

The Lord Your God
Is an
Awesome God!



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Remember Your Creator

Text: Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:7

Have you ever made something? No, something besides the mess in your room. Have you made something that originated in your own mind and formed with your own hands? Have you made something that you could call your own?

As creative as we are, we only take the things that exist in this world and join them in new ways. When cabinets are made, the carpenter doesn't make the tree from which the wood comes. The potter doesn't make the clay used to form the pots on his spinning wheel. Ancient Hebrew had a word for making things from existing material; the word is *asha*. But Hebrew also has another word that is similar. The word *bara* refers to the creation of something from nothing. Or, another way to express it is to create something that has never existed before. Imagine, what would it take to make something that never existed before? Something so original that its idea is completely brand new? The Bible tells us that God is able to create things from nothing.

There is a story that illustrates the concept: One day, a group of scientists decided that man had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to tell God that they were done with Him. The scientist approached God and said, "God, we've decided that we no longer need you. We're to the point that we can clone people and do miraculous things. We can handle things on our own from now on; we don't need you." God patiently listened to the man and after the scientist was done talking, God said, "Very well. To prove that you are capable, let us have a contest. Let's see who can create a man." The scientist was a bit ruffled, this wasn't going as he had expected, but he loved a challenge. He agreed. The God added, "We're going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam." The scientist realized that starting from scratch might take some time, but he replied, "Sure, no problem" and bent down to grab himself a handful of dirt. God just looked at him and said, "No, no, no. Create your own dirt!"

Paul, speaking of God's ability to create a mighty nation from a childless old man, said, "*God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did*" (Romans 4:17). God has the power to bring into existence things that never existed.

Task:

Using a concordance or lexicon, go through Genesis chapter 1 and mark each occurrence of *bara* in that chapter. What new things did God create that did not exist before?

It is not that God made a few things. The pagan world had the idea that there were multiple gods, each who specialized in certain areas. There would be a god of trees and a god of vineyards, a god of music and a god of metal working. After all, no man can do everything, so the ancient world had the idea that no god created everything. But the Bible tells us, *“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness; who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; ...”* (Isaiah 44:24-26). The God who created the entire universe all by Himself, the God who form a world full of life, is the same God who made you and I and everyone we know. John tells us, *“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”* (John 1:3). Even when an artist creates a painting or a photographer snaps a picture, God’s hand is involved because the materials and the concepts presented are things that God made long ago. Man doesn’t make something from nothing; he merely repackages the things created by God.

Since God created everything, then this implies that God came before all things. *“Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him? Everything under heaven is Mine”* (Job 41:11). Since God created everything, this implies that God is greater than His creation.

Task:

Using the following verses, describe in your own words how God is greater than His creation.

I Kings 8:27

Isaiah 66:1-2

Isaiah 48:12-13

Consider how many things we still don’t understand about God’s universe, despite the combined efforts of millions of people over thousands of years. Since God has created it all, this means that God’s knowledge far exceeds the knowledge of man (Isaiah 40:12-17; 55:8-9).

Pagan man viewed their gods as being dependent on their worshipers. They would not exist if someone didn’t believe in them. They needed men to build houses for them and images for them to occupy. However, the fact that God created the world means God is not dependent on man (Acts 17:24; Psalm 50:12). God can have anything He desires. It is man who is dependent on God and not the other way around.

Task:

Using the following verses, describe in your own words what belongs to God.

Psalms 24:1-2

Deuteronomy 10:14

Psalms 50:10-12

Ezekiel 18:4

Imagine making something with your own hands and that inanimate object suddenly took on life, stuck its tongue out at you, and said you didn't know what you were doing. It would be shocking, but it also would be ironic because the whole reason that thing existed was due to your efforts. Since when would something made have the right to critic its maker? Yet, you know, mankind has been doing that to their maker for a long, long time. *“Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'? Woe to him who says to his father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to the woman, 'What have you brought forth?' Thus says the LORD, The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hands, you command Me. I have made the earth, and created man on it. I - My hands - stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways; He shall build My city And let My exiles go free, Not for price nor reward," says the LORD of hosts”* (Isaiah 45:9-13).

God deserves respect from His Creation; and I don't mean a polite “thank you” once in a while. Respect for God means honoring His wishes (John 14:15). It also means not sneaking around doing wrongful deeds as if He didn't exist or cared (Isaiah 29:15-16). *“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts ...”* (Malachi 1:6). Israel showed God disrespect by becoming careless in their worship of Him. Matters haven't changed much today.

Somehow man has gotten into his head that the world revolves around him. Yet the Bible tells us that the world was made for whom? _____
(see Hebrews 1:2, 10; Colossians 1:16). God has given mankind control of the earth (Psalm 115:15-16), but it doesn't mean we own it. We are stewards of a small portion of God's creation.

Dictionary Lookup:

Define “steward.”

As a result, we exist for God’s good pleasure (I Corinthians 8:6). *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Many people hold a quasi-belief in God. They are willing to admit that God exists, but they don’t think He takes an active role in the world. Instead they believe that God created the world or got it started and then walked away to let it evolve on its own. It is difficult to understand that the Being who created a universe so vast that we don’t know how big it is would be interested in the beings He made on one little world. *“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?”* (Psalm 8:3-4).

The answer is within each of us. When you make something, you care about it. It is important to you because it represents something that you thought about. When parents have children, they care about what happens to them. They want to know that the efforts they put into raising those children produced people they are happy to say is their son or daughter. God made the world and He made you and I. He cares about what happens to His creation. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16; see also I John 4:9-10).

God doesn’t want to see all His work go for naught. *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (II Peter 3:9). God created the world to produce righteous people. He doesn’t want you or I or anyone else to be lost. *“Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live? ... For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord GOD. “Therefore turn and live!”* (Ezekiel 18:23, 32).

Class Discussion:

1. Some religions worship animals. Why is it not possible for say a cow to have created the universe? What would it take for a being to create the universe?
2. Some religions believe the movements of the sun, moon, and stars control events in human life. Is this sensible?
3. The most fundamental components of our universe are time, space, and matter. Show where these came from in Genesis 1.

Class Activities:

- Locate songs that praise the power of God. Ask some of the boys in the class to lead a song.

For Further Research:

- Several biological systems have been shown to be irreducibly complex. In other words, the system is so interdependent that the alteration or removal of even one small part would cause the whole system to fail. These systems cause evolutionists problems because there is no way to describe how these systems evolved from something simple to something complex in a step-by-step manner.
 - Look up the steps needed for blood to clot. Is it possible for this to evolve from something simpler?
 - Look up the life cycle of a butterfly. Could it have evolved?
 - Look up how a cow digests food. How does a calf survive on milk, which takes a different digestive system and then switch over to dry feed?
 - How simple is a bacteria? What do these single-cell organisms contain?
 - How do bacteria move?
- Creation contains many amazing capabilities that we often take for granted. Look up the following:
 - The ability for the eye to heal without scar tissue.
 - How does a bumble bee fly?
 - How does the flute nosed bat sleep during the day without being seen?
 - Our mouths are exposed to many germs, how is it that the tongue rarely gets infected?
 - How do mudskippers live in mud flats between tides without access to oxygen?
 - Most birds cannot drink sea water and survive. How do albatrosses survive months over the oceans without access to fresh water?

Holy is His Name

Text: Psalm 99

Near the end of his life, Joshua delivered a farewell speech to the people of Israel. *“Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”* So the people answered and said: *“Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.”* But Joshua said to the people, *“You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.”* And the people said to Joshua, *“No, but we will serve the LORD!”* So Joshua said to the people, *“You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him.”* And they said, *“We are witnesses!”* *“Now therefore,”* he said, *“put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel.”* And the people said to Joshua, *“The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!”* (Joshua 24:14-24).

Is it not odd that after the people declared that they would serve God because of the things God has done for them that Joshua responds *“You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God.”* What is it about holiness that makes God so difficult to serve?

The word “holy” translates a Hebrew word referring to something or someone dedicated to the service of a god. In the ancient world of idolatry, people did not associate moral ideas with holiness. Immoral people could be service a god and they would still be called holy people. For example, if you look up the literal translate of “temple prostitute” found in Genesis 38:21 and I Kings 14:21, you would find that the phrase is actually “holy woman” and “holy man” respectively. The fact that prostitution was wrong rarely crossed the pagan’s mind.

However, when the Bible applies holiness to God and His people, it is used in a different sense. For example, when God is declared to be holy, as in Isaiah 57:15 or I Peter 1:16, it cannot mean that God is dedicated to Himself; that just would not make sense. Holy does include dedication when it is applied to people and things, but it involves more than mere dedication. Holiness also means holding something or someone as extra special. God said He selected the people of Israel to be a holy nation (Deuteronomy 7:6). Being holy, Moses said God *“will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken”* (Deuteronomy 26:19).

But God also valued righteousness as a part of holiness. *“The LORD will establish you as*

a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways” (Deuteronomy 28:9). God told Israel that righteous action on their part would cause them to become a holy people.

Task:

The Bible uses light to represent righteousness and dark to represent sin. How righteous is God?

I John 1:5

James 1:17

Psalms 36:9

John 8:12

Revelation 21:23

Revelation 22:5

I Timothy 6:16

God’s righteous acts declare that He alone is truly holy (Revelation 15:4). Therefore, if we are to treat God as holy (to hallow Him), we must do it through righteous living. *“God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness” (Isaiah 5:16).*

Perhaps you can grasp the idea of holiness by looking at the word which has the opposite meaning, *“that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean”* (Leviticus 10:10). The word translated here as “unholy” is the Hebrew word for “profane.” “Profane” means to pollute or treat something as common and of no value. When people throw trash down in a park, they are polluting it – they act as if the park as having no more value than a garbage dump. When God warn Israel not to profane His name (Leviticus 22:32), He is saying that He will not be treated as if He is just another in a long list of gods. That is why Joshua warned the people repeatedly not to serve other gods. If they did so, they would be treating God as a common household idol. There would be no distinction between the real God and the fake idols.

People can profane God's name by breaking God's law. "*Lest I be full and deny You, and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God*" (Proverbs 30:9). People break rules all the time. Just ask your parents or your teachers how often you have ignored what they have asked of you. I'm sure you would get an ear full of examples. But consider this: would God be treated as someone special if we treated His rules just like we treated any other rule?

Task:

What was the purpose of tassels on Jewish garments?

Holiness is making a distinction between what is special and what is ordinary. It was a failure to make a distinction that caused God to be angry with Israel. "*Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them*" (Ezekiel 22:26).

Task:

How is God different from the gods that man has created in his imagination?

Exodus 15:11

Isaiah 40:25-26

I Kings 8:23

I Samuel 2:2

If you ever look at Hebrew or Greek as it was originally written, you would quickly realize that they did not have punctuation marks in their languages. When we want something noticed, we will write it in **bold** or underline it or put it in *italics* to make the reader notice the words. In older languages, repeating things served the same function as emphasizing the text. Read Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 and notice how the angels address God. He is not just holy,

He is not just extra holy (holy, holy), He is extra-extra holy (holy, holy, holy). One commentator said that by using holy three times in a row, the angels are saying that God is infinitely holy.

Task:

What position does God hold in the world?

I Chronicles 16:25

Psalm 95:3

Psalm 96:4

Nehemiah 9:5

Psalm 89:7

Psalm 97:9

John 3:31

Class discussion:

- Why are some parts of our language known as profanity? How are some of these words or phrases profane?
- Why would making and worshiping an image of God profane God? See Isaiah 17:7-8 and explain this passage.
- Can an unholy person treat God as holy? Why?
- Can the way we approach worshiping God impact whether we view God as holy?
- See Leviticus 11:44-45. Peter quotes this verse in I Peter 1:14-16. What is Peter's point?
- Read Psalm 99 again. What is it about God that makes Him holy?

Class activities:

- Find songs that speak of God's holiness. Ask some of the boys in the class to lead a song.
- Create a poster that would explain the idea of holiness to others.

Regarding God as Holy

Text: I Peter 1:13-19

“But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’”(I Peter 1:15-16).

It is not enough to say that God is holy. God requires that His followers imitate His nature. If we accept that God is holy, then we must become holy as well. If we don't we will never see God. *“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”* (Hebrews 12:14).

Review:

Paul tells us to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks; so, how would you explain “holiness” to one of your friends?

Dictionary Look-up:

What does “sanctification” mean?

How does it fit into the idea of holiness?

Task:

Look up each of the following passages and explain what we must do to be holy?

II Corinthians 7:1

I Thessalonians 4:3-7

Titus 3:8

Philippians 2:15-16

Jeremiah 7:9-10

Our Bibles are filled with stories from the lives of people who lived before us. Some fill us with admiration for the person's faith and courage, but others leave us wondering what the person was thinking to act so dumb. *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"* (I Corinthians 10:11-12). If we walk away thinking "I would never do such a thing!" we missed the whole point of the story. The fact is that the people in the Bible are people just like you and I. They are no different than your friends or the people in your neighborhood. It is not enough just to know what happened. We need to know why it happened. Then, when we are faced with a similar problem, we might have a chance to act properly.

Let us consider what happened to Nadab and Abihu: *"Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace"* (Leviticus 10:1-3).

A moment's thought:

Why did God kill Nadab and Abihu?

The obvious answer to the question above is that they broke God's command by using a method and type of fire that God didn't authorize. But have you wondered why the source of fire mattered to God? Fire is fire, isn't it? But take careful note of verse 3. God told Aaron that by their action they did not treat God as holy. There was something about the fire that they used which did not treat God as holy.

Most of your Bibles call the fire "profane" or "strange." "Profane" means treating something as common, ordinary, or contemptible.

A moment's thought:

Later, God tells the people the fire for the incense was to come from the altar of sacrifice (Leviticus 16:12). What is it about the fire there that would make it holy?

Assume for the moment that Nadab and Abihu just used some coals they had on hand to light their household fires. Would such a source be holy? Why?

Yet, there is more to this story. You could almost feel sorry for Nadab and Abihu. God punished them for using the wrong fire, but He didn't explain in detail where the fire was supposed to come from until after they died (Leviticus 16:1, 12). A hint is found when God gave further instruction to Aaron right after his sons died. *"Then the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying: Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses"* (Leviticus 10:8-11). We cannot be absolutely certain, but from God's remarks it appears that Nadab and Abihu were "under the influence" of alcohol when they went in to work that day. Alcohol impairs a person's judgment. It interferes with a man's ability to decide between right and wrong. Yet, priests were expected to be careful to distinguish between holy things and unholy

things.

You see, when Nadab and Abihu went into the tabernacle, this was not the first time that Israel ever offered incense to God. The tabernacle has been around for years now. Nor was this the first time that Nadab and Abihu served in the tabernacle. They knew from past practice that the fire for the incense was taken from the altar of sacrifice. However, this time they didn't bother to walk back out to get the fire. They decided just to use the coals that they already had on hand. Perhaps because of the alcohol, they made a serious error in judgment. They replaced something that was holy with something that was ordinary.

Let me be clear, the fire itself was not different from any other fire. What made the fire holy was its dedication to the service of God. It was set apart by God's command and, therefore, it became special.

God is pleased when sacrifices are offered that He has hallowed. (Hallowed refers to something set apart as special or holy.) When a person offers God something that He has not commanded, that person is placing his own personal preferences before God's choices.

Task:

Read the following verses. What had the Israelites done wrong? How had their choices impacted their relationship with God?

Malachi 1:6-10

Malachi 1:11-13

Jeremiah 11:15

Isaiah 1:10-20

A doctrine that has gained popularity is to say that everything we do is worship to God. However, this cannot be. Worship is a special time when we approach God. It is a holy time because it is set apart for doing something special that God commanded. Remember that God did not condemn Nadab and Abihu because He did not like the scent of their air freshener. He was offended at their attempt to worship Him with things He did not set apart as holy. The worship of God is only acceptable when we offer sanctified gifts in holy ways to God.

Class Discussion:

- The Lord's Supper was instituted as a special meal to remember Jesus and his death (Luke 22:19-20). Paul criticized the Corinthians for profaning this meal (I Corinthians 11:17-27). How had the Corinthians caused the Lord's supper to not be holy?
- God has sanctified certain elements to be used in worship of Him, such as singing and prayer (Ephesians 5:18-10; Hebrews 13:15).
 - Would the offering of burnt meat or incense be acceptable today? After all, they were holy and acceptable under the law of Moses.
 - Instrumental music was sanctified under the Old Law (Psalms 150:3-6). Does it remain acceptable under the law of Christ? Why?
 - Sometimes a person will say, "I just know God would be pleased with _____." Why would anyone expect God to be pleased with something for which He did not ask?
- There are denominations which vote on what they will or will not accept. What is wrong with men voting on what is acceptable? How do the following verses apply: Isaiah 45:9-12; Jeremiah 18:1-6; Romans 9:19-21?
- Could the way we dress for worship impact whether we are treating God as holy?

Class Activities:

- Find songs which speak of worship being a special or holy time. Ask some of the boys in class to lead a song.

God Cannot Lie

Text: I Kings 22:1-28

The gods of heathen men were molded in man's own image. But man is flawed. *"Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things"* (Romans 1:22-23). For example, the Greeks saw their gods as super-humans. They acted just as men did, both good and bad. The primary difference was that the gods greater powers than men. When the gods did something, they did it like men but better than men. Since men lie, well then, the gods must be really good liars when they want to be.

However, the Bible tells us that the only true God is not like man's concept of a god. *"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"* (Numbers 23:19). God is not like men. Men might tell lies, but God cannot lie. Even if we determined that every man on earth lied, God would still be true (Romans 3:4). God is the God of truth (Deuteronomy 32:4). He will not lie (I Samuel 15:29). More importantly, God cannot lie. *"Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began"* (Titus 1:1-2).

The fact that God is unable to lie is an important concept to every Christian. For one thing, our Bibles come from God. How much trust would you have in its teachings if you knew that God might have lied to man?

Task:

Use the following verses and determine how much of our Bible comes from God. When we talk of the Bible being the inspired word of God, what should we mean by it?

II Timothy 3:16

I Corinthians 2:12-13

Galatians 1:11-12

II Peter 1:20-21

Task:

If the Bible is from God and God is the God of Truth, then what must the Bible contain?
What do the following verses claim that the Bible contains?

John 17:17

Psalm 119:142

Psalm 119:160

Since God cannot lie, then it follows that God would require truth from His followers.

Task:

What was God's opinion about lying under the Old Testament?

Exodus 20:16

Leviticus 19:11

Proverbs 12:22

Proverbs 19:9

Task:

Look at the following verses and decide: Has God's view of lying changed under the New Testament?

Colossians 3:9-10

Ephesians 4:25

Revelation 14:5

Revelation 21:8

Revelation 21:27

Even though God opposes lying, men are always looking for excuses that allow some form of lying. We will take a look at two examples to see if their excuse finding holds water.

Analyze:

“In I Samuel 16:1-5 God told Samuel to mislead others as to his purpose so that Saul would not learn of his true purpose. A deception is no different from a lie.”

1. Did God tell Samuel to lie?
2. Was it within God’s rights to request a sacrifice from Samuel?
3. Was it wrong or a lie to provide Samuel with an additional reason for going to Bethlehem?
4. Was it necessary for Samuel to tell everyone the full purpose of his journey?
5. Is withholding information that you believe someone else has no right to know a sin? Why?

A more difficult passage to understand is found in I Kings 22. Take a moment to read the entire chapter. In particular, we want to focus on I Kings 22:20-23: “*And the LORD said, 'Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, 'I will persuade him.' The LORD said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the LORD said, 'You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.' Therefore look! The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you.*”

Think a moment and ask yourself why God asks the spirits in Heaven for volunteers to persuade Ahab to go where he would end up dying? God did not command that this particular spirit go, but God did permit the spirit to go after the spirit volunteered to go.

Task:

1. What kind of spirit volunteered to go?
2. What method did the spirit volunteer to use to persuade Ahab?
3. Of all the spiritual beings we know about, which ones would be willing to lie? (See John 8:44)
4. Did these beings have access to God? (See Job 1:5-6)
5. Read Job 12:16. Do only the righteous belong to God? Can God make use of the unrighteous to accomplish His ends? Can you give examples?

Paul told us, “*And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*” (II Thessalonians 2:11-12). It is not that God, Himself, lies or approves of lying. However, God will make use of liars to deceive people who already demonstrate a disregard for the truth. Such was the nature of Ahab.

Have you ever seen a horoscope or heard a prediction by a supposed psychic? The answers they give are generally worded in such a vague way that just about anything could happen and you would say, “That’s just what the person said would happen!” When King Jehoshaphat asked for God’s advice, the false prophets that came gave a vague answer: “*Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king*” (I Kings 22:6). In Hebrew, the statement is more vague than it is in English. The translators added the word “it” to the statement, but “it” doesn’t appear in the original Hebrew. The statement could be interpreted that God had given Ramoth Gilead into the hands of King Ahab. However, the state can be equally interpreted as saying that God has given Ahab’s army into the hands of the king of Syria. Once the false prophets found a great but vague statement, they kept repeating it over and over again (I Kings 22:12).

King Jehoshaphat didn’t like the answer, most likely because he knew it was too vague. He wanted to hear a response from a real prophet. King Ahab reluctantly sent for a prophet named

Micaiah. Now as Micaiah is fetched he is instructed, “*Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Please, let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement*” (I Kings 22:13). So when Micaiah answered the king, he said, “*Go and prosper, for the LORD will deliver it into the hand of the king!*” (I Kings 22:15). He was told to answer just like the false prophets, and this is exactly what Micaiah did. In other words, Micaiah did not lie (the vague statement did cover the truth), but he did mock the king by giving him exactly what he commanded Micaiah to say.

Interestingly, even though Ahab accepted the vague answer from his lying prophets, Ahab rejected the same answer from Micaiah. Obviously, somewhere deep inside Ahab knew that God wasn't supporting him. Even more amazing is that when Micaiah told Ahab clearly that he would die and that vague answer from the false prophets were a part of a heavenly plot to get Ahab to go into battle, Ahab went anyway. Ahab was so far gone into sin that he would rather follow what he knew to be a lie than to follow God. Isn't this just what Paul said in II Thessalonians 2:11-12?

God doesn't tempt people with evil (James 1:13). He cannot lie. He commands His followers not to lie. However, it doesn't mean that God will not take advantage of the fact that there are people willing to lie to accomplish His will. It doesn't excuse the liar nor make the consequence of lying any less severe.

Class Discussion:

- Aunt Bertha asks you if her dress makes her look fat. What should you say? Is lying an acceptable alternative for tactfulness?
- Many people claim that everyone lies. Would this be true? Would it be true at all times? Even if everyone did lie, does that make lying acceptable?
- People usually expect certain people to lie, such as politicians and used car salesmen. Why? Because lies are expected, does it make lying acceptable in certain occupations?
- Could you be a politician or a used car salesman and not lie? How?
- One study on lying stated, “Most lies were self-serving – to enhance the liar’s status or protect him from embarrassment, disapproval, or conflict. But nearly one-fourth of the lies were to benefit other people – to spare their feelings, for example.”
 - Can you be honest without hurting another person’s feelings?
 - Which is easier: finding a tactful way of telling someone the truth, or telling them a lie that they want to hear? What does that tell you about the reason many people lie?
 - Suppose a busy doctor needs to tell his patient that they have a cancer which will kill them after three months of excruciating pain. Some doctors think it is kinder not to warn the person. Do you agree? How would you react if you were the patient and were told the truth? Now, remember that the doctor is under a tight schedule, what do you think is the real reason doctors avoid telling patients bad news?
 - When a person claims he is trying to spare another person’s feelings, what is he really doing?
- Leonard Saxe, a psychologist, said, “If we punish children too harshly for lying, we may

make it more likely that they will lie in the future to escape further punishment.” What do you think?

God's Promises Are Sure

Text: Hebrews 6:9-20

Reading through the Bible, we find many promises of an eternal home in heaven with God. But how can you or I be sure that such a home is really there? None of us get to visit it beforehand. It is not like a hotel that you can check out on the Internet, or ask someone if the beds are soft or if the view is good. None of you personally know people who have been there who can tell us what heaven is like. So how can we know it is really there waiting for us?

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews was concerned that Christians would abandon their hope during their struggles on earth. Part of the purpose of the letter to the Hebrews is to give confidence in the reality of God's promise.

Task:

Read the following passages from Hebrews and note what might cause Christians to give up.

Hebrews 2:1

Hebrews 6:12

Hebrews 3:12

Hebrews 10:26

Hebrews 4:1

Hebrews 10:35

Hebrews 4:11

Hebrews 12:1

Hebrews 5:11

Hebrews 12:15

To counter this very real possibility, the writer of Hebrews wants us to have confidence that heaven is really there waiting for us. If we truly believe it, then we will work hard to gain permission to enter it. *“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”* (Hebrews 6:11-12). However, to have such a confidence, we must first have confidence in the one who made the promise. When God promised His servants a home in heaven, He did not just say “trust me.” He offers proof to you and I from His

past dealings with men as evidence that His promises are sure.

When people make promises, they generally speak of their intentions, but often they fail to keep their promises. There are a number of reasons why people don't keep their word. They might be forgetful, lazy, or hindered. Knowing that many people will not keep their promises if left on their own, we ask people to bind themselves in some way. For example, if I took out a loan to purchase a car, I might sign an agreement. One term of that agreement might say that if I forget to make my car payment on time, the bank will charge me extra the following month. It might go on and say that if I get more than three months behind on my payment, the bank can come and take my car to cover their losses.

Because people don't always keep their word, banks will sometimes accept a cosigner on the loan. The cosigner is a person with a better record of paying off his promises. He agrees to make payments if the actual borrower doesn't pay. "*For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute*" (Hebrews 6:16).

A formal promise is called a covenant. Ephesians 2:12 speaks of "*covenants of promise.*" Covenants are similar to our modern-day contracts. A covenant specifies who are the agreeing parties in the covenant. It sets out the terms of the agreement and establishes the consequences of either breaking or keeping the agreement. It establishes a reminder, or witness, to the fact that the covenant exists and sets out how the parties are going to remember the covenant. The covenant is then established by swearing an oath and a sacrifice is offered to someone greater who will oversee that the covenant is kept. Usually the sacrifices were offered up to God.

This last part causes a problem when God enters into a covenant with mankind. Who is going to back up God's promises since there is no one greater than God? "*For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself*" (Hebrews 6:13). God is His own back up. He put His own reputation as God on the line. The history of God's past covenants allow us to determine His reliability.

Genesis 9:1-17

Who were the parties in this covenant?

What were the terms of the covenant?

Who was bound by the terms of the covenant?

What would be the consequences of the covenant?

What served as the reminder or witness to this covenant?

Was the result of this covenant? Was it kept?

Genesis 17:1-14

Who were the parties in this covenant?

What were the terms of the covenant?

What conditions were placed on the people bound in this covenant?

Who was bound by the terms of the covenant?

What would be the consequences of the covenant?

What served as the reminder or witness to this covenant?

Was the result of this covenant? Was it kept? (See Joshua 21:43-45)

Exodus 19:3-6

Who were the parties in this covenant?

What were the terms of the covenant?

What conditions were placed on the people bound in this covenant? (Glance through Exodus 20 through Deuteronomy 31)

Who was bound by the terms of the covenant?

What would be the consequences of the covenant? (See Deuteronomy 27:15-26 and Deuteronomy 28:2-14)

What served as the reminder or witness to this covenant? (See Deuteronomy 4:26; Exodus 25:21; 40:20)

Was the result of this covenant? Was it kept? (See II Kings 17:7-23; Jeremiah 31:31-34)

It is easy to think that covenants were only a part of the Old Testament, but the Bible tells us that Christians are under a covenant with God today. *“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”*” (Acts 2:37-39). Take careful note that Peter called it a “promise.” Part of what was being

promised was forgiveness of sins.

Task:

What has God promised to Christians in the New Testament?

I John 2:25

James 1:12

James 2:5

Hebrews 4:1

Hebrews 9:15

II Peter 1:4

II Peter 3:13

Yet, like covenants in the Old Testament, there are conditions placed on these promises. In Acts 2:38 the condition was the men had to repent and be baptized to enter into this covenant. There were also consequences to keeping this covenant: Peter stated that men would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Task:

What is the gift of the Holy Spirit?

1) How many gifts are we talking about?

2) To whom was this gift promised?

3) Read Ephesians 1:13-14. What gift does the Holy Spirit give?

Stop a moment to wonder: Why did God bother making oaths and covenants? He is the supreme being in this universe. He can do as He pleases. So why would He bother with making covenants with His own creation? *“Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us”* (Hebrews 6:17-18). The writer of Hebrews tells us that He did it for two reasons. First, it demonstrates His unchangeable purpose. Through covenants, God stated in advance what would happen. The regular reminders insured that men would remember what God had said. When it eventually did happen, even though it was hundreds of years later, people see that God’s purpose never changed over time. Second, God used covenants to give us solid hope. We have received promises, but we know we can trust that the outcome will be as God said, because of his past promises which were kept. *“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast”* (Hebrews 6:19).

When we talk about faith, we are talking about people who showed confidence in God’s promises. *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1). On many occasions Abraham believed God, despite the seeming impossibility of what he was promised, and as a result his faith in God grew stronger. *“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform”* (Romans 4:20-21). Joseph knew that God would bring his family out of Egypt. *“And Joseph said to his brethren, “I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”*” (Genesis 50:24). Joseph knew because God had promised. Hence, he gave orders that his bones be taken to Canaan when the people went. David also knew that God’s words were true. *“And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant”* (II Samuel 7:28).

As we mentioned in the previous lesson, God cannot lie. *“Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the*

truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:1-2). Paul also wrote, “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (II Corinthians 1:20-22). When Paul says “all the promises of God in Him are Yes,” he is saying that all of God’s promises are true; they always come to pass. Thus, the conclusion must be “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23).

Do you trust God’s promises? *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Look back on your life. Are you acting like you positively know that God gives homes in heaven to those who follow Him? “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Corinthians 7:1). God made you a promise, will you accept the terms of the covenant? He loved you so much that even before you had a chance to say “yes” or “no,” long before you were born, God sent his Son to be the sacrifice to seal that covenant. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Will you be one of that number?*

Class discussion:

- Hebrews 6:18 says God demonstrated His ability to keep His promises by two unchangeable things in which God cannot lie. What are those two things?
- The word “testament” means “witness,” in particular, a witness to a covenant. How does the New Testament both contains a covenant and serves as witness to the covenant?
- Put on your thinking caps: if Christians are under a covenant, then what are the parts of the covenant? In other words:
 - Who are the parties to the covenant?
 - What are the terms of the agreement?
 - What does it say will be the consequences of breaking or keeping the covenant?
 - What are the conditions of the covenant?
 - How do people accept the terms of the covenant?
 - What serve as reminders or witnesses to the covenant?
 - What is offered as a sacrifice sealing the covenant?
- In past covenants, the parties who made a covenant would share a meal together to demonstrate that their differences were resolved and that they now were in fellowship (See Genesis 26:30; 31:54; Exodus 24:9-11.)
 - Now read I Corinthians 10:15-17 and look up the meaning of the word “communion.” What serves as the covenant meal for Christians?
 - Read Matthew 26:26-29. With whom are we sharing this meal?
 - Read I Corinthians 11:23-26. What other covenant purpose does the Lord’s Supper

- serve?
When Christians partake of the Lord's Supper, what are they doing?

Class activity:

- Find songs which speak of promise and hope. Ask some of the boys in class to lead a song.

King of Kings

Text: Psalm 47

In the ancient past, there was a mighty Babylonian conqueror named Nebuchadnezzar. In the first year of his reign he destroyed the Assyrian Empire, which was the mightiest empire in the world at that time. He took all the Assyrian Empire's territory and added it to his own territory. He then proceeded to expand his empire, conquering countries that Assyria never destroyed. It took nearly eighteen years for him to bring down the mighty merchant city-state of Tyre which literally had world-wide trade deals. He then conquered the ancient kingdom of Egypt which had stood for thousands of years. Daniel rightly called him the king of kings. *"You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all"* (Daniel 2:37-38). Nebuchadnezzar was a mighty man, but notice that Daniel said that there was someone greater than he. Daniel said that Nebuchadnezzar only gained his position of power because God gave it to him. *"Daniel answered and said: 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him'"* (Daniel 2:20-22).

If God makes and breaks kings, and even king of kings, then what does this make God to be?

As often happens when a person reaches a point of having it all, Nebuchadnezzar came to believe that his position was obtained by his own power. *"The king spoke, saying, 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?'"* (Daniel 4:30). God proved to Nebuchadnezzar who truly was in control by removing something that most people would think was their very own: his ability to reason. *"While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.'" That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws"* (Daniel 4:31-33). After seven years, Nebuchadnezzar's intelligence returned to him and he acknowledged God's sovereignty. *"And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was*

restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down” (Daniel 4:34-37).

Task:

Read through Daniel chapter 4 and list the titles or names attributed to God. How are these names significant to God’s position?

God is the ultimate king. It is God who governs the universe as well as the world’s governments. *“He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly” (Luke 1:52).* The very existence of governments is by God’s will and not man’s. *“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Romans 13:1).*

Task:

- 1) Read Proverbs 8:12-16. By what means are rulers able to govern?

- 2) Read Romans 16:26-27. Where is the sole source for this characteristic?

- 3) Read James 1:5 and Proverbs 2:3-6. Where can people gain this characteristic?

- 4) Since a person needs this characteristic to rule and there is only one place to get it, who controls who rules?

- 5) How did God prove this in his dealings with Nebuchadnezzar?

Since God controls the governments, it is proper to say that all governments are merely representatives of God. In reality the only true ruler, the one who rules by his own authority, is God. *“I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen”* (I Timothy 6:13-16).

When we address God as “Lord,” it is not merely a term of respect or an acknowledgment that He rules over our personal life. God is the Lord because He is the one and only ruler of this universe. All the nations with all their rulers serve God. *“Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him”* (Psalm 72:11).

For further study:

- 1) Read Deuteronomy 10:17. What are the titles of God given?

- 2) Does the title “God of gods” mean there are other gods? What does it mean?

- 3) Read I Chronicles 16:25-26. What does this passage tell us that explains the title “God of gods?”

It is certain that every kingdom of man comes to an end. It happens for the simple reason that the great heroes who establish the kingdom die. Eventually, someone comes to power who is unable to hold the kingdom together and the whole thing collapses. But God is not like man; God is eternal. *“But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King”* (Jeremiah 10:10).

One of the names for God in the Hebrew language is *yahweh*. The exact meaning of the word has been lost, though we know that God has called Himself by the name *yahweh*. What we do know is that it is very similar to the Hebrew word for “I am.” In other words, the word means that God always has, is, and always will exist. When *yahweh* is translated into other languages, such as Greek, it was translated as “Lord.” For example, Jesus translated *yahweh* in Deuteronomy 6:5 to the Greek word for lord in Luke 10:27. Hence, we also know that *yahweh* contains the idea

of a ruler as well as the idea of eternity. This combination of eternal ruler is seen in Psalm 10:16: *“The LORD is King forever and ever; The nations have perished out of His land.”*

God wasn’t claiming kingship over ancient Israel. That kingdom of Israel no longer exists, but God’s reign has no end. *“The LORD shall reign forever - your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!”* (Psalm 146:10). Since God continues to reign, this implies that His kingdom has no end as well. *“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations”* (Psalm 145:13).

In Revelation 11:15, an angel announces: *“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”*

Task:

- 1) In Psalm 89:26-27, what did God promise concerning the Messiah?

- 2) In the parable of the talents, who is the nobleman in Luke 19:12? What was he to receive?

- 3) What was the nobleman able to do after he received what was promised in Luke 19:27?

- 4) What was prophesied concerning the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14?

- 5) After Jesus’ resurrection, what did Jesus say he now received in Matthew 28:18?

- 6) What is Jesus’ position in Revelation 1:5; 17:14; 19:16?

When the New Testament refers to Jesus as Lord, such as in Ephesians 4:5, it is not a simple, polite title. It is an acknowledgment of Jesus’ position in the universe. Jesus does not just reign over the church. *“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus*

Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

Wait a minute! How can Jesus be “King of kings” if that is God the Father’s title?

- 1) In John 1:1 and Colossians 2:8-10, what is Jesus?
- 2) In Hebrews 1:8, what does God tell the Son?
- 3) Who gave Jesus his authority? (See John 19:11 and Matthew 28:18)
- 4) What will Jesus do with the kingdom one day, according to I Corinthians 15:24-28

What is amazing is that one so mighty and so great in authority takes the time to notice the lowly. *“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones’”* (Isaiah 57:15). It is the brokenhearted, the lowly of earth, whom God saves. *“The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit”* (Psalm 34:18).

We are here to serve the Almighty King (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Such service is what God expected of His people under the old covenant (Deuteronomy 10:12-13) and it is what He wants of His people today (Hebrews 12:28). Have you submitted to your King?

Class Discussion:

- What is meant when someone is called a lord?
- By sharing the same titles with God the Father, what is proven concerning the nature of Jesus?
- Use your Bible to find answers to the following questions:
 - If Jesus is king, where is his kingdom?
 - What are other names for that kingdom?
 - Who are citizens of that kingdom?
- Is it possible to be in a kingdom, but not be a citizen of that kingdom?
 - When a foreigner visits or lives in another country, does he follow the rules of his native country or the country he is currently in?
 - Is Jesus only king of Christians? (See Revelation 11:15)

- Even if someone refuses to become a citizen in Christ's kingdom, whose laws is the non-citizen obligated to obey?
- Is it just for God to condemn people to Hell for violating the laws of His kingdom even though they did not choose to become citizens?

Class Activity:

- Find songs which speak of God's sovereignty. Ask some of the boys in class to lead a song.

Our Father in Heaven

Text: Luke 11:1-13

“And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.”” (II Corinthians 6:16-18).

If we will separate ourselves from the wickedness of this world, God promises to be a father to each of us. But have you given thought as to why God selected the role of a father to describe His relationship with us? He didn't call Himself a mother, sibling, or even a best friend. There are things about the role of a father that better describes how God cares for us, but in order to understand it, we need to understand what a father does for his family.

If I asked you what a father gives to his family, one of the first thing most people say is that a father loves his children.

For study:

How does God show us love? And how do we return that love? (I John 3:1-3)

How did we become God's children? (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:4-7; Ephesians 1:5)

What is different between a natural born child and an adoptive child that helps explain God's relationship with us?

Which is more impressive: love given to your own children or love given to an adopted child? Why?

Fathers do much more than just provide love for their children. Ephesians 6:4 tells us several things that a father does for his children: *“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”*

The phrase “bring them up” is based on a Greek word that means “to nurture.” In other words, fathers provide the things their children need to grow up to be adults. A part of this would be seeing that his children have the necessities of life: food, clothing, and shelter. *“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (I Timothy 5:8).

Making Application:

Read the following passages and describe what God does for us in providing our necessities for life.

Ephesians 1:2-6

Luke 11:11-13

Matthew 6:25-34

We need food, clothing, and shelter in order to physically grow up, but children also need the comfort of security and protection from harm to develop well mentally.

Making Application:

The following passages describe God's relationship with His people, Israel. What is said can be equally applied to His people today, Christians (Romans 15:4). What do these passages say about the security God gives His people.

Deuteronomy 32:6

Psalm 89:26

Psalm 62:1-8

Yet, Ephesians 6:4 tells us that God expects fathers to be responsible for their children's education. This is not say that only dads can teach their children, but that they oversee what their children learn and see to it that they are taught well.

Making Application:

Read the following passages and describe how God is involved in our education as Christians.

John 6:45

Micah 4:2

Hebrews 10:16

Titus 2:11-14

II Timothy 3:16-17

Psalm 94:12

I Thessalonians 3:11-13

But effective teaching must contain corrective actions along with encouraging direction. If we listened to all our lessons and did just what we were told to do, there would be no need for correction – but how many of us have actually done this? I know I wasn't always a good student. It is in the nature of children to want to see things for themselves, to exert independence, and as a result, to get into trouble. *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and*

strength to your bones. ... My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:5-8, 11-12).

God told David that He would watch over David’s son, treating Solomon as His own child. *“I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men”* (II Samuel 7:14). At first, you might not think this would bring comfort to David, but it was. God was saying that He loved David’s son enough that he cared how Solomon turned out. He cared about his welfare and his moral standing.

A father who doesn’t deeply care about how his children turn out won’t bother to correct them when they do something wrong. Such a father is wrapped up in his own life and only does things that are convenient for him. A father who loves his children will punish their wrong doings because he wants them to live and live properly. It is not fun disciplining your own child. You would rather be buddies with him. It is the same for God. Jesus said, *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent”* (Revelation 3:19).

The writer of Hebrews talked about this at length: *“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”* (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Discipline is not fun for the receiver or the giver, but it does produce peace in the long run. Several studies over the years have noted that neighborhoods without fathers in the homes have higher crime rates. It would be natural to expect this. Good fathers teach their children the way to live righteously. They enforce that teaching by punishing their children when they stray. As a result, they mold their child’s character.

Making Application:

What is common in all these verses?

Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:3; II Corinthians 1:2-3; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; I Thessalonians 1:1; II Thessalonians 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3; I Peter 1:2; II John 3

Class Discussion:

- Some of the passages call God a “Rock.” What is meant by such a description?
- What is an illegitimate child? Why would a father’s attitude toward an illegitimate child be different from his attitude toward a legitimate child? Could it be related to his attitude toward the child’s mother?
- Why is the willingness to punish evidence of love?
- How do earthly fathers punish? How does God, the Father, punish?
- Even though God provides for us, does that mean a Christian will never face hardship, hunger, or even death? (See Philippians 4:11-13 and II Corinthians 11:23-31.) How could God be a Father and allow these things to happen?

Class Activity:

- Find songs which speak of God being our Father. Ask some of the boys in class to lead a song.

God is Love

Text: I John 4:7-21

How would you define love? Would you recognize it if you saw it? Would you be certain that it was love if you had it?

The Bible gives two definitions of love. The first one, found in Song of Solomon 8:6-7 describes the passion of love. *“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised”* (Song of Solomon 8:6-7). A seal is a small cylinder with carvings on its surface. Its use was how people uniquely signed documents because every person’s seal would be different. If it was lost or stolen someone could forge agreements in that person’s name. Hence, a seal was both personal and very valuable to that individual. A person kept their seal bound to their arm or chest in order to keep track of it. Shulamith states that love is the same, it is personal and very valuable to the ones who are in love. She also states that it is strong and doesn’t give up easily by comparing it to death and the grave. Death does not lightly let go of those who have died and neither does love does love end. Using the image of an overwhelming flood to represent problems and love being a mighty fire, Shulamith states that love is not easily stopped by life’s problems. Nor is love for sale. All the money in the world cannot buy true love.

In I Corinthians 13:4-8, Paul gives a more technical definition of what is love.

Research:

On a separate piece of paper, make two lists from I Corinthians 13:4-8. In the first, list the things that love is and in the second, list the things that love is not. Describe in your own words what Paul means and give one example illustrating that point.

God gives every child examples of love in their own lives as they grow up. Each of us experience the love that our parents have for us, and we see the love that our parents have for each other. Of course, parents are people, and people make mistakes and sometimes fail in their duties. However, overall we get the gist of what love is about by watching those who raise us.

We spoke in the last lesson about God being our Father. Just as our earthly fathers demonstrate love, God demonstrates love to us as well. Where our earthly fathers may make mistakes, our heavenly Father demonstrates love perfectly because God is love (I John 4:8, 16). By saying “God is love” the Bible is saying that God is the source of love (I John 4:7) and that He is the embodiment of love.

Something to Think About:

How do you know that your parents love you?

Is it because of words or is it because of the things that they do?

In what ways do your parents demonstrate love to you?

Is their love free or is it costing them something?

What are they getting in return?

John tells us that God's love is demonstrated in what He willingly sacrificed on our behalf (I John 4:9). Jesus told his disciples, "*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends*" (John 15:13). Jesus then proceeded to do this very thing by offering up his own life to purchase our salvation. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). In other words, God didn't just say He loved us; He showed His love by what He was willing to sacrifice. "*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him*" (I John 3:16-19).

Jesus willingly did this so that we might benefit from his love. "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish*" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

God's love is also shown in His care for us. David described this love by using the

illustration of a shepherd's love and care for his sheep in Psalm 23. Jesus also talked about God's care in his sermon on the mount found in Matthew 6:25-34. God values each of us. He gives us just what we need. *"If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"* (Luke 11:11-13).

Finally, God demonstrates His love toward us by willingly making us His children. *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"* (I John 3:1).

If you think about it, parents love their children without expecting much in return. Many times the love starts before the child is even born. Even after birth, parents are willing to put up with a lot of misery because they love their child. A newborn is cute, but it certainly isn't lovable in the practical sense. Babies fuss and cry. They keep their parents up at all hours of the night. Every little thing must be done for the baby, including changing messy diapers. Now just what did an infant do to deserve love? What benefit does a parent gain from a child that costs him money in food, clothing, diapers, and equipment? Yet, if you ask any parent, the cost doesn't matter. The sleepless nights and jangled nerves are worth it – because parents love their children.

Study:

What problems do people cause God? Do those problems drive God away?

Ecclesiastes 7:29

Isaiah 59:1-8

Romans 5:8

II Peter 3:9

Just like our parents, God's love is persistent and strong. He doesn't love His people because we deserve it or because God owes it to us. God pointed this out to Israel after He lead

them out of the land of Egypt and through the wilderness. *“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”* (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). And it is no different for the Christian today. *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”* (Titus 3:3-7). The “works of righteousness” mentioned in this verse is satire. Mankind in general does not involve itself in righteous deeds when left on its own. The point is that God loved us even though we were unlovable people.

The love a parent has for the children of their own bodies is amazing; but some parents show an even greater love. Some parents are willing to give love to children who are not their own. What kind of love does it take to accept someone else’s burden? Even when an older child is adapted, they are rarely loveable at the beginning. They are in a new environment and are uncertain as to their position in the family. Often times they cannot trust their new parents because so many in the past have abandoned them. They just don’t know if it is for real or not. As a result, they take their uncertainties out on their new parents; often times crossing the line of acceptable behavior just to see if their parents really mean it. And yet there are couples willing to work at breaking down this defensive barrier and to show love even when it is not returned.

For study:

What kind of parent is God to each of us? What status did we start out with? To what did God raise us to be? Why did He do it?

Galatians 4:4-7

Romans 8:15-17

Ephesians 1:5

Because we grew up being loved, many people do not realize that love doesn’t just happen.

Love is taught.

For study:

How does God teach us love?

I John 4:19

I Thessalonians 4:9-10

Galatians 5:22

II Timothy 1:7

Finally, our parent's love for us gives us confidence to face the world. There might be people out there willing to hurt us. We might get our feelings hurt. We might stumble and hurt ourselves. But behind all the problems is the knowledge that there is someone who truly loves us. I can take my problems to them and they will help me sort things out. I might disappoint them at times, but they are always there when I need them. *"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love"* (I John 4:17-18).

Class Discussion:

- Go through Psalms 23 point by point.
 - What is being stated about a shepherd's care of his sheep?
 - What is being stated about God's care for His people?
 - Give an example of how God shows His care in this manner.
- Go through Matthew 6:25-34
 - What are the basic things that each person needs?
 - How does God give these basic necessities to the creatures of His creation?
 - Which is of more value: plant life, animal life, or human life? Why?

- What does worry accomplish? Why?
- Does God's love mean that He will accept us just as we are?
 - What should God's love cause in us? (Romans 2:4)
 - Is there any reason that people must perish in their sins? (Ezekiel 18:23, 30-32)
 - The why did Jesus point out that most people will end up in hell? (Matthew 7:13-14)
 - Whose fault is this?

Class Activity:

- Find songs which speak of God's love. Ask some of the boys in class to lead a song.
- Write a prayer expressing thankfulness for the love God has shown for us.

Gentle Cords and Bands of Love

Text: Hosea 11

People usually have a very limited idea of what constitutes love. They generally only want to see the positive aspects of love and deny that there are any negative aspects. Any sin that they may have committed is dismissed because “God is love!” It is argued that hell cannot exist because a loving God would never send people to eternal punishment. Ultimately, because “God is love,” people don’t think it matters what you believe. God is going to accept you just as you are and no matter what you do because “God is love.”

Because of this limited view on love, people have a hard time with passages like Hebrews 12:6: *“For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”* People have a hard time combining the ideas of punishment and love in the same sentence. As a whole, our society continues to struggle with the idea of being loving and firm at the same time. There is a strong movement promoting the idea that spanking ought to be made a crime. Supporters cannot imagine a loving parent swatting the bottom of their own child. It may happen one day because many parents are timid about correcting their children. They don’t want to face their child’s anger. They just want to be friends and have a loving relationship.

Something to consider:

Read Romans 11:22. Does God’s love mean there will be no punishment? Who makes a difference in God’s actions: God or man?

God had a great deal of trouble with Israel and He told them about it in a variety of ways. In Hosea 11, God depicts Himself as a frustrated parent dealing with a rebellious teenager, who represents Israel. Even though the story deals with Israel, there is much we can learn because we are not that much different. *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (I Corinthians 10:11-12).

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son” (Hosea 11:1).

Egypt was a nation given over to idolatry. Hence, when Israel left Egypt they also left a land of sin and sinful practices. Israel was also serving as slaves to the Egyptians, so leaving Egypt was also freedom from slavery (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). When Israel heeded God’s call, they became His children.

Making application:

Read the following verses and see how Christians are called out of similar circumstances.

II Corinthians 6:16-7:1

Ephesians 2:1-10

Titus 3:3-7

Romans 6:17-18

Jude 1

I John 3:1

“But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images” (Hosea 11:2).

Oddly, the more God called on Israel to be a holy people, the further they went after idolatry. They just could not leave their idols behind. *“But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt” (Ezekiel 20:8).* Nor were they able to leave slavery behind them. *“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ‘I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying, At the end of seven years let every man set free his Hebrew brother, who has been sold to him; and when he has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you.’ But your fathers did not obey Me nor incline their ear” (Jeremiah 34:13-14).* Just like a teenager determined to go his own way, Israel would not obey God. *“For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, “Obey My voice.” Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but which they have not done” (Jeremiah 11:7-8).* They did their own thing, took what God gave them, but would not have

anything to do with God. *“You have brought Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and with great terror; You have given them this land, of which You swore to their fathers to give them-“a land flowing with milk and honey.” And they came in and took possession of it, but they have not obeyed Your voice or walked in Your law. They have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do; therefore You have caused all this calamity to come upon them”* (Jeremiah 32:21-23). Doesn’t it sound just like a teenager who takes all the benefits of living with his parents but then refuses to listen to them? *“That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the LORD; who say to the seers, “Do not see,” and to the prophets, “Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.””* (Isaiah 30:9-11).

Making application:

Can Christians do the same thing as Israel? What do the following verses warn Christians not to do?

Galatians 5:13

I Peter 2:16

II Peter 2:18-19

“It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them” (Hosea 11:3).

How many of us realize what our parents have done for us during our childhood. Oftentimes we don’t fully appreciate it until we become parents ourselves. The sleepless nights when we had a fever, the gentle guidance they gave when we thought we made our own choices, the solid advice they gave that we then ignored. Somehow, when children become teens parents become the dumbest people in the world.

God had just that problem with Israel. God brought Israel up, but now they wouldn’t listen to advice that would make their life better. *“If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you”* (Exodus 15:26). Israel never really appreciate the aid God gave them in the wilderness. *“He found him in a desert land And in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He*

encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, Hovers over its young, Spreading out its wings, taking them up, Carrying them on its wings, So the LORD alone led him, And there was no foreign god with him”(Deuteronomy 32:10-12). *“The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God, who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day”* (Deuteronomy 1:30-33).

God gave Israel rich blessings, but the people took those very things to offer sacrifices to false gods. *“For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold - which they prepared for Baal”* (Hosea 2:8). *“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider. Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints”* (Isaiah 1:2-5).

Making application:

Read Titus 2:11-14. What does God teach Christians? How is the teaching done?

“I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them” (Hosea 11:4).

God removed the heavy yoke of slavery from Israel’s neck, but this didn’t mean he left them to run free and wild. He replaced the burden of slavery with a gentle law that made their life easier and better than they had ever known. *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright”* (Leviticus 26:13). There had to be restrictions because complete freedom is never good for anyone. *“The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth”* (Lamentations 3:25-27). Just as our parents place rules on us, designed to protect us and aid us, so God did with Israel.

Making application:

Christians are given freedom, but is it complete freedom with no restraints?

Matthew 11:28-30

John 6:44-45

II Corinthians 5:14

But if there are restrictions, then something must be done when those rules – light as they are – are violated. *“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights”* (Proverbs 3:11-12).

Some of you have gone out for sports. The coach trains you by giving you instructions in how the game is played. But instruction alone is not sufficient to make you good at the sport. Training also involves a lot of hard work as you practice moves over and over again. Even though plopping on the couch in front of a TV would be easier and more fun, we put up with the sweat and agony because we know it is good for us. Israel faced the same sort of training. *“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint”* (Isaiah 40:30-31).

Making application:

Must Christians endure hard times in order to be trained?

II Corinthians 4:16-17

Hebrews 12:5-15

“Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them” (Hosea 11:5-7).

Despite all of God’s efforts on Israel’s behalf, Israel was bent on rebelling. God was forced to severely chastize them, not because He enjoyed it but because it was what they deserved. *“And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy”* (II Chronicles 36:15-16).

This is where most parents fail in raising their children. They are reluctant to allow their children to receive the full accounting of what they earned with their choices. Too many parents repeatedly rescue their children from the results of their stubborn rebellion. It might start in grade school with their child misbehaving in class. Instead of punishing the misbehavior, the parents attack the schools and tell them to be less demanding. As their child grows and follows the ways of sin (stealing, drugs, sexual promiscuity, etc.), his parents wring their hands and wonder what they had done wrong. What went wrong is that there never was a reason not to do wrong. There comes a time when a parent with a rebellious child has to say, “It was your own choice to sin, you will have to face the penalties of that choice on your own.”

Making application:

Does God let Christians face the consequences of their bad decisions?

Galatians 6:7-8

Romans 2:2-11

“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror” (Hosea 11:8).

No parent likes to see their child suffer, even if it was the child’s own fault. Even while punishing Israel’s stubborn rebellion, the suffering of Israel tore at God’s heart. Even though they were wicked, God still loved them. He recalled the treasured days of their youth when they were innocent of harm. *“Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy*

on him, says the LORD” (Jeremiah 31:20).

Even though a rebellious child doesn’t deserve forgiveness, most parents are willing to offer it – if the child would just leave off sinning. God is letting Israel face the consequences of their sins, but God still holds out hope. *“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord GOD. “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord GOD. “Therefore turn and live!”*” (Ezekiel 18:30-32). Notice that God doesn’t offer to bend His standards to compromise with rebellious Israel. He asks that Israel to return from her sins, and if she does, He will accept her back. Israel didn’t deserve forgiveness, but God was willing not to totally destroy her.

Making application:

How does God treat His rebelling people today? Does He compromise His principles?

II Peter 3:9

Romans 5:6-11

I Corinthians 6:9-11

I John 1:5-10

“They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes,” declares the LORD” (Hosea 11:10-11).

It is difficult for most parents to put their foot down and let their child suffer for their bad decisions. Yet they have to endure watching the agony of their own child until the child’s stubborn will is broken and he finally, humbly asks to be rescued.

God had to treat rebellious Israel harshly. He had to assume the role of a strong voiced father who loudly and clearly tells his wayward son what he must do. God would roar at Israel and eventually Israel would come trembling back to God. He wasn’t afraid to scare them; He wasn’t hesitant to break their will; He wasn’t worried about their ego or their self-esteem. It was Israel’s

over-inflated ego that had gotten them into trouble in the first place. They needed to be taken down several notches so that a chance to change might take place.

The cure for rebellion is a broken spirit. *“The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all”* (Psalm 34:18-19; see also Isaiah 66:2). Once a person humbles himself, then God lifts them out of the mire of their own mess. *“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made”* (Isaiah 57:15-16). *“Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up”* (Hosea 6:1).

Class discussion:

- In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus pulls together a similar theme of rebellion and restoration.
 - Who is the father in this story? Who do each of the sons represent?
 - Why did the father give his son his inheritance before he died?
 - Why didn't the father seek out his son to bring him back?
 - What caused the wayward son to return?
 - Did the father in any way compromise his principles?
- Why is it a bad idea for parents to protect their children from their own mistakes?
- Does a rebellious child mean he has bad parents?
- Can children be raised without punishment?
- Does punishment indicate hatred?

Class activities:

- Find songs which speak of humbleness or a broken spirit. Ask some of the boys in class to lead a song.
- Write a short letter to your parents letting them know you understand why they are strict with you at times.

The Judge of All the Earth

Text: Job 34

Have you ever cried out: “It’s not fair!”? Perhaps you told you mom that, or a teacher, or a friend. Usually people say it when they think they are not being treated justly or in a proper way.

Define the following:

Justice

Just

Fair

Equitable

We symbolize justice as a blindfolded woman holding a pair of scales in one hand. The scales represent the weighing of evidence to determine what is right or wrong. The blindfold means that there is no respect of persons with justice. In other words, justice doesn’t peek to see who is involved in a case. It is the facts, and not who is involved that matters in the outcome. The rich and powerful do not have an advantage, nor do the poor and defenseless have a disadvantage. Justice weighs the evidence and dispenses fair judgments to all.

Now think about the times you said, “It’s not fair!” Where you being just at that moment? Most people think so, but the problem is they are not impartial to the outcome. Let’s imagine that your mom gives you and your friend each a piece of cake. You’ll find a lot of people saying “It’s not fair!” when they see that they got the smaller piece. But you would have to look long and hard to find someone crying, “It’s not fair!” when they realize they got the bigger piece.

People who cry, “It’s not fair!” are usually partial. They stand to benefit if things change. Hence, in truth, they are not just because their partiality. This is well illustrated in the parable of the vineyard works recorded in Matthew 20:1-16.



Understanding the Text: Matthew 20:1-16

How many groups of workers were hired?

In negotiating their pay in advance, what was offered to each group?

When payment came, who complained?

Who stood to benefit if their complaint was addressed?

Would the worker's judgment of the master be unbiased and fair?

Did the workers received their negotiated wages?

Then why did the workers complain? What was their motivation?

Bias is a problem in any society. We don't want judges having business dealings with people whose case they are deciding. We don't want government officials involved in foreign policy taking money from foreign governments. In fact, most companies have rules against employees receiving gifts from clients and suppliers for this same reason.

Imagine reading an article about recent research that says product X is the greatest thing since sliced bread. Then you get down to the fine print and find out that the manufacturer of product X funded the research. Do you still look at the results in the same way?

In the Old Testament, God made rules against bribery – the giving of money or goods to gain an advantage. *“You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous”* (Deuteronomy 16:19).

Something to think about:

Could God be bribed? (Deuteronomy 10:17; Romans 11:35)

Could a rich person have an advantage over a poor person? (Job 34:16-19)

Since God is interested in righteousness, would a righteous person have an advantage over a wicked person when judged by God? (Job 35:5-8)

Would a smart person have an advantage before God? (Job 37:23-24)

Abraham called God, “the Judge of all the Earth” in Genesis 18:25, and so God is. God is a fair, impartial judge. God judges based on actual deeds and not who did the deeds. *“And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear”* (I Peter 1:17).

It may seem obvious, but judgements must be based on some sort of standard. Imagine appearing before a judge, but knowing that the decision you are going to receive completely depends on the mood the judge happens to be in that day. You probably wouldn't think you received a fair hearing because a person's mood is not a good standard. When a judge does not live his life according to the law, then you have little reason to expect that the judge will use the law as a true standard in his decisions. *“These things also belong to the wise: It is not good to show partiality in judgment. He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," Him the people will curse; Nations will abhor him. But those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, And a good blessing will come upon them”* (Proverbs 24:23-25). Think about it, would you expect a judge who uses illegal drugs to uphold the laws concerning illegal drugs?

Such injustice cannot occur with God. God is without sin. *“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”* (I John 1:5). Because God perfectly lives by His law, He is able to perfectly judge us. *“Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes”* (II Chronicles 19:7). This is the point Elihu made concerning the justice of God. *“Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding: Far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to commit iniquity. For He repays man according to his work, and makes man to find a reward according to his way. Surely God will*

never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice” (Job 34:10-12).

There exists a major flaw in our own justice system: men do not know everything. Hence, much of our court proceedings revolve around discovering facts and deciding which facts are relevant to the case being considered. Despite our best efforts mistakes are made. People are punished for things that they have not done and people are free who have committed crimes. God’s justice does not suffer from this problem. *“For His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps. There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. For He need not further consider a man, that he should go before God in judgment” (Job 34:21-23).*

Something to think about:

Read the following verses and determine what God knows about and based on what information will we be judged.

Proverbs 5:21

Proverbs 15:3

I Corinthians 4:4-5

Ecclesiastes 12:14

II Corinthians 5:9-10

When you were caught doing something wrong, have you ever said “I’m sorry” or “I promise not to do it again”? We ought to be sorry for our bad behavior, but some wait until punishment is certain to blurt things like this out. They are hoping that if they appear contrite enough, then the punishment will be not so severe. Such tactics don’t work with God. *“For has anyone said to God, ‘I have borne chastening; I will offend no more; teach me what I do not see; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more’? Should He repay it according to your terms, just*

because you disavow it?" (Job 34:31-33). The point is that it is the judge who determines the sentence, not the one being sentenced.

People commonly suppose that if they were unaware of something in advance or if they didn't understand a particular rule, then it would not be fair to apply the rule to them. Of course, if that were true, the best thing a person could do is never learn a single rule because then nothing would apply to them. However people might think, God says laws apply whether you know them or not. This was true under the Old Testament: *"If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity"* (Leviticus 5:17). And it has not changed under the New Testament. If anything, God is more strict under the Law of Christ. *"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead"* (Acts 17:30-31).

Man is biased. He isn't necessarily looking for justice. He is looking for the easiest way out. But God doesn't think the way man thinks. God is a God of justice. He always does what is right and fair. *"Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,"* says the LORD. *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:6-9).

Something to think about:

When you get mad, how fairly are you able to judge a situation?

Why?

What is the problem with man's anger? (James 1:19-20; Job 36:17-18)

Do emotions cloud God's judgment? (Romans 2:5)

Can God be angry and just at the same time? (Psalm 7:10-11)

Class discussion:

- In Ezekiel 18:20-32 is a discussion of the fairness of God's judgments on the righteous and the wicked.
 - Does God consider the past when judging a person?
 - Why did the people think this was unfair? In what way were they biased?
 - Why was God's way fair?
 - Way is it fair that the righteous and the wicked are judged in the same way?
 - Rather than complaining about how "unfair" God was, what should these people do?
- Can people judge other people? Find verses to support your point.
- What can you do to make your judgments more just?
- How are trials conducted in your country?
 - What do men do in an attempt to make the trials fair?
 - Do these things always work?
 - When God makes judgment, does He face the same difficulty? Why?

Class activities:

- Find songs dealing with the justice of God. Ask one of the boys to lead one of the songs.

My God of Mercy

Text Ephesians 2:1-10

Several years ago I taught High School math and science in a private school. As occasionally happens, one student copied from another and turned in the assignment. The school's policy was to give zero grades to both the cheater and the one from whom he copied. This was felt to be the only fair thing to do since it was hard to determine who did the work and who copied. It also encouraged students to retain control over their work. Fortunately the school did not have a "zero tolerance" plan. Teachers were allowed to modify the policy as they saw fit.

On handing out the grades, I informed both boys that I had caught them, that they received zero grades as per the school policy, and that they were to write a short paper on a set of verses that I gave them as a punishment. To the boy that I was fairly certain cheated I gave a list of verses on the subject of laziness. To the other boy I have a much shorter list of verses on responsibility.

When they turned in the assignments, I privately asked each boy what he had learned from the assignment. The cheater took the opportunity to complain that I had given him a longer list of verses. He went on to grumble about how unfair life was for him. The other boy, when asked, won't look me in the eye. He humbly explained that he realized he bore responsibility for the result because he let the other boy borrow his notebook that contained the finished assignment.

I told the second boy that I was restoring his grade. He looked up at me in complete surprise. "You don't have to do that! I was wrong!"

"Yes, you were," I replied, "and you are exactly right, I don't have to do this. But I am going to do it because I want you to learn another lesson: I want you to understand the meaning of 'mercy.'"

When a person breaks the law, justice demands that the law breaker be punished, but mercy overrides judgment. *"For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment"* (James 2:11-13).

The public school system has gone through a fad of issuing "zero tolerance" policies. For example, there is a problem of violence in the schools, so the schools have issued a zero-tolerance plan: "Any student caught with a knife with a blade over one inch will be suspended for the remainder of the school year." These plans sounded real good until an honor student was brought in because she had a butter knife in her lunch bag to spread peanut butter on some crackers. It was a knife. It did have a blade and the policy didn't say anything about the blade having to be sharp. It was over one inch long. So since it was a zero-tolerance plan, the girl was suspended.

But the policy was foolish and the school looked foolish – not because knives should be allowed in schools – because "zero tolerance" means there is no room for mercy.

"Mercy" means giving less than what was deserved. *"The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will*

not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psalms 103:6-14).

Making application:

What does sin deserve as punishment (Romans 6:23)?

Who is guilty of sin (Romans 3:23)?

What would be the result of a zero-tolerance plan for dealing with sin?

What doesn't God enjoy (Ezekiel 33:11; II Peter 3:9)?

What does make God happy (Jeremiah 9:24; Micah 7:18-20)?

Perhaps you are now sighing with relief. “God will save me, even when I sin” you might say. “Why, there is no need to change because God’s mercy will excuse my sins!” Paul had an answer to this: “*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*” (Romans 6:1-2). The flaw in the thought is that it is the one wanting mercy who is deciding he is going to get mercy.

It is up to the judge to decide who will get mercy, not the defendant. God told Moses, “*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*” (Exodus 33:19). The application of mercy is God’s choice, not man’s. Paul quoted this passage from Exodus and then makes this conclusion, “*So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy*” (Romans 9:16). Just because you want mercy doesn’t mean you will receive mercy.

Jonah thought to manipulate God’s mercy in a negative way. God told Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh. But Nineveh was the capital of Israel’s most feared enemy. Jonah did want

there to be any possibility for Nineveh to be saved, so he ran off in the opposite direction. He thought that if Nineveh didn't hear about their danger, then God won't extend mercy to them. "*Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm*" (Jonah 4:2). But Jonah was forced into preaching at Nineveh, they did turn from their sins, and Jonah couldn't stand it. Yet, one of the points in the story of Jonah is that man cannot stand in God's way. It was God, not man, who decided who would receive mercy.

While mercy overrides justice, it does not eliminate justice. God is full of mercy, or as Paul put it "*the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant*" (I Timothy 1:14). As a result of His mercy, God went out of His way to offer men salvation. "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you*" (I Peter 1:3-4). This was the reason Jesus came into the world. He did not come to condemn the world – it already stood condemned by their own sins. Jesus came to bring mercy by offering salvation (John 3:17).

So if God wants the world saved and Jesus paid the debt of sin, why doesn't God just declare that everyone is saved? The answer is: because it wouldn't be just!

Digging deeper:

What does justice require of sin (Hebrews 2:2)?

Will God pervert justice (Job 34:10-12)?

Would it then be just to save sinners who remain sinners?

How does God, then, balance justice and mercy (Exodus 34:6-7)?

The center of the problem is sin. God wants to offer mercy, but our sins require a just response. Hence, God's solution is to offer a way for sin to be removed or forgiven. "*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead*

in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7). To satisfy the need for sin to be punished, Jesus died on our behalf. *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”* (Romans 5:8-10). Notice in particular that Paul said we were *justified* by the blood of Jesus. God could justly save us because Jesus offered His life on our behalf.

God then gave requirements needed to benefit from that gift. The requirements sort out the righteous from the wicked.

What are the requirements to receive God’s gift?

II Thessalonians 2:13

Ephesians 2:8

Ezekiel 18:30-32; Luke 13:3, 5

Romans 10:8-10

Romans 6:3-7; I Peter 3:21

Hebrews 5:9

You will find some in the religious world who would object to the idea of meeting requirements in order to gain salvation. To these people such effort on man’s part is an attempt to earn salvation. But the reality is that all of man’s efforts have earned us death. We are not saved by our works because they remain insufficient to save us from our sins (II Timothy 1:9). Instead, we should be thankful that God is not saving us according to our deeds (Titus 3:4-7). Jesus once pointed out to his disciples that it was difficult for a rich man to be saved. This startled the disciples. After all, the rich can buy anything that they wanted, so they asked, *“Who then can be saved?”* Jesus reply is important, *“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are*

possible” (Matthew 19:25-26).

The standard for the offering of salvation is not our works, but the works God requires of us. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:8-10). Think about it. Which of those things that God requires of us can really save a person from his sins? None of them alleviate the problem of sin. It is Jesus’ shed blood that takes care of the problem and saves us. But justice is satisfied because something that is within our capability to do is used to determine that which is beyond our ability to accomplish. *“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much”* (Luke 16:10).

Justice, though, demands more. For mercy to remain just, it must be applied equally to all people. This is a point that the Jews had a hard time understanding. They grew up thinking that God would save them simply because they descended from Abraham.

Digging deeper:

Read Romans 11:30-32

Because the Jews had sinned, who did God give salvation?

But to remain fair, that same salvation was also offered to whom?

Does nationality make a difference in how a person is saved (Acts 15:11)?

To whom is the promise extended (Romans 4:11; Titus 2:11)?

Some religions teach that God picks in advance the individual people whom He plans to save and condemns those He plans to be lost. Yet this would not be just or fair because the choice would essentially be arbitrary on God’s part. But by offering the same conditions for salvation to all men, conditions that all men can easily handle, then justice is satisfied. God chooses who will be saved, but by specific individuals, but by the type of person He wants to be saved. When a person demonstrates the proper character through obedience in small demands, God can justly show mercy on the type of people He wants to save. *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times*

He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:7-14).

There is one other way that God demonstrates mercy to us. Have you ever thought about what would happen if God zapped us right when we broke His law? How many people would still be living? In fact, mankind wouldn't have made it past Adam and Eve, would they? *“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).* God shows mercy by His forbearance and His patience with our sins. He wants people to be saved, so He gives people opportunities to repent. *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).*

“For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Psalm 86:5). God stands ready to forgive you of your sins. Don't waste the opportunity.

Class Discussion:

- Can mercy be shown if there is no obligation or debt?
- Can a person still be punished and have received mercy?
- Can mercy every be owed to a person?
- Explain in your own words how mercy and justice interact with each other.
- Are Christians required to show mercy toward others?
- Come up with some situations in which you could show mercy to another person.

Class Activities:

- Find songs dealing with the mercy of God. Ask one of the boys to lead one of the songs.

The Lord is a Jealous God

Text: Nahum 1:2-8

Definitions:

Jealousy

Envy

Zeal

There is a beautiful description of passionate of love in Song of Solomon 8:6-7. *“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised.”*

We usually think of jealousy in a negative sense. You might have heard stories of a woman killed by a jealous husband, or something similar. But jealousy is not always bad. It means to “vigilantly guard your possessions.” In other words, jealousy is the desire to hold on to what is yours for your own personal use. In Greek, “jealousy” comes from the word *zelos*, which means jealousy, envy, or zeal. The word literally means “heat.” In Hebrew, the word for “jealousy” is *qin’ah*, and it carries the same meaning as it does in Greek. The Hebrew word is based on a word that means “to become red,” as in when a person face becomes red when they are angry. Jealous is the passion that makes you feel hot under the collar.

Envy is closely related to jealousy. It is the same emotion, but it is misdirected. A jealous person wants to hold on to what is his; an envious person wants to have what belongs to someone else. A problem arises when someone incorrectly believes that something is his own exclusive possession. For example, a girl might become envious of another because she is going out with a boy she likes. Dating doesn’t create an exclusive relationship, though many young people would like to imagine that it does. Therefore the girl, trying to hold on to her boyfriend wrongly becomes jealous.

In contrast, a marriage does create an exclusive relationship. *“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?*

So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6). A wife would have the right expect her husband to be hers alone. She should not expect to share her husband with another woman. She would be a jealous wife in a proper sense if she demanded that her husband not commit adultery with another woman. She is trying to hold on to something that belongs exclusively to her: her husband’s body. “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (I Corinthians 7:4).

Yet, even here a person can take matters too far. A husband might demand all of his wife’s attention. He becomes angry if she talks to anyone else, especially another man. Such would not be right. We all interact with a variety of people in our day-to-day lives. Just because a person is married, it does not mean that all interactions are ended. A husband demanding exclusive possession of all his wife’s attention would be a jealous husband in a bad sense because he is trying to hold on to something that is not his.

This is why Paul says in I Corinthians 13:4 that “love does not envy” or “love is not jealous,” depending on your translation. At first it seems to be a contradiction to Song of Solomon 8:6-7, but it is just the other side of the same coin. It is right to have a burning desire to hold on to what is yours, but too many, in the name of love, claim the right to more than what belongs to them.

We talked about this at length because God bluntly declares that He is a jealous God. “*God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; the LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies” (Nahum 1:2). God does no wrong, so therefore, His jealousy must be a proper type of jealousy.*

Think about it:

What belongs to God (Psalm 24:1)?

So what can God properly lay claim to as belonging exclusively to Him?

Even though God has the right to claim people as His exclusive possession, not every one will acknowledge that claim. Far too many people think that they belong only to themselves and will do as they please. Using marriage as an example again, there are some who marry, but ignore the vows that they took. They argue that their bodies are their own and they can do what they please. A spouse married to such a person would be right to be upset.

When God gave Israel the land of Canaan, the people were eager to enter into a covenant with God. But Joshua warned the people that the covenant was more than what they would be able to handle. “*But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the LORD*

and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good." And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD!"" (Joshua 24:19-21).

Discover for yourself:

Did the covenant between God and Israel acknowledge an exclusive relationship? If so, what was demanded of Israel? (Exodus 20:4-6; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:23-24)

Even though the people willingly entered into a covenant with God, what did they do?

Psalm 78:58-59

Deuteronomy 32:16, 21

Isaiah 42:8

Returning to our marriage example, God feels like a woman who sees her husband breaking their marriage covenant by seeing another woman. But worse, the "other woman" is not a woman at all, but a store mannequin in a display down the street. How do you think she would feel? Now how do you think God felt when His people shared His worship with things that were not divine and were not even alive?

This is not a problem that belonged exclusively to people in the Old Testament. Paul warns Christians not to do the same thing. *"Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?"* (I Corinthians 10:20-22).

The bride in Song of Solomon said that love's jealousy is as strong as the grave. How strong is that? Have you known many people who have come back from the grave? We can all say quite firmly, "No." The grave doesn't willingly let go of its possessions.

Discover for yourself:

How strong is the anger of a husband who finds out his wife has been cheating on him?
(Proverbs 6:29-35)

Is that anger easily stopped?

Is it possible to pay back the husband so he would no longer be angry with you?

Why?

Is God's jealousy any different? (Zephaniah 1:17-18)

Recall that when Joshua warned the people that they would not remain faithful, he told them that God would not forgive (Joshua 24:19-21). While God is willing to forgive sins, this doesn't mean that God is willing to accept partial service or enter into a compromise. *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon"* (Matthew 6:24). People are amazed at the anger of Jesus when he drove the moneychangers out of the temple. *"Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up!"*" (John 2:13-17). The word translated as "zeal" is the same word that also means "jealousy." Jesus was jealous for God. The Jews were two-timing it with another (money) right in God's own house!

Imagine an unfaithful husband asking his wife to forgive him of adultery while saying that he plans to continue to spend time with the other woman. Won't the wife be absolutely furious?

How angry can God get?

Zephaniah 3:8

Exodus 34:7

Deuteronomy 28:20

Isaiah 27:11

Ezekiel 8:18

When we become Christians, we willingly enter into a covenant to become a people for God's own possession (I Peter 2:9-10). Therefore, we cannot keep visiting sin and expect God to be happy with it. *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"* (Romans 6:1-2).

Digging deeper:

What are Christians warned not to do? (Luke 9:62; Hebrews 10:38)

Worse, what happens to those who willfully abandon their covenant with God? (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Just how serious is a Christian's covenant with the Lord God? (Hebrews 10:26-31)

The Hebrew writer mentions that a primary cause for people leaving God is a lack of fear

over the consequences. People don't believe that their misdeeds will be met with that great of a punishment, if it is punished at all. In part it is because they fool themselves into thinking that they got away with sin because they were not immediately punished. *"Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God"* (Ecclesiastes 8:12-13). But God's anger is very real. *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matthew 10:28).

Digging deeper:

While we should long for God's love, how terrified should we be of facing God's wrath?
(Isaiah 8:13; Psalm 119:120)

Who will face the wrath of God?

II Thessalonians 1:6-10

Psalm 50:22

God should be feared. *"You, Yourself, are to be feared; And who may stand in Your presence When once You are angry?"* (Psalm 76:7). It is just the point that Jesus was trying to get across to each one of us. *"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched'"* (Mark 9:43-48). Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation, but he is trying to demonstrate the seriousness of the matter. Any sane person wouldn't cut off their leg, arm or eye because they would live in misery for the rest of their lives. So why would any sane person risk a permanent place in hell where the misery will never end?

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Class Discussion:

- Give a situation that would illustrate envy. Why would envy be an improper response?
- Give a situation that would illustrate jealousy. Is jealous an appropriate response in this case?
- Give a situation that would illustrate zeal. Why would zeal be a proper response?
- When would it be appropriate or not appropriate for a person to be jealous of his spouse?
- Why do some passages tell us not to fear God and others do? What is the difference?
- When we choose to do something other than worship God on Sunday, what are we saying is more important in our life? What do you expect would be God's response? Why?

Class Activities:

- Find psalm dealing with the anger of God. Give a dramatic reading of the psalm in class.

The Eternal God

Text: Romans 11:25-36

Imagine going back in time to the early days of this country and trying to explain the marvels of our time to someone who lived back then. Could you explain how we get around in automobiles? “Well, cars are kind of like carriages, but they don’t have horses. They have an engine that makes them go. Oh, what a moment, you don’t know what an engine is ...” Perhaps you would like to explain an airplane? “Well, they are big metal contraptions with wings like a bird, but they don’t flap. ...” How about the now common cell phone? “We can talk over large distances using electricity. What’s electricity? Ah, ...”

We have grown up with so much technology that we just accept what is there without really trying to understand how they work. Not that it matters a whole lot because most technology is easier to use than to explain. But trying to explain what we casually accept to another person who doesn’t have the same experience with technology is hard.

Let’s apply this idea to another point. God is eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27; Genesis 21:33). So how do you explain eternity to people stuck in the passage of time? In trying to explain how long wisdom has existed, Solomon wrote, “*The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primeval dust of the world*” (Proverbs 8:22-26).

To research:

How long has God been around? (Psalm 93:1-2)

How long will God be around? (Psalm 90:2)

Where does God live? (Isaiah 57:15)

God has given men a grasp of what eternity is, but it doesn’t mean that we fully understand it. “*He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end*” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

How do people deal with things that they don’t understand? For many of us, we try to

redefine the incomprehensible into terms that we can understand. In other words, we try to simplify the problem. Yet, in dealing with God, this has often gotten men into trouble. *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things”* (Romans 1:20-23). God’s eternal power is clearly seen in our world, but man has a hard time putting his arms around the concept of a God with the power to create an entire universe. So man redefines his concept of God with things that he understands and sees. The problem is that those things don’t even come close to describing the eternal God.

We have a tendency to oversimplify things. “Oversimplify” means “to simplify to the point of causing misrepresentation, misconception, or error; to cause distortion or error by extreme simplification of a subject.”

Toward better understanding:

When a person says a plane is like a bird, does that give an accurate description of a plane?

What are some of the problems with the description? What are some of the wrong ideas given about a plane?

When Paul spoke of God’s eternal power, he meant that there is no limit on what God can do.

Consider:

Could you make a complete catalog of all the things God is able to do? Why? (Psalm 145:3)

Is there a limit on how long God is able to do something? Why? (Isaiah 40:28)

What two things are impossible to do with the works of God? (Psalm 40:5)

“O LORD, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep. A senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this” (Psalm 92:5-6). Though Job’s friends did not understand why Job was suffering, they did perceive the greatness of God. *“But as for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause - Who does great things, and unsearchable, marvelous things without number”* (Job 5:8-9). *“Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven - what can you do? Deeper than Sheol - what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.”* (Job 11:7-9).

Job understood the vastness of God as well. *“He does great things past finding out, Yes, wonders without number. If He goes by me, I do not see Him; If He moves past, I do not perceive Him; If He takes away, who can hinder Him? Who can say to Him, 'What are You doing?’”* (Job 9:10-12). Perhaps, though, the best description is found in Job 26:14, *“Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?”* (Job 26:14). The things we see concerning God are just a very small portion of what God has done and is capable of doing. It would be silly to try to make a conclusion about the vast totality of God based on small glimpses that we see. *“Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? Who can declare all His praise?”* (Psalm 106:2).

Consider:

How many facts does God know? (Psalm 139:1-6)

How much does God understand? (Psalm 147:5)

Can we know or understand as much as God? (Romans 11:33-36)

Could anyone teach God? (Job 36:22)

Could anyone give God advice? (Isaiah 40:13)

Further consideration:

How faithful is God? (Psalm 36:5-6)

How much mercy does God have? (Psalm 103:11)

What are the limits of God's love? (Ephesians 3:17-21)

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

“All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in

the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"" (Daniel 4:35).

It is almost laughable when people try to describe God in human terms. God is not a man (I Samuel 15:29). Men have too many limitations.

Consider:

Read Psalm 90:12. How many days do we have compared to God?

Read James 4:13-14. What problem does man face when he makes future plans?

Read Colossians 1:20. Notice the mean of things invisible. What things are invisible to man?

If something is invisible to man, can man know about it and understand it?

Read Deuteronomy 4:9. Why do people need constant reminders?

So even when we learn something, does that mean we will always remember it?

Read Ecclesiastes 12:12. Is man able to learn everything about this world?

When Moses asked God who he should say to Israel sent him, God told him to say that "I Am that I AM" sent him (Exodus 3:14). "I Am" is an appropriate name for God. It captures the idea that God always exists, in the past, present, and future. It also tells us that God is self-sustaining. He doesn't need anything else to make Him complete or to keep Him going.

As difficult as it is, we need to appreciate the vastness of God without trying to box Him in with our own ideas of what God should be like. This is why the world is filled with false doctrines. People latch on to one aspect of God and then think they fully understand Him. "*For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God*" (I Corinthians 2:11). The only one who could understand God is God Himself.

The Lord our God is an awesome God. "*Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!*" (Psalm 117).

Class Discussion:

- Give an illustration that would help explain eternity.
- Discuss the follow statements. What is wrong or what is being left out? How would you answer a person who believed this?
 - Universalism: “God is love! He will not condemn a person to eternal punishment.”
 - Skepticism: “God is responsible for the suffering in the world because He knows about it in advance and does nothing about it.”
 - Calvinism: “Since God’s will is always done, the behavior and eternal destiny of a person is the fulfillment of God’s choice and not the individual’s choice.”
- How does Deuteronomy 29:29 apply to this topic?

Class Activities:

- Find songs dealing with the eternal nature of God. Ask one of the boys to lead one of the songs.