

Discussion Guide: The Gospel of Forgiveness

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NIV)

April 18, 2004: "The Gospel of Forgiveness" by Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, Seminary Professor of West Minister Extension in Texas. Dr. Ferguson hales from Scotland and was a pastor there for several years. He is a well-known author and speaker, and is both a Bible Scholar and true churchmen. He was in Indianapolis for the recent PTRC conference held at CPC this weekend. The topic of the conference was forgiveness, and he continued this theme in this morning's message with a focus on Luke 24: 45-49.

Dr. Ferguson pointed out that repentance and forgiveness of sin was the centerpiece of Christ message that he proclaimed to his disciples after he returned in his resurrected body for 40 days. Reference was made to the Emmaus road encounter and other times Christ spoke directly to his disciples as he prepared them for their call to take the Gospel to the nations.

Jesus reminded his disciples of the Old Testament prophecies and explained the fulfilling of them as a providential and well-executed plan. He had to suffer (the passion), He had to die on the cross, was buried, and was resurrected on the third day (as He had tried to tell them in the days before Golgotha). He helped them to see the empty works associated with trying to keep the law, but how the law testifies to the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (see Romans 3: 21-23).

In keeping with Luke 24: 44, Dr. Ferguson cited Genesis 3; the Psalms; and the prophets as prophesy of Christ's coming and his fate. In verse 45 it says, "then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures". The disciples did not yet have the New Testament letters. The gospels were still not penned. Jesus was the Word and the Word was with them in the flesh. They very likely were remembering the many messages they had heard in the synagogues growing up as Jesus made the law come alive. He had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Everything he did in retrospect now was coming into focus. He was preparing them for the great commission. They had to be amazed and zealous at this newfound revelation from a risen savior.

But, then the Christ did the unthinkable. He told them to wait, not to go anywhere, and it was clear that the power was not in just their new knowledge, but from the "power from on high" which had not yet anointed them. The disciples had to be thinking "can't we just hand out some tracks or something!"

Christ was training his disciples to be faithful witnesses. Dr. Ferguson suggested three key elements to being a faithful witness.

1. We must tell the facts about Jesus. In Luke 24:46 we get a hint as to how to do this. We must reference the written Word as our authority. We must tell the whole Gospel. We must be able to show how the story was prophesied and fulfilled in Christ and only in Him.
2. We must be able to interpret the facts of the matter. He was not a mad man, a wise prophet, or a liar, He was the Christ and had to suffer and die for our sins. He who knew no sin became sin so that we could be forgiven and live.

3. We must be able to communicate this hope to the hearer who asks “can there be forgiveness for even me?” Peter’s first sermon where many were saved cut the Jews to the heart as he explained how they crucified the Christ. They asked what can we do. The answer and the crux of today’s message: **repent and trust in Him** who was accursed for your sins. He will forgive even you.

Discussion Questions:

Read Luke 24: 45-49, and then share your observations of what you picked up as the key points of this passage.

1. Why do you think that Christ had to open the eyes of eyewitnesses? How come even after having the whole story some of us still need our eyes opened?
2. Have you ever had an Emmaus Road experience? Share your insights with the group.
3. Have you ever used the prophecies in the O.T. and the facts in the N. T. of Christ’s works and life to demonstrate the amazing fulfillment of Scriptures in the person of Christ? How might Gen 3, the Psalms and certain prophets be used to evangelize others?
4. Dr. Ferguson talked about prayer as something to do before ministering the Word of God. Do you think the disciples prayed while waiting for the power on high? Why?
5. Why should we pray when we have already been promised and given power in our salvation?
6. Has the Holy Spirit fell fresh on our group? How would others know? If we are just going through the motions how might prayer change the depth and direction of our group?

Application Questions:

So that we can be effective witnesses for Christ,

1. If an opportunity arose, what facts about Jesus are you prepared to share? What scriptures would you use? In what sequence would you share the facts?
2. As you share the facts about Jesus, what questions would you anticipate might be asked (or what questions have been asked of you when you shared your faith) and how might you interpret the facts to help them understand the message?
3. By what power are we able to communicate the hope that lives within us? What must we do to draw upon that source and communicate effectively to others?