

How Then Shall We Live?

In spite of the abundance of Scripture which affirms Jesus' love for us, we may never be able to fully comprehend the depth of love which motivated him to leave the comforts of heaven and become a man, knowing that he would be misunderstood and ridiculed throughout his earthly life and eventually be beaten, spit on, nailed to a cross and left to endure an excruciatingly slow and painful death – all for people who, for the most part, didn't even appreciate his sacrifice. As Philippians 2:5-8 tells us, Jesus was by very nature God, but he willingly took on the nature of a servant, humbling himself and becoming obedient to death on a cross (the punishment reserved for the worst criminals) even though he never did anything wrong. He endured this experience because he knew that sin had separated each one of us from God, and, without his sacrifice, we would be powerless to restore the relationship that God longs to have with us and that we desperately need with him (Isaiah 59:1-2; Hebrews 9:26-28). Romans 5:6-8 says, *“at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Jesus lived the only sinless life that has ever been lived, so his was the only death which could satisfy the demands of justice, allowing God to set us free from the bondage of sin because Jesus accepted our punishment and paid our sin debt in full. Even more marvelous is the fact that God offers the gift of salvation and a personal relationship with him to *all* who are willing to trust him enough to obey him (Hebrews 5:9). By reading the New Testament, we can understand how Jesus wants us to respond to his sacrifice for us.

As Jesus met with his eleven apostles during the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension back to heaven, he gave them many instructions regarding his desires and expectations. The book of Matthew ends with Jesus directing them to *“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you”* (Matthew 28:18-20). Mark records Jesus telling the Eleven to *“go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:15-16). Luke relates how Jesus opened the apostles' minds so that they could understand the Scriptures and told them, *“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:45-47).

The book of Acts provides a record of how the apostles obeyed Jesus and spread the good news about him throughout the world. The first recorded sermon was preached in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus returned to heaven. On that occasion the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to speak in languages that they had not studied so that the Jews from every nation who had gathered in Jerusalem at that time could understand the message. Acts 2 relates how Peter and the other apostles explained that Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Messiah and convinced the crowd that *“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* The people who believed this *“were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’”* (Acts 2:36-38). Verse 41 tells us that *“those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.”*

We see a similar response to the teaching about Jesus in the other conversions which are recorded in the book of Acts. For example, Acts 8:12 says, *“When they [the Samaritans] believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of*

Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

Acts 8:26-39 relates the story of Philip being sent by the Holy Spirit to an Ethiopian eunuch, an important governmental official. He was on his way home from Jerusalem and was reading the book of the prophet Isaiah as he was riding in his chariot. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, and after answering that he didn't, he invited Philip to ride in the chariot with him and explain it to him. Philip started with the passage that the man was reading (Isaiah 53:7-8) and *“told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.”*

In Acts 9:1-19 and in a recounting of the same event in Acts 22:2-16, we read about what happened to Saul (later known as Paul) as he was on his way to Damascus to imprison Christians for their faith in Jesus. As he spoke from a very bright light which blinded Saul, Jesus told him to go into the city where he would be told what to do. Saul believed Jesus and allowed his companions to lead him into Damascus. Saul's penitent heart is evident as he fasted and prayed for three days while he awaited further instructions. When Jesus sent a disciple named Ananias to Saul, Ananias explained to him that he was to be Christ's witness to all men of what he had seen and heard, and then he asked Saul, *“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name”* (vs. 16).



In Acts 16 we read about Paul (formerly Saul) and Silas being severely flogged and thrown into prison in Philippi for casting a fortune-telling spirit out of a slave girl (whose owners were angry because this affected their income). About midnight while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, there was a violent earthquake, all of the prison doors flew open and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer

started to kill himself since he assumed the prisoners had taken advantage of the opportunity to escape, but Paul and Silas stopped him by assuring him that the prisoners were all still there. The jailer fell trembling before them and asked, *“What must I do to be saved?” They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved—you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds. Then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer...was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family”* (Acts 16:25-34).

As we read the book of Acts, we notice that those who accepted the good news about Jesus expressed their faith by being baptized. They were then filled with joy and began experiencing the blessings which come from being in Christ, where all spiritual blessings, including the forgiveness of sins, are found (Ephesians 1:3-7).

As we can see from Galatians 3:26-29, being in Christ also makes us beneficiaries of the promises of God to Abraham which we discussed in Lesson 2: *“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ...If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.”* In Romans 6:3-4, Paul connects baptism with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection and explains that the old man of sin is buried and a new creature rises to live a new life: *“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*

The books of the New Testament which follow the book of Acts are primarily inspired letters written to Christians, instructing and encouraging them regarding how to live their new life in Christ. For example, Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:21, *“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.”* Similarly, John said in 1 John 2:6, *“Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”*

But what is involved in walking as Jesus did? According to Ephesians 5:2, we follow Jesus' example as we *“live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and*

gave himself up for us...” Considering all of the different meanings that love has in our culture, how can we know what God intends when he tells us to live a life of love? Paul answers that question in Romans 12:9-19 when he describes a life of love: *“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*

By reading scriptures such as these and reflecting on the life of Jesus, we know that the kind of love that God requires of us is a love which leads us to humbly obey him and serve others.

Obeying God. 1 John 2:3-6 tells us that *“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”* Returning to this thought in 1 John 5:2-3, John says, *“This is how we know that we love the children of God; by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands, and his commands are not burdensome.”* As we obey God’s commands, we become more like him, reflecting his light to those around us. We read in 1 Peter 1:14-16, *“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”* Along the same lines, Ephesians 4:22-24 tells us to put off our old self and *“...to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

While discussing the process of putting on our new self in Colossians 3:1-14, Paul says, *“Since, then,*

you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God...Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry...You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator...Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Even though passages such as these describe characteristics of God’s people, they are not intended to be a mere checklist of “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt nots.” Rather, the Bible makes it clear that God wants our hearts and our complete devotion 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Instead of requiring us to offer animal sacrifices as the Israelites were commanded to do in the Old Testament, God wants us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. Paul expresses this thought in Romans 12:1-2 when he says: *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* God knows that if Jesus is our Lord and King, we will be motivated to trust and obey him in every aspect of our lives, and living like Jesus lived will become who we are, not just what we do.

However, just as the Jews found it impossible to keep the Old Testament law perfectly, we are also incapable of living a completely sinless life. Jesus understands this. The key is living our lives in a continuous effort to trust and obey God, something John called walking in the light, as opposed to walking in darkness. Those who walk in darkness are capable of doing good, but it is not what they are all about. Similarly, those who walk in the light will make mistakes, but their lives will be characterized by goodness and love. With words of encouragement to

fellow Christians, John says, *“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:7-9).

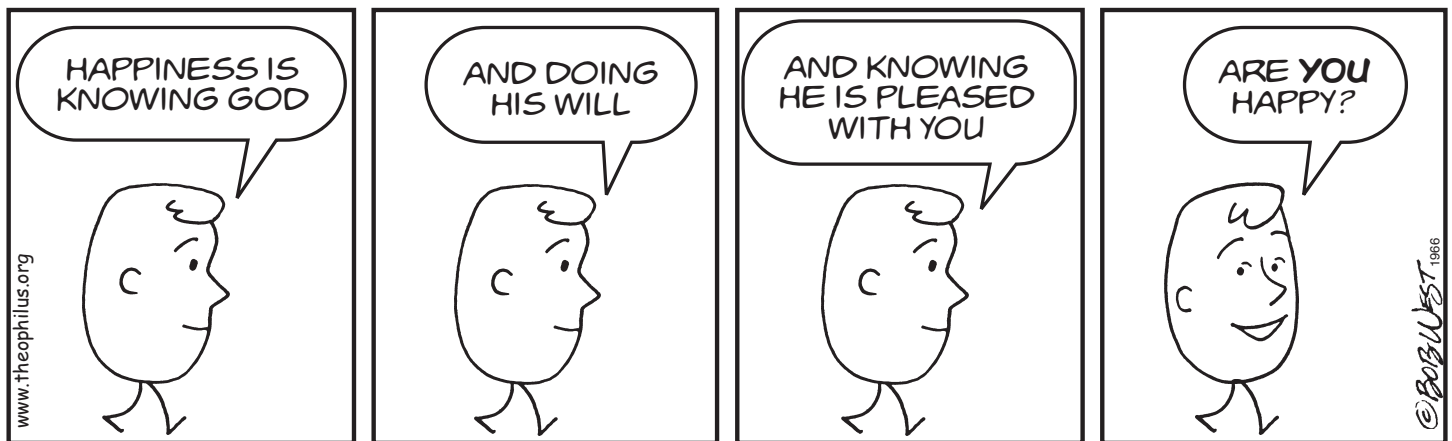
Serving Others. The Bible teaches that we cannot love God without also loving our fellow man. According to 1 John 4:20-21, *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”* James explains in James 2:15-17 that love for our brother involves more than just a feeling of concern for his misfortune: *“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”* In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus said that whatever we do for others, we do for him. Furthermore, what we do for others must be motivated by love rather than duty. Paul made this point in 1 Corinthians 13:3 when he said, *“If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”*

To help us live a life of love, God provides his Holy Spirit to live within us, giving us the strength to obey him and serve others (Romans 8:9-11,26-27). In addition, he instructs us to spend time with other Christians so that we can encourage each other to keep on keeping on, even when we are dealing with life’s most difficult circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:25). After reminding us in Hebrews 11 of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and other Old Testament characters who exemplified great faith, Hebrews 12:1-3 says, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*

By helping each other to keep our eyes on Jesus, together we can look forward to being with him forever in heaven where God will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 21:4). We can’t imagine how wonderful heaven will be, but we can be certain that whatever following Jesus may cost us during this life, heaven will surely be worth it all!

THEOPHILUS

Loving God and Loving Each Other



How Then Shall We Live?

Name _____

Address _____

Before Jesus returned to heaven, he gave his apostles what we refer to as the “great commission.” What did Jesus tell them to do?

a) Matthew 28:19-20

b) Mark 16:15-16

c) Luke 24:46-47

The book of Acts provides a record of how the apostles obeyed Jesus and spread the good news about him throughout the world.

a) In Acts 2:36-38, the apostles told the Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost that God had made this Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ. When those who believed their message asked what they should do, what did Peter tell them?

b) In Acts 9:1-19 and Acts 22:2-16 we read about Jesus speaking to Saul (Paul) from a blinding light as Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. Jesus told Saul to go into the city, and he would be told what to do. While he was waiting for further instructions, what did he do (Acts 9:9)?

When Jesus sent Ananias to Saul, what did he tell him to do (Acts 22:16)?

c) While Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi, the jailer asked them, “*What must I do to be saved?*” What was their answer (Acts 16:31)?

Then what happened (Acts 16:32-34)?

(over)

In Romans 6:3-4, to what does Paul compare baptism?

How do 1 Peter 2:21 and 1 John 2:6 tell us to live?

From Romans 12:9-19, name five characteristics of the life of love which God intends for us to live.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

According to 1 John 5:2-3, how do we show our love for God?

From Ephesians 4:22-5:7 or Colossians 3:5-10, name some of the characteristics of the “*old self*” which we are told to “*put off*” when we “*put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*”

According to 1 John 4:20-21, we can’t love God without loving our brother. What is involved in loving our brother (James 2:15-17; Matthew 25:31-46)?

Name two of the ways that God provides us with the strength that we need in order to obey him and serve others.

- a)
- b)

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