

Idolatry:

“I am more prone to listen to therapeutic advice than spiritual advice, say, from a pastor.”

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Lesson Four:

Title: Do I want advice which reflects who I have made God to be?

Biblical Texts: Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8, James 1:7, John 3:16, Matthew 26:11, I John 1:8, Acts 4:12, I Corinthians 2:2, Matthew 1:21, Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 1:9, Romans 5:10

Lesson Objectives: The students will be able to:

1. Identify the commonality among three Bible verses about God. (Knowledge)
2. Interpret eight statements regarding God. (Comprehension)
3. Analyze these statements, pointing out which most reflect his or her own thinking. (Analysis)
4. Compare these statements to God’s Word. (Analysis)
5. Produce a list of God’s attributes based on His Word. (Synthesis)
6. Evaluate the God of their own design verses the God of the Bible. (Evaluation)

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Setting Our Sights

So far, we have studied the temptation of seeking advice which only promotes our own comfort, happiness, and fulfillment. We've also explored the dangers of listening to the world's advice and even our own, without checking it against the Bible. In this final lesson, we will investigate our inclination to listen to God's advice, but not always that of the one, true God. We will identify the commonality among three statements about God, interpret eight statements regarding God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and analyze these statements, pointing out which reflect our own thinking. From there we will compare these statements against the Bible, produce a list of God's attributes using the Bible, and evaluate the God of our own design against that of the Bible.

Getting Started

1. One of the ways that human beings draw conclusions regarding God is by observing life. Below are ten observances. What conclusion would you draw from each? Read each observance and jot down a word or phrase to describe the conclusion you would draw regarding God.

* Every day the sun both comes up and goes down.

* A baby is born with developmental disabilities.

* Two nations are waging war in Europe.

* Human beings are born with an immune system.

* Diseases such as polio, diphtheria, AIDS, and COVID-19, have taken the lives of countless people.

2. Gathering again, compare your responses to those of others in the group. Are there differences? How might we account for the differences?

Digging In

1. We've learned that, while it is possible to learn much of God's nature through observing His created world, it is easy for human beings to make false assumptions. If we look to nothing more than our own thoughts and feelings to determine who God is, the world could have eight billion gods, one for each person on the earth. Let's look to the Bible to learn about God. Read the three Bible verses below. What common characteristic about God do they all teach? Underline the words that support your conclusion.

Malachi 3:6

⁶“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

Hebrews 13:8

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

James 1:17

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

2. Given that God doesn't change, we can know that whatever is true of God has always been true, and will always be so for everyone, everywhere. The challenge is making sure we have the correct information.

a. Below are eight statements regarding God. With a partner, read each statement, circle those you have encountered before. Can you recall where you encountered them?

- I. The Father blesses those He loves with financial prosperity.
- II. God's unconditional love means He approves of every part of my lifestyle.
- III. God's love is so powerful that, one way or another, everyone will enter heaven.
- IV. Caring for others is even more important than the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ.
- V. It's possible that Jesus did exist, but He is first and foremost an example of how we are to live.
- VI. Good people go to heaven. Bad people go to hell.
- VII. Unity with other faiths is more important than having Biblically correct teaching.
- VIII. If I take a step toward God, He will take a step toward me.

b. Review the list. Underline those that reflect your own thinking.

3. Now compare each statement to God's Word. Are these statements true? Why or why not?

- I. The Father blesses those He loves with financial prosperity. (*John 3:16*¹⁶ ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (Matthew 26:11***¹¹ ***For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.)***)
- II. God’s unconditional love means He approves of every part of my lifestyle. (*1 John 1:8*⁸ ***If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.)***)
- III. God’s love is so powerful that, one way or another, everyone will enter heaven. (*Acts 4:12*¹² ***And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”)***)
- IV. Caring for others is even more important than the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ. (*1 Corinthians 2:2*² ***For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.)***)
- V. It’s possible that Jesus did exist, but He is mainly an example of how we are to live. (*Matthew 1:21*²¹ ***She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”)***)
- VI. Good people go to heaven. Bad people go to hell. (*Ephesians 2:8-9*⁸ ***For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,***⁹ ***not a result of works, so that no one may boast.)***)
- VII. Unity with other faiths is more important than having Biblically correct teaching. (*Titus 1:9*⁹ ***He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.)***)
- VIII. If I take a step toward God, He will take a step toward me. (*Romans 5:10*¹⁰ ***For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.)***)

Hitting Home

1. Now that we've discovered how the Bible corrects the false statements regarding God, let's compile a list of true statements using the same verses. Below is a list of some of the verses we examined in the last exercise. What does each teach us?

John 3:16 _____

Acts 4:12 _____

1 Corinthians 2:2 _____

Matthew 1:21 _____

Ephesians 2:8-9 _____

Titus 1:9 _____

Romans 5:10 _____

2. We have compiled a list of falsehoods and truths. Compare the two in each item below. Why is the truth of God superior to the falsehood? Write your ideas below each item.

Falsehood: The Father blesses those He loves with financial prosperity.

Truth: God loves everyone.

Falsehood: God's love is so powerful that, one way or another, everyone will enter heaven.

Truth: God gives salvation only in Jesus Christ.

Falsehood: It's possible that Jesus did exist, but He is mainly an example of how we are to live.

Truth: Jesus does exist, and He died for our sins.

Falsehood: Good people go to heaven. Bad people go to hell.

Truth: We are saved by God's grace in Jesus, not our goodness or works.

Falsehood: If I take a step toward God, He will take a step toward me.

Truth: God acted to make peace with sinners.

Wrapping Up

Summary Fill in the Blank

Having reached the end of our final lesson, let's take an opportunity to review what we have learned. Below are four questions, one reflecting lesson content from each lesson. Write the missing word in the space provided.

1. In my sinful nature I am prone to listen to advice which promotes the belief that life is primarily about _____.

2. Spiritual advice is found in the Bible. Worldly advice _____ the Bible.

3. Although, even as Christians, we cannot always trust our own advice, we can be _____ of God's perfect advice which He gave us in the Bible.

4. When we were God's enemies, He made _____ with sinners through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Extra Mile

Below are eight key Bible verses drawn from the four lessons of this study. To keep them fresh in your mind, choose one verse each week and send it along with a brief note of encouragement to another participant in the study. Use email, text, or other media.

Luke 12:15

Romans 5:11

Philippians 2:8

Psalms 51:10

I John 4:15

Acts 4:12

I Corinthians 1:23

Romans 5:10

Helps for the Leader

Lesson Four: Do I want advice which reflects who I have made God to be?

❖ Getting Started

Prepare a few Bibles and writing utensils for those who may have forgotten to bring these items. Once again, welcome everyone warmly into the study space and thank them for returning. Give each person a copy of the study. If there are any new participants, have everyone introduce themselves.

Have students turn to lesson number four. Ask a student to read the introductory portion under “Setting Our Sights”.

1. (About four minutes.) Move the group to the exercise under “Getting Started.” Invite a participant to read introductory paragraph number one. A primary theme in this lesson is drawing our own conclusions regarding God’s nature, and then listening only to advice that reflects who we have determined Him to be. We draw these conclusions based on our own observances. Direct participants to complete this exercise individually. In case participants struggle to get started, an example response to each is given below.

* Every day the sun both comes up and goes down.

____ God is orderly. _____

* A baby is born with developmental disabilities.

____ God must be uncaring to allow children to suffer. _____

* Two nations are waging war in Europe.

____ A good God would prevent war from starting. _____

* Human beings are born with an immune system.

_____ God is an amazing Creator who wants people to be healthy and safe.

* Diseases such as polio, diphtheria, AIDS, and COVID-19, have taken the lives of countless people.

_____ God created a bad world. _____

2. (About five minutes) Bring the group back together. Invite a participant to read the paragraph under number two. Read each observance again and ask for responses from the group. Complete as many as time allows. There will likely be some variation. Highlight these variations as they occur. The goal of this portion is that students would begin to see the danger of determining God's nature solely on our own observances. If human beings decide who God is solely based on his or her observances, we end with a different God for every human being on earth.

❖ Digging in

1. (About three minutes.) Have a participant read paragraph one. Invite participants to read each verse, share which words he or she highlighted, and why. The goal of this activity is that participants would recognize that God does not change in His nature. He always has been, and always will be the same. Example support portions are underlined.

Malachi 3:6

⁶“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

Hebrews 13:8

⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

James 1:17

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

2. (About eight minutes) Ask a participant to read paragraph two, including the portion labeled “a”. Make sure that everyone has a partner and then direct the pairs to complete the activity. The goal of this portion is not that participants decide if the statements are true, (That comes next!) but rather to take inventory of what they have encountered before and then reflect upon the sources of such information.

a. Give pairs three to four minutes to complete the exercise. Reconvene the group and invite participants to share what they circled and where they encountered it.

b. Read the instructions for portion “b”. Allow participants one or two minutes to underline those statements which reflect their own thinking. The goal in this portion is that participants would reflect on where they stand in reaction to what they have encountered in the world and even in their own hearts and minds. This is a reflective exercise. So, there is no need to share responses.

Finally, read aloud the summary paragraph below.

There is a great deal of information in the world regarding God. Not all of it is true. Such information can come from a vast array of sources: family, friends, movies, music, books, social media, even Christians and pastors. Recall in previous lessons we learned that the sinful world is not always a trustworthy source for information regarding God. The same is true of our own hearts and minds which are affected by the sinful nature. Given that God does not change, we do well to look to an unchanging source for information on God.

3. (About eight minutes) Read aloud the instruction for this portion. As a whole group, read each item “I” through “VIII”, including the Bible verse. Invite participants to decide if the statement is true or not, based on the Bible verse(s) and why. All eight statements are false. An explanation for each is given below.

Offer these if participants struggle to reach the correct conclusion. For clarity and in summary, read aloud the paragraph below.

- I. The Father blesses those He loves with financial prosperity. ***(God loves all people, and yet we will always have the poor.)***
- II. God's unconditional love means He approves of every part of my lifestyle. ***(God's love is unconditional, yet everyone's life includes sin.)***
- III. God's love is so powerful that, one way or another, everyone will enter heaven. ***(There is salvation only in Jesus Christ.)***
- IV. Caring for others is even more important than the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ. ***(Salvation in Jesus is the primary message of the Bible.)***
- V. It's possible that Jesus did exist, but He is first and foremost an example of how we are to live. ***(Jesus did exist, and His primary purpose was to be our Savior.)***
- VI. Good people go to heaven. Bad people go to hell. ***(We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by our obedience.)***
- VII. Unity with other faiths is more important than having Biblically correct teaching. ***(While we make every effort to live in peace with others, teaching correctly is more important than unity.)***
- VIII. If I take a step toward God, He will take a step toward me. ***(I never could have stepped toward God, because prior to His work of salvation, I was His enemy.)***

We've considered eight popular statements regarding God. By comparing them to the Bible, we've discovered them all to be false. When we don't have the correct information regarding God, we are apt to fill in the blanks for ourselves. This is dangerous because the world, the Devil, and our sinful nature are always leading us away from the truth. It is interesting to notice that many of the eight statements are partially true, making them especially tricky. Thanks be to God Who has given us the perfect truth in the Bible!

❖ Hitting Home

1. (About seven minutes) Invite a participant to read the introductory paragraph here. The goal in this section is that participants would compile a list of true statements using the verses referenced in the previous section. This section is part two in a process. Part one was correcting the false statements. Part three is

further down in the lesson, in which we will compare the false statements regarding God to the truth. Direct participants to the verses printed in the previous section. Invite participants to share what he or she has learned from each verse. Read the answers below only if participants struggle to reach the correct conclusions.

John 3:16 ___ *God loves everyone.*_____

Acts 4:12 ___ *God gives salvation only in Jesus Christ.*_____

1 Corinthians 2:2 ___ *God's most important message to us is the Good News of Jesus.*

Matthew 1:21 ___ *Jesus does exist, and He died for our sins.*_____

Ephesians 2:8-9 ___ *We are saved by God's grace in Jesus, not our goodness or works.*

Titus 1:9 ___ *God wants us to have and teach the truth.*_____

Romans 5:10 ___ *God acted to make peace with sinners.*_____

2. (About seven minutes) Invite a participant to read the instructions for this exercise. So far participants have discovered that God does not change. They have used the Bible to correct false statements regarding God and used those same verses to compile a list of characteristics of His nature. The object of this portion is that students would compare the false and true statements, and recognize how God's true nature is superior. This portion is designed to drive home the overarching goal of this lesson, that participants would see the benefit of trusting the true God discovered in the Bible against advice from a god they have developed themselves. Work through each item together. Share the answers given below if need be. Read the summary paragraph below for clarification.

Falsehood: The Father blesses those He loves with financial prosperity.

Truth: God loves everyone.

____The falsehood suggests that God only loves the wealthy. The truth includes all people, regardless of economic circumstances. _____

Falsehood: God's love is so powerful that, one way or another, everyone will enter heaven.

Truth: God gives salvation only in Jesus Christ.

____The falsehood suggests that God does not care about sin. The truth is an expression of God's love, to save us at His own expense. _____

Falsehood: It's possible that Jesus did exist, but He is mainly an example of how we are to live.

Truth: Jesus does exist, and He died for our sins.

____The falsehood puts the burden on us to live a certain way to please God. The truth offers the certainty of forgiveness in what Jesus did. _____

Falsehood: Good people go to heaven. Bad people go to hell.

Truth: We are saved by God's grace in Jesus, not our goodness or works.

____The falsehood leaves me with questions of how good I must be. The truth comforts me with God's mercy. _____

Falsehood: If I take a step toward God, He will take a step toward me.

Truth: God acted to make peace with sinners.

____The falsehood puts the burden on weak and broken sinners. The truth reflects a loving God who puts mercy into action. _____

The temptation to take advice from a god of our own creation is always present. We have discovered, however, that God doesn't change to fit our wishes. Because of our sinful nature, we tend to create a God who ignores sin and grants every wish. As we have found, gods of our own design are not trustworthy, and place the burden of salvation upon our shoulders. While learning of the one, true God

can be challenging, we know we can trust Him, and we see His overwhelming love in making peace through Christ so that we can be certain of salvation. We are wise to ignore advice from the god of our own design and trust in the one, true God as He shows us Himself in the Bible.

❖ Wrapping Up

(About three minutes.) Invite a participant to read the introductory instructions. Below are the four questions with answers. Use these answers if participants have trouble. Notice that two and three allow for more than one correct answer.

1. In my sinful nature I am prone to listen to advice which promotes the belief that life is primarily about __me_____.
2. Spiritual advice is found in the Bible. Worldly advice __contradicts/disagrees with_____ the Bible.
3. Although, even as Christians, we cannot always trust our own advice, we can be __certain/sure_____ of God's perfect advice which He gave us in the Bible.
4. When we were God's enemies, He made __peace_____ with sinners through His Son, Jesus Christ.

❖ The Extra Mile

Read aloud the instructions for the section. Before dismissing the group, facilitate the exchange of email addresses, cell numbers for text, or other media information.

Thank everyone for being a part of the study. Close with the Lord's Prayer.