

The Holiness of God – Part I

I speak using a subject related approach. Those of you who were here last week remember that as an outflow of my testimony, in my second year as a Christian, I was praying to the Lord about why I do not seem to walk in all that I read in scripture about what a New Testament (N.T.) Christian should experience. I basically received the intuitive revelation that I did not function in the abundant life of the Kingdom because I did not fully understand the Cross and I did not because I did not yet fully believe in Hell. And I didn't fully believe in Hell because I had precious little revelation of the sin of man. And I had no revelation of the sin of man because I did not understand the Holiness of God. And I did not understand the Holiness of God because I had fast-forwarded past Genesis 1:1; the most power-packed verse in all of Scripture, and the first verse of Scripture for a reason. So out of that then came the flow sheet that you see of a teaching series. Now the way I think of it is like the old text books in math, if you got to the end of the chapter and worked the problem, then check the end of the book to see what the correct answer was, and if you didn't get the same answer as the back of the book had, you were well advised to go back to the math problem and work through it step by step because somewhere in that series of steps, there was an error. So that's what I've done here with this series, leading to the Kingdom going through the Cross, but with the preliminary steps that you see outlined.

Now I began to understand, I think, in my second or third year as a Christian that one of the problems when you call something "basic Christianity" is everyone thinks they're beyond it. They can always think of some unbeliever or some new believer that might benefit. So I thought that the only way to get somebody, for instance, to read a book called Basic Christianity was to call it Christianity for the Non-Christian. And then all Christians could think of a non-Christian that they'd want to read the book and then the Christian would have to read the book to discuss it with the non-Christian. So if you wrote a book and called it Basic Christianity, precious few Christians would buy the book. By the same token, if I gave a series and called it Basic Christianity, most Christians would give themselves a by although they could all think of someone that might benefit from hearing the basics. But I think the revelation for us is to know that advanced Christianity is becoming the basics. So if we have not become it, then we need to go back through the math problem and understand our understanding of the basics. Isaiah 37:31 says "And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward to bear fruit upward." So if we don't see fruit coming upward, the simple reason is we have not put the root down. Now in my mind, only three categories of people need to hear this type teaching: Unbelievers, new believers who do not know the basics and long-standing believers who know the basics, but have not yet become the basics. Virtually all people, virtually all Christians have either missed the points that we'll talk about in this series, or have dismissed it once they obtained it.

I Corinthians 8:2 warns us that the man who thinks he knows does not know as he ought to know. When any of us sit in a teaching and dismiss it because we already know, you're simply refusing to receive the blessing that God has for you through me or anyone else who stands up to speak in His Name. So I drew up this little poster simply to make the point of what I'm talking about. I call it "the root to the fruit." We cannot have the fruit in the NT of the abundant life if we're not functioning in the root of "How Great Thou Art." So any part of Christianity in the NT is an outflow of the revelation of the Holiness of God in the OT and we're going to follow through with that sequence.

Now today, we're going to begin looking at the beginning of our individual spiritual journeys even before we look at the beginning of everything. Now whether we knew it or not at the time, when we as human beings began to ask certain questions about who am I, what is my origin, what is my condition, what is my hope, what is my destiny, what is my purpose for existence, then we're actually tending to

take credit ourselves for being bright enough to ask questions like that. But actually all we're doing is fulfilling how God created us to function. Eccl. 3:11 says He put eternity in our hearts. In other words, the awareness we have that there has got to be something beyond natural flesh and blood existence is actually put in every human being. He has made us to seek meaning beyond ourselves. He has made us never to be fulfilled by that which is within ourselves. Now at its root, the basic question that summarizes all those questions is "does life have a point?" Now I spent decades trapped in the mind. Remember, brought up in the Southern Baptist church? I wandered in college when I got smart and got educated. Then went into the captivity of the mind, locked in what I would now call the paralysis of analysis.

Now my release was begun, precipitated by asking certain questions, but even when asking the questions, I still functioned in pride that I was so bright enough and had insight enough to ask such questions. Then belatedly, I learned that the questions that I was asking had actually been written by a mathematician from France named Pascal hundreds of years ago. He drew up the following diagram. He was thinking and speaking as a Christian and trying to figure out a way to break the noggins of his atheistic academic friends. So he drew up what's called Pascal's wager, I simply label escaping the mind. And this is all apart from Christianity. We're going to get to that, but I'm dealing with the human mind and the captivity that we tend to function in before we get saved. There are only two possibilities. That is to say, life had no point. There are only two possibilities under that. If I believe it has a point, I am wrong, but I lose nothing because it has no point, so it's hopeless to begin with. Secondly, if life has no point and I believe it has no point, well, I am right, but I gain nothing, because there is no point, so it remains hopeless.

The second possibility though, is that life has a point. Now under that one, if I believe that it has no point, I am wrong, and potentially lose everything, because it had a point, but I did not seek the point, and I missed the point of my being here, and I remain in a hopeless condition. But if it has a point and I believe that it has a point, I am now right, and potentially gain everything, because by believing that it has a point, I begin to seek the point so as not to miss the point. So out of those possibilities, there is only one that even offers hope at all. So looking at Pascal's Wager, the only logical, rational and prudent behavior for any human being is to believe that life has a point, and to begin to seek that point, so as not to miss the point of life.

There is nothing more rational than believing in God. But reasonably bright people can do irrational things all the while under the delusion that they're functioning in their rational minds. And I've done them all along the way at one time or another. We cannot know truth. I've lived there and had real estate there for quite some time. The skeptic believes that we simply cannot know truth. Of course, it's obvious probably to this group that if you cannot know truth, then he cannot know it to be true that we cannot know truth. So that's one of those irrational things that a person does, although he construes himself in his pride to be the ultimate rational creature. If we cannot know truth, he can never know it to be truth that we cannot know truth. So he makes a statement as truth while stating that we can't know truth. Another such statement: It's irrational to believe anything that is not verified by the scientific method. But of course, the logical question to ask that person is "where is the scientific experiment that verifies that it is irrational to believe something not proven by the scientific method?" Well, the answer is, there is no scientific study that verifies that. So a person who makes a statement like that is making a statement which is ruled out by the very premise of the statement.

Understanding the irrational things done by people who are prideful in their rationale can actually help you to witness to them by simply giving little simple statements like I'm giving you here. You don't

really have to argue about Christianity. Simply ask them questions about their belief system. Now in this secular book even, seven habits of highly effective people, one of the seven habits is seek to understand, then to be understood. Because if your primary purpose in human interaction right out of the starting gate is to be understood, you're simply going to turn people off. But if your primary drive is to understand them, you will have a greater chance of connecting with them and then gently exploring with them the irrational things that they are basing their lives on.

Now you ask questions with gentleness and reverence because that's how Scripture tells us to ask them. Now when you ask such an unbeliever questions, it helps you to understand his belief system, it primarily helps him to understand his own belief system by examining it in way into a depth he's not done before and also along the way, if you're walking in humility, will ensure that you understand your own as you begin to question his.

I once heard a speaker named Winky Pratney who was a PhD Chemist and in the pursuit of his discussion, he was faced with the same situation Pascal was. He was in an academic research environment dealing with many atheists. So he learned through hard won experience not to argue, but to simply do the following. It asked them four questions: What do you mean by that? And maybe different words are used so it doesn't become repetitious but the basic theme is the same. And what you do is to require the person to probe deeper and deeper into his belief system by his own explanations to get to the root of it. Next, how do you know that's true? Because you see all statements about ultimate truth are based on faith, not science. No matter what the belief system, one always reaches the limit of scientifically obtained provable knowledge and at that point makes a leap of faith to base his life as if certain things are true that cannot be proven. Now scientists are notorious for doing this. That is to say, they base their whole lives on faith while pooh-poohing people of faith such as Christians.

The third question: What does it mean to you if what you believe is true? Because most who operate that way in the captivity of the mind tend to operate in denial about the utter hopelessness of the premise of their belief system to which they so fervently cling. And then what does it mean to you, if what you believe is not true? Because most have tried to escape the inescapable, including even the forced choice situation of Pascal's wager. They reject the one choice that offers hope in order to cling to hopelessness and all the while defending such behavior as the ultimate in rational behavior.

So no Christian should ever feel threatened, humiliated, defensive, or apologetic about our belief system when it comes under attack from an unbeliever. Because someone who is locked in the captivity of the mind, is violating all the premises that I talked to you up to this point and all the while thinking he is behaving in a rational fashion. Now we believe that life has a point. That point is our Creator God. Our Creator God brought all of existence into existence and He brings meaning into the universe including into us, His creation. We also take one more leap of faith. If that Creator God hates me, or is indifferent to me, then my life is even more hopeless than it would be if there was no Creator God, because now we have an omnipotent God Who is indifferent to me or hates me. But if that omnipotent Creator God cares about me, there is in fact hope. So that man is no fool who takes the leap of faith, that life has a point, that the point is a Creator God and that that Creator God cares about me. In other words, what man can be called a fool who chooses hope out of hopelessness?

Now all of that is simply to prepare us to defend the hope that is within us as we talk to people who are in the captivity of the mind as I was for 30 years. I would, I think, in retrospect potentially have come to the Kingdom sooner had Christians been prepared to defend the hope within them by answering the questions as I'm presenting them to you today. Now all of this sounds entirely logical and not

Scriptural. It is entirely logical, but the point is the following. We do not get to God by logic, but it is logical to seek to get to God. You see human reason is not the enemy of God. In fact, God is the reason for reason, and reason for reason has two meanings. The reason for something can be the cause of it and the reason for something can be the purpose for which it exists. God is both. He created our reason; he gave us reason for reason. Now the solution to the misuse of the human mind is not to dismiss the human mind; in other words, the solution to misuse is not non-use, but proper use. What is that proper use? Well, the Lord God teaches us that the purpose of the Old Testament law was to show us that no man can keep the law and thus to show us our need of a Savior. The purpose of the law was to bring us out of relying on our self-righteousness before a holy God. Likewise, the purpose of reason is to bring us to the limit of reason, to bring us to the end of logic, to bring us face to face with God, Who can be known only by faith, and not simply by reason. Where reason ends is where the leap of faith begins. So the spiritual walk thereafter then tells us how to view reason, how to give thanks for reason, and how to use reason to the glory of God.

Now all of this so far is based on a kind of an apologetics approach. But let me read you two scriptures to capture all of the essence that I have said up to this point. Ps. 53:1 “The fool has said in his heart there is no God.” Well, can you see by Pascal’s Wager using human logic, the foolishness of pronouncing that there is no God? And now we have in the word of God the revelation that God Himself tells us the definition of a fool. From scripture, it is the one who says there is no God.

The second Scripture is Hebrews 11:6. “Without faith, it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe only two things. To come to God, you must believe that He is; and that He is a rewarder of those who seek him.” Well you can go back and see in our logical analysis even apart from God that using human reason we made three leaps of faith. There is a purpose. It’s a Creator God and the Creator God cares about me. Well all we’ve done then independent of scripture using reason is to fulfill the Word of God as He explains it to us in Ps. 53:1 and Hebrews 11:6. Now apart from a Creator God, how can people explain existence? Well, they can’t, although they try because their system of explaining it is simply invalidated by their methodology which is the scientific method. One way is to simply say that the physical universe has always been here. But even now, the scientists know that tracing everything back to the big bang that all the matter and energy in the universe were concentrated at one point in an area smaller than one electron and at that point, all their methodology and quantum physics break down and they can’t go backward beyond that point.

So existence is here, but by their methodology, they can never deal with how it came to be here. The physical universe came from nothing. Well by scientific methodology that simply can’t occur because nothing is what comes from nothing. Something can never come from nothing unless that something is operating outside the confines and methodology of the scientific method. In other words, science can never deal with the first cause of existence. It is simply outside the arena of the scientific method. So the first cause of existence can only be approached by faith and not approached by science. Now, people who are atheistic as I was for many years, tend to think that this somehow occurred as a cosmic coincidence. That out of disorder, came order, that out of the nonliving came life, that out of the unconscious came consciousness, that out of non-reason, came reason, that out of the amoral came morality, and out of the unfeeling came emotion. That’s asking a lot for a physical creation independent of a Creator God. They tend to believe that man stands alone at the center of a cold bleak universe and exists in the total isolation of any meaning outside of himself. Now brothers and sisters - that is a leap of faith and a hopeless one at that. But while clinging to hopelessness, they claim to be happy while wanting others to believe as they do in their system of hopelessness—all irrational things.

But now, let's begin to look at what the Bible says. Because when God wrote the Bible, His revelation specific revelation to man, He put as the first entry in the Word of God, Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Man has no need to go backward beyond that point. Man has no reason to go backward beyond that point. Man has no ability to go backward beyond that point. And that is the linchpin of all future understanding of Christianity; because you will not believe with total commitment in the Son of God if you do not believe in the God of Genesis 1:1, Who "in the beginning created the heavens and the earth." So I believe that God wrote that as the first verse in the Bible, not because it just seemed to be a good place to start, but because it is the beginning of all human understanding. It is the beginning of understanding where we came from, the beginning of understanding of Who this God is. The beginning of understanding ourselves in the light of Who this God is; the beginning of understanding what our proper heart response is to be before this God of Genesis 1:1—namely humility in the fear of the Lord. It's the beginning of teaching us that man, in spite of all his pride, has never created anything. It's like the rearrangement of the deck chairs on the Titanic; that man has never created anything but has only described, analyzed, and rearranged the things that were already here. In other words, man stands in awe of his ability to create a computer, while ignoring the fact that since the time of creation, all the raw materials for the computer have already been here. But after all this period of time, he finally rearranges those pre-existent materials to have a functional computer and then takes pride in the rearrangement while dismissing the power of the God Who created the raw material for him to use to begin with and gave him the gift of human reason to create it to begin with. So, "In the beginning, God..." And I think we make a mistake to say, well I know that so let's fast forward by that. Now words, remember, are simply symbols to represent and communicate about a reality. But words are never the reality itself. So you can use the word "tree," but it doesn't capture the fullness of the reality of what a tree actually is. So words will always fall short of capturing the essence of God, in describing God, but that doesn't mean that words are useless. If they are useless, God would have not have put the Written Word for us.

Now if we look at Genesis 1:1...In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, then we can begin to put some comments down on paper and our understanding of what must of necessity flow out of that verse. It tells us that God is two things that separate Him completely from everything else. He is the only uncreated thing in all of existence. Everything else that exists flowed out of the Creative Word and Creative Power of this God. He is also the only self-determined thing in all of existence. Now what I mean by that is He is the only thing in existence Whose meaning and purpose flows intrinsically from out of himself. Every other thing in existence has its meaning and value determined by the God Who created it. Now every now and then, I'll try to toss in a new testament corollary so you don't feel that we're wasting time as we go back to begin with the beginning. John 5:44—Jesus says "how can you believe when you seek glory from one another?" In other words, if we're seeking praise and glory from one another, we cannot even believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Well, why is that? Let me give an example of how we tend to function so commonly in the church. If a person has low self-esteem, we tend to pat them on the back, encourage them, give them empathy, tell them they're really okay, they are better than they think they are, etc. We give them counseling. We try to do all that we can to reinforce these things. Well the problem with that is those aren't the issues. The issue is that that person does not understand Genesis 1:1. Because that God of Gen. 1:1 is the only self-determined thing, and every other thing, including us, receives our value as assigned and revealed by how that Creator God feels about us. So the cure to self-esteem is not back-patting consolation from the fellow Christians. The key to self-esteem is knowing that your value does not come from your opinion of yourself. Your value does not come from the opinion of you that others hold. Your value comes from the God Who created you and determined your value. So the answer is to begin to seek that God of Gen. 1:1 Who created you and determined your value. Receive a revelation from His Word and His Spirit about how He values you,

and then you are no longer focused on self-esteem, do you see? So what I am speaking to you is not just cold hard theology. What I am speaking to you is the revelation of why we have missed so much of it in the New Testament, and missed the abundant life. Because in the New Testament, the person who thinks too highly of himself, we call it pride. The person who speaks lowly of himself, we call humility. But in fact, both are in pride, because they are assigning their own value. And when you assign your own value to yourself, you are violating the Creator God, Who is the One Who assigns your value. So the person who says “Poor me, I am worth nothing,” is in fact in pride, not humility, because they are insisting on setting their own value instead of coming to the Lord God and letting God tell them how He values them, do you see?

So this is not just cold hard theology, it has direct correlation to the New Testament abundant life existence. So that’s a bit about God, but what about in the beginning? What was creation the beginning of? Well, not God—He’s always existed, but of all of existence except God. Now that includes time, because before Genesis 1:1, there was no time. You see, time is a physical measurement, not a spiritual measurement. Time is measured by physical things such as the rotation of the earth every 24 hours, the circling of the sun by the earth roughly once a year or the oscillation of atoms with the so-called atomic clock. But before creation, there was no earth, no sun, and no atoms, thus, no time. You see our transcendent God transcends time. He simply is not confined by the limits of time as we tend to function and understand it. Well, how are we to react to Genesis 1:1? Well, let Scripture interpret Scripture. Psalm 19:1 in the King James Version: “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.” In other words, creation testifies of the Creator. That allows you to understand Romans 1:20. “For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood through what has been made so that they are without excuse.” In other words, any man who looks at creation and does not see the fingerprints of God is without excuse. So science is not the enemy of God, unless we begin to worship science rather than worshipping God, Who created that which science studies. And I’ll end today with this simple point. You’ve probably heard it made, but it’s so valid that it needs to be restated from time to time. Any man walking about and finding a ballpoint pen or a watch or any other thing with a functional capacity will look at it and presume that it was made by intelligent design and by craftsmanship. They would never believe that that pen or that watch occurred by the random interaction of non-purposeful, physical laws. Any rational person would look at that item and say not a chance by chance, assuredly by design. Yet we have the majority of human beings when they view the incomprehensible complexity of the created order, the fine tuning of the physical world that even provides an environment in which we can function, millions of species of plants, millions of species of animals, will still say not a chance by design but assuredly by chance. Such is the pride of man. And I lived there for 30 years that I could speak with such passion once I break out of the bondage of the mind to try to speak to you to prepare you to give a defense for the hope that is within you. Because those who consider themselves the most rational and the most intelligent, because of their pride, draw the most irrational and unintelligent conclusions. Through the progressive accumulation of human knowledge, man understands more of the created order; but then he transitions to worship his intellect, being impressed with his understanding rather than seeing the fingerprints of God in that which he is studying. And then we fulfill Ezekiel 16:14-15 where God through the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament speaking to the children of Israel, says “I gave you beauty and you trusted your beauty.” So God gave us reason; but let us not trust our reason.