
Bible Study Center Seminar

Topic: “Warning Signs!”

This is a 3-part seminar dealing with the topic of the level of commitment God expects from his followers. We will begin by establishing the Bible's basic foundation of authority and how to study it. From there, we will draw upon various historical details of mankind's interaction with God and see what details we can learn regarding the level of obedience and compliance to his instructions, as well as what happens when man fails to accomplish that level.

Each session of the seminar is designed to span 2 hours, from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM and will break down into an initial 10-minute introduction/review, followed by a 40-minute lecture, with a 20 minute snack/visitation break, followed by another 40-50 minute lecture.

The flow of topics covered in the seminar is as follows;

Session 1A = Introduction: Laying a FOUNDATION

Session 1B = Warning Signs?

Session 2A = Standards

Session 2B = Desires

Session 3A = Relationship

Session 3B = Summary & Questions

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Session 1A: Introduction

“CHRISTIANITY” today is a very confusing situation. Worldwide there are **thousands of groups** that **CLAIM** to believe in Christ, **CLAIM** to follow the Bible, **CLAIM** to be Christians and yet **NO TWO GROUPS TEACH THE SAME THINGS!** When Jesus came to the earth one of his goals was to start his church. The New Testament speaks of only ONE church. In **John 17:21**, shortly before he was killed on the Cross, Jesus prayed for

his followers of that time and of all times to “**be ONE**”, in the same way that he and his Father are **ONE!** After Jesus left the earth, his followers were given the task of continuing his work. The Apostles taught and led the effort to spread original Christianity throughout the world. They believed that the church should be one¹ and they worked hard to keep the one church united, but as time passed, they witnessed a very sad thing. They

Worldwide there are thousands of different groups

- Each one **CLAIMS** to follow Christ!
- Each one **CLAIMS** to follow the Bible!
- Each one **CLAIMS** to be Christian!

And yet...

NO TWO GROUPS

teach the same things!

Is this really a good thing?
Is **THIS** what Jesus died for?

Diagram 1

watched as people who started out as Christians became false teachers who confused the faith of many people and caused division in Christ’s church. Where there **should have been unity** in faith and practice, differences and debate happened! The Apostles were not able to stop the process even though they gave many warnings and predictions of doom for anyone who did not stay with the true teachings. In various places they warned Christians to remain faithful to the original teachings of Christianity. (See: **Galatians 1:6-9**, **2 John 1:9-11**; **Revelation 22:18-19**; and **1 John 2:3-6**; **24**)

There are also several passages where the Apostle Paul spoke in detail to Timothy about the false teachings in the future. In **2 Timothy 3:1-7** Paul tells Timothy that in the future people would not hold on to **the TRUTH**. He explained that they would be religious people, having a “form of religion”, but that they would deny the power of it. The context shows that their “religion” would be wrong and that they would try to **deceive** people, especially “women who are burdened with many sins”. In the next chapter, **2 Timothy 4:1-5**, he told Timothy to be hard-working in teaching people the Scriptures because people would not hold onto **TRUE TEACHINGS** but while having “itching ears” would surround themselves with teachers that would say things “**they want** to hear”.

These passages provide important insight into the situation of the thousands of groups we see today. Over many centuries various leaders ADDED TO, TOOK AWAY FROM, and/or CHANGED the original teachings of Christianity. This is how the world went from having the ONE church Jesus started and prayed for to having the 38,000 churches that “Christianity” today is very happy about!

The **WARNINGS** of the Apostles are just as important for us as they were for the original readers of the New Testament books. We live in a world where we must be very careful to make certain that the teachings we accept and follow are the same original ones that came from to the people in the time of original Christianity!

¹ In **Ephesians 1:22-23**, **Colossians 1:18**, the Apostle speaks of the church as the “body” of Christ. In **Ephesians 4:1-6** he mentions only “**ONE** body”. No writer in the New Testament speaks of more than one church!

Christianity is **NOT** a democracy and the teachings of Christianity **WILL NOT** change with time. Christianity will not **EVOLVE!** This is because Christianity is based upon a message from God that was revealed in its entirety and once it was completed, it was fixed and unchangeable. God is its author, Christ and the Apostles were the messengers, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the result is what WE now call the Bible. (See **Diagram 2 = 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21**)

It is an undisputed fact that differences in teachings between religious groups exist today because people, whether sincere or not, use God's word outside of its **original intended context**².

While this is sad and creates much arguing and confusion, the situation is not hopeless. All we have to do to repair things is to get everyone to stop and apply to religion and the Bible **one of the most basic guiding principles that ALL people in ALL nations hold dear**, which is the belief that what a person says (a message) belongs to that person and that, out of respect for that person, no one should ever misrepresent that person's message in any way.

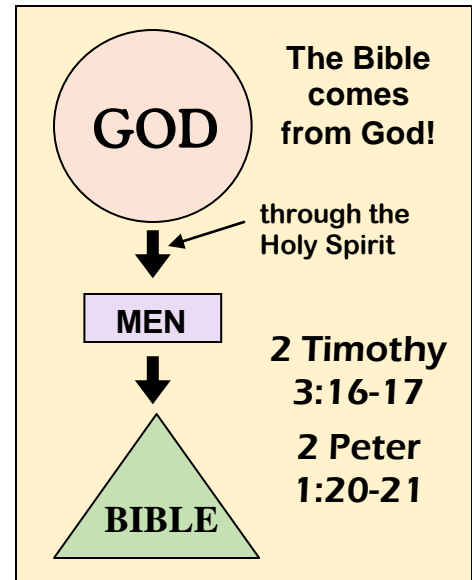


Diagram 2

What a person says belongs to that person, and it would be disrespectful to misrepresent that person's message in any way!

Our obligation is not necessarily to agree with what a person says, but to **UNDERSTAND** that message, as it was intended. If we decide to tell that message to other people then we must do so in a way that preserves the **INTENDED meaning of the one who originated that message**. Anything less would be disrespectful and unethical! To prove the necessity of this point simply consider the following. "How do YOU feel when you are the victim of misrepresentation?" It is no different with God and HIS message! In **2 Timothy 2:14-15**, Paul spoke to Timothy about ethics **when handling the Word of TRUTH!** We must study to **UNDERSTAND God's message BECAUSE IT BELONGS TO HIM!**

People today **interpret**³ the Bible message any way necessary to support their CLAIMS about their faith! They all FEEL confident about their relationship with God. In addition,

² **Context** means looking at how Bible passages fit together with the ones that come before and after. It has to do with finding out what the writer was actually saying by tracing the points he makes from paragraph to paragraph. It is not proper to take a single sentence (or verse) out of its paragraph and make it say whatever we want it to say. If our explanation of a verse does not fit back into what the original writer was saying then our understanding of the verse must be wrong and thus "out of context". Bible passages cannot mean something today that the original readers would not have understood them to mean during their time.

³ In **2 Peter 1:20-21** the Apostle Peter made a comparison between the idea of **understanding** something and **interpreting** something. Understanding something means accepting the authority and explanation of another other than ourselves. Interpreting something means explaining something based upon our own authority and opinion. The writers of the Bible did not receive a message from God and then write their

they ALL DO THINGS to help God and to show how grateful they are for all HE does for them. Even though everyone today KNOWS that different groups teach and practice different things everyone seems to think that by only looking at the fact that everyone believes in God and gives Jesus the glory and credit for everything that this will somehow cover up the differences and division that exists just below the surface.

If it was not for the story Jesus HIMSELF told in **Matthew 7:21-23**, we could join in the joy and praise God as more and more groups are added to the list of churches! In the story he speaks about some people who, at first, seemed to be very good, **humble**, religious people who were **proud** to call Jesus "Lord!" As the story continues, we are amazed to hear Jesus condemn these "good" and "active" people! His words "I never knew you" stand in contrast to their own beliefs and personal convictions! **They BELIEVED in Jesus! They WORKED for Jesus! They ALL GAVE CREDIT to Jesus! How could Jesus disown them?** The key to understanding the whole story is simple. It is **NOT** enough for us to do religious things for God and **then trust in our feelings** to judge what is "true" and what is "false"!⁴

Jesus' point is simple. Each one of us must do "**the will of my Father** who is in the heavens" in order to have him as our "Lord"⁵ and be pleasing to the Father! According to what Jesus said in another place, **THAT WILL** is to be found in the teachings that he brought and delivered to mankind. In **John 12:44-50**, Jesus showed all of us that the teachings he gave will be the basis for the Judgment, because those teachings were not his, but originated with the Father. He was just another of the many spokespersons that God used throughout time to deliver a message to the people of the world. Because of this, **we ALL MUST STUDY AND UNDERSTAND those teachings and then FOLLOW THEM CAREFULLY AND COMPLETELY!**

If the "words I have spoken will be the judge on the last day", then does this not mean that **all TRUE TEACHINGS of Christianity must be found in the teachings of Christ?** Was this NOT the point of John in **2 John 1:9-11**? The answer must be "YES!" to **BOTH questions!** This is the reason why each person must learn to study the Bible! How can we place our trust in any other person to study for us? Can we simply trust religious leaders today who tell us that the Protestant Reformation was from God? What if they are wrong? You alone must study and decide these matters for yourself, because YOU will stand alone before the Lord and give an account for your beliefs! (**2 Corinthians 5:10**)

Session 1B: Warning Signs?

I want to begin the material for this seminar with a question:

"What do the following have in common?"

- Adam and Eve⁶
- Cain⁷
- People of the time of Noah⁸
- Sodom and Gomorrah⁹
- Pharaoh¹⁰

interpretations of what they thought God was telling them. They wrote what God told them to write. **We are told to understand the Bible not interpret it!**

⁴ **Proverbs 14:12** and **16:25!** A most amazing passage on this subject of trusting one's feelings is **2 Thessalonians 2:11-12**, where we discover that **if** people **do not want to believe and accept the truth** then God himself might cause those people to believe that what they **want** to hear is true even though it is really a lie!

⁵ **Luke 6:46-49, John 14:15.**

⁶ **Genesis chapter 3**

⁷ **Genesis chapter 4**

⁸ **Genesis chapters 6-7**

⁹ **Genesis chapters 18-19**

- Old Testament Jews¹¹
- New Testament Jews

They all did things that were wrong and it cost them dearly. You would think that with all of these stories and lessons that the people who lived during the time of original Christianity would have learned to be obedient and submissive to God. However, here is an interesting window into what original Christianity was really like.

*"For I have no one like-minded who is genuinely concerned for your situation, because **they all seek the things they want and not the things of Jesus Christ.**"*

Philippians 2:20-21

It is interesting to see how Paul shows us details about attitudes within the group of believers that existed during his time. We know this problem became much more common, and the last remaining apostle, John, issues this warning in **1 John 2:15-17**.

*"Do not love the world, or the things in the world. **If anyone loves the world, then the love of the Father is not in him.** Because everything in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the boasting of life aren't from the Father but out of the world. And the world passes away and the desires of it, but **the one doing the will of the God remains forever.**"*

Notice the idea of "loving the world" and especially the following points after. Notice how what we have seen and what John talks about connect with what James said about how sin works in **James 1:12-15**.

*"Very happy is the man enduring temptation, because **after being tested** he will receive the crown of life promised to the ones loving him. Let no one being tempted say, 'I am tempted from God', for the God is not able to be tempted for evil and he himself tempts no one. **But each one is tempted by his own desires, being lured and enticed, then the desire after taking hold of him, gives birth to sin, and sin after completion brings death.**"*

The **POINT?** We get into trouble when we do what we think or want.

We easily see this as a pattern in the history of all the stories of failure of people and unchecked, this can and will lead to our own ruin and the loss of everything that we hope for!

- **Matthew 7:21-23** – "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord'..."
- **Parable of the Sower**¹² – only one soil type survives!
- **Mark 7:6-7** – The history behind this quotation is interesting. It traces back to the Old Testament when people began to insert their own beliefs about what they thought their relationship should be like. They changed teachings and created new ones all to fit **what THEY wanted**. Of course, God would not agree with any of it, and sent a clear message: **devotion is useless if it is based upon teachings of men!**

¹⁰ Exodus chapters 5-15

¹¹ Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13

¹² Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8

Consider now **Philippians chapter 2**. What is the underlying issue here being discussed?

Humility

- Everyone needs to **think** in this way... (**verses 1-2**)
- Putting aside strife and conceit, in **humility**, consider the things of others to be more important than your own things (**verse 3**)
- You need to **think** like Jesus did (**verses 5-8**)
 - Emptied himself
 - Humbled himself
 - Became obedient “unto death”
 - Even a “cross death”
- Remember God’s reaction (**verses 9-11**)
 - God lifted him up to a high place!¹³
 - God “graced” to him the name above every name!
 - Every knee bows, and every tongue confesses...
 - This is how God is glorified!

Now... Look at the subsequent point with which Paul **compels** his readers, in **Philippines 2:12-15**.

*"Thus, my beloved brethren, just as always you obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more rather in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, because God is the one working in you both to will and to work for what pleases Him.** Do all things without grumbling and argument, so that you might become blameless and pure, spotless children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, in which you shine as lights in the world."*

HERE'S A THOUGHT:

*If the Christian life is easy, and God overlooks what so many point to as our base human weaknesses, why does this writer place the burden of success or failure squarely upon us, individually, and command us to go forward in life "**with fear and trembling**?" Why with fear and trembling?*

The truth of the matter, when seen in light of the previous stories we considered earlier, is that we ALL have the responsibility to be faithful to our promise of loyalty to God, always keeping in mind exactly who HE is and HIS expectations regarding “loyalty” and “obedience.”

As we discover, all of the Bible stories have a major significance in our lives and the lives of all who live after them. Consider the message of Paul in **1 Corinthians 10:1-12**. Notice how he uses the history of God’s relationship with Israel to illustrate how THEY should act.

- Do not desire evil **as they did (verse 6)**
- Do not engage in idolatry **as they did (verse 7)**
- Do not commit sexual sin **as they did (verse 8)**
- Do not tempt the Lord **as they did (verse 9)**
- Do not grumble **as they did (verse 10)**

¹³ Acts 2:36

* Verse 6 - those things are "a **pattern** for us, **not to be like them...**"

* Verses 11-12 - those things are "a **pattern, to warn us...** to whom the end of the age has come."

- **Romans 15:4-ff** - things written before were do so "for our teaching..."
- **1 Corinthians 10:13** is the **KEY to everything!**

*"No temptation has taken you except human ones, and the God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted more than that which you are able, **but with the temptation He also makes the way of escape for you to be able to endure.**"*

So, what have we learned from our time together thus far?

God is the Father of our giant human family spanning eons of time, from the Creation up to the present, and forward unto "The End" and into eternity! He alone has the authority. No matter how old, smart, intelligent, wise, wealthy or "powerful" we might consider ourselves to be, either individually or collectively, we are, have been, and always will be "children" in his presence.

Is it any wonder then why, when asked who was the greatest in the Kingdom¹⁴, Jesus turned to a child and explained that **unless we TURN and BECOME AS CHILDREN we will never enter into the kingdom of heaven?**

One thing is certain, challenging God's authority remains an impossibility and this is borne out by the historical record. If God put down a rebellion in heaven¹⁵, and if He took the most powerful "child" among us (Pharaoh), opposed him, and then, when Pharaoh was ready to give up, controlled and made him into an example¹⁶ of just how weak and helpless our "power" is compared to HIM¹⁷, for all the world to see, and that example influenced people in other existing nations at that time to commit treason against their own people¹⁸, then we all need to be extremely careful how we approach establishing and maintaining a relationship with the God of the Universe!

Aside from the Bible being a source of the knowledge of God, it is filled with warning signs, placed there by God who wants everyone to be happy and free to enjoy the wonderful world He created!

As we seek to understand and apply His teachings, we also need to read and learn from the WARNING SIGNS so that we won't make the same mistakes and, like those people, lose everything.

¹⁴ **Matthew 18:1-3**

¹⁵ **2 Peter 2:4-8**

¹⁶ **Exodus 9:16; Romans 9:17**

¹⁷ **1 Corinthians 1:25**

¹⁸ **Joshua chapters 2-6**

Session 2A: Standards

We are in no position to question or provide our own clarification on things for which there are no complete instructions. This is why we cannot trust in our own interpretations. Here are other things we must consider:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth so my ways are higher than yours."

Isaiah 55:8-9

"I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps." **Jeremiah 10:23**

"There is a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way of death."

Proverbs 14:12

"The secret things are for the Lord our God, but the things revealed are for us and for our children forever to do all the saying of this law."

Deuteronomy 29:29

So, let's consider a few additional cases and see what they have in common:

- **Lot's wife** left, fled to the mountains, but turned and looked back¹⁹
- **Uzzah** and the incident with the ox cart²⁰
- **Nadab and Abihu** - priests, and the sacrificial fire incident²¹
- **King Saul** and the Amalekite incident²²
- **Solomon** with his wives and the high places²³
- **Rehoboam** and his immaturity caused a civil split in Israel²⁴
- **Jeroboam** who had it all and lost²⁵

All of these people started out in a good position with God, but changed their focus at some time later, thus placing them out of favor with God. Notice the different consequences they faced as a result of their choices.

So, here is a dilemma. How do we explain God giving differing punishments to different people? For example, God gave the Israelite people specific instructions regarding offering burnt offerings and incense. They were told to use a particular source of fire, but when Nadab and Abihu substituted a different fire source, God immediately killed them. However, when God also gave Moses specific instructions to speak to a rock to bring forth water, and Moses, instead, struck the rock with his stick. As a result, God only banned him from entering the Promised Land. Why kill one and not the other when BOTH failed to follow exact instructions?

Here is the point. We must accept that God CAN be merciful **IF HE WANTS**. He alone has the power to decide what is best for HIM in these matters. Paul makes this point clear in **Romans 9:14-18**.

¹⁹ **Genesis 19:17-26**

²⁰ **2 Samuel 6:3-7**

²¹ **Leviticus 10:1-7**

²² **1 Samuel chapter 15**

²³ **1 Kings chapter 11**

²⁴ **1 Kings chapter 12**

²⁵ **1 Kings 11:26-40; chapter 12**

*“So, what shall we say? That there is no fairness with God? Heaven forbid! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy upon whomever I will and compassion upon whomever.’ Therefore, it isn’t a matter of the one wanting, or of the one running, but of the one receiving mercy from God. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘Because into this same thing I raised you up so that I might show in you my power and so that my name might be spread throughout the earth.’ Therefore, **He mercies whom He wishes and He hardens whom He wishes.**”*

The one thing we can count on is that we can trust that God is FAITHFUL and FAIR. He will not punish someone who is innocent.²⁶

As the Father of His family, God makes the rules and decides how He will apply them - **as HE sees fit**. It is a mistake to assume that God **“will understand and be flexible with me.”** The stories of the Bible are filled with people who thought such and they paid the ultimate price for their error.

Having said all of this, there **IS always hope for leniency!** Consider these examples:

- Moses²⁷
- King Hezekiah²⁸
- Saul of Tarsus²⁹

These are people who did things that placed them on the wrong side with God, but while they experienced some degree of “punishment” their overall **relationship remained intact**.

"Influence"

The **standards** we have today have come into our lives through a long and complex process. It began with things we observed happening around us in our families when we were children, but even then, we were already being influenced by outside forces. As we grew and became independent-minded, we came under the influence of a myriad of sources outside of our families. Teachers and fellow students, advertisements, music and videos on the internet, friendships, work relationships, and much later politics, **all have impacted our lives and affected our standards**.

Our parents recognized the potential negative reality of this and tried to manage these influences so that we would become “good kids.” Regardless of how religious they might have been, they all believed in the Biblical principle, *“Bad company corrupts good morals.”*³⁰

Even our religious beliefs have been influenced by the religious world around us. Unless we were atheists before becoming Christians, we were involved in some kind of religious environment, which shaped our thinking about God up to this point in time. The danger here is that if we bring these with us into our study of the Bible, they can influence us to see things that may not be what God actually intended. We cannot trust what we see in “religion” because, as the writers

²⁶ Ezekiel chapter 18 – **VERY IMPORTANT!**

²⁷ Numbers 20:2-12; Deuteronomy 34:1-8; Matthew 17:1-8

²⁸ 2 Kings chapter 20

²⁹ Acts 7:54-8:3; 1 Timothy 1:12-17

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:25

warned, people can hold to the form of religion but deny the power of it, and they can be wolves in sheep's clothing. Hence, the warning of John and others...

For some reason, the older we get, the more independent-minded we become and THAT independence **CAN BE a problem** in our relationship with God. We need to make a difference between accepting anyone and anything claiming to be "Christian" and realizing the fact that God does not provide a standard for every possible area of concern we might have. We must hold unwavering to things God reveals and be flexible in matters for which he does not define in definite terms. Remember **Deuteronomy 29:29!**

Yet another **Warning Sign!**

"Culture"

While on the topic of influence, a person's cultural norms can interfere with understanding matters of importance in any relationship. For example, cross-cultural marriages are prone to miscues due to different cultural understandings of relationship issues.

In the same way, it is common (natural) for people to process the teachings from God through culture, but is that fair? Is it acceptable? Consider this example.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus provides a process³¹ for handling problems between his followers. It involves clear steps designed to bring out the issue of offense, secure acceptance of responsibility for harm done, and bring about repentance and forgiveness. It is a major part of Jesus' teaching.

Notice how the process Jesus expects keeps the focus of the problem upon the two people directly involved in the struggle, and others are only brought in if the initial confrontation does not yield a resolution. Additional steps in the process bring more and more people into the situation and the party refusing to accept accountability and repent faces expulsion from the group.

This process, and especially the forced isolation of a person unwilling to repent, is quite harsh behavior in many cultures. Instead of following the statements of Jesus, they insert their own cultural conflict-resolution equivalent. They do this and believe that as long as the end result Jesus wants is achieved, the process by which that is done is not THAT important. There are a couple of things wrong with that reasoning.

First, **Jesus is THE LORD**, and HE was given authority from the Father to instruct mankind regarding what God wants in this matter. Jesus always pointed out that all the things he taught were not from him, but from his Father.³² Therefore, these instructions in Matthew 18 are from God, and (hopefully) by now we should all be able to see the importance of **following exactly what God tells people to do.**

A second problem with substituting a cultural conflict-resolution process does not have any provision to compel capitulation of the offending party. The process will gradually involve more and more people and often results in a polarization of

³¹ **Matthew 18:15-19; Luke 17:3-4**

³² **John 5:30; 6:38; 7:28; 8:28-29; 14:9-10**

those for one side or the other ending in no resolution at all, and damage to the unity of the community that can linger for years!

As an example, I recall a time when we had a problem emerge between members and some of the local leaders in the church refused to apply a literal application of what Jesus taught in Matthew 18, choosing instead to use the cultural equivalent. I remember being shocked hearing one of them tell me, *“You Americans can do this if you want, but we Filipinos have **our way** of dealing with these situations.”* I recall things did not go well. The problem was not resolved and some families, who chose the side of the offender, left the church because they believed their friend was being falsely treated.

Another **Warning Sign!**

Mentors and Heroes

As a final word on **influence**, we need to discuss the importance of **mentors** in our lives. Who are these people? These are people, usually older and more experienced, who we respect and desire to imitate because of who they are or what they may have accomplished. We have all had some experience with this perhaps as children with our “childhood heroes,” whom we admired and longed to grow up and be just like them.

While the Bible is filled with personalities, famous and infamous, there are many who are worthy of such consideration. The New Testament does, in fact, contain a number of statements encouraging us in this area.

- **1 Corinthians 4:16** – be imitators **of me** (Paul)
- **1 Corinthians 11:1** – be imitators **of me** (Paul) **as I am of Christ**
- **Ephesians 5:1** – be imitators **of God**
- **Hebrews 6:1-12** – **imitate those you see doing right**
- **Hebrews 13:7** – Remember your leaders... Consider the outcome of their way of life and **imitate their faith**

Of course, we also have the chapter about faith, **Hebrews 11**, that mentions numerous example stories of remarkable people whose faith carried them through difficult times. It is followed immediately by **Hebrews 12:1-2**:

*“Therefore, also we **having such a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, putting aside all impediments, and the easily distracting sin, let us run with endurance the race that is laid before us, looking away from these to Jesus the founder and completer of the faith.**”*

Jesus is our primary pattern for imitation!³³

All of these influences can sway our understanding and commitment to God’s standards. Therefore, it is imperative that we look and think carefully at the world around us and make sure that our choices of influencers will lead us forward on our journey of faith to become the good soil, always understanding that at any time our choices can lead us to “rocky ground” or fill our lives “with thorny weeds!”

³³ **1 Peter 2:18-25**

Session 2B: Desires!

This brings us to the next topic of discussion in our study: **DESIRES**. Ultimately, the problems we face in **ALL** our relationships go back to what James talked about in his explanation of how sin works!

*“But each one is tempted **by his own desires, being lured and enticed**, then the desire **after taking hold of him**, gives birth to sin, and sin after completion brings death.”*

Managing our desires becomes a major area of work because, let’s face it, once we set our sights upon doing or acquiring something, that desire can consume us. I see kids in toy stores who, once they see a toy and fix their hearts upon it, will sit and throw a tantrum in public to convince their parents to get that toy for them. It is sad to see so many parents give in to this behavior not realizing that if they give in to their two-year-old how will they be able to control their teenager?

*“Train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” **Proverbs 22:6***

There is an interesting phrase found repeated at least 12 times in the Old Testament: **“did what was right in their own eyes...”**³⁴ It characterizes so much of the history of Israel, that ended with God ending his agreement with them.

God’s FINAL warning to people: Jeremiah chapter 18:1-12!

Background: God sent the prophet Jeremiah to visit the house of a man who made pottery. While there, he witnessed the man working on a project. The potter made a mistake and so he flattened the clay and then reshaped it into something else. God used that observation to illustrate the reality of His power and authority over mankind, and His warning to Israel.

Looking at that message, here are the main points:

- God is free to do with us as he wants.
- If God helps someone because they obey Him, and they later turn on Him, then just like the potter, He will change His mind and destroy them.
- If God condemns someone because they disobey Him, and they later turn to Him, then He will change His mind and help them.

This shows that even though **God HAS THE RIGHT to do whatever He wants, HE CHOOSES** to treat us fairly, making His actions and reactions toward us **BASED UPON OUR CHOICES**. As we will see later, this fairness is echoed in other places.

Unfortunately, Jeremiah was sent to Israel with this message because they had refused to repent, insisting upon **doing what they wanted**, and were destined for rejection!

Another **Warning Sign!**

³⁴ **Deuteronomy 12:8; Judges 17:6; 21:25; Psalms 36:1-4; Proverbs 12:15; 16:2; 21:2; 26:5; 26:12; 26:16; 28:12; 28:26**

Looking back on at the stories we have so far discussed, they leave us with an honest question...

*“When _____ was doing bad, **did they think they were doing bad?**”*

Unfortunately, nothing changed when the New Agreement arrived. Even with all the warnings, the references back to history, the fact that Jesus himself came down from heaven to teach and warn people,

- *“I encourage you, brothers, to **watch out for the ones doing the divisions and the stumbling blocks** alongside the teaching you learned, and turn away from them. For such people **do not serve our Lord Christ, but they serve their own stomach**, but through the smooth talk and blessings, **they cheat the hearts of the innocent.**”*
Romans 16:17
- *“I make known to you, brothers, the good news, which we gave to you, which you received, in which you stand, through which you are saved, **if you hold to the word which we gave to you, unless being out of it you believed in vain.**”* **1 Corinthians 15:1-2**
- **Antichrists** – people who began as Christians, but who turned away and became false teachers. There were already many antichrists when John wrote about this topic.³⁵
- **The 7 churches of Revelation**³⁶
 - **Ephesus** – 2:1-7
 - **Smyrna** – 2:8-11
 - **Pergamum** – 2:12-17
 - **Thyatira** – 2:18-29
 - **Sardis** – 3:1-6
 - **Philadelphia** – 3:7-13
 - **Laodicea** – 3:14-22

From these, we see that even Christians can, and do, lose sight of their commitment and purpose. The “threats” Jesus makes reinforce the call to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

Christians need to remember that just because our past was washed away in the water of baptism, that GRACE should be a happy recollection that reminds and encourages us to fight hard to resist the enticements and temptations of the world. We must never forget that we will continue to receive temptations, and if we fail, we will accumulate more sin. If we are humble and learn from our mistakes, we can find forgiveness, but if we reach a point where we think sin is not wrong, we will be lost.

The writer of Hebrews leaves us with a stark reminder of just who it is we are offending when we refuse to take the way of escape He made available for us.

“For if we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth there is no longer any sacrifice left concerning sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment and a zealous fire to consume the opponents. Anyone despising the law of Moses, on the testimony of two or three witnesses dies without mercy. How much worse punishment do you think is worthy for one who has trampled upon the Son of the God, considered common the blood of the agreement, by which he

³⁵ **1 John 2:18; 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7**

³⁶ **Revelation 1:9-3:22**

*was made special, and mocked the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay', and again, 'Lord will judge his people.' **It is terrifying to fall into hands of a living God!**" Hebrews 10:26-31*

Considering all God had to do to get us to be with Him, it is logical that he would not take lightly willful disobedience. Considering how he dealt with his people in the past, as the reference to the "law of Moses" reminds, all of the stories we have referenced show us that we will not be treated any differently. God is no respecter of persons.³⁷ He cannot be because He has already set His standard and enforced it in the lives of millions of souls who have lived since the beginning.

As we learned, those things **are a pattern for us, upon whom the end of the age has come...**

God will not change His standards **just for us!**

³⁷ Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25

Session 3A: Relationship

We need to remember that Christianity is a **relationship** with God. He invites all people to be part of His family, in which He is the Father who wants very much for us to succeed!³⁸ We already know how He watches out for us and regulates how far evil can go in trying to overcome us. He tells us all about the relationship and how to maintain it.

Unfortunately, God has chosen to assume something of a background role as Father. This creates a great challenge for us. In our earthly families, we can easily tell when our fathers are pleased or displeased with us by their reactions, facial expressions, and subtle glances. So, how can we tell if God is pleased or displeased with us?

Warning Signs (for any relationship)

Relationships are evaluated **independently by each party involved**, and while the status of the relationship generally depends upon the contributions of all parties involved, a major breach by any party **CAN BE** very destructive. The easiest way to lose a relationship is to **assume the other party(s) will overlook mistakes**.

Marriage is perhaps the most sacred of the relationships that exist among people. It provides a foundation for procreation, as well as weaving the social fabric of the communities in which people live and grow. All tribes and nations of the earth have marriage in some form, and from it, children learn the basics of how to relate to one another as adults.

Like most relationships, marriage begins in an environment of uncertainty (*dating*) evolving into ever-increasing stability and depth, highlighted with extreme joy and happiness (*courtship*), culminating in a special moment incorporating promises of loyalty in the presence of God, friends, and family, with celebration, and lots of pictures of smiling people... and cake!! 😊

No one involved in such an event ever considers that the bond of loyalty created on that day can or will ever be broken or fade with time. **So, why then do so many marriages today end in breakup?** And consider the fallout-effect of broken marriages upon the couple, their families, and especially upon the kids born into the union.

Here is a problem. If enough families within a given social community experience such a daunting change, **it can have a devastating effect upon the community standards**, which are sets of guidelines that shape behavior within a community and create structure and **continuity** within. Standards ensure fairness and productivity. People are most at home within the standards they grew up with and when people raised with different standards come together there are often difficulties in relationship and in levels of tolerance.

The Great Battle: Women from Venus and Men from Mars

While it is a fact that men and women differ in many ways, they are bound by a common origin and were created to be dependent upon one another.³⁹ Failure to

³⁸ 1 Timothy 2:1-6

³⁹ Genesis chapter 2; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Corinthians 11:8-11

recognize and deal with differences can and will lead to the end of the relationship. Most failures do not happen overnight, but we often hear about people “growing apart.” While emotion and attraction are undeniable (and quite irresistible) forces that bring people together, “**irreconcilable differences**”, which creep into the relationship over time all too often become the reasons given for relationship failure!

Here are some factors that create **Warning Signs** in relationships that we learn from marriage that also apply in a person’s relationship with God.

"Changing Standards"

Because people differ from one another in nationality, background, knowledge, culture, personality type, and life experience—all of which shape and mold their **standards**—they will often experience difficulty relating when placed in new unfamiliar environments.

In marriage, the more tolerant and flexible the couple are as individuals, the easier it will be for them to adjust to one another and build a life together that will last “*until death do us part.*” The more close-minded they are, the more difficult it will be, and, the more likely a time might come when differences will become “irreconcilable.”

This is not what God intended!⁴⁰

STANDARDS are necessary in a family relationship and our heavenly family is no exception. If we look back at **Matthew 7:21-23**, there is reference there to a **standard** that is **NOT** set by us. It is not even set by the Jesus, the Son!⁴¹

Do not forget what we learn from the **Parable of the Sower**. The outcome of each soil type does not depend upon the seed but upon the soil-type, which is affected by the standard to which the person submits. The “soils” refer to people who are motivated by **particular** standards that lead them to an outcome. Even if people are dedicated to the same standard, the level of outcome (fruit) will be different person to person, hence the 30, 60, and 90 even among the “good soil.” This applies both to the good as well as to the bad. (*Not everyone is a thief, and not all thieves steal at the same level of criminality.*)

As long as there is a standard, referred to by Jesus in **Matthew 7** as “*the will of my Father who is in the heavens,*” and as long as **THAT standard** is the one determining who IS and IS NOT accepted by Jesus, **then ANYONE who desires to have Jesus as Lord must submit to and follow THAT STANDARD.** This is the basis for the point John made in **2 John 1:9-11**.

“Anyone going ahead and not remaining in the teaching of the Christ does not have God. The one remaining in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not invite him into your house or give to him any greeting because the one greeting him, shares in his evil works.”

In the previous sections, we looked at a number of factors that affect relationships among us. We noted that all of those also carry over into our

⁴⁰ **Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:21-33**

⁴¹ **John 12:47-50**

relationship with God, and we are just as likely to treat a relationship with God in the same way we do all of our other relationships.

Jesus once put the dilemma in simple terms in **Matthew 7:17-20**.⁴²

“Every good tree makes good fruit and every rotten tree makes rotten fruit. A good tree is not able to make evil fruit neither a rotten tree to make beautiful fruit. Every tree not making good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So, from their fruit you will know them.”

What is it about human beings that that makes evaluating the status of a relationship so difficult?

- All the things we discussed in **Sessions 2A and 2B**
- Perspective (*Tastes, hobbies, politics, religion, social status, economics, so many others...*)
- Gender } These interact with each other over time.
- Age }
- **SELF! ← Definitely the most challenging factor!**

→ **Reality check:** My needs **always** take priority! Right?

Isn't this perhaps the most difficult and frustrating thing we face in ANY relationship?

So, how can we have confidence in any relationship?

Sharing a common standard is a very good start. This is one reason why we often encounter policies and guides in school or work. While these often make life easier, without fail there are always some who insist upon seeing themselves as being exempt from any attempt at **“control.”** People who create problems are often heard saying, *“It’s a free country!”* in justification for their failure to cooperate.

We see this same pattern of attitude in the stories we have examined in our study. *“For all seek their own things and not the things of Jesus Christ”*⁴³ and *“did what was right in their own eyes”*⁴⁴ are not unique character flaws in Christianity.

- **Romans 14** – Let God define the issues that matter, and in matters where God does not seem to care one way or another, keep your beliefs to yourself! Do not cause others to stumble!
- **1 Corinthians 8-11** – Respect the opinions of others, and if you consider yourself to be strong, be the more mature one and bear with the “weak” ones.
- **Philippians 2** – Consider the needs of others to be more important than your own needs. Be just like Jesus!

This is what Jesus meant when he talked about *“deny self and taking up your own cross.”*⁴⁵ It is what Paul meant when he spoke of *“presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice”*⁴⁶ to God.

⁴² **Matthew 12:33-37; Luke 6:43**

⁴³ **Philippians 2:20-21**

⁴⁴ See list in **note #32**

⁴⁵ **Matthew 16:24-27; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-24**

⁴⁶ **Romans 12:1-1**

Here is the problem: Unless we allow God (*our Father*) to manage HIS family, we will pay a price for our disobedience. (*Do not forget the churches in Revelation!*)

Simplifying the idea of denying self and bearing our cross, we need to understand the word **metamorphosis**, and how it was used in the message.⁴⁷

- It represents the idea of change taking place in stages.
- Being transformed by changing the way we think...
- Being changed to be like Christ from one degree to another...
- The **put-off** and **put-on** lists...⁴⁸

There are a variety of lists containing ideas, actions, and attitudes scattered all throughout God's message, **in both testaments**, and each one relates to us as humans interacting with God. They provide the details of the "common standard" given to by God, and by which He determines us to be either good or bad children. As we learn about these, we put off the things we learn that God dislikes and replace them with things He likes. This change-process is the "salt" and "light" of which Jesus spoke⁴⁹, and the "aroma" of which Paul spoke.⁵⁰

So, making changes is an obvious Warning Sign affecting our relationship with God, but there is more...

The importance of the 3 C's in relationships!

Of course, aside from being the very best we can be, the WAY we handle relationships does affect how strong they are and how long they will last.

- **Commitment** – to stay in it for the duration no matter what happens!
- **Consideration** – to consider the needs of the other to be more important than the needs of self, and being sensitive to differences in individual standards, in areas where God does not specify a right or wrong.
- **Communication** – talking and working hard to achieve understanding, dealing with problems when they are small,⁵¹ seeking understanding and not "conversion," because if God does not specify, then we are free to believe what we want.

And a 4th – **Contrition**, which is a willingness to admit fault and make things right. This of course must be paired with forgiveness.⁵²

So, how can we have confidence in our relationship with God?

- **John 15:10** – Jesus shared his secret for success and says it is our secret for success as well!
- **1 John 2:3-6** – This is a rewording of the same point Jesus made in Matthew 7:21-23. This one ends with a reference to **imitating** Jesus.
- **Luke 14:26** – We must understand that **no one can be allowed to come between us and our promise of loyalty**, because we belong to God!⁵³
- **Matthew 10:16-39** – This shows how far sideways things might go, but no matter what happens, we need to focus upon what we know is true.

⁴⁷ **Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:18**

⁴⁸ **Ephesians 4:17-32; Colossians 3:1-17**

⁴⁹ **Matthew 5:13-14**

⁵⁰ **2 Corinthians 2:14-16**

⁵¹ **Ephesians 4:25-27**

⁵² **Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 17:3-4; Colossians 3:13-14**

⁵³ **1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 7:23**

“Semper Fidelis” (it’s Latin for “always faithful”)

The bottom line in all of this is: **FAITHFULNESS** and **LOYALTY** – a never-give-up attitude that puts the will of God first in our lives, always watching for **WARNING SIGNS** that threaten our relationship! He deserves only the very best we have to give, **so that he can accomplish what HE WANTS TO DO IN US!**

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.”

Proverb 3:5-8

Never forget the other side of this coin: **Mark 7:7!**

“Well did Isaiah prophecy concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘this people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away far off from me; vainly they devote themselves to me teaching for teachings the commandments of men.’”

Closing thoughts:

Jeremiah 18 – Let us not forget the tragedy of Israel. Even though they had done wrong over and over, and God was about to pull away from them, he **STILL PLEADED** with them to repent. However, **verse 12** says it all! Stubborn to the end, they earned God’s anger and punishment! That same fate awaits anyone who makes a promise of loyalty to the God of the universe and then does not keep it!

Ezekiel 18 – Here we see the fairness of the Lord defined in very specific terms. The soul that sins is the only one that will die. A son will not die for the sins of the father nor shall a father die for the sins of a son. A good man’s goodness belongs to him alone and a bad man’s badness belongs to him alone. This puts fairness into all of the cases and stories we have seen in our journey. **We can trust our Father to be fair in the way He treats all of us.**

Ezekiel 33:10-20 – We close with this because it shows us the fairness and desire for repentance God has in his heart for all mankind! However, **verses 12-13** clearly show that “past obedience” will not save us from punishment and destruction if we turn away from God and sin.

This is the same thing we saw in Hebrews 10:26-31!

Be warned! It is terrifying to fall into the hands of the living God!

Session 3B: SUMMARY

We can ask God for wisdom and for all the things we need in our daily lives, but the Bible is our only connection to God’s MESSAGE/TRUTH! It contains a standard from him for all people under the New Agreement and was delivered once for all through the ones He chose as instruments.

The message belongs to God and therefore there can be only one possible meaning, one possible truth, and that must be the meaning that God intended.

Our quest is to understand that message. This is done by careful and contextual study, combining all details provided before we make conclusions.

We have seen many warnings that show us the importance of caution when approaching a relationship with God.

1 Timothy 4:1 – The Spirit expressly says that in the future

2 Timothy 3:1-9 – In the later times people will be selfish, having the appearance of loyalty, but denying the power of it.

2 Timothy 4:3 – having itching ears they surround themselves with teachers

We know that God is very serious about people obeying Him. We have seen that He is fair, and that He wants all people to come to a knowledge of His truth, so they can be saved and be with Him in His kingdom for all eternity! However, we also know that God has limits to His patience and He has on many occasions closed Himself off from people. **This has not changed!**

2 Thessalonians chapter 2 – Be strong, be ready. Stay faithful, or else. Those who do not love the truth could fall into a trap of deception set by God himself to make them believe a lie!

Hebrews 10:26-31 - If we go on sinning, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but the certainty of judgment and a God who is very angry. **Why is this so? We have seen the KEY to understanding why. 1 Corinthians 10:13.** The true test of our love and appreciation for all He has done for us, as well as for His Son, Jesus, is to consistently choose **“the way of escape”** each and every time we are tempted. How can we know and recognize that way if we do not study and learn what God wants us to do?

All the warnings caution us against following our own desires because that never results in a good outcome. Instead, we must trust in our Father and do exactly what he says! *(Just as Jesus did!)*

Our lives as followers of Christ become a constant daily effort to learn new things and replace the old with these new things, all as part of a process God put in place to see us become less like who we were and more like Jesus, from one day to the next and from one degree of glory to another. *(Salt, light, and perfume!)*

“Not that I have already received, or I am already complete, but I chase after to reach it, upon which I was also reached by Christ Jesus. My brothers, I do not consider myself to have reached it; but one thing, forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching toward the things in front, I chase after unto the prize of the upward call of the God that is in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:12-14

Always looking forward.

Never looking back.

Always watching!

Always careful!

Always faithful!