

*The
Decisive Teachings
Of Jesus*

12 Lessons

*Prepared by
Paul E. Cantrell*

2010

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"The Decisive Teachings of Jesus"

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Lesson One

"Jesus—The Master Teacher"

Jesus was a teacher—but more, He was a Master Teacher! He knew, understood, and taught perfectly the Truth of God. But He was a teacher come from God in order to speak the Truth of God (Jn. 8:40). The Truth that He taught could set men free if they would accept it (Jn. 8:32). The people who heard Him recognized that He was an unusual teacher! Notice the following Scriptures:

Jn. 3:2 _____

Mk. 1:22 _____

Mk. 12:14 _____

Jn. 7:46 _____

Jesus was not only a perfect teacher, but a perfect man (Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15). He lived the way that He taught! When Jesus taught, He taught as one having Authority! What He taught was by His authority and whoever does His bidding will be likened unto a wise man (Matt. 7:24-29). Those who reject his teachings will receive eternal judgment from Him (Jn. 12:46-50). Jesus was not a "legalist," nor a "dogmatist," nor a "namby-pamby" teacher. His teachings were TRUTH to be believed and obeyed to have life eternal (Jn. 6:68-69); and, those who reject Him and His teachings will be separated from God eternally (2 Thess. 1:7-9). He made it quite clear that men were to **"repent or perish!"** (Lk. 13:3).

He was Misrepresented

This was done, not so much by the people, but by the religious leaders in Israel. They felt they could be saved by their own "righteousness" and did not need to believe in Jesus and His teachings (Rom. 10:1-3; Lk. 18:9-14). But Jesus did not give in to their wicked schemes and plainly stated that those who want what He was offering had to pay the price! (Matt. 16:24-25).

Mankind is no different today—they still want to be "saved" their own way rather than the "strait" and "narrow" gate and way that Jesus taught (Matt. 7:13-14). There are all kinds of ideas advocated by men that are contrary to the teachings of Jesus. Note the following:

1. People want to believe and do what they like (no matter how contradictory it may be) and still be pleasing to God.
2. They want to believe that they can commit such sins as murder, rape, lying, stealing, fornication, adultery, etc., and still be acceptable to God—even while refusing to repent!
3. Many people want to believe that Jesus is so good that He would not allow good people to be lost.

4. Many say directly or indirectly that Jesus will allow people to be saved without believing and obeying His Truth. That people can just ignore His teachings as though He was a mere fallible man.
5. Many clearly feel that Jesus' teachings are too restrictive and too demanding and that every person has a right to his own belief.
6. Some feel that if a person is sincere, Christ will save him no matter that he believes or does.

A Call for a Decision by Jesus

The Master-Teacher is no "Johnny-come-lately!" He knows whereof He speaks! The Father gave Him His Message and that is what He is teaching (Jn. 5:42-44; Jn. 8:37-47). He is speaking the Truth that must be believed and obeyed. The choice becomes clear—we either choose to listen and believe Jesus or the lies of men and Satan (Jn. 8:44). The choice that we make is between:

1. The Gospel of Christ that can save us (Rom. 1:16) or the teachings, doctrines, and commands of men that will condemn us (Matt. 15:7-9).
2. Jesus being Lord in my life (Matt. 7:21) or I retain my right to believe what I want to.
3. Entering through the strait gate that leads to life (Matt. 7:14) or entering through the wide gate that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13).
4. Gladly receiving His Word and obeying Him (Matt. 7:24) or to not obey Him (Matt. 7:26).
5. To love Jesus more than father, mother, son or daughter (Matt. 10:37) or to love them more than Jesus and pacify them.
6. A resurrection unto life or a resurrection unto condemnation (Jn. 5:28-29).

Jesus was no compromiser—He taught Truth that is absolute! We need to know, understand, love, believe and obey this Truth so that we can be right with God. (Jn. 8:32; 2 Thess. 2:10-12). This Truth has the power to save sinful man but not the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 2:4-8).

Concluding Thoughts

One of the purposes of this series of lessons is to look carefully at the "decisive teachings" of Jesus. We will not be able to study all of these at this time, but have chosen twelve special passages that hopefully will help us see clearly how decisive Jesus was in His teaching. And then, at the same time, encourage one another to be willing to hold firmly to His teachings—to believe and obey it and even "contend" for it (Jude 3).

Lesson Two

"You Cannot Serve God and Mammon"

This statement by Jesus was given and recorded by Matthew in what is called the "Sermon on the Mount." (Matt. 6:24). In this decisive statement, He calls for a decision to be made by humanity—you must make a choice between the two (God or Mammon). The word "Mammon" is believed to be an Aramaic word for riches or wealth. He further illustrates the statement by saying that you cannot love and hold to both at the same time; rather, a choice have to be made one way or another. Jesus clearly states that we cannot serve two different Masters at the same time! We will listen to the one and deny the other; or, we will cling to the one and push the other aside. A clear choice is called for by Jesus' decisive teaching. Our choice is a simple one:

1. Choose the master that has our eternal bliss in mind; or
2. Choose the master that wants us to share his everlasting shame when this life is over.
3. You cannot serve two Masters—so, make up your mind to this fact of life!

Illustrations to Illustrate!

Rom. 7:1-3—The marriage relationship.

Two people get married to each other. After a number of years, one mate decides to divorce the other and marries another person. This is the wrong choice. Jesus clearly teaches that this is the wrong choice (Matt. 19:9). The right choice is to remain with your mate and make your marriage work. The choice is not really between marriage, divorce, and remarriage; but, it is between whether God is our Master or if our passions, wants, desires are our Master. We cannot serve two masters.

Jas. 4:4—Friendship with the World.

James states very clearly that a Christian (or one who professes to be such) cannot be a friend of God and of the world at the same time. If we want to be a friend to the world, we will make God our enemy. We can't have it both ways! 1 Tim. 6:8-11 warns of the terrible dangers of treading on this path of seeking to be friends with the world.

1 Kings 18:21—God or Baal.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel had turned to being followers of the idol god "Baal." The Prophet Elijah faced them with the choice they needed to make—the true God or the false god (Baal). The Prophet asked them why they were so hesitate to make their decision—***"If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."*** Many of us have heard this expression that would seem so appropriate at this point: ***"Get in or get out!"*** Make your decision and live with it.

Matt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-25—Riches or God.

There was a rich young Ruler that came to Jesus with an all-important question—***"What must I do to have Eternal Life?"*** Jesus' first answer was that he needed to keep the commandments of God. The young Ruler stated that he had kept all of them. However, he seems to have overlooked a possibility of one of them—***"Thou shalt not Covet!"*** Jesus proceeded to give him insight to his choice he needed to make—***"go sell all you have and give to the poor and come follow me."*** I would imagine that the young man was stunned at first; and then, went away sorrowfully. His true love was Riches—not God! Money had won his human affections—not God, Jesus, or eternal life.

Luke 12:16-21—The Rich Farmer.

A farmer prospered in his work and had to build larger facilities to care for the crops. But he made a terrible mistake! It was not that he had worked and been prosperous; but, that he was too wrapped up in himself and was unconcerned about what God said about being concerned for others. Jesus called the man a "fool" and then gives us an insight to his problem: ***"who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*** He had allowed things to become more important than God in his life.

Concluding Thoughts

Jesus did not change His teachings to capture the discipleship of the rich young Ruler. He did not call him back nor run after him to apologize for making discipleship too hard. Jesus did not soften the strong demands of discipleship for anyone. **Truth was truth!** Falsehood or lies do not save us or make us acceptable to God. Jesus was definite and decisive in his teachings on Mastership. He was not easily swayed, nor was He flexible when it came to Truth. That's the way it is!

Jesus does not allow people to set out the rules by which they will be willing to follow Him. He makes the rules—if He is to be our Lord and Master, we follow!

Jesus was a decisive Teacher and He wants His followers to be decisive followers of His teachings.

Lesson Three

"Beware of False Prophets"

This statement is a strong warning about people who will pervert God's Message to their own ends. This warning is just one of many warnings in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. But it is also just one of several warnings that Jesus, Himself, gave about such people. Israel was plagued by false prophets who were trying to deceive them and lead them astray from God. Because of such, God's people are warned to be vigilant and watchful so that they will not be misled by such. The Scriptures clearly and profusely denounce and expose them for what they are. Jesus, Himself, is here condemning such deceivers of mankind and perversions of God's Word. His denunciation of such people shows His devotion to God's Truth and His abhorrence of false doctrines. It is hard to fully realize how much damage such people do to their fellow human beings. They cause division, disharmony, and fighting among the people of God (or those who would like to be such). They can help cause people to be lost eternally!

QUESTIONS

1. *Are there false teachers in and out of the church today?*
2. *Are they all outside the church or are some inside?*
3. *How can we know who is a false prophet or teacher today? How do we identify them?*
4. *How are we to look upon them and treat them?*
5. *Why such strong warnings in Scripture concerning these people?*

SOME SPECIAL WARNINGS ABOUT SUCH

1 Tim. 4:1-3

It actually says that "some" will depart from the faith. Why?

1. Because they gave heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons;
2. Because they gave heed to hypocrites who spoke lies;
3. Because these teachers of such had their conscience seared.

He actually gave an example of their teaching:

1. They forbade certain people to marry;
2. They commanded people to abstain from foods which were acceptable to God.

1 Tim. 4:7

They were told to reject profane and old wives' fables and exercise themselves toward godliness.

1 Tim. 6:3-5

If people teach differently from what the Apostles taught and do not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, or to the doctrine which accords with godliness—He is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wrangling of

men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth. These people suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such people....withdraw yourself!

2 Tim. 4:1-4

God's word is to be preached with all diligence because false teachers will come in and try to turn people away by appealing to itching ears that turn away from the truth and turn to fables.

2 Thess. 2:1-12

The Apostle told of a "falling away" that was coming. His apostasy will be identified with a man called "the man of sin" or "the son of perdition. This false teacher will exalt himself as though he is God, he will sit as God in the Temple of God (the church). He gains his following by the working of Satan, with power, signs, and lying wonders. He will greatly deceive God's people because they did not have a love for God's Truth. They will be misled by his strong delusions and condemned because they love unrighteousness.

WAYS TO IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHERS

Jesus said that we can know such people by their "fruits." They will appear as "sheep" and will have "fair speech" and "smooth words." But in reality, they are ravaging wolves that tear people asunder spiritually. Their appearance is not reality. They can even appear as "Apostles," "Ministers of righteousness," or an "angel of light." (2 Cor. 11:13-15). This is what makes them so deceptive! They may even appear to be kind, meek, loving, and benevolent. So, we cannot necessarily identify by these things—but, by their teaching! They lie and do not speak the truth. Their false teaching can destroy a person's soul for eternity. They may appear to be harmless, but when you see the results of their teaching, they tear, ravage, and devour people's souls. Their doctrine is desirable, inviting, easy, and loose—but false, and leads to everlasting ruin! So, we must learn to contrast their teaching with God's teaching! We must learn to ask an all-important question: *"Where does the Bible say that?"*

GOD'S WARNINGS ARE CLEAR!

He says clearly: ***"Beware of false prophets!"*** The Apostle John warns: ***"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."*** (1 Jn. 4:1). The dangers, perils, risks, hazards are real! Read, study, learn, understand the Word of God so that you can tell the difference. It's your soul and only you can make your salvation sure (Phil. 2:12). Look clearly at the temptation of Mother Eve—how simple and easy it was to mislead her by a slight change of the Word of God—from ***"You shall surely die!"*** to ***"You shall NOT surely die!"***

A true teacher of God will show his concern for the souls of people by being sure he is teaching the Word of God only! And, it may be at times, he will have to be like John the baptizer—and state it like it is clearly: ***"You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*** Or, it may be that he will have to quote the strong words of

Jesus against deceptive and false teachings of men (Matt. 23:15-36). A true teacher of God's word will hate every false way (Ps. 119:104).

OUR CHALLENGE

1. ***"To hold fast the faithful word as we have been taught, that we may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."*** (Tit. 1:9)
2. ***"In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth."*** (2 Tim. 2:25)
3. ***"Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."*** (Tit. 1:13)

Those who care about their souls will make every effort to hold firmly only to the Word of God!

Let's not forget—there are many false spirits (teachers) that have gone out into the world!

Lesson Four

**"Not Every One Who Cries 'Lord,' 'Lord,'
Shall Enter the Kingdom of Heaven."**

In our previous lesson, we studied about those who take the Message of God and change it to suit their own ends. Such people are referred to as "False Prophets" or "False Teachers!" But it would seem that such people are not the only ones who refuse to keep the Will of the Father in heaven. A lot of people themselves decide whether they want to obey God's Will or not...or just how much of His Will they will practice that suits them. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus states that only few in relation to the many will make it to Heaven. People listening to and allowing False Prophets to mislead them is one reason why only a few will make it. But Jesus went even further in Matthew 7:21-27 and gave additional reasons for why few will make it to Heaven.

"Those who claim to recognize Jesus as "Lord" but do not submit to His Will, will not make it to Heaven. This term is the same as "Master," "Ruler," or "the One with Authority to Command." It is one thing to cry "Lord" in recognition of Jesus' position in Heaven, but clearly another thing to show it by correct actions. We must recognize Jesus' Lordship:

Rom. 10:9 _____

John 20:27-28 _____

Matt. 4:10 _____

Phil. 4:1 _____

Of what value is it to cry "Lord," "Lord"—if we ignore what He commands?? Obedience, correct obedience, is required to get into Heaven! God does not offer salvation to disobedient people. Jesus taught the necessity of obeying the Will of the Father; and He also practiced such Himself (Lk. 2:49; Heb. 5:8-9). God sent Jesus into the world to give a message to man. To reject this message is not only rejecting Jesus, but it also is rejecting the Father who sent Him as well (Lk. 10:16). We cannot claim the promises in this message if we reject or disregard the commands He has given. We must obey the Father's Will if we want the benefits of His message.

"Those who are seemingly very religious, but do not submit to the Father's Will, will not make it to Heaven. Jesus pictures some as being very disappointed in Judgment because they were not allowed into Heaven. They even "argued" with Jesus about it. *"But Lord, we prophesied in Your Name, we cast out demons in Your Name, and we did many wonders in Your Name!"* And yet, Jesus said, *"I never knew you!"* If we understand this statement correctly, He is saying that they never were His disciples—they never were right with God! How could Jesus say to religious people that He never knew them? Why did they not make it to Heaven? Jesus stated it clearly: *"You who practice lawlessness!"* Another translation says that they practiced iniquity! Lawlessness is a good translation because they were ignoring God's commands—they evidently were living up to their own standard as to what they would do to go to Heaven. But God is the One who sets the standard in order to be acceptable to Him—not man! Yes, men can be busy in religious activities! They can

even be fully given to their religious concepts. But the key question must be asked—"Are we busy doing what the Lord says we should do?" Jesus indicated that He was not pleased with (nor approved of) their religious activity. Thus, only the obedient will enter into Heaven—not those who are obedient to what they want to do. Men must obey God!

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Rich Young Ruler (Luke 18:18-23). This man was successful, a Ruler, and Young! And he was religious. He stated that he had kept the commandments of God from his youth. But Jesus saw a grave error in his life—material things meant more to Him than obeying God. That one thing that he lacked was huge! He went away sorrowfully. **Partial obedience** needs to be changed into **full obedience!** (Lk. 14:33)

Cornelius, the Centurian (Acts 10:1-2). This Gentile was a "believer in God,; he is called "devout," "he feared God with all his household," and "was generous with his money," and "prayed to God always." And yet, he needed to be saved! When he was told what he must do, he obeyed immediately. All that he had done was good and right, but still had to do more in obedience to God!

Saul of Tarsus (later called Paul) (Acts 22:16). Saul was a very religious man before God! (Acts 26:4-5). He stated that he had lived up to his conscience all of his life (Acts 23:1). But he had to learn about Jesus and what the Will of God was for his life under this New Covenant system. When he came to an understanding of what he must do, he was obedient in all things. (Acts 26:19-20).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Jesus not only warned us about false prophets that will try to deceive us and destroy us spiritually for all eternity; but, he also warned that we can deceive ourselves by being religious and doing those things that we think are right and acceptable to God. But.....they are not according to His Will and will avail us nothing in the Day of Judgment!

Jesus makes a strong statement! It will do us no good to cry "Lord," "Lord," if we are not willing to do the Will of the Father. It is these and only these that will enter into Heaven.

Lesson Five

"Except you Repent, You will Perish!"

It is interesting and important to notice that **repentance** has been the Theme of all of God's Prophets and Preachers from the beginning to the end of the Word of God. **WHY?** It is because mankind sins and needs to turn from such. Please notice:

Ezek. 18:30 _____

Matt. 3:2 _____

Matt. 4:17 _____

Acts 2:38 _____

Acts 17:30 _____

Rev. 3:19 _____

Jesus began His public ministry emphasizing the same message that John was preaching—"Repentance!" He even added this well-known expression: "**Repent,....or Perish!**" (Lk. 13:3).

When preaching ceases about man's need of repentance—you will have preachers who have become "People Pleasers!" As a result, the church will drift into comfortable living rather than righteous living! Preaching repentance will not cause people to be comfortable. The real issue of preaching is the saving of souls; and, repentance is a necessity to that end! The Church and Sinners need to be constantly challenged by hearing preaching that emphasizes the need of repentance. We need to be convicted of sin and converted or turned to God's way. Our hearts and lives need to be changed toward righteousness so we can be right with God. We need to hear preaching that will save our souls and not salve our consciences!

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

The basic meaning of the Greek word is "to change one's thinking (mind or life). Involved in the concept is an understanding that God is right and I need to change accordingly. It is to realize that sin "continued in" will condemn us for eternity. Preaching must "cut people to the heart" (Acts 2:37) so they will cry out "What must I do?" Repentance also demands humility—a humbling that causes one to turn from disobedience to obedience to God. In John's preaching, he made it clear that repentance needed to bear fruit (the change of one's life) (Matt. 3:8). Without this fruit, it is not true repentance! Ezekiel put it very plainly: "**Repent and turn away from all your transgressions (sins).**" (Ezek. 18:30). Repentance is a call for sinful man to change his mind about practicing sin and mend his ways—turn from his unrighteous ways. Repentance is an act of one's will or his mind to

change and a continual effort to live above sin. This change is brought about by a "godly sorrow" that results in a change of one's life for the better. (2 Cor. 7:8-10). Repentance actually calls for a "death to sin" and its practice and a turning to righteous living (Rom. 6:1-6).

HARSH OR LOVING?

Some might say that this is too harsh, too demanding of human beings. God's love needs to be more lenient to His weak creatures. But it is this Jesus who said:

Luke 17:3—"Repent or Perish!"

Matt. 7:14—"Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Is the way to life truly difficult? Is it possible that only few will find it? Jesus said so! He does not lie! He knows what it takes for people to be saved because He provided the way. Was God unjust when he only saved 8 people during the great flood when possibly millions perished? Is it possible that man really needs to repent or he will perish? **Then, who can be saved?**

Those who believe the Gospel (Rom. 1:16)

Those who obey the Gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9)

Those who gladly receive God's message and are baptized (Acts 2:41)

Those who remain faithful to the end (Rev. 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:5-11)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The preaching of repentance is a necessity so that people can be warned to turn from their sins to God. But true preaching is not complete until it offers hope to the penitent.

That God has provided a way of mercy and forgiveness (Acts 2:38)

That man can become acceptable to God by true repentance that turns him back to God. (Acts 3:19)

God lovingly calls on man to repent while there is time and opportunity (Heb. 10:31). Jesus came to seek and save the lost not to pronounce eternal condemnation for all men. He gave up Heaven, endured the life and death that all men face, and gave up His life as an atonement for man's sinfulness. In the words of Ezekiel 18:32: **"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares the Lord God. Therefore, repent and live."** We can choose to live or perish! Choose LIFE!

Lesson Six

"You Cannot be My Disciple"

After Jesus' baptism by John, He underwent special temptations for a period of time. Having successfully overcome each one, He began his public ministry among the Jewish people. His ministry among the people resulted in "disciples" (John 4:1-2) or "followers." But He also shortly called twelve men to full-time discipleship (Matthew 4:17-20; 5:1).

Why use the term "disciple?" It was a good Greek word that identified a person as a pupil of a teacher and one who became a follower in learning and in practice as well. A good illustration of a disciple is a child and its parent. The parent has the opportunity to have the greatest impact upon his or her child while he is in their home. It is reflected in so many ways.

A good definition of a disciple of Jesus would be—***one who has been taught, has accepted the teachings of Jesus, and is making a zealous effort to follow and imitate His teachings and His life.***

The term, "disciple," is used in the Gospels and Acts to identify followers of Jesus. The term, "Christian," superseded the term "disciple" as is indicated in Acts 11:26.

In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) Jesus directed his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of as many people as possible. Discipleship is a dual process:

1. ***They must be taught, learn, understand the Gospel message about Jesus***(Matthew 11:29).
2. ***They must become a follower of Him***(Matthew 4:19-20). To accomplish this, they must be taught to observe all Jesus has commanded.

The entire New Testament has been written to tell us who true disciples of Jesus are and how they ought to live. But, there are some passages that are very specific in pointing out the negative and positive traits of discipleship to Jesus. This lesson will primarily deal with these passages.

THREE "CANNOTS" OF DISCIPLESHIP

To be a true disciple of Jesus one must give recognition to the Lordship of Jesus! Jesus is to be "Lord" and "Master" of my life! He makes it very clear that to profess such, but not strive to live up to it is worthless (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46). This concept is stated clearly by the Lord in Luke 14:26, 27, 33.

(1)

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:26). Our love for Jesus must be so strong that our love for others will be inferior. Jesus is obviously not telling us to hate our earthly family. But he is saying that it should be

clear to all, even the closest members of our family, that Jesus is first (Lord) and always will be.

(2)

"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:27). The cross is a symbol of death. Jesus is telling us that we will have to die if we are really going to follow Him. Romans 6:1-2 talks about our "dying to sin." And in Romans 6:6, it speaks of being "crucified with Jesus" so that the body of sin may be done away with. Sin is selfishness! It is doing what I want, not what God wants me to do! Unless I die to my own selfish desires, I cannot be a disciple of Jesus.

(3)

"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:33). Whatever that stands in the way of following Jesus must be removed—given up! It is to determine that nothing will hinder my being a follower of Jesus—not my job, my money, my friends, or even my family. If there is ever a choice between these and following Jesus, I must follow Jesus. All that I have and am are in His hands to use.

If the above sounds like "total commitment" to you, then you have understood what the Lord is saying! He is to be Lord of my life.

THREE "POSITIVE MARKS" OF DISCIPLESHIP

The next three concepts of discipleship are given from a positive standpoint. They are all three found in the Gospel of John (8:31-32; 13:34-35; 15:8).

(1)

"If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed." (John 8:31). A disciple is a learner and a follower. A disciple of Jesus is also a learner and a follower. He is telling us that if we will **"hunger and thirst after righteousness"** that we can truly be His disciple. Time and effort must be put forth to learn the Wisdom of God and put it into practice in our lives. Jesus' ability to overcome temptation was made possible by His knowledge of what was right. It was also a recognition of a great truth about man, that he is more than physical! **"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."** (Matthew 4:4). Our survival spiritually, as well as our relationship to God, depends upon our abiding (continuing) in the Word of God.

(2)

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35). It is not the great things that causes the world to sit up and take notice of us, but our great love for one another. Discipleship requires that we love our brethren as well as God (1 John 4:20-21). We are even called upon to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). But it will be quite evident to the world if we do not love our brethren. We live in a world

filled with hate, which means that the disciple of Jesus who loves his brother will stand out in such a world. This love is not just a gushy feeling for the moment if everything is fine, but a desire and concern for the well-being of our brethren under all circumstances.

(3)

"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." (John 15:8). Jesus pointed out that the way you know someone is by the fruit they bear (Matthew 7:20). Paul praised the Colossian brethren for their fruitfulness. **"All over the world this gospel is producing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."** (Colossians 1:6) Not only did the gospel bring them into discipleship to Jesus, but they in turn were teaching others and fruit was still being produced in their midst.

Jesus even gives some principles in John 15 that need to be followed in order to be fruitful:

1. We must keep our connection to the vine (Jesus), for without Him we can do nothing. (verses 4, 5).
2. We must allow God to prune and cleanse us with His Word. (verses 2-3).
3. We must pray to God to help us be fruitful. (verses 7, 16).
4. We need to do quality work with people—so they will remain faithful too. (verse 16).

When a farmer tills the soil, clears the briars and weeds, plants the seed, fertilizes it and tends the crop, he depends on God's working through natural law to reward his efforts with fruit. The same principle is true in bearing spiritual fruit. A disciple must till the soil, sow the seed, fertilize, nourish, weed it, etc., and God will give the fruit through his natural spiritual laws. Paul stated it by inspiration this way: **"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase."** (1 Corinthians 3:6).

THE GREAT POTENTIAL OF DISCIPLESHIP

When one looks at the apostles Jesus chose to do the great work of His kingdom, we are made to stand in awe of the Master Teacher! He truly disciplined eleven of these twelve men! From a human standpoint, one could question Jesus' choice of men. What the world would have said would not work, Jesus knew the hearts of those he chose. In about thirty years Paul, by inspiration, indicates that their great task had been accomplished—the gospel was preached into all the world (Colossians 1:23)!

This great potential of disciples of Jesus is still possible today! We have the Master Teacher—so all that is lacking is the great desire on the part of men to become disciples of Jesus. (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus is calling us as He called the twelve, **"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."**(Matthew 4:19). **So, the only thing that hinders our potential as a disciple of Jesus—is ourselves!**

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The challenge to discipleship is to reach our full potential as a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship infers there must be a teacher as well as a learner. We have the Master Teacher. Do we have the willingness of heart to become great disciples of Jesus?

The challenge is so clearly expressed by the inspired apostle Peter when he challenged his readers to: **"but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct..."** (1 Peter 1:15). Paul expressed the challenge so vividly when he said, **"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children."**

Changing the disciples of Jesus into the image of Christ took place over a period of time. Peter did not become the "rock" and John did not become the "servant" without spending time beholding Jesus (John 1:42; Luke 9:54). John records in his Gospel that they **"beheld his glory"** (John 1:14). Being with Jesus, seeing his attitude and actions, hearing His teaching, and finally experiencing the scene of His great sacrifice and His resurrection and ascension into heaven had its desired effect upon the chosen apostles. But on others as well! Even though we cannot be with Jesus in person, we have the Gospels that reveal to us the things we need to **"behold"** to be a true and great disciple of Jesus.

May our hearts and lives be open to the Master Teacher, so that we may become disciples that He can effectively use to carry out His purposes and plans upon this earth!

Lesson Seven**"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."**

There is possibly not a stronger statement to be found in the New Testament than this one by Jesus! It clearly illustrates how decisive and definitive His teachings can be. This particular statement was given by Him on the night of His betrayal as He prepared His disciples for His death and the great work ahead of them. However, Jesus' teachings were not one-sided, but rather they were balanced! On this same night that He made it clear that a true disciple of His had a great hope awaiting them in Heaven (Jn. 14:1-3). When Jesus stated such a decisive concept, was He:

1. Non-caring;
2. Trying to discourage people from following Him;
3. Desiring that only a few people could come to God through Him;
4. Being unkindly bigoted;
5. Was His attitude bad?

I would suggest that none of these things are true! Jesus wanted people to come to the Father and He gave up Heaven and came to earth to prove it! He literally sacrificed Himself so that we might be able to come to the Father! Let's look closer at this statement of Jesus.

"I AM THE WAY"

Jesus is saying that He is not just one of many ways to the Father; rather, He is the only WAY to Him! Men sin and go away from God. We become what the Apostle John called lawless people (1 Jn. 3:4). Such are said to be without God, the Father, and without hope (Eph. 2:12). But through Jesus we can come to God and have hope of eternal life with Him. No other can provide the WAY to the Father. Without Jesus, we are LOST—man's greatest tragedy! (Rom. 3:23). But there is hope—Jesus has made the WAY possible to the Father by His atoning blood! (Heb. 10:19-20). Reconciliation and Rest is offered through Jesus, the Son of God (2 Cor. 5:18; Matt. 11:28-30).

"I AM THE TRUTH"

Jesus is not one of many truths, but He is THE TRUTH! Grace and TRUTH came by Him (Jn. 1:17). Without Him, or if we reject or repudiate Him, we live in error not truth! (1 Jn. 4:6). If we abide in Jesus, we abide in TRUTH; and, it is this TRUTH that sets us free (Jn. 8:31-32). Without TRUTH (Jesus), we walk in darkness! (Jn. 3:18-21). Those who are of the TRUTH love the light and hate the darkness.

The following is said about Jesus and the TRUTH:

1. His name is FAITHFUL and TRUE (Rev. 19:11);
2. His ways are JUST and TRUE (Rev. 15:3);
3. His judgments are TRUE and RIGHTEOUS (Rev. 19:2);
4. His testimonies are TRUE (Jn. 21:24);
5. His Record is TRUE (Jn. 19:35);

6. He is the true light that gives light to mankind (Jn. 1:9);
7. He is the TRUE God who gives eternal life to believers (1 Jn. 5:20).

In Jesus, there is no sin, no error, nor nothing false. He is Truth absolute! And, it is only through this TRUTH that we can come to the Father!

"I AM THE LIFE"

Jesus stated that He is THE LIFE! In Him is LIFE! (Jn. 1:4). Outside of Him is darkness (Jn. 1:5). He is the one and only SOURCE of SPIRITUAL LIFE with the Father.

1 John 5:12 _____

1 John 5:11 _____

1 John 4:9 _____

John 6:48 _____

John 3:16-17 _____

Men in sin are dead (Eph. 2:1, 5). They need to be made alive. Such is only possible through Jesus who is the life that opens the door to come to the Father (Jn. 10:10). He is the RESURRECTION and the LIFE to those who will believe, trust, be obedient to Him (John 11:25-26).

Jesus invites us to come and share in this life. Our Job is to respond positively to his invitation. But....how many are willing to come to Him to have this LIFE? (John 5:40). The sinner, apart from Christ, is dead (1 Tim. 5:6; Rom. 6:13; Col. 2:13). If we want life, it is only possible through Him. But....He is willing to give us LIFE!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

"No one comes to the Father, but by Me." This is strong, decisive, and definitive! There is no way we can misunderstand what Jesus is saying!

1. Jesus is The Way we should walk—without Him there is no way to find God.
2. Jesus is The Truth we should believe and obey—without Him there is no true knowledge to find God.
3. Jesus is The Life we can enjoy here and hereafter—without Him there is no way to be receive life from God.

Jesus kindly and lovingly lets us know that He is the ONE we must turn to for access to the Father. We are complete in Him. (Col. 2:10).

Lesson Eight

"I will Build My Church"

The Prophets foretold of the coming of the Messiah and the New Kingdom of God (Heaven).

Gen. 22:18 _____

2 Sam. 7:13-17 _____

Isa. 53:1-12 _____

Matt. 1:20-23 _____

Matt. 3:2 _____

John the baptiser came preaching the same message: **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** Jesus began His public ministry by preaching the same message (Matt. 4:17). But later, He ties another term to this coming kingdom of heaven—**"I will build my church!"** (Matt. 16:18). He was no mere man! He was God in the flesh (Matt. 1:23) with power and authority from the Father to build His church or kingdom. Shortly afterwards, He would become king over this new "kingdom" and head over this new "church!" (1 Tim. 6:15; Eph. 1:20-23). He was given all power and authority in heaven and on earth upon His resurrection from the grave (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus made it very clear that this would be done! There was no "maybe," or "if the Jews will let me," or "if things go well." It was an absolute certainty! He even emphasized that the **"Gates of Hades would not prevail against such."** (Matt. 16:18). It would be built! Even death, the grave, or the Hadean realm of the dead would not prevent Him from building His church. He would be raised from death to build it. His intentions were "set in concrete!" He would not be deterred from such. Jesus set up the church as He promised and this church (kingdom) would be made up of the saved (redeemed ones) (Acts 2:47). Peter's confession that Jesus was **"the Christ, the Son of God"** was proven to be true by His building of His church!

OPPOSITION DID NOT DETER HIM

During Jesus' public ministry, many of His newly made followers turned away and walked no more with Him (Jn. 6:63-66). They left because his teachings were too hard. But Jesus did not change His message nor His plans because of such. He did not run after these people and plead with them to come back. Neither did He promise to teach more of what they wanted to hear. The truth does not change even if men will not accept it. Jesus then turned to His close disciples and asked them: **"Will you also leave men?"** (Jn. 6:67-69). Simon Peter answered for the group: **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."** Shortly after this, Jesus pointed out to the disciples what they would have to endure if they followed Jesus.

Jn. 15:18-20 _____

Jn. 16:2 _____

Matt. 10:22 _____

Lk. 6:22-23

They needed to remain firm and committed to Him and to the church or kingdom that would soon be set up among men. They needed to be uncompromising in their devotion to Him and His teachings.

SHALL BE ROOTED UP!

A short time before Jesus promised to build His church; He faced the Scribes and Pharisees with some very strong language. He accused them of:

1. Transgressing the commandment of God (Matt. 15:1-6);
2. Being hypocritical (Matt. 15:7);
3. Honoring God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him (Matt. 15:8)
4. Worshipping God in vain (15:9).

Jesus' disciples pointed out to Him that His words had offended the Pharisees (Matt. 15:12). Upon this Jesus gave some strong warnings to His disciples:

1. ***"Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted."***
2. ***"Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."*** (Matt. 15:13-14).

These two statements could include all that is false! The false will be uprooted because it did not come from the Father. It is truth that will pass the test—that will be firmly planted in the hearts and lives of those who love God. All else is false. False practices, false doctrines, false traditions, false attitudes, and false organizations—all will be rooted up. What is not authorized by God will be condemned (Col. 3:17). When truth (the word of God) is taught correctly, and believed and obeyed correctly; such are saved and compose the church that Jesus said He would build (Acts 2:47). But when truth is perverted, that which comes out of it is perverted and will be rooted out (Gal. 1:6-9). Sin (all that is contrary to the Word of God) needs to be denounced in all its forms—even in the Lord's church as well. But such needs to be done with the right spirit (Col. 4:6; Eph. 4:15).

The Spirit of Jesus

There is no question in regards to the Spirit of Jesus as portrayed in Scripture. He was kind, loving, gracious, tender, compassionate, and understanding. But He was also plain in speech, straight-forward, bold, decisive, and uncompromising in His language and acts about truth, sin and error. It is wrong to assume that since Jesus was ***"meek and lowly"*** (Matt. 11:29) that He did not condemn anything or anyone. The above study shows that it is "Christ-like" to warn people of the dangers of that which are false. Christ also expects us to recognize the difference between truth and error (Prov. 14:15; Rom. 12:9; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Jn. 4:1). He wants us to do as He did—defend or uphold the truth (Jude 3) and oppose that which is false (Tit. 1:13). When it comes to upholding the Lord's church that

He built, we should not be **"tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."** Rather, we should stand fast in the faith and **"speak the truth in love."** (Eph. 4:14-15). If people do not want to come into the church that Jesus built, He will be sad, but He will not change His mind. He did not change His mind, and He did build His church as He promised! Men may try to change His church, pervert His church, or start their own church; but Jesus still has His church and it is composed of the saved of this world. All the works of men will be "rooted up!" No one has the right nor the authority to build another church than the one Jesus built. All such efforts will be in vain.

Concluding Thoughts

1. Jesus expects His disciples to be just as decisive in their believing, obeying, and teaching of His truth as He was.
2. We are not to over-emphasize the gentleness and humility of Jesus in order to compromise His **decisive teachings!**

Lesson Nine

"You are of your Father, the Devil"

In these lessons, we are looking at the bold, uncompromising, and decisive teachings of Jesus. Such teachings are manifold (many)!. He makes many positive statements about Himself that we have already studied. However, in this lesson, I believe this would be considered a decisive **negative** statement. It would be considered negative in the sense of one that no one would want to hear about themselves—**"You are of your Father, the Devil!"** (Jn. 8:44)

BACKGROUND TO THIS STATEMENT

In the midst of John chapter 8, it states that Jesus was teaching in the Temple area. It must have been a "general" audience—possibly with some religious leaders involved in the group. His teachings on this occasion follow the incident of the adulterous woman who was brought to Jesus by the religious leaders to try to trap Him. He successfully dealt with their attempt (Jn. 8:1-11).

Later, Jesus continues His teaching to the people. He makes a statement that some in His audience took exceptions to—**"The Father who sent Me bears witness of Me."** (8:18). They asked, **"Where is Your Father?"** (8:19). He answers, **"You know neither Me nor My Father."** (8:19). He later adds, **"He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone."** (8:29). At this point, many were convinced that Jesus was sent of God. (8:30). Jesus makes an effort to encourage those who believed to abide in His words so they could truly become His disciples. He then adds, **"You shall come to know the Truth and the Truth will make you free."** (8:31-32)/

This statement brought forth an aggressive reply by the "unbelievers," **"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone."** (8:33). Jesus then replied, **"I know you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill me."** (8:37). Jesus again makes a bold statement that brings an aggressive reply—**"I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father."** (8:38). The people quickly reacted, **"Abraham is our Father!"** (8:39).

The "trap" is now set! Jesus then says, **"If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham."** (8:39). Jesus pointed out to them that Abraham would not do what they were attempting to do—to kill Him! (8:40). Now, He is ready to show them who their true father is, **"You do the deeds of your father."** (8:41). They quickly respond, **"God is our Father!"** (8:41). To which Jesus responds, **"If God were your Father, you would love me."** (8:42). Now He is ready to make His bold, uncompromising, and decisive statement about them—**"You are of your father, the Devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."** (8:44).

THE POWER OF TRUTH

The Truth can both set men free or it can cut deeply! The heart of man must be changed if it is to be cleansed of its iniquity! Jesus now explains further, "**He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.**" (8:47). The reactions of some of the people becomes nasty, "**You are a Samaritan and have a demon.**" (8:48). They cannot deal with Jesus' logic, nor are they willing to make any changes—thus, they resort to nasty insults. Jesus continues to try to persuade them about who He is, "**It is my Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him.**" (8:54-55).

Jesus again lays a foundation for a great truth they are going to hear. He told them that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, and he saw it and was glad. (8:56). They reacted by stating that Jesus was not even 50 years old, so His statement could not be true. Jesus makes a bold claim to DEITY—"**Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM!**" (8:58). This was the "last straw"—they wanted to stone Him for blasphemy! (8:59).

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

1. Whoever continues in sin is a servant of sin. Such people have as their father, not God, but the Devil.
2. Jesus did not compromise truth nor seek to please people through softening His teachings. Neither should we!
3. The difference between a child of God and a child of the Devil is **Obedience!** (Rom. 6:16-18; Matt. 7:21-23).
4. There is a difference in being Abraham's seed (descendant) and in being Abraham's children. (Jn. 8:29). Jesus admitted they were Abraham's descendants, but they were not Abraham's children. Abraham had an obedient faith (Jas. 2:20-26) and they did not. Thus, we too can claim to be a Christian, but do not have a spiritual connection to Jesus (Gal. 3:26-29).
5. Jesus reasoned logically with them. The process is as follows:
 - a) Abraham's children:
 1. If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.
 2. But, you do not do the works of Abraham.
 3. Therefore, you are not Abraham's children.
 - b) God's children:
 1. If God were your Father, you would love me.
 2. But, you do not love me.
 3. Therefore, God is not your Father.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

1. When Jesus encountered religious error and/or moral evil, He was uncompromising with the Truth.
2. He was never unkind, uncouth, nor unloving; but, He was uncompromising with Error!
3. Can we be any different and still be a follower of Christ?

Lesson Ten

"These Shall go Away into Everlasting Punishment."

Jesus uttered many decisive statements; but, there is probably not a more decisive one, nor a more permanent one than this statement above (Matt. 25:46). Jesus is threatening people with **"everlasting punishment!"** How do people react to His statement? Is this crude? Is this unloving? Is this unkind? Where is the "meek and lowly" Jesus that we hear about in Scripture? Why do people not want to hear or say such words about others? Are we too "refined" to speak of such things? Have we "matured" to the point that we really don't believe in such language? Survey after survey point out people's unbelief of such a teaching! They claim to believe in Heaven, but not in Hell! It would seem that people want to pick and choose what they want to believe or hear and throw away the rest of the Word of God. God gave a warning about such people in 2 Timothy 4:3-4—***"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."*** It would seem that people would much rather accept "fables" than "truth!"

But here is the "meek" and "lowly" Jesus that states boldly, uncompromisingly, and decisively that certain people are going to go into everlasting punishment! But there are many other terms that are also graphic in their descriptions of this place of punishment. Please read the following Scriptures and fill in the blank who God says will go into everlasting punishment (or its equivalent).

- Matt. 7:15-20 _____
- Matt. 18:8 _____
- Matt. 25:41-46 _____
- _____
- Acts 13:46 _____
- Rom. 2:8-9 _____
- 2 Cor. 5:10-11 _____
- Gal. 1:6-9 _____
- Eph. 5:3-5 _____
- 2 Thess. 1:7-9 _____
- _____
- 2 Pet. 2:17 _____
- Rev. 14:11 _____
- Rev. 20:14-15 _____
- Rev. 21:8 _____

These references are just a few of those that can be found in the Word of God. The concept of reward and punishment is evident from the beginning to the end of the Bible. If a person claims to believe the Bible, he cannot help but be shaken by these terms or concepts.

VARIOUS TERMS FOR EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT

The following terms are used primarily in the New Testament that helps to describe the concept of punishment of man after death.

1. A person will perish. Lk. 13:3
2. A person will be condemned. Mk. 16:16
3. A person will suffer damnation. Jn. 5:28-29
4. A person will be cast into outer darkness. Matt. 22:13
5. A person will be cast into fire. Rev. 22:14
6. A person will be cast into fire and brimstone. Rev. 21:8
7. A person will be in a place where the "worm" dies not and the fire is not quenched. (Mk. 9:44, 46, 48)
8. A person will suffer a 2nd death. Rev. 21:8

One of the terms that is used in the Bible is "Hell." In fact, it is very interesting to note that Jesus used this term (from the Greek, Gehenna) 11 of the 12 times it is used in the New Testament. Following are the references: **Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 23; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:8; Jas. 3:6.**

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A person cannot honestly claim to believe in Jesus and reject such teachings as this. These words are too critical to be passed over lightly.

No one really would like to believe in Hell; but, we certainly want to believe in Heaven. But, we do not really have a choice of not believing in both if we believe in Jesus!

Please note that it is God, who is the essence of love that plainly states that people are going to be cast into everlasting punishment — where there is no end!

Let's not be so concerned about what people feel, but what people need to hear!

Lesson Eleven

"All Authority has been given unto Me."

Jesus was faced with the question of Authority when He was asked by the religious leaders—**"By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?"** (Matt. 21:23). They were the ones with authority—presumably by God. Jesus seems to indicate such in Matthew 23:1-3. But Jesus, an unschooled carpenter, had begun teaching the people publicly without consulting them and having their backing. He also cast out demons with authority (Lk. 9:1; Mk. 1:27). The more He threatened their position with the people, the more upset they became. They were ready to face Him head-on with this issue of authority.

The question of authority is a legitimate one. God had designed for certain ones among the Israelite Nation to teach the people and Jesus was not one of those men (in their eyes)! Jesus' teachings had caught the attention of a lot of people. They were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them **"as one having authority."** (Matt. 7:28-29). He was posing a threat to the present leaders and something needed to be done—so, they challenged His authority to do what He was doing.

JESUS UPHOLDS HIS AUTHORITY

Jesus states to these religious leaders that He would tell them by what authority He was doing these things if they would answer a question from Him. Often-times, a well-worded question can help deal with a very tight situation. Jesus' question put the squeeze on these men because either way they answered, they were caught! Jesus' question was: **"The baptism of John –where was it from? From heaven or from men?"** (Matt. 21:25). This was a very simple question and one easy to answer for an honest person. But these men were not honest. They showed that by not being willing to honestly answer His question. This situation that these men were put in by Jesus' question is often referred to as "The horn of a dilemma."

1. If they said John's authority was from God, they would then face the question—"Why didn't you obey him?"
2. If they said John's authority was from men, they feared the people—because all looked upon John as a prophet.

So, because they were dishonest, they were caught in a dilemma. So, Jesus said that He would therefore not tell them by what authority He was doing these things. But, in reality, Jesus did let the people know that God had sent Him and He was speaking what the Father had given to Him

Jn. 8:16, 18, 26-27 _____

Jn. 5:27 _____

But it may not have been to the same people.

THE EXTENT OF JESUS' AUTHORITY

Jesus, after His death, burial, and resurrection, stated clearly what kind of authority that the Father had given unto Him.

Matt. 28:18-20 _____

1 Peter 3:22 _____

This authority is also seen in His relationship to the church.

Eph. 1:20-23 _____

Col. 1:18 _____

Because Jesus is "THE" authority, we must please Him in all we say and do!

Col. 3:17 _____

This is the reason why we need to constantly ask people—*"Where does Jesus or the Bible say 'so-and-so'?"* Is He the authority or not? Have you noticed how people tend to treat the authority of Jesus in their lives and in their conversations? Is the proper respect for His authority being shown in the religious world about us?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

1. Jesus gives us a good way to help men see truth if they are honest. Dishonest people will only see what they want to see.
2. The Scriptures certainly make it clear that John's activities and teachings had the authority of God behind it. His activities were foretold (Mal. 4:5-6) and stated as being sent by God.
3. Jesus came with authority from God also. He used His authority to accomplish God's plan for man's redemption. God exalted Him to a very high position of authority because of His perfect submission to the Father.

Lesson Twelve**"You shall be Perfect"**

Jesus said that His people are to be "perfect!" In what sense are we to be "perfect?" This statement by Jesus is at the end of a context that gives us a very good clue on how to answer this question. The context is talking about expressing godly love! It is to be expressed to all, not to just a few close friends. We are to even love our enemies. The tax collectors will greet those who greet them. But we must go beyond what ordinary people do—we are to love our enemies: (1) bless those who curse us, (2) do good to those who hate us, (3) and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute us. In other words, we are to be "perfect!"

Our problem with the word "perfect" is that we want to use it too often in the extreme position of absolute perfection. While it is used that way in some instances (which we shall see); yet, it is also used in a less than absolute perfection in other places (which we shall see). In order to help us see this distinction, we are giving a list of words that are used to express perfection in various contexts: (1) Perfect, (2) Complete, (3) Mature, (4) finished, (5) Whole, (6) Accurate, (7) Diligently, (8) fit thoroughly, and (9) Blameless.

WHO DOES GOD SAY ARE PERFECT?

1. God—Deut. 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:31; Job 37:16; Ps. 18:30; Ezek. 28:15
2. Christ—Lk. 13:32; Heb. 2:10; 5:8
3. The Law of Moses—Ps. 19:7 (But the Law made nothing perfect—Heb. 7:19)
4. Jesus in the flesh—Heb. 5:12
5. The Will of God—Rom. 12:2
6. Gifts from God—Jas. 1:17
7. Jesus' sacrifice—Heb. 10:14
8. Saints of God—Eph. 4:12

Now look at how God speaks about us (saints) being perfected or made perfect:

1. We are challenged to be perfect as God is perfect—Matt. 5:48
2. We are to make our ways perfect—Job 22:3
3. We are to become a perfect man—Eph. 4:13
4. Paul speaks of the saints as being perfect—Phil. 3:15
5. The Scriptures can make us perfect—2 Tim. 3:16-17
6. We can be made perfect and complete—Jas. 1:4
7. The person who does not stumble in word is a perfect man—Jas. 3:2
8. Perfect love cast out fear—1 Jn. 4:18
9. God knows when our works are not perfect—Rev. 3:2
10. Mark the perfect and upright man—Ps. 37:37
11. Noah was righteous and perfect (He walked with God)—Gen. 6:9
12. We are to perfect holiness in the fear of God—2 Cor. 7:1
13. We are to be perfectly trained—Lk. 6:40

14. We are to be perfectly joined together—1 Cor. 1:10
15. We are to perfect that which is lacking—1 Tim. 3:10
16. God can make us perfect in every good work—Heb. 13:21
17. God wants us to be made perfect in one—Jn. 17:23
18. Our strength can be made perfect in weakness—2 Cor. 12:9
19. By works Abraham's faith was made perfect—Jas. 2:22
20. Love can be perfected among us—1 Jn. 4:17
21. Fear causes us not to be perfect—1 Jn. 4:18
22. The Apostle said he spoke wisdom among those who are perfect—1 Cor. 2:6
23. Those who keep God's word, their love is perfected—1 Jn. 2:5
24. The Apostle wanted the Corinthians to be made perfect—2 Cor. 13:9
25. Love is our bond of perfection—Col. 3:14
26. We are to go on to perfection—Heb. 6:1

OUR CHALLENGE FROM GOD

1. To be perfect—Matt. 5:48; 2 Cor. 13:11; Deut. 18:13
 - ◇ No other goal is fitting of the Christian.
 - ◇ If we were perfect in the absolute, we would not need Christ.
2. We are to have a perfect heart—1 Kgs. 8:6; 11:4; 15:13
 - ◇ King Asa—1 Kgs. 15:14; 2 Chron. 15:17; 16:9; 24:2
 - ◇ Solomon—1 Chron. 28:9; 29:19
 - ◇ Hezekiah—Isa. 38:3
 - ◇ People in David's time—1 Chron. 29:9
3. We are to be perfect and upright like Job—Job. 1:8; 2:3
4. We are to be perfect like Noah—Gen. 6:9; 17:1

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

1. It would seem to be quite obvious that absolute perfection is not under consideration in most of the places where the word is used. It does indicate a high degree of submission and obedience to God's Will.
2. It is also obvious that God will not allow us to get by with a mediocre kind of obedience. It needs to be full, whole, blameless obedience to God.
3. Our perfection before God can only come from a heart that is "perfectly" submissive to the Will of God. Therefore, the heart is the key to being perfect before God.
4. The Scriptures state that God's eyes move to and fro throughout the earth to find a perfect heart (2 Chron. 16:9). Has He found you or I yet?

