

Lesson 8

Growing Pains

Has someone ever said to you, “Look how you have grown since the last time I saw you!” How do you do it? You don’t try to grow, do you? As you eat properly and take good care of yourself, growth just happens!

In the book of Acts, God was growing His church. As is the case with your physical body, this growth of the church just happened as believers met together to hear the preaching of the Word and to pray. Thousands of people believed the Word and came to faith in Jesus as their Savior.

When the leaders of the Jews heard the preaching and saw the group of believers growing larger all the time, they were angry. They worked hard to stop the apostles’ preaching and the growth of the church. They threw Peter and John in jail. They threatened the apostles many times. But nothing they did had any effect on stopping the growth of this new church. The Word of God still spread like wildfire! Everywhere it spread, more and more people were gathered into the congregation of believers.

Jewish Customs

When we think of customs, we think of traditions or family habits. For example, eating turkey for Thanksgiving dinner is a nice custom. But when the Jews talked about customs, they were thinking of something much more serious than a family tradition. These Jewish customs were based on the laws that God had given the Israelites through Moses. Many of these rules are from the book of Leviticus.

In Acts 6:14, people who were persecuting the church said that “Jesus, will . . . alter the customs which Moses handed down.” Why was that a big deal? The Jewish leaders were furious when the apostles kept teaching about Jesus instead of these customs.

[TM reference]: Optional activity

There were serious consequences to disobeying the “customs Moses handed down”.

Read the following verses and fill in the chart below.

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Custom/Command</u>	<u>Result</u>
Leviticus 5:17-18	<i>Sacrifice for forgiveness</i>	<i>you will be forgiven</i>
Leviticus 11, especially v. 24	<i>Eating unclean foods</i>	<i>you will be unclean</i>
Exodus 31:14-16	<i>Honoring the Sabbath</i>	<i>put to death/cut off from the people</i>
Genesis 17:11	<i>Circumcision</i>	<i>a sign of a covenant with God</i>

Discuss in class why you think it was so important for the Jews to maintain the old customs.

Many answers may be given; one main point is that God had instituted these customs--no mere man (as they viewed Jesus to be) had the power or right to change them. Also, God had established these as a way of maintaining the covenant relationship between God and His people. To change them would be to separate themselves from God.

Why don’t we Christians follow all the rules that God had given in Leviticus? Romans 10:4

- *Christ is the end of the Law*
- [TM see also: Colossians 2:14 *Jesus cancelled the “certificates of debt” (NIV “written code”) and nailed it to the cross*]

What does Jesus say about the law? Matthew 5:17

Matthew 5:17 tells us that Christ fulfilled the Law.

What does that mean?

Jesus did not break the Law but was perfectly obedient in all things for our sake (Hebrews 4:15, Philippians 2:8). He was not guilty of anything.

[TM reference]:

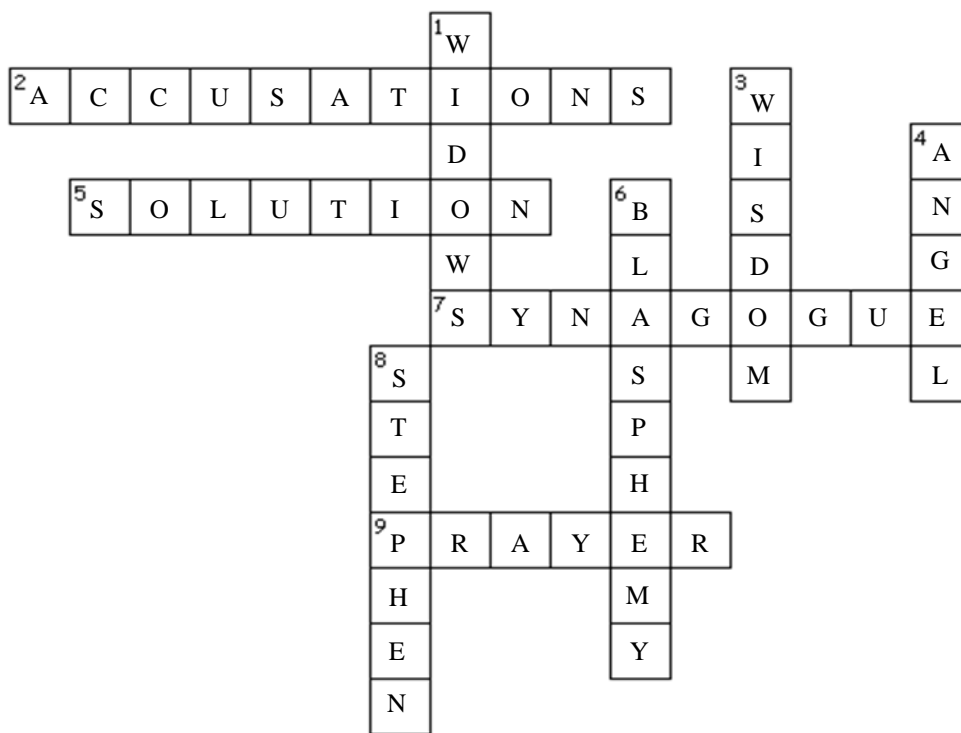
It is important that Christ kept the Law perfectly because God established His law and demanded that mankind obey it perfectly; only then would we be worthy of heaven. Christ kept the law and satisfied God’s righteous demand. Through faith

in Him we are credited with Christ's innocence instead of our own guilt. We couldn't keep the Law ourselves because there is nobody who does anything good, no one who understands, no one who seeks God, no one who is righteous unless God makes him so. (Romans 3:10-12)

If ever there was good news, this must be it: that Jesus was able to obey the whole Law perfectly for us. God has demanded that we be holy as He is holy (Leviticus 11:45) and we *are not holy!* Christ is holy, He has obeyed the Law perfectly, and we who are believers are covered under His blood before God and His perfect justice.

Into the Word: Acts 6:1-15

As the Word of God spread, the number of believers in Jerusalem increased rapidly. These new converts included many priests. Acts 4:34 explained that those who had property sold it to have money to care for those in need. As the church grew, so did the volume of physical needs among the members. The apostles realized they couldn't continue to "serve tables" and preach the Word at the same time. Something had to change. On top of these issues, the growing church continued to experience opposition and false accusations.



Across

- 2. One of the *accusations* (v.14) reflected the council's misunderstanding of Jesus' words in John 2:19-22. The "place" being destroyed was the temple of Jesus' body.
- 5. The apostles were to select seven men to help in an attempt to bring a *solution* (v.3) to the problem.
- 7. Some members of the *synagogue* (v.9) or of the Freedmen couldn't cope with Stephen's wisdom or the Spirit.
- 9. The apostles would then be free to devote themselves to *prayer* (v.4) and the ministry of the Word.

Down

- 1. The *widows* (v.1) were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.
- 3. These assistants to the apostles were to be men filled with the Holy Spirit and *wisdom* (v.3).
- 4. All who were sitting in the Council saw Stephen's face to be like a face of an *angel* (v.15).
- 6. The accusers falsely charged Stephen with *blasphemy** (vv.10-11) and brought him before the Council.
- 8. *Stephen* (vv.5, 8) was the first of the men chosen and was full of grace and power.

* Blasphemy is a word that is not used often anymore. However, the sin of blasphemy is common. In the Old Testament times, blasphemy was punished by death (Leviticus 24:15-16). Anytime we use the name of God in a thoughtless or mocking manner, it is blasphemy. It is a sober reminder for each of us to ask the Lord to help us guard our hearts, minds, and tongues so that everything we do or say reflects that we are children of God.

Memory Verse

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."
John 15:12

Extra Memory Challenge

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.
Romans 12:10-13

New Ideas:

Service and Vocation

In the beginning of Acts 6, we see that a need arose for a specific task to be done in the church. The apostles devoted their time to prayer, preaching, and teaching. But the congregation needed someone to make sure that the food for the widows was being evenly distributed. So they picked certain people to serve in this ministry. This is an example of how, in the Early Church, members of the congregation helped to choose those who were in positions of leadership.

The church still needs people to serve in different roles. Many churches have pastors and deacons to care for the spiritual welfare of the members and trustees to tend to the physical matters like maintaining the building and paying the bills. Whatever need there is in the church, God has given someone gifts to meet that need.

Paul wrote to the congregation in Rome reminding them that we are all members of one body but with different gifts. Every gift is to be used for the glory of God.

The opportunity to use our gifts in the congregation as well as in our families and communities is part of our vocation. The word "vocation" refers to God's call to us to love and serve our neighbor in everyday life, even in mundane and routine tasks. Whatever roles God has given you as a student, friend, son or daughter, brother or sister, church member, etc., all are ways to serve one another and be the hands and feet of Christ extended to others.

[TM note: distributing the food for the widows was serving through vocation.]

[TM reference: Dr. Monseth's chapter and footnotes in the Free and Living book regarding church offices]

Discussion Questions

Each teacher should encourage, as much as time permits, discussion and inquiry on the part of students. Not every aspect of the following questions is addressed here, and students may have thoughts related to but not mentioned in this guide. The obligation of the teacher, then, is to understand as deeply as possible the Scriptures that are being discussed, in order to answer as well as possible any questions a student might have.

1. Vocation is about loving and serving God by loving and serving our neighbor in everyday life with the gifts, resources, and opportunities He gives. List all the ways you can serve in your home, congregation, school, and community.

- Home – obeying your parents, cleaning your room, making your bed, doing your chores and homework, be kind to your siblings
- Congregation – clean the church building, shovel the walks, help in the nursery, media ministry, music, hold the door for an elderly person, visit the homebound/sick/shut-in, teach.
- School – be a good student and classmate, listen in class, learn, respect teachers and leaders, speak well of others, discuss issues with parents
- Community – help a neighbor, serve well at a job, visit someone who is hospitalized, serve at the food shelf or volunteer for some other community service

2. Stephen was doing what God had called him to do, yet he also faced persecution, and even death. Though you are faithfully serving others in your vocation, you are still likely to face ridicule and persecution. Discuss what Jesus said about persecution in John 15:18-20. How can you respond to hatred and persecution you will face as a Christian?

Know the Word of God, and be faithful to the Word of God (II Timothy 3:16-17). Fight the good fight of faith (armor of God-Ephesians 6). Be ready to give a response, but with gentleness and reverence toward others (I Peter 3:15). Pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:11-12, 44).

Daily Devotions

Monday: Ephesians 4:11-16
Tuesday: I Corinthians 12:1-11
Wednesday: Romans 12:3-8
Thursday: I Thessalonians 1:2-10
Friday: I Thessalonians 4:9-12
Saturday: I Thessalonians 5:12-15
Sunday: II Thessalonians 3:6-13

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSIONS, CREED, AND CATECHISM

* Lesson 8: Augsburg Confession – Article 12 (Repentance)

What does it mean to repent? Article 12 of the Augsburg Confession summarizes what the Scriptures teach about this. Repentance is feeling sorry for sin and believing in Christ for forgiveness. The article emphasizes that forgiveness is only received through faith in Jesus, not by any of our “deeds” of repentance. The article also states that those who truly repent should receive absolution and be assured of forgiveness. Finally, the article teaches that one who knows he is forgiven will freely show the “fruits” (evidence) of repentance (Matthew 3:8).

1. What is the message of Jesus in Mark 1:15?
“Repent and believe in the gospel.”

2. John the Baptist told the people to “bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance” (Matthew 3:8). When do you bear fruit, according to Jesus in John 15:3–5?
When you are “clean” and abiding in Him and His Word.