

Announcements:

Next week is the *Modern Medicine, Biblical Technology and Your Brain* Seminar at the Trade Center in Chattanooga starting sharply at 9 a.m.

Most of you have already signed up; we have about 100 seats left, please invite those who you think would be interested and willing to come. We want to have a full audience, as we will be making a DVD series from these presentations. If some of you teach at the college this would be a great seminar to invite some college students to attend. People can sign up at our website comeandreason.com home page.

Because of the seminar next week we will not meet here for class. Today we will do lesson 4 at our regular time and lesson 5 at 11:30 – 12:30. We will record lesson 5 and webcast it next week at our regular class time.

Update on Heart of Health Live, the TV program we have partnered with Heartwise Ministries to produce, is currently broadcasting every Thursday at 6 pm on:

- Charter Channel 5 WTNB in Cleveland/Dayton/Athens
- Channel 10 in Dalton/Calhoun/ Ft. O/ Northern GA
- Digital 51.1 WDNN in Chattanooga
- Nationwide on Myfamilytv.tv
- heartwiseministries.org.
- We will go live worldwide on 3ABN the first Thursday in January.
- LifeTalk radio wants to air the program live on their radio stream.
- The program is rebroadcast on Legacy and we will send to SmartLifestyle as well.

Pray that God will use this show to reach millions with the message about Him!

Growing in Christ Lesson 4 4Q 2012

Salvation: The Only Solution

SABBATH

In the first paragraph the lesson describes salvation beautifully:

“God’s part in the controversy has been to stop, and ultimately eliminate, the deleterious effects of sin, not just on the earth but on the creation as a whole. God’s action to rescue the creation from the destructive results of sin constitutes the doctrine of salvation.”

Thoughts?

Isn’t that well said? Do you notice how sin is described as destructive, and the destruction is a result of sin not an infliction by God? And God is described as a deliverer, rescuer or healer? Well done!

Where is sin? If we want to find sin where do we have to look?

- Is the decay we see in nature, what Paul describes as all nature groaning under the weight of sin, sin?
- Or is the decay we see the result of sin? Like fever the result of disease but the fever isn’t the disease?

So, if God is going to eliminate sin from his creation from where does it need to be eliminated? The hearts, minds and characters of intelligent beings?

What if we are afraid of God – what impact will that have on his ability to eliminate sin? Does our fear or distrust of God impact God’s ability to eliminate sin?

What method does God use to eliminate sin?

Christ! Christ is God's method, vehicle, means to eliminate sin from his creation. How?

- By revealing truth, which destroys lies and restores to trust
- By cleansing humanity from the infection of sinfulness in his own mission in humanity on earth

With Christ's victory in hand, how does God eliminate sin from us? Truth, presented in love, leaving us free to choose to enter into a relationship with him, to trust him. Can sin be eliminated from our hearts and minds without our voluntary choice to cooperate with God?

So God works to restore us to trust so we will voluntarily open the heart and cooperate with him for our healing and restoration.

- The Holy Spirit presents truth to our minds in ways we can comprehend
- We are left free to choose what we will do with that truth
- When we choose to act in harmony with the truth we receive divine power to enable us to succeed with the choice
- Christ procured the remedy to sin, single handedly, and there is nothing we can do to add to that remedy
- But we must choose to participate in the remedy Christ achieved, to trust God, to open the heart, to act on what we know is right.
- Our personal, individual choices will have no bearing on the salvation of the human species – that was achieved by Christ
- Our personal individual choices will have no bearing on the eternal elimination of sin from the universe, that will be achieved by Christ
- Our personal choices do have a direct bearing on our eternal destiny, and can impact specific other people influencing their eternal destiny

SUNDAY

What is the “scope” of the sin problem?

- John 2:25 - He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.
 - Which means what?
 - That he knew man believed lies about God, didn’t understand the truth of God’s methods, and that selfishness and fear were the primary motives in man?

- Ps 59:2 - Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men.
 - Which means what?
 - That mankind is defective, and selfish, and even if Satan were eliminated mankind is still in a terminal condition.

- Jer 17:9 - The human heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?
 - Which means what?
 - Our motives are deviant from God’s design and we will lie to ourselves

- Rom 5:12 - Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—
 - Which means what?
 - Our condition is terminal, but it is not our fault, we were born with this terminal condition. But despite it not being our fault if we don’t experience remedy we will die eternally.

- James 1:13-15 - When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵

- Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.
- Which means what?
 - Our defective minds, filled with fear and insecurity tempt us to be selfish and live out of harmony with God's design, and this results in death
- 2 Thes 2:10 - and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.
 - Which means what?
 - Truth heals and if we refuse the truth we cannot be healed.
 - Why does truth heal? Because truth displaces lies, leads us back to God and God's design protocols for life.

Thoughts? What do these text reveal about the scope of the sin problem?

Where does sin occur? In our hearts and minds! Then what needs to be cleansed? Our hearts and mind!

What about the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, that 2300 years and the sanctuary will be cleansed? What is to be cleansed?

Do record books in heaven contain sin? When we hold a Bible in our hands and read of David's misdeeds do we possess sin in our hands? If we were to burn the Bibles, or use an eraser to erase what is recorded there would we be destroying sin?

If Christ were to erase records in heaven would he be destroying sin? No! Sin happens in hearts and minds and it is hearts and minds that God wants to cleanse, not the recorded history of the universe.

MONDAY

The lesson points out that sin needed immediate attention – why? If penal substitution is correct, and the problem is that the governing authority must inflict punishment, then why did sin need immediate attention?

But, what was the immediate attention that God provided? Right in Eden? Gen 3:15 – “I will put enmity between you and the woman...”

What does this action by God tell us about what needed immediate intervention? Did God need immediate appeasing, placating or propitiating, or did mankind need something done within him immediately? What did God do and why?

God put a desire for good in the heart of man, a conviction of wrongdoing, a longing for something better. If God had not intervened in our hearts humanity would have a perfect unity with Satan. Paul puts it this way:

the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. Rom 8:7,8

What is Paul saying? What would be the condition of our hearts and minds if not for God’s grace intervening in our hearts to cause enmity with Satan?

Is the heart of humanity the only place God intervened or interceded after Adam’s sin? Where else?

With the principalities and powers of darkness, God sends his agencies to hold in check evil forces:

- hedge of protection around Elisha
- angels fighting for mankind in Daniel chapter 10
- four angels holding back the four winds of strife

And one other place, God intervenes/intercedes with sin in man's behalf. Christ interceded with the natural course sin would take within mankind when "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2Cor 5:21) In other words, sin would have destroyed humanity, but Christ stepped into humanity and intervened to change the trajectory and alter the outcome of what sin should have done to the species by overcoming sin and curing humanity.

So, what kind of intervention/intercession is this? God intervening with God not to punish? Or God intervening with the enemy of good, and with the natural consequences of what unremedied sin does to God's creation in order to heal and save?

TUESDAY

Read middle dark section, "Christ's sacrificial death..." thoughts?

This is a most important question, for how one answers this question impacts how one understands the character and trustworthiness of God.

The lesson uses words like justification, sanctification and glorification.

I liked how in Tuesday's lesson they equated justification with reconciliation and sanctification with regeneration. This is well done.

But in THURSDAY's lesson, things get a little confusing. Let's read first paragraph of Thursday's lesson:

"The experience of justification..."

And then in the third paragraph it states, "His perfect life is credited to you as if it were yours."

Thoughts?

This is a proffered solution, but what is this solution to address? In other words, what is the problem this solution is designed to fix?

This solution is addressing something called retributive justice, and is the basis of penal substitution theory. The idea that justice requires the infliction of punishment for breaking the law and that the ruler must inflict such punishment lest unpunished rebellion persist.

The concept of penal substitution originated sometime after Constantine, when the idea of God's law was changed from the law of love to an imposed law construct. It arose during the Middle Ages when people thought it was just to:

- Publicly beat people who broke some social rule
- Beat children at school
- Imprison people who honestly couldn't repay a debt
- To burn people at the stake who believed differently

I want to recommend a new book that just came out in August 2012 - *Healing the Gospel: A Radical Vision for Grace, Justice and the Cross* by Derek Flood

He opens the book describing his experience as a teen having a personal encounter with Jesus and the experience of peace, love, joy and renewal and acceptance with Christ. He goes on to describe how he wanted to share this incredible experience of being loved by God with everyone so he went to church, but something was different. I quote:

I quickly discovered that the message I was taught to share with others was very different from what I had actually experienced. It seemed more like bad news, and led to all sorts of awkward conversations like this:

Jesus died for you!

Why did Jesus have to die?

Because of our sin.

What if we haven't sinned?

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." No one can keep the law.

But if no one can keep it how can we be blamed for that?

Because "the wages of sin is death" and so justice requires that you be sent to be tormented in Hell for all eternity.

That's awful!

Yes, but there's good news: God has provided a way out by sacrificing his Son.

God kills his own son?

Yes, that's how much he loves you.

Why would that make things better?

Because it satisfies God's need for punishment. Sin must be paid for with blood because "without blood there is no forgiveness."

I feel ill.

Can't you see this is God's mercy and love? Don't you want to open your heart and let him into your life?

I think I have to go now. (p 1,2)

He goes on to say:

I was taught to tell people that they *deserved* to be punished by God forever. Taught that we should see ourselves as *worthless, totally depraved, capable of nothing good* apart from God. I was taught that the reason Jesus died was because God demanded that someone had to suffer the penalty of sin, someone had to be punished to appease God's wrath. No wonder I got a cold shoulder when I tried to share this "good news" with people. (p 2)

Behind all of this lies an image of God as a judge who is primarily concerned with satisfaction of punitive justice. (p 3)

Thoughts? Have you ever been presented with such concepts? And do such ideas engender trust or undermine it? Who would want to undermine trust in God by presenting him like this?

Now listen to this from the same book:

...we think that the gospel is rooted in the idea that Jesus had to die to fulfill the 'demands' of (punitive) justice. This is an understanding of the atonement known as *penal substitution*, "penal" meaning punish, and "substitution" meaning that Jesus is punished instead of us...

What I propose is that the above is not at all what the Bible teaches, and instead is a result of people projecting their worldly understanding of punitive justice onto the biblical text. The New Testament, in contrast, is actually a *critique* of punitive justice. It presents it as a problem to be solved, not as a means to the solution. The problem of wrath (that is, punitive justice) is *overcome* through the cross, which is an act of restoration – restoring humanity to a right relationship with God. In other words, restorative justice is how God in Christ acts to heal the problem of punitive justice.

Love is not in conflict with justice, love is how justice comes about because the New Testament understanding of justice is ultimately not about punishment, but about *making things right again*. (p 8)

Thoughts? Justice is about making things right again. Notice in this view justice is doing what is just or right, which is an expression of love. This stands in stark contrast to human governments which conceive of justice as inflicting punishment.

In Chapter Two Flood states:

Beginning in chapter two [of Romans], Paul has been criticizing the assumption of his religious audience who are calling out for justice in the form of retribution and punishment. Now he proposes that God's justice really comes through God's action in Christ to restore all humanity in love. Restorative justice instead of punitive justice...

Paul then goes on to explain how God's **restorative justice** in Christ comes about: God acts in Christ to make us good. A key concept here is "justification" which normally refers to legal acquittal, i.e., declaring a person innocent in court, and has often been **mistranslated** as such in Romans. But if that were the case then Paul's entire argument would fall apart. **He is arguing that it was just for God not to punish sinners** as his audience wished. If his only reason was that God had declared these sinners innocent, this would have been seen by his audience as a profound injustice – the acquittal of the guilty... **God brings about true justice, Paul tells us, by making sinners into saints**. This act of redemptive transformation is nothing short a miracle and happens through relationship – through being loved by God, and God's goodness making us good. Paul goes on to explain in Romans 7-8 that as God's Spirit indwells us, as we

experience Christ's indwelling love, we are relationally transformed into his likeness. This way of the Spirit brings life, Paul says, but the way of law (i.e. the way of retributive justice) brings death.

Thoughts?

I recommend this book to you. It is quite well done. We see this message appearing all over as the Holy Spirit is awakening the world from its slumber so the way may be prepared from the coming Bridegroom!

Read fourth paragraph, "The experience of forgiveness..." thoughts?

What are they saying? To what are they saying the sinner is vulnerable? Are they saying that sinners are vulnerable to God wrathfully actions to injure and destroy them? And that forgiveness protects us from God?

Are they saying that the barrier removed is a barrier of God's wrath?

"Christ's self-sacrifice is *pleasing* to God because this sacrificial offering **took away the barrier between God and sinful man** in that **Christ fully bore God's wrath on man's sin**. Through Christ, God's wrath is not turned into love but is turned away from man and borne by Himself." (*Seventh-day Adventist Believe* 27, p. 111)

Thoughts?

Do such constructs engender trust in God? Do you see the root problem? Those who think this accept the idea that God's law is like human law, imposed and therefore God must act like human governments and impose punishment or there is no justice.

How can we free our church these ideas and help our church leaders extricate themselves from these distortions? We can't take the gospel to the world when we are embracing Satan's view of justice.

Read last paragraph, "Repentance is a prerequisite..." thoughts?

What does this mean?

- God is willing to forgive but won't forgive until sinners repent?
- God remains unforgiving, resentful, a grudge holder until sinners repent?
- God forgives everyone, but not everyone opens their hearts to experiences the forgiveness which would lead them to repentance?

Which comes first, God's forgiveness or sinner's repentance?

"God's kindness leads you toward repentance" (Rom 2:4)

If God is unforgiving would that lead toward repentance?

Read bottom paragraph WEDNESDAY's lesson, "We are told..."

The lesson supports that it is God's kindness, love that leads us to repentance, then is there a problem if we suggest that forgiveness is not given before repentance?

Is there a difference between being forgiven by God and "experiencing" forgiveness?

Those who put Christ on the cross, what did Christ say? "Father forgive them..." did Christ forgive them? Did Christ have authority on earth to forgive sins? Did they open their hearts to experience this forgiveness? Were they saved? Were they now Jesus' friends?

Do the wicked in the end die forgiven or unforgiven by God?

Does God spend eternity holding grudges, resentful and with an unforgiving heart?

Read bottom pink section Wednesday's lesson, "What are some..." thoughts?

FRIDAY

Read top paragraph, "The plan for our redemption..." thoughts?

What does it mean an unfolding of the principles that are the foundation of God's throne?

Is this suggesting something about how God's character, government, kingdom operate?

Read and discuss questions 2, 3