

Lesson 1 - Christ and Culture

We live in a world where less people believe in the Bible, God, Satan, evil hell, and sin than they used to. This all boils down to the death of evil. If you can rationalize evil away you open the door to behave however you want. Some call this moral relativism – do what you want to do and what is true for you is “your truth.” The world wants to remove the standards so that it only has to answer to itself and not to God or anyone else.

Why is culture so interested in doing away with right and wrong?

Why is it dangerous to say truth doesn't really exist?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

What is the purpose of a foundation?

Who does Paul say is the only foundation of our lives?

The world tries to convince us that each and every one of us serve as our own foundation. *How do phrases like, “It is true for you but not true for me” or “you have your truth and I have mine” show the world tries to provide its own foundation for everything?*

Why is that dangerous?

Why do you think the world finds that appealing?

There is a term in psychology called “Functional behavior” that basically means people do things that work for them. On the surface, from a non-Christian perspective, this type of thinking could be very appealing. No one can judge you. You get to do what you want to do. There are no eternal consequences for anything. But if you dig deeper thinking you can have a foundation outside of Christ is destructive.

We are all building something through the way we live our lives and the quality of our foundation has a direct relationship with how long what we are building will last. That is why Christ is the ultimate foundation – he lasts forever and he is perfect!

What does Paul say will happen to what we build with our lives?

There are consequences to what we count most important and the actions we take in life. *What two outcomes does Paul mention in 3:14-15?*

- Reward
- Suffer loss

Have you ever asked yourself of all the things you are busy doing in life, which ones of them will have an everlasting impact and which ones will have results that will be burned up when it is all said and done? As Christians we need to involve our lives in things that have eternal purposes.

There is this phrase in verse 15 that is pretty confusing. Paul writes, “If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” It sounds like Paul is saying ultimately everyone will withstand the test even if their foundation was lacking. That is not the case. First, notice that he is writing to Christians (**1 Cor 1:2**). So those he is wrote to already had a foundation in Christ (**3:11**). Then in **3:12** he says that the Christian’s building material may differ from each other but they are still all building on “this foundation.”

What are the different building materials he mentions and what might they actually represent?

- Gold, silver, wood, hay, straw, etc
- They represent “the quality of each man’s work” (**3:13**) - the quality of the way we live our lives, the people we reach out to, our ethics, etc

No matter what building materials they are using, Paul says that if we are Christians we are building on Christ’s foundation. So it is not the foundation that will get tested because that is Christ. What is tested is what we do with our lives.

For non-Christians, they aren’t building on the same foundation we are. Jesus used the example of people either being wise or foolish builders (**Matthew 7:24-27**). Jesus said the difference between those building on the sand and those building on the rock depends on if the builders are listening to Jesus and putting into practice what they hear – Christians.

Part of evangelism is helping people see that the foundation they are building on won’t last and that it has no hope to last beyond the grave. Only Christ offers that hope because he is the resurrected Lord who promises that we will share in his resurrection (**Rom 6:5-8**).

The rest of this series is going to take a good look at various things our culture has begun rejecting and see what the Bible really says about it (hell, sin, Satan, and the power of the Gospel).

Application:

What are you building on and what are you building with?

How might we upgrade our building materials?

What do we do if we figure out we have been building things that don’t please God?

Lesson 2 – The Reality of Evil and Sin

Good and evil are both real:

Because God is love and because love requires the freedom of making a choice, God gives every single person who has ever lived a choice. From the very first man and woman in the first chapters of the Bible all the way to you, every single person has the freedom to choose good or evil. In the beginning God made everything good but we know it didn't stay that way forever because everyone makes choices...some for good and some for evil.

Everyone agrees that good is real but we don't get as much consensus in the world on the reality of evil.

Why do you think people are so hesitant to call a particular action or decision evil?

What things would most people in the world still acknowledge as evil?

Are people more likely to see something as evil if it is done to them vs done to someone else? Why?

- It is easy to be a moral relativist when something evil is done to someone else. It is a lot harder to deny the reality of evil when someone hurts you or the ones you love.

The Bible has a lot to say about evil and sin. Here are a few verses and what they teach:

- **Habakkuk 1:13** says, “[God’s] eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.”
- **Romans 3:23, 5:12** teach us that every single person who has ever lived has done evil/sin at some point in their lives. No one is perfect.
- **Matthew 12:35-37** – our character will be revealed, good or evil, and there are either consequences or reward for who we are on the inside.
- **Matthew 15:19** – good and evil are directly related to what is inside of our hearts.
- **Luke 1:77** teaches us that sin is something we need saved from.

Which of those verses stood out to you and why?

The distinction between good and evil is for our best interest – boundaries are healthy and protect us from danger.

Why do some people think God or Christians are all about taking the fun out of life through rules? How would you respond to that comment?

Read Job 4:8

What does Eliphaz, Job’s friend, say is typically the result of doing evil things? Do you find that to be true?

What dangers might result from us choosing or doing evil things?

Last, it is important that we don't just think other people do evil things. We have to recognize that sometimes we do as well. We should never look down on people because they get things wrong or do things that they shouldn't. *Instead, how should we view those who are living with the consequences of their own evil actions?*

The answer to that question can be guided by this question – *How does God see them? And What does God hope for their lives?*

We recognize that evil and sin are real. We recognize that they should not be a part of our lives and yet sometimes we do make mistakes. We realize that God sent Jesus to bring salvation and forgiveness for our sins. Last, we hold out that same hope to those who have not yet found God in order that they might be able to turn their lives around as well.

Application:

How does a recognition of your own mistakes help you treat others with kindness and compassion?

Have you ever done something that had consequences?

Is it possible for there to be both forgiveness and consequences? Why?

How do we get the wisdom we need to be bold and call sin and evil out for what they are without being seen by the world as hateful or arrogant hypocrites?

Lesson 3 – The Reality of Judgment & Hell

What did Jesus teach about the most during his ministry?

1. The Kingdom of God
2. Eternal Life
3. Prayer
4. Persecution
5. Judgment & Hell

The first thing we notice is that Jesus taught more about what God wants us to do and who God wants us to be (#'s 1 & 2) more than he warned us about the dangers of hell (#5). However, Jesus taught very clear that one day there would be a judgment and that there were only two options for all of mankind.

Read Matthew 25:31-46 - *What are the two options Jesus lays out in these verses?*

You will notice that there is continuity between the life that we live here and now and how we will live in eternity. Those who God allowed into heaven to live with God forever were those who had lived like citizens of God's kingdom during their lives on earth. Those who didn't care for God or others got the result of that kind of selfish living.

Hell in the New Testament:

One of the words translated "Hell" in the New Testament is the word "Gehenna." Some believe that in Jesus day this was a nasty garbage dump where people would go and burn their trash down in a valley outside the city. That valley had a wicked history. Ahaz and Manasseh sacrificed their children there by burning them in an idolatrous/pagan worship practice (**2 Chronicles 28:3, 33:6**). Jeremiah 19 gives us graphic detail of the evil slaughter that took place there. It was so bad that God told him to rename it "the valley of slaughter" because the Babylonians had massacred Jews there and threw their bodies in the valley.

Jesus' audience almost certainly knew those stories. That place had a history of being a literal, burning hell. So when Jesus teaches that people who are outside of God and Christ will be judged and sent to Gehenna/hell forever that is not something anyone would want to be a part of.

What is hell like? Read each of these verses and mention something they teach about hell

- **Matthew 10:28** - Hell is a place of destruction.
- **Matthew 5:22** – It is a place of fire
- **Matthew 25:41** - It is eternal
- **2 Thessalonians 1:8** – It is for those who don't obey the Gospel
- **2 Thessalonians 1:9** – It is a place apart from God's presence and God's power

To some it sounds very gloomy, negative, harsh and unpopular. God is not always popular and neither is the truth but that doesn't make it any less true or applicable. **Read Matthew 7:13-14**

How popular is the path to life?

How popular is the path to destruction? Why do you think that is?

Read Revelation 20:10-14

Who gets judged into eternal punishment in the lake of fire?

- Satan, the beast (Cesar/Nero), the false prophet (those engaged in emperor worship), death, Hades (the place of the dead), and those not in the book of life.

Why is it important to realize that God's judgment is real and actually will happen?

Have you ever stopped to think that at the end of it all God will even judge and condemn death itself? Why do you think God does that?

- Sin is related to death (**Rom 6:23**) and both run counter to God's plan to give people life.

Last, it is important that we remember first and foremost Jesus didn't spend all his time telling us what not to do. Jesus didn't just pile on more and more rules. Jesus taught more about heaven and eternal life than he did about hell but Jesus still taught that God's judgment and hell are real and relevant and we have to keep that in mind. It is important that Christians agree with Jesus on this and that we don't go along with the popular opinions of the world that some of these things are just fairy tales or that everyone will be in heaven forever.

Why does the world reject hell?

Although avoiding punishment is more motivating to some it is important that we remember that we are striving for life and righteousness and not just seeking to avoid sin and unrighteousness. There is a difference and that difference will impact our relationship with God. Life is not simply about sin management and hell avoidance. Living for God is about seeking God with everything we've got and submitting ourselves to Him in everything.

Application:

Is there anything in your life today that is more in tune with hell than it is with heaven? What should you do with that?

Who do we know and love who have not turned their lives over to God? What can you say to them to start a conversation to lead them to God?

- Prayer is also a great starting point. We should have a list of people we pray for regularly in regard to this.

How might your really living for God attract people to the kingdom in a way more powerful than blasting people with fire and brimstone?

Lesson 4 – The Reality of Satan

There are several words in Hebrew and Greek that are translated as Satan. In Hebrew the word basically means someone who stands opposed to you. Sometimes it refers to a personal being who is out to oppose God's people as a whole. Other times it is used in scripture to describe someone who stands in opposition to someone else. We see that second use in Numbers 22:32 when Balaam's donkey won't move down the path because the Lord's angel stood in "opposition" to him. It literally says the angel was a satan to Balaam because the angel blocked his way.

That is the general role of Satan in the world. He tries to stand in our way and block us from being in relationship with God. We see that in the first few chapters of Job where Satan has been going throughout the earth seeking to oppose people (**See Job 1:6-9**). We also see in that passage that Satan is one who makes accusation against us.

What accusation does Satan make against Job in regard to why he serves God so well?

What is the only way to find out if that is really true or not?

- Take it all away and see if Job is still faithful to God – that would prove Satan wrong if Job holds up in faithfulness to God even though everything he has is taken away.

Do you think Satan makes accusation today? What answer do we have as Christians?

Read Colossians 1:21-23

What makes Christians "Free from accusation?"

According to Paul in these verses who or what makes us holy?

So Satan can stand opposed to us and he can make all sorts of accusations but if Jesus has died for our sins there is no one left to accuse us and disqualify us from "the prize"!

Satan is also a tempter. We see that in the very beginning. **Read Gen 3:1-7**

Satan is no longer tempting us with eating certain fruits (unless maybe you are a staunch vegetarian!) but he is still in the business of tempting us (**1 Cor 7:5**) and often he uses some of the same strategies today that he did the very first time he tempted someone, which we just read about.

What strategy did Satan use to tempt them? What did he appeal to and why does that often still work today?

Jesus taught about Satan on a number of occasions (Matt 12:22-37, Mark 3:20-30, Luke 10:18 are a few examples). In much of Jesus' teaching on Satan we see that there is a real spiritual struggle going on between good and evil. Jesus came to overcome those things and set us free from sin and death (**Rom 6:18-23**). We often think about Jesus dying to forgive us of our sins but sometimes we don't get the point that what Jesus was really doing was conquering sin and death and having victory over Satan himself! That is what makes the Gospel, "Good news!" We will talk about that more next week.

Read Revelation 20:7-10

What does it say Satan will do in the world?

What does 20:9-10 tell us God will do to Satan/the devil?

When God defeats the author of deception and decay that is real victory. We know that this world can be a terrible place and Satan personifies all that is wrong with the world. He stands opposed to God's kingdom. He even tried to lead Jesus astray (Matthew 4)! But ultimately God and his people (that's us!) will be victorious and we will live in a place where there is no more sin, no more opposition or death or tears. God will reign with his people forever in perfect harmony.

But what will happen to Satan and all those who follow him? (Rev 20:10, 14)

Remember, no matter what the world throws at us we will overcome if we are on God's side. In the mean time, don't let Satan trick you into believing what the world believes – that he is not real. If he can convince you he doesn't exist he has done his job and it will make his work that much easier to do.

Application:

Have you been tempted to think Satan isn't real? Have any of these verses been beneficial in helping you see the big picture?

Knowing that Satan is real, personal and in opposition to your life does that put any sin you struggle with in perspective?

How does knowing that Satan stands opposed to God and his kingdom help us remember how important it is to flee from sin? How can we actually flee from sin or situations that might result in sin?

What lies have you "bought into" that are ungodly and need to be brought back in line with scripture? The truth is, the world surrounds us with lies and deception in order to draw us away from God. We have to be grounded in scripture so that we know what is true and what is not.

Last, we need to be praying for each other so that Satan would be far from each one of us and that we can all draw near to God.

Lesson 5 – The Gospel

Here are a couple of pretty basic questions to get at the heart of what the gospel is all about.

1 - *How would you define the Gospel?*

- The standard answer is “good news” or the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ

2 - *What makes that “good news?”*

- It is good news about salvation.

3 – *What do we need saved from?*

- We needed saved from sin and death

4 – *What makes sin so bad?*

- **James 1:15** - *What does James say sin leads to?* - Sin results in death and since we know that all of us sin
- **Eph 2:8-9** – *What does Paul say about our ability to save ourselves?*
 - Salvation is a graceful gift. We cannot do enough good or just avoid evil to be with God in heaven forever.
 - Because we cannot save ourselves - We need help!

What makes the good news so good is that we didn't deserve for God to save us. We were powerless against sin and we had no solution for death on our own. But Christ has paved the way for us through his death, burial and resurrection so that we can draw near to God again without our sin getting in the way.

- **Rev 1:18** – Jesus holds the keys to death.
- **Heb 2:14** – Jesus' death destroyed the devil's grip on our lives

Hebrews 2:14 gives us a clue as to how Jesus paved the way through death to give us life. The death burial and resurrection is more than just forgiving sins so we can be in heaven. Let's look at another verse that will give us an even more specific clue about what the Gospel is all about.

Read 1 Cor 15:54-57 – *What word is used three times in those verses to describe what Jesus has done for us?*

When we think of the Gospel we often think about **forgiveness of sins** because we know God cannot tolerate sin and so if we are going to be in heaven our sins have to be forgiven. We rarely think about the **victory** that had to be won for those sins to be forgiven. The Gospel is God's victory over sin and death so that we can have eternal life.

Once you start talking about victory you are talking about **power**. Paul taught that there really are powers of darkness and evil in this world (**Eph 6:12**) and that God also had power to defeat

all that stands in His way especially through Jesus' death on the cross (**1 Cor 6:14**) and his resurrection from the dead (**Eph 1:18-20**)

How do these verses redefine how you see God's power?

Sin is real. Death is real. Satan is real. Hell is real. But so is Jesus and his power and willingness to raise us from the dead. Heaven is real and God is real and God is fighting for us to bring victory over everything that is wrong with the world. Praise God!

Application:

What can you do this week that embodies life and light and God's will?

Are there any things in your life that still haven't been given over to the power of God through the Gospel? How can you hand those areas of your life over to God?

What would keep you from doing that?

How can our assurance of our salvation help us to live righteously in the world?