

God's Temple (Student)

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Lesson One

The Tabernacle

Texts: Exodus 33:7-11; 35-40; Numbers 14:32-35; Deuteronomy 12:1-14 and 16:16

The purpose of this lesson: To introduce the students to some basic concepts regarding the Jewish tabernacle; these concepts will have relevance later as we consider the Christian's relationship with God.

The problem was huge! How do you transform a group of slaves with primarily an identity based on forefathers and family heritage into a religious nation? How do you transform a group of slaves who have been dehumanized by slavery into a people who through a relationship with the living God sustain a theocracy? How do you transform slaves into God's people without making them arrogant by developing a sense of self importance (the "God delivered us—so we are important" syndrome)? How do you help people who were slaves? (Today, does not helping some in need continue to be a challenge because they lack values and insights?) How do you help a people who knew so much about idolatry learn to depend on God? How do you transform slaves who equated religion with idolatry into a nation that realizes the difference between spirituality and performing religious acts?

Help your students realize that the transition from slave in Egypt to the nation of people who belonged to God was NOT an easy, simple transition.

Slavery is a dehumanizing establishment! A good (productive) slave thinks of himself/herself as property, not as a person. He or she is not to be a person of values and principles, but be a person who does as his or her owner says. The only time period that matters is the time period selected by the owner. A good slave is not supposed to function on original thoughts, but to function on the owner's instructions. Slaves are expected to be dependent. The slaves' experiences do not usually prepare them for an independent life. Slavery tends to make slaves quite selfish and self-centered.

Help your students understand that slavery in any form is dehumanizing. (The form of slavery that existed in America differed from slavery in the first-century Roman Empire, and the slavery of the Old Testament.) It is difficult for many Americans to relate to the feeling of being property, existing to be used, and having no rights.

There is a slave mentality. A slave thinks like a slave, acts like a slave, has the priorities and values of a slave, and sees situations as a slave looks at them. While there are various kinds of slavery, all the kinds share at least one thing in common: slaves must have the mental outlook of a slave. The slave mentality is not reversed quickly merely by providing the man or woman freedom from the control of an owner. In the case of Israel, dependence would not be transferred from Egyptian owners to God promptly, easily, and without difficulty.

One of the reasons for slavery being so dehumanizing is found in the fact that it profoundly alters the way the person thinks. That thinking does not automatically change because the person's physical circumstances change—especially if you were born to slave parents and personally never experienced freedom in any form.

Read Exodus 6:1-9, and remember this followed an incident when even Moses (read Exodus 5:22, 23) concluded resisting Pharaoh was futile. Realize God had as much to prove about His identity to Israel as to the Egyptian Pharaoh. The ten miraculous acts of God in Egypt that

resulted in Israel's deliverance were as much to establish credibility with Israel as to prove to Pharaoh that He was superior.

Emphasize God's acts to deliver Israel from Egypt served two purposes, not one. Israel had to learn to trust God. Call attention to the fact that God's messages to Israel commonly contained the reminder that He was the God who brought them out of Egypt. He alone was responsible for making them a nation and providing them Canaan. Be sure to read again such statements as Deuteronomy 7:6-11 and 9:4-6.

Following is the writer's view. There are other views. After Israel crossed the Red Sea, at some point a tent was erected outside the camp for Moses to judge problems that arose among the people and to confer with God. Read Exodus 33:7-11. One of the central objectives of this small tent was to visibly establish the unique bond between Moses and God. The cloud represented God's presence. Israel was reminded repeatedly that Moses was doing far more than advancing his own personal agenda.

To the writer, it was important to verify the bond between Moses and God early—to verify Moses was not acting on his own for self-centered reasons. That is one of the reasons the writer distinguishes between the small tent in Exodus 33:7-11 and the tabernacle. Some regard Exodus 33:7-11 as an early reference to the tabernacle.

From Exodus 35 through 40:33 the tabernacle, the furnishings, and the priestly garments were built according to God's designs and instructions. When completed, again the cloud declared God's acceptance and presence. During the 40 years of stay in the wilderness, the cloud provided guidance for Israel, and a visible reminder that the God who delivered them from Egypt was among them (also read Numbers 14:32-35).

Be certain to call attention to the cloud and its function.

The tabernacle was situated in the middle of the camp with 3 tribes encamped on each side (read Numbers chapters 2, 3). It did not serve as a place of assembly, but as a place of sacrificial worship performed by those designated by God. It was by design a portable place of sacrificial worship. It was unique because (1) its existence was commanded by God, (2) it functioned on the basis of delegated responsibilities, and (3) it was a visible reminder of God's active role in the affairs of Israel.

Note the tabernacle's place and its basic function. Note the unique roles it served by its presence—it was a constant visual reminder of God's presence among them.

During the wilderness experience of Israel, the tabernacle served a crucial, practical role in the nation. Day and night it visibly reminded Israel that (1) they were a nation by the acts of God, (2) God was present, and (3) the nation knew when and where to go as well as when to stay. Among other things, the tabernacle functioned to transfer dependence on the Egyptians and Pharaoh to dependence on God.

Note the practical role the tabernacle served. God did not merely deliver them and then leave them "on their own." The tabernacle was one of the constant reminders of their dependence on God (like the manna was). God wanted them to learn to trust Him.

What happened to the construction known as the tabernacle when Israel settled in Canaan is not known. Presumably, much of the tabernacle's original construction materials wore out with the passage of time. When Canaan was divided into territories which were to serve as the homelands of each tribe, the tabernacle would no longer be in the daily sight of Israel as a nation. The known sites of the tabernacle in Canaan that seemed to be semi-permanent sites were perhaps Gilgal (Joshua 4:19), perhaps Shechem (Joshua 8:30-35), Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:3), Nob (1 Samuel 22:11), and Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39). When David transferred the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he built a tent to house it. Where the tabernacle was in Canaan is

sometimes a mystery and sometimes speculation. The Ark of the Covenant seemed to represent the Lord's presence, and where it was became the site of sacrificial worship. Read Deuteronomy 12:1-14 and especially note verses 5, 11, 13, 14 and 16:16.

As long as Israel was in the wilderness, the tabernacle served (to Israel) several truly practical purposes. Though it remained the center of sacrificial worship, it was not the daily visible reminder when Israel conquered Canaan. The change from a roaming people to a settled people had some influence on the role of the tabernacle. Perhaps God expected future generations in Israel to operate spiritually by trusting the God who delivered their ancestors from Egypt. Perhaps they were to grow beyond the need of daily visible reminders.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Discuss the huge problem.

The discussion should include the difficulty of moving from slavery to the people (nation) of God.

2. Slavery is what kind of establishment? Why?

It is a dehumanizing establishment. It teaches people to see themselves as property instead of persons.

3. Explain the slave mentality.

This explanation should focus on the ways slaves look at themselves.

4. In Exodus 6:1-9, what was Moses to tell Israel?

He was the God who appeared to their forefathers. He was the God of the covenant. He was the God of deliverance. He was the God who would give them Canaan. He could be trusted to do as He promised.

5. What were the two purposes of God's ten plagues or miraculous acts in Egypt?

a) *Those acts built confidence in Israel's ability to trust God.*

b) *Those acts demonstrated God was superior to Pharaoh (the Deliverer was superior to the enslaver).*

6. What was the purpose of the small tent in Exodus 33:7-11?

It served two purposes. (1) It showed the bond between Moses and God. (2) It allowed people to seek justice.

7. What did the cloud represent both in the small tent and tabernacle?

The cloud represented the presence of God.

8. Where was the tabernacle situated?

The tabernacle was in the center of Israel's camp with all Israel camped around it.

9. The tabernacle did not serve as what, but served as what?

It was not an assembly tent, but the place to offer sacrifices.

10. Give three reasons the tabernacle was unique.

- a) Its existence was commanded by God.*
- b) It functioned through delegated responsibilities.*
- c) It was a visible reminder that God was active in Israel's affairs.*

11. The tabernacle reminded Israel of what three things day and night?

- a) God made them a nation by His acts.*
- b) God was present.*
- c) God guided their movements and determined where and how long they stayed.*

Lesson Two

King David Envisioned the Temple

Texts: 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 22:6-19

The primary objective of this lesson: To study David's desire to build God a temple. To be acquainted with the fact that initially the Jewish temple fulfilled both political and spiritual purposes.

The life of King David is the study of a man who endured many times of personal adversity and knew many times of personal success. The low point seems to be when he sought refuge in the city of Gath, a Philistine city, and pretended to be insane to save his life (1 Samuel 21:10-15). The high point seems to be when he was the king of the whole nation in the city of Jerusalem.

Point out that David's adult life was a combination of successes and failures. Note that most of his greatest successes came when he was physically stressed and obviously dependent on God, and most of his failures came when he was successful materially and forgot his dependence on God. Some times success is our enemy—we seem to do better at coping with stress than we do with managing success.

In choosing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, David demonstrated his political brilliance. He did not choose King Saul's ruling city, nor Mahanaim the capital of Saul's son (Ishbosheth—2 Samuel 2:8, 9), and thus show possible favoritism to the tribes often called Israel. He did not choose Hebron to be his capital, and thus show possible favoritism to the tribes known as Judah (see 2 Samuel 2:10, 11). David sought to heal the civil war in the nation of Israel by conquering a city and making it his capital—a city that belonged to no Jewish tribe: Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6-10).

Ending the conflict of civil war is a delicate combination of responsibilities. Addressing the emotions, the jealousies, and the distrustfulness of such violence is a challenge! Not all the wounds of the American civil war have healed yet! Destroying the resentments and distrust between Israel and Judah to build a single nation from both was a major challenge!

In yet another brilliant move, he planned to make Jerusalem both the political center and the spiritual center of the nation. When Israelites came to Jerusalem for justice in difficult matters (one of the primary responsibilities of the king was to decide justly), they also would see the spiritual center of the nation. When Israelites came to offer sacrifices, they would see the

political workings of the nation. David thereby promoted the concept of nation as superior to the concept of tribe or even a group of tribes.

There was to be a permanent separation of power between the king of the nation and the high priest. The king should never assume the sacrificial duties of the high priest! Before King David, God's worship center was in one geographical place, and the king ruled in another. One primary responsibility of a good king was to hear difficult cases and render just decisions. Thus, the people went to one place for sacrificial worship, and another for justice. That could result in a rivalry between the two centers concerning who had the most influence over the people.

No matter what the concern of the people, they would need to come to Jerusalem. No longer would there be two centers of the nation: the political one and the religious one. There would be only one center! That center would belong to the entire nation, not just to the special interests of a group of tribes. David's intent was truly brilliant! It offered healing and hope for a war-weary people. Judah and Israel could be one nation, one people as God intended.

Stress the fact that David was dedicated to building God's nation rather than the people being shackled with no more than a collation of tribes. Though it had been many generations since Egypt, Israel as a people had never achieved their potential as a nation. This seems to be an understood goal of King David.

Because we submit to God does not mean that we abandon our abilities.

However, something troubled King David's conscience. He lived in a palace built of the finest building materials known then. That which represented God's presence (the Ark of the Covenant) was placed in a tent in Jerusalem. That was not proper! How could the king who ruled the nation live in better physical circumstances than God who ruled the universe?

We all have our judgment/opinion of what is and is not proper. This usually triggers a conscience reaction. To King David, the situation was not appropriate. Note this is centered in a human concern, not a divine concern. Also note God knew the human concern was genuine and from good motives.

He told Nathan, the prophet to the King, about the King's concerns. Nathan said, "Do what you have in mind to do. It is obvious that God is with you."

Nathan's initial reaction was positive and supportive. He saw nothing "wrong" with King David's desire. The man who would later say, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7) would not be timid about expressing himself.

That night God spoke to Nathan in a vision with a message for King David. The summary of that revelation follows:

God's reaction differed from Nathan's initial reaction.

1. You want to build a permanent structure for Me? I never asked any Israelite for that!
2. The focus is not on what you will do for Me, but on what I will do for you. I will make you a dynasty in Israel (a house).
3. Your descendant will build a house for me.
4. You will die, I will establish your dynasty, and I will provide your descendant abundant opportunity and responsibility.
5. Your dynasty will be eternal. (Jesus was a descendant of David—Matthew 1:2-16; all Christians are descendants of Abraham and, thereby, a part of God's nation or kingdom—Galatians 3:29.)

Note each of the five things. Note the focus is on what God will do for David, not on what David will do for God. Make applications to today. God can do fine without the help of people, but people cannot do fine without the help of God.

Consider a contrast in the tabernacle and the temple:

1. The tabernacle was designed by God; the Jewish temple may not have been (see 1 Chronicles 28:9-19—was it David's design, was it God's design given through revelation, was it a combination of both?). Seemingly, the structure called the temple by Israelites followed the basic pattern of the tabernacle. The temple was built and rebuilt three times: Solomon's temple, which was destroyed (2 Kings 25:9, 13-17); the second temple built by the Jewish exiles who returned from captivity; and Herod the Great's remodeling enterprise that began in 19 BC, was totally complete in AD 64, and was destroyed by the Roman military in AD 70.
2. The tabernacle was commanded and accepted by God (Exodus 40:33-35). The temple was not the result of God's command (see 2 Samuel 7:6, 7), but was accepted by God (read 2 Chronicles 5:11-14, 6:4-8, and 7:11-16).
3. The tabernacle was only for Israelites. The temple was to bless both Israelites and gentiles (see 1 Kings 8:41-43).
4. The tabernacle was portable. The temple was a permanent structure.

Discuss each of the four things. Note the structure did not change the way they worshipped God, but the place they worshipped God. It was the same sacrificial worship administered by the same priesthood. The same sacrifices were offered. The sacrificial animals and produce served the same purposes.

Consider some comparisons:

1. Both existed as the center for sacrificial worship to glorify God's name.
2. Both signified God's presence.
3. Both were a reminder of God's acts and a promise of God's blessings.
4. Both served as Israel's religious focal point.

Recognize each of the four things. Again note it is not a change in system of worship, but a change in place of worship.

The principle point: God's people worship God. They know they depend on God; He is not dependent on them. God will forever continue even if His people reject Him.

The challenge in all ages has been the same; there has been very little change. In idolatry, people take care of the idol to protect themselves from what they regarded as divine harm. The god represented by the idol was not directly interested in human affairs unless a human successfully appealed to and interested the god. God the Creator is not dependent on people, is naturally interested in people, and sustains people who follow Him. In that contrast is a basic difference between the worship of an idol and the worship of the Creator. People who worship God the Creator do so in appreciation, not in fear.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What do you personally most admire about King David's life? Least admire? In answering both, explain why.

The answer will be individual. The "whys" will be individual. The teacher should listen a lot, ask for explanations/examples in seeking to understand rather than to "fix," and be certain to understand the view being shared before sharing a view.

2. How did King David demonstrate political brilliance in making Jerusalem his capital?

He chose a city that did not belong to either "side," and thus He avoided the problem of appearing to show favoritism to any faction.

3. How did King David demonstrate political brilliance in making Jerusalem both the political center and the religious center of the nation?

When an Israelite came to Jerusalem for any political or religious reason, both the political center and the religious reinforced each other. The concept of a nation, not a faction, was reinforced.

4. What troubled King David's conscience?

The King of the nation lived in a permanent residence built of their finest building materials, and the Ark of the Covenant (representing God's presence) was in a tent. King David did not feel it was appropriate for the King of the nation to live in better circumstances than the God of universe.

5. What did Nathan, the prophet, first say to the king?

"Do what you have in mind to do. It is obvious God is with you."

6. What instruction did God give Nathan in a vision that night?

"Take this message to King David."

7. Summarize God's message to King David.

- a) *I, God, never asked any Israelite for a building.*
- b) *The focus should be on what I will do for you.*
- c) *Your descendant will build a house for me.*
- d) *Your descendant will have abundant opportunity and responsibility.*
- e) *Your dynasty will be eternal.*

8. Contrast the tabernacle and the temple.

- a) *The tabernacle was designed by God; the temple may not have been—at least not entirely.*
- b) *The tabernacle was commanded and accepted by God; the temple was not commanded by God, but was accepted by God.*
- c) *The tabernacle was just for Israelites; the temple originally was to bless both Israelites and gentiles (non-Jews).*

9. In what ways were both alike?

- a) *Both were centers of sacrificial worship existing to glorify God's name.*
- b) *Both signified God's presence.*
- c) *Both were reminders of God's acts and promises.*
- d) *Both served as Israel's religious focal point.*

10. What is the principle point of this lesson?

The principle point: God's people worship God. (a) They know they depend on God, not He on them. (b) God will continue even if His people reject Him.

11. What did you learn from this lesson that impresses you?

This response will depend on the view of the individual. The teacher mostly listens.

Lesson Three

King Solomon Builds and Dedicates the Temple

Texts: 1 Kings 6 and 8

The objective of this lesson: To focus your attention on the dedication of the Jewish temple and on the significance of the Jewish temple.

Solomon began building the temple in the fourth year of his reign, and construction of that temple continued for seven years. It was what people today would call a pre-fabricated building—all the pieces were fashioned to fit together prior to being assembled at the site of the temple (1 Kings 6:7). Can you imagine preparing stone and boards without the aid of power tools or motor-driven machines? Can you imagine the expense of all the gold used? Or all the carvings? Or all the kinds of wood? To do all of that by hand is beyond our ability to imagine! Consider the brass work in 1 Kings 7:13-47 and the gold work in 7:48-51.

Focus attention on three things:

- 1. It took 7 years to build the temple.*
- 2. Each piece was prepared to fit.*
- 3. It was an expensive undertaking.*

With enormous pomp and ceremony, the temple was dedicated. Solomon invited all the “who’s who” in Israel to attend the temple’s dedication that began with moving the Ark of the Covenant from the tent to its place in the new structure. The animal sacrifices that were a part of moving the Ark of the Covenant and the furnishings of the tent were too numerous to count. When the Ark was situated in its new home, a cloud filled the structure to the extent that the priests could not function in the room that was before the room containing the Ark.

Note:

- 1. The people who attended.*
- 2. The animal sacrifices involved in the moving of the Ark of the Covenant and the furnishings of the tent.*
- 3. The cloud filled the temple as the cloud had filled the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34, 35.*

As Solomon began his address to the people (1 Kings 8:12-30):

1. He acknowledged God's message to David concerning the temple.
2. He blessed God for keeping His promise (though Solomon had the temple built, it was God that provided the opportunity).
3. He acknowledged that God did not ask for the temple, but David did well to envision this heart gift to God.
4. Though the temple was David's idea, Solomon—not David—built it as was decreed by God.
5. God was credited with allowing the temple to come into being.
6. God was credited for allowing Solomon to be King.
7. As elaborate as the structure was, it could not contain the boundless God.
8. Though the boundless God could not be confined to a building, would God please accept this temple as a special place of prayer?

Note the things Solomon stressed prior to the prayer:

1. *The origin of the idea of the temple.*
2. *The way he acknowledged God.*
3. *No house could contain the boundless God.*

Solomon listed a number of prayers that he requested God to hear and respond to when a person or group prayed toward the temple:

1. When the nation suffered a defeat in war because of sin, if the people repented, hear their prayers, forgive their sin, and reestablish them in Canaan.
2. When the nation suffered a drought because of sin, and they repented and prayed, hear their prayer, forgive their sin, teach them how to live, and send rain.
3. If there was famine, or blight, or mildew, or locusts/grasshoppers, or siege, or any kind of plague, and the nation repented by men and women personally repenting, hear their prayers, forgive the individuals, and help them live in reverence.

4. If a non-Jew came from another country because he had heard of God's greatness, hear and answer his prayer so all will know You are a great God with a mighty name.
5. If the nation went to battle, hear their prayers and maintain their cause.
6. If Israel went to battle, were defeated, and captives were taken (because of sin), if the captives repented in the land of their captivity and faced toward the temple, God hear their prayers, forgive their sins, may their captors show them compassion, and may You notice their plight.

Note each prayer and make certain the students understand what Solomon asked.

When Solomon concluded his prayer, on his knees with raised hands before the altar, he pronounced a blessing from God on the nation. The blessing went all the way back to Moses and praised God for His faithfulness in keeping all His promises to Israel. He expressed the desire (a) for all people to realize God's greatness and (b) that God would maintain the cause of Israel no matter what changes occurred. He urged the nation to be faithful to God.

Note the concept of blessing the nation.

- *Note the blessing stressed that God was with the nation for generations.*
- *Note Solomon's two desires. Also note the irony that Solomon could be God's leader here and years later could lead the nation into idolatry.*

Solomon's prayer and blessing were followed by:

1. A sacrificial dedication of the facilities.
2. Sacrifices of praise to God.
3. Feasting.
4. A fourteen-day celebration
5. The people returning home (on the eighth day) with joy for the goodness God showed to David and to the nation of Israel.

Stress the events that followed the actual act of putting the temple into active service. Feasting and joy were not inappropriate for the dedication. Remembering King David was not inappropriate.

You are asked to consider the significance of the Jewish temple from the moment that temple was consecrated.

1. Note the people who were present.
2. Note the deliberate impressiveness of the event—it was a “once in a lifetime” occurrence never to be forgotten. Anyone who saw what happened would never forget it. It was truly an “I was there!” occasion.
3. Note the sacrifices offered. Can you imagine how much wood was required to offer so many sacrifices? Can you imagine how much preparation had to be made for such an event? It did not “just happen.”
4. Note the scope of Solomon’s prayer in regard to prayers offered in the direction of the temple. Because of God’s presence in the temple, prayers prayed in faith in God had special significance when facing the temple.
5. Note the reasons Israel as a nation had to be joyful because of God’s acts.
6. Please note that awareness of God’s acts produced joy.
7. Also please note the event focused attention on God. All was possible because of what God did!

Call attention to the fact that many things emphasized the significance of the moment.

Though the temple did not come into being because of God’s command, God accepted it, and was not offended by the temple’s service. From the moment the Jewish temple was placed into service, it was extremely important. The Jewish temple served a key role in Jewish history, in divine history, and in Christian history.

Stress the fact that from its beginning the temple was recognized as being important. Here is a specific example of something that was not commanded by God being accepted by God because of the heart-motivation of the giver—King David.

For Thought and Discussion

1. How long was spent in building the temple? Why could it be called “prefabricated?”

It took 7 years to build the temple. Each piece was built to fit before it was assembled on the geographical site.

2. Who was invited to its dedication? Discuss the animal sacrifices and the cloud.

Every person who was of tribal significance was invited. The animal sacrifices were too numerous to count. The cloud filled the temple to the extent that the priests could not enter—just as with the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34, 35.

3. How did Solomon begin his address?

- a) *Solomon acknowledged God’s message to King David.*
- b) *He blessed God for keeping His promise.*
- c) *He acknowledged God did not ask for the temple, but the temple was a good gift.*
- d) *Though Solomon built it, it was David’s idea.*
- e) *God was responsible for the temple.*
- f) *God was responsible for Solomon being King.*
- g) *The temple could not contain God.*
- h) *Yet, the temple should have a significant place in Israel’s prayer life.*

4. What prayers did he request God hear when the prayers prayed facing the temple?

- a) *The prayer of a defeated Israel.*
- b) *The prayer of a nation ruined by a drought resulting from sin.*
- c) *The prayer of a nation suffering a plague caused by sin.*
- d) *The prayer of a non-Jew who had heard of God.*
- e) *The prayer of Israel as they prepared for battle.*
- f) *The prayer of Israelite captives.*

5. What two desires did Solomon express?

- a) *The desire for the people to realize God's greatness*
- b) *The desire for God to continue with Israel when changes occurred.*

6. What followed Solomon's prayer and blessing?

- a) *The dedication of the facilities.*
- b) *Praise of God*
- c) *Feasting*
- d) *A 14-day celebration*
- e) *The people returning home with joy.*

7. State the things which emphasized the significance of the temple.

- a) *The people who were present.*

- b) *The deliberate impressiveness of the event.*
- c) *The animal sacrifices offered.*
- d) *The scope of Solomon's prayer.*
- e) *The joy*
- f) *The tributes to God.*

Lesson Four

The Temple in Jewish Society

Texts: 2 Kings 24, 25; Ezra 1; 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23

The purpose of this lesson: To stress the importance of the Jewish temple to the Jewish people. The relevance of this point hopefully will be obvious in a later lesson.

As already stated, first there was the temple built by Solomon. That structure existed from its being built early in Solomon's reign until Israel's defeat by the Babylonians in BC 586. The Babylonian military forces destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Make certain the students understand that the temple building Solomon built was destroyed when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. Unless there is recent archeological evidence, there is no physical trace of the existence of that building that remains today.

Much later King Cyrus of Persia defeated Babylon. King Cyrus II gave the exiled Jews (along with other exiled people) permission to return to their homeland. As a condition of return, they were to rebuild God's temple and offer prayers for King Cyrus II.

The descendants of the original Jews exiled by the Babylonians were permitted to return by King Cyrus II of Persia. [His surviving records (such as the Cyrus Cylinder) confirm the Old Testament's view of this ruler.] The Babylonian exile of the Jews was of such length it is unlikely any original adult captives lived long enough to return to the Jerusalem area. The elderly who wept when the second temple building was built were likely children who were exiled or exiles who heard the stories/reports of the original exiles.

The second is, today, usually referred to as the Second Temple. This temple was built (with much difficulty) by some of the Jews who returned from exile. Not all Jews returned from their exile—some were too settled, some were too old to travel, and the undertaking of going from an established situation to an unestablished situation was not appealing to many. The returning exiles could not begin to rebuild with the grandeur of King Solomon's structure (Ezra 3:12, 13).

The first exiles returned to rebuild the temple. However, the lack of a security wall and the threats of those who disapproved of a Jewish presence complicated and delayed that task (see Ezra 1-4:24; and 6:13-22).

The third temple was actually a major remodeling of the second temple at the direction of Herod the Great. Though Herod the Great was brilliant in many ways (he was a notable builder), he had an earned reputation for being distrustful. Though he was ruler over the Jewish people in Judah, the Jewish people did not trust Herod's intents. The priests and the ruling Jews agreed to the remodeling of the temple if Herod the Great stockpiled the material prior to the reconstruction and placed the priests in charge of the actual renovation of the temple building. This renovation began around BC 19 and continued until 64 AD. The Roman military force destroyed that building in 70 AD. The Jewish temple has never been rebuilt. Where it stood now stands the Mosque of Omar, one of the priority holy sites of the Muslim—the declared site of Mohammed's ascent into heaven.

Be certain your students understand that Herod's efforts were a remodeling of the second temple building and an expansion/renovation of the courts. Read any resource material available to you on Herod the Great. Even minor research on Herod the Great reveals why the Jews who made decisions would distrust him. Couple that with the huge animosity between Herod the Great and the leading Jews. You will see quickly why the leading Jews did not wish to be dependent on Herod the Great for temple work.

The temple occupied an important role in Jerusalem for the entire time of its existence. In two-thirds of the united monarchy (the reigns of King David and King Solomon) Jerusalem was the main site of political and religious activity for all Jews. From King Rehoboam to the defeat of the Babylonians, Jerusalem was the political and religious center of the Kingdom of Judah. However, after the Babylonian defeat, Jerusalem was never a recognized political center again. Yet, it was always the religious center of the Jewish people. The temple made it their religious center long after they had no kings.

During the reigns of King David and King Solomon, the city of Jerusalem was both the political center and religious center for all Jews. When Solomon built the temple, the temple was the religious center for all Jews. However, the temple served only the Jews in Judah during the period of the divided kingdom. When the nation of Israel divided, King Jeroboam turned the 10 northern tribes to idolatry. He feared a return to the temple would result in a revolt and his death (see 1 Kings 12:25-33). Eventually these 10 tribes (known as Israel) went into Assyrian captivity and never returned as a nation (see 2 Kings 17:19-23). During most of this period and the time following the Assyrian exile until the Babylonian exile of the Kingdom (nation) of Judah, the temple was neglected and in bad repair. 2 Kings 12:6-12, the rule of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-8), and the rule of King Josiah (2 Kings 22:1-7) are exceptions. The temple building Solomon built ceased to exist with the Babylonian captivity.

The temple served several roles in Jewish society. (1) It was the place for sacrificial worship. When a national festival was held (such as Passover), Jerusalem with the temple was the place to go. When an individual offered animal sacrifices to God, Jerusalem with its temple was the place to go. Even when the Jewish people were dominated by non-Jewish kings, if the temple was pure, it was the place to go to bless and acknowledge God.

All sacrifices for national festivals and the sacrifices of individuals were offered at the temple. Consider Luke 2:21-32.

(2) It became a center for learning. If the question was, “What is the correct thing to do?” or, “How do I do this correctly?” or, “What is the proper ritual?” or, “What is the proper ethical response in this matter?” or, “What should I pray?” the temple was THE place to go to ask and receive an answer for your question. The temple area was known for its religious discussions and religious debates.

From its inception, the temple was the “go to” place to receive answers for your religious questions. The priests and other religious authorities were there. These people were in position to understand what you asked and to address your question. As an example, consider Luke 2:46, 47.

(3) The leading religious authority was the temple’s high priest. In the absence of a Jewish king, this position became “the voice of authority” for all Jewish people—both those in Jewish territory and those scattered throughout the world. If any Jew came from Jerusalem, Jewish people wanted to know the latest decrees of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin and pronouncements of the high priest. Knowing these decrees and pronouncements enabled Jewish people to stay in touch. In this way, information was delivered regarding the gatherings and affairs of the Jewish people.

This situation became an important means of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ among Jews outside of the Palestine area. Consider Acts 13:5 and 15. To prevent Christian Jews from using this forum, the synagogues required prior to giving a report that the Jew giving the report renounce Jesus Christ first (which no Christian could do). Consider Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 12:3 as the indication of such a curse existing.

The gospels and Acts reflected Jewish attitudes in such matters. When Jesus was a 12-year-old boy, he was lost to his parents for three days because he was in the temple area listening to discussions and asking worthwhile questions (Luke 2:41-51). When a man in the last week of his earthly life, Jesus spent the days publicly teaching in the temple area (see Luke 19:47, 48; 22:53; Matthew 26:55; Mark 12:35-40). One of the accusations against him just prior to his death was that he spoke disrespectfully of the temple (Mark 14:58; 15:29; Matthew 26:61). When Jesus' church began in Acts 2, Acts recorded only Jews hearing the gospel until Acts 10. This movement was looked upon as a Jewish reform movement. Though it began with popularity (see Acts 2:47), it was quite unpopular with some. When these Jews who opposed Christianity killed Stephen, one of the reasons for his death was that he dared declare that God does not live in temples made by humans (Acts 7:48-50).

The role of the temple in the New Testament does not "prove" the role of the temple in the Old Testament. It merely illustrates the continuing importance of the temple in the lives of the Jewish people.

Remember, the temple building itself existed to perform rituals. It was not built for assemblies. What we commonly refer to as the temple was a complex, not just a building. In Herod's renovation, there was a large court of the Gentiles in which anyone could come. This court was separated from the rest of the complex by a wall that was about 66 feet high and 23 feet wide at the base. There were warning signs at each entry way that warned proceeding toward the temple building would result in death for those not Jews. Next there was the court of Women. Any Jew could enter this court. Next was the smaller court of Israel where only Israelite men (of age) could enter. Next was the smaller court of the priests where sacrifices were offered by the priests. Only priests were permitted in this area. Then came the temple building itself that was only entered by priests performing required rituals. The temple was for ritual service. The courtyards could be used for assemblies.

The temple building itself was used only for performing Jewish rituals for the Jewish people. The temple building was not to be a place of public assembly.

There is a single point you are asked to note in this lesson: the temple occupied an important role in Jewish society.

The objective is NOT for you to learn Jewish history or Jewish practices. The objective is to challenge you to see the important role the temple served in Jewish life.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Who built the first Jewish temple? What ended the existence of that building?

King Solomon built the first Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian military destroyed that temple building.

2. Discuss the second temple (Jewish).

The discussion should include the understanding that this is the building built by Jewish people who returned from the Babylonian captivity.

3. Discuss what is referred to as the Jewish temple built by Herod the Great.

The discussion should include the understand that this was a remodeling project on the temple building (that was completed in about two years) and an ambitious remodeling/expansion of the courts that took a long time.

4. Jerusalem was the political and religious center for all Jews when? For the Kingdom of Judah?

It was the center for all Jews in the reigns of King David and King Solomon. It was the center for Judah (the kingdom/nation) in the period of the divided kingdom from the rule of King Rehoboam to the Babylonian defeat.

5. State three roles the Jewish temple served.

a) *It was the place for sacrificial worship.*

b) *It was the center of learning.*

c) *It was the place religious rulings were given for the Jewish people.*

6. Discuss Jesus and the temple in Luke 2:41-51. In 19:47, 48. In Mark 14:58.

Luke 2:41-51—Jesus' visit to the temple complex when he was 12, when he stayed to listen and ask questions.

Luke 19:47, 48—Jesus teaching publicly in the temple complex during the last week of his earthly/physical life.

Mark 14:58—The accusation that Jesus said he would destroy and rebuild the temple (during his trials).

7. Why did the temple building (not the complex) exist?

It existed to perform Jewish religious rituals.

8. What single point are you asked to note in this lesson?

The temple occupied an important role in Jewish society.

Lesson Five

Trusting the Gift Instead of the God

Text: Jeremiah 7:1-20

Things became extremely wicked among God's people. To introduce yourself to conditions in Jerusalem, read Jeremiah 1 and 5. These were the people who were supposed to be God's people, but they were an extremely wicked people. Through Jeremiah, God expressed His contempt for the horrible lives these people lived. Jeremiah was to make them aware of their utter moral failure. Jeremiah's task was unpleasant and discouraging (read Jeremiah 8:18-22; 15:15-18; 20:7-18).

Because we say we belong to God and do religious things does not mean that we cannot be wicked people. Perhaps one of the biggest and easiest roadways to wicked values and conduct is an arrogant belief in our own goodness. Jesus' biggest confrontation in his earthly life was with people who were regarded to be society's most religious people.

A significant part of the problem was introduced in Jeremiah 7. The reasoning seemed to be this: (1) The temple contains God's presence on earth. (2) The city of Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, contains God's temple. (3) God will not permit anything bad happen to His temple, therefore God will not let anything bad happen to Jerusalem (and Judah). The people are safe from harm because Jerusalem contains the temple. (4) Thus, it does not matter what any prophet (or anyone else) says against the city and the people because "we have God's temple."

Stress that when Christians reason that they are protected from God's anger because of what they have done or have given to God instead of who God is, those Christians likely are making God extremely angry. Note these people thought they were protected because their forefathers gave God a temple. The gift, not God, was their protection.

Note that God's anger with them was not focused on the temple, or HOW they offered sacrifices, or the practices they used in their religious rituals. With all the evil in Jerusalem, the probability was quite high that there were glaring flaws in the temple worship/practices. If people are deeply flawed morally, typically their worship practices are not A-Okay. If their worship was less than what God expected, those flaws were NOT the priority problem with God. The priority problem was the way they lived! Worship is reflected in one's life. Worship is not a substitute for a godly living!

It is simple for Christians to think that the key to divine protection is found in correct procedures. Worship must be an outgrowth of who we are. We worship God because we appreciate what God has done for us. For Israel, it was deliverance from Egypt that led to their formation as a nation. For us, it is the deliverance from sin that permits us to be in God's family.

(a) To believe that God would not act against Jerusalem because the city contained God's temple was to be deceived. To hold that conviction was to trust deceptive words. The moral "cure" for God's anger would not be found in reforming temple practices!

They were deceived because they were temple-focused rather than God-focused. (It is simple for us to be church-focused rather than God-focused.)

(b)The problem would be addressed only if they amended their ways, their deeds, addressed the unjust way they treated neighbors, stopped oppressing those who were not Jews, stopped oppressing powerless Jews who had no social status, stopped shedding innocent blood, and ceased worshipping idols. The foundation problem was to be seen in what they did every day in their lives. How they lived was reflected accurately in how they treated other people.

They thought correct temple practices replaced godly behavior. (We can think "correct" church practices will replace godly behavior.)

The end result was they stole, murdered, committed adultery, and engaged in idolatry in the conviction that they made everything "alright" if they went to the temple and offered the "right" sacrifices in the "right" way. Appealing to God had nothing to do with how they lived. Appealing to God only concerned going to the temple. Thus, they caused temple worship to be a fraudulent misrepresentation of God. God Himself saw what they were doing!

They thought "doing temple right" was the key to making God happy. (We can think "doing church right" is the key to making God happy.) If we are ungodly people, the key is not "the temple" or "the church," but how we behave as people. The key to correct worship in any age begins with godly living. Worship and behavior "hold hands."

(c) God said, "Look at Shiloh! It contained My tabernacle before the temple ever existed. Note the wickedness of those people. Note what I did to them even though they had My tabernacle.

God proved in Shiloh that ungodly behavior would bring destruction—and having the tabernacle would not protect them! Read and be familiar with 1 Samuel 1 through 4. God already had demonstrated it took more than a "correct building" to produce divine protection. Wicked behavior caused the downfall of Shiloh and Israel!

"I have tried to tell you what the problem was, but you refused to listen. I called you, and you refused to answer Me. Your behavior has left me no choice. I will do to the temple and Jerusalem what I did to the tabernacle and Shiloh. I will have nothing to do with you! I forbid Jeremiah to pray or intercede for you! You will realize you have not hurt Me, but yourselves!"

Their ungodly deafness forced God to take more drastic actions. God's actions occurred after much patience. God sent them many prophets and disasters, and they refused to listen. Wicked behavior can turn God against a people, regardless of how much God loves those people. Divine love will not ignore the wicked behavior of a spiritually deaf people.

Wow! If you understand fully what God said, the appropriate reaction should be, "Wow! Wow!" If your impression is that the way they lived genuinely made God quite angry even after all He did for them, you are correct! (The way they acted really ticked God off!) Their behavior was nothing less than an abuse of God's generations of kindness and trustworthiness!

Consider. God had delivered them from Egypt thus ending their slavery, made them a nation, and made it possible for them to have a land—just as He promised Abraham long before a Israelite people existed. Their forefathers approached Canaan for the first time about a year after leaving Egypt, and faithlessness kept them from entering Canaan. Yet, God's perseverance prevailed. The period of the judges was not a godly period, but God's perseverance prevailed. God's perseverance prevailed through King Saul, King David's failures, and the divided kingdom. However, when the people trusted more in their gift to God than in God Himself, God abandoned them to the consequences of their own wickedness.

There is an end to God's patience! Even God will end enduring abuse!

To delve deeper into the problem, read again 2 Samuel 7:1-7. Then read 1 Kings 9:3. When you read those references with Jeremiah 7:1-11, a reality becomes quite apparent. The temple was King David's idea! God later accepted a human idea though He never commanded the idea. Thus a human gift was given to God, God accepted the gift, and the people placed their confidence/trust in their gift rather than in the God who lead their forefathers from Egypt and gave them Canaan. The people had more confidence in their gift than they had in God! In fact, they used the gift in an attempt to manipulate God so they could justify ungodly behavior. Do you blame God for being so angry?

When we place our trust in our gifts and actions instead of God Himself, the truth is that we trust in ourselves more than we trust in God. This is not an "anti-obedience" statement but a human motive statement. If we deceive in regard to our "whys," we deceive ourselves—not God.

That approach sounds so much like us it is scary! We sacrifice for buildings, furnishings, parking lots, and a host of other things that are not wrong of themselves. Then we declare our faithfulness because we gave to things that primarily benefit us. We are spiritually comforted when or if we can say, "Look what we did," rather than devoting ourselves to living by God's values. Often our lives do not reflect God and His values. It is so easy to trust our gifts instead of trusting the God to whom we give our gifts.

We find it very convenient to trust the good things we do rather than to trust in God. God accepts us for our dedication to holy living, not because we prove ourselves "profitable." God's acceptance always will be based on His mercy and grace, never on our deceived sense of profitability. It is not a matter of procedures but a dedication to holy living that depends on God.

Care to look honestly in the mirror with the determination to see yourself accurately? Do you trust what God did for us in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, or do you trust the gifts you have given to God? The message of this lesson is NOT anti-gift to God. It IS anti-trust in the gifts we give to God. It is an examination of our motives when we give to God.

The stress is on what God did for us in Jesus' death, not on what we do for God. It is what God did that made forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, sanctification, etc. possible. All we do is respond to what God made possible. While what we do is a necessary response, it did not create the mercy and grace of God.

Never forget that God cannot be manipulated. Trust God, not what you do for or give to God. The uniqueness of relationship with God is found in what He gave us, not in what we give Him.

If we deceive ourselves into thinking we can manipulate God, we revert to a basic concept in idolatry. We can respond to God, but we cannot manipulate God. We must never forget that God brought us into existence. We did not give God existence.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What do Jeremiah 1 and 5 say to you about the inhabitants of Jerusalem?

They were an extremely wicked people.

2. How did God express His contempt?

God expressed His contempt through the message of Jeremiah.

3. How do Jeremiah 8:18-22, 15:15-18, and 20:7-18 show Jeremiah's task was discouraging?

Jeremiah 8:18-22—discusses Jeremiah's grief and internal suffering.

Jeremiah 15:15-18—discusses the pain of his persecution.

Jeremiah 20:7-18—discusses his misery to the point that he regrets being born.

4. What seems to be the reasoning of Jerusalem's inhabitants?

a) *The temple contains God's presence.*

b) *Jerusalem contains the temple.*

c) *God will protect the temple.*

d) *Nothing bad can happen to Jerusalem or its people.*

5. God did not focus His anger in what ways?

God did not focus His anger on the temple or its procedures.

6. What belief was a deception?

To believe that God would not act against Jerusalem and its people because Jerusalem contained the temple was to be deceived.

7. How should God's anger (the problem) be addressed?

It would only be addressed if they changed the way they behaved and treated other people.

8. What was the foundation problem?

The foundation problem was the way they lived every day.

9. Why should they look at Shiloh?

It proved God would act against the wickedness of His people regardless of what facility they had.

10. God tried to get their attention, but they responded how?

They responded with deafness to God's warnings.

11. Discuss this statement: The people had more confidence in their gift to God than their God.

The discussion should include the understanding that to trust our gifts instead of our God is to trust in ourselves and to try to manipulate God.

Lesson Six

The Transition

Texts: 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-21; 1 Peter 2:5-10

The objective of this lesson: To emphasize that the transition from God's presence being in a geographical place to understanding God's presence is in a people is a huge transition.

Transition is a huge challenge! People like the way things have been. The older people become, the more their desire for "important things" to remain unchanged tends to increase. People like the familiar. They like needed improvements they understand, but they do not like radical change.

Transition is not easily made. Typically, the older we become, the more difficult it becomes for us to make significant changes. When we find change difficult, we find comfort in refusing to correct. In that situation, it seems "right" or "good" to refuse to change. Often a refusal to change involves more than just a consideration of "right and wrong" or "desirable corrections."

That is especially true in the practice of religion. A religious practice may not be very old. The practice may involve questions older than the practice itself. However, the questions do not matter—if the religious practice is as old as parents or grandparents, the religious practice is ancient. The practice is not to be questioned or changed, and is without doubt correct.

Nowhere is transition made with more difficulty than in religious matters. Typically, people ignore valid questions in a refusal to see the validity of appropriate improvements (improvements that would move us closer to God's will and intent.)

If we think religious change is challenging today, can we begin to imagine the challenges religious change produced 2000 years ago?

People after Jesus' death and resurrection faced enormous religious transition (transition God wanted).

Some of those challenges involved truly ancient practices. There was holy ground, holy sites, holy geographical turf, temples, multiple gods, and idolatry. Temples were not built anywhere and everywhere like today's church buildings. They were built at an appropriate site on appropriate geography. If a church building is built, the two primary questions are, "Is cheap land available? Is the place big enough for the buildings now needed, for future expansion, and for the vehicles we will bring?" Their questions might be, "Has the god touched this place? Is the site located on holy ground?" We think about convenient parking; they thought about pilgrimages. We think about ease and accessibility; they thought about meaning and difficulty.

Those challenges involved their concepts of holy, concepts of appropriate approaches to God, concepts of HOW to worship, concepts of WHERE to worship, and concepts of what constitutes worship. The transformation from a temple/animal sacrifice worship to a worship centered in the execution/resurrection of a man that was offered by faith is a radical transformation.

Lest you think such considerations are strictly pagan, Moses stood on holy ground and was commanded by God to remove his sandals in Exodus 3:4, 5. A cloud (not people) determined when the tabernacle would travel and where it would go (Exodus 40:34-38). A cloud showed God's acceptance of the tabernacle and the temple (Exodus 40:34, 35 and 1 Chronicles 5:14). The Jewish temple seemed to be built on the site where Abraham was called to offer Isaac (Genesis 22:1, 2, 14), and the site where King David sacrificed to keep a plague from entering Jerusalem (2 Samuel 24:15-25). Sacrifices were not to be offered at cultic sites (which were numerous in Canaan), but at one geographical place selected by God (Deuteronomy 12:1-14). The place the devout Jew performed a religious act definitely mattered to God.

Temple worship was God approved. Animal sacrifice was God approved. Worship through Jesus Christ is God approved. The transition was not from things that were wrong to things that were right. The transition was from the inferior to the infinitely good. God does things in Jesus Christ no human could ever do for self. The divine acts in Jesus' death and resurrection are superior in every way to any human act any person could perform anywhere anytime.

That is drastically different from the Christian concept of today. Evangelistic Christian thought stresses that there are no holy places, no holy sites, and no divine geography. Evangelistic Christian concepts stress that it is not a matter of WHERE but a matter of WHAT. Evangelistic Christians stress divine acceptability is based on people's behavior, not on place. Evangelistic Christians often quote Matthew 18:20 noting where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name—the emphasis is on people, not geographical place.

We are so accustomed to a people-centered spiritual focus that we experience difficulty trying to relate to a temple/animal sacrifice focus. While we reject a temple focus, many hold dear a focus on the "appropriate" uses of the place of assembly of Christians on Sunday morning.

The gospels make it quite evident that Jesus did not shun the Jewish temple area in Jerusalem. Matthew made these points: (1) Part of Jesus' early temptation occurred in the temple environment (4:5). (2) He is greater than the temple [God's presence in him is more significant than God's presence in the temple] (12:6). (3) The temple was a place of prayer [recall Solomon's dedication], not a place of commerce (21:12, 13). (4) The temple area was one of the places Jesus healed (21:14). (5) The temple area was one of the places Jewish leadership challenged Jesus (21:23). (6) Jesus declared that the temple area, as impressive as it was, was temporary (24:1, 2). (7) Jesus taught publicly in the temple complex (26:55).

In all the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John references, remember the following things. (2) Jesus was born a Jew. (2) As a Jewish adult, he was subject to Jewish culture and to God's commands in Judaism. (3) To reject the temple would be a rejection of something God accepted. (4) Opposition to inappropriate temple usages is not the same thing as a rejection of the temple itself. (5) When in Jerusalem, Jesus was obviously active in the temple complex.

Mark made these points: (1) When Jesus visited Jerusalem, he taught in the temple complex and emphasized the original purpose of that complex (11:15-18). (2) He confronted the Jewish leadership there (11:27-33). (3) It was a site for Jesus discussing the Christ, hypocrisy, and the basis of generosity to God (12:35-44). (4) Jesus presented the temporary nature of the temple (13:1-8). (5) During the last week of his physical life, it was the site of daily teaching (14:48, 49).

Luke made these points: (1) Jesus was presented at the temple as any Jewish firstborn male was to be. Jesus' mission [when he was a baby] was confirmed then by Simeon and Anna (2:22-38). (2) When Jesus was 12, he was in the temple area learning and questioning (2:41-51). (3) The temple complex was the site of one of Jesus' early temptations (4:9-12). (4) The temple area was the setting for some of Jesus' parables (18:10). (4) The temple was to be a place of prayer, not a place for taking advantage of people (19:45, 46). (5) The last week of his physical life, Jesus taught daily in the temple area, and was extremely popular with the people (19:47, 48; 21:37). (6) Jesus was confronted in the temple area by the leaders of the temple complex about his teaching and actions (20:1-8). (7) He stressed the temple was temporary (21:5, 6). (8) The last week of Jesus' physical life, people came early to the temple complex to hear Jesus teach (21:38). (9) Those who controlled the temple including its Jewish security force were among those who arrested Jesus (22:52, 53). The disciples [11 of the 12] continued in the temple praising God after Jesus' ascended (24:53).

These things are mentioned by John: (1) Jesus “cleansed” the temple area (2:14-16). (2) Jesus talked to the man he healed at the pool of Bethesda in the temple area (5:14). (3) Jesus taught in the temple area (7:14, 28ff; 8:2, 20, 59; 10:23). (4) The arrested Jesus affirmed he taught publicly in synagogues and the temple (18:19, 20).

Acts documented the role the temple played in the life of the early Jewish Christians (all converts to Jesus Christ were Jewish in Acts 2-10). (1) The original converts visited the temple area daily (2:46). (2) The first recorded miracle performed by Christians was performed as Peter and John went into the temple area (3:1, 2). (3) The first arrest of Christians occurred because Peter and John were teaching in the temple area affirming Jesus was an example of resurrection (4:1-3). (5) When the arrested apostles were released by an angel, they were commanded to teach in the temple area, which they did (5:20, 21). (6) The apostles taught daily in the temple area (5:42).

There are numerous things to be remembered when seeing the involvement of Jewish Christian converts with the Jewish temple. (1) The temple, from the first, was a place of prayer (1 Kings 8:22-54). (2) If a devout Jew wished to be close to God, he or she went to the temple (Luke 2:25-32, 36-38). (3) Devotion to God expressed in the temple complex was NOT anti-God. There was no attempt of a devout Jew who was a Christian to rebel against God by going to the temple. (4) A person does not have to deny a culturally-approved way to approach the Father of Jesus Christ in order to be Christian. (5) God worked through Abraham to produce Israel. God worked through Israel to produce Jesus. God works through the resurrected Jesus to reach the world. See God’s work as an unfolding, not as disconnected segments.

Consider the enormous change for both Jewish and gentile Christians to understand that the Christian temple was not a geographical place with a structure, but the Christian temple was people who were in Jesus Christ, who placed their trust in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-21; 1 Peter 2:5-10). That was a radical change!

The transition from a geographical place containing God’s presence to a people with faith in Jesus Christ containing God’s presence is an enormous transition.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Discuss this: People, by God's direction, recognized holy sites to be geographical sites.

The discussion should include an understanding that there were holy sites. Often this allowed people who lived in a world filled with idolatry to honor God in a way that was familiar in honoring gods.

2. Discuss Jesus' physical association with Israel's temple in Jerusalem.

Included in the discussion should be the understanding that Jesus had much contact with the temple. All Jewish people who were godly did.

3. Discuss the early converts' association with the Jewish temple.

The discussion should include that Acts verified such contact happened.

4. What was a radical change for Christian converts?

The change from a holy site/building that contained God's presence to a people who had faith in Jesus Christ containing God's presence was a radical change.

Lesson Seven

Transferring the Meaning of the Temple

Texts: from previous studies and in the lesson

The purpose of this lesson: To emphasize that the Jewish temple in Jerusalem was holy because God's presence made it holy.

The temple contained the presence of God (1 Kings 9:3 and 2 Chronicles 7:1-3, 12). All the properties that were associated with the temple existed—not because of geography, not because of value, not because of expensive preparation, not because of human claims—because of the fact the God allowed His presence to be in that place. Without God's presence in the temple, the temple would be just another expensive house built by people.

It was God's presence—and no other factor—that made the temple holy. Interestingly, when the Israelites did not understand holiness, they continued to “see” the temple as holy. They existed by an interesting disconnect between wicked behavior and “holy” sites.

This central point must not be missed and cannot be exaggerated. The presence of God made the temple God's temple! Without God's presence the temple was just another expensive building built by humans for religious purposes. Idols often had expensive buildings built for them. *The* thing that distinguished *the* temple of God from the idolatrous buildings/altars Solomon later built to honor idols (1 Kings 11:1-8; 2 Kings 23:10-14) was the fact that God's presence was in the temple. God's temple exists when that temple contains God's presence. Without God's presence, it is not God's temple.

The only thing that made the temple holy was God's presence. Human behavior never made the temple holy.

In what ways did the temple benefit Israelites (and non-Israelites)?

The first consideration: The primary threat to a correct understanding of God in the generations of the Bible (early and late) was idolatry. The biblical injunctions against idolatry were based on the understandings that follow.

Idolatry was the primary threat to a correct understanding of God in the Bible. It was a concept of disinterested deities controlled and manipulated by humans versus a self-sustaining deity on which humans had to be dependent. See 1 Kings 18:25-39 as an example.

(a) The god or goddess was created by human concept or effort. Isaiah 44:15-20 spoke of the foolishness of taking a tree, making a fire, cooking a meal, warming oneself, and (from the same tree) making a god, worshipping it, and asking it for deliverance. Paul in Acts 17:24-31 contrasted the concept of the living, creator God with the concept of an idol by appealing to God's ability to create, His self sufficiency, His nearness, and His ability to sustain human existence. Idols, in contrast, were the product of human art, thought, and ignorance.

An idol had to depend on people even if it was to be moved. Consider the irony of depending for deliverance on something the person made. Consider the irony of depending on a god that had no interest in you.

(b) Thus, God the Creator, was not to be reduced to the concept of "one among many," nor was He to be considered the product of human effort or thought. Exodus 20:1-17 (the Ten Commandments) was given to the young nation of Israel who previously existed in a society that honored idolatry. God produced this nation (Israel) from Abraham. God's acts delivered these people (who were slaves) from Egypt to be God's people. Through Israel would come the Christ through whom God would reach out to all people (see Isaiah 49:6 and Luke 2:29-32). In these ten commands, the first four are centered in how this new nation should honor the living God who delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Obviously they did not know how to treat God—they knew how to treat idols, but they did not know how to treat God.

Stress God's ultimate intent in the Christ.

The basic understandings of how to treat God were these:

- (1) He was not to be regarded as one among many—to do so was to insult God!
- (2) He was not to be reduced to the "form" of an idol.
- (3) He was to be respected above all else.
- (4) He was to be the source of their dependence.

Stress God's independence of humans—God would still be there and function if all humans denied Him and His existence.

The six commands that followed declared how they should treat each other—or human-to-human treatment. Consider something inherent in these Ten Commandments and their order: only if they knew how to treat God would they understand how to treat each other. Treating God as though He were an idol would result in ungodly treatment of each other. The last six commands surely suggest they did not know how to treat each other! This deficiency did not exist because they had no previous religious exposure. It existed because (1) they did not know the living, Creator God, and (2) they did not comprehend His moral values.

Stress that humans do not learn how to treat humans correctly simply because they experience some form of religious exposure. Knowing how to treat the living God is directly related to humans knowing how to treat humans—for all humans are made in the image and likeness of God.

The second consideration: The presence of the Holy God made the temple holy. The temple could be considered by people to be holy because it was declared to be a religious place. The temple could be considered by people to be holy because of its geographical location and the history of that place. The temple could be considered by people to be holy because of the human functions performed in that building. However, all of that is insufficient. It is based on a human concept of holiness.

Stress the concept of made. That which belongs to God is holy.

How would those concepts of holiness be insufficient? Why would the human definition of holiness be different? The human concept and definition of holiness is inadequate because such concepts/definitions are typically based on restricted access, restricted purposes, and human designation. In contrast, God's basic concept of holiness is based on being, on who He is. There is a significant difference in human forms/practices and divine being. Human forms/practices can designate appropriate procedures to be followed. God's being can make something holy. There is an enormous difference between respecting what is declared holy and actually making something holy because the divine presence is there. It is the basic difference between a human acknowledgement/declaration and a divine actuality. For humans to say something is holy is a far cry from God making something holy because His presence is there.

Contrast the idolatrous human concept of holiness with God's actual holiness.

The basic divine concept of holy is the absence of any sin, the absence of expressions of sin, or the absence of the taint of evil. Thus, there is complete righteousness. There is nothing human that is totally separated from sin and evil in all their expressions. Only God is absolutely separated from all sin/evil; only God is pure righteousness. Thus, the concept of sanctification or belonging exclusively to God becomes the commitment of the person who is directed by God.

Associate the concept of sinlessness with holiness. Help your students see the impossible problem of a human being free from sin through human effort.

The temple was holy because God's presence was there as it was nowhere else. Ideally, people who went to the temple wished to belong to God exclusively. That is why wicked people who had no desire to abandon wickedness so offended God, even when those people did the "right" things (see Isaiah 1:10-15, or Jeremiah 6:20, or Amos 5:21-24). The reason prayers prayed at the temple or in the direction of the temple were effective was due to the fact that the temple contained God's presence, not because it was declared by humans to be a religious place. God, not human declarations, made the temple holy.

End the lesson by stressing the presence of God makes something holy. The temple did not possess "magic." It possessed the presence of God.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What central point must not be missed? Discuss the importance of that understanding.

The central point was that God's presence made the temple holy.

The discussion should grasp the concept of made.

2. What was the first consideration of the importance/blessings of the temple?

The first consideration was that idolatry was the primary threat to a correct understanding of God (in the Bible).

3. The god or goddess was what? What did Isaiah 44:15-20 say?

The god or goddess was created by human concept or effort. (People recognize God; they produce idols.)

Isaiah 44 discussed a person taking a tree, making a fire, cooking a meal, warming himself, and finally making a god to whom he prayed for deliverance.

4. God the Creator could not be reduced to what? Use Exodus 20:1-17 to illustrate that fact.

God the Creator cannot be reduced to one among many.

God in Exodus 20:1-6 made it quite plain that He alone was God.

5. What are the basic understandings of how to treat God? What would they not understand without that awareness?

a) *He is not one among many.*

b) *He cannot be reduced to the "form" of an idol.*

c) *He is to be respected above all else.*

d) *He is the source of dependence.*

They would not know how to treat each other if they did not know how to treat God.

6. What was the second consideration? Discuss the divine concept of holy.

The second consideration: The presence of God made the temple holy.

The divine concept of holy is complete separation from sin/evil and the absence of any expression of sin/evil.

Lesson Eight

The Change

Text: 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17

The purpose of this lesson: To stress that God sees a Christian congregation as His temple representing Him.

While there was a continuation from Judaism to Christianity (God worked through Judaism to provide the Christ on which Christianity is founded), also there are some powerful contrasts between Judaism and Christianity. One of those contrasts is seen in the existence and the role of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Many insights are gained into Christianity through understanding the perspectives and practices of first-century Judaism.

There are genuine contrasts between first-century Judaism and the Christianity of the New Testament. (For example, proselytism, the salvation of all people, salvation based on faith rather than ancestry, etc.) However, one should approach God's work throughout the Bible as a continuation that had the single objective from the problem's beginning (the problem of sin and evil). God was determined to produce the Christ to solve what people could not solve of themselves. God was continuously at work in differing ways as He pursued a single objective.

Both Judaism and idolatry (in most of idolatry's forms) were geography oriented. The sites that were selected for altars or religious buildings commonly had to be "holy" sites. These religious sites could be designated/looked upon as being holy for a variety of reasons. *Prior to erecting sacrificial altars or religious buildings*, there commonly was a "reason" for regarding the place appropriate for the religious purpose. Examples of this view *prior to the existence of Israel as a nation or the existence of the tabernacle or temple* can be seen in Genesis 8:13-22; 12:7, 8; 23:7-14; 26:22-25; 28:10-17 (note especially verse 17); 33:18-20; and 35:1-15.

While the concept of "holy geography" is foreign to many Christians' thinking, it was a basic view in the Old Testament and a common view in the New Testament.

In Judaism, the site used for holy purposes was holy [thus, there was "holy" geography] (consider Deuteronomy 12:1-14). In the Christianity revealed in the New Testament, there is no emphasis on a "holy" geography. While it is true that (1) Jewish converts to the resurrected Jesus Christ honored the Jewish temple as containing the presence of God (consider Acts 2:46 and 3:1) and that (2) Jewish converts and gentile converts did express faith in God in

contrasting religious acts (consider Romans 14:1-15:3), there was no “stress of necessity” placed on geographical sites. The Christian regarded everything to be holy because (1) God the Creator is the source of everything, and (2) everything has the potential of being sanctified. Consider Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

While the nation of Israel had to participate in sacrificial worship to God at a single place, such is not required of Christians in the New Testament. The Christian view of “holy” differs from Jewish concept of “holy” in basic ways. Both see “holy” as separated for God’s use, but the “how” often differs.

One of the huge contrasts between Judaism and Christianity is in what is considered temple. In Judaism temple was a place, a geographical site. This fact must not be emphasized in ways that are not true. God’s concept was that holy or penitent people would come to a holy place to praise Him through animal sacrifice and to make petition to Him through prayers. However, animal sacrifices and prayers were ineffective, were an insult to God, *if holy or penitent people did not come to the temple.* Even if the animal sacrifices were correct, the methods of offering were correct, and the place was correct, God was insulted if the people were wicked and not repentant (read again Isaiah 1:10-15) The fact that unrepentant, wicked people came to the temple never deceived God! Being at the temple did not transform wicked lives (determined to continue wicked practices) into righteous lives.

A huge deception under Judaism or Christianity was/is that wicked people dedicated to wicked pursuits and motives can deceive God by obscuring their wickedness with correct procedures. With God, correct procedures are meaningful when those procedures come from holy or penitent people.

In Christianity, believing people who are devoted to obeying and following the resurrected Jesus are God’s temple. Thus, the deliberate, understood wickedness of the man or woman converted to the resurrected Jesus Christ is an attack on God’s temple. The congregation in Corinth was riddled with wicked acts, wicked attitudes, and wicked practices. These Christians practiced division (chapters 1:10-4:21), were sexually immoral (chapter 5); were justice driven--not compassionate (chapter 6:1-10); were inconsistently judgmental (chapter 6:12-20); were confused about marriage (chapter 7); were confused about confronting idolatry in the converted (chapter 8); were confused about Paul’s example (chapter 9); were confused about the appropriate presentation of self in worship (chapter 11:1-16); were confused about the Lord’s Supper (chapter 11:17-34); were confused about the purpose of spiritual gifts (chapter 12); were confused about the role of love among Christians (chapter 13); were confused about the importance of edification (chapter 14); were confused about resurrection (chapter 15); and were confused about Paul’s collection (chapter 16:1-9).

To attack a congregation or a part of a congregation is to attack God's work. Remember, a growing congregation contains multiple generations, those with much wisdom and knowledge and those with little, spiritually mature and immature, degrees of spiritual ignorance, etc. Nurturing instead of attacking is not easily or simply done! God's objective is not perfection but growth.

Twice in this massive spiritual confusion Paul used the fact that Christians are to view themselves as God's temple to address the Corinthian Christians' massive spiritual confusion. The first is in 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17. The problem Paul dealt with was the problem of their internal division. Of the many spiritual problems this congregation had, Paul dealt with this problem first. Paul regarded this problem as foundational to all their problems—1:10-4:21 dealt with the problem of their division in some way. Paul wrote more about their division than he wrote regarding any other problem they had!

Internal division seems to have been Paul's priority concern at Corinth. To understand that Paul addressed their problems by comparing them to a temple or sanctuary would have been profoundly meaningful then as those people lived in the time of temples and temple procedures/etiquette. Paul's illustration likely meant much more to them than it means to us.

One of the approaches he used was centered on the realization that the congregation was God's temple. He began with "Do you not know..." (3:16)? It is appropriately assumed this was NOT the first time they were exposed to this concept. "You are God's sanctuary because God's Spirit lives in you collectively as a congregation. If a converted person is at fault in destroying God's sanctuary, God will destroy that person! God's sanctuary is holy, and you (collectively) are that sanctuary." Internal division is destructive to God's purposes. Internal division results in the wrath of God. To cause division within a congregation attacks God's work in Jesus Christ in a basic way that guarantees God's anger—and He will act in His anger!

The transition from a temple being a place of altars and animal sacrifices to a people was not an easy transition! Though they likely had been told (that concept), they had not completed the transition. Paul was very plain about the importance of making the transition! To attack God's temple made God angry enough to destroy. That was clearly understood by them! Paul rarely pictured God as destroying a Christian. However, destroying God's temple would anger God so much the He would destroy the destroyer!

As casual as Christians are about creating congregational division, as justified as Christians seem about generating congregational division, Christians today must not understand the seriousness Paul attached to that problem. Paul attached this seriousness to congregational division for two reasons. (1) Such division is a fundamental attack on God's purposes. (2) Such

division is a failure to recognize who every Christian is in Christ. No person can honor God while holding those two basic misconceptions. Those who are a part of God's temple cannot attack God's presence in self or in others in Christ.

Promoting or creating internal division is extremely dangerous spiritually! An attack on a congregation is an attack on God and His eternal purposes.

For Thought and Discussion

1. In what way was there a continuation between Judaism and Christian?

God was continually at work to bring the world the Christ.

2. Both Judaism and idolatry were what? That differs from New Testament Christianity how?

Both were geographical site oriented. There was no emphasis in the Christianity of the New Testament on a "holy" geography.

3. Use the temple to illustrate a huge contrast between Judaism and Christianity.

The illustration should include this: the Jewish temple in Jerusalem was focused on a geographical site. Christianity in the New Testament was focused on the people in Christ being God's temple.

4. What never deceived God? The temple never transformed what?

Wicked, unrepentant people never deceived God even if they did “correct things with right procedures.” Correct temple procedures did not transform wicked behavior into righteous behavior.

5. How can Christians attack God's temple?

When those declaring themselves to be Christian use wickedness with deliberateness and understanding to attack a congregation, they attack God's temple.

6. Discuss how the Corinthian congregation had wicked acts, attitudes, and practices.

The congregation at Corinth had internal division, were sexually immoral, were justice driven, were judgmental, were confused about marriage, about confronting idolatry in the converted, about Paul's example, about the presentation of self in worship, about the Lord's Supper, about spiritual gifts, about the role of love, about edification, about resurrection, and about Paul's collection.

7. Twice Paul addressed their massive spiritual confusion in what way?

Paul used the temple twice to address their confusion.

8. Discuss Paul's treatment of their internal division.

The discussion should include an understanding that internal division is destructive to God's purposes.

9. Discuss the fact that internal division is destructive to God's purposes.

The discussion should include the understanding that internal division destroys people instead of saving people. It produces a divine anger that also destroys the destroyer.

10. Give two reasons for internal division being serious.

a) *It is a fundamental attack on God's purposes.*

b) *It is a failure to understand every person in Christ is a Christian.*

11. Those who are a part of God's temple cannot do what? Why?

They cannot attack God's presence in self or in others in Christ. God's temple is composed of all who are in Christ—God does not ask for your permission to extend forgiveness to other Christians.

Lesson Nine

The Individual

Text: 1 Corinthians 6:15-20

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, Paul declared, “You (collectively) are God’s temple; God’s Spirit continually lives in you.” Paul declared that internal division within the congregation was indefensible because the congregation was God’s temple (sanctuary) containing God’s Spirit. Thus, internal division was inappropriate behavior for a local group composed of men and women who were in Christ. The plural pronoun Paul used to indicate he was addressing the congregation is seen in English translations: in the King James Version (contrasting “ye”—plural—(3:16), with “any man” (3:17), and in the Phillips Modern English translation or the New International Version which both contrast “you yourselves” (3:16) with “anyone” (3:17).

In last week’s text (in the same letter as today’s text) Paul condemned internal division within the congregation at Corinth as an attack on God’s temple—which was the congregation.

In today’s text, Paul spoke of the individual Christian as God’s temple. The context is sexual involvement of a Christian *by personal choice* with a prostitute. Paul said this was inappropriate behavior for a person who has surrendered self to Christ. The argument Paul made is basically the same—the individual Christian contained God’s Spirit.

Today’s text concerns itself with the choice of a Christian to be involved in sexual intercourse with a person—a prostitute—when there is no thought of the commitment of marriage. Paul’s approach is much more than “that is an immoral act”—his approach: that the choice to engage in such sexual intercourse (which was common) was a violation of Christian commitment. The violation of Christian commitment insulted God by making His temple “unclean” (unsuitable for God’s presence—for the concept of inappropriateness making an assembly unclean, consider Deuteronomy 23:1-6).

So which is it? Is a congregation God’s temple? Or is the individual Christian God’s temple? Both! Why both? The same thing makes both the congregation and the individual Christian God’s temple—possession of God’s Spirit. A congregation is a collection of men and women who have given their lives to Jesus Christ. Christians are a people who possess God’s Spirit. Whether as individuals or as a congregation, Christians behave as persons who possess God’s Spirit. The presence of God is in them whether they are together or they are pursuing their lives individually. Ungodliness had NO role in their collective or individual behavior. Both internal division (in the congregation) and sexual immorality (in the individual) were/are ungodly.

Stress that in both the Jewish temple and idolatrous temples, there were acts that were inappropriate which contaminated that temple. The people to whom Paul wrote were familiar with and would not question that concept.

The meaning and application of this text has been/is much discussed. Two things must be remembered. (1) What today's Christians would regard as undesirable sexual involvement would not even be considered immoral by many in the first century. (2) The existence of "choice" did not exist for many in slavery. A slave had to do as he or she was instructed to do by an owner. A Christian slave's options were extremely limited. There was a vast difference in being an agreeable, willing, pursuing prostitute and in being a slave. There was a vast difference between pursuing prostitutes as one was motivated and controlled by sexual desire and being a slave.

In (1), those who are not Christian neither saw nor acknowledged harm in "no commitment" sexual intercourse. There would be a distinct difference in the Christian's choice to engage in "no commitment" sexual intercourse and society's view of "no commitment" sexual intercourse. In (2), the emphasis is on "choice," not merely on the act. Both would be quite relevant to the societies of Paul's time.

There was an old history in idolatry of regarding sexual intercourse as a fertility rite. There was an ancient history in idolatry of "sacred prostitutes." It could be considered a religious act to involve oneself in temple prostitution. There was also the common act of prostitution that was based on nothing more than the sexual desire of the person. In those two, what most Christians today would consider to be sexually immoral was in the first century (especially among non-Jewish people) common practice. (If you as a Christian view this as strange practices and concepts, have you heard of people today engaging in sexual intercourse for personal gratification without any form of commitment, or an unmarried man and woman living together, or an unmarried man and woman joyfully, deliberately having a child? Perhaps the strangest consideration today is that such sexual intercourse and having children without marriage is considered wonderful and approved in some situations, but shameful and unapproved in other situations.)

For the person who could make choices, but who was not a Christian, there were many ways to justify "no commitment" sexual intercourse. Paul said the key was found in the understanding that Christians did not think like nor view situations as did people who were not Christians. The values of a Christian were different from the values of people who were not Christian. Today, Christians are too often ignorant of those differences.

Most of us are so far removed from the realities of slavery—the ownership of a person by another person—that we cannot imagine being in an existence that is robbed of choice.

Again, the concept of “choice” is extremely important. For example, even today there is a vast difference in being a rape victim and in pursuing or willingly yielding to “no commitment” sexual intercourse. The demands of slavery could (and often did) surpass the situation of rape.

It is extremely important for you to see and understand Paul’s approach regarding a Christian’s willing sexual involvement with a prostitute. Paul’s approach: As a Christian, you knowingly, willingly committed your body to Jesus Christ in order that God might live in you through His Spirit. Because you made that commitment to God through Jesus Christ, you are not free to involve the same body in other commitments. Involvement of your body in commitment to Jesus Christ and to a prostitute is an insult to God. Such dual commitment to such opposite influences in you is nothing less than a violation of God’s temple. It is nothing less than (1) taking God’s sanctuary suitable for God’s habitation/presence and (2) making that habitation unfit for God’s presence. Society may regard such actions as an acceptable behavior, but that behavior is a careless affront to what God is and what you committed yourself to being. In understanding, honor your commitment to God!

The choice to be involved in “no commitment” sexual intercourse was, for the Christian, the choice to insult God because the Christian’s body was no longer a suitable habitation for God’s presence.

God made an unspeakable investment in you! Invest your body to be God’s temple! God’s investment in you through Jesus Christ was not a “partial investment” based on a contradictory commitment! Do not make your investment of your body in God partial or contradictory.

Christians need a deep, accurate understanding of what God did through Christ to make it possible for the Christian to be a Christian. The Christian’s obedient “thank you” responses to God are quite limited. The chosen use of the body is one of the “thank you” responses a Christian can make.

Paul’s point would have been profound and clear to those who lived among temples. “You understood what you were doing when you decided to be a Christian! Your decision was based on choice, not deception! Do not attempt to do the impossible now—to be godly and ungodly at the same time by using your body for contradictory purposes! It cannot be done! You cannot

invest the same body in opposing pursuits! You can only devote your physical existence to the pursuit of God or to the pursuit of godlessness!"

Paul used an understood illustration to emphasize the spiritual seriousness of making what was a socially acceptable choice—he did not merely say, “Do not do that!” It was important for the Christian to understand why “I do not do that.” It was important for the Christians at Corinth to understand that more was involved than a condemned act.

Commitment to Christ must be an understood commitment! Note that Paul’s appeal is based on commitment and the use of physical existence. Christian existence is an understood commitment, not a mindless ritual.

Much thought needs to be given to “understood commitment.” Much more is involved in being Christian than observing biblical Christian acts and rituals.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What was God’s temple in 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17? In 6:15-20?

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 the temple was the congregation at Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 the temple was the Christian individual at Corinth.

2. How could both be considered God’s temple (sanctuary)?

Whether Christians collectively or individually are considered, they collectively or individually possess God’s Spirit. A congregation was merely an assembly of Christian individuals. It was having God’s Spirit in them that made them God’s temple.

3. What two things should be remembered?

- a) *What today's Christian would regard as undesirable sexual involvement would not be considered immoral by many in the first century.*
- b) *The existence of "choice" did not exist for many in slavery.*

4. Discuss how many could consider sexual intercourse without marriage commitment as okay.

The discussion should include the facts that they might refer to fertility rites, or sacred prostitutes, or the rightness of responding to a natural desire. Many considered such sexual intercourse as a religious act.

5. Illustrate how today people consider sexual intercourse without marriage commitment okay.

This discussion will include what the individual student considers to be an illustration.

6. What was Paul's approach to willing sexual involvement with a prostitute?

Paul's approach: The Christian was not free to use his/her body in conflicting commitments. To choose "no responsibility" sexual intercourse insulted God by ignoring the commitment the Christian made to Him.

7. What was/is an insult to God? Why?

Christian "no responsibility" sexual intercourse is an insult to God. It ignores the commitment the Christian made to God when he/she entered God's spiritual family and accepted forgiveness and other spiritual blessings.

8. Discuss God's investment in a Christian.

The discussion should include the things God does for us in Jesus Christ.

9. What did they make to God when they became a Christian?

They made an understood commitment to God to use their bodies only for godly pursuits and involvements. They made a choice, and the choice was not based on deception.

10. Discuss the meaning of understood commitment.

The discussion should include (a) the desire to learn God's values and (b) the desire to use the body only for godly purposes. That does not mean all the choices are evident at the moment of becoming a Christian, but it does mean the person knows the type of being he/she wishes to be—a person who belongs to God through Jesus Christ in all matters. One is devoted to the reality of eternal existence rather than transitory physical existence which is certain to decline and end.

Lesson Ten

The Binding That Clashes

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

The purpose of this lesson: To stress the urgency of Christians considering the long-term significance of commitments they make as individuals. Making a present commitment may forecast a future problem that places personal allegiance to Jesus Christ in jeopardy.

Do you think it is demanding to be a Christian today (I agree--it is demanding!)? The more secular a society becomes, the more demanding the challenge to be a spiritually focused Christian becomes. The more secular a society becomes, the more avenues of temptation develop for the man or woman committed to a spiritual existence in Jesus Christ. Secularism in an individual or a society changes acceptable values, changes acceptable priorities, changes the definition of morality, and changes concepts of "right and wrong" and "good and bad."

It has never been simple or easy to be a Christian. Rarely are the values advanced and supported by society the values advanced and supported by those who give their lives to Jesus Christ. The objectives of those in Jesus Christ are not the objectives of those who do not place their trust in Jesus Christ. Today, the dividing line seems to be the line between secular objectives and spiritual objectives.

If you think it is demanding to be a Christian today, transport yourself back to the first Christian converts and the first Christian congregations. (We are not as likely to feel sorry for ourselves if we honestly observe those who obviously had worst circumstances than we have! Such observations do not eliminate the challenges of our situation, but such honest observations improve our perspective.) Suppose you and your spouse *before* conversion belonged to a religion that encouraged involvement in "sacred prostitution" as a religious act. One of you converts to Christianity. Would your conversion impact your marriage?

The object is NOT merely to dismiss today's challenges or to say that someone's struggles should not be struggles at all, but (1) to put our struggles in perspective through comparison and (2) to realize that people who live by faith in God always have known struggle.

Suppose your boss was a devout, practicing idolater. As such, his definition of honesty and being truthful differed significantly with your Christian concepts. He literally could freeze you out

of the local job market. Would your concepts and your boss's concepts clash as together you two pursued "business objectives"?

The concepts of honesty and truthfulness between a Christian and a person who places little or no faith in Jesus Christ always have differed regardless of the time period.

Suppose the person who pretty much controlled your life was "very" into the city's political life. This person was prominent in business and could afford to be a significant force in the city's affairs—this person had serious "clout" that reached far beyond the city. To maintain that importance, the person had to be actively involved in the most prominent idolatrous religion in the area. Do you think the person's idolatrous involvement would place pressure on your life as a Christian?

The Christian always has faced unjust consequences that resulted from a person who did not believe in Christ being in control of the Christian's life.

The actual scenarios are endless. The point is this: it has never been simple and easy to be godly. It may be more simple for you to be godly in our democratic society than it was for a person who lived in a society controlled by a king or idolatrous forces. This is not an attempt to declare that situations today are simple—situations are not! However, it is not uncommon for situations to be difficult for godly people. Read Hebrews 11:13-16, understanding that this was written to distressed Christians (10:32-39).

Being godly is challenging for any man or woman in any generation. In every situation of hardship, the Christian must never fail to see his/her advantages or count his/her blessings. The objective is not to demean the challenges or say the challenges do not exist, but to put the challenges in perspective.

In our text today, Paul wrote to the same Christians in Corinth that he wrote in the last two lessons. His directions must have been startling considering the realities of their world. Consider a single illustration of the common reality. The world of the Roman Empire functioned on the patronage system. A wealthy man tried to anticipate his future needs. He would, as we would say, put "someone" he thought he might need on a monthly retainer. The "someone" would receive a monthly payment for doing nothing. However, if the wealthy man needed the "someone's" skills and services, the "someone" was to respond to the wealthy man's request immediately and use his abilities in the wealthy man's interests.

Passages in scripture, such as today's text, easily can be misapplied if the circumstance at the time of the writing is not considered. A serious student of the Bible would be blessed in his/her studies by an understanding of the patronage system in the Roman Empire.

That was simply the way business operated. The common issue was NOT "do I agree with the wealthy man's policies, concepts, and methods." The common issues to be addressed were (1) "Do I need the money?" and (2) "Can I deal with the fallout of rejecting the offer of the wealthy man?" It was commonly more of a pragmatic decision than a decision based on idealism. Commonly, the question was more "What do I need right now?" than "What conflict might find me in the future?"

Every adult Christian has experienced a situation when "the right now" looked so wonderful that future potential conflicts were ignored. For the Christian, there is always more to consider than the perceived needs of the present. Also, disappointing the "wrong people" commonly results in unwanted consequences. The decision to be godly is sometimes sacrificial!

Thus it was today's need versus speculation about the future difficulty. The upside was easy--dependable monthly money with little or no effort right now. The downside was the loss of control of self in possible future conflicts. Sound familiar? And you thought today's dilemmas were new!

There are few difficulties a godly person faces today that were not faced in previous generations. The forms may change, but the foundation issues still exist.

First, note that Paul said, "Look ahead to spiritual conflict before you form any bond." Idolatry and Christianity cannot and do not mix (or we might say materialism [Christlessness] and Christianity [spirituality in Christ] cannot and do not mix). The nature of the bond is not the issue—marriage, business, social commitment, etc. The issue is the incompatibility of the forces involved in the situation.

The bond may present itself in "modern forms." However, when entering the obligation of bonds with an ungodly person, little has changed in the basic conflicts that develop. When the basic objectives are incompatible, the bond will produce disappointments and conflicts in the future.

Second, note that, again, Paul used the “we are the temple of the living God” concept to address the problem. The issue was not “What do I want?” The issue was “Who am I?” The issue involved accepting what was approved by society versus being family to God who is the Creator. The Christians at Corinth were declaring that membership in society was as important as being accepted by God as family. Paul said, “You cannot declare both because you (collectively) are God’s temple!” God’s values and society’s values were not the same!

Their understanding of the seriousness of appropriate temple conduct and temple practice would make a profound point if they realized they were the temple. That realization would impact behavior and relationships. Being God’s temple would carry a message that confrontation could never convey.

“Right and wrong” as defined by materialism and “right and wrong” as defined by God are not compatible—in fact they are hostile to each other. Who are we as Christians? We are God’s temple. What would be inappropriate behavior in a pagan temple would be inappropriate in God’s temple! The Christians at Corinth must remember that they are God’s temple!

Christianity is not an occasional function, but a lifestyle. The concern is “Who are you as a person 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in town and on vacation?” not merely “Do you go to church and act godly on Sunday?”

For Thought and Discussion

1. The more secular society becomes, the more demanding being spiritual in Christ becomes.

2. Give 3 illustrations of how demanding it could be to be a Christian in the beginning.
 - a) *Being married to a spouse who is still idolatrous and worships in a fertility cult.*
 - b) *Having an idolatrous boss who defines honesty and truthfulness differently.*
 - c) *Being controlled by an idolatrous person (on the job) who is wealthy, has much influence, and is much into politics.*

3. It has never been simple or easy to be what? Why?

It has never been simple or easy to be godly.

Society is rarely godly, and Christians live and manage in society.

4. Read Hebrews 11:13-16 and 10:32-39 and comment on these scriptures.

Godly people do not "fit" into the material world. They long for an existence in which they "belong."

5. In today's text, whom did Paul write?

He wrote the Corinthian Christians he wrote in 1 Corinthians. He also included other congregations in Achaia.

6. How did the "patronage system" function in the Roman Empire?

The discussion should include the concept "You owe me because I paid you."

7. In the "patronage system," the common issue was not what?

The common issue was not "do I agree with the wealthy man's policies, concepts, and methods."

8. The common issues to be addressed were what two things?

- a) *“Do I need the money?”*
- b) *“Can I deal with the fallout of rejecting the offer?”*

9. The issue was what versus what? The upside was what? The downside was what?

- a) *The issue: need versus speculation about future difficulty.*
- b) *The upside: easy, dependable monthly money that required little or no effort.*
- c) *The downside: the loss of control of self in future conflicts.*

10. What did Paul first say? What was the issue?

- a) *“Look ahead to spiritual conflict before forming a bond.”*
- b) *The issue was incompatibility.*

11. What did Paul say second? What was the issue?

- a) *“We are the temple of the living God.”*
- b) *The issue was “Who am I?” not “What do I want?”*

12. What is not compatible?

The definitions of “right and wrong” in materialism and in Christianity are not compatible.

Lesson Eleven

God's Work and Human Understanding

Text: Ephesians 2:11-22

The objective of this lesson: To stress that God can do things that benefit us and we can struggle with what He did. Our struggles and questions do not mean (or prove) God did not do it.

The text is related to the lesson in the following way: (1) Christians in Ephesus did not understand how God could make people converted from a Jewish background and an idolatrous background to be considered one. (2) Though they did not understand how, God already had reconciled them through Jesus' death. Though not understood, it was a "done deal," an accomplished fact. (3) God needed neither their permission nor their understanding to do what He did. (4) The key to understanding what God accomplished in Christians was to be found in realizing God made them His temple to house His Spirit. Thus, the issue was again "Who are you?" To them, being God's temple to house God's Spirit communicated powerfully.

This was a significant illustration/point to them that is likely of little importance to us.

It seems Christians always have been the victim of misunderstanding how God's work and our actions cooperate to produce our salvation. Hopefully, we understand two things. (1) What God did for each of us in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection is astounding and incredible! (2) In accepting God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, we accept the responsibility to show our appreciation for God's gift (we commonly refer to this as obedience). Both those concepts are accurate. However, understanding how those two concepts work together often results in a basic misunderstanding.

Christians usually have little difficulty in accepting those two concepts as true. The difficulty usually comes when Christians seek to combine those two concepts.

There are those who wish to rely on what God did for us in Jesus in a manner that God did not and does not intend. The incorrect manner usually (in some way) absolves us human beings from any response to God for what He did for us in Jesus. The reasoning: (a) What God did in Jesus defies human understanding. (b) What God did/does for us in Jesus is a gift. (c) We cannot earn God's gift. (d) Therefore, we do nothing to receive the benefits of God's gift.

The incorrect manner of combining those two true concepts commonly results in declaring that humans who respond to God have no responsibility. To say that we cannot earn salvation and to say that we have no responsibility as heirs of salvation are not the same thing—these are two different concepts.

God making Jesus Christ in death and resurrection the foundation of divine grace and mercy does defy human understanding. God loving us so much that He would intervene in human existence to make human eternal salvation possible for everyone is beyond human understanding (consider John 3:16-21 and Romans 5:8-11). Truly, what God makes possible in Jesus' death and resurrection has to be a gift—no human act could deserve what God did for us in Jesus (consider 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, Colossians 1:21-23, and 1 Timothy 1:12-16). Because what He did for us is a gift, there is nothing we can do to earn God's saving acts. Who could earn forgiveness, sanctification, and atonement (consider Romans 11:33-36 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)? The entire concept of human earning is an affront to the concept of divine grace!

The motivation of seeking to be deserving of God's work through Jesus and the motivation of being grateful for what God did through Jesus for us are two different motivations. Because we cannot earn salvation gives us no reason for ingratitude! Gratitude does not eliminate doing or practicing.

The question becomes this: Is there a concept that combines the concept of a gift given and responsibility on the part of the receiver? For certain! There is the concept of assuming responsibility—consider Philippians 2:12, John 3:21, and 1 John 1:6, 7. The person who accepts what God did in Jesus “works” or “practices.”

Inheritance combines the concepts of “gift” and “responsibility.” The New Testament stresses both “gift” and “responsibility in the pursuit of salvation in Christ.

Paul did emphasize the fruit of the Spirit in contrast to the deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-24). He also associated the Spirit's fruit with crucifixion of the flesh's deeds—a deliberate execution of the acts that opposed the cultivation of the Spirit's fruit.

When Paul contrasted fruit of the Spirit and deeds of the flesh, when he associated fruit of the Spirit with crucifixion, he stressed the reality of Christian responsibility.

Peter emphasized what is typically called “the Christian graces” (2 Peter 1:2-11). The Christian individual finds life and godliness if he/she develops these things. The qualities Peter listed were to be diligently pursued. Practicing them would prevent stumbling and grant entrance into the eternal kingdom.

When Peter listed what we call the “Christian graces,” he clearly stressed our responsibility.

Both Paul’s list and Peter’s lists involve doing or practicing God’s values. They declare there is a “doing” that is not related to an “earning.” Does that concept exist? Can there be a “doing” that does not “earn”? Is it possible to be committed to a responsible behavior without the motivation of earning? Can a genuine gift require responsible behavior? Does the responsible behavior earn the gift?

Neither listing associates “responsibility—doing—practicing” with “earning” (the concept of God owing us.)

This concept not only exists, but people use the concept today. The concept is called an inheritance. The gift of inheritance is associated with salvation a number of times in the New Testament—Matthew 25:34, Mark 10:27 (Luke 18:18-23), Luke 10:25-28, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Corinthians 15:50; Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 1:18, 5:5, Colossians 1:12-14, 3:24, Hebrews 1:14, 6:12, 9:15, James 2:5, and 1 Peter 1:3-5, 3:8, 9.

Salvation (in numerous ways) is called an inheritance. People who belong to God “inherit” God’s gifts.

Why inheritance? (1) The first reason is based on the Christians’ relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The New Testament commonly refers to Jesus before his coming, during his earthly stay, and after his ascension as God’s son (consider John 3:16, 17, and 17:1-3, 5). He rules (is Lord) now and will continue to reign until he defeats all God’s enemies. Then he will subject everything (including himself) to God again (see 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Through Jesus Christ, by being in him (Galatians 3:26-29), Christians are family or household to God (Galatians 4:4-7, 1 Timothy 3:14, 15)—remember, the word “church” comes from a Greek word that means “the called out.” Christians are “called out” to be God’s family continually.

Christians are heirs because they are family to God in Christ. Therefore, they have the responsibility to behave like the Holy God's family (consider 1 Peter 2:5-10).

The "inheritance" is founded on "who you are" as a part of God's family, not on what you have done to place God in debt to you. A Christian is an heir because he/she is a responsible part of God's family. Only what God did for us in Christ allows us to be a part of God's family.

(2) The second reason is the concept of inheritance. If a person is to receive an inheritance, the person (a) is qualified and (b) behaves as a qualified heir. Though behavior does not "earn" the gift of the inheritance, failure to act like an heir can remove the gift. In inheritance, there is a gift combined with the behavior of one who is an heir. Also, there certainly is the understood practice of an heir losing the gift of inheritance because of inappropriate behavior (consider 2 Peter 2:20-22).

An inheritance is an unearned gift that considers responsible behavior.

A Christian obeys God because the Christian appreciates all God has done for him/her. The motivation for any and every act of obedience is NOT a desire to "earn." No one can be deserving of God's inheritance of salvation that results in entering God's eternal kingdom to receive eternal life. The motivation is the desire to say "Thank you!" to God as the person learns how to act like a person who is in God's family. To respond to God in obedience for all God did/does for those in Jesus Christ is an expression of gratitude, never a human attempt to earn God's inheritance.

A person does not automatically know how to behave as a family member in the Holy God's family. A good illustration is found in the fact that we do not know how to act when we are forced to interact with circles of people we never associate with.

Again, the question returns--"Who are you?"

For Christians 2000 years ago, the answer was found in "We are God's temple."

For Thought and Discussion

1. What seems to make Christians victims?

We seem to become victims in understanding how to combine God's work in Jesus with our actions to produce salvation.

2. What two things should Christians understand?

a) *What God did for us in Jesus is astounding and incredible.*

b) *Accepting salvation includes accepting responsibility to show appreciation for God's gift.*

3. What does an incorrect understanding of God's grace usually do?

It absolves us humans of any responsibility to respond to God and what He did for us in Jesus Christ.

4. Give the general reasoning used to absolve people of any responsibility in salvation considerations.

- a) *What God did for us in Jesus defies human understanding.*
- b) *What God did is a gift.*
- c) *We cannot earn God's gift.*
- d) *Therefore, we do nothing to receive God's gift.*

5. What is the question that should be answered from scripture?

The question: Does any concept combine the concept of gift and the concept of responsibility?

6. What did Paul say was the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:19-24?

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

7. Give Peter's list in 2 Peter 1:2-11.

Peter's list is faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

8. What is the concept that combines giving divine gifts and human responsibility?

That concept is to inherit or receive an inheritance.

9. What two reasons exist for referring to salvation as an inheritance?

- a) *The Christian's relationship with God as family member (through Jesus Christ).*
- b) *The concept of inheritance.*

10. Explain why Christians should obey God.

The explanation should include the concept of gratitude.

Lesson Twelve

Built Up to Build Together

Text: 1 Peter 2:1-10

The objective of this lesson: To fill us as Christians with a sense of privilege and to urge us toward a sense of responsibility in being God's people.

There is a progression and a purpose. In the progression, we all begin at the same point—the immaturity of a self-focused infant. Begin by considering a baby—not a toddler or a pre-school aged child, but a baby. When a baby wants to eat, the baby lets you know it—whether at 2 a.m. or at noon. The convenience of the parents is not an issue; the issue is “I am hungry!” When the baby becomes uncomfortable in its diapers, the baby lets it be known. When the baby does not feel well because of gas, the baby lets it be known. The schedule of the entire family must yield to the baby's needs and desires. Enormous immaturity expresses itself through self-focus.

Stress how self-focused a baby is because the infant is totally immature.

Every Christian who begins life in Christ is an immature baby. (One major difference in the spiritual infant and the physical infant is found in the fact that the spiritual infant must unlearn a former existence to learn a new existence.) Immature spiritual infants have a tendency to be self-focused. The more a person moves from self-focus to a family focus, the more that person moves from spiritual infancy toward spiritual maturity.

Stress that all of us begin spiritual existence as a spiritual infant. The infant needs milk in order to grow. Meat and other forms of adult food would produce death from choking or from a lack of nourishment (the inability to digest).

The purpose for all Christians is growth. Just as the rate of growth differs for physical infants, the rate of growth also differs for spiritual infants. God's primary focus is not on the rate of spiritual development, but on spiritual development. The motivation that stimulates spiritual growth is “tasting the kindness of the Lord.” Progressively, the person in Christ grows away from a self-focus to a family focus. Spiritual maturity in an individual Christian typically occurs when the individual Christian becomes more concerned about the well-being of the spiritual family (the congregation) than personal desires. The challenge of spiritual maturity often involves determining the spiritually healthy balance between personal desires in a congregation and the well-being of the congregation.

Stress that God's focus is not on rate of growth, but on growth. A person's background powerfully influences the rate of spiritual development.

Why? The spiritual person is profoundly impressed with the unselfish (often sacrificial) kindness of Jesus. The Christian constantly benefits from Jesus' unselfish kindness. Increasingly, the Christian wishes to reflect (mirror) that kindness—increasingly the Lord becomes his/her example of how to behave in God's family.

The example in God-cherished spiritual development is Jesus. Christians look to the values that led Jesus to do and to be who he was in his physical existence.

Where is the Christian going? What is his/her destination?

The person who is serious about spiritual development must have an understanding of who he/she is in Christ and the direction he/she wants to develop as a person who is in Christ.

1 Peter 2:1-10 declares that the Christian wishes to become a "living stone" which the Lord Jesus will utilize as building material. Why? Jesus in his earthly existence was a "living stone" which God used as building material to achieve His objective. Did the Israelite leadership and priesthood see Jesus as a "living stone," as a fundamental part of God's building material? No! In fact, the majority of them rejected Jesus as being "fit" for divine building material! What "knowledgeable people" regarded as being unsuitable divine building material was used by God as the essential stone in the foundation of God's building.

Jesus was not recognized as spiritually valuable by those who should have been the first to see his godly value. These people's religious values were so perverted that they could not see the value Jesus was to God's purposes. He who was of the greatest value ever to God's purposes was discarded by "religious experts" as being worthless to God's purposes.

Christians also serve the role of priests in God's building. Their responsibility is to offer up "spiritual sacrifices" (verse 5) acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Please note that what makes the sacrifices offered acceptable is Jesus Christ, not the person.

In the illustrations of 1 Peter 2:1-10, Christians serve dual roles: (a) as God's spiritual house (temple) and (2) as the sacrificial priests in God's temple. The double emphases stress the importance of the Christian's dedication to holiness.

God's stone, Jesus Christ, serves a dual role. For the person who believes in what God did through Jesus, every promise God made (promises we can see from Genesis 12:1-3 forward) is fulfilled. Everything God intended to do for sinful humans He did in Jesus Christ. What God did in keeping His promises resulted in God sending Jesus to be the Christ. Jesus Christ becomes (is) the foundation for the individual believer to trust God to do "what He says He will do." However, for the person (in context, the Israelite) who refused to believe in what God did (does) in Jesus, Jesus became the "stumbling stone." For the person who rejected God's presence and work in Jesus, Jesus caused a spiritual falling.

Jesus also served a dual role. However, the role he served depended on the faith of the individual. God did not give us humans who accept Jesus the role of judge of human rejecters or evaluators of human accepters. Our role involves encouraging and guiding, not serving as judges pronouncing eternal judgment. That is Jesus Christ's role, not ours.

The contrast is striking! The contrast is between a stone that is precious to God and a tripping stone that caused people to stumble.

That Jesus could serve in those two roles at the same time is amazing! That he could encourage some while he rejected others is astounding.

Who were Christians to be? They were to realize they were selected by God to be a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people to be possessed (owned) by God. What were these people to actually do? They proclaimed God's excellencies. Why? They did so for two reasons: (1) God called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. (2) They had become God's people who received mercy.

Stress that those who are called by God through Jesus Christ to be Christians are called to be something. Too often we define Christianity in terms of what we are not rather than in terms of what we are.

Be careful! The dividing line was the willingness to trust God's work in Jesus. It was not the worthiness of the individual, nor the accomplishments of the individual, nor the lineage of the person. It was the willingness to trust what God did (the making of an eternal Savior for all people) and is doing (forgiving, sanctifying, redeeming, dispensing mercy of grace, and providing propitiation in Jesus Christ).

We are too prone to define spiritual worth in terms of function performed or achievements. God does not define spiritual worth in those ways. God defines spiritual worth in terms of faith in Him and in the ways we are motivated by that faith. It is not a matter of ability we have, but of trust we exhibit. Thus, spiritually it is a "level playing field" for all—those gifted by ability are no more spiritually significant to God than those with few abilities. Regardless of ability, we have only done what we should do (Luke 17:7-10).

What are we as Christians? We are built by God upon Jesus Christ to be God's temple. We are to serve as God's priests in God's temple. Again, that may not say much to you, but it was a profound call to holiness to those to whom Peter wrote.

Stress that people who are Christians sense that God is at work in them (by their permission, through their faith in God's work in Jesus) to use them for His purposes. This is not about a person exchanging places with God, or assuming God's responsibilities, or deciding he/she is spiritually special. God may use him/her in a very lowly way. It is about understanding that the Christian lives for more than the material and for more than personal gratification.

The key consideration was NOT whether you belong to the proper institution, but "Who are you? What is your calling?"

Serving Christ is about a sense of being, of purpose in Jesus Christ, and about a direction for life because the person belongs to God through what God did in Jesus Christ.

For Thought and Discussion

1. There are what two things?

There is a progression and a purpose.

2. The more a person moves from self-focus to family focus, the more he/she does what?

The more that person moves toward spiritual maturity.

3. God's primary focus is not on what but on what?

God's primary focus is not on rate of spiritual development, but on spiritual development.

4. The motivation that stimulates spiritual development is what?

The motivation is "tasting the kindness of the Lord."

5. The spiritual person is profoundly impressed with what?

He/she is impressed with the unselfish, sacrificial kindness of Jesus.

6. 1 Peter 2:1-10 declares the Christian wishes to become what?

He/she wishes to become a "living stone," God's building material.

7. Christians also serve as what?

Christians serve as priests in God's building.

8. What dual role does Jesus Christ serve as God's stone?

- a) *He verifies God keeps His promises, gives the blessings He promised to believers.*
- b) *He is the stumbling stone to those who reject what God did in Jesus.*

9. Who were Christians to be? Why?

- a) *They were to be a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people possessed by God.*
- b) *(1) They were called out of darkness into God's marvelous light, and (2) they had received mercy.*

10. What was the dividing line?

The dividing line was the willingness to trust God's work in Jesus.

11. As Christians we are built by God upon Jesus Christ to be what two things? What is the emphasis?

- a) *Christians are built by God upon Jesus Christ to be the temple and to be priests in the temple.*
- b) *The emphasis is on God's call to holiness.*

Lesson Thirteen

The Challenge

Text: Romans 12:1, 2

The objective of this lesson: To stress that Christianity is not to be considered an “add on” to life that becomes one of many obligations, but Christianity is a direction of total life defined by God in Christ.

I wish to begin with an affirmation that may be contrary to what you have heard: being a Christian is extremely challenging. The more complex the society one lives in becomes and the smaller our world becomes, the more challenging it becomes to be a Christian. It is simple to enter God’s grace that He made abundantly available to all through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5, 6). It is extremely challenging to be what God through grace made us in Jesus Christ.

Stress that we are totally forgiven, totally accepted, totally sanctified by God’s grace the moment we enter Christ (consider 1 Corinthians 1:30 in light of all the problems in that congregation, and 1 John 1:5-10). Christian existence is focused on actually becoming what God in Christ, through His grace, made us. Christians are literally, continually growing into what God made them.

This commitment to become is never over as long as you physically exist. In being the man or woman who is serious about being a Christian, the longer you live, the more you learn. The more you learn, the better you understand. The better you understand, the more your spiritual objectives improve. The better your spiritual objectives become, the more your physical life changes. The more a Christian’s physical life changes, the more like Christ he/she becomes. The more like Christ he/she becomes, the more he/she learns and understands. The result: this progression continues. The objective of the person in Christ is, consciously, to be more and more like Christ. He/she is not accidently Christian; he/she is purposely Christian. That is who he/she wishes to be. That is the direction of his/her life.

Stress that it is a continual development that no Christian outgrows or attains.

In today’s text, there is (1) the challenge of the declaration and (2) the challenge of the meaning of the declaration illustrated by the context. Consider both.

The rest of the lesson focuses on these two challenges.

(1) The challenge of the declaration:

With an understanding of God's intent in Jesus Christ, all of you in Jesus Christ are urged to transform your physical lives. The God who brought you into being had an intent for human beings prior to their perversion through the existence of sin in human life. Restore God's vision of human physical existence which now is made possible by being in Jesus Christ.

This begins a paraphrase of and commentary on Romans 12:1, 2. The foundation understanding rests on a person's grasp of what God did for those in Jesus Christ through grace. The beginning understanding is this: God never intended for us to be what we have become through sin.

This intent/understanding can be restored because God is merciful. It is not restored through the brilliance of people, but through the efforts of a merciful God by His work in Jesus Christ.

The basic task in being Christian is the task of spiritual restoration. God at work in Jesus Christ is the basis of defining who we are and what our purpose is.

The human awareness of the work of this merciful God in Jesus Christ results in a presentation to this merciful God of the person's body (existence). The person willfully becomes a living sacrifice dedicated to God's purposes. In his/her awareness of this merciful God, the individual allows God to determine who he/she is.

The only thing a person really possesses to give God (in appreciation of what He did/does in Jesus Christ) is the surrender of self, the acknowledgement that He rightfully should control the body.

The whole concept of worship is changed for this person in Christ. Worship is not about a correct geographical place to which a pilgrimage is made. Worship is not about a system of animal sacrifices. Worship is a seven-days-a-week commitment focused in the life the person lives. The objective of the person in Christ is simple: every act of every day of his/her life honors God by serving God's original objective in human existence. God is praised through who the person is daily in his/her physical existence.

At that time, nowhere was the transformation more visibly obvious than in the person's concept of worship. Can you imagine the contrast seen by others in being a person who went to a temple to worship and going to no temple but worshipping?

The material objectives of society do not define who the person is or what he/she does. Instead, he/she learns a new way to think which results in God's way to look at physical existence. This transformation is not the mere changing of a few "bad habits." It involves a discovery of what physical life is about. God's will determines who a person is and what a person does. Definitions regarding the purpose of existence change at the root level. God defines what is good, what is well-pleasing to Him, and what is mature—not "men filled with human wisdom" nor the human societies of this physical world.

In Christ, what defines "who you are" is neither material ambitions nor social aspirations. God's will is not based on material objectives or society's aspirations.

(2) The declaration illustrated by the context:

The illustrations are taken from Romans 12:3 through Romans 15:13. This material illustrates what it means to live a life of the living sacrifice which the person willfully gives to God.

What it meant to be transformed as a person in Christ living in Rome is seen from Romans 12:3 forward. This behavior in Christ was in distinct contrast to many who lived in Rome at that time.

- a) This person will see and use his/her life and abilities as a part of a body.
- b) He/she refuses to see life in God's body as a competitive effort.

- c) He/she lives by love, not by vengeance.
- d) He/she is not a threat to unchristian government.
- e) He/she lives by a helping love, not by the patronage system.
- f) He/she refuses to live/act like people who do not know Christ.
- g) He/she seeks to encourage those who (1) believe in Jesus Christ, but (2) who act differently because of differing faith convictions.
- h) He/she uses Jesus Christ's interest in people to determine how to treat people.
- i) He/she unselfishly helps the spiritually weak.

It was not easy in that environment to daily be this type of person. We likely can more readily identify with the difficulty quickly in matters such as genuinely rejoicing in the blessings of those who are obviously different from you, in not seeking vengeance on those who cause you hurt, in showing kindness to enemies, in not causing trouble for unchristian rulers, and in helping/encouraging those who are spiritually weak.

This is in contrast to:

- a) Being the all-important one.
- b) Being the one who must be pleased in all considerations.
- c) Being one who hates enemies.
- d) Being one who was hostile to an idolatrous government.
- e) Being one who was obligated to treat someone else as he/she was directed.
- f) Being one who was controlled by unchristian values.
- g) Being one who must "control" the expressions of faith of a fellow believer.
- h) Being one who uses personal feelings to determine how others should be treated.
- i) Being one who decides the church is better off without those who are spiritually weak.

It was common for a person to look out for self and self's interest, and ignore people who were not of direct benefit to you. Christians in Rome existed in conditions where many could hurt you and very few could help you. In such circumstances it was easy to reason "If I do not help me, who will?" In such circumstances, it was simple to NOT BE OF HELP to anyone—that seemed to be the safest direction to take. To be kind to people who might hurt you definitely took a transformation, a redirection of life and a redefinition of "Who am I and what is my purpose?"

Do you see the challenge? Do you grasp how being in Christ changes a person? Being God's temple in the determination to be a suitable habitation for God's Spirit is a huge commitment!

The choice to allow God in Christ to transform your life is not a simple choice that is easily accomplished!

For Thought and Discussion

1. This lesson begins with what affirmation?

It begins with this affirmation: Being a Christian is extremely challenging.

2. How long does the commitment "to become" what God's grace made you continue?

This challenge is never over as long as you physically exist.

3. What two challenges are contained in today's text?

a) *The challenge of the declaration.*

b) *The challenge of the meaning of the declaration given in terms of "real life."*

4. People in Christ are urged to do what?

Christians were urged to transform their physical lives.

5. Why can people in Christ transform life?

They can transform life because God is merciful.

6. Discuss how transformation changes the concept of worship.

The discussion should include acceptable worship is not dependent on a geographical place or animal sacrifice, but on a daily commitment to live by God's values and purposes.

7. What does NOT define who the person in Christ is or what he/she does?

The material does NOT define who a Christian is or what he/she does.

8. Illustrate the contrast produced by transformation.

Use as illustrations the things given in a. through i. near the end of the lesson. Choose more than one illustration.