the head and king of his church.*
3. From where do the members of Christ's church come?  
*From the whole human race.*

4. Where do we find the church of Christ?  
*Wherever the Word of God is purely preached and people sincerely believe it.*
5. What great blessings does Christ give his church?  
*Forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and everlasting life.*

Every Sunday we go to church. But did you ever stop to think what *church* really is? We should not confuse the church with the building of wood or brick in which we sit on Sunday. Instead, we should think of the church as the *people* who come together in that building, the fathers and mothers and children who gather with one another to worship and serve God.

The most important thing about a church is not whether the building in which it meets is a grand structure with lovely windows and beautiful furnishings inside, or a little building of wood with a simple pulpit, old chairs, and bare floors. The early Christians, in fact, did not even have church buildings. They simply went from house to house for their meetings. In some countries of the world where the authorities do not allow freedom of religion, this is necessary even today.

In the early days of the church Christians were often persecuted for their faith, sometimes even killed. In the great city of Rome they did not dare to meet in public where the authorities might have found them. So they came together at night in underground passages and caves to worship God and listen to the precious message of salvation. That is the important thing about worship. God is interested in whether those who meet to worship him have true faith in their hearts and a sincere desire to confess and serve the risen Savior.

Who are the people who meet to worship? Who belongs to the church? Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and confesses his name belongs to the church. But that is not all, for even the youngest children of those persons who believe also belong to the church. Here is an important thing for us to remember: we are

not children of the world, but children who belong to God and to his church. That is why Christian parents take their children along to worship God on Sunday and make certain that they are taught about God's Word during the week. This is a great blessing for those who have believing parents. There are many who do not have this privilege. We must remember to be thankful to God for Christian parents. He wants us to grow up to believe in Christ, and, when we are old enough to understand better what it means, to confess Christ as our Savior and promise to live for him always.

Christ himself is the head of the church. The Bible sometimes talks about the church as a body. If a body did not have a head, of course, there would be no life in it. Jesus, who has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, gives life and faith and strength to his people in the church. He rules them with his Word and his Spirit. That is why the church has his name: it is called the *Christian* church or the church of *Christ*. Christ founded it; he bought it with his blood; it belongs to him and he cares for it always. The church has no other head and king but Christ.

Christ gathers that church out of the whole world, from every nation and of every type of person. He brings them together to make up one great family of brothers and sisters in Christ. It makes no difference whether we are young or old, rich or poor. It makes no difference whether we live in the United States or Canada, Europe or Asia, Latin America or Africa. True believers all over the world together form the one great church of Christ, and all Christians belong together because they all belong to Christ. You can read what Paul says about the believers in Romans 12:5. How do you suppose Christ wants these brothers and sisters to live together?

Every week the members of the church answer the call of Christ to come together to worship God in their houses of worship. Since the earliest days of the church, the weekly meetings of God's people have

been held on Sunday, the first day of the new week, the day of Jesus' resurrection. Christ meets with his people in church. Though we cannot see him, he is truly there with his Spirit and his love, no matter how small the group; for he has promised that where even two or three gather together in his name, he will be with them.

What are some of the things we do when we come to God's house? For one thing, we join in prayer to God to ask for his blessings on us. We pray for all the needs of our lives, of our homes and schools and churches, of our country and of the whole world. We ask him to forgive our sins and to supply us what we require.

But we do not only ask God for things. We also come together to thank him for his blessings. One of the ways we show him that we are grateful is by singing songs of praise. God is worthy to be praised by his people. When we sing in church, that is what we are doing. We should think not only of the music but also of the words, so that our songs are sung not only with our lips but also with our hearts.

Besides asking God for blessings and praising him for what he is and does, we also come together to listen to the Word of God. God has a message for all of us, and we should listen attentively and reverently to it. In that message God tells us what great things he has done for us and how he wants us to live for him. God's message is always the same and yet it is always new.

The Word of God is like food, which God supplies to satisfy the spiritual hunger of his people and to nourish them. When Christian people listen to God's Word, they are built up in faith and again strengthened to live for God during the days of the week. Every day of the week God wants his people to live in obedience to him, to fight against sin, and to live in such a way that others will be able to see that they are children of God.

### QUESTIONS

1. What do you think it means for a *child* to belong to God's church?

2. How are some of the ways we can show our love for Christ and for one another?
3. Why are all Christians brothers and sisters of one another?
4. Think about the things that you do in your church during a Sunday worship service. Do you know why these things are done?
5. What did Jesus mean when he told his disciples that Christians are to be the light of the world? How does the church help us to do this?
6. What does it mean that God's message is always the same yet always new?

## LESSON 20

### How Sinners Are Made Righteous

1. What great blessing is ours if we believe in Jesus Christ?  
*We are justified by faith.*
2. What does it mean that we are justified by faith?  
*That God takes away all our guilt and considers us righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ.*
3. Is there any way we can earn righteousness before God?  
*No. Even our best works are imperfect and polluted by sin.*
4. Do we have to earn our righteousness before God?  
*No. Christ has earned righteousness for us by his death on the cross.*
5. How can that perfect righteousness of Christ become ours?  
*If we accept Christ with true faith.*

Have you ever wondered why the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders of Jesus' time found it so hard to accept the good news of the gospel? It is certainly not

because all of them were what we would consider "bad" people. You will remember that there were some very sincere persons among the Pharisees. Two of them in particular are mentioned in the Bible: Nicodemus, who once came to talk to Jesus at night, and Joseph of Arimathea, in whose tomb Jesus was buried. Nicodemus and Joseph were good men, who tried to live in the way they thought God wanted them to live. Indeed, many of the Pharisees believed themselves to be doing exactly what God required.

The Jews of Jesus' time, especially the Pharisees, believed that they could please God by their own deeds. They felt that God would allow them to enter the kingdom of heaven if they were very careful about obeying the law and doing good things. They never doubted that God was pleased with them, and that he would give them a place of honor in his kingdom because of how carefully they followed many rules.

When Jesus came, however, he showed them that they were entirely wrong. He made it clear that all our good works can never save us or make us pleasing in God's sight. Even the very best deeds of human beings are imperfect and stained with sin, so that God cannot possibly accept them or be pleased with them.

But if our works cannot make us righteous or acceptable in God's sight, how can we be made righteous? There is only one way, and God's Word shows it to us. God himself gives us the righteousness we need, not because of anything we have done to earn it, but because of the works of his Son Jesus Christ. It was he who earned righteousness for us, and God gives us that righteousness if we truly believe in Christ as our Savior.

In the letters that Paul wrote to early Christians, which now make up much of our New Testament, the great apostle emphasizes that over and over. One of the passages where he says this very clearly is Romans 3:28, where he tells us what justifies us and what does not justify us. You should look carefully at that verse.



Exactly what does Paul mean in Romans 3:28 by that word "justify"? To be justified by God means that *God declares us to be righteous before him*. God takes all the guilt of our sins away from us. He accepts us as his beloved children. If we sincerely believe in Christ, God, the great and holy Judge of the world, tells us that he does not consider us to be guilty. He looks upon us as though we ourselves had earned what Christ actually earned for us.

Perhaps we can start to understand this if we think about a simple illustration. Suppose that a person steals a thousand dollars. If he has spent all of that money, he may not have anything with which to repay the person he stole from. He is arrested and brought to trial. The only thing the judge can do is to find the man guilty and punish him. "You are guilty," he tells the man, "and you will have to suffer for your crime by going to prison."

Just then a friend comes along and speaks to the judge. He tells him, "I will pay back the thousand dollars which this man has stolen, and I will do anything else that the law requires of this guilty man." Perhaps the judge will then change his sentence and say to the guilty man, "I will not hold this guilt against you. The debt which you owed is paid, and you may go free."

This is only an illustration. The kind-hearted friend could pay back the thousand dollars the man had stolen, but he could never take away the guilt of this man. Even though the debt is paid, the man will remain guilty of taking something that did not belong to him.

The saving work of Christ is entirely different. Not only did Christ live righteously in the way that God requires us to live, but he also takes all our sin and guilt on himself and so takes our guilt away.

It is true that in ourselves we are burdened with all the guilt of our sin. We deserve God's righteous condemnation. We stand before God, the great and holy Judge. As God looks at us, the only thing he can say is:

**“You are guilty, and you have earned the most severe punishment for time and eternity.” But Christ puts himself in our place. He lived and died for our sake, to take away our sin. If we believe in him, God says something different: “Christ has taken your sin and guilt away. I no longer consider you guilty. I will not punish you; instead, for the sake of Jesus Christ I give you my love and eternal life.” That is what it means to be justified by God.**

**When God justifies us, he does so completely. When God declares that he no longer considers us guilty for Jesus’ sake, not the least bit of guilt is left in us. All our sins are blotted out. God forgives them all. For this reason the Christian can have peace in his heart.**

**But let us never forget that there is only one way for the righteousness of the Savior to become ours. We must believe in him with our whole heart. We must come to God confessing our sins, feeling sorrowful and repentant, and putting our trust only in Christ, who came to take away the awful burden of our guilt.**

### **QUESTIONS**

- 1. Do you think there are still people today who try to become righteous before God through their own works?**
- 2. Why is it impossible for a person to become righteous before God by his own good deeds?**
- 3. Describe what justification means in your own words.**
- 4. Read Jesus’ parable in Luke 18:10-14. How did the Pharisee in that story try to justify himself? Why did Jesus say that the publican went home justified while the Pharisee did not?**
- 5. Look up Romans 5:1. What do you think it means to have peace with God?**
- 6. What are we no longer afraid of if we have truly accepted Jesus Christ in faith? Read Romans 8:1.**

## LESSON 21

# God's Spirit Teaches Us to Believe

1. From where does the true faith come which we need in order to accept Christ?  
*The Holy Spirit works it in us.*
2. How does the Holy Spirit work true faith in us?  
*By changing our hearts so that we can see that we are sinful and must go to Jesus to be delivered from it.*
3. What does the Holy Spirit use to work this faith in us?  
*The preaching of God's Word.*
4. Is preaching by itself enough to move people to believe in the Savior?  
*No. The Holy Spirit must apply the truth to their hearts.*
5. What should we pray for when we go to listen to God's Word?  
*That God's Spirit will teach us to understand and accept that Word.*

We learned in the last lesson that it is impossible for us to be righteous before God except by true faith in Jesus Christ. We can never stand right with God by what we ourselves do because it is all imperfect. Even the very best of our actions are so full of sin and selfishness that we only make our guilt before God greater. When we go to bed at night and look back on what happened during the day, we have to confess our disobedience.

Once we realize how sinful we are, we will never again boast about our own good works. Instead we will humbly ask God to take away all our guilt for the sake of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, who has paid for all our sins and earned eternal life for us by his sacrifice on the cross. If we have a true faith in that Savior and if we place our whole trust on him, God will take our guilt away. Then all the righteousness of Christ is ours, and God takes us to himself as his beloved children.

But now an important question comes. How can we learn to believe? How can we learn to have that true faith in Jesus Christ which is necessary if his righteousness is to become ours? God's Word gives us a very clear answer to that question.

Some people say we can give ourselves the necessary faith. They believe that all it takes for true faith to come into someone's life is for that person to *decide*, by himself, to believe. Is this true? Can we give our heart in faith to Christ by our own will? No, we cannot. Our heart is by nature not a believing heart but an unbelieving one. If God left it to our choice, we would never accept the gospel. Quite the opposite. We would drift ever further away from God and harden our hearts against him.

But God has not left us in so hopeless a situation. Paul explained to the Ephesian Christians where the faith that we need comes from. You can read his words in Ephesians 2:8. Faith is the gift of God, just as Christ and his saving work are the gifts of God.

It is God's Holy Spirit who changes our hearts and teaches us to believe. We have nothing to take credit for. By his power and grace God works our salvation from beginning to end.

But how does God's Holy Spirit work faith in us? First of all, he uses the gospel. Through the preaching of the gospel the Holy Spirit comes to us and teaches us to know Christ and all he has done for our salvation. That is important to remember when the gospel is being preached: though a man is talking, it is God's Spirit who is speaking to us, bringing to us the message of salvation. He teaches us to know all that God has done in his love for sinful human beings. He shows us how truly wonderful is the salvation that God offers to all who are listening.

The Holy Spirit does more than that. He not only teaches us to know Christ and what Christ has done for us, but he also teaches us to put our trust in him. The Spirit of God works in our hearts in such a way that we

learn to love Christ, to depend on him to take away our sin, and to put our trust in him alone.

That is what it means to believe. When the Holy Spirit works in our heart so that we feel how sinful we are, so that we flee to Christ for forgiveness, and so that we trust that Jesus hears and will help us, we have learned to believe. That is the kind of faith the Holy Spirit works in our heart to make us children of God.

God wants all of us to believe in Christ in that way and to give our whole heart to him. It is sad that there are people who know the gospel message and hear it preached often but continue to live in unbelief and indifference. Many do not pay any attention to the call of the Holy Spirit. They neglect Christ, who is standing and knocking at the door of their hearts. God is angry with those who treat his offer of salvation in that way. He warns us that there is no escape for us if we ignore so great a salvation.

At the same time let us never forget that all true faith is God's work in us. None of us would ever learn to believe in Christ our Savior if the Holy Spirit did not work in our hearts and teach us to trust Christ and him alone. Our prayer should always be, "O Holy Spirit of God, teach me to understand the gospel and to believe with my whole heart in Christ my Savior." If this is our sincere prayer, God's Spirit will surely work that wonderful faith in our heart. He will fill us with peace and gladness, because we love Christ and trust his saving power.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Why are we unable to believe merely by our own effort?
2. What was the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit when Peter preached on Pentecost? Read Acts 2:41.
3. Does everyone who hears the gospel put his trust in Christ?
4. Read the story of Jesus' miracle that is told in Mark 9:17-27. What does verse 24 tell us about who gives us faith?

5. What ruler felt something of the truth of the message that Paul brought to him? Read Acts 26:28. Did that move him to believe in the Christ whom Paul preached.
6. Tell how Martin Luther learned to put his trust in Christ alone.

## LESSON 22

### What Our Baptism Means

1. What more does the Holy Spirit do besides working faith in us?  
*He strengthens that faith through the preaching of God's Word and the use of the holy sacraments.*
2. What are sacraments?  
*They are signs and seals of God's saving grace, instituted by Christ himself.*
3. How many sacraments are there?  
*Two: holy baptism and the Lord's supper.*
4. What is the sign of baptism?  
*Water, with which we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*
5. What does baptism mean?  
*That our sins are washed away by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ.*
6. Why are the children of believing parents baptized?  
*Because God has taken them as well as their parents into his covenant.*

Every Sunday in church we hear the minister preach a sermon. During some Sunday services, there is also a baptism. The minister reads a form explaining what baptism is. He asks the fathers and mothers of the children to be baptized if they will promise to bring up

their children in the fear of the Lord. Then he sprinkles water on the heads of the babies, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Did you ever wonder how it comes about that the children of the church are baptized? Baptism is not something that people have thought up. It was commanded by Christ himself before he left this earth. You can read what Christ said to his disciples about this in Matthew 28:19.

Baptism shows us that the sins of God's people are washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the meaning of the water used in baptism. Of course, this water itself does not wash our hearts clean. We have already learned that nothing can take sin away and make us clean before God except the power of Jesus' blood. But the water of baptism is a *sign*. When the water is sprinkled on the person being baptized, we are reminded that Christ's blood takes away the sin and uncleanness of our hearts just as water cleans dirt from our bodies.

Baptism is not for everyone. Only persons who belong to the church of Christ may receive this sacrament. Baptism is a sacred mark that God places on those who belong to him, those whom he has chosen to be his people. There is a name we sometimes call those who belong to the church: God's *covenant people*. What this means is that God belongs to them, and they belong to God. When God made his covenant with Abraham, he said, "I will be a God to you and you will be my people." God says the same thing to his covenant people today.

God's covenant people are chosen and called by God and cleansed in the blood of Jesus Christ. They are called by God out of the world to belong to him and to serve him and share in his life and salvation. To these covenant people God has given the sacrament of baptism as a sign and seal that he has called them and cleansed them and that they no longer belong to this world.

There is an important and wonderful thing about the covenant God has made with his people. Not only adults are included in it. God also takes the children of believing parents as his own. Peter told the people to whom he preached at Pentecost that the promise was not only for them but also for *their children*. Because children are included in the covenant, they, too, are given the sign of baptism.

Indeed, in our churches we do not very often see adults being baptized. But in missionary churches adult baptism is quite common. People who have not heard the gospel message until late in life receive the Savior through the work of the Holy Spirit and confess him as their Lord. Then they ask to receive the sign of God's cleansing — holy baptism. How much joy there is in heaven when sinners repent and believe and when God's sign of baptism is placed on them!

We must remember to be thankful for parents who believe in Christ, who have brought us to church to be baptized, and who have promised God they will do all they can to teach us the Christian faith. When we think back on the fact that we were once baptized, we should think of the sign God has placed on our heads. We should recall how good God is to deliver us from the power of sin and to make us his own children.

Our baptism also tells us that God wants us to love and obey him and to fight against everything that is sinful. God is greatly saddened when his children do something that is wrong. Every day we should come to our heavenly Father, praying that he will help us fight the sin within our hearts and teach us to follow and obey him as his covenant children.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why are we baptized with water? Can water take away our sins? What can cleanse us from our sins?
2. Do you think baptism can save us?
3. What did the Ethiopian say when he believed in Christ? Read Acts 8:36.



4. What did Ananias say to Paul when Paul was converted on the way to Damascus? Read Acts 22:16.
5. What are some of the ways that parents try to teach the Christian truths to the children whom they have brought for baptism?
6. What does it mean for us to be called God's *covenant people*?

## LESSON 23

### What the Lord's Supper Means

1. What are the signs of the Lord's supper?  
*The broken bread and the poured out wine.*
2. What is the broken bread a sign of?  
*The body of Christ, which was broken on the cross.*
3. What is the poured out wine a sign of?  
*The blood of Christ, which was shed on the cross.*
4. What does Christ teach and assure us by his supper?  
*That he feeds our soul with his crucified body and shed blood.*
5. What command did Jesus give when he first celebrated his supper?  
*That Christians should always celebrate this supper in remembrance of him.*

In our last lesson we learned what baptism means. By the sacrament of baptism Christ assures us that the sins of his people are washed away by his blood. Jesus gave his own blood so that all our sins might be forgiven and completely taken away from us. Baptism tells us that God has put his mark on us, so that we may always remember that we are cleansed by the blood of Christ and that God has chosen us out of the world as covenant people to belong to him alone.

But Jesus has more than that to tell his people. Not only does he take our sins away, but he also gives us grace every day. By his grace we are able to live and work for him and to become stronger and more active in his service. Christ does not want us to be weak and sickly in faith. He wants us to grow up as strong and vigorous Christians. He wants us to be ready to fight bravely in the battle against evil. He wants us to be full of energy for his service.

It is our Lord himself who makes our spiritual life strong. It is he who nourishes us, so that we grow up from being like little children to being men and women in faith. This is what Christ tells us in the sacrament of the Lord's supper.

Jesus first celebrated this sacrament on the evening when he was betrayed, the night before he died on the cross. On that evening he had gathered with his disciples in a room in Jerusalem. The feast of the Passover was going on. After eating the Passover supper, Jesus took bread. He broke it and gave it to his disciples. He told them to take it and eat it, for it was his body. After they had eaten the bread, he took a cup of wine and passed it to his disciples. He told them all to drink from it, for it was his blood. Then Jesus said to his disciples that he wanted his followers to remember his death this way until he would return some day on the clouds of heaven.

Jesus himself explained the meaning of the bread and wine of the Lord's supper. The broken bread means the body of Christ, which was broken on the cross. The poured out wine means the blood that he shed when he died for us. In the Lord's supper, Jesus is telling us that, just as food and drink make our bodies strong, his sacrifice on the cross gives us more and more strength to believe in him, to love him truly, and to obey him in all things. That is why Jesus said the words which John has written in his Gospel, chapter 6, verse 55.

Not everyone may partake of the holy supper of the Lord. Only those who truly believe in Christ and

have confessed their faith in him may eat the bread and drink the wine of the supper. When we confess that we believe in Christ, he comes to assure us in the holy supper that he has given us eternal life and that he will work in us a strong and victorious faith. To those that believe in him and confess him, he promises the strength to fight all temptations and sins. He will make it possible for them to live and work for him every day.

God wants all children who are baptized to grow up to love him and to trust in Christ. When they are old enough to understand what it means to confess Christ, God wants them to declare their faith before the church and before all people. Then they may enjoy this second sacrament, in which he assures them that he has not only chosen them and cleansed them from their sins, but will also provide for them every day on earth and prepare them for a life of perfect salvation in heaven.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. When did Jesus first celebrate the holy supper?
2. What are some of the ways in which Christians show that their faith is growing stronger?
3. Can the bread and the wine of the supper give people a stronger faith?
4. What do you think the children of believers should do while their parents are partaking of the Lord's supper?
5. Why did God give us the sacraments of baptism and the holy supper?
6. What must young people in your church do before they are allowed to partake of the Lord's supper?

## LESSON 24

### Coming to the Lord's Table

1. How does Christ want his people to partake of his supper?  
*In a worthy way.*
2. What must Christian people do in order to partake of the Lord's supper in a worthy way?  
*Examine themselves properly.*
3. What three questions must God's people ask themselves before going to the supper?  
*First, am I truly sorry for my sins?  
Second, do I believe that my sins are forgiven for Christ's sake?  
Third, do I truly want to live a life of thankfulness and obedience to God?*
4. What are those persons doing who partake of the Lord's supper in an unworthy way?  
*They are eating and drinking judgment to themselves.*

God has given his people the sacrament of the Lord's supper in order to strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ. He wants all his people to come to the Lord's supper, but he wants them to do so in the right way. God does not want his people to partake of the sacrament carelessly. He wants them to come with a true desire to remember Jesus' death and to become stronger in their faith. That is why God requires every Christian to examine himself or herself carefully and prayerfully before he or she comes to the Lord's supper.

You know what an examination is. People who are going to school often take examinations so that they and their teachers can find out how well they are learning. Usually, these examinations include some difficult questions, which we must think carefully about before answering.

Even more difficult than the kind of examination we have in school is self-examination. In a self-examination we ask ourselves questions about our love

for God and our obedience to him. In this way we come to know ourselves as we truly are. What makes this so difficult is our sinfulness. We would much rather think about the sins of other people than about our own. We must ask God to help us be honest in self-examination. More important than what other people think of us, more important even than what we think of ourselves, is what God *knows* about our hearts and our actions.

Three questions are especially important when we are examining ourselves. The first is, "Do I truly feel sorry for my sins with my whole heart?" Stop to think about the wrong things that all of us think and say and do every day. One of the sins that we fall into often is that of feeling hatred for other people, and then saying and doing hateful things to them. If we know that we have acted in this way toward someone, we should go and ask that person for forgiveness. We cannot have the love of God in our hearts without living right with other people. In the same way, if there are other sins in our hearts, we should not try to excuse them or forget them, but we should honestly confess them to God and ask him to forgive us and help us to overcome them.

The second question is, "Do I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior?" If we are to partake of the Lord's supper in the right way, we must trust Christ alone to forgive our sins and to give us eternal life. For the sake of Christ, God has taken our sins away completely. Before we come to the sacrament, we must truly believe that.

The third question in our self-examination is, "Do I feel thankful for all God's goodness and mercy to me, so that I wish to do everything that he wants me to do?" If we know how great our sins are, if we know that God saves us from these sins through his Son, we will be thankful and happy. We will do our best to please God by doing what is right and obeying him in all things. There are some verses in one of the Psalms that are good ones for the Christian to learn, for they show what

our attitude should be now that we know we are forgiven for Christ's sake. Read Psalm 116:12-14.

With these three questions God wants his people to get ready for celebrating the Lord's supper. If they have examined themselves in this way, they will be blessed and strengthened in their faith by partaking of the sacrament. But those who come to the Lord's supper without feeling sorry for their sin, or without believing that Christ is their Savior, or without desiring to live a life of thankfulness will be more guilty for having partaken of this sacrament. That is the meaning of the words "they eat and drink judgment to themselves."

God gives the sacrament of the Lord's supper to help strengthen our faith. It is very important for us to remember this when we are able to partake of the bread and wine. For those who have prepared themselves in the right way, the Lord's supper is a great blessing. For those who have not, it is judgment.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Whom does God want to come to the Lord's supper?
2. May we come to the Lord's supper if we have wronged someone without asking that person's forgiveness?
3. What should the Christian do if someone has wronged him? Read Matthew 18:15-17.
4. Tell how Joseph's brothers came to him for forgiveness. What did Joseph say to them?
5. What does John say about people who claim that they are Christians but have hatred in their hearts for other people? 1 John 2:9.
6. What are some of the things we will do if we are living a life of thankfulness to God?

## LESSON 25

### The Gratitude of Our Hearts

1. What do we owe God for all his grace?  
*The sincere gratitude of our heart.*
2. How do we show our gratitude to God?  
*By always trusting him and obeying him.*
3. What three things happen when we live a sincere Christian life?  
*First, we glorify God.  
Second, we become more certain that we are truly God's children.  
Third, we let our light shine before others in order to build them up and lead them to Christ.*
4. Will those who lead unthankful and disobedient lives be saved?  
*No. Those who dishonor God cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless they repent.*

God calls on his people to serve him and to give their whole life to him. But he wants us to do this for the right reason. Many years ago, before slavery was outlawed, slaves would work very hard for their owners. They did so because they were afraid of being punished severely if they did not do enough work. Many people today work very hard for their employers only because they want to receive their wages. They know that they will not receive money if they do not do their work well, and that if they continue to do badly, they will be released and have no job.

Those are two reasons why people work hard. God does not want us to serve him for either of those reasons. He does not want us to be afraid of him. He does not want us to obey him out of fear of punishment. That is just like slavery, and God does not want that for his people. But he also does not want us to serve him only in order to receive a reward for doing so. That would be selfish service, and God does not want that kind of response from us either.

God calls his children to serve him out of gratitude. Gratitude, or thankfulness, is our love for someone who shows us a favor. A sick and poor and helpless person is grateful to kind friends who take care of him in his need. Children, too, should be grateful to their parents for what they do. Children have not earned these many things, but parents give them freely out of love.

It is sad when children are ungrateful toward their parents. Sometimes children forget all their parents have done for them, how they have worked and cared for them, prayed for them, and shown their love for them in many ways. Some children, as soon as they grow up and begin to earn some of their own money, perhaps when they begin to drive a car, act as though their parents owe them everything. This brings grief to the parents, shame to the child, and displeasure from God.

We have good reason to be thankful to our parents and teachers and to all who are kind to us. But we have much greater reason to be grateful to God. God does not owe us anything. We have made ourselves completely undeserving of anything by our many sins. Yet in his great and free love he gives us many more blessings than we can count. Every breath we breathe is from him. All our food and clothing, our health, our good times, our parents, our home, our school — every single blessing we receive is a gift from the hand of God. Besides all of these gifts, God has given us the greatest blessing of all: his Son Jesus Christ, who came to earth to be our Savior. He has given us everlasting life.

If we are truly grateful to God, we will show it by our words and deeds. There are two ways in which God wants us to show our thankfulness to him. First, he wants us to trust in him in all things. God has given us his promises in his Word. He has promised us that he will save us for the sake of Jesus Christ, and that he will care for us in this life and for eternity. If we trust that promise, God is pleased. If we do not trust it, he is grieved.



The second way we show our thankfulness to God is by obeying him. God has not only given us his promises: he has also given us commandments. He wants us to speak and to do what is right, because that is his will. Often Satan tempts us to do what is wrong. If we resist the temptation of the evil one and do what we know to be God's will, God is honored and looks on us with joy. God wants us to show the whole world that we are his children and that we love him most of all.

If we live in obedience to God, we will also be setting a good example for others. Many people do not know and serve God. God wants us to live in the world in such a way that our actions are like a book which may be read by those persons who do not know him. He wants them to see from our lives how good it is to serve God, and how the grace of God fills the hearts of his people with thankfulness and joy. That is what Jesus means by the words he says in Matthew 5:16. God wants to use us as a way to draw other people to Christ, so that they also may believe in him and be saved.

If we are thankful to God and obey his will, we may always be certain that we are God's children. The more we live for God in love and obedience, the more surely we feel that Jesus is our Savior and that we belong to God's own people. But those who live unthankful and disobedient lives dishonor God, set a bad example for others, and plainly show that they do not have Christ as their Savior and Master. Unless such people truly turn from that kind of life, they can never enter into the kingdom of God.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Many persons in the Bible showed their thankfulness to God by trusting his promises and obeying his commandments. Can you tell how each of these people did that?

Abraham  
Moses

Daniel  
Peter and John (Acts 5:39)

Joshua  
David

Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25)

2. What does it mean for a Christian to let his light shine?
3. Why is it important to set a good example for others?
4. Can you think of some ways in which you can set a good example for other people?
5. What does the Bible say about those people who refuse to obey God?
6. What may we be sure of if we live in gratitude and obedience to God?

## LESSON 26

### What It Means to Be Converted to God

1. How are we able to live an obedient life of thankfulness?  
*By the grace and Spirit of Jesus Christ.*
2. What great change does Christ work in us by his Spirit?  
*The conversion of our heart.*
3. What is conversion?  
*Sincerely repenting of our sin and turning our heart to God.*
4. How does conversion change our life?  
*We flee from sin and begin living for God by doing good works.*
5. Can a Christian live in perfect obedience to God?  
*No. In this life, even the best person makes only a small beginning of obedience.*
6. Is a Christian satisfied with such a small beginning?  
*No. The Christian wants to live by all God's commandments, and so prays constantly that God will help him or her do so.*

A Christian is one whose heart is *converted* to God. The word "convert" means "turn." When we are

converted our heart is turned away from sin and turned to God.

The heart of an unconverted person is turned away from God. Such a person does not like to do what God wishes and finds pleasure in doing things that are sinful. An unconverted person is going in the wrong direction, getting further and further away from God. To keep on going in this way is to be lost forever.

In his great love for sinners, God calls them from their evil ways. You can read what he says to sinners in Zechariah 1:4. To turn away from our sins means first of all to be sorry for them. This is what the Bible calls repentance. Repentance is what Peter felt after he had denied the Master whom he loved. When Jesus looked at him with sorrowing eyes, Peter could stand it no longer. A feeling of guilt and shame came sweeping over him, and he rushed outside weeping bitterly. Afterwards Jesus forgave him everything.

God wants to see that kind of repentance in our hearts, too. He wants us to come to him saying, "Lord, I am sorry for my sin. I wish I had not been unfaithful and disobedient." If we truly repent of our sins and confess them before God, he will forgive us and help us overcome the evil in our hearts.

But conversion means something more than turning away from sin. It also means turning toward God. When our heart is turned toward God, we love him and are happy to obey him.

We can read many wonderful descriptions of conversion in the Bible. One of the best known is the story of Saul of Tarsus, who later took the name of Paul. Before he was converted, he hated Jesus. So he persecuted the Christians in every way he could think of. He thought that nothing could stop him from destroying the Christian religion. But God stopped him. On the way to Damascus, where Saul planned to persecute some more believers, he was taken hold of by God. God made him see his great mistake and his great sin. Saul repented of his sin. From that moment on he loved Jesus.

His whole life was changed. The most eager persecutor of Jesus' followers spent the rest of his years serving his Master with his whole heart.

After our heart has been converted to God, we should not expect that we will have an easy time of it. It is then that a great battle begins, a daily fight against the sin of our heart. Satan will not let go of us easily. He will try with all his power to get us to turn away from God again. He will tempt us and deceive us and try to make us unfaithful to Jesus. That is why Jesus told his followers to watch and pray so that they would not enter into temptation.

Sometimes the battle against sin and the devil is a very hard one. Often we will have to confess that we have not stood up as we should have in the fight, that we have been cowardly and unfaithful. But we should never give up the battle or feel discouraged. Christ is our captain; and we are his Christian soldiers, marching, in the words of a familiar song, as to war, "with the cross of Jesus going on before."

Let us trust in our great Captain and his cross. Let us pray to him that he will help us and guide us in every battle. He has overcome Satan and he will lead us on to victory. He will give us the power to conquer Satan and to overcome our sinful words and actions and our sinful thoughts and desires.

Does any Christian ever gain so complete a victory that all the sin in him is rooted out? Can a Christian ever get so far in this life that he can say, "Because I am perfect I do not have to fight against sin any more?" Indeed not. Even the best of Christians still have to battle against the power of sin. Many years after his conversion, the Apostle Paul looked on his life and saw that he was time and again doing the bad things he did not want to do, and time and again failing to do the good things that he wanted to do.

But in the battle against sin, Jesus gives more and more strength and grace. The more we fight against sin, the stronger we become in doing what is right. And we

know that the day is coming when we shall receive the complete victory, when the battle of this life is over and in the life of glory with our Lord sin will be no more!

### QUESTIONS

1. Tell how King Saul went further and further away from God. What was the end of his life like? What does this teach us?
2. How did Judas Iscariot turn more and more away from God? How did his life end?
3. What does the experience of Saul on the road to Damascus teach us about the power of God?
4. How does someone who has been converted feel about his sins?
5. How did Peter show that he repented of his sins? Read Matthew 26:75. How did the sinful woman do so (Luke 7:37-38)? Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8)?
6. What does Jesus say about sinners who repent? Read Luke 15:10.
7. Who can give us help and strength in our fight against sin? Read Psalm 115:11.

## LESSON 27

### What It Means to Pray

1. To whom do we pray?  
*To God, who will hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ, and who can help us.*
2. What is prayer?  
*Asking God for all we need.*
3. What needs may we come to God with?  
*All the needs of our bodies and of our souls.*

4. In whose name must we pray?

*In the name of Jesus Christ, who has earned every blessing for us.*

5. How should we pray to God?

*With a sincere heart and with trust and humility like a child.*

Praying is asking God for everything that we need and would like to have. Christians should pray to God every day. We always need prayer because we have nothing ourselves and can do nothing by ourselves. Everything we have we must receive from God.

God wants us to come to him with all our needs and troubles with just as much trust as we would have when going to our parents for help. Whatever our need or trouble, God wants us to come to him. One of his many promises for times of trouble is written in Psalm 50:15.

There is only one true God of heaven and earth. It is to him alone that we must pray. Persons who do not know the true God sometimes pray to idols. Such wood or stone or metal images are the work of men's hands, and the Bible makes it very plain that they can neither hear nor speak nor see, and cannot help us. Our God is a living God, who made heaven and earth. But he did not stop paying attention to the world after creating it. He still hears his people when they speak to him, no matter where they are. He is always close to those who call on him honestly. God heard Jonah calling to him from inside of the great fish. God heard Moses calling to him from the top of the mountain. God heard Paul and Silas calling to him from their prison cell. God will hear us, too, when we call on him.

God hears more than the words that we speak. He knows our needs and our desires before we have spoken a word. God reads our thoughts and desires as if they were written in a book. We must remember this when we pray. God sees our heart. He wants our prayer to come not only from the lips, but also from the heart. If

we speak words which we do not really mean, we are not praying sincerely. When God sees this he is grieved.

God wants us to come to him in prayer with complete trust in our hearts. When a beggar asks a passerby for a handout, he may have good reasons for doubting that he will get anything. His appeal for help may be in vain. But we should never doubt God. No matter how great our need, our appeal to him will not be in vain. God receives us not as beggars, but as his own children, whom he loves.

Does God always answer our prayers? Sometimes it seems not. Paul had an ailment that bothered him very much. He called this his "thorn in the flesh." We do not know what this ailment was, but it hindered Paul in his missionary work. Paul prayed that this ailment would be taken away from him, but it was not taken away, and Paul probably suffered from it until his death.

Perhaps it seems that God did not hear Paul's prayer. But God did hear it. Paul tells us what God's answer to him was: "My grace is enough for you." Paul wanted his ailment removed so that he could be a better servant for God. But God told him that he would give him strength to be a good servant even with the ailment.

God often deals that way with his children. It may seem at the time that he does not hear our prayer. Perhaps a father prays for the money to provide a better life for his family, yet stays poor. Perhaps a mother prays that her sick child will recover, yet the child dies. Even then God is hearing the prayers of his people. If he does not give us exactly what we ask for, it is because he knows that something else is better for us. Our Father in heaven always knows best, even though we do not always understand his ways with us.

Someday we will understand. Then we will see how wisely and how kindly God has dealt with us. Then we will thank him for not giving us our own way, but for leading us all the time in his way. The more we learn to understand now that he is leading us, the better we will

be able to pray as Jesus did: "Father, not my will but thine be done."

God wants us to come to him with a humble heart. Because of our sins, we have not deserved any of his blessings. We may come to God for help and strength and for the things we need only because Jesus has earned these things for us. That is why we are taught by Jesus to pray in his name.

To pray in Jesus' name is to ask God for his blessings because Jesus earned them for us, because Jesus told us to ask the Father for them, and because we want to spend those blessings in God's service. That kind of prayer is prayer in the right spirit. God will surely give us his grace and everything that he knows we need.

### *QUESTIONS*

1. Think of some stories from the Bible which show how God answers the prayers of those who call on him.
2. If God knows what we need and desire anyway, why do you suppose he wants us to pray to him?
3. Tell in your own words what it means for a prayer to be sincere.
4. Why does God want our prayers to be trustful?
5. What is Jesus' promise to those who sincerely and trustfully come to God in prayer? Read Matthew 21:22.
6. Why must our prayers be humble?
7. What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?



## LESSON 28

# How Jesus Taught Us to Pray

1. What is the name of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples?

*The Lord's Prayer*

2. What are the words of that prayer?

*Our Father who art in heaven,*

*Hallowed be thy name.*

*Thy kingdom come.*

*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,*

*But deliver us from evil;*

*For thine is the kingdom, and the power,*

*and the glory, forever. Amen.*

3. What do we ask God for in the first three petitions of this prayer?

*For all things that glorify him and advance his kingdom on earth.*

4. What do we ask for in the last four petitions of this prayer?

*For everything we need in this life and for our salvation.*

5. What promise has Christ given those who pray in faith?

*That they will receive whatever they ask for in prayer.*

One day the disciples came to Jesus and asked him to teach them how to pray. The beautiful words he taught them are familiar to all Christians. This prayer is usually called the Lord's prayer. In these few short sentences Jesus shows us the way to pray to God.

First of all, Jesus teaches us to pray to God as *our Father in heaven*. Christ wants us to understand and to feel in our hearts that when we come to God with our needs we are coming not as beggars but as children going to their father. This means that we come to God with love and trust and reverence in our hearts. God loves us truly as a father. You can read about this love of his for us in Psalm 103:13. It is to this Father in heaven

that Jesus tells us to take our needs, trusting that in his love and wisdom he will provide for us in every way.

An earthly father who loves his child very dearly still cannot always help him, however much he would like to. Perhaps the child is sick, and the doctors say they are unable to do anything more than to pray for recovery. The child's father may wish he could give his very life for his son, but it would not help. Or perhaps the father is poor; and no matter what he does, he will be unable to provide all the things his child needs.

We need never be afraid that the time will come when God our Father will be unable to help us. Why not? Because he is our Father *in heaven*. He rules as the almighty Creator of heaven and earth. Nothing is too difficult for him. Everything belongs to him. There is nothing that God is not able to do for us.

Christ wants us to remember all this when we pray the prayer he taught us. God our Father is in heaven, and he alone can give us everything necessary for us.

If you look carefully at the Lord's prayer, you will notice that it is made up of seven short prayers, or *petitions*. The first three of them include the word "thy."

Hallowed be *thy* name.

*Thy* kingdom come.

*Thy* will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In these three petitions Jesus is teaching us to pray that all people may truly love and serve God and glorify his name. To please and to glorify God should be the first thing that all Christians want to do.

In the last four petitions, the word "us" appears.

Give *us* this day our daily bread.

Forgive *us* our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead *us* not into temptation,

But deliver *us* from evil.

In these four short prayers, Jesus teaches us to ask God for everything we need for our body and soul. Every day we need food and clothing and many other things, and we receive them from God. But our greatest need is

for our sins to be taken away and for strength to fight against all evil and live a truly Christian life. All the riches of the earth would not be a blessing to us if we lived away from God and sin ruled our lives.

### *QUESTIONS*

1. Read in your Bible Luke 12:22-28. What does Jesus tell us here about our Father in heaven?
2. Why do we pray at meal time? Why do we pray before going to bed at night?
3. Read Matthew 6:14. What is Jesus telling us there about forgiveness?
4. Jesus once asked, "What would it profit a person to gain the whole world but lose his own soul?" What do you think the answer to that question is?
5. Why should we often pray using words other than those of the Lord's prayer?
6. Do you know the meaning of the little word "Amen," with which we usually end our prayers?