

BIBLE STUDY: FACING LIFE'S ISSUES WITH A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

1. **“Issues”** [Definition: a vital or unsettled matter, a concern, a problem]

- A 7-year-old son is killed in an accident while his father is texting
- A daughter in 3rd grade is being bullied at school
- Parents discover their son is a practicing homosexual
- A 19-year-old girl cannot find closure following an abortion
- A family learns its home is being foreclosed
- A secular university undermines your son's faith
- Your spouse wants a divorce
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List some issues which are currently a problem for you or someone close to you.

What emotions are aroused in persons facing these and similar issues in life?

Is there a common root for these issues?

If so, what?

“Issues” underscores the problem of sin in our lives.

2. **“Perspective”** [Definition: the capacity to view things in their relative importance]

A person's perspective in life depends on that person's worldview. Two opposing worldviews predominate in today's world. What are they?

a. _____

b. _____

“Perspective” implies a specific focus in life.

Take a moment to articulate your perspective relative to the issues you listed above.

What was Adam’s God-given perspective (or focus) in life before the Fall?

Genesis 1:27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

What does “image of God” mean in terms of Adam’s perspective on life in God’s world?

What was Adam’s perspective in life after the Fall?

Genesis 3:9-13: The Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

What range of emotions is evident in this account?

What did God say/do to change Adam’s focus?

Genesis 3:15: And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

What is the significance of the words “I will” in this verse? (See also Genesis 12:2-3)

The Biblical Perspective

1. The change of focus illustrated from the Psalms.

From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture teaches us the importance of an **outward** focus (on God's Word of promise) for our spiritual well-being rather than an **inward** focus (in our hearts). Psalms 13 and 77 help us to see this in action in the lives of David and Asaph.

In **Psalm 13**, what is David's frame of mind in verses 1-4?

What is the focus of his attention?

What changes in verse 5?

In **Psalm 77**, what is Asaph's frame of mind in verses 1-9?

What is the focus of his attention?

What changes in verses 10 and following?

Read Revelation 7:9-12.

John shares with us his vision of heaven. The vision includes "a great multitude... from every nation, tribe, people and language" (verse 9).

What does their **posture** (verse 11) indicate about their focus?

What do their **words** (v.12) indicate about their focus?

"John sees all the angels of heaven surrounding the throne with their eyes fixed on God. Inside the ring of angels are the elders. Revelation chapter 5 also talks about these elders, 24 of them. They

represent all believers in heaven. The elders are focused on God. The four living creatures do the same.” (*Meditations*, NPH, April 27, 2010, page 61)

2. The issues we face in life are sin-related.

You are having a discussion with a co-worker or a new acquaintance about your Christian beliefs. The heart of your witness is on sin and grace, law and gospel. He/she asks you what you mean about sin. How would you respond? **What is sin?** Take a few minutes to think about your answer. Use the space below to summarize the responses:

Compare your response with the following:

“The Reason for God” Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Manhattan (p.162):

“Sin is the despairing refusal to find your deepest identity in your relationship and service to God. Sin is seeking to become oneself, to get an identity apart from God.

“What does this mean? Everyone gets their identity, their sense of being distinct and valuable, from somewhere or something. Kierkegaard asserts that human beings were made not only to believe in God in some general way, but to love him supremely, center their lives on him above all else, and build their identities on him. Anything other than this is sin.

“Most people think of sin primarily as ‘breaking divine rules,’ but Kierkegaard knows that the very first command of the Ten Commandments is to ‘have no other gods before me’. So, according to the Bible, the primary way to define sin is not just the doing of bad things, but the making of good things into *ultimate* things. It is seeking to establish a sense of self by making something else more central to your significance, purpose, and happiness than your relationship to God. . . . Our need for worth is so powerful that whatever we base our identity and value on, we essentially ‘deify.’ We will look to it with all the passion and intensity of worship and devotion.”

(Compare this with what Luther said: “What it is that is more important to you in your life is your God.” Also, recall his explanation of the 1st Commandment: “We should, fear, love and trust in God above all things.”)

In what respects does Keller’s exposition of the meaning of sin differ from your summation above?

In what way(s) does Keller’s insight into the meaning of sin expand your own understanding?

What (or where) is the focus in life of the person who seeks an identity apart from God?

What are the consequences of such an inner-directed focus?

What is the proper biblical perspective on life, and what are the consequences?

Two Historical Notes: At the time of the Reformation one of the essential differences between the Reformers and Rome had to do with opposing views of the basic human nature after the fall into sin. The Augsburg Confession asserts that we are all “*sine metu Dei, cum concupiscentia* (without a true fear of God, *with* concupiscentia). Rome agreed with the first part of the definition but denied the second part. The Reformers employed a Latin term to explain concupiscentia. They taught with Scripture that man is born with a mind that produces only thoughts *incurvatus in se* (thoughts turned back in upon one’s self). That is the default setting with which we were born. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to convert inner-directed thinking into outward or other-directed thinking. That is the biblical perspective for dealing with life’s issues.

In today’s terms, we could say that sin begins with the default setting with which we were all born. It’s a disease term passed on from one generation to the next. “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5).

In Article II of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Philip Melancthon wrote: “This is precisely the intention of St. Augustine’s definition that original sin is concupiscentia. It means that when righteousness is lost, concupiscentia follows. Since nature, in its weakness, cannot fear and love God or believe in him, it seeks and loves carnal things; either it despises the judgment of God in its security, or it hates him in its terror. Thus Augustine includes both the defect and the vicious disposition that follows. Concupiscentia is not merely a corruption of the physical constitution, but the evil inclination of man’s higher capacities to carnal things.” (Apol II, 103.24).

NEXT LESSON: What has God done to give us an outward-directed focus in life?

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