

A Relationship Broken

Introduction

Our first lesson was designed to look at the Bible. In that lesson we saw first the Bible systematically laid out. By learning the different sections of the Bible and the books that belong to each section, we learned pretty much how to find things in the Bible.

Then we saw briefly how the Bible came into being over a period of about 1600 years. People with such diverse backgrounds as farmers, fishermen, and scholars wrote the 66 books that make up the Bible, and they wrote them in as widely scattered countries such as Iraq to the east and Italy to the west. And yet, as we are claiming in this course, all their writings together tell basically one message.

No wonder the Bible claims its writers were inspired by God. In this lesson we have a different approach than the last one. Instead of looking at the Bible from the outside in, as it were, we begin looking into the message of the Bible itself.

In a nutshell, this lesson is designed to help the student to see the great human need that the Bible was designed to meet. You'll remember we called this course "A Survey of the Bible." Well, the method we are using to survey the Bible is to show the human condition the Bible claims to provide the answer to.

Then to show how that answer was developed and made known, as well as how and in what context it can be applied to our lives today.

The Main Diagram: God

The first thing you'll notice about the main diagram is maybe the prominent word "God." We've highlighted it because the Bible claims to be more than anything else a book dealing with a relationship between man and God. Of course the very mention of the word "God" meets with a very wide range of differing responses.

For some the word brings a thrill, an excitement and comfort, while others become angry at hearing it. Some hear it and are happy with their lives; others hear it with embarrassment and hope nobody else knew they heard; while others hear it and feel bitter. That's because our response to the word depends on our upbringing, our learning, and our experience.

It also depends on our attitude to right and wrong, or to truth.

Reasoning about the Existence of God

While we're thinking of God, let's follow one line of reasoning about His existence. It might help a doubting student think more confidently about the existence of God. It proceeds like this: We all really have to admit that something has always been.

Why? Well, something exists now, doesn't it? If it was just my voice or your hand, you'd still have to acknowledge that something exists now, right? But what does that have to do with the question of whether something has always existed? Just that: the fact that something exists now proves that something has always been. Because from nothing, nothing comes. Or to put it another way: if there were ever a time there was absolutely nothing, there would be absolutely nothing now, because that original nothingness couldn't have produced anything.

At this point, though, we face an obvious question: What existed eternally? And our minds go in two directions. First, we start wondering if matter is that eternal something. Matter is described by the great English philosopher Bertrand Russell as "blind, unthinking matter, the mother of us all."

Well, if matter is the eternal something, he's correct: it's the mother of all of us. You see, if we say that only matter existed forever and ever, then everything we see now—the leaf of a plant, a baby's hand, the human eye, a butterfly's wing—all of this has come about from nothing but matter. Or more accurately, all that we see is the product of time + chance + matter.

But our minds can move in a different direction in search of the eternal something. We can imagine the possibility of life, intelligence, a creative power that existed eternally. If so, we'll see intelligence, creativity, or whatever other description we might attach, as the source of everything we now see: the leaf of a plant, a baby's hand, the human eye, a butterfly's wing.

And here's the thing about it: since the beginning of everything, what we see now is buried deep in the past. There's no way we can prove how it all began—at least by "proof" we mean presenting the kind of evidence we have that Rolls-Royce cars come from England. Instead we've got to decide which of the possibilities are more reasonable.

And while keeping with everything else we can see, having done that we make a decision and say, "I believe that..." In other words, we must have faith. Whether we accept that matter has been forever, or that intelligence has been forever, I must emphasize that the person who says that matter has existed eternally and there once was no life, intelligence, or if you please God, accepts that view by faith. He has too.

There's absolutely no way he can prove that, as we can prove that Rolls-Royce cars are made in Britain. You see, he wasn't there, and there's no way he can go back and be there. For many people—and I'm one of those people—it appears far more reasonable to understand that all the things we see (trees, flowers, and so forth) came from intelligence, a creative power, than to say they just happened, the result of thoughtless matter.

But each person must study that question for himself or herself and come to a personal decision. But even if we should come to the conclusion that intelligence or life has existed eternally, a more precise understanding of that eternal something remains a mystery. There's no way we can know, for example, merely by looking at the wonders of nature and using unaided reasoning, whether that eternal intelligence is in the form of one being or millions of beings, or if those beings have personality.

Human reasoning can only theorize about such questions. This is precisely where the Bible begins. It begins by stating the existence of a being it calls "God.", "In the beginning God..." And through its pages it reveals that God to us. The exciting thing is it not only claims to make it possible to know about this God, but it also takes as its theme the task of enabling us to know God.

A Programmed Universe

Now perhaps we're ready for the second detailed section of this lesson. It's labeled "A Programmed Universe. "Here we consider how we relate to the universe at large, to God.

The Bible begins with the statement, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." It then proceeds to detail God's formation of our planet Earth and life on it. The point we want to make at this stage is that in creating the universe God put within all its components the ability to carry out their functions automatically.

We might compare the universe to a giant computer which has been programmed by God to carry out His plans. When man discovers the details of how God programmed the universe, he speaks of "laws of nature," or scientists speak of "physical laws. "For example, between 1665 and 1687 Isaac Newton struggled with the problem of an apple's fall from a tree to the earth, the moon's orbit around the earth, and the motions of the planets around the sun.

And he came up with a single formula that explained all three—one mathematical law, a law of nature that had an enormous impact on man's understanding of how God made the universe operate.

Man's Ability to Relate to God

But let's move to the next detailed diagram: "Man's Ability to Relate to God." Here we confront the problem creature of the universe. And it happens to be "you" and "me."

You see, here's a creature that wasn't automatically programmed into the universe. Now at this point we're going to look at a passage in the Bible, and that passage explains why a man is so different than all else we know of in the universe. And to do this I'm going to ask you to find that passage in your Bible.

The passage is Genesis 1:26–27. Maybe I can say a word here about bible references. Usually we refer to the passages in the bible by giving the name of the book first then the number of the

chapter, finally the number or numbers of the small sections that the chapters are broken in to, called verses. in this case, the book's Genesis, the chapter is number one and the verses are 26 and 27. Genesis is the first book of the bible, so you'll be looking for Genesis 1:26-27 at the front of your bible. I imagine by now you've found the passage, good. Let's read this passage together.

Then God said, let us make man in our image. In our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. Over the livestock, over all of the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.

You'll notice here that god made man in his own image. What does this mean? Elsewhere in the Bible we read that man has a spiritual dimension or has been given a spirit which can exist apart from his body. Maybe you can turn to the second passage. This is Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and verse 7.

Now to find ecclesiastes you need to open your Bible at the middle. Okay. You're probably at the book of Psalms, or perhaps the book that follows Psalms that's called Proverbs. Well, right after Proverbs comes Ecclesiastes, Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes. You're there already? Good. Now find the last chapter, chapter 12.

Here the writer discusses, in exquisite language, the need to remember God when we're young, knowing that we'll lose strength and vitality with the approach of old age. In verse 7 you'll read these words, speaking about the death of man: "...and the spirit returns to God who gave it." Well there you have it—man has a spirit given him by God, and when he dies it returns to God.

Now it's in this connection that we see not only man's uniqueness but also his capacity to be most dangerous. You see, if man was created in God's image, it meant his spirit would have the capacity to love as God loves. God, the Bible says, is love.

So how could man be made in His image without being able to love? But in order to be able to love, man had also to be able to choose. I think you'd agree that if there's no choice there can be no love. When you push the button and make the cassette player reproduce this lesson, you don't say, "Oh good, this cassette player still loves me."

You know that it just does what it has to because it's made that way. It's like the universe programmed to operate in a certain manner without any choice. But how different you are—and those you love.

You and they have a choice about how you'll treat each other. And it's not just a choice as a cow has a choice to clover or buttercups. It's a choice that often involves how you think you ought to treat each other.

That means you can treat the other person as you think you ought to, or you can treat that person how you think you ought not to. You have the choice. In other words, if we have the ability to love, we also have the ability to hate.

If we couldn't hate, it would mean that our love is just a natural mechanical way of treating other people. And it would mean that we just fit into God's universe as cows and buttercups fit into it. But here's the exciting thing about all of it: from the beginning God loved man and wanted man to love Him.

And the way in which it's been possible for man to express and experience his love, God has been that God has always given him commands. For example, when man existed his original habitat, the garden of Eden, he was given this instruction by God: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die."

I think you'll see in giving man commands God had man's well-being in mind. First, He was making it possible for man to know how to live on this wonderful planet in such a way as to have true happiness, fitting into the beautiful scheme of things. Second, God was making it possible for man to show his love for his Maker as he enjoyed the wonderful life he was given, by keeping God's commands. Let me illustrate this by describing God as the great Master Musician.

He wrote beautiful music to be heard and enjoyed on His special planet Earth. However, if that music was to be as beautiful and harmonious as He had composed it to be, all the players—that is, of course, human beings—all the players would have to play it just as He wrote it. Just as violinists, pianists, and flutists each must carefully follow the music if they're playing a symphony with an orchestra.

So God intended all the people to obey His commands for the different areas of responsibility in their lives.

Man's Choice and Disharmony

Now though, we must move to the final detailed diagram of this lesson: "Man's Choice / Disharmony." And here we can consider just what man has done with the ability to love—how he's used his power of choice. Perhaps we can begin this sad story by going back to our musical illustration.

The musicians have in fact chosen to ignore the score when it suited them, and this has resulted in a horrible cacophony of clashing, discorded sounds. Even the Master Musician had to block His ears.

What Is Sin?

Would you turn please to 1 John 3:4. That's at the back of your Bible, or towards the back. If you go right to the back, unless you have a Bible with a lot of maps or a concordance, you find the book of Revelation. Well, you move forward from the book of Revelation, there's the book of Jude, then 3 John, 2 John. That'll bring you back to the first epistle of John. We're going to be looking at the third chapter and verse 4. Fine. Now, John writes the statement: "for whosoever sins, transgresses also the law, because sin is transgression of the law" John here gives us a very special definition of sin. It is the transgression of the law.

And the law under consideration in this passage is the law of God. When we disobey what God has commanded, that's sin. Just as when one musician in an orchestra disregards the music that is in front of him and plays something completely different, there is a discordancy.

But sin isn't just a matter of violating God's commands. We can sin in another way. And to see how, I'd like you to turn back from 1 John to the book of James. Just before 1 John are the books of 1 and 2 Peter. And just before those books is the book of James. Would you look for the 4th chapter and 16th verse? If you are in the book of Hebrews, you've gone slightly too far backwards. James is immediately after Hebrews. Now you're there. Let's read James 4 and verse 16.

Wherefore, for the person who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, for him, it is sin. If we have difficulty in seeing we're sinners because we've disobeyed His commands, well surely we have no difficulty in seeing we are sinners simply through negligence or omission of obedience. Sometimes we just don't do what God says we should do, and that's sin.

It's like the musician who takes his place in the orchestra, plays no wrong notes, but he doesn't play the right ones either. He just doesn't play the composer's music. The Bible says that all responsible persons—all persons who've lived long enough to learn their left hand from their right and to have the ability to understand the responsibility—the Bible says all such responsible persons have sinned.

Let me read the simple announcement of Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. "Now friend, there's the great tragedy of the human race. There's the explanation of the tears, the heartache, the guilt, the prisons, even the hospitals and the cemeteries that exist in the world.

God's Justice and the Penalty for Sin

You know from the beginning God pronounced penalty upon sin. We have to acknowledge that the loving God who we read about in the Bible and whom we learn to love is also a God of justice. He has to be when you think about it, doesn't He? Because if He loves us He'll want us to live in such a way that our lives will be rich and fulfilled. Happiness will be our lot. But that way is the way He's given us in His commands.

When we fail to live as He instructs we rob ourselves and eventually rob other people of their happiness and well-being. And we also rob God. Now a loving God, a just God cannot permit this to happen.

Imagine the parents who assert their love for their sons and their daughters, express great hopes for happy adult lives for their children, yet permit them from earliest childhood to disobey, to fight and fuss unchecked, and incur the displeasure, the anger of friends, the neighbors and school teachers and eventually the police. Well God never planned to be an irresponsible, indulgent Father. In fact His very first command to man carried warning of a penalty to be suffered if man disobeyed.

He said that the day Adam disobeyed he'd die. That's in Genesis 2:17. Now I'd like you to turn please to Isaiah 59:1–2. Go right to the center of your bible, Then turn towards the right or the back of the bible. If you found at first turn the Book of Psalms, you need to progress on from that through Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. That will put you into Isaiah, whoops in Jeremiah, you went too far, Isaiah is just before Jeremiah. Then to the back of the book of Isaiah to chapter 59 verses 1 and 2.

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He can not hear." Isaiah speaks so dramatically of the tragic conditions sin has brought about. It's made a separation between God and man—such a separation that God is unable to reach or hear man.

As one of the prophets tells us of God: He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. So He has had to be willing for us to be separated from Him because of our sin.

Dead Even While We Live

Now in order that we might know just how tragic that separation is, we'll have a look at a New Testament passage: 1 Timothy 5:6. It uses a horrible word to describe a man or woman separated from God by sin. I'd appreciate it, please, if you would look up that passage also in your Bible. 1 Timothy 5 verse 6, 1 Timothy is before the books of Titus and Hebrews and immediately after Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. There you are, 1 Timothy 5 and verse 6. Here an old man, Paul, a follower of Jesus Christ, is writing to a young fellow who worshiped the same Jesus.

He tells him of a condition of a woman who no longer cares about living for God but willfully disobeys Him. Look at what he writes in 1 Timothy 5:6: "But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." There's the horrible word "dead."

She's dead even while she's living. To the Ephesians he wrote earlier that they'd been dead in their transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1). So he was in the custom of speaking of people who hadn't yet taken God's remedy for sin as being dead.

You might compare man's situation to an electric light bulb. So long as the bulb is in contact with the electricity supply its light keeps glowing. It's alive, But when you push the little switch WHICH breaks its contact with the mighty supply of electricity; it goes dead. And the room is in darkness. So with man. When he's in touch with his Maker, when he has a positive relationship with God, he may be called "Alive." But when man or woman is infested with sin, God diagnoses the condition as death. I find this a difficult lesson to teach because we're dealing with something that really has to be accepted by faith.

A person might feel no physical evidence of his spiritual condition. In fact, he might be a splendid physical specimen, and she might reign as Miss Universe and still be dead. We just can't expect that everyone will feel they are in bad shape.

Rather we must help them see God's diagnosis of death. Wrather, we must help them see God's diagnosis of death. The true story helps drive the lesson home

A True Story

One night some years ago a teacher in New Zealand was presenting a lesson similar to this to a group of young people. To emphasize the point that you have to accept God's diagnosis regardless of how we feel, he made a comparison to physical health.

He pointed out that at that moment there was someone somewhere in the world preparing for bed who should have been consulting a doctor. Why? Because, said the teacher, "Although he doesn't feel bad, he's really in such critical condition that when the sun rises tomorrow morning his head will be on the pillow of death." Imagine the shock of the teacher during class the following morning when the father of two young persons who'd been at class died of a heart attack about sunrise.

In fact he'd been taking physical advice just as his children had been taking spiritual advice. But this story dramatizes for me the truth and urgency of the Bible when it describes a spiritual condition resulting from sin. Sin therefore, guilt and death are realities regardless of whether we recognise it as such or not.

The Purpose of This Lesson

Well, you can now see the purpose of this lesson. It's been designed to show that God created us so that we may have a wonderful relationship with Him through love, But that we've blown it, we've become sinners, separated ourselves from God. We've died because of sin. This has been a study of a very tragic condition—the most tragic we could possibly imagine. It's a study of tremendous human potential unrealized, about shattered dreams and ruined hopes.

But our next lesson will present an entirely different picture. Instead of leaving us in an atmosphere of gloom, it will make possible the most incredible hope and optimism. That's because it will present God's solution to the problem this lesson has opened up.

I kind of wished we could have gone straight to that lesson. But we have to understand our need before we can appreciate God's solution. Until then just think of this fact: God has provided the means through which we can be brought back from the death of sin.

Closing

Now you might take the evaluation sheet and look it through. If you're not sure about answering some of the questions there, look back over the pages for this lesson. When you're pretty sure you've grasped the material, close the study booklet and fill in the evaluation sheet. I trust the lesson will have been valuable and look forward to being with you for the third lesson. Best wishes to you and your continuing study.