**RECEIVE**

Decisions that Encourage Discipleship

Choosing to intentionally grow into Christlikeness.

*“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” Hosea 4:6*

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**Unit 101 Choosing to leave the place where Jesus finds me.**

*(Luke 9:23a) “if anyone will come after me…”*

**Unit 102 Choosing to Serve Jesus where He Leads me.**

*(Luke 9:23b) “…let him deny himself…”*

**102-3: Exploring Justification & Walking in Your Baptism**

We are coming to the half-way point of our second unit at the end of this lesson. I think I have told you, that this unit (six lessons) will end the Wednesday before Easter, and that I will be “taking a break” from Easter to the beginning of September, because of a family vacation, General Assembly, and summertime. If all goes well, I will hope to start unit 103 *“take up his cross daily,”* with a mailing of 103-1 on September 11th and a video class of 103-1 on September 13.

Today we are looking at “being made right in the eyes of God”, the idea of being justified (Just as if I had not done it!) This is something that we take “by faith” because of what is written in God’s Word. Certainly, there are often emotions as we feel the presence of the Holy Spirit anew in our lives, but the real evidence is what God says in His Word, and that we have acted in faith upon those promises.

**Hebrews 11:6 (**Enoch/NIV**) *“For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God*.** ***And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”***

Hebrews 11 is the great faith chapter, and each one of the persons presented in the chapter could well provide a study in faith—not only their believing, but also the acting in their lives upon that belief. One of the greatest in my mind is the one we know very little about, Enoch, but who is one of the two, possibly three that did not experience a normal human death because of their faith and living. (the other one is Elijah, and the other possible one is Moses!). Think of this man who sought God before their were any Scriptures to inform him, before the cross and atonement of Christ, before Pentecost and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit.

\*\* The story of Enoch being translated because he pleased God.

\*\* The impossibility of pleasing God without faith.

That faith pleases God should not be new information for us, but it is central to the revelation of God in His Word. If you love someone, you want to please them and have a wonderful relationship. God delights in seeing us turn from our own human understanding and ‘bet our life” that He is trustworthy.

\*\* Not only believing He exists but that He actually rewards.

The idea of rewards brings to all of our minds the difficulty in continuing to trust Him in every circumstance since we all have experiences where we have trusted in Him and it did not work out the way we had hoped. Sometimes we are able to look back in our lives and thank God we were spared from what we had prayed to occur **but not always.** It is in those times of not having answers that our faith shines.

\*\* **Hebrews 11:20-22 *“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. 21By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. 22By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.”***

These three verses about these three patriarchs have become meaningful to me in my retirement. Isaac wanted to bless Esau and was tricked into blessing Jacob by his wife and his son. Jacob did not understand at his death why he had to go for so many years believing his son Joseph was dead and had to replace one of his sons as a tribe in Israel with Joseph’s two sons who were born of Egyptian women. And surely Joseph did not think that the two dreams that motivated him for his life of sheaves bowing down, and stars bowing down, meant that he would be sold into slavery, spend years in an Egyptian prison and never make it back to the promised land. But they moved forward in faith and obedience when their desires and their understanding did not seem to bring them what they had hoped and loved God.

\*\* The necessity of rewards requiring those who **earnestly seek Him.**

The Heroes of faith in chapter 11 not only obeyed and believed, but they were also earnest in their seeking and delighting in God. This is the NIV version, the KJV version says “diligently.” I think the NASB version did not include this concept because of their Calvinistic understandings.

**\*\*\*\*\*My Story of Irrational Exuberance in Faith\*\*\*\*\***

I have included in this lesson a story when I stepped out from safety and tried to “walk on the water.” I do not want to imply that I am an expert in this, but I am glad for those times when I felt the “nudging of the Spirit” to leave the safety of the “boat,” and obeyed, and trusted what I was sensing the Spirit was saying.

**Exploring Justification**

**Romans 3:10-12** (quoting from the Psalms) ***“There is no righteous person, not even one; There is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks out God; they have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, there is not even one.”***

The first part of what we need to understand is that we will not explore justification if we don’t think we have done anything wrong that needs to be justified! There are many in our American culture who believe that, and therefore are hard to convince of their need for a Savior—and certainly struggle with any need for a “Lord.”

\*\* Righteousness and Justification come through faith! (Romans 1:17)

**Romans 1:16-17 *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written: ‘But the righteous one will live by faith.”***

Notice how much the Gospel is related to believing and faith. One of the more powerful witnesses of Scripture is that seventeenth verse that God’s righteousness is revealed from faith to faith—faith is contagious!!! You can be helped by the faith of another—and they can be helped and strengthened by your faith.

\*\* What seems good to us is not always what God sees (Matthew 7:13-23).

\*\* Loving Him enough to keep His word allows His presence with Us!

**John 14:23**  ***"…If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him….”***

It really is all about love. As I have done “marriage counseling” as a pastor, I have become aware that not everyone who stays in the same house “married” has very much love for their mate! Sometimes it’s a marriage of convenience. Other times it is a struggle of two “strong-willed” people. Perhaps all the reasons cannot really be counted or understood. But the relationship God wants is one of intense love from us and intense love back to us. *“All He wants is me, unreservedly, not just a part, He wants all of my heart. All He wants is all of me, all He wants is me!*

\*\* Not employing the Word in our life becomes questionable in our lives.

What does it mean when a “follower of Christ” is casual with their commitment to God’s word and their love of the things of God? We are not the judge—and I am sure glad that I am not!!! But it does cause me concern, especially when I am their pastor and have a spiritual responsibility for them and see a very casual concern in their lives for God’s Word, and a casual love that seems to be less than vital.

\*\* What we say, even to ourselves, is not the issue—it is what we do!!!

Keeping His Word is the fulcrum on which this promise swings. I have too many things that I keep that are not that vital, but some things I keep are extremely important. Knowing the difference makes the difference!

**Walking in Your Baptism**

**Romans 6:1-18 *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2Far from it! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. 5For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7for the one who has died is freed from sin. 8Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all time; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11So you too, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore***

***sin is not to reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, 13and do not go on presenting the parts of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead, and your body’s parts as instruments of righteousness for God. 14For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under the Law but under grace. 15What then? Are we to sin because we are not under the Law but under grace? Far from it! 16Do you not know that the one to whom you present yourselves as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of that same one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 17But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were entrusted, 18and after being freed from sin, you became slaves to righteousness.***

This passage is obviously one of the strongest passages in Scripture concerning sin and our response to it in our lives. “Walking in our Baptism” assumes that all of us who are following Christ have been baptized. It is amazing to me how many of the ones who follow Christ do not get baptized, and how many churches do not intend to practice baptism. It is a powerful outward expression of an inward work of God in our lives. I have always said, “I would rather be more wet at the judgment than I have to be than to come to the gates of heaven a “little dry!”

**Sin: A Transgression:**

\*\* I John 3:4 *“sin is lawlessness” /* James 4:17 *“knows to do good and does not do it…”*

**Sin: A Falling Short:**

\*\*I John 5:17 *“all unrighteousness is sin”* Romans 14:23 *“whatever is not from faith….”*

I hope you remember from last week my attempt at describing the four verses in the New Testament that tell us what sin is. Two fit with the definition of sin as a “willful transgression of a known law.” I John 3:4 and James 4:17 both imply a previous knowledge and a choice not to obey. I John 5:17 and Romans 14:23 are two verses that focus not on our actions, but on God’s glory and perfection—and our inability to attain that in this life. Just because it is impossible, does not mean that we should utterly disregard God’s help to make us better in this by His grace.

\*\* Is continuing in sin possibly the refusal to change our lives and living?

**Romans 6:11 *“So you too, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*** Proverbs 23:7 says that we are what we think in our heart. How we consider ourselves in this life makes all the difference in our outcome! If we really believe that we are dead to the attractions and diversions of this life, we will not have the struggle that dooms so many of the ones who fall away.

\*\* Why is baptism not always practiced by churches and Christians?

I will leave it to you to answer this question. I have heard excuses “I am too old”, or “My health isn’t good enough to get cold”, etc. But most of the excuses I have heard is how inconvenient it is, how difficult it would be to admit that I have been a follower of Christ for all these years and have failed to do it. Does the Bible say that if you are not baptized, you will not go to heaven? Not in so many words. But it is a way to glorify Christ, and what Christian would not want to do that? I am afraid that the real reason for not being baptized is not wanting to consider that I am to be dead to sin, a “half-heartedness” in following Christ.

\*\* What death (vv10-11) is Paul referring to for Christian believers?

I believe that the death Paul is referring to is found in **Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”*** This is the powerful concept of self-denial that is central to this unit of teaching and to the Scripture itself.

\*\* What does it mean to present yourself as a slave for obedience? (v.16)

The concept of Scripture is not that we are “independent actors” making our own way. The concept of Scripture is that we are either in “God’s family” or we are outside of that family. And to be outside is to be under the control of the evil One.

It does not matter how serious the sins are that are being committed, without the blood of Christ covering us, we are hopeless at the judgment of God.

\*\* How important is it to obey from our heart the teaching we received?

I am so glad that the obedience is not the perfection of action in our life, but the heart and love we have. The church and other followers of Christ cannot always rightly determine what is in our heart, but God does not make a mistake about it.

He knows what we want to do, and excuses do not win the day in his opinions.

\*\* What does it mean to become a slave of righteousness? (v.18)

A slave does not questions the orders from the Master. There are a lot of the things of righteousness that may not make sense to us in our human lives—but that it makes sense to us is not the crucial issue. “Does it make sense to God” is what is important and His Spirit will guide us in that, and help us to follow Him.

**Hebrews 13:7 *“Remember those who led you… imitate their faith.”***

I think that this phrase is an often-overlooked admonition of Scripture. I believe that Godliness is often passed on from generation to generation, and not all that is old ought to be discarded without thought—especially those believers that have been a help to our walk with Christ in times past. Imitating them is not the advice here, but honoring their lives and **Imitating their faith** is the advice.

**\*\*\*\*\*United Cry for Repentance, Anne Graham Lotz\*\*\*\*\***

I have included in this mailing a copy of a powerful “cry for repentance” in our country given by Billy Graham’s daughter, Anne Graham Lotz. I ask you to prayerfully consider it as your repentance for your life and for our nation.

HAVE YOU INVITED THE SPIRIT OF GOD INTO YOUR LIFE?

**GO FOLLOW JESUS THIS WEEK!!!**