

Gospel Motivation
An Adult Bible Study
Short Course 1
Introduction and Foundation Lessons

by

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Gospel Motivation

Lesson 1 The Gospel—God’s Love and Forgiveness in Christ

“Gospel Motivation,” Preface and Chapter 1, pp. 5-21

Worship

Read Responsively About God’s Blessings on the Righteous, Psalm 37:25-31.

L: I was a young man. Now I am old.

G: But I have never seen a righteous person forsaken or his children begging for bread.

L: Every day he is gracious and lends.

G: His children will be blessed.

L: Turn back from evil and do good.

G: Then you will remain forever.

For the LORD loves justice.

G: He will not forsake his favored ones.

L: They will be protected forever,

G: but the descendants of the wicked will be cut off.

L: The righteous will inherit the earth.

G: They will dwell on it forever.

L: The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom.

G: His tongue speaks what is just.

L: The law of his God is in his heart.

G: His steps do not slip.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us understand the height, breadth, and depth of your love for us.

Thank you for sending your Son to die for our sins and giving us a place in heaven with you. Throughout this course, help us see the many ways the Gospel of your forgiveness can be expressed. Use those many ways to help us grow to serve you more.

All: Amen

Thinking about motivation

1. This course explores the many reasons Scripture gives us to serve the Lord. They all stem from the hope we have because of his gracious forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

However, not all people, including some Christians, do God’s will for the right reasons. Think about the motivations some people have for living according to God’s will. Are they right, wrong, or partially right or wrong?

- John grew up knowing right from wrong. He was told that if he did enough right things, God would be pleased and give him a place in heaven. He knows he can never be perfect, but he was told that if he tries his hardest, God will never reject him. “I’m just doing what my parents told me,” he said.

- “I know what’s right. I just feel better when I do it,” said Laura. “When I don’t, my conscience bothers me, and the feeling won’t go away. When I live according to what I know is right, my day goes so much better.”
- “When I do things I know I shouldn’t do,” said Jack, “it always catches up with me. I create enemies. My home life can get really rocky. I’m always looking over my shoulder to see who’s watching me. I have to shape up my life. I can’t have this trouble keep coming into my life.”
- “I’m scared of God,” said Sue. “People say he’s good, but I know he’ll punish me someday if I don’t clean up my life. Maybe someday I’ll be able to see him as good. Maybe I’ll even believe he loves me.”
- “I try to be a moral person,” said James. “And I think I am. I try to be kind to others because it’s the right thing to do. I don’t know if there’s a God or not. Regardless, if everybody thought like me, it would be a better world.”
- “I heard a preacher on TV last night,” said Anne. “She said that the more I give, the more I’ll get—up to ten times as much. She sounded convincing, so I sent her church \$500 this morning. Now I’ll wait. Good things are on the way; I know it.”

The Gospel—God’s greatest gift

2. How does each of the following passages describe what God has done for us?

Genesis 3:15—

“I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.”

John 3:16—

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. The one who believes in him is not condemned, but the one who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.”

Romans 3:19-24—

“Now we know that whatever the law says is addressed to those who are under the law, so that every mouth will be silenced and the whole world will be subject to God’s judgment. For this reason, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by works of the law, for through the law we become aware of sin.

“But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known. The Law and the Prophets testify to it. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.

“In fact, there is no difference, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

3. What is God’s agenda in sending his Son for us? In other words, why do we exist as Christians? as Christian congregations? Why is it so important that we line up our agenda with God’s?

4. Can you tell the difference between these two statements?

“I want to serve God more, so I’ll use the Gospel to accomplish that.”

“I love the Lord for giving me the Gospel, so I will try to serve him more.”

The Gospel—God’s gift for eternity

The gift of eternal fellowship with God is God’s greatest gift. Right now, we live on earth. But our time here is only a speck, a little dot as you would make with the tip of a sharp pencil. But take that pencil, make a dot, and start drawing a solid line to the right. Keep drawing. Don’t stop. Take your pencil sharpener because you’re going to need it. Take a few packs of pencils too. Keep drawing until your line stretches around the world. Keep going. Circle the globe a few more times. But don’t stop there. In fact, never stop.

That’s what the second part of your life will look like. That’s what God is concerned about. That’s the part of your life that Jesus was focusing on when he died for your sins. Our life seems to be of utmost importance now, but it will have no importance when we die. Then it’s a matter of being forever in Heaven or in Hell. We truly treasure the Gospel only when we see it in that context.

5. Why does the present seem so important to us?

6. Imagine your first minute in eternity. How important will your present life seem then?

For thought

7. According to Ephesians 3:16-19, what is the only way a believer can grow in his or her understanding of the Gospel?

Ephesians 3:16-19—

“I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he would strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner self, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Then, being rooted and grounded in love, I pray that you would be able to comprehend, along with all the saints, how wide and long and high and deep his love is, and that you would be able to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.”

Summary

There are many reasons to keep God’s commandments. But many of them fall short of the reasons Scripture gives us. The Gospel of God’s forgiveness in Christ is the biggest thing we have. As recipients of the Gospel, we have many reasons to serve him.

Close with prayer or the Benediction

Gospel Motivation

Lesson 2 What Is Gospel Motivation?

“Gospel Motivation,” Preface and Chapter 1, pp. 5-21

Worship

Read responsively about God’s blessings on the righteous, Psalm 1:1-6.

L: How blessed is the man

G: who does not walk in the advice of the wicked,

L: who does not stand on the path with sinners,

G: and who does not sit in a meeting with mockers.

L: But his delight is in the teaching of the LORD,

G: and on his teaching he meditates day and night.

L: He is like a tree planted beside streams of water,

G: which yields its fruit in season,

L: and its leaves do not wither.

G: Everything he does prospers.

L: Not so the wicked!

G: No, they are like the chaff which the wind blows away.

L: Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

G: nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

L: Yes, the LORD approves of the way of the righteous,

G: but the way of the wicked will perish.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to accomplish our salvation. You have given us the benefit of his work—the forgiveness of our sin and credit for living a perfect life—simply through faith. When we realize how sinful we are and that you will someday judge us, we know we can appear before you because we are clothed with the robes of Jesus’ perfect life. Today, help us review the heart of the Gospel.

All: Amen

The Gospel motivates us—two examples from Scripture.

1. What is the Gospel? Read these two sections of Scripture. How do they define the Gospel

1 John 4:19—

“We love because he first loved us.”

Ephesians 2:4-10—

“But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! He also raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He did this so

that, in the coming ages, he might demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them.”

Diagramming Gospel Motivation passages

2. In this study, when the Gospel is followed by (or follows) an encouragement to serve the Lord, we call this a “Gospel/motivation” link.

Throughout this course, we will be using the following pattern to mark the Gospel/motivation links: Gospel passages will be highlighted in bold. What the Gospel motivates us to do will be highlighted in italics.

Feel free to adopt your own pattern, for example, mark the Gospel in parentheses and underline what the Gospel motivates us to do. Or bring two colors of pencil to class and use them to make the distinction.

We will be focusing on how the Gospel motivates us to serve the Lord. However, Gospel statements are sometimes accompanied by Law statements, namely, what we were like before we became Christians or what will happen if we fall away. You may want to mark those law statements in a third way.

In the previous section, we read a brief passage from 1 John 4: “We love because he first loved us.” We can easily diagram it like this: “*We love* **because he first loved us.**”

John tells us what to do, namely, to love. We marked that sentence in italics. The next phrase is the Gospel, which tells us why we can do that. God loved us first. So we marked that in bold.

3. Do the same with these two lengthier passages.

1 John 3:1-3—

See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are! The world does not know us, because it did not know him. Dear friends, we are children of God now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he is revealed, we will be like him, and we will see him as he really is. Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure.

Titus 3:3-8—

For at one time we ourselves were also foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by many kinds of evil desires and pleasures, living in malice and jealousy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, he saved us—not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the

renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life. This saying is trustworthy. And I want you to insist on these things, so that those who believe in God are intent on keeping busy with good works.

Practice

4. Use the following passages to practice. Find as many Gospel/motivation links as you can.

Ephesians 4:32–5:2—

Get rid of every kind of bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling, and slander, along with every kind of malice. Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us.

2 Peter 1:5-9—

And, for this very reason, after applying every effort, add moral excellence to your faith. To moral excellence, add knowledge. To knowledge, add self-control. To self-control, add patient endurance. To patient endurance, add godliness. To godliness, add brotherly affection. And to brotherly affection, add love. For if you have these qualities and they are increasing, they are going to keep you from being idle or unfruitful in regard to your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, the person who lacks these qualities is shortsighted and, in fact, blind, because he has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

5. Share one Gospel/motivation pair that expressed the Gospel in a way you found striking.

For thought

6. Comment on the following statement: “In the fullest sense, holiness of living flows from the Gospel only when the Gospel is the center of our thinking and valued more highly than the holiness of life that flows from it.”

Summary

The Gospel is the good news that God forgave the sins of the entire world in Christ. He had led us to believe that we are forgiven, and to find our hope of eternal life in that fact. Jesus’ forgiveness is our greatest treasure and the reason why we want to serve God. In many unique ways, the Scripture describes the gifts God has given us in Christ and urges us to serve him because of those gifts.

Close with prayer or the Benediction

Gospel Motivation

Lesson 3 The Gospel of Death and Life

“Gospel Motivation,” Chapter 2, pp. 23-32

Worship

Read responsively about God’s blessings on the righteous, Psalm 9:11-14

L: Make music for the LORD, who is seated in Zion.

G: Proclaim his deeds among the peoples.

L: Yes, he who avenges bloodshed remembers them.

G: He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

L: Have mercy on me, O LORD.

G: See my afflictions that are caused by those who hate me,

L: and raise me up from the gates of death, so that I may declare all your praise.

G: In the gates of the Daughter of Zion I will rejoice in your salvation.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us focus on your Son’s death and resurrection. Help us think about what they mean for us, namely that by dying for us, Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, and by rising again, he proved that he was successful. Today, through the words of St. Paul, help us dig deeper into these two foundational truths of our faith. May the truths we learn motivate us to live for you.

All: Amen

Motivated by the Gospel of Death and Life—Romans 6:1-14

1. In the first two sections of Romans (Romans 1:18–3:20 and Romans 3:21–5:21), Paul tells about God’s wrath on sin, and about the righteousness he gave us in Christ.

In the third part of Romans, which begins at chapter 6:1, Paul tells us how to view our lives now that we know the Gospel. He does this from three standpoints. The first is the Gospel of death and life (Romans 6:1-14).

Read Romans 6:1-11—

¹ What shall we say then? Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase? ² **Absolutely not! We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer?** ³ **Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** ⁴ **We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.**

Note: Look at the last phrase of this paragraph. The EHV translates “we too would also walk in newness of life.” The original Greek reads “so that. . . we too might walk in newness of life.” Here the phrase “in newness of life” is not talking about living a new life in service to God. Rather, the phrase refers to the new life that we already have in Christ, the life we have because we are united with

Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. In this life we are free from sin. In other words, this is the Gospel, not what the Gospel motivates us to do. That will start in verse 12 below.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection.

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him, to make our sinful body powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin. ⁷ For the person who has died has been declared free from sin. ⁸ And since we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he will never die again. Death no longer has control over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died, he died to sin once and for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ In the same way also consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Note: The resurrection Paul speaks of in verse 5 refers to the new life we live right now in Christ. It is the “newness of life” referred to above in verse 4 and being “alive to God in Christ Jesus” referred to in this verse, verse 11.

Use the following questions to explore the Gospel of death and life as Paul explains it in the above verses.

- Some were saying, “If God is gracious to sinners, then it makes sense that the more we sin the more gracious God can be, right?” How does Paul answer that question?
- Throughout this section Paul explains how Christians have died along with Christ. When did this happen?
- Dying with Christ and being dead to the guilt of sin is followed by something else? What is that?
- How does Paul describe Jesus’ new life at the end of verse 10? After you answer that, look at the next verse. How does Paul describe your new life as those who have risen with Christ?

Read Romans 6: 12-14—

¹² *Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires. ¹³ Do not offer the members of your body to sin as tools of unrighteousness. Instead, offer yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead, and offer the members of your body to God as tools of righteousness. ¹⁴ Indeed, sin will not continue to control you, because you are not under law but under grace.*

- In verses 1-11, we heard the good news: In Christ we died to our sins because they were laid on him. And in Christ, we have risen, free from sin, ready and able to serve God. Because of this, what does Paul encourage us to do in verses 12,13?
- Paul says that sin does not control us any longer (verse 14). Why is that true?

Other New Testament passages that teach the Gospel of Death and Life

2. Read the following passages and diagram the Gospel/motivation pair found in each.

Galatians 2:20—

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Colossians 3:1-5—

¹ Therefore, because you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ So put to death whatever is worldly in you: sexual immorality, uncleanness, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.

2 Corinthians 5:14,15—

¹⁴ For the love of Christ *compels us*, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live *would no longer live for themselves* but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.

For thought

3. We often say—and rightly so—that in baptism our sins were washed away. Based on the Romans passage we read above (Romans 6:1-14), what can we also say happened to us when we were baptized?

Summary

Death hardly seems a good word to describe the Gospel. But Paul used it that way. When Christ died, we died. That is, when Christ died for the sins of the world—for the sins of all people—it's as if we with all our sins died with him.

And when Christ rose to live a new life, free from our sins, we rose to a new life founded on God's grace and forgiveness, not on the demands of the Law. Now we ought to, and can, serve God willingly.

Close with prayer or the Benediction

Gospel Motivation

Lesson 4 The Gospel of Slavery To Righteousness

“Gospel Motivation,” Chapter 3, pp. 33-42

Worship

Read responsively about God’s blessings on the righteous, Psalm 11:4-7

L: The LORD is in his holy temple.

G: The LORD is on his throne in heaven.

L: His eyes observe.

G: He focuses on the children of Adam.

L: The LORD is righteous. He examines the wicked.

G: He really hates those who love violence.

L: On the wicked he will rain down fiery coals and sulfur.

G: A scorching wind will be the cup given to them.

L: Indeed, the LORD is righteous. He loves righteousness.

G: The upright will view his face.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we confess our sins. We know that apart from you, we would have remained slaves to sin and unrighteousness for time and eternity. Thank you for rescuing us from that existence. Today, give us your Holy Spirit to teach us about a new and wonderful slavery in which we exist and a new master who directs our lives.

All: Amen

Motivated by the Gospel of Slavery to Righteousness

1. The next section of Romans is closely connected to the section we looked at in our last lesson. But instead of “death” vs. “life,” it speaks about “slavery to sin” vs. “slavery to righteousness.”

Read Romans 6:15-23—

¹⁵ What then? Should we continue to sin, because we are not under law but under grace? Absolutely not! ¹⁶ Do you not know that when you offer yourselves to obey someone as slaves, you are slaves of the one you are obeying—whether slaves of sin, resulting in death, or slaves of obedience, resulting in righteousness?

¹⁷ **Thanks be to God that,** although you used to be slaves of sin, **you became obedient from the heart to the pattern of the teaching into which you were placed.** ¹⁸ **After you were set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.** ¹⁹(I am speaking in a human way because of the weakness of your flesh.) Indeed, just as you offered your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness, resulting in more lawlessness, *so now offer your members in the same way as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.*

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. ²¹ So what kind of fruit did you have then? They were things of which you are now ashamed. Yes, the final result of those things is death. ²² **But now, since you were set free from sin and have become slaves to God, you have your fruit resulting in sanctification—and the final result is eternal life.** ²³ For the wages of sin is death, **but the undeserved gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Use the following questions to explore the Gospel of slavery to righteousness.

- Paul began the previous section on the Gospel of death and life (6:1ff) by asking a question: If God’s gracious forgiveness increases the more I sin, then sinning is good, right? Can you spot a similar question at the beginning of this section?
- What do you think Paul means by “the pattern of the teaching into which you were placed,” that is, the teaching that God led us to believe?
- What did this “pattern of teaching” do to our relationship to the Law?
- How did this “pattern of teaching” make us slaves to righteousness?
- How would our lives have ended if we had remained slaves to sin?
- How will our lives end now that we are slaves to righteousness?

Slavery to Righteousness versus Slavery to the Law

7. React to the following scenario: Jason is thinking about this passage. He keeps concluding that slavery to the Law and slavery to righteousness mean about the same thing. The Law says, “You have to keep me or you will die.” Righteousness says, “You have to keep me, and you will live.” He concludes, “It seems that both are telling me to be a good person, which is what I have a hard time doing.”

Help Jason sort this out. Describe the difference between the two kinds of service Paul speaks about.

Practice

8. In the above section, Paul said that his explanation of the two kinds of slavery was stated “in human terms” to help the Romans understand what he was telling them. He doesn’t use this picture elsewhere in his writings. For this reason, we’ll continue spotting Gospel/motivation pairs using other pictures found in Scripture.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8—

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Purge out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, just as you are unleavened. For our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, namely, Christ! So let us keep celebrating the festival, not with old yeast, not with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

John 15:5—

I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.

Titus 2:11-15—

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It trains us to reject ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, that is, the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are his own chosen people, eager to do good works.

For thought

9. We are either slaves to the Law or slaves to Christ. Why can a person never be in a state of neutrality regarding these two options?

Summary

Christ's work has made us righteous in God's eyes. It has rescued us from slavery to sin. We are children of God. Righteousness is now our master. It is the theme of our lives. It makes us eager to serve God by following his will.

If we are slaves to the Law and sin, our result will be eternal death in Hell. But if we serve God as slaves to righteousness, our end will be eternal life with God. Heaven is the "final result" (literally the "end") of our life of being a slave to righteousness, not in the sense that we've earned heaven, but in the sense that that's how the life of a slave to righteousness will end.

Close with prayer or the Benediction

Gospel Motivation

Lesson 5 The Gospel of True Spirituality

“Gospel Motivation,” Chapter 4, pp. 43-53

Worship

Read responsively about God’s blessings on the righteous, Psalm 50:1-5

L: LORD, who may be a guest in your tent?

G: Who may dwell on your holy mountain?

L: One who walks with integrity,

G: who does what is righteous, and who speaks the truth in his heart.

L: He has no slander on his tongue.

G: He does not harm his friend, and he does not defame his neighbor.

L: He despises everyone whom God rejects,

G: but he honors those who fear the LORD.

L: When he promises something,

G: he does not break his word even though it costs him a lot.

L: He does not lend his money to get interest,

G: and he does not accept a bribe against the innocent.

All: One who does these things will never be toppled.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, many people realize that the material possessions of this world do not give them true fulfillment. They know there is something more, something in the spiritual dimension. So they search for it. But they end up in a world of errors and false truths, always trying to convince themselves that they have found the truth. We know that such truth can only be found in Scripture. Guide us by your Word to the only truth that can truly fulfill us.

All: Amen

The Gospel of Death to the Law

1. Continue reading about the freedom we have to serve God.

Romans 7:1-6—

¹ Or don’t you know, brothers (since I am speaking to those who know the law), that a law has jurisdiction over a person only as long as he lives? ² For example, a married woman is bound to her husband by law as long as he is alive, but if he dies, she is released from this law regarding her husband. ³ So then, she will be labeled an adulteress if she is joined to another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from this law, and she is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

you will often see employees in the library poring over the handbook because they have a question about policy and want to please their boss.

Describe the two ways of serving that come from the two different places of working.

5. Consider a second example.

Mother bakes cookies on a regular basis and keeps the cookie jar filled to the top. Occasionally, she dispenses a cookie or two to one of her children. Imagine that you are a little boy or girl, one of the family members, who passes that cookie jar every day. You take the cookie jar for granted, knowing that when your mother wants to, she will give you a cookie. You are quite content with the situation and don't think much about it.

Now imagine that you come down to the kitchen one day, and there, above the cookie jar, is a big sign that reads:

DO NOT TAKE ANY COOKIES.

DO NOT TAKE EVEN ONE COOKIE.

DO NOT TOUCH THE COOKIES.

IF YOU DO, I WILL FIND YOU AND PUNISH YOU.

DO NOT EVEN THINK ABOUT TAKING A COOKIE

I AM YOUR MOTHER, AND I CAN READ MINDS.

I WILL PUNISH YOU IF YOU EVEN THINK ABOUT TAKING A COOKIE.

LOVE, MOM

Now the dynamic changes. You may not have even thought of taking a cookie, but now your mind is consumed with the thought. Maybe I won't get caught, you think, after all, I can just rearrange the cookies and make the jar look as full as it was before. But then you think of Mom's last command, don't even think about it. You know you are "dead meat" because that's what you just did.

The day wears on. That's all you think about, taking a cookie. You picture the sign that says not to take one. Maybe it's for my own good, you think. That helps for a while, but you find yourself still thinking about taking one. I will just have to force myself not to think about those cookies, you say to yourself. You blot the thought out of your mind for a while, but all of a sudden it rushes back into your consciousness. "Why did Mom do that?" you think. "Boy, is she mean! I don't even want to see her tonight."

Later that afternoon, you get off the bus and slowly walk into the house. Mom is not around. You're going to take a cookie. You don't even think about how she might punish you if she finds out. You

don't even think about the taste of the cookie. You just want one. Why? Because Mom said you couldn't have one. It sounds illogical. You can't explain your feelings. But you can't deny them either. So you sneak in the back door, take a quick look to see if Mom is in the kitchen. She's not there. You turn your eyes to the cookie jar and the sign.

But look! Mom tore down the sign. Just a couple of torn scraps of paper stuck to the cupboard door. The cookie jar looked like it used to look, a nice place where Mom stored cookies. Mom walks in. "Oh," she says, "I took down that sign. You can have a cookie whenever you want, but be a good boy and don't eat too many." You happily grab a cookie and go off to do your homework. Now the situation has changed. No fear, no punishment, no sin, no anger at Mom. The intense desire to steal a cookie is gone. Mom's love is on your mind. So are her instructions.

Use this example to define true spirituality.

6. Sometimes church leaders clearly present the Gospel message of God's forgiveness in Christ. But after they have done that, they list laws children of God should keep. This can leave the congregation wondering about the Law in their lives.

Imagine a pastor concluding his sermon on Sunday by saying, "Now remember, you don't have to keep God's laws. Christ kept them for you. Amen." What would you think as you left church that morning?

For thought

7. How do Christians grow spiritually?

Recall what makes us spiritual. We have come to know that Christ has brought us from death to life, from being slaves to sin and death to being slaves to his gift of righteousness, and no longer liable for keeping the Law. For this reason, we serve God in the new way of the Spirit, using God's law as a guide. This is true spirituality.

Summary

Trying to keep God's law to be sure of his blessings—his favor, his blessings on this life, and his blessing of eternal life—is fruitless. When the Law comes to bear on us, our sinful nature is incited to sin. At best, we can only achieve a certain level of outward obedience. But in Christ we have died to the demands of the Law. We are now able to serve God willingly. This is the meaning of true spirituality. It is not something the world can give. Only the Holy Spirit can give it to us by leading us to Christ.

Close with prayer or the Benediction

Gospel Motivation

Lesson 6 The Gospel of a New Creation

“Gospel Motivation,” Chapter 5, pp. 55-65

Worship

Read responsively about God's blessings on the righteous, Psalm 11:7-10

L: All his precepts are trustworthy,

G: steadfast forever and ever, done in truth and uprightness.

L: He sent redemption for his people.

G: He commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name.

L: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

G: All who do his precepts have good understanding.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, you have made us new creations. As such, we live in your grace and can serve you in the new way of the Spirit. Yet we still struggle to put off sin. Today, help us understand why that is the case. And cause our hope of eternal life to burn brightly as those who are new creations.

All: Amen

Introduction: Christians struggle with their sinful nature.

1. The following statements summarize Romans 7:7-25. Read those verses and reflect on the statements as you do.

God has made us new creations. We are dead to sin and alive in Christ to live for God. We are no longer slaves of sin, but slaves of God's gift of righteousness. We are dead to the demands of the Law.

If we were only new creations, it would be clear sailing. We would serve God perfectly in the freedom we have in Christ.

But why do we see ourselves struggling with sin? Because we still retain the sinful nature we had before we came to faith, which acts opposite to the new creation God has made us to be. This means a struggle. Paul talks about this struggle in Romans 7:7-25. Because he retained his sinful nature, every time he heard one of God's laws, his sinful nature sprang into action: “But when [the] commandment came, sin came to life, and I died” (Romans 7:9,10). He assessed his life like this, “I know that good does not live in me, that is, in my sinful flesh. The desire to do good is present with me, but I am not able to carry it out” (Romans 7:18).

As a new creation, he willingly served God all the time. But because he had a sinful nature, he couldn't serve God as he wanted. Paul sums up his existence, “So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind [my new nature], but with my sinful flesh I serve the law of sin” (Romans 7:25).

The Gospel of a New Creation.

2. Which will win, Paul's new nature or his sinful nature? Paul answers that in Romans 8:1-17. In a marvelous way, he ties together everything he has said about what Christians have become, namely, people made new in Christ, people in whom the Spirit is putting to death the sins of the sinful nature, and people who can be sure they are God's children.

Read Romans 8:1-4—

¹ So then, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ Indeed, what the Law was unable to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did, when he sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin. God condemned sin in his flesh, ⁴ so that the righteous decree of the law would be fully satisfied in us *who are not walking according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.*

- Sadly, because we have a sinful nature, the law of sin and death is still active in our lives. Review the meaning of the two important phrases:

What is the law of the Spirit of life?

What is the law of sin and death?

- In verse three, Paul reminds us that we have been set free from the law of sin and death. How did that happen?
- In his letters, Paul often says that Jesus' perfect obedience is credited to *those who believe*. At the end of Romans 8:4, however, Paul says that Jesus' perfect obedience is credited to *those who are living according to the spirit*. Can you explain why both ways of speaking are true?

Read Romans 8:5-17—

⁵ To be sure, those who are in harmony with the sinful flesh think about things the way the sinful flesh does, and those in harmony with the spirit think about things the way the spirit does. ⁶ Now, the way the sinful flesh thinks results in death, but the way the spirit thinks results in life and peace. ⁷ For the mindset of the sinful flesh is hostile to God, since it does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the sinful flesh cannot please God.

⁹ But you are not in the sinful flesh but in the spirit, if indeed God's Spirit lives in you. And if someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

¹¹ And if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit, who is dwelling in you.

¹² So then, brothers, we do not owe it to the sinful flesh to live in harmony with it. ¹³ For if you live in harmony with the sinful flesh, you are going to die. *But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live.*

¹⁴ Indeed, those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery so that you are afraid again, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we call out, "Abba, Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself joins our spirit in testifying that we are God's children.

¹⁷ Now if we are children, we are also heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,

- In verse four, we saw that there are two ways a person can live, either according to the flesh (according to the law of sin and death) or according to the spirit (that is, according to the Holy Spirit who led us to Christ and made us new creations). Looking at the above section as a whole (Romans 8:5-17), find the verses that define what will happen to the person who lives according to the flesh.

They are hostile toward God.

They refuse to keep God's law.

They are unable to keep God's law.

They are unable to do anything that pleases God.

They do not belong to Christ.

Their end is eternal death.

They are slaves, afraid of God's anger and eternal death.

- Define what will happen to the person who lives according to the spirit of life

They have life and peace.

They have the Spirit of Christ living in them and they belong to Christ.

They are because of Christ's righteousness.

Their mortal body will come to life along with their spirit.

Their end is eternal life.

They know they are children of God.

They are heirs of eternal glory along with our brother, Christ.

3. What should this tremendous contrast motivate you and every believer to do?

Practice

4. Use the following verses to learn more about our lives a new creations.

2 Corinthians 5:15-17—

¹⁵ He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again. ¹⁶ As a result, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we knew Christ according to the flesh, we no longer know him that way. ¹⁷ So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come!

Galatians 6:14,15—

¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. ¹⁵ In fact, in Christ Jesus circumcision or uncircumcision does not matter. What matters is being a new creation.

Colossians 3:9,10—

⁹Do not lie to each other since you have put off the old self with its practices, ¹⁰ and put on the new self, which is continually being renewed in knowledge, according to the image of its Creator.

For thought

5. John says, “I’ve always wanted to live a more moral life. But for the first time, Romans 6-8 has enabled me to do that. Most importantly, now I know the reason why I should want to live that way.” What might John have in mind when he thinks about why he should live according to God’s will?

Summary

Even as believers, we have a sinful nature. Our sinful nature leads us to do things we don’t want to do. But God has made us new creations by giving us his Spirit. We are not condemned for our sins because Christ suffered for us in our place. And he fulfilled the Law we could not fulfill.

What great blessings we have! We have an obligation to do what the Spirit wants us to do, an obligation we willingly accept.

Close with prayer or the Benediction