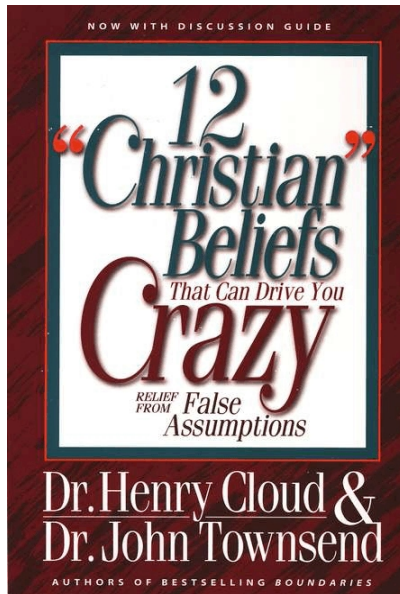


12 False Christian Assumptions

This series of home group lessons is derived from the book *12 Christian Beliefs That Can Drive You Crazy* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. There are twelve lessons in the series, each exploring one of these so-called Christian beliefs, which are actually false assumptions. We highly recommend this book, since we have observed that these beliefs are strongly held by many apostolic people. We hope you find this series to be helpful.



This series is provided for the edification of the church and is offered without charge.

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 1. “It’s selfish to have my needs met.”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

Read Job 30:25-27

Sarah was having a terrible day. Well actually a terrible life. Exhausted and lonely one day, she flipped on the radio and tuned in to her favorite Christian station. “So you’re down, troubled, lonely, you’re under crushing pressure. You wonder if things will ever change for you,” the pastor was saying. Is he reading my mind? She thought, turning up the volume. “There’s an answer,” he announced. “Stop thinking of yourself and start thinking of others! Get off the pity pot. Repent of your self-absorption and find peace in sharing.” Sarah’s heart dropped. Peace in sharing? I’ve been sharing myself all weekend, and I’m in pieces, not at peace. She immediately felt guilty for her thoughts. I guess he’s right, she thought bleakly. I’m just being selfish. As she flipped through her church bulletin to find another committee to volunteer for, she despaired about herself and her life.

Every day, well-intentioned ministers teach this same crazy-making, false Christian assumption: “It’s selfish to have my needs met.” On the surface this principle sounds Christian, but a deeper look reveals just the opposite. It’s like someone saying, “I saw you at the gas station last night filling your car’s tank. You need to be filling other people’s tanks with that gas.”

Jesus values our needs. In fact, He created us to be needy to help us to grow and be closer to Him. He intended for us to be incomplete in and of ourselves. He made us to be relationally dependent on Him and His body. He made us in such a way that we must reach out to survive.

Read Matthew 5:3-6

Jesus is describing some needy people in these verses. But is he criticizing them for having needs? No. He’s meeting their needs. Jesus wants people with needs. These needs draw us closer to Him and to other people. Our needs help us to be humble, since we can’t “do it on our own.” Our needs help us to grow because they force us to realize that we must look to God for the answers to our needs. His answers lead us to maturity, “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Our needs help us to be real.

Read Matthew 7:17-18

If God built us to have needs, then letting those needs go unmet can cause major problems in our lives. Just as neglecting regular oil changes will destroy your car’s engine, neglecting our God-given, legitimate needs

will cripple us. Bad fruits or symptoms are God’s way of letting us know that something is wrong. Feelings of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, compulsive behaviors, and the like are all symptoms of a deeper problem. These symptoms let us know that we are not getting our needs met.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 and Luke 7:36-47

The most comforting people in the world are those who have been comforted; the most loving people in the world are those who have been loved. It’s not surprising that John, the apostle who Jesus loved most, later became known as the apostle of love. Jesus demonstrated this principle in Luke 7. The woman, a sinner who found forgiveness, was able to love much, while Simon the Pharisee, who was blind to his own neediness, was unable to love. We must acknowledge our needs and bring them to the feet of the Master in order to love Him and other people with genuine love.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever heard this crazy-making, false Christian assumption before? Did you believe it? How do you feel about it now?
2. How are needs pleasing to God? Name some positive results of admitting needs to God and others and asking for help.
 - Our needs draw us closer to Him, help us to be humble, connect us to other people, help us grow to maturity.
3. Why would people feel uncomfortable about admitting their needs to others and asking for help?
 - Pride; thinking that asking for help is not pleasing to God; grew up learning to be self-reliant; fear that no one will care enough to help; fear of being ridiculed for not being able to “do it themselves.”
4. Describe what you think would be appropriate and inappropriate ways of asking God and others for what you need.
 - Appropriate: asking with a right attitude, asking with the right motives (not asking amiss, James 4:3), asking with an understanding of what God and others can and should do.
 - Inappropriate: demanding help from others through hostility or pouting; expecting others to read your mind; asking for help when you don’t need it (knapsack vs. boulder).
5. Are you experiencing any “bad fruit” or symptoms in your life that indicate that your needs are not being met? Are you asking for help? If you are not asking for help, what do you think is holding you back?

It is not selfish to have your needs met. Jesus created us to be needy so that we would draw close to Him and other people.

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 2. “If I’m spiritual enough, I’ll have no pain or sin.”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

Ted was discouraged. In fact, he felt so depressed that he wondered if he really were a Christian. To fight against his feelings of depression, he increased his Bible study and listened to all the spiritual life tapes he could get his hands on. But he only felt more depressed. Because of some things he had been taught in church, Ted believed that his feelings of depression must be the result of a spiritual failure.

Like many Christians, Ted subscribed to this false assumption: “If I’m spiritual enough, I will have no pain or imperfections.” People who live under the cloud of this assumption see only two options: 1) try harder at the spiritual disciplines; or 2) give up on the spiritual life altogether. Perhaps the best-known individual who learned this spiritual lesson was Job.

Read Job 7:15

We see here that Bro. Job was not living the abundant life.

Read Job 8:3-6, 11:13-16

Job’s infamous friends came along with these words of “comfort:” you suffer because you sin. If you are truly good, you won’t hurt. If you depend wholly on God and stay away from sin, your pain will go away. In other words, get your act together, and then God will bless you.

Read Job 42:7

But God did not agree with the message Job’s friends preached. God tells us that we encounter pain and imperfection within ourselves, others, and the world every day. Being a Christian doesn’t exempt us from problems. We will have tribulation in this world, but through Jesus we can overcome.

Read Psalms 139:23-24

There are three common ways that we try to avoid pain and owning our own imperfection. The first is “denial”: pretending the sin or pain is not there. This leads to discouragement, anxiety, and criticizing others for things we deny in ourselves. We don’t need to fear our badness, God is big enough to handle it. The second way is “works”: working harder to make up

for our faults, improve ourselves, and ease our guilt. Works tend to produce a false image of spirituality, lead to legalism, and become empty rules. The third way is “law”: condemning our badness, feeling guilty about it, and getting angry at it. The Bible is very clear about the destructiveness of guilt. God has set us free from the law of sin and death through grace.

This false assumption leads to “bad fruits” such as feelings of failure, wasted energy, hiding, unforgiveness, and lack of love.

Read 1 John 1:8 and Mark 7:20-23

Being an imperfect human being is normal—it is reality. Failure is also normal. When you find in yourself the things Jesus mentioned in Mark 7, don’t fear them, own them. God is gracious. We need to accept the presence of badness within us.

Read Psalms 62:8 and James 5:16

We must confess and forsake our sins. We must also take our pain—our sadness, grief, hurt, abandonment, woundedness, and rejection—to God and to others where it can be loved and healed. After we have received grace we must give it in the form of forgiving those who have wronged us.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you ever believe that once you became a Christian you should not experience any more pain—that you would somehow be perfect? When you did experience these things, how did you feel? How do you feel now, in light of this teaching?
2. Why would people refuse to accept the badness inside themselves? Why do people think that God does not accept the badness inside them? What is the difference between “acceptance” and “approval?”
3. How might uncovering sins such as those Jesus mentioned in Mark 7 actually show that a person is growing in God rather than backsliding?
4. Have you ever found yourself avoiding sinful tendencies and pain within yourself by denying it, doing works, or condemning it with the law? What kind of fruit did it produce in your life?
5. Do you feel comfortable pouring your heart out before God and other people? Why or why not?

Because God accepts our fallenness, we can too. We don’t need to hide from it anymore. We must take our pain and imperfection to God and to each other where we will find healing that leads to love and good deeds.

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumption

Lesson 3. “If I change my behavior, I will grow spiritually and emotionally”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

Deeply discouraged, Debra approached her house knowing what awaited on the inside: resentful children and a critical husband. No one in the family was getting along, and she shouldered a lot of the blame. Reaching out for help, Debra confided in the wife of an elder in the church. The older woman told her, “Emotions follow behaviors. If you act loving, you’ll feel loving. The Bible tells us to ‘put on the new self.’ That means to behave like a loving Christian. Then you’ll feel like a loving Christian.” Though it seemed dishonest to act differently than she felt, Debra took the woman’s advice. While her husband and the kids enjoyed her bright attitude, Debra still felt depressed.

Read Philippians 1:9-11

Over and over again, the Bible points out that our actions are the *result* of spiritual change, not the cause of it. Good behavior is the cart, not the horse. Changes in behavior indicate that God is doing an invisible, internal work within us. Destructive behaviors are not the causes of bad attitudes; they are the result of the heart’s sinful condition. Positive behavior comes from God’s work in our hearts. This is why changing only our behaviors confuses fruits with roots.

Read Matthew 23:25-26

In essence, Debra’s older friend told her to pretend to love others. Covering up the resentment with “spiritual behavior” sounds frighteningly similar to what Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for. God is more interested in searching our hearts to get to the root of our sin than He is in meticulous correctness on the outside. And He knows the outcome of pretending. Years and years of trying to behave right with little or no connectedness to God and others leads to despair. The very fact that we are Christians signifies that we have problems or else Jesus wouldn’t have needed to die for us.

Read Romans 11:33-36

The “good behavior” approach to living for God also places the power of change squarely on our shoulders. This behavior denies the power of the Cross. Changing one’s behavior in order to change one’s heart also fosters a proud, omnipotent, self-dependency that leaves God out of the picture.

Read Philippians 2:12-13 and Psalms 1:1-3

How should we behave then? In the Bible, God continually compares our spiritual maturity to how plants thrive. Herein is the answer: instead of attempting to fix our symptoms, we must actively take ourselves to good nutrients. Just as a tree planted in rich soil can flourish, so can we expose ourselves to God’s healing resources. This is how we take personal responsibility for our spiritual growth. We don’t make ourselves grow, we connect to the One Who can make us grow.

Read Psalms 139:23-24

Actions can be confusing and are not accurate guideposts of spiritual growth unless they are correctly interpreted. What seems like good behavior on the surface may be motivated by fear or pride rather than love. And what seems like bad behavior on the surface may indicate that God is bringing the hidden things of the heart out of hiding and into relationship with Him. What appear to be dangerous and even bad periods in some lives can actually bring them closer to the Lord because these individuals are being honest with God from the heart rather than fearfully complying on the outside.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why isn’t “good behavior” a valid cause of spiritual growth? How would believing this false assumption affect a believer’s life?
2. Why do you think God is more concerned with our heart motives than our outward behaviors?
 - Because we can “do everything right” on the outside, but inside have wrong motives (ex. The Pharisees); right actions that don’t come from the heart inhibit our relationship with God and others; “doing right” fosters pride, and God can’t draw close to the proud.
3. How could bad behavior indicate a good change in a person’s heart?
 - Hidden things are finally being exposed to the light of God and being brought into relationship with Him.
4. How can wrongly judging outward behavior (your own or someone else’s) interfere with the work God is doing in a person’s heart?
 - We can either praise someone who “behaves good” when it may be a pretense OR we can condemn someone “behaving badly” and thwart God’s effort to bring sin into safe relationship.
5. How does your behavior reflect the work of God in your life? Are your good behaviors motivated by love? Are your bad behaviors motivated by God cleansing your heart?

Behavior change is the result of spiritual growth, not the cause of it! Even in the times when your behavior feels out of control, God is still doing a deep work in your character and changing you on the inside.

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 4. “I just need to give it to the Lord.”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

Alcoholism had cost Dennis two large businesses and two families. After each loss he built his life anew but was unable to sustain it. His life was bleak and no one believed he could ever change. But Dennis is a different man today. He is a successful businessman, a faithful husband, a loving father, and a good friend. And he has maintained this lifestyle for two decades. When asked how he made his amazing turnaround, Dennis answers dryly, “It wasn’t hard. I went to seven AA meetings a day.”

Read Philippians 2:12-13

Dennis’ restoration from alcoholism didn’t just drop out of the sky. He worked very hard for it. Although AA is not the place to turn for spiritual answers, the principle is that God requires us to be partners in the business of our spiritual growth. According to Paul, we are co-laborers with God in working out our salvation. Many times, however, we adopt a passive attitude toward spiritual growth, assuming incorrectly that all we need to do is “give it to the Lord.” When we adopt this passive attitude and do not perceive that we are partners with God in cultivating our spiritual growth, we will eventually find ourselves in a spiritual rut.

Read Ephesians 1:3

There are a couple false assumptions that a Christian can adopt that will keep him from growing. One stems from this verse. Some believe that if we really knew what God has secured for us in the heavenly realms, we would be transformed into a state of wholeness. We wouldn’t have to deal with the past, with pain, or with brokenheartedness. They teach that you just have to focus on your position in Christ.

Read Numbers 33:51-53,55

God has secured for us “every spiritual blessing.” But if we are to possess these blessings, we must fight the good fight of faith with Him. When we refuse or neglect to be partners with Him in our spiritual growth, we deny our responsibility for the process—the responsibility to face our pain and the issues that caused the pain.

Read Matthew 7:5 and 1 Corinthians 11:28

Another false teaching is one that says, “Introspection is self-worship. Just focus on the Lord,” or “Stop thinking of yourself.” There is a vast difference between self-worship and a godly examination of ourselves. Whenever a person encounters God he is forced to look inside himself and see his sin and brokenness. When Isaiah saw the Lord, the very next thing he saw was his own sinfulness. Those who teach us to get our minds off ourselves are actually teaching us to avoid the process of our own cleansing and healing.

Read 1 Timothy 4:15

God has given us an arsenal of at least a dozen things we can do to be active partners with Him in our spiritual growth process. We are able to: 1) Own our own problems; 2) Confess our failures to God and others; 3) Ask for help from God and others; 4) Ask God to reveal what is in our souls; 5) Turn from the evil we discover inside ourselves; 6) Discover what needs were not met in our biological families and then take those needs to the family of God where they can be met; 7) Seek out those whom we have injured and, when it is helpful, apologize, admit our wrong, and ask forgiveness; 8) Forgive others who have hurt us; 9) Develop the gifts and talents that God has given to us; 10) Continue seeking God; 11) Seek for truth and wisdom; 12) Follow God’s example of love. This is working out salvation with fear and trembling. This is pressing toward the mark.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever heard the false assumption, “I just need to give it to the Lord?” Did you believe it and act on it? What do you think about it now?
2. Why would it be tempting to live according to this false assumption?
3. Describe some natural examples of the spiritual principle that we are co-laborers with God in cultivating our spiritual growth. (ex. God supplies the rain, sunshine, and soil, but a farmer has to go out and plant seeds, care for his crop, and eventually harvest the crop).
4. Of the list of 12 actions with which we can “work out our salvation,” which action do you find the easiest? Which do you find most difficult to take? Why?
5. In which situation in your life do you need to be a more active partner with God? What have you “just given to the Lord” that needs to be worked on by both you and God?

In order to grow spiritually, we must be active co-laborers with Jesus in the process.

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 5. “One day, I’ll be done growing spiritually”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

Read 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Spiritual growth is not like changing a burned-out light bulb. Take the bad one out, pop the new one in. Fix an irrational fear. Cure a compulsive spending problem. Repair an anxiety attack. Spiritual growth takes time and continues throughout life. Although God Himself is a finisher—“It is finished!” (John 19:30)—we must be patient with ourselves and others while spiritual problems are being worked on. We must be patient in the face of our continuing sinfulness and immaturity. We will finish our course in life just as Paul did, but we will never finish growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ while we are here on earth.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18

We are made in the image of God. But when man sinned in the Garden of Eden, the image was tarnished severely. Once we are born again and living for God, we are in the process of “growing” the image of God in ourselves so that we can be like Him. All of this growing is spiritual growth if it involves the biblical process of love, responsibility, and forgiveness. If the process produces a cheerful heart, concern for others, a deeper sense of responsibility, and an ability to set limits on evil, then it is a spiritual growth process.

Read 1 Timothy 1:5

The goal of the spiritual growth process is love, not finishing a task. This “one day I will be finished...” false assumption forces a person to focus on the law—finishing the journey—rather than the spirit—how you are going about the journey. It drives a person toward the taskmaster of perfection, and arriving at perfection becomes the demand that breaks the person’s back. In fact, love is not only the goal, it is the process of achieving the goal. Learning to trust, to extend our heart, to take ownership over our resistance to love—these are all part of the spiritual growth process. When we focus on finishing, we lose sight of the goal.

Read Romans 8:1

Spiritual growth is full of bumps and bruises. We take a step, make a mistake, learn from it, and make a more educated step. We blunder,

confess, repent, and learn from our painful consequences. And since there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus we are never alienated from love in all of our errors and outright sins. If there were no grace to catch us when we fall, we wouldn’t risk making a mistake. The cost of failure would be too high. People who are told to just get their lives together and get well are robbed of God’s forgiveness. They are given no room for trial and error, for risk and learning. There is no room for growth built on love. When we focus only on finishing, we lose forgiveness.

Read Luke 18:9-14 and Matthew 5:48

If we believe that one day we will be finished with our spiritual growth, our tendency will be to become proud and self-sufficient. We deny our unfinished business; we deny that we are beggars who need to daily cry out to God for the grace to help us with our problems. When Jesus commanded us to be perfect, he commanded us to be mature or complete, not to never make a mistake. God wants a grown-up, not a perfectionist.

Read Proverbs 13:12

If we believe that one day we will be done growing spiritually, we will eventually despair. Failure and regression are normal parts of spiritual growth. If you were to chart the spiritual growth process, it wouldn’t look like a straight, ascending line. It would look like a zigzagging line full of hills and valleys. If Paul was the chief of sinners, if Peter denied the Lord, if the murderer and adulterer David is remembered as a man after God’s own heart, then we must give up the idealized picture of ourselves and allow our imperfect selves to be forgiven, loved, and matured.

Discussion Questions:

1. In your own words, describe the goal of spiritual growth.
2. What are some results of focusing on the end of spiritual growth rather than the process itself?
3. Do you focus more on finishing your spiritual growth or on growing? If so, what results of “focusing on finishing” have you experienced?
4. Do you feel driven to perfection? Where do you think that motivation comes from?
5. How can the Church become a place where people feel safe to spiritually grow at their own pace?

Instead of asking, “Am I finished growing spiritually yet?” Learn to ask, “What’s next on my journey, as I am known by God and others?” The endpoint and the journey is loving and being loved.

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 6. “Leave the past behind.”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

Read Philippians 3:13-14

Many have used this passage to prove the false assumption that we should “leave the past behind,” or “leave the past in the past.” But what Paul has left behind is not the hurts or situations that require him to forgive someone, neither is it his old sins. The past that Paul is forgetting is his old way of trying to achieve righteousness. He’s leaving the old system behind. Paul is not saying in this passage, let bygones be bygones. On the contrary, this man models the act of bringing one’s past to the Light and confessing it.

Read Ephesians 5:13

Instead of covering up the past, we are to expose the deeds of darkness in our past so that they do not affect us now and in the future. We are to uncover feelings and hurts from the past and we are to uncover hidden motives generated by past relationships. For example, a man who is highly ambitious may be trying to gain the approval of other people.

Read Ephesians 4:32

Unless we look at the past, we cannot truly forgive because forgiveness deals with the past. The hurt and abuse people faced as children surface later in relationships and behaviors that often result from unforgiveness. For example, Tom constantly argued with his superiors over trivial matters. He made an issue of everything and always had to have the last word. As he explored this problem, he realized that he was trying to settle an old score with his father who had put young Tom down whenever they talked and always had to have the upper hand in conversations.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:11-13

Grieving is the process of letting go of things we were once attached to, which opens the door to life. When we deliberately release our attachment to persons, goals, wishes, or religious systems, we open the door to new and better things that God has for us. We are no longer restricted by our affections for things we can no longer have. Too many people experience loss but never grieve. This obstructs the healing process because there is no outlet for emotions such as sorrow or anger. The result is depression. Though grieving is painful for the moment, it is necessary to avoid the long-lasting pain of depression. Grieving is letting go of the past, cleansing, and healing.

Read 2 Chronicles 30:7-8 and 1 John 1:9

To repent we must understand the past. The Old Testament records several times when God confronted the people for walking in the wicked ways of their fathers. They were repeating generational sins, and He called them to repentance. People who deny the sins of their fathers are destined to repeat them. They hurt their own children as they themselves were hurt.

Insight and confession break the chain of generational sin and give hope. If we confess the wicked ways we learned in our early years and turn from them, God will honor our repentance. Then we will enjoy the freedom that comes from walking in the light of God and not repeating inherited patterns of darkness.

Similarly, if we find personal sin in our past that we alone are responsible for, then we must confess it to God and others. We then need to make amends with anyone that we have wronged by apologizing and seeking reconciliation. God is serious about the way we treat each other. In making amends there is healing for us as well as healing for those we have hurt.

Read Colossians 1:19-20

Though none of these processes can change the past, they nevertheless redeem the past. God is in the process of reconciling everything that has gone wrong, including our personal past: he deals with the past, reconciling people to himself, repairing damage, rebuilding what sin has destroyed. But in order for Him to do this, we must bring all of our broken parts to Him. This is the ultimate way of dealing with the past. Bring your past to God, whether it happened two days ago or 20 years ago. Bring it to Him and to His people, allow His light and grace to transform it, bring His truth to bear on it, and experience the reconciliation of your whole life.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the difference between changing the past and redeeming the past?
2. According to this lesson, what vital elements of spiritual growth are lost when we “leave the past in the past?”
3. Why is it difficult to examine the past for losses and grieve them? What are the even more difficult consequences of not grieving our losses?
4. What generational sins have you discovered from your past? What are some behaviors that you do not want to repeat in your own life?
5. How can you effectively deal with these generational sins (as well as personal sins)? What will be the fruit of overcoming these past sins?

Don’t believe the false assumption that you should “leave it in the past.” Humbly and honestly bring your past to God and allow Him to redeem your past as well as your present and your future.

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 7. “If I have God, I don’t need people.”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

Roy was a successful Christian businessman with a wife and children. One day he was “fine,” the next day he had moved out of his house and virtually disappeared for more than a year. When Roy returned to his home, he confided in a Christian friend about the year he spent away. He told his friend that he had been under extreme pressure and in deep depression. Other friends had given him loads of advice and he had spent hours in prayer and Bible study trying to conquer his emotional pain. He had seriously contemplated suicide. But one day his neighbor, a non-Christian, visited Roy to borrow a screw driver, and Roy ended up pouring his heart out to this man. He told of his business pressures and marriage struggles, his abusive mother and absent father, his acting-out school years and his brother who had let him down. His neighbor had just listened and asked questions without offering advice. After their conversation and spending time with some of his neighbor’s friends who were struggling just like him, Roy began to feel better. Much better. He had the courage to reenter life again. But he was confused. “Why did hanging out with a bunch of ordinary people help me?” he asked his friend. “Why wasn’t God enough for my needs?”

Read 2 Corinthians 3:5

Some interpret this verse to mean that we are sufficient in Jesus and Jesus alone, leading believers to the “me and God” syndrome: it’s me and God against the world. If He’s beside me, I need no one else. This distorted teaching says that going to people for spiritual and emotional needs is wrong. This crazy-making assumption tells people who turn to other people for help that they lack faith, that their view of God is small or limited, that they are proud, and even that they are sinning. But this teaching is not upheld by the Bible or life experiences.

Read Galatians 6:2

People need people. People are God’s resources, and He uses us to meet people’s needs with love. This is the essence of ministry. Jesus uses other people to help us to grow, to comfort us, to give us wisdom, and to repair us. What if Philip, when asked by the eunuch, how can I understand the Scriptures unless someone explains them to me, had said, “Well, you need to lean on God to understand these words. See ya.” Or if the Philippian Church hadn’t supplied Paul’s material needs, or the women didn’t follow

Jesus and minister to Him? What if a mother stood over the crib of a crying infant, told her baby to be comforted by God, and walked away? Or a husband never showed affection to his wife because Christ loved her and that’s enough? Obviously, Jesus relies on us to be His physical body in the world and minister to one another in love.

Read 1 Timothy 2:5

The worst aspect of this false assumption is that it distances us from the humanity of Jesus. It was not sufficient for God to remain in heaven and deal with mankind on a spiritual level. He came down to earth in physical form to minister healing, deliverance, and salvation to a condemned world. God chose to minister through humanity, though direct, hands-on compassion and love. At the root of this false assumption is false doctrine, specifically the ancient philosophy of Gnosticism that deemed the physical world to be evil. Gnostics believed that Jesus was purely spiritual with no humanity. John, however, exposed this false teaching when he wrote that they had seen Jesus with their eyes and that their hands had touched Him. Jesus’ humanity was essential in order to bring salvation to the world. Jesus’ humanity was the mediator between God and mankind.

Read Ephesians 4:15-16

Jesus is still using humanity as a mediator between Himself and mankind, but today that humanity is us. We are to build up one another in love. We are to provoke one another to good works. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. We are to act as God’s finger in the world by ministering with compassion, not point the finger at people and “minister” with criticism and condemnation. And we are to turn to other people when we are in need so that Jesus, through them, can minister to us.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Roy get help from these ordinary folks and not “from God?”
2. Why would it be difficult for a person to seek ministry from other people rather than directly from God?
3. What are the benefits of turning to other people in times of loneliness, pressure, depression, and the like?
4. Tell about a time when you turned to another person for ministry and found spiritual healing and renewal.
5. What issues in your life right now are you only bringing to God but not to other people? Tonight may be a good night to allow others to help you bear your burdens.

God made us so that we would need Him and other people. Allow Him to touch you through whatever or whomever He desires.

Lesson 8. “Shoulds are good.”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

Henry grew up reading the Bible every day because He loved it. From fourth grade on, he would read his Bible every night. When Henry got to college, He joined a discipleship group that enforced a daily quiet time. Every week the group would ask, “Are you having your quiet time?” He began to dread the question, and suddenly when he didn’t read his Bible or pray every day he felt guilty. Reading his Bible, which he had always loved doing, had become a requirement with negative consequences. Henry had moved out of a world of “want to’s” and into the world of “should’s.”

Read Matthew 22:37-40

Our goal as Christians is to love the Lord our God with everything we’ve got. But we cannot really love Him until we are free to *not* love Him. Serving God from a sense of obligation rather than from genuine love is a problem. We must perceive our freedom to choose, and freedom comes through grace. Though we are saved by grace through faith, we can still be very much under law in our life experience. Living under law produces the feeling that if we do not do as we should, we are bad or condemned and deserved to be punished. To the degree that we experience guilt, anger, and loss of love when we do not do as we should, we are still under the law.

Read Romans 4:15

There are at least five major consequences of being under the law. First the law brings wrath. We expect God to be angry at us when we transgress His law. We, in turn, get angry at Him. We resent Him and His rules, and we want to move away from Him. Then we get angry at ourselves. Wrath is a natural fruit of the law. Second, we are in a state of guilt and condemnation when we are under the law, something we should never feel when we are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Read Ezekiel 18:4 and Romans 7:5

A third consequence of being under the law is being separated from love. Law implies that if we do not do what we should, then God will not love us. Unless we are as we should be, He will not relate to us. Fourth, when we are under the law, sin increases. The law arouses within us the desire to sin more, not less. This is a confusing and destructive principle.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

The fifth consequence of the law is that we gain no benefit from following it because our motive is not love. Our motives are everything to God. We may sacrifice in all sorts of ways, but if we don’t have love it is meaningless. Only when we are free can we freely love. If we are slaves to the “shoulds” we are not ready to love. Slaves do not love; sons and daughters do.

Read Joshua 24:15

What does a life outside of the “shoulds” look like? In relationships, it means that we are free to love. We don’t have to love God or anybody else. We are free to love whomever we please. It also means that we do not put others under the law by condemning them, getting angry at them, or withdrawing love from them when they fail to love us the way we want. When we evaluate our performance, we look at what we should be doing without condemning ourselves. We are not defensive about our failures, for we are not condemned. Instead, we take responsibility for our failures..

Read Hebrews 12:2

Coming out from under the law means changing the “have to” to “want to.” But we may not always feel like doing what is right; Jesus certainly didn’t feel like to go to the cross. But He did it because He wanted what it would produce: a redeemed body of people who have freely chosen to love Him. Likewise, we may not want to do individual deeds of obedience, but we do want the end result of our deeds. Many time we must do what we don’t want to do in the immediate moment in order to get what we want in the future. Maturity expects delayed gratification. That is the true “want to.”

Discussion Questions:

1. How do the “shoulds” keep us from fulfilling our purpose as Christians, to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength?
2. What are some consequences of emotionally living under the law?
3. Why do we have a tendency to put other people under the law by criticizing them and being angry with them when they fail our expectations?
4. What have you been doing because you should be doing it and not because you want to be doing it?
5. How can you change your “should” to a “want to”?
 - Read Romans 8:1-2. Relying on the power of Jesus and building a relationship with Him and His body of believers fees us from the law of sin and death—the law of the “shoulds.”

Once you break free from the “shoulds,” you will start to live, finding true freedom to desire God and His life.

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 9. “Guilt and shame are good for me.”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

“Whatever Became of Guilt?” The sermon title jumped out at Randy and Vicki as they sat in the pew. Shrugging, they listened to the pastor as he began his message. This Sunday, Pastor Glenn came right to the point. “Beware of the humanistic approach to guilt,” he preached. “If you feel guilty, you are guilty! Guilt solves the problem of loving ourselves too much,” he said. “Rather than concentrating on how wonderful we are, guilt refocuses us to the darker side. It puts who we are in perspective. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through guilt...” His message continued to the discomfort of the couple. Driving home, Randy said, “Honey, I feel worse after the sermon than I did before.” Vicki nodded. “Same here.”

Read John 16:8

Pastor Glenn was confusing guilt with the goading of God’s Spirit in the heart. When Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, He was describing His Spirit’s role in convicting sinners. God’s Spirit exposes our sinfulness, but it doesn’t dictate our response. Guilt, worldly sorrow, rebellion, and indifference come from us, not God. Once we have been born again, the work of guilt is done because we have been pronounced “not guilty” by the blood of Jesus.

Read Romans 3:19 and Genesis 2:25

Guilt has two common meanings: *the legal state of having done wrong, and the feeling of self-reproach resulting from the belief that we have done wrong.* The Bible only describes the first meaning of guilt, the legal condition of having broken the law. Feelings of guilt are often our consciences condemning us and telling us we are bad.

A person’s conscience acts as a kind of internal parent monitoring our goodness and badness. But this can hinder spiritual growth because of the inaccuracy of our conscience. For example, *Ken was in group therapy for depression. One day he was late to the group. The other members said hello and then sat quietly. After a moment, Ken blurted out, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry!” The group looked startled. “I know why you’re all so quiet,” he said. “I disrupted you all by being late, and now no one wants to talk. I’ve ruined the group.” His conscience punished him for being late. He assumed his conscience’s judgment was accurate, but it wasn’t.*

Read 1 Corinthians 8:7, 1 Timothy 4:1-2 and Hebrews 13:18

The Bible describes three types of consciences: the weak, the seared, and the clear or mature conscience. The weak conscience prohibits, criticizes, and accuses unjustly; the seared conscience has little sense of remorse, can’t empathize with others, and is controlling and manipulative; the clear conscience isn’t perfect, but it can help a person make better, more biblical decisions.

Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-11

Godly sorrow is a better response to our failures than guilt. Paul teaches here that godly sorrow (remorse) is empathetic, centering on the hurt we have caused others, often those we love. We feel bad because we’ve injured another person. Worldly sorrow (guilt) focuses on how bad we are and is more concerned with the misdeed than with restoring the relationship. Guilt-ridden people are afraid to love. They are also afraid of being themselves because they feel so condemned. Emotionally they are under the law. Guilty people are more concerned about being good and living a sin-free life than they are about getting well and living for God.

Read 1 John 3:19-20

What can we do if we’re controlled by guilt? We need to: 1) Own the guilt; 2) Become more concerned with building relationships than “sin-busting”; 3) Investigate where you learned your messages of guilt; 4) Take ownership of your anger; 5) Forgive those who controlled you by withholding love when you were “bad”; 6) Reeducate your conscience through spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting; 7) Learn to yield to the voice of Jesus; 8) Don’t resist grief; it is necessary for healing and restoration; 9) Let caring brothers and sisters comfort you and love you through this process.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some examples of guilt and shame messages?
 - How can you be so selfish? Shame on you for saying that! After all I’ve done for you. You should have recovered from (whatever) by now.
2. What is the motive behind guilt and shame messages?
 - The speaker usually wants something from you and is angry that you are not providing it. Guilt and shame are simply ways to coerce you into changing your mind.
3. Who in your life has given you messages of guilt and shame? What were they? How have these messages affected your life and your relationship with these people?
4. How do you generally react to having done wrong? With guilt or with godly sorrow? How can you tell?
 - Guilt focuses on the wrong-doing, while godly sorrow focuses on the hurt of the other person.
5. What can a believer do to overcome guilt feelings in his life? What can he do to reeducate his conscience? (See list above for answers)

Guilt is not good for us because it prevents us from being motivated by love. God’s Spirit and His loving people can move us away from guilt and toward love.

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 10. “If I make right choices, I will grow spiritually.”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

As Laura listened to the sermon on Sunday morning she grew more and more discouraged. She had come to church yearning for help. At 31, she was back in another hurtful romantic relationship and still didn't own her life. She couldn't stand up to her mother, who manipulated her life, and couldn't follow through on diets. She was weak-willed in most areas of her life. As the pastor ended his sermon he said, “It all comes down to choices. People choose to do what they want to do. If you really want to live for God, you will. By an act of will, you will stop sinning, choose God's ways over your own, and make right choices. Go from here today and make right choices!” Laura's heart sank. She had tried to make right choices for years, but didn't have the willpower to do it. If this was God's offer, then she had no hope. Slipping out of church, she glumly drove to her boyfriend's house. At least she wouldn't be alone.

Read Romans 7:15

“Just say no!” was a popular drug campaign of the 1980's. Some people have held this philosophy about other things as well, such as anger, lust, depression, addictions. This false assumption makes life pretty simple: you just need to find out what is right and do it. Knowledge and willpower become the keys to spiritual growth. But willpower is human power, which is why it usually falls short. Instead of experiencing victory, we experience what Paul experienced: utter failure. We are hopeless if we believe that simply making the right choices will cause us to grow spiritually.

Read Matthew 22:37

In this verse, Jesus paints a picture of an integrated person who takes all of himself—not just his will—to God. We do things with our entire person, not just our will or our intellect. Jesus wants us to serve Him and relate to Him with our whole person. Willpower alone is insufficient. We must have His power.

Read Romans 7:22-24 and Galatians 5:17

Often we are faced with internal conflict within ourselves, and we don't like to face that conflict. We may know what is right, but deep in our hearts we may love things and people that are contrary to what is right. For this reason the Bible calls for a change from the inside out, not just making right choices.

Read Romans 8:1-4 and Galatians 5:16,18

The transforming power we have within us is not our human willpower but the power of the Holy Spirit. God triumphs over the power of sin with the power of His Spirit. It is then up to us to tap into this life-changing power by connecting to God through prayer and connecting to the members of His body. This is how we receive the grace and truth necessary to be transformed into His image.

Read Philippians 2:12-13

The word translated “to will” literally means “to desire.” Any act of the will that does not come from a desire initiated by God is “bad fruit.” And we cannot have God's desires apart from the indwelling presence of His Spirit. As we openly confess our evil desires to God and to others, those desires can be transformed through grace and repentance. Only then can we desire what God desires.

Read Galatians 3:3

Right choices don't cause spiritual growth: they are the result of spiritual growth. The ability to make right choices is a fruit of the Spirit. When we believe we can make right choices apart from God, we are being prideful. Jesus told us to own our spiritual poverty and allow Him to transform us.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does leaving this false assumption behind affect your perception of living for God?
 - It takes the pressure off! We don't have to do it on our own, we have to connect to Jesus and allow His power to transform us.
2. What is an example of a “right choice” that we don't have the power to make on our own?
 - Examples are: to choose to stop being angry, fearful, addicted to a substance or activity, habitually sinning, etc.
3. Though we can't make “right choices” such as these, what choices can we make that will draw us closer to Jesus and enable Him to transform us?
 - examples are: confess our sins, give up thinking we can save ourselves, submit our inabilities to God, repent, make amends with others, forgive, ask for help in searching for our faults, let others meet our needs.
4. What things in your life have you been trying to make “right choices” about but are not submitting to the power of God? What has the result been?
5. What choices can you make instead to bring healing to the situation?

Instead of trying to make right choices, surrender your inability to God, be humble, be unable, and allow Him to begin the process of spiritual growth in you. As you cooperate with Him, in due season you will produce fruit!

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 11. “Doing right is more important than why I do it.”

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

The Andrews family sat in the pastor’s office—mom, dad, and their 16-year-old son Dave. They were there to discuss Dave’s recent behavior problems at school and home. As Dave sat in stony silence, his parents blamed their son’s behavior on his choice of friends. When the pastor suggested that family life can directly influence a teen’s behavior, Dave’s mother got defensive, but Dave perked up. “Ask them about the schedule,” Dave instructed the pastor. The schedule Dave was referring to was jammed full of good, Christian activities. When Dave’s father defended the wholesome family schedule, Dave glared at him and said, “I think you keep so busy so you and Mom don’t have to talk to each other. You don’t like to talk to each other.” The room was silent.

Read Romans 2:13

This encounter illustrates the false assumption, “Doing the right thing is more important than why I do it.” Or, more spiritually phrased: Obedience is the key to Christian life. People who believe this false assumption use Scriptures to support their belief. But this suggests that God looks at our actions more than our motives and will bless our efforts regardless of our reason for doing them. In other words, it doesn’t matter if you are obeying because you are avoiding someone; it doesn’t matter if you’re obeying because you don’t want to look bad to others; it doesn’t matter that you’re feeling resentment or guilt as you obey; it just matters that you obey.

Read Deuteronomy 5:33, 6:24, and 10:13

The word “obey” in both the Old and New Testaments means, “to hear, to attend to.” The word obedience describes our relationship with God: we hear what He wants and then we respond, much like a child responds to the voice of his parents. Obedience is a structure that enables us to grow up to maturity; it is not an end in itself. And obedience always has a purpose. We don’t obey just for the sake of obeying; this would suggest that God is a control freak (which He is not). His directives help us to learn His ways so that we can grow into His image. They help us to become like Him.

Read Isaiah 29:13

This false assumption has six main problems. First, it teaches us to

substitute seemingly sacrificial acts of service for true obedience. Second, it splits a person apart on the inside. We desire one thing and then do another, like this verse suggests. Third, it discourages a sense of responsibility for our actions and attitudes. A person becomes so focused on pleasing a feared authority figure that he cannot deal with differences between the authority figure and himself. The result is a person not taking responsibility for his true feelings about situations.

Read Matthew 21:28-31

Fourth, this false assumption promotes lying. It forces a person to lie about the “no” on the inside and say “yes” on the outside, which, according to this parable, is not pleasing to God. Fifth, it denies our fallenness or our inability to perfectly obey every command in the Scripture. And sixth, it devalues the power of the cross in our lives. Jesus gives us the grace necessary to try, fail, learn from the consequences, and try again without heaping anxiety, condemnation, or guilt on us because we didn’t obey perfectly. When we know we won’t be condemned when we fail, we grow faster. We take more risks.

When we allow ourselves to work through our inner motives and conflicts about situations, we are more free to be autonomous, to take responsibility for our behavior, and to be truly free in Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does this false assumption seem so spiritual on the surface?
 - Because obedience to God is a biblical principle.
 - Because our actions are important to God.
2. Why is it so easy for people to live this false assumption? (think back to the Andrews family)
 - Because obedience allows people to avoid confronting deeper issues while maintaining outward spirituality.
3. Why would living this false assumption be destructive to a person’s relationship with God and others?
 - Review six problems mentioned above.
4. Have you ever believed this false assumption? Do you now? How has it affected your relationship with God and others?
5. What can people do to stop acting upon this false assumption?
 - Value honesty and take responsibility for how they really feel about situations; Be willing and able to say “no,” or in other words, have good boundaries established; appreciate how much Jesus values their heart motives and act on that.

**Why we do something is just as important as what we are doing.
Motives matter!**

Theme: 12 False Christian Assumptions

Lesson 12. "If I know the truth, I will grow."

To the teacher: After studying this outline and reading each of the Scriptures, summarize in one or two sentences what you have determined to be the main point that you hope to communicate to the group:

When Joyce began attending a home group meeting, she had believed all 12 false Christian assumptions. She had been 130 lbs overweight when she began, but was now maintaining a healthy weight. When asked how she explained her weight loss, she answered, "First, I had to come out of isolation and connect to other people. Second, I had to set boundaries that would enable me to get my life under my control. Third, I had to deal with and express my pain and hurt instead of covering it up with eating. I learned that Bible study couldn't cure me; I had to do what the Bible talks about. Knowing the Bible did not change me, doing it did."

Read John 8:32

People who believe the false assumption "If I know the truth, I will grow" misinterpret Scriptures such as this one. They assert that Bible study alone is the remedy for spiritual and emotional healing. Although the Word is necessary for spiritual growth, the Bible itself teaches that study of Scripture is insufficient in and of itself for bringing us into a healthy Christian life.

Read John 5:39

Jesus Himself rebuked the Pharisees for subscribing to this false assumption. While they were busy scrutinizing the fine points of the Scriptures, they missed the One who could give them eternal life. They were cut off from God and from each other.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

The essence of spiritual life is to be reconciled to God, having a vibrant relationship with Him. It is then being reconciled to others in the same way. God knew that for us to understand this concept, He would have to become one of us. Even today, He still comes to us in bodily form through His Church, which is the "BODY of Christ." The Church is the Spirit of Jesus with skin on. We feel God's grace not only by studying the Bible, but by experiencing it through our relationships with Him and His body.

Read 1 John 4:20 and 1 Peter 4:8-10

Humans are God's agents for administering His grace. God's grace is not something we learn only by reading the Bible. We also receive it through our human relationships.

Read Luke 6:46-49

Besides cutting us off from an avenue of God's grace, this false assumption teaches people to become hearers of the Word but not doers. They are taught to get over their emotional and spiritual problems by just reading their Bibles and praying. But there will be no genuine healing until a person becomes a doer of the Word.

Read Psalms 119:9

We don't keep our ways pure by reading the Word. We keep our ways pure by doing the Word. In keeping Jesus' Word there is life and health. Doing the Word leads a person to being humble and loving, responsible and forgiving, cleansed and transformed, and actively involved in bringing others into the same kind of healing relationships with Jesus and His body.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does this false assumption seem so true on the surface?
 - Because we are to esteem the Bible and the integrity of the Word.
 - Because reading the Bible is a spiritual activity.
2. But why is this false assumption not true after all?
 - Because reading and knowing the Bible alone does not bring healing; only responding to the teaching of the Scriptures brings healing.
3. Tell about a time when you turned to reading Scripture in an effort to solve emotional problems that you were having. What was the outcome?
4. Why is it so spiritually dangerous for people to believe this false assumption?
 - If a person turns to the Scripture believing that Bible knowledge will heal him of his problems and it doesn't work, he may become disillusioned with the Word of God and eventually with God Himself.
5. Tell about a time when you began to do the Word after it became known to you and you were healed of an emotional, physical, or spiritual problem. What situations in your life now do you need to apply this principle to?

Learn the truth, study your Bible diligently, but don't stop there. Put the Bible into action in your life. It is doing the teachings of Jesus rather than just knowing them that sets us free!