

Wonderful Words Of Eternal Life

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Wonderful Words of Eternal Life

Introduction

The apostle John said "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." ... "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." ... "The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (John 1:2, 4 and 1 John 1:2-3)

Jesus invites everyone to "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Peter stated in John 6:68 "Lord ... You have the words of eternal life." These lessons are about those wonderful words of Eternal Life:

Atonement

Covenant

Incarnation

Justification

Propitiation

Reconciliation

Sanctification

Atonement

Let me begin by asking, are you in debt? Most of us are. Let me re-phrase it. Are you or have you ever been in debt over your head? Some of you may feel a sense of suffocation because the debt that you owe is more than you can bear. Maybe you're thinking about your mortgage, second mortgage, car payment, student loan and all those credit cards that have piled up. You suddenly are beginning to realize your income doesn't equal the outgo and bankruptcy may be staring you in the face. WHOA!

Now this lesson isn't about physical indebtedness. But if you're deep in debt or have been, you will better appreciate in your heart the nature of this lesson.

Atonement may bring the image of those dry old dusty preacher words. If you've been to church at all, you've probably heard preachers somewhere stand up and talk about atonement. Maybe you heard what it meant, but you've forgotten and you don't know that you ever really want to know again. Atonement is a wonderful word that you and I don't even have the luxury of not understanding if we're Christians. It's a word that shapes and manifests the destiny of our lives.

What does it mean? The dictionary provides its secular definition; to supply a need or to restore a deficiency. Interestingly enough, the Greek word used in the writing of the New Testament meant to pay a debt and particularly to pay a debt that an individual would be unable to pay. If you were to do that you would have atoned the debt. That's the reason for the little introduction about financial indebtedness. But atonement as used in the Bible has nothing to do with financial indebtedness. It has something far more important than that.

God creates every human being in His image. (Genesis 1:27) He creates every one of us absolutely spotless, holy and without sin. Some of you have heard the doctrine of original sin proposed. It is the idea that when a child comes from its mother's womb it already has sinned as it has its parents' sins. There is nothing in the Bible to validate that. Instead Jesus told the disciples in Luke 18 to let the little children come and be around him for such is the kingdom of God. They're not sinners. They're innocent and wonderful and clean. God really does make us in his image in a multitude of ways, one way being we're pure and without the stain of sin. But as we grow older and mature, one by one, time after time, we choose to sin. The Greek word rendered sin means to miss the mark. It was often used as an archery term. If someone was shooting at a bull's-eye and the arrow went off-centered just a little bit, that person missed the mark. That's the idea of sin. When I miss the mark of God's ideal for my life, I've sinned. When we hear the word sin or sinner, we tend to associate it with some heinous things. We think about criminal behavior. We think about that which is socially unacceptable and it includes all that. So, whenever we miss the mark for God's ideal for our life, we sin. Whenever we do something that God would not have us do, we've sinned. Whenever we don't do something that God would have us do, we've sinned. So make sure we understand that every time that you miss a mark, we've fallen short of God's intent and you have sinned.

Paul states in Romans 3:23 "all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." In missing the mark, we begin to incur a debt to our Creator. He created us sinless and in His image, but little by little we begin to incur sin and a chasm grows. The question is what are we going to do about it? That's a tough question. Since all men and women are sinners, they cannot pay that debt for each other. I don't have enough holiness to take care of myself let alone give you any. You don't have enough to take care of yourself let alone to lend me any. So collectively we're no better off than we are individually. We're just a mass of humanity going through time with this huge sin debt that will kill us.

Paul also said in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death..." The idea of wage is that there is something earned by our actions. That's the pay back. That's what's coming our way. What we can expect for our sin is death. You say, what's death? Oh, it doesn't mean being put into a casket under the ground, that's going to happen anyway. The word "death" means separation. Our sin debt causes us to be separated from the Almighty God who made us so perfect. Incidentally, the idea would be like the separation and the relationship you have with your banker if you kept accumulating a debt that you could not pay.

Well what do we do? Praise the Lord, God gave an answer. The answer has its roots way back in the Old Testament. Take your Bible and turn to Leviticus 17:11. It states a fundamental principle that is eternal. **"For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar."** Now I'm not sure why, but if you think about it for a moment it begins to piece together. God and His infinite wisdom decreed in essence that "humans, you're sinning and that sin is sapping the life away from you. Sin is creating a debt to Me that is drawing you farther and farther from Me. Your life is being drained and life is made possible by blood." Incidentally only in the last few years are we scientifically beginning to understand just how true that statement is, how necessary blood is to life. Then God said, "Why

don't We let blood, sacrificial blood poured out on the altar, pay for sin? It will atone for sin. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years later in the New Testament when the Hebrew writer was writing under inspiration in Chapter 9, verse 22, he repeats the same theme. It says, "without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness" of sin. There has to be life to pay for sin. Life pays for death.

So Israel, knowing their sin and the growing chasm between them and God, saw payment for that sin debt that God specifically provided called "The Day of Atonement." The Day of Atonement would be that one day every year where Israel as a nation would have their sin debt taken care of. Aaron, who was the high priest, would have to take care of his own sin. "Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering." (Leviticus 16:11) Aaron would cut that bull's throat and pour the blood out on the altar to atone for his own sin, but then he had to do something else.

He would then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain to do with it as he did with the bull's blood. He would sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. In this way, he made atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins had been. You see, God decreed that with the shedding of that blood, sin could have atonement. It could be paid. So Aaron did that until he died and then the high priest did it for years and for generations and for centuries, but there was one problem. The people were offering those blood sacrifices of animals in faith. They were coming before God obediently and they were humble and that pleased God and so God smiled upon those people, He forgave them, but what we need to understand is that the sin debt wasn't really being paid. Not by those animals. (Leviticus 16:15)

In Hebrews 10:1-3 the Bible says "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--- not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins," and verse 4 states, "because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." If you think about it, you know that's right. There's no way that the blood from an animal, even if it's offered in obedience and humility, could take away the sin of one who was made in the image of God. Therefore: no human being with those animal sacrifices could ever be truly cleansed. So entered Jesus Christ, The Word, who became flesh.

John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Verse 14 states "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld the glory of the only begotten of the Father." Hebrews 4:15 says that he lived a sinless life. "We don't serve a high priest, who cannot deal with our infirmities, but he has been tempted in all points like we, yet he was without sin." So when that one perfect, sinless individual came and lived, it made him fit to be the real, genuine and authoritative payment for the sin debt. "For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear

for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own." (Hebrews 9:24) This wasn't a copy. This wasn't a ritual and this wasn't a ceremony. Jesus actually paid the price.

John the Baptist "saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29) The apostle John also wrote in 1 John 2:1-2 "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin." Don't you like that? He says I'm trying to get you not to sin, but I know you're going to sometimes. When you do sin, listen. "We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense---Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." Isn't that incredible? Yes. Isn't that unfathomable? Yes, it is. Isn't that too good to be true? No, it's not too good to be true. It's absolutely true. When you go to that cross and when you accept that sacrifice and believe on the only name that you can believe in wherein you must be saved, Jesus. (Acts 4:12) When you repent of your sins, Acts 20:21, and when you re-enact that very death, burial, and resurrection by allowing yourself to be buried with Christ in the waters of baptism to come up a new creature with your sin buried in that watery grave, Romans 6:3-5, you become a Christian and you understand the concept of atonement.

John Bunyan wrote in the 17th Century one of the most famous works of all, called "Pilgrim's Progress." The main character in "Pilgrim's Progress" was a character called "Christian." It was all symbolic. Listen to what he said about Christian in this work. "Now I saw in my dream that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side by a wall, and that wall was called salvation. Up this way therefore did Burden Christian run, but not without great difficulty because of the load that was on his back. He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending and upon that place stood a cross and a little below in the bottom, a sepulcher. So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from his back and began to tumble and so continued to do until it came to the mouth of the sepulchre where it fell in and I saw it no more." We lose our burden when we come to the cross too. Lesson #1065, Steve Flatt 7-7-1992

Covenant

One of the most precious and encouraging words in the English language, or any language for that matter, is the word "covenant." Covenant, it's precious. It's not just precious, it's prevalent. Would it surprise you to know that the word covenant is used hundreds of times in the Bible? It is imperative that we understand its meaning.

1. Covenants were a permanent enduring bond between two parties that were not to be broken. Now notice those words I used, permanent, enduring, not broken. We're talking about real cement. Covenants were pledges of undeniable trust. What is a covenant? Is it akin to a contract? Or, like one teenager said "A covenant is a super glue contract." But a

covenant is not like a contract. The difference goes back into the very reason for their inception. A contract is built upon mutual distrust. That's why you have a contract. But a covenant is built upon mutual trust. So in that sense they are exactly opposite.

If you or your business sells a house or something else you write up a contract. You make sure you've got all these ramifications just in case the other party fails to come through with their end of the bargain. That's a contract. But a covenant doesn't have those stipulations. The only real ramification of a broken covenant is just that, brokenness, and all of the hurt that goes with that. So a contract is that enduring bond formed by undeniable trust.

2. A covenant as seen in the Bible is often symbolized by an exchange of gifts. For example, the Bible gives a number of instances where men would make covenants with each other and they exchanged certain parts of their garments in order to solidify and to symbolize the covenant. The men would often trade tunics. They would trade their coats. As one of them walked down the way, and you saw Bill wearing Bob's coat, you'd probably think, "Well, look Bill must be in covenant with Bob because he has on his outer garment." Often times when two men would enter into covenant in the old days, they would swap belts, and they would even place a weapon on that belt. It was a way of saying, if I'm in covenant with another individual and if you try to harm him, you'll have to deal with me also. We're in covenant.

By the way, there is one form of covenant that most adult people that I know enter into today in this world. It's marriage. That's a covenant, so says Malachi. It was also quoted in the 13th chapter of Hebrews. Even in marriage today they exchange rings and have done that for centuries as a symbol to solidify the covenant. There's often the exchange of gifts.

3. A covenant is designed to transcend time. You don't wear out a covenant. Oh, it can be fulfilled. An example of that is discussed below, but as long as it's meant to be enforced, it will keep going. Even death may not stop a covenant and that will be discussed later also.

So a covenant is a permanent, enduring, undeniable bond of trust and is often symbolized by gifts and transcends time.

What does the Bible tell us about covenants? For the sake of discussion they will be combined into three types of covenants. There are covenants between two people, men making covenants with God and God making covenants with men.

1. Covenants between two people. Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech. (Genesis 21) Laban made a covenant with Jacob. (Genesis 31) Ahab and Ben-Hadad made a covenant in 1 Kings 20:34. The covenant in the Bible between people most of us would probably think of was between David and Jonathan, King Saul's son. These two were closer than physical brothers. "After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house." (1 Samuel 18:1-2) Now look at verse 3. "And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was

wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt." You see those symbols, those gifts, they were in covenant. They loved each other beyond description and they said nothing will ever keep us apart. Incidentally, in two chapters later in 1 Samuel 20, the covenant is affirmed.

What may be one of the most touching scenes in the Bible that I can remember was years later, after Jonathan and his father, Saul, had been killed by the Philistines. David had become king over all Israel. One day David summoned his guard around him and said, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Samuel 9:1) There was a little boy, or if he had been little, he was grown now. His name was Mephibosheth. When the city was being sacked, the nurse had dropped him, he had become crippled and now he was in hiding in a little wilderness outpost called Lo Debar. David sent for him and put him at the king's table and gave him all of Jonathan's possessions. David told Mephibosheth "the reason I'm doing this is because I have been in covenant with your father." Now do you get a picture of the strength of covenants?

2. Covenants between men and God. Sometimes covenants were made between men and God, where men initiated it. Jacob made one to God in Genesis 28. Josiah made another in 2 Kings 23. Joshua made a covenant to God in Joshua 24:25.
3. Covenants between God and man. God initiates and makes a covenant with man. Had you rather have a promise from God or a promise from a fellow human being? The answer to that is rather obvious. Why would we rather have a covenant from God? They are the most important covenants for the following reasons:
 - a. God has the power to make greater covenants. God can do things for us that we never could if He chooses to. We have a sin problem. There's nothing you or I can do for that, nothing you can do for me for that but if God chose to make a covenant, He could take care of it.
 - b. God will never break a covenant. He is all faithful. There is no question of the trust in him. It is absolutely permanent.

Well, what are some of God's covenants?

Let's look at four or five examples of God initiating a covenant with man.

- a. After God had destroyed the earth by water and saved Noah and his family and that whole host of animals in the ark, God said, "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.'" (Genesis 9:11-12) That is a promise of trust from God. Write it down and put it in stone, it will never change. Every time we get a nice rain and the rays of sunshine come through those beads of water and we look up and see that multi-colored rainbow in the sky, we're reminded that our God's

keeping his word. The rain didn't stop in those days. It stops for us doesn't it? There's the promise. Oh, that's just the first.

- b. After God sent Moses back to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel out of their captivity, Moses said "The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. The Lord spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. ... At that time I stood between the Lord and you to declare to you the word of the Lord, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up to the mountain." (Deuteronomy 5:2, 4) Then Moses recounts what we call today the Ten Commandments, the very foundation of that old covenant with the people of Israel. God said, "I'm going to be your God, I'm going to lead you. I'm going to bless you as I promised Abraham." That was the covenant. God stayed faithful to it. But that covenant with the Israelites wasn't designed to be God's final, most comprehensive, and best covenant.
- c. God had something to say through the prophet Jeremiah about that old covenant with Israel. "'The time is coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant.'" (Jeremiah 31:31-32) Now see what happens. Sometimes human beings break that pledge of trust. "Though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts, I will be their God and they will be my people." (Jeremiah 31:32-34) Oh, what a beautiful promise. It still took a few hundred years, but finally as stated in Romans 5 at just the right time, Jesus Christ came and as he was about to die, he was preparing his people and all the people of the world, for what was going to be that new covenant.
- d. Listen to what Jesus said to the apostles in the Upper Room just hours before he would die. "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, 'Take and eat, this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them saying, 'Drink from it all of you, this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin.'" (Matthew 26:26-27) "The new covenant is starting right now, just in a matter of hours, as my blood is poured out, the forgiveness of all sins, Jews, Gentiles, everybody who comes to me, it's going to be there for the offering and it will never go away as long as the earth is allowed to stand."

The whole Hebrew letter is a great treatise about the superiority of this new covenant over the old. But look at the Hebrew writer's commentary on the covenant Jesus set up. It says, "But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs (talking about the old) as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, (that was the covenant under Moses) no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant,

and I turned away from them, declares the Lord" (Hebrews 8:6-9 with verses 8 and 9 quoted from Jeremiah 31) "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete." (Hebrews 8:13) I've got good news for you. If you've never understood the Bible, the Old Testament was the Old Covenant, the New Testament is the new covenant. We don't have to observe all the rituals, regulations and ordinances of the Old. Why? Colossians 2:14 tells us it is because Jesus came and fulfilled the Old Covenant. The death of the testator, Jesus being nailed to the cross, ended the Old Covenant and ushered in a new and better covenant. It's founded on better promises and it's got a better solution. It's not my and your keeping every letter of the law perfectly. Our new covenant is founded on a Savior whose blood will take away our sins, because we can't take it away ourselves. Every Lord's Day, when we gather and we break unleavened bread, we're reminded of that covenant. There's the symbol like the wedding ring. Whenever we take that fruit of the vine, we think about, "this is the blood of My covenant." (Matthew 26:28) Remember God pledged goodness to us and He's asking us now to return to His covenant. We must pledge that goodness back to Him and offer our lives as sacrifices to Him. Covenant is a great word. Amazing Grace #1072, Steve Flatt 8- 16- 1992

Incarnation

What is the most startling doctrine that a human being could imagine?

God would become a man. That's it: that God would become a man and that is the definition of the word, "Incarnation," God coming in the flesh. Today in our lesson I want us to stretch our minds to try and encompass what that means.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." (John 1:1) "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him...Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God---children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:9-10, 12-14)

"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made God known." (John 1:18) Somebody has made God known. Isn't that amazing to think about? Knowing God, it's a good thing because we're born with this natural insatiable desire to know about God. Pascal once said there is a God-shaped vacuum in every human heart. Children want to know about God, don't they? Do your children ask you questions about God? My children asked "Daddy, does God have a beard?" Or Daddy, "Where is Heaven?" Or Dad, "Tell me how old God is." They want to know about God, but so do we too.

We've been in Christian evidence classes or maybe we've thought it through on our own and we find that we can draw some conclusions about God just by what we see around us. You look up at all the stars in the sky at night and you think about how far they are, how big they are and how many there are. You think there must be a God and he must be awfully powerful.

Then you look around at what you see on the earth and you see the order of things. Just look at the human body. Think about the fact that in your body there are a hundred thousand miles of blood vessels. Think about all the intricacies of the human eyeball and that the most magnificent filter in the world is the human kidney. There are all kinds of detail and order. You think to yourself, there must be a God and He must be extremely intelligent.

We look at those things and they're only flickers of light. They tell us there is a God, but they don't let us know God. They don't let us understand God. If we are ever really going to commune with Him and if we are ever going to trust Him with our life, then we're going to have to meet. If we're going to meet God, we're going to have to meet him in the same element, but the problem is we can't go to His element. The good news is God came to our element. The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld the glory of the only begotten of the Father.

There are a lot of tenets about Christianity that skeptics have a hard time believing. Skeptics read about a miracle of Jesus walking on the water and say, "Do you really believe that?" Do you really believe somebody walked on the water? Or they read about Jesus dying and physically coming back from the grave and say, do you really believe that? Or that do you really believe that an execution of a man can do away with a world of sin? These are stumbling blocks to them.

Do you know what the real stumbling block is to the skeptic? The real stumbling block is the same thing that bothered Jesus' original critics. It's the doctrine of incarnation. The really staggering claim about Christianity is that God became man. That Jesus somehow took on humanity without ever losing his Deity. Folks, it's here that we part company with the world's religions. The world's religions will make a place for Jesus but they will not tell you that he is God come in the flesh. Oh, they'll say he's a good man, he's a prophet, he's a teacher, but if that's all you believe about Jesus, then you run into problems with the New Testament.

But if Jesus was the Son of God, if Jesus is the Son of God, then nothing else presents any real problems. Jesus walking on the water. If he made the water, why couldn't he walk on it? Do you have any problem believing that if Jesus came from Heaven, that he could come back from the dead? Is there any problem believing that one who is Divine, who is God, that if that one chose to die, is there any surprise that his death could have a saving significance? The most startling claim in history is in John 1:14, "**The Word became flesh.**" Underline it, write it down and memorize it. If you can believe that, you can believe everything else that's in this book. That's incarnation.

By the way, have you ever eaten Mexican food? You say, "what does that have to do with anything." Have you ever had chili con carne? Do you know what chili con carne is? It means chili with meat, that's what the con carne means. Incidentally, that word carne is the same root word

from which we get the word incarnation. You know what, that's what God is saying. That's what John is writing us in his prologue. Do you know what incarnation is? It's God with meat. It's God with flesh. God con carne. That's what John is saying in John 1:14. He dwelt among us and the Greek word there in John 1:14 for dwelt means he pitched a tent or he tabernacled among us. Now that's a fascinating thought too. He dwelt among us, he tabernacled among us.

When you hear that word tabernacle, you students of the Bible, what do you think of? You think of the tabernacle in the Old Testament don't you? How the Israelites used to carry it around and it revealed the presence of God. Do you remember? The tabernacle was where the glory of God was. You read all kinds of things about the tabernacle. One time in a war with the Philistines, the tabernacle was taken from Israel. Shortly after that, a woman gave birth to a child and she was so distraught. Do you know what she named her son? She called him Ichabod, meaning the glory has departed.

The apostle John said in the first chapter the good news is the glory has now returned. Only this time the glory is not in a box, the glory is not in a tent, the glory is not in a temple, the glory is tabernacled in a body. Infinite became finite and the invisible became visible and somehow eternity squeezed itself into time. The apostle John said, "I saw his glory and I listened and I followed and I leaned on his breast, and when I leaned there, I heard the heartbeat of God." What a daring thought. What an exciting thought. But by the way what a divisive thought. I want you to know today that there is no other doctrine of Christendom that has caused greater debate than this doctrine of incarnation. Do you know what it does? The idea of God really coming in the flesh separates the believers from the admirers.

The first chapter of John verse 11 states "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." They didn't understand, they didn't believe. Even his own brothers initially didn't believe that Jesus was God come in the flesh. How many millions still don't believe that? Folks, Jesus was crucified for one reason. He wasn't crucified because he performed miracles on the wrong day of the week. He wasn't crucified because he criticized some of the rabbis' old sermons. He was crucified for one reason, he claimed to be God in the flesh and they couldn't live with that. No issue in the early church was more important than this issue of incarnation.

Many years later, John again under the inspiration of the Spirit, wrote, "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world." (1 John 4:2-3) Folks I want you to know that spirit of the antichrist is the spirit that dominates this world. Most of this world, most of the so-called Christian world has rejected the daring claim that God has come in the flesh and there are hundreds of millions who do not believe it, but it happened. Going back to the prologue in the gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 12 and 13, here's the promise to those who can believe it. "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God---children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." John says "Look what can happen to those who can believe this incredible concept about incarnation. If you can believe it, you can become a son

or a daughter of God.” Folks, that's a wonderful thought. John said if you're willing to accept the fact of the supernatural birth of a child to a Jewish teenage peasant girl, who was a virgin, then you yourself can become a supernatural re-creation of God. His birth and your re-creation are just as much of God as the other. You cannot have one without the other. Incarnation is not just dry theology, it's the good news that God has come to us.

Now some practical lessons about what God coming in the flesh means.

1. If I accept incarnation, it will affect the way I view Deity. If I believe that Jesus was God coming in the flesh, it affects the way I view God. Remember we all want to know God. We're born with that desire. Now John said you can know God. All you've got to do is look at Jesus. You don't have to keep looking at the flickers of light. You don't have to just look up at the stars and say, well there must be a God. I can see God.

In John Chapter 12, verses 44 and 45, Jesus said, “when you look at me, you look at the one who sent me.” In John, Chapter 8, Jesus said, “if you know me, you know the Father.” In John, Chapter 14, verse 6, he said, “I am the way and the truth and the light”, and in John 7, he says, “if you really knew me, you would know the Father.” You don't have to wonder about God. You can see God in the life of Jesus. God said you will never get a revelation of me that will remotely parallel what I will show you in Jesus of Nazareth. It changes the way you view Deity when you believe in the incarnation.

2. Incarnation shapes the way I view humility. With precious few exceptions, most of us need to be humbled, and humbled with regularity. We struggle with pride and few things help us combat our pride better than focusing on incarnation. Think about it. How did the King of the Universe come into the world?

History has recorded for us that one time Alexander the Great conquered a city and he entered that city this way. A man leading the parade throwing flowers followed by 200 painted elephants with writers, then by 200 painted camels, then 200 horsemen riding backwards facing a golden chariot drawn by 40 black stallions and after the 40 black stallions drawing the chariot there were 200 tamed lions bringing up the rear. In the middle of that golden chariot there was an ivory throne and seated on top was Alexander the Great. That's what I call an entrance and I guess if you're King of the World, that's the way you enter.

But how did the King of the Universe enter? He was born to that virgin, teenage peasant woman, in a tiny town, in a stable, carried by the one who would be his earthly father to a feeding trough streaked with saliva and given the common name in the Aramaic of Joshua rendered in the Greek Jesus, and nobody even noticed the wise men. That's ironic isn't it? Wise men couldn't even find him without help. Paul in Philippians 2:6 talking about Jesus stated “who being in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (held on to) but made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant” and Philippians 2:5 says? “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”

3. The incarnation of God come in the flesh changes the way I view mortality. We usually look at the death and the resurrection of Jesus and say, I know that I can come from the grave and I know that I can go to God. I agree with all that, but that was not possible before the death and resurrection of Jesus, he proved that mortality can be spanned when he came to us. That proved to us that mortality and immortality could be spanned, could be crossed, when God came in the flesh.

There is no greater, more amazing, more startling concept than the concept of incarnation. It is our hope, it is that to which we cling. Adapted from Amazing Grace #1069, Steve Flatt 7-19-1992

Justification

Through no merit or power of our own, simply through the cross, we are provided atonement (propitiation) and forgiveness. Can you believe that? WE ARE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE FORGIVEN AND JUSTIFIED!

- What does it mean to be justified? There are a variety of meanings in the dictionary, but basically it means, "just standing". It refers to justice. You would be found not guilty, free from condemnation and innocent. That is the concept of justification.
- Forgiveness remits our debts --- atonement. Forgiveness cancels our liability to punishment --- propitiation. But justification bestows upon us a guilt free relationship, a right standing before the Almighty God. That's even more incredible.
- How does this come about and what does it mean in our context? The answer to the following questions may help.

What is the source of our justification? If one stands before God, what's the source of their justification? It's the same source as their atonement and propitiation. It's God's grace as stated in Romans. "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23-24) Incidentally, the Greek word for grace is *charis* meaning a gift. I am justified by a gift. That's grace. What gift and where did that gift come from? It's the gift of Jesus. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Romans 5:8-9)

Whose blood? The blood of Jesus on the cross. Since we've been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! We've been saved from wrath, that's propitiation. Now we're justified by that same gift, the blood of Jesus Christ. We are justified by the same source that forgives us. That very same source gives us right standing before God. Don't ever forget that.

After we've been Christians for a while some may think about all the good life they have lived, the people helped, the services attended, the prayers offered and if they are not careful, they forget the true source of their justification. It's not their works, it's not the services they have attended and not even the prayers they have prayed. There is no way they can earn justification. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that makes them righteous. It is made clear in Romans 3 "For we

have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one;' (vs. 9-10) and "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (v. 20). You see the source of justification is the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

What does justification mean? "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." (Romans 3:28) It is not what man does; it is what Christ did! "Man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." (Galatians 2:16)

There's the source out there. How do we tap into that source? What's the means? "For we maintain that a man is justified" (what are the next two words) "by faith apart from observing the law." (Romans 3:28) "Knowing that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." (Galatians 2:16) "For by grace are you saved through faith." (Ephesians 2:8) What is the means to our justification? What is the connector from us to that source? It is faith. But, what is faith?

God's definition of faith is recorded in the Bible. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It's being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we cannot see. Faith is an absolute and life changing trust in what cannot physically be seen. For example, we cannot see God but we see the evidence of his handiwork. In our feeble and finite human mind we cannot see God; but we know that God exists. Why? Because of the evidence that around us has convinced us without a shadow of a doubt of what we cannot see and that is the existence of God. That's faith.

We did not see Jesus when He was here on earth. We have not seen Him in a vision of any kind, but we are absolutely certain He lived. That He performed the miracles recorded in the Gospels, that He fulfilled prophecy, that He died on that cross and that He was raised from the tomb. We never saw a bit of that with our eyes, but we know it and that is faith. What the Bible is telling us about the justification is that faith is our connector. Faith is that tiny little part that we control that determines whether or not we tap into that great power source that would not only forgive us, but would justify us.

Let's look at the electric light illustration. By turning the wall switch on, the light in the room comes on, dispelling darkness. What's the power source for the light? It's a generator somewhere miles away. Some dynamo plant that's producing electricity, but at our disposal is a switch. If it is turned on, light is produced. If no effort is made to turn it on, no light is produced. Regardless of the power source, regardless about how strong the power, unless we choose to connect to the power by turning the switch on, we do not get advantage of the light. Faith is our connector that allows us to be justified but we must turn it on.

Faith is a life-changing trust. It has its conception when you hear about Jesus Christ, who he is and what he's done. The Bible says faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. That's when the conception starts. Then that belief grows until it leads us to repentance. That is changing our life style. Faith, real faith, leads us to turn. It won't let us stay where we are. That repentance will lead us to a new birth. In Ephesians 1:13, Paul says, you believed after you heard the word of truth. Peter said in Acts 2:38 to the crowd that was listening to him, "Repent." Paul

said in Acts 20:21, to the Christians at Ephesus, don't you remember I preached to you the message of repentance. Genuine repentance results in a change, a death of the old life. However, that trust leads to obedience. We bury the dead old self by a rebirth, baptism, calling on God to forgive and are resurrected to a new life in Christ (Titus 3:5; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27) and from that birth, faith grows in our life until faith is our life.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17) Faith is life changing, a life changing trust. Just acknowledging that God exists does not produce faith much less works and James 2:26 states faith without works is dead. It's not that faith is works, but genuine faith will produce works. That absolute life changing trust connects us to the almighty source of justification.

What about the effects of justification? We are Christians, having been forgiven, being justified and standing in a righteous relationship before God. What about the effects of this righteous standing? First, all human status is really done away; race, nationality, gender, financial worth and position among man. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-29) If you have been justified in the sight of God, do not worry about being justified in the sight of man or what man thinks. Just be concerned about what God thinks.

Secondly, you can approach the Almighty God freely and boldly and now! Prayer to the Almighty God is a privilege. It's a privilege that you accept when justified by the blood of Jesus through faith. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16) If it were just mercy, we would be cowering in the presence of God but we have been justified. Now, God says, you can approach the throne of grace with confidence. We're talking about the Almighty God who put into this universe at least one trillion galaxies, one of which is the Milky Way, our galaxy. There are over one billion stars and around one of those little stars, there is a solar system with nine planets and on one of those nine planets, there are over five billion people and every human is just one of them. We are sinners who can boldly approach God Almighty. That's the effect of justification.

Lastly you can stand before God on Judgment Day without fear. The scariest words that some people may hear are "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27) Those who are obedient and therefore justified have comfort in the following: "the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us." (1 John 1:2) "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34) and "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25) One of these days we will stand before the throne of God. Will we be ready? Will we be JUSTIFIED?

1 John 2:1, "My little children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense..." Romans 8:34, "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died ...more than that, who was raised to life ... is at the right

hand of God and is also interceding for us." Hebrews 7:25, "he is able to save completely (listen to that) those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

Revelation 3:5 says, he who overcomes will be dressed in white, for they're worthy. One of these days we will stand before the throne of God. I hope we will be given a white robe. Not because we are clean, but because we have totally and faithfully trusted in the one who would make us clean and allow us to stand before the Almighty God. What else could we ask for? What could possibly be better in this universe? Steve Flatt, Amazing Grace
Amazing Grace lesson #1067

Propitiation

In the study on Atonement we find that Sin creates a debt between a human, the sinner, and the Almighty God who is sinless. The debt must be paid. The sinner has nothing to offer as payment. Sin doesn't just create a debt between humanity and Deity; it also elicits the wrath of God. God is Holy and Righteous, therefore, sin is absolutely foreign to His nature. He detests sin and when sin comes near to God, it is something that angers him. Look at Adam. He sinned by doing what he desired rather than what God commanded. Consequently, Adam was driven out from the presence of God and from Eden, the place where God originally placed him. By inspiration Paul tells us "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23) and "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18) A little bit later Paul states "because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." (Romans 2:5-6) Consequently "because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." (Ephesians 5:6; also reiterated in Colossians 3:6)

What are some of the things God classifies as sin or disobedience? "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." (Ephesians 5:3-5) "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds." (Colossians 3:8-9)

The wrath of God is against sin (disobedience). That wrath will occasionally be manifested in our current times as God puts His foot down and draws the line and says I will allow sin to go no further and what it's doing to siege the earth. But more than that, the wrath of God will be revealed most fully when Jesus comes again and there will be the final judgment. The Bible says that those who were faithful to the Lord will go to live with Him and yet at the same time it says

that those not faithful will be cast into a place that the Bible calls Gehenna in the original language. Gehenna was a garbage dump outside the walls of Jerusalem that was open and burning almost continuously. In that kind of context you have eternal punishment compared. The Bible uses weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth over and over again in describing the eternal punishment situation.

Many people detest the notion of our God demonstrating wrath. These people believe there's a God, they believe God is love, they believe God is merciful, and they believe in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. But frankly, they think the doctrine of the wrath of God is beneath them or they have come to accept the lie that wrath is unworthy of God.

Others think of rage when wrath is mentioned, somebody seeing red and just absolutely going berserk. They say surely God wouldn't do that. Jonathan Edwards in the 17th Century saw God toying with humanity, holding humanity out over an open fire. But these are not biblical depictions of God's wrath. To the contrary, in the Bible it says God's wrath is never out of control, nor is his wrath cruel.

When God comes His wrath can be characterized as:

1. Judicial. It is the wrath of the all-perfect judge administering perfect judgment. "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." (Romans 2:5) You see that God's judgment and His wrath are going to be righteous. God's wrath will be no more raging, or no more cruel, than a prudent, honest judge pronouncing sentence against someone who deserves that sentence. It's not out of control. It's judicial.
2. Chosen. "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." (Ephesians 5:6) God's wrath comes to the disobedient. They chose their desires rather than obedience "the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21) Colossians 3:5-8 adds the following to the above list: passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, malice, blasphemy and filthy language out of your mouth. So, when someone chooses to do these things they choose disobedience, sin.

God made us human. We are frail, we are vulnerable, and everyone of us matures to the point that when we distinguish right from wrong, we generally will choose to sin. In fact, Romans 3:23 says, "all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." So, can one really be responsible for choices that, in their weakness, God knows they are going to make. How could He really send them to Hell (Gehenna) for their sin when all of us sin? What kind of choice is that? That's where our word propitiation comes in.

God does not want to see a single one of us suffer from His wrath and knowing that He still made us all vulnerable giving us the ability to choose. We have a choice for "Whoever believes in the Son (Jesus) has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains

on him." (John 3:36) "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Romans 5:8-9) You see the Bible makes it clear. When one chooses to believe in Jesus, obeys the gospel, comes up from the waters of baptism as a Christian and continues to obey the teachings of Christ, they are saved from God's wrath. But how does Jesus make the difference? Where does Christ come in? He propitiates for us.

The word propitiation means deflect wrath or let it bounce off. In another form the word was used to define a shield that a warrior would take into battle. What would you do with a shield? When the enemy would rare back the bowstring and let an arrow fly, the shield would go up to deflect it to keep you from harm. When a sword would come crashing down the shield would go up so that it would hit the air and it would mar the shield, but you would be saved. Now do you begin to see the relationship with Jesus?

Jesus deflected our wrath. "He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2) Isn't that something? He is the shield; he is the deflector of wrath for our sins, for the sins of the whole world. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed" (Romans 3:24). "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation (atoning sacrifice in the NIV) for our sins." 1 John 4:10) Isn't that great? Jesus not only paid my debt to God, [atoned the debt caused by my sin], He shields [propitiates] the wrath God is aiming at us caused by our sin.

Now let's piece it all together. When Jesus was dying as he hung on the cross He said, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" At that moment for the only time in eternity, God the Father had forsaken the Son. He had turned his back on him. Jesus, who as God and before the world was created, had always had perfect communion with God, could no longer sense his presence. Why not? Because, he was being our propitiation. He was taking the wrath of God in that separation and burying our sin so that when we come to that cross obedient to the gospel by dying to sin, being buried with him in baptism to rise a new creature and claim his righteousness, would be freed from sin. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

How can this be? By propitiation. "For God made him who had no sin to be sin for our sakes, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) The one who had no sin became sin and in doing so deflected God's wrath away so that we could live.

What does all this mean to me?

1. I am a sinner.
2. The wages of sin is death.
3. I have nothing to remove my sin.
4. Unless something can be done, I will perish.

5. Jesus was God and in Him everything was made.
6. Jesus became flesh and lived among mankind.
7. Jesus was without sin.
8. Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to become an atoning sacrifice and a propitiation for our sins.
9. Jesus accomplished his mission when He willingly gave himself to be crucified.
10. Through Him and in Him; that is, in Christ, I can be free of sin and God's wrath.
11. I must be obedient to his Gospel and live according to his teaching.

Amazing Grace lesson # 1066 Steve Flatt 7-21-1992

Reconciliation

Growing up did your parents ever give you a left shoe as a present and tell you by the way if you're good, next year we'll go ahead and give you the right shoe to go with it? No, you've never experienced that. The reason you've never experienced this is because generally one shoe without the other is worthless; they belong together don't they?

Reconciliation is bringing two things together that are separated. Two things that belong together are not supposed to be apart. Those things are reconciled when they're brought back together. Left and right shoes aren't the only things that belong together.

Man and God belong together also. David once said, as a deer pants for water, so my soul longs for thee oh God. (Psalm 42:1) Solomon his son said God you have made us with eternity in our hearts. Man is made for fellowship with God. There has never been a time in the history nor never will be a time when there will be more atheists in this world than there will be God fearers and God believers. Not that everybody will believe in God the way they should but God has made us so that we realize there is this infinite need for fellowship with him.

But sin has become a barrier to that fellowship. Romans 3:23 states "all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." Romans 6:23, records "the wages of sin is death." Remember that word, death? It just means separation. It's a terrible separation. But God solved all of these problems created by our sin in one fell swoop. Ironically he solved them on an instrument of capital punishment, a Roman cross. God made it possible for us to be holy but our sin destroys that holiness leaving us with the following consequences:

1. Our separation leaves us indebted to God. God solved that at the cross by atoning for our sins. He paid a debt for us that we are unable to pay for ourselves. The concept of atonement is wrapped up in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin" for our sakes.

2. Our sin evokes God's punishment and wrath. God says, I'll take care of that! At the cross I'm going to give you propitiation. That big word just means to turn away wrath, to deflect it. The Bible says, 1 John 2:2 that Jesus Christ is the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sin, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

3. Our sin leaves us unworthy to approach God. God says I'll take care of that! "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Romans 5:9) Do you realize all those things occurred at the cross? Did you ever stop to think about that? The huge debt that you cannot pay is taken care of. The wrath that's coming our way from God because of our sins will be deflected by God's shield. The fact that we would have to cower as a slave, as an insect, in the presence of God has been removed. God says, I'm going to justify you, allow you proper standing in my presence. Did you realize that all of that was taken care of at the cross?

You need to understand the importance of the cross. Paul said in Galatians 6:14, "Far be it for me to glory in anything save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ." Paul did not glory in his past, in his writings or in his good works. He did not even glory in the other parts of Jesus' life. He did not glory in the virgin birth. He believed it, but he didn't glory in it. He didn't glory in the teachings. He didn't glory in the miracles. He didn't even say he gloried in the resurrection. He said the reason I gloried is because of the cross, because of all that was done right there.

4. Our sin destroyed our relationship with God. At the cross, God made it possible for man to reconciled himself to God through trust and obedience. He put two things back together that were separated that never should have been apart. "by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." (Colossians 1:20) "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." (Romans 5:10, 11)

In writing to the Christians in Corinth Paul said "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:18) There are two very, very important applications of this reconciliation!

1. God is the reconciler and we are the reconcile. God did all the work. He reconciled us to him even though he never moved. He's not the one who sinned. He didn't get mad. He has been where he's always been. We're the ones who've wandered off. But he reconciled all things to himself by the cross of Jesus Christ. We sinned. We went away. We hardened our hearts. We made our excuses. We became callous. God is doing the calling and searching. He found us in our pitiful condition pleading with us to come home. But we must recognize him and hear his call. "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:8) What could be more reconciling than God putting on flesh, living among us, suffering at our hands? He allowed himself to be fully tempted and fully victimized, that wasn't easy, letting that proud, pompous, self-righteous, know-it-all crowd nail him to a cross in the name of the religion that he had given them. Then while dying on that cross saying, "Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing."

The point is, God did all the things he had to do in such a way that we would look at that cross and say, oh how much he must love us. Let's don't be guilty of looking at John 3:16 and reciting

it so flippantly. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." "For God so loved the world that he gave (and he gave) his only begotten Son." We look at that and I say to myself, my how he must want me back. How the Father must want me to live in Heaven. And if you've never looked at it that way before, if you've never thought of the cross in that light, think of it that way and be drawn to that cross. That's why Jesus said, if I be lifted up, I'll draw all men to myself. That's reconciliation, God did it.

2. He's given to us the ministry of reconciliation. God is leading the reconciliation charge. God is the loving Father in Luke 15, who when he sees that boy a long way off he runs to him and embrace him. When a person does that and sees God in the person of the Son, Jesus on the cross, and believes him, turns away from the life currently living and is baptized by the authority of Jesus, their sins are washed away and the Spirit of God go to work changing them. "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:5) Say to the world, look God came after you, look what he's done for you. God is patiently waiting not wanting that any should perish. Reconciliation is one of the most beautiful words. Amazing Grace, lesson # 1068 Steve Flatt, 1-5-1992

Sanctification

Sanctification means the process or the state of being set apart. Incidentally, it is the same root word for the word "Holy". That's what holy means, it means to be set apart. We often associate it with perfection. We think about holiness as meaning someone is absolutely perfect. Over the years some individuals who have understood that sanctification is tied to holiness have thought, "Oh, I can't be that way." Don't mis-define the word. Generically it means to be set apart.

Now scripturally, it means to be set apart from the secular and the sinful for a sacred purpose. If you go through the Bible and look for that word, sanctify, you'll find in the Old Testament that it was used often for days and places and things. For example, in Genesis 2:3, after God created the heavens and the earth, it says that he "sanctified" the seventh day. He made it holy, he set it apart as the day of rest. I think about Exodus 29:43, referring to the tabernacle or the tent of meeting, God said "And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory". But, in time the old law had fulfilled its purpose and Jesus' blood on the cross had purchased for mankind a new covenant. The use of the word "sanctify" or "sanctification" stopped being associated for the most part with days and things and began to be tied to people.

For example, Paul said in talking about drunkards and idolaters and murderers and homosexuals and all kinds of people involved in sinful behavior, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11) You see it was the people that were sanctified. Or "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:23) Now those are just two examples. There are many, many more. God is saying, Christian, I want you to be sanctified, set apart. It's my will that you be holy, that you be set apart, not just a day, not just a tent, I want people to be sanctified. If sanctification means being set apart, set apart from what? Why? For what purpose?

During his ministry and before he left the earth, Jesus prayed for his disciples and all who would come after them. "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." (John 17:15-17) Now what does that mean? Set them apart. They're in the world. He was not asking God to take them out of the world, but set them apart by the truth. Then Jesus said "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth" (vs. 18, 19). He's saying for their benefit, I've set myself apart so that they'll be set apart as well. We're not supposed to be of the world; that is, desire worldly things, such as the lust of the flesh, lust of the eye or pride in our lives.

Colossians 3:1-3 captures the message of being set apart from the value system of the world. Look at it. "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

When the Bible talks about not being of the world, the Greek word for world is *kosmos*. That doesn't mean our planet. That doesn't mean this big old ball of land and water that you and I inhabit. It doesn't even mean the people of the planet. The word *kosmos* means the values, the desires, the aims, the aspirations, the feelings of all of the people who inhabit this planet. It is the value atmosphere that surrounds and that bombards us right and left and that we breathe in everyday with our eyes and ears. That's the world. Don't ever forget that since man sinned and was driven from the Garden of Eden his value system has been dominated by the Prince of Darkness, by old Satan himself.

According to 1 John 2:16, there are three things that dominate the *kosmos*, the world system. They are a) lust of the flesh, b) lust of the eyes and c) pride of life. That's the message of the world and it's trying to lure you away from God. Sanctification is being set apart from these three things, not being lured into their momentary pleasures. Oh, we are going to have to live in the midst of them and be bombarded by their appeal (seeing them, hearing them, reading about them, but not being fooled by their appeal). Their value system is not going to be our value system which leaves us set apart from the world as our lifestyle is in accordance with God's will and our affections are on the things of God.

How does sanctification occur? A common belief is that we sanctify ourselves by our own grit, determination, perseverance and observance of the law. We make ourselves holy. We make ourselves set apart. Well, the Bible doesn't teach that. The Bible teaches that no man has kept the law perfectly and set himself apart from sin. Scripture teaches that we are sanctified, set apart or holy, by God through the power of the blood of Christ and the Holy Spirit. "He [Jesus] might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate." (Hebrews 13:12) "For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren." (Hebrews 2:11) The element of holiness is the same thing that has atoned for us, the same thing that has propitiated for us, the same thing that has justified us, and the same thing that reconciles us and it also sanctifies us. It is the blood of Jesus.

The power of sanctification is blood. Equally apparent in scripture is the agent of sanctification, the Holy Spirit. "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." (2 Thessalonians 2:13) That verse says that the Holy Spirit is the agent, the sanctifying work of the Spirit. People don't set themselves apart when they come to Christ, it is through the power of the blood and the power of the Holy Spirit. So when does that occur, it occurs when one becomes a Christian.

In 1 Peter 1:2, Peter is talking about God's elect who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ.

Paul said he was chosen "that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:16) He did not set himself apart when he came to Christ, He was set apart through the power of the blood and the power of the Holy Spirit. It occurs whenever anyone obeys the gospel and becomes a Christian. "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11) All of those happened when you obeyed the gospel. You're washed, you're set apart, you are justified and the Spirit of God who set you apart will empower you to stay apart if you let him. But you retain the right to forfeit your sanctification.

Yes we can choose to forfeit that right. "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12) "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." (Hebrews 10:26) When you become a Christian, God will set you apart from the world and you will stay set apart unless you choose to go back into the world. These scriptures do not support the doctrine that "once saved always saved" or there is nothing you can do to forfeit your salvation. Don't give up what God has given you that's worth more than the whole world.

But why must I be sanctified? If God's blood cleanses me from sin, what difference does it make whether I just go ahead and keep on sinning or not? That same question was asked in Romans 6, where some Christians in Rome, two thousand years ago were saying, you know if the blood of Jesus keeps cleansing why not just enjoy sin, let it cleanse all of it. In Romans 6:1, Paul says, "God forbid."

The reason for not following the *kosmos*, the world value system, is because we are to bring honor to God. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4) You see it brings honor to God when we live the way God has called you to live. "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:20)

A second reason is we are God's ambassadors. (2 Corinthians 5:20) How are we going to show Christ to a world that's living in an empty and hollow way of life, seeking after the *kosmos*, the world? How are we going to point them to something that will pull them out of that if we're following the beat of the same drummer? We can't. You can't. I can't. You are set apart by the blood of Christ and the power of the Spirit. If you are set apart, the world sees that. That's something that a purposeless world really doesn't want. As an ambassador of Christ, I dare not forfeit the sanctification that he's given me. It's really not a terrible, old, dry, dusty preacher word after all, is it? Let's be set apart. God will give you a rich and full spiritual life if you will yield to that calling.

By not conforming to this world's values we show a world that's living in an empty and hollow way of life, a better, fuller and richer way of life having a hope for eternal life in Christ Jesus. Don't dare forfeit the sanctification God has given us. Adapted from Amazing Grace lesson # 1070 Steve Flatt



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