

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will do Bible study together from John chapter 9. We will use “the five steps” method of Bible study. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. You may join our Bible study every week by preparing for the next Bible study. You may also gather a few people around you and use this method of studying the Bible together. Doing Bible study together with a few other Christians is one of the best ways to grow to maturity as a Christian.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read John 9:1-41 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read John chapter 9 yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in John 9:1-41. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in John 9:2 about the connection between sin and suffering. According to the Bible, physical suffering, like hardships, persecution, accidents, sickness, defects and death, can be traced to three moral causes:

First, physical suffering can be traced to the sin of mankind’s first ancestor, Adam.

God created Adam as the first of all people and regarded Adam as the representative head of the human race. When Adam fell into sin, all his human descendants fell together with him and are by nature guilty before God. Romans 5:12-21 and 8:19-23 and other passages in the Bible clearly teach that the fall of the first two human beings into sin affected the whole human race. The sin of Adam and Eve brought enmity of Satan, pain and death for man and thorns and thistles for the earth. All mankind *suffers in solidarity* with others, because of the sin of the first human beings. For example, both good and bad people suffer in disasters like floods or droughts, earthquakes or epidemics.

Second, physical suffering can be traced to the sin of the parents.

God does not simply deal with individuals, but also with communities. God’s commandments are given to the whole community, to families as well as to individuals. In Exodus 20:5, God says that he will punish the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate him. For example, in Jeremiah 32:18-24, although God had led the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt and they took possession of the land Israel, they did not obey God nor followed God. Therefore in later generations, God handed Israel over to siege, capture and exile to Babylon.

Third, physical suffering can be traced to one’s own personal sins.

God’s judgement will reckon with every individual’s sin. In Jeremiah 31:30 he says, “Everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes - his own teeth will be set on edge”. And because all people have sinned, all people suffer and all people will die!

It is clear that physical suffering due to one’s own sins and due to one’s parents’ sin is in fact the result of the fall of Adam into sin. However, the Jewish religious teachers tended to exaggerate the importance of one’s own sin out of proportion. They believed that there must always be a definite relationship between one’s suffering and one’s sin. They traced every particular suffering to a particular sin. For example, the friends of Job traced his suffering to his sin of cruelty to the widow and the fatherless (Job 22:5-11). The Jewish rabbis even taught that babies were able to sin in the womb. They concluded that Esau had tried to kill his brother while he was still in the womb (Gen.25:22-26).

But, in Luke 13:2-5, Jesus teaches that *people who suffer are no more guilty than those who do not suffer!* He says, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish”. Here in John 9:3 Jesus teaches that *suffering does not only have a cause, but may also have a purpose!* This man suffered blindness, not because of any sin, but so that his healing may bring glory to God! His suffering had a purpose! His healing would bring people to know and accept Jesus Christ! All afflictions and calamities have as their origin the fall of mankind into sin, but have as their ultimate purpose the glorification of God in Christ!

(T) An important truth for me is from John 9:3-5 about the works of God that Christians must do while it is still day. In John 9:4, Jesus says, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”

First, there is only a short time to do God’s work.

Jesus says that “his day” is as long as he is still on earth. For his disciples, their day is also as long as they live on earth. With respect to every disciple of Jesus today, there is a divinely appointed time to do God’s work. God places every Christian only for a certain length of time on earth. That is the only time he gets to do God’s work on earth. Therefore, every Christian must make the most of the opportunities God has given to him!

Second, the work of God are active deeds of love.

God constantly brings people on our path. We have a choice to react or respond in three ways: Some people are jealous of the people God brings on their way and attempt to destroy them. They can never do anything constructive. They can only criticise, gossip, abuse or even persecute these people. This is what the Jewish religious leaders and teachers did to Jesus Christ. Other people are curious about the people God brings on their way and attempt only to know more about them. The disciples wanted to solve a theological question about whose sin was the cause of this blind man’s suffering. However, Jesus does not only want us to ask questions, but to perform deeds! Therefore, the work of God is to take constructive action and help the needy on earth!

(S) STEP 3. QUESTION

Let us try to understand all the truths in John 9:1-41 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. “Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?” Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (9:13) Who were these Pharisees to whom the former blind beggar was brought?

(T) These Jewish teachers were acting under the orders from the Jewish government, called the Sanhedrin. They had the authority to expel the blind man from the synagogue (22,34). John 1:24 shows that at times the Sanhedrin would delegate a group of Pharisees to examine matters concerning the Messiah. In John chapter 9, they were probably examining the miracle that was allegedly performed by Jesus Christ. Moreover, the parents of the blind man exercised extreme caution, because they were afraid of being thrown out of the synagogue by the Pharisees. All these facts show that these Pharisees were probably a group of officially appointed and authorised representatives of the Sanhedrin. They exercised religious political power over people.

2nd Question. (9:16-34) What method of argumentation did the Jewish religious teachers use against their enemies?

(S) John chapter 9 gives a good insight into the methods used by the Pharisees against their enemies.

One. The Pharisees argued amongst themselves in order to arrive at a conclusion.

In verse 16 some Pharisees argued as follows: “All people who come from God keep the Sabbath. This man, Jesus, does not keep the Sabbath. Therefore, Jesus is not from God.” *Their argument* seems logical, but is wrong, because it *is not based on the teaching of the Bible* concerning the Sabbath. It was based on their own regulations concerning the Sabbath! Other Pharisees argued as follows: “Only people who are not sinners can open the eyes of people born blind. This man, Jesus, has opened the eyes of a person born blind. Therefore, Jesus is not a sinner”. Thus, while some concluded that Jesus could not have come from God, others argued that he must have come from God. So they were divided amongst themselves!

Two. The Pharisees ignored the facts, but used fear to force people.

In verse 17-23, they questioned the parents of the blind man. The parents stated that this was their son and that he definitely was blind. Therefore, a great miracle had really taken place. Nobody could deny these facts! But, alas, the Pharisees were not willing to admit that Jesus performed this miracle! Instead, the Jewish spiritual leaders of the Sanhedrin had already made a decision, that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah, would be put out of the synagogue. The Pharisees *made decisions to inspire fear in the people, so that the people would not dare to oppose them*. However, these Jewish religious leaders received no authority from God to make such a decision, because it is not they but God who determines who the Messiah is and what he does!

Three. The Pharisees twisted the facts in order to discredit Jesus.

In verse 24 they tried to make the blind man say things that would discredit Jesus. They said, “We know that this man, Jesus, is a sinner. Therefore, give the glory of performing this miracle to God”. They wanted the blind man to say that it was not Jesus, but God who performed the miracle. They argued, “Only people who come from God can open the eyes of those born blind. This man, Jesus, is not from God. Therefore, he cannot have opened the eyes of a person born

blind. They thus tried *to twist the facts*. They wanted everybody to believe that Jesus was a sinner and could not have performed such a miracle.

(T) Let me mention three more methods of the Jewish religious teachers.

Four. The Pharisees repeated their questions in order to catch a person making an inconsistent statement.

They *asked the same questions again and again*. But the blind man saw through their method of stalling the discussion. He asked the Pharisees if the real reason why they wanted to hear his answers again was that they wanted to become disciples of Jesus. This made the Pharisees furious.

Five. The Pharisees did not admit defeat, but instead resorted to abuse.

The Pharisees *could not admit defeat*. So they resorted to reviling and abuse. They called Jesus “that fellow” and “a sinner” and said that they did not know where he came from. This time, the blind man answered the Pharisees with their own method. He argued, “Only people who are from God are heard by God. This man, Jesus, was heard by God. Therefore, Jesus definitely comes from God!” But the Pharisees said that they did not know where he comes from! The blind man defeated the Pharisees with their own method of argumentation! The only difference is that his argumentation was correct and very biblical, because God does hear the prayers of a righteous man.

Six. The Pharisees resorted to violence or misuse of their authority when they lose.

The Pharisees suffered a humiliating defeat. The only thing left for them to do was to *use violence or misuse their authority!* They threw the former blind man out of the synagogue. This was a serious punishment in those days. A person, who was thrown out of the synagogue, was cut off from the religious and social life of Israel! People would avoid him and refuse to do business with him. People might even be inclined to kill him without fearing a trial.

3rd Question. (9:35) How does Jesus Christ approach people?

(S) Later that day Jesus went out and sought the blind man whom he had healed. While the Pharisees *rejected and avoided* him, Jesus *sought and found* him! Jesus was not only interested in his *physical* healing, but also in his *social* and *spiritual* healing. Jesus was concerned with *the whole man!* Jesus not only came to save souls, but to heal bodies, to restore broken relationships, to forgive sins, to reconcile people with God the Father, to help the needy and to speak for the oppressed. While the Pharisees were only concerned with their *own power, position of authority and honour*, Jesus Christ was concerned with *the welfare of other people* and he was concerned with *the whole man*.

4th Question. (9:38) May Christians worship Jesus Christ?

(T) In John 9:38 we read, “Then the blind man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he *worshipped* Jesus. The man recognised that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God and therefore the proper object of worship. He fell on his knees before Jesus. He did not simply respect or revere Jesus, but actually worshipped Jesus! In John 4:20-24, the same word “worship” definitely indicates the worship of God. Also in other parts of the Gospel, Jesus is worshipped by his disciples and by other people. He never objected or corrected people. He therefore affirmed that he is divine, the Son of God, equal with God the Father and equally worthy of honour and worship! This is because Jesus is not simply a prophet or a good man. Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). The one and only God took on the human nature without laying aside his divine nature and entered his creation and human history to live among people and serve them and die for them.

5th Question. (9:39-41) When are people spiritually blind?

(S) In John 9:39 and 41, Jesus teaches, “For judgement I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind”. To the Pharisees he says, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim that you can see, your guilt remains”.

The first coming of Jesus Christ into this world was for the purpose of salvation and for judgement. To people who believe he gives salvation and to those who reject him he punishes with perdition.

One. The people who acknowledge that they are blind, will see again.

They are the people, who do not have the light of salvation and acknowledge that they have no righteousness and no holiness. They realise that God has touched their heart and mind and made them receptive to his word. They repent of their sin and helplessness and reach out to Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. They will receive salvation by receiving Jesus Christ. Their spiritual eyes will open and they will see all things in their true perspective, as God sees things.

Two. The people who claim that they always see, will become blind.

These are the people, who do not see their own need of salvation. They try to keep the law and do good works in their own power. Therefore they always claim that they are right and holy. They see no need to have a Saviour. They always

harden their heart to the word of God. They will always remain without Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. They will never see God's righteousness and holiness. They will never experience the joy of salvation. They remain blind to the all true spiritual things.

(T) STEP 4. APPLY

Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of *possible applications* from John chapter 9. Afterwards consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*.

(S) I want to do the works of God as long as I still live. God has given me one life only and I want to dedicate this one life to his service. I want to avoid being jealous and destructive, and instead be constructive. I want to believe and do what the Bible teaches and especially love and help people in need.

(T) I want to remember that suffering is a part of the Christian life. There will be times when I suffer, because of my own sins or because of my parent's sins or because of the sins of my society and my culture. But there will also be times when, like the blind man, I will suffer, because God has a glorious purpose in mind. Suffering is never without a cause or a purpose. In short, I want to glorify God even if he calls me to suffer.

(S) STEP 5. PRAY

Let us take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in John chapter 9.

Dear Father in heaven, Dear Father in heaven, thank you that you bring people on my way every day so that I may love them and help them in their need. Thank you that I may know today that this is a part of doing your work here on earth. I feel very privileged that you have involved me in doing your work here on earth!

(T) Dear Father in heaven, I confess that suffering is not easy. Many times I do not understand why I am suffering. But today you have taught me that suffering may also have a purpose. I pray that when you call me to suffer, that I may glorify you throughout my suffering! In Jesus' name, amen!

(S) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Make a commitment to do Bible study every week. Prepare next week's Bible study. Use "the five steps" method to prepare John chapter 10.

Second. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".