

## Session Eight : working on the spiritual dimension

In the three synoptic Gospels, Jesus identified the most important commandment as a fusion of Deuteronomy 6.4-5 and Leviticus 19.18 – loving the one true God with all our being and our neighbour as ourself.

In John's Gospel, Jesus told his disciples, as he came to the end of his earthly life : "If you love me, you will obey what I command" said (John 14.15).

In the previous chapter he had taught his disciples that he was giving them a new commandment – to love one another as he had loved them, so that everyone would know that they are his disciples (John 13.34-35).

Our relationship with Jesus and our relationship with others is **totally intertwined**. In John's first letter, we read : "This is love : not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4.12).

The last part of this passage is fascinating because John had already used the expression "No-one has even seen God" in the prologue of his Gospel – "No-one has ever seen God but the Only-Begotten who is at the Father's side has made him known" ( John 1.18). Jesus took on a human body and became visible to humanity. God is revealed through Jesus. And now that Jesus has returned to his Father's side, what makes God "visible"? According to John it's through Christians ("the body of Christ") when we love one another.

And that is why we Christians meet together as a body : "Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more so as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10.24-25).

As we saw in the video, a revitalised church will seek to do four things when we meet together as God's people. Our AIMS should be

- **Adoration** : worship, in amazement at God's grace towards us
- **Issues** : Training disciples to live in today's world
- **Mission** : Sending out the congregation as the scattered church
- **Scriptures** : Biblical teaching

We need all these four components in order to live for God's glory as the scattered church, where we spend 97% of our lives! Because these four things provide **motivation** (through worship, prayer and God's promises in the Scriptures) and practical **training** (through the Scriptures and the discovery of the depth and breadth of the Christian world-view).

*That should lead to living lives that show the plausibility of the Gospel*

So what will a non-Christian see as they begin to get to know us, at home, at work or in our leisure activities? What will help them see that our faith works and want to ask us questions as they begin to look into this “option”? What are some of the positives of being a Christian? Here are eight magnificent things which we have as Christians. As we live them out, there is the real possibility that it will have an impact on the attitude of people around us !

- We have a new, real and lasting identity as God’s children (Romans 8.16). We don’t have to construct our identity, or use secondary things (such as nationalism or choice of gender) to give us this identity. We can accept that we have done wrong, be forgiven and live in fellowship with God.
- We have become part of a world-wide family, the community of God’s people.
- Belonging to this community we can experience God’s love and build relationships which will go on forever.
- We have the privilege of having an opportunity each week in the context of our local community of God’s people to examine our lives without fear, as we read God’s Word and allow God to work a slow but radical change in our characters, in fellowship with the Creator himself.
- We know good and evil really exist so we can work for justice and mercy in this world because we know they reflect God’s heart. He is both righteous and merciful so we can build relationships with people and have an impact on their lives without falling into ideologies of “power” and “victimhood”.
- We can know great contentment as we wholeheartedly thank God daily for what we have rather than dwelling on what we wish we had.
- We are not totally at a loss in the face of suffering since we can trust in God, call on his help and be assured that suffering will not have the last word.

- We can have complete confidence in the face of death as we know we shall be changed and live with God for ever in his new creation.

As we as Christians live out these things in today's context, we pray that people will see that our faith is coherent, consistent, and gives real meaning to life – both the big picture of the meaning of life and the details of everyday living, both through our individual lives and our lives as part of a community of believers.

In fact this fits in well with the way that people make decisions in today's world. When my wife and I needed to buy a new oven for our kitchen, my wife's first reflex was to look on the internet. This was not to see what the manufacturer said or what the shop communicated about the appliance, but to see what other users recommended. We are "users of Christianity" and therefore "recommenders" of this happy way of life. In internet terms, we are "influencers"!

Our time together as the gathered church will prepare us for this. As Jesus said: "Out of the outflow of his heart his mouth speaks" (Luc 6.45). So we will be ready to live out these things at all times and in all places, in our four relational networks (family, work or school, neighbours, friends and leisure activities).

How will this work out in practice? Our Christian lives are built around the Christian world view  
Creation – Fall – Redemption – New Creation  
Let's think about how this might give opportunities to share our faith.

### **Creation**

There are so many things which are awesome in this world – in nature, in the human body, in the respect of a harmonious process for example. And if we are confronted with ethical issues, we can remind people that if there is no creator God, there can be no consensus on ethics since they are just human inventions. So it might be good to look into whether God really is there and to listen to what he says.

### **Fall**

Are there relational problems around you? You can suggest that the real explanation of this phenomenon is our human nature which is self-centred and incapable of seeing the interests of others. And then ask why this should be and tell our side of the story by sharing the Biblical explanation.

### **Redemption**

Do the people around you try to boost their courage with positive thinking or are they in despair about some difficult situation? Share with them how you commit this to God in prayer. Are they tempted to use dishonest ways of solving their problems? Show them another way by being honest and upright while trusting God.

### **New Creation**

So many people are looking for happiness in materialism (what they can buy with the money they earn), and sometimes being frustrated because they think they don't have enough money to buy this "happiness". We can show them that we are contented with what we have and that

happiness comes from gratefulness (which we express to God) and much of this contentment is completely free of charge. We can desire what we already possess and live in the living hope of eternal glory in the New creation.

### **Question**

**How can you work towards this true spirituality in your local church as a means to lead to ongoing re-creation?**