

Growing in Christ

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Lesson #5 for November 3, 2012

Scriptures: Isaiah 35:10; Mark 10:45; Romans 6:12-23; Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:16; Galatians 4:1-11; Colossians 2:15.

1. This lesson will focus on some of the many things Jesus accomplished by His death on the cross. Did Jesus have to die? Why did Jesus have to die?
2. Was the death of Jesus on the cross primarily for the benefit of human beings? And how does that relate to the demonic forces in the universe? Do those who carefully study the crucifixion and its implications manage to benefit more from it than those who only study it casually? Do we really need to know why Jesus had to die?
3. What are some of the aspects that separate Christianity from other religions?

The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion; it had now [36] become the principle of the Jewish religion. Satan had implanted this principle. Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin. (*Desire of Ages* 35.2)

4. The Christian religion stands apart from every other religion for several reasons: Our God came down from heaven, lived a meritorious life, died a criminal's death, rose from the grave, returned to heaven, and promised to come back to take us to be with Him for eternity. Nothing that we have done or can do—or for that matter ever could do—would take the place of what God has done. Christians do not travel to see where Jesus is buried. He is alive!
5. According to the Bible, anyone who does not have Christ is a slave to sin. (John 8:34) And “sin pays its wage—death.” (Romans 6:23) “Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us.” (Acts 4:12) So, Christianity is a religion based on the fact that God has reached down to this planet to save us.
6. Read Isaiah 35:10; Mark 10:45; Galatians 4:4-5; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:12; and 1 Peter 1:18-19. These verses make it clear that Christ has freed us from sin, grief, sorrow, death, and numerous other evils.
7. The New Testament suggests that Christ's death was both sacrificial and substitutionary. What do these terms mean? Christ's death was sacrificial in that He was willing to die to accomplish what needed to be done. He came to this earth to live as He did and to die as He did because He loves us.
8. In what sense is Christ's death substitutionary? Was someone demanding the payment of a debt? How does what Christ did make your life today different? Hopefully, no Christian would argue with the fact that if Christ had not come and died, we could not be saved. But, why is that?
9. As asked by the literary character Bozo/Boso in Anselm's (c. 1033-1109) *Cur Deus Homo*:

If God could only save sinners by condemning the Innocent, is He truly omnipotent? If, on the other hand, He could, but is not willing to do so, how are we to think of Him as wise and just? What justice could there possibly be in accepting the death of the most innocent Man who ever lived in place of the guilty?

No human legal system would accept that. So, how can God do such a thing? And if this

“legal” transaction makes it possible for God to save sinners because they are “covered with the righteousness of Christ,” would that suggest that we are taken into heaven without God the Father realizing that we are still sinners? Is that legal fiction?

10. When the New Testament speaks of redemption, then, unless our linguistics are at fault, it means that Christ has paid the price of our redemption. To the extent that the price paid must be adequate for the purchase in question this indicates an equivalence, a substitution.—Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 1965), p. 61.
11. If we are to believe that God made a payment to purchase our salvation, to whom did He make the payment? And what price did He pay? Did God negotiate with the Devil for our salvation? According to the ransom theory, God deceived the Devil to get us back!
12. Read Romans 6:12-23. Jesus Himself made it very clear that we cannot serve God and the world at the same time. (Matthew 6:24) In Romans Paul said we either serve sin or we serve righteousness. In fact, we are a slave to one or the other. What does it mean to be a slave to sin—Satan’s side? What does it mean to be a slave to righteousness—God’s side? If you are on God’s side, you are always free to leave. Satan will try to force you to stay if you are on his side. Lucifer left from God’s side in heaven.
13. In Romans 6:1-3, Paul discussed what is supposed to happen at baptism. Can we actually bury our old selves in the waters of baptism? Unfortunately, sin leaves scars. The change that comes when we accept Christ does not automatically take away all the effects of past sin and certainly does not take away our evil habits!
14. This is no fault on the part of God. He may treat us as if we had never sinned, but our nervous system does not. We may theologically be dead to our sins and freed from them, but the Devil will do everything possible to remind us of those sins whenever he can!
15. But, there is a transformation possible. That transformation happens on a daily basis as we get to know God and Jesus Christ better and better. By beholding we can become changed. (*Great Controversy* 555.1) It is not easy to die to sin.
16. We do not like to think of ourselves as slaves. So, what does it mean to be a slave to righteousness? And how can slavery to righteousness be the same as real freedom?
17. Read 1 John 3:8; 5:19; John 12:31; 16:11; Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:16; 2:15; and Romans 8:38,39. These verses make it very clear that the Creator of the universe has more than enough power to free us from sin. Unfortunately, they also make it clear that anyone who continues to sin belongs to the Devil! How does this fit with the fact that Christ has already judged and condemned the Devil? Hasn’t God won the great controversy? Don’t we believe that the Devil is ultimately defeated?
18. We read of people in New Testament times who were demon-possessed. Conservative Christians believe that was a reality. Unfortunately, many people in our day have a very naturalistic and scientific worldview, and they think that such things as demon possession are ideas from an age of superstition and ignorance. While the Bible is scientifically accurate in many respects, it also draws back the curtain on the supernatural world which we otherwise would know nothing about. So, why don’t we see demon possession today? Or, do we? Have some people sold their soul to “rock-and-roll”?
19. While there are apparently clear examples of demon possession in more primitive parts of the world even today, apparently, it does not suit Satan’s purposes in developed countries to work that openly. He exerts his power through “natural” forces. **People who are**

controlled by circumstances outside of themselves are making themselves open to demon possession because Satan will eventually find ways to manipulate those circumstances and control them. Look at the effects of street drugs, for example.

20. Seventh-day Adventists believe in the great controversy between God and Satan over the character and government of God. Ellen White wrote her *opus magnum* the five-volume series known as *The Conflict of the Ages* in which she spelled out in considerable detail that great controversy. As you understand the great controversy, how does it impact your life on a day-by-day basis? The great controversy is happening in our minds. Satan is alive and well on planet earth. And he works through many channels. Read Colossians 2:8,14,20; Galatians 4:1-11. Some of Satan's tools include the worthless deceit of human wisdom, our record of past sins, even slavery to the weak and pitiful ruling spirits of this world. We may not fully understand exactly what Paul had in mind when he spoke of these things; but surely, everyone of us has had experience with the temptations and power of the Devil.
21. Christ has promised us victory from this bondage to sin. How do we claim that? How do we make Christ and God the top priority in our lives? If we spend almost all of our time trying to keep up with worldly pursuits and have little time for Bible study, prayer, and witnessing, we will find ourselves becoming more and more transformed into the image of the world with which we spend our time. If we want to become more like God, we need to spend more time with Him.
22. So, if the Devil has been defeated and Christ has already gained the victory, why does God still allow the Devil to roam about like a lion looking for prey to devour? (1 Peter 5:8) How does the Devil devour people? Colossians 2:15 suggests that Christ has stripped the Devil of his weapons and his armor. But, the Devil is still working very successfully, often through religions and religious leaders. Read John 8, especially John 8:44.

After Christ's death, Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted. Whatever attitude he might assume, he could no longer await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts, and before them accuse Christ's brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin. [Zechariah 3:1-5; Job 1&2] The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken. [The entire unfallen universe watched the crucifixion.]

Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. [Why?] Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

A battle unseen by human eyes is being waged. The army of the Lord is on the ground, seeking to save souls. Satan and his host are also at work, trying in every possible way to deceive and destroy. . . . Day by day the battle goes on. If our eyes could be opened to see the good and evil agencies at work, there would be no trifling, no vanity, no jesting or joking. If all would put on the whole armor of God and fight manfully the battles of the Lord, victories would be gained that would cause the kingdom of darkness to tremble.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 41.

23. What are some of the Devil's methods of trying to frighten, intimidate and tempt us? Read Hebrews 2:14,15. What does Hebrews imply about our fear of death? Very often, fear is our response to the unknown. Look at the experience of the disciples. When Christ was crucified and the disciples realized that He was dead and buried, they went into deep mourning, hiding in the upper room behind locked doors. They were certain that they were going to be next.
24. But, look at what happened to the disciples when they realized that Christ was coming back to take them to heaven. They were transformed by their new understanding of what Christianity was all about, and they had no further fear of death. (Acts 4:8-13)
25. So, what did Christ accomplish in Gethsemane and on Calvary that so completely defeated the Devil? Back in the beginning, God had said that sin leads to death. (Genesis 2:17) In effect, the Devil said, "That's not true!" (See Genesis 3:1-5) So, who is telling us the truth? When Jesus drank the cup of suffering even in the Garden of Gethsemane before anyone had touched Him, He fell dying to the ground. (*Desire of Ages* 693.1) God had to send an angel to revive Him so that He could go out and go through that whole incredible experience of trials, beatings, and crucifixion. But, Jesus had already demonstrated to the entire universe that sin kills—not only in the first death but also in the second death. He did it again on Calvary. He did not die of crucifixion. Death from crucifixion usually took days.
26. Following the death of Abel, Satan began to claim that the reason people were dying was that God was upset at them for sinning. Thus, Satan claimed that God was the One responsible for their deaths. But, what did Jesus say when He died? Did He say, "My God, My God, why are you killing Me?" No! He said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me." (Matthew 27:46) And incredible as it may seem, the one group of people who claimed to be the closest followers of God were the ones who were out there crucifying their Messiah and God and hoping to get Him buried on time so they could rush home and keep Sabbath in honor of the One they had just crucified! That is absolutely satanic.
27. Satan had tried to claim that He should be treated as equal with Christ. God had said that is not possible because Satan is a creature and not a Creator and not God. On Resurrection Sunday morning, Jesus arose in His Own power and returned to heaven, thus proving that He was/is God. (John 10:17,18; 2:19; *Desire of Ages* 785.2)
28. Satan's accusations and questions raising doubts about God have been totally answered and refuted. Many of Satan's accusations were answered all the way back at creation. Satan claimed that God was not willing to share His creative power. So, God created creatures who could pro-create. In the eyes of the onlooking universe, the great controversy was over 2000 years ago. It is only here on this earth that we have not yet understood all that God through Christ intended to teach us. When will we learn? We need to look all through the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen White to see Satan's accusations. See, for example, Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:9,10; Colossians 1:19,20.
29. Does understanding how Christ defeated Satan help us in our battles against Satan? Does it help to know that he is a defeated foe? Do you have any questions about whether or not he is fully defeated?

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