

Lesson 1: Five Christian Essentials (Rom.5:1-2, 11)

Each year, many of us had medical checkup. Is that because we were sick? Or because we had any symptoms? Actually we were fine. Why did we take medical checkup then? The answer is because we wanted to keep our good health. Our home doctor said like this. If he has our healthy data, it is easy to find symptoms because each person has different tendency. According to him, because we are healthy, that is why we need to take medical checkup.

It is also true that it is good to have our spiritual health checkup regularly.

In Matt 7:24-27, Jesus talks a parable of two men. "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

This parable tells us how important the foundation is. And Jesus' point is to put his words into practice. He didn't talk about how much Bible knowledge you need, or how deep you should understand the Bible.

"Foundations Class" is the opportunity where you can check your spiritual health. It's better for you to do it before your life collapses, like the house fell with a great crash in the storm. Sooner or later, whether you like it or not, the storm may hit your life. It would be too sad if you recognize your foundation is not strong enough after your life collapses. Yes? Am I right? And I also want to remind you that the point is not just to gain new understanding of the Words or to enjoy new teaching, but to put His Words into practice.

Before starting the first lesson, let me introduce about "Foundations Class."

"Foundations Class" took its original form in 1993 by Eric Dooley who is the founder of New Life Fellowship. This material has been used in Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Through its use in New Life Fellowship in Ho Chi Minh City (an international church) it has ministered to people from over 20 countries. In HCMC, Eric often said "Foundations Class" was the front door of NLF.

There are some natural divisions in this nine-week study. The first week lays an important foundation of Christian essentials: how to hear God's voice, the Word of God, prayer, fellowship, and witness. The next four weeks are like the four legs of a chair: repentance, water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit,

and being added to the church. The next three weeks are on faith, grace, and righteousness. The final week is the Great Commission.

Okay. In Lesson 1, we will study "Five Christian Essentials." In short, a Christian is to live in the right relationship with God, and that relationship reflects the relationship with others.

1. Restoration of Relationships

Jesus speaks a parable:

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." (Luke 15:11-24)

This story shows about man, God and salvation very well.

God created man to live in relationship with Him. But man denied God. Man wanted God to leave him alone. He didn't like to be under God's authority. He wanted to do everything according to his will. Or, he wants to use God as a handy man who answers all his wishes. We call this attitude sin.

In the story, the younger son had everything he needed to live while he was with his father. But when he left his father, he lost everything. He used up all his money foolishly. Now he had to worry about his daily food. He didn't have a place of security and peace any longer. Moreover, he was facing the danger

of losing his own life. His situation shows what man's situation is like when he was totally separated from God because of his sin.

The younger son realized that the reason he was going to lose his life was because he had left his father. He decided to go back to his father.

When the father saw the shabby miserable appearance of his son, how did he respond? Did he punish the son because he had wasted all his property from him? No. Instead, he slaughtered the fattened calf and had a feast to celebrate his return. Did he say "When you become a good worker, and become worthy enough to be my son, I will let you stay in my house. Until then, you have to work as a servant!"? No. Instead, he gave him the best robe and a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. That means, he accepted him as his son.

2. Reason for Acceptance

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' (Luke 15:21)

The son understood that he was no longer worthy to be accepted as his son. In the same way, because of sin, we are not worthy to be accepted by the Holy God.

However, God never says "If you want to come to me, you have to do this or stop doing that first. Then after you reach this level, then you may come back to me." Whatever man do, it is impossible to change his sinful nature. We must understand this. It is not true that we, you and I became sinners because we committed many sins. But the fact is we sin because we are sinners as descendants of Adam, whose first sin is the origin of our sinful nature.

It's very simple. Let's think about apple. Not computers but trees. It does not become an apple tree because it bears many apple fruits. The fact is it bears apple fruits because it is an apple tree. Apple trees bear apple fruits because it is their nature. And actually even though it doesn't bear any apples it is still an apple tree.

And we must also realize that whatever man tries, it is impossible for him to erase what he has done in the past. Let's imagine you are a banker, working in a bank. One day you cheated and stole some money from the bank and the bank found it. You may claim like this. "Just think about how much profit I have made for this bank, and how much more profit I am able to make from now on. Comparing those big amounts of profits, it is almost nothing what I took. ..." Whatever you say, how well you claim your theory, the bank will hand you over

to the police and they may put you into jail. The reason is because you stole money from the bank.

Man cannot erase what he has done in the past. God will judge us because of our sins. The bad news is "the wages of sin is death. (Rom.6:23)" But the good news is "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2Cor.5:21)" It is only by the grace of God we can be forgiven and saved and accepted as his children, through our faith in Jesus Christ.

If we believe in Jesus Christ and want to come back to the right relationship with God, he will definitely accept us. The truth is God is waiting for us to come back to him.

3. Five Christian Essentials

The son went back to his father and he was accepted as his son, not as a servant. Then after that, how did he live? What do you think? I think, he stayed with his father, he respected his father, he was proud of being the son of his father, every day he talked to his father, and he enjoyed the relationship with his father very much.

(Rom.5:1-2)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

(Rom.5:11)

¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

What is it like to be a Christian? He has peace with God. He rejoices in God. He lives in the right relationship with God, and that relationship reflects the relationship with others. That is Christians' life.

Throughout history God has been reaching out to man, trying to reconcile him to Himself. God has chosen to progressively reveal His nature, His character and His will to man, so that man might know, love and fellowship with God just as he was created to do so. The wonderful truth is that now all men can know God and have fellowship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. We live in a truly unique time in human history because the revelation of God is complete in His Son and in His Word, the Bible.

Because of what God has done for us through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a man is justified by faith alone and not by works. One result of this is that each believer has access to God directly, apart from any human intermediaries. Because God wants to communicate with man He has given us His Word, the Bible, which is the supreme source of authority for both faith and life.

From these truths we can see five things that are essential for each of us to live a fulfilled Christian life and grow in maturity to become all that God wants us to be:

1) Because God has reached out to man and wants us to have fellowship with Him, we can each know Him personally. It is important for each of us to know how to "hear God's voice."

When we read the Bible personally, God speaks to us, he shows his will in our mind. And we can also hear God's voice through group bible study, listening or reading sermons, and also through Godly consolers. In the Bible you can find some other ways through which God speaks. But the point is to have fellowship with God. You need to develop how you spend time with him personally. It's just like you build up the relationship with your friends. There is no short cut. You need to take time and build up the relationship little by little, step by step, day by day.

2) Because God has revealed Himself to us through the Bible, we should have a deep appreciation and love for God's Word.

The word of God is neither irresponsible words of strangers, nor ancient theories which has no relation to us personally today. It's the word personally spoken to each one of us by the one who loves us and died for us on the cross. We know the word is the life and truth. There are no other words as important as this, right? If so, we will not listen to His Word absent-minded, right? We wouldn't want to miss hearing His word, no matter how busy we are, right?

If we live in the right relationship with God, we love his word. And we don't just listen to it and forget about it, but we will keep it in our heart and mind, and act on it in our daily life.

Some people spend more time reading a devotional book, quiet-time materials or commentaries than reading the Bible. Devotional books help you develop your habit to listen to God's voice. But they are not the word of God, they are human words. My suggestion is when you established your habit to have quiet time daily, you should spend time with the word of God rather than keep listening to someone else's thought. Let's talk about reality. You may have 5 minutes a day for reading a devotional book, and it's all your quiet time. You

give only 15 seconds for the word of God and use other 285 seconds for someone's idea. That's what you are doing if you are heavily relying on a devotional book.

Again the point is to have fellowship with God. If you want to develop your relationship with God, whose word would you listen to? I think you already know the answer.

I have met some people who said, "I tried to read the Bible, but I couldn't understand it very much. So I stopped it." I think they've got the order wrong. The fact is, you don't understand the Bible because you don't read it. You may not understand it at first, but if you read it many times you will understand it. It doesn't mean you have to read the same chapter or verse again and again until you understand it. What I mean is that you should read the Bible from cover to cover again and again every year. The Bible consists of 66 books, the Old and New testaments. Each time you go through it, you will have better understanding of it. The more you read the Bible, the more it starts to make sense. You cannot just take out a portion from the Bible to understand it. It must be understood in the context. That is why you need to read the whole Bible. If you read 4 chapters every day, you can read through the Bible once a year. It takes about 20 minutes.

Again the point is to have fellowship with God. Is there any reason why you cannot have 20 minutes personal time with God every day?

3) Because we can each have direct access to God, it's important to understand how to pray.

The prayer is like talking to God. It's not chanting or channelling. It's also not listing Church terms. It is conversation with your beloved. You must know that God wants to hear from you because he loves you. He is waiting to hear from you because he paid the cost of reconciliation. If you know how to talk to your friend, you know how to pray.

You may find it helpful to pray aloud when you are praying alone, for it will help you to focus on God. If you pray quietly or just pray in your mind, sometimes your prayer turns into just thinking over your issues and you may lose focus. Moreover, you may feel sleepy when you pray quietly.

4) Because God has reconciled us to Himself, we can be reconciled to each other. This is called fellowship.

Let's think about the parable I quoted earlier today. The younger son came back to his father. He started to live with his father again. There are other family members and people in the father's house. He has relationship with the father, but if he never spends time with other members of the family, there is something wrong.

Christians are added to God's family. They are connected with one another and knitted together to build up a local church. Church doesn't mean a building but it is the assembly of believers. We don't move from church to church for own preference or interest. If you don't commit to one local church, you cannot build up close relationship with people.

5) Because God has saved us, we can tell others the good things God has done for us. This is our witness.

We don't want to talk about the relationship in which you have a guilty feeling, or of which you are ashamed of. But if you have good and close relationship with someone whom you respect and you are proud of, then you want to talk about that relationship with others. You may naturally start to talk how you developed such a close relationship with that person, what he has done for you, how great he is and so on. If you don't want to talk about Jesus with others, there may be problems in your relationship with Jesus.

Today we studied "Foundations Class" Lesson 1, Five Christian Essentials. 1) Hearing God's voice. 2) Love for God's Word. 3) Prayer. 4) Fellowship. And 5) Our witness. In short, a Christian lives in the right relationship with God, and that relationship reflects the relationship with others.