

How Firm a Foundation

- nine truths to live by

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* Title taken from Richard Keen's 18th century hymn: "How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word."

Throughout this course, all quotations of Scripture are from the New International Version (NIV) 2011 edition, used with permission.

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Enjoying this course ...

My motivation is the same as Jude's:

"I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people." (vs 3)

As such, what you will find here is a collection of studies designed to engage the mind and provide a beautiful investment of nine weeks of your life.

Primarily designed for new believers to become grounded in truth, this course has been enjoyed by young people applying for church membership, parents preparing for the baptism of their child, as well as Christians requesting transfer of membership from other churches.

Each chapter has a Bible study section with interactive observational questions that lead the thinkers through to valuable and life-changing beliefs. The course can be enjoyed on your own, but there is value-add in group participation with a leader to facilitate discussion. Each section closes with a reflective section— designed for further thinking during the week – and further online and printed resources to pursue.

Above all, may the Lord richly bless you in your study of God's Word. May the Holy Spirit be your teacher.

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 14:26

**John P Wilson
(Oct 2020)**

CHAPTER 1

GOD'S TWO BOOKS (how God has spoken to us)

If we wish to know someone, that person has to reveal something of himself to us. If he hides and refuses to share anything of himself then we're left to our own imagination and assumptions. Our knowledge of a person comes as we watch what that person does, as we listen to what he says or read what he writes. In fact, the more he shares his life with us the better we can know him.

So it is with our knowledge of God. It's a great relief to know that God did not keep to himself, but chose to reveal himself to us. What a kind and generous God we have who reveals himself, rather than hides.

John Piper (*Desiring God Ministries*) speaks of God's two books, the book of Scripture and the book of nature: "God has two books: the word and the world." The first of these we call Scripture (the Bible) – God's book of words, inspired and authoritative. On the other hand, his other book – the book Piper describes as "the whole organic complex of nature, history and human culture" – is neither inspired or authoritative. Yet it still speaks of the glory of God.

Let's come to that book of the world first.

a) GENERAL REVELATION (God's book of the world)

Read *Psalms 19:1-6*

According to *verses 1 and 2*, which particular parts of creation speak about God?

When they speak, what do these verses say about God's character?

From *vs3-6*, is there any part of human culture unreached by God's revelation – is there any limit to where the knowledge of God extends? _____

Consider Paul's teaching to the Roman Christians of the 1st century:

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

According to this verse, what does creation tell us about God's character?

HOWEVER we cannot possibly learn all we need to know about God by simply looking at nature or even all of God's creation. It's not enough – in fact it leaves us longing for a clearer picture of God. Consider, by way of analogy: how much do you really know about your favourite barista by drinking cappuccinos? In fact, you might taste-test every coffee she's ever made and, over the weeks, you'll learn of her artistry and skill, even the consistency of her work, but you won't learn too much about her without lots of conversation.

What important life questions remain unanswered if our knowledge of God is limited to natural revelation – if all we have is God's book of the world?

SUMMARY:

Natural revelation of God is incomplete. If we rely *only* on God's first book, then our worship of him is not properly informed, and if all we know is from nature, then this would result in us worshipping nature. In so doing, we would be guilty of the same sinful attitude against which Paul writes:

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Romans 1:25)

We need God's second book.

b) SPECIAL REVELATION (God's book of words)

Read David's thoughts in *Psalms 19:7-11*

EXPLANATION:

The writer uses five different words: "law", "statutes", "precepts", "commands" and "decrees". David uses these words interchangeably to refer to the written Word of God, which in his day was the early books of the Old Testament.

In vs7-9, the five words mentioned above (law, statutes, etc.) are each paired with different descriptions of God's Word. Can you list these descriptions (the first pair is completed for you by way of example):

<i>law</i>	<i>perfect</i>

In vs7-11, there are five blessings for us as we read the Word – five ways we'll benefit. Can you list them? (the first is "refreshing the soul"):

It's worth pausing here to consider the enormity of this – that we are recipients of these blessings through the kindness and mercy of God.

SUMMARY:

God's written word is his own revelation to us, and, using the words of David, it is something which is good for our soul (v.7). "Soul" is a word describing our spirit or our inner self.

Although David was writing about the Old Testament, the same idea is confirmed in the New Testament by both Paul and Peter concerning the whole of God's Word.

Let's read 2 Timothy 3:15-17

... ¹⁵how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(v.15) According to this verse, in what way does knowledge of Scripture help us?

(v.16a) The expression "God-breathed" is our guarantee that everything in Scripture is true and correct. God cannot breathe out (or inspire) anything false, contradictory or misleading. From this, we believe that all Scripture is without error and therefore completely trustworthy in every respect.

(v.16) According to this verse, in what four ways is Scripture useful (profitable) for us?

How does this compare with what we read earlier in *Psalms 19*, especially in v.7 and v.11?

(v.17) According to this verse, what is the expected outcome?

Let's read 2 Peter 1:16-21 ...

(v.16) When Peter uses "we", he is speaking on behalf of all the apostles (see v.1). So, he is claiming that the apostles' teaching and writings are not made up of half-truths, or exaggerations or biased accounts, but rather they are trustworthy eyewitness records.

Especially noting from v.20:

²⁰Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

(v.20,21) From where did the messages and teaching of Scripture originate?

According to these verses, who is it that guides and inspires the writers of Scripture?

SUMMARY:

In the pages of the Bible we see a unique combination of the personalities and individual styles of more than thirty different authors – all of them writing under the overriding authority and inspiration of God. The Bible is the inspired words of God written through the work of enlightened authors. Therefore, we can be sure that it is exactly as God intends.

The God of the universe, creator of heaven and earth, has shared himself with us through his Word. What a privilege to have this inspired revelation carefully recorded, preserved through the ages and now readily available for us on the printed page and in digital form.

To reinforce, we do well to remember Jesus' view of God's written word:

- When replying to the unbelieving Jewish leaders of his day: *Is it not written in your Law? ... and the Scripture cannot be broken. (John 10:34-35)*
- When praying to his Father in heaven for his disciples: *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)*

FOR REFLECTIVE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Why did the Apostle John write his Gospel? (*John 20:30,31*)

ii) Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

iii) Have you this "life" that John speaks of?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

Read again *2 Timothy 3:14-17*


iv) Have you been made "wise for salvation

" through faith in Christ Jesus? (i.e. is the way of salvation clear to you yet?)

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()


v) Why does Paul insist that pastors should engage in the reading of Scripture and in preaching and teaching? (*1 Timothy 4:13*) Give reasons as to why preaching and teaching from the Scriptures is important in the church.

b) Something to read ... something to watch:

 If you can get hold of it, there's a booklet that's well worth reading:

Reading the Bible by Geoffrey Thomas (Banner of Truth).

- this was first published in 1980 and it remains the best short (18 pages) explanation of the nature of God's book, with suggestions for reading it and how to benefit from it.

 Then, to extend the mind just a little more, go online and watch a 15 min YouTube video: *Kevin DeYoung on the Doctrine Scripture* (Desiring God).

- you may find the whole clip challenging in parts, but PLEASE engage with him for the first 5 minutes of the video where Kevin speaks about the wonderful effect reading Scripture has on our soul and the difference it makes to our life.

AN OVERVIEW OF BIBLE BOOKS

THE OLD TESTAMENT:

Major Sections	Books by name	Period of writing	Author
HISTORY/LAW (5) (from creation to Moses)	<i>Genesis</i> <i>Exodus</i> <i>Leviticus</i> <i>Numbers</i> <i>Deuteronomy</i>	beginning of writing ↓ to 1400 BC	all five books written by Moses
HISTORY OF ISRAEL (12) (from the entry into Canaan to the Exile)	<i>Joshua</i> <i>Judges</i> <i>Ruth</i> <i>1st / 2nd Samuel</i> <i>1st / 2nd Kings</i> <i>1st / 2nd Chronicles</i> <i>Ezra</i> <i>Nehemiah</i> <i>Esther</i>	1400 BC ↓ 470 BC	Joshua mostly, Samuel Ezra Nehemiah
POETRY & WISDOM (5) (often used for singing all through Israel's history)	<i>Job</i> <i>Psalms</i> <i>Proverbs</i> <i>Ecclesiastes</i> <i>Song of Solomon</i>		many Psalms by David many by Solomon Solomon Solomon
MAJOR PROPHETS (5)	<i>Isaiah</i> <i>Jeremiah</i> <i>Lamentations</i> <i>Ezekiel</i> <i>Daniel</i>	740BC ↓ 530BC	Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel
MINOR PROPHETS (12)	<i>Hosea</i> <i>Joel</i> <i>Amos</i> <i>Obadiah</i> <i>Jonah</i> <i>Micah</i> <i>Nahum</i> <i>Habakkuk</i> <i>Zephaniah</i> <i>Haggai</i> <i>Zechariah</i> <i>Malachi</i>	740 BC ↓ 430 BC	Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

THE NEW TESTAMENT:

Major Sections	Books by name	Period of writing	Author
THE GOSPELS (4)	<i>Matthew</i> <i>Mark</i> <i>Luke</i> <i>John</i>	contemporaries of Jesus writing between 50 AD -70 AD	Matthew Mark Luke John
CHURCH HISTORY (1)	<i>Acts</i>	30 -60 AD	Luke
PAUL'S LETTERS (13)	<i>Romans</i> <i>1st/2nd Corinthians</i> <i>Galatians</i> <i>Ephesians</i> <i>Philippians</i> <i>Colossians</i> <i>1st/2nd Thessalonians</i> <i>1st/2nd Timothy</i> <i>Titus</i> <i>Philemon</i>	as early as 50 AD	Paul, formerly Saul
OTHER LETTERS (8)	<i>Hebrews</i> <i>James</i> <i>1st/2nd Peter</i> <i>1st/2nd/3rd John</i> <i>Jude</i>	written before the end of the Apostolic era (100 AD)	unknown James - br. of Jesus Peter John Jude
PROPHECY (1)	<i>Revelation</i>	before 100 AD	John

CHAPTER 2

THE LIVING GOD (WHO God is and WHAT he is like)

Knowing God is the key to ... E V E R Y T H I N G. How we think about God controls how we live. As a person thinks about God, so their standards of behavior, values and relations with other people are determined.

a) THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

It is reasonably assumed that your participation in this course indicates that you believe in the existence of God. Whether you know him as your saviour and friend is a different matter. Which was the purpose behind asking you those reflection questions (ii), (iii) and (iv) of the first study.

Let's assume that you believe in God. WHY? What convinces you about the existence of God? Are you able to list any reasons for your belief?

Can you prove the existence of God to another person? YES () NO ()

Relying solely on our own understanding, and even engaging in the very best scientific investigation, does not lead to proof of God. Don't misunderstand this – we can be absolutely sure of God – but belief in God is a matter of faith. (Faith being that gift of God which enables you to believe something you cannot see or prove – see *Hebrews 11:1*, “*faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*”)

Even in the Bible, his existence is assumed and not proven. There are no arguments or proofs for him (only a warning for the atheist – see *Psalms 14:1*, “*The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’*”)

Consider how the opening sentence of Scripture assumes his existence from the beginning*:
“*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” (*Genesis 1:1*)

Which is confirmed at the beginning of John's gospel (where “the Word” refers to Jesus):
“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*” (*John 1:1,2*)

* This is how we are then able to put all other knowledge such as science and philosophy in context – they all build on top of this underlying truth: God exists. This is why using these secondary measures to argue for or against God's existence don't satisfy.

b) WHO IS HE?

How can the finite understand the infinite? We all have finite minds – limited in capacity, and so it's very difficult for us to define God or even describe what he is like. Truly, God is beyond us. However, he has revealed himself to some extent, and this much is sure: God is spirit, God is personal and God is trinity. Let's look at each in turn.

i) God is spirit

While the Bible contains no definition for God, perhaps the beginning of a definition is found in the words of Jesus to the woman at the well (the Samaritan woman): *"God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24)

Let's read *John 4:21-24*

What's meant by the description *"God is spirit"*? How does that help you understand God?

How do Paul's words to Timothy help you understand the nature of God? ... see *1 Timothy 6:15,16* *"... God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see."*

God does not have a body like we do – excepting when God the Son took on a human body for the purpose of achieving our salvation. He took on humanity when he was supernaturally conceived within the womb of the virgin Mary. Then, after thirty or so years on earth, he ascended into heaven in that same human form (see *Acts 1:9-11*).

ii) God is personal

While God is spirit, he is very knowable and personable. God is more than a mere force for good. The Bible clearly speaks of God as a person.

There are multiple Bible references that describe God as a personal being – not as a human person, but that he is an intelligent, self aware and moral being. In other words, he is capable of thinking, feeling, desiring and acting like all living beings.

To take just one example: *Psalms 103:8*

*The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.*

What are some of the marks of God's personality mentioned here?

It's because God is personal that we can talk with him. It's because he is personal that we can reach out and trust him, and we then find that he reaches down to us and enters into our experiences with help, guidance and comfort. An impersonal force could not do this.

iii) God is trinity

The Bible teaches that, while God is one, he exists in three persons called Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

While the actual word "trinity" is not found in the Bible, it's the teaching of the Bible that God is one God in three persons. While the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have at times different functions, nevertheless:

- there is no rank – the Father does not outrank the Son, nor the Son outrank the Spirit;
- there is no individualism – the Son never sets his own agenda, nor does the Spirit;
- there is no self-existence – they never exist or act alone but remain always a unity.

Let's read *Matthew 28:19* where the three persons are mentioned together:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

While there is no rank, individualism or self-existence within the trinity, the Bible does show us distinct purposes for Father, Son and Spirit, which are:

1. The Father: first read *Matthew 6:5-15*

God is both the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then also the Father of all Christians too. So, it's the Father who should be the one we pray to. He is revealed in Scripture as the one who decrees and plans all things – especially his great works of creation and of redemption.

2. The Son: read *Philippians 2:5-11*

The second person of the trinity, the Son of God, is the Lord Jesus Christ. While Scripture says that God the Father planned the great works of creation and redemption, it's all carried out through God the Son. Jesus created the world. Jesus saves lost sinners. The mighty works of God are carried out through the one perfect mediator: God the Son. (see also *Colossians 1:15-20*).

3. The Holy Spirit: read *John 16:5-15*

The Spirit's work is to apply the great work of God in saving sinners and bring it to our hearts, assuring us of faith. It is the Holy Spirit's task to convict us of sin and apply the work of salvation to us, and then to continue to live in us as our guide (v. 13).

How does it help you when you pray to remember God as trinity? i.e. what are the roles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit when you are praying?

How does it help you when you witness to others about the Gospel to remember God as trinity? i.e. what are the roles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in salvation?

Explanatory Note:

A final word about God the trinity. Don't worry if you cannot grasp this entirely. No one living on earth can really understand the trinity. Although St Patrick (5th century) is famous for illustrating with a 3-leafed clover, no man-made illustration of the trinity can be of much assistance. In faith, we gladly accept the Bible's teaching about God the trinity.

c) WHAT IS HE LIKE?

We have defined God as spirit, personal and trinity. Are there ways to describe what he is like in his character?

One classic description of God is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism (17th century):

Qn. 4 What is God?

Answer: God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

Let's take three adjectives from this catechism answer (see the left-hand column below) and apply them to the nouns listed in the same answer (see the right-hand column), and see how each adjective ("infinite", etc) applies to each noun ("being", etc), as follows:

INFINITE ... God is not subject to any limitations. He is infinite in respect of all the descriptions mentioned in the next column.
Read Job 11:7-9

ETERNAL ... God has all these characteristics mentioned in the next column and he has always had them. He is above time's limitations.
Read Psalm 90:1,2

UNCHANGABLE ... In all the respects listed in the next column, God is forever the same. His characteristics do not vary.
Read James 1:17

BEING

Daniel 4:34,35

WISDOM

Romans 11:33-36

POWER

Matthew 19:26

HOLINESS

Isaiah 6:3

JUSTICE

Psalm 145:17

GOODNESS

Ephesians 2:4,5

TRUTH

Numbers 23:19

FOR REFLECTIVE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Concerning the trinity

What does Paul's greeting in *2 Thessalonians 1:1-2* teach us about the Father?

What does *Colossians 2:9* teach about Christ the Son, and his relationship to God?


What does *Acts 5:3-4* imply about the Holy Spirit and his relationship to God?


ii) Concerning the nature of God

To really know God takes more than studying texts of Scripture. What's most important if we are to know and please God? (*Hebrews 11:6*)

There is much about God we cannot possibly understand: in that sense God is beyond our reach. If we could perfectly understand God, then we would be God.

b) Something to read ... something to watch:

 *Authentic Christianity 101* by Robert L Dickie (Evangelical Press, 2007), 48 pages
- the opening chapters of this booklet on "the existence of God" and "the nature of God" are the most succinct and helpful I've read on the subject.

 Then, to extend the mind just a little more, go online and watch a YouTube video: enter the words: *David Platt Trinity*

- it'll be 8 min of your life well spent on exploring the doctrine of God as trinity, and what a difference it makes to your life to understand God better.

CHAPTER 3

MANKIND

(WHO we are and WHAT we are like)

Who are we? Why are we here? Does human life have purpose?

It's important we take notice of God's words in answer to such questions as: who are we?" because what we are now is not always how we were. Consider:

a) MAN and WOMAN: INNOCENCE

Let's read *Genesis 1:26-31*.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

1:26 According to the Bible, in whose likeness is mankind? _____

If we had time to read the preceding verses (vs. 24, 25), we see that each of the species of the animal kingdom was separately created (livestock, creatures that move along the ground, wild animals). Then, Adam and Eve were created as the ultimate act of God's work. John Blanchard writes: "In terms of size, man is minute compared with the sun, moon and stars, but God has given him a unique and honoured place in the universe."

What is meant by the description "in the image of God" (v. 27)? In what ways are we, and not the animals, made in God's image? Can you think of at least three ways?

i)

ii)

iii)

According to the Bible, when Adam and Eve were created what was their purpose in life (i.e. what were their duties?)

1:26 _____

1:28 _____

1:28 _____

SUMMARY:

The first two humans were Adam and Eve. The whole human race has descended from them. (Paul, while preaching at Athens, said: "*From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth.*" Acts 17:26).

God created Adam and Eve, not as babies, but as physically mature adults, and with no knowledge of sin. They had freewill with which they could choose between obeying or disobeying God. As long as they obeyed, they lived in a state of innocence.

In order to receive Adam and Eve's faithful devotion, God placed a test before them, as recorded in *Genesis 2:15-17*:

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Freewill obedience to this expectation would have meant continuing in the state of innocence. However, something disastrous happened.

b) MAN and WOMAN: SIN ENTERS

Please read the whole of Genesis 3. It's not a long chapter and to read it together now will bring much blessing ... *Genesis 3:1-24*.

This is the turning point in the history of mankind. Let's look at the main characters:

i) God:

He had created all things perfectly (1:31).

He had provided an abundance of food for Adam and Eve (1:29).

He also provided the "test of love" before them (2:16,17).

ii) The serpent:

The serpent was being used (possessed) by: _____ (read *Revelation 20:2*).

Satan's main desire was to throw doubt on the Word of God (3:1), and to get Adam and Eve to turn from it and fail the "test" of *Genesis 2:16,17*.

iii) Eve:

The first to be deceived (3:2,6 also *1 Timothy 2:14*). She exercised freewill, chose to disobey.

iv) Adam:

Followed Eve into sin (3:6,7). He, too, exercised freewill and chose to disobey. Following this fall into sin, what immediate changes do we notice?

3:7 _____

3:8,10 _____

3:12 _____

SUMMARY:

For the first time mankind's innocence was gone. The whole condition of humanity at this point is irreversibly changed. The course of the history of men and women changed in this one act of disobedience.

c) MAN and WOMAN: FALLEN

We read in *Genesis 3* of several long-term consequences of this first sin. Can you list them:

3:16 _____

3:17,18 _____

3:19 _____

3:23,24 _____

Of these, it is the curse of death which must be examined more closely.

On that day, men and women died in two ways:

- i) they died spiritually (cut off from the presence and the fellowship of God);
- ii) they began to die physically (death entered their bodies).

To sum up, the man and woman for the first time experienced a dead spirit and a dying body.

We inherit the consequences of this disaster. As Adam and Eve lost their status of innocence when they sinned, so their fall affects us. This means: we are not born innocent, but rather as sinners.

Read *Psalms 51:5*

What is David's description of himself when he was born?

Read also: *Romans 5:12; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:21,22.*

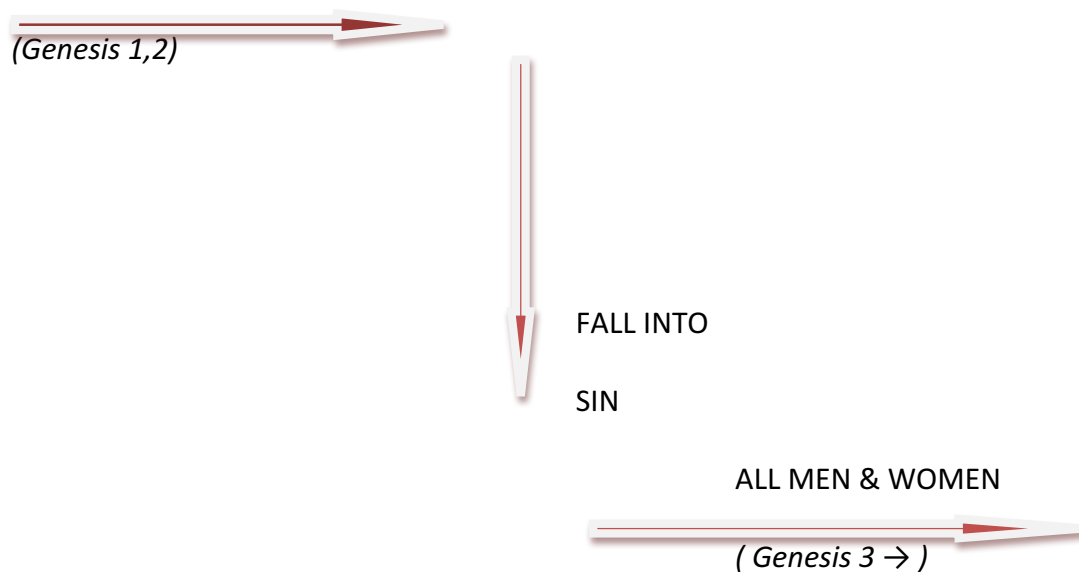
The Bible teaches that the children of Adam and Eve inherited their corrupt nature and sinful character. The poison of sin polluted the entire human race.

What is the common word used by Paul in *Romans 5*, *Romans 6* and in *1 Corinthians 15* to describe mankind?

We can now begin understand what the Lord Jesus means when he says you must be born again (*John 3:3*). John means the same thing when he writes of being *born of God* (*John 1:13*). They are saying that in order to become a Christian, you need to be given a second birth. There has to be a spiritual rebirth. A dead spirit has to be "touched" and brought to life.

SUMMARY:

ADAM & EVE in PARADISE



Everyone born since Adam and Eve are born sinners:

- knowing sin
- feeling guilt
- dying
- lost

Question ... Is there any hope? Can men and women ever be restored? (see *Ephesians 1:7*)

FOR REFLECTIVE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Do you consider yourself to be a sinner?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

ii) Do you consider that it is right (fair) that you should come under the "death penalty" as recorded in *Romans 6:23*?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

iii) Reading *Revelation 21:27*, do you think that your sins would defile heaven?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

iv) Do you think that your sins would bar you from heaven unless they were forgiven?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()


v) Are your sins forgiven?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

vi) Reading *John 1:12,13* do you know that you have been "*born of God*"?


YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

b) Something to read – something to watch:

 Now is the time to do some follow up reading on the subject.

We recommend Jim Packer's *Concise Theology* and the three chapters* titled: "The Fall", "Original Sin" and "Inability". First published, 1993, but still available and wonderful reading.

* You can access these chapters on websites such as www.monergism.com – head for the **Directory of Theology**, then hit the **Reformed Theology** button, then "**original sin**", scroll to the bottom of the page and there Jim Packer's chapters are listed.

 For a short, very clear, summary of the effects of sin in the human heart, go online and watch a YouTube video by Al Mohler (Southern Baptist, USA): enter the words: *Mohler consequences sin thirdmill*. It's a pity that it only goes for 3½ minutes, but it's so good on explaining the effects of sin from Genesis 3.

CHAPTER 4

JESUS CHRIST (WHO he is)

INTRODUCTION:

Almost the whole world has heard of Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth remains the most well-known and verifiable man who's ever lived. Even history books of the first century mention him. He has far more written of him than other great figures of the same time (e.g. Julius Caesar). In fact, the whole of our dating system centers on him: B.C. and A.D.

What we 'make' of him is another matter. Responding to his claims is the key to living well ... and, sadly, many miss out on life as it was meant to be.

So, it's not so much his existence which is in dispute, but rather the question remains as to whether we are going to accept or deny the Bible's claim that Jesus Christ was "more than a carpenter".

a) WHO IS HE?

People hold many different opinions about Jesus – what are some views that you've heard?

Let's read Acts 10:36-43, a record of Peter's visit with Cornelius. Peter speaks:

³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

i) According to Peter (v. 36), who is Jesus? _____

ii) According to Peter (v. 38), who is Jesus anointed with and empowered by? _____

iii) According to Peter (v. 39,40), what happened to Jesus after he died?

iv) According to Peter (v. 42), what is Jesus appointed to do finally?

v) According to Peter (v. 43), what blessing does Jesus provide?

Let's examine together, from just one Gospel (Matthew), some of the incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus which help us to answer this question: WHO is Jesus?

Opposite each reference listed in the table below, write in the appropriate column what we may learn about the nature of Jesus, whether human or divine. For most of the references there will be something to note in both columns, but not always. In your group, you might divide the Bible references between you and share the results.

Two references have already been completed as examples:

TEXT	HIGHLIGHTING HIS HUMAN NATURE	HIGHLIGHTING HIS DIVINE NATURE
Matthew 1:19-21	<i>born of Mary in the normal way</i>	<i>conceived by the Holy Spirit miraculously</i>
Matthew 3:13-17		
Matthew 4:1,2		
Matthew 4:23-25		
Matthew 7:28-29	<i>he was a popular teacher of people</i>	<i>his authority set him apart from other teachers</i>
Matthew 8:23-27		
Matthew 9:36		
Matthew 12:46,47		
Matthew 17:5		
Matthew 26:39		

“Jesus is truly man and truly God. He is not part man and part God. In him there exists two natures so that he is divine and also a sinless man.” *Bitesize Theology*, by Peter Jeffery.

C S Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*: “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool; you can spit at him and kill him for a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God.”

SUMMARY:

How can we know for sure that Jesus Christ was more than a carpenter? How can we know that he was, in fact, at the same time BOTH TRULY MAN AND TRULY GOD? Primarily we know this is so because of the authoritative testimony of the Scriptures.

In the Gospels, we see him in human form enduring weakness as we do. Yet, at the same time, we also see such glory and majesty that can belong only to God himself (e.g. at his baptism, on the Mount of Transfiguration, during his healing ministry).

John Blanchard, in his booklet *Ultimate Questions* [Evangelical Press, 1987] has helpfully put it like this:

“Although Jesus became fully man, he remained fully God. He remained as completely God as if he had not become man; he became as completely man as if he were not God.” (p.22)

Let’s read *Hebrews 4:14-16*

¹⁴ *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.* ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.* ¹⁶ *Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

vs. 15 reminds us that Jesus lived as a man, and experienced much of the human weakness, sufferings and temptations that we do, yet with one important difference: [without _____]

Jesus is eminently qualified to be our Saviour. His divine nature guarantees his sinlessness and his human nature means that he can stand in our place as our representative. So, when he submitted himself to the Cross of Calvary it was not for himself, but rather it was for us.

Read *John 10:11*, where Jesus pictures himself as a shepherd:

¹¹ *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”*

Why do you think he calls himself *good*?

According to the words of Jesus, for whom did he die? _____

Read *Mark 10:45*

⁴⁵ “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

According to this verse, why did Jesus come into the world?

According to this verse, what payment was made as a “*ransom for many*”?

In what sense is Jesus’ death a ransom?

b) GETTING TO KNOW JESUS:

The Son of God can be known by his names. Many of them are well known. His name “Immanuel” means “God with us” and reminds us that he is God.

What do each of the following names mean to you, and how do they help you to know and understand him?

Lord _____

Jesus _____

Christ _____

FOR REFLECTIVE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:


Read *1 John 4:11-16*

Every gift and blessing mentioned in these verses comes because of God's love (vs. 11). See if you can complete this list of amazing displays of God's mercy from the verses numbered:

- i) vs 12, who is lives in us? _____
- ii) vs 13, who has God given us? _____
- iii) vs 14, who did the Father send into the world to be Saviour? _____
- iv) vs 15, what's required to have God live in us? _____
- v) Do you think you've come to acknowledge Jesus as Son of God?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()
- vi) From vs. 11, how should the love of God show in our lives?


b) Something to read – something to watch:

 Now is the time to do some follow up reading on the subject.

We recommend both:

- i) Peter Barnes' *Milk of the Word* (Banner of Truth) chapter 3, and
- ii) Jim Packer in *Concise Theology** (Evangelical Press) chapters titled: "*Incarnation*", "*Two Natures*" and "*Virgin Birth*".

* You can access these chapters on websites such as www.monergism.com – head for the **Directory of Theology**, then hit the **Reformed Theology** button, then "**original sin**", scroll to the bottom of the page and there Jim Packer's chapters are listed.

 Then, to explore what it means to acknowledge Jesus, go online and watch this very brief YouTube video by Ligon Duncan (The Gospel Coalition), enter the words: *Duncan why believe Jesus TGC*. It'll be 3 minutes of your life well spent.

CHAPTER 5 SALVATION

(WHAT Christ has achieved)

a) THE DILEMMA WE FIND OURSELVES IN

IF

the conclusion we reached in chapter 2 is correct
i.e. that our God is infinitely and unchangeably HOLY, JUST and TRUE

AND

IF

the conclusion we reached in chapter 3 is also correct
i.e. that all of us are sinful by nature,
spiritually dead and opposed to God

THEN

both God and ourselves face a serious 'dilemma'
- as Job said (*Job 9:2*) "How can mere mortals prove their innocence before God?"

ALMIGHTY GOD	OURSELVES
<p>Let's read <i>Psalms 145:17-20</i> <i>The Lord is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfils the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.</i></p>	<p>Let's read <i>Mark 7:20-23</i> <i>He (Jesus) went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."</i></p>
<p>What does this remind us about God's nature and his attitude towards sin?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>What do these verses teach about our own nature (without Christ)?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

b) HOW GOD HAS PROVIDED A SOLUTION TO THIS DILEMMA

We need to go to the right person for help. The sick need a doctor's diagnosis and treatment. It's no good asking an accountant for a cure. It's even worse to browse internet sites for self-diagnosis and online solutions.

We also need to ask in faith for the right cure. When we're suffering chest pain, we don't look for a Band-Aid. If our iPhone crashes, we don't ask for a new screen protector.

Yet, that's exactly our tendency – prior to faith in Christ. We think it's possible to get ourselves back into fellowship with God with home-made remedies. For example, how often have we tried to gain the attention of God (win his favour) by dutiful attendance at religious services, or by careful attention to our lifestyle, or by tiring ourselves out in good deeds for others?

So, how can we make amends for our sin? Read: *Romans 6:23*

the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What's the difference between our wages and a gift? Can you describe below what you expect from each?

wages	gift
your wages are	a gift is
.....

We have sinned and are now under that sentence of death. Without God's intervention with his free gift, there would be no hope for us. The gift is Jesus himself: the death of Jesus Christ in our place is our only hope.

God's salvation which he has provided for us is so deep and broad that we find that there are several different ways of describing it in the Bible. We explore the meaning of four of these:

i) Substitution:

In the world game we call soccer, under FIFA rules there are three substitutes named for each team. Any player may be replaced during the game by the coach, and at that point his place is taken by a substitute. What do the following Bible verses teach us about Jesus (especially as it relates to his work of substitution)? In your own words, describe what is being substituted for what in each:

John 10:11

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

1 Peter 2:24

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

1 Peter 3:18

Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

ii) Redemption – by paying a ransom:

Most often, we hear the word ransom used in tragic and criminal settings, such as a kidnapping story. You know how it plays out in movies: the son of a wealthy banker is kidnapped ... the father negotiates paying a ransom in order to redeem his son from the perpetrators who hold the boy captive.

What do the following verses teach us about Jesus (especially as it relates to his offer of redemption – paying the ransom)?

Matthew 20:28

the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Galatians 3:13,14

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus

iii) Sacrifice:

Perhaps the word sacrifice is overused and undervalued in general conversation. It ought to be reserved for when a painful choice has to be made: such as when a World War 1 ANZAC soldier chose to sacrifice his life on the beaches of Gallipoli for our freedom.

What do the following verses teach us about Jesus (especially as it relates to the sacrifice he made on our behalf, and how costly it was for God)?

Romans 3:25

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.

1 John 4:10

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

EXPLANATION

Before moving on to the final description, it's worth reflecting on the strong Old Testament theme at this point. There is a clear link between the Old Testament sacrificial lamb and Jesus Christ as the atoning sacrifice (as John writes in 1 John 4).

Let's read from *Hebrews 7:24-27*

because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Jesus is the Old Testament sacrificial lamb. But, of course, sacrificed just the once. He endured all the punishment that belonged to the sinner in order that the sinner might stand before God as free from guilt and condemnation as the Son of God does.

iv) Reconciliation:

Ever had a friend turn on you and cut you off? So much so that he put a block on all social media contact and even started spreading bad rumours about you? What would it take to be reconciled – restored to friendship?

What do the following verses teach us about Jesus (especially as it relates to his loving work of reconciliation)?

Romans 5:10-11

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

SUMMARY

This has been a review of how God provides a solution to our dilemma, a rescue for our lost condition. We've looked separately at the merciful offer of Jesus Christ in substitution, redemption, sacrifice and reconciliation. By separating these words for study purposes, there is no suggestion that they are separate in operation or effect. Rather, they are some of the various ways the Bible describes the precious gift of Jesus in salvation.

At the one time, he:

- substituted himself for us at the cross,
- redeemed us from captivity by being the ransom price,
- sacrificed his life for us, and
- reconciled us to fellowship with God.

They are different descriptions of the same thing.

c) RECEIVING THE BLESSING OF SALVATION

In salvation, there are two parts: God's work and our response.

In this study so far we've focused on the great work of God in providing salvation for us. We haven't until now emphasised what response you and I are called to make.

Read the passage of Scripture in the left hand column and, for each, itemise all the essential responses called for if you are to know and enjoy salvation:

<p><i>Acts 2:36-38</i> <i>Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.</i> <i>When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"</i> <i>Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."</i></p>	
<p><i>Acts 16:29-31</i> <i>The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"</i> <i>They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."</i></p>	
<p><i>Romans 10:9-11</i> <i>If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."</i></p>	
<p><i>John 3:36</i> <i>Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.</i></p>	

FOR REFLECTIVE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

What is your own response to Christ's sacrifice and God's work of reconciliation? Place a tick in the appropriate response to the following questions:

Have you:

- **repented of your sin?** YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

- **believed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ?** YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

- **received him into your life?** YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

- **placed your trust in him?** YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

Finally, read how the Thessalonian Christians were converted (*1 Thessalonians 1:8-10*):


What did the Thessalonians turn from? _____

What did they turn to? _____

What was their new attitude to God? _____

What was their new attitude to Jesus? _____

b) Something to read – something to watch:


 You will no doubt benefit in spending time this week with further reading and thinking on the subject of the Cross of Jesus – and what it means. Here are two suggestions:

Read *The Cross* by Martin Lloyd-Jones (Banner of Truth, 2009).

Here is a booklet (of only 20 pages) of Dr Lloyd-Jones at his best where he shows how in Jesus, and particularly in his death, God was carrying out a promise made at the dawn of human history and making it possible for imperfect people to have a personal relationship with their creator.

Or, *Ultimate Questions* by John Blanchard (Evangelical Press).

It's only a 32 page booklet, but especially helpful at pages 24-27

 For a short, very clear, summary of salvation in Christ, go online and watch a YouTube video by John Piper: *John Piper - What is the Gospel?* (Gospel Coalition). It only goes for 3½ minutes, but it's Piper's six-point summary, explaining how the gospel brings us to God and answers Job's ancient question (Job 9:2).

CHAPTER 6

THE HOLY SPIRIT

(WHO he is and WHAT he does)

a) WHO HE IS

This study will focus on the HOLY SPIRIT: the third person of the TRINITY. He is also known by various other names, such as the Spirit of the Lord, or the Spirit of God. Look up the following names for the Holy Spirit which Jesus used:

John 14:16,26 _____

John 14:17 _____

He is God:

In thinking about the Holy Spirit, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are thinking about God. To some, it may seem easier to think of God the Father, and also of God the Son (Jesus Christ) and yet not as easy to think of God the Holy Spirit. Let's never lose sight of God as trinity. While it's clear that the Father is not the Son and that the Son is not the Father, likewise the Holy Spirit is neither Father nor Son – yet each is fully God.

He is personal:

The Holy Spirit can and does relate personally with us. He is described in Scripture as having intelligence, feeling and a will. He is portrayed as speaking, searching, testifying, commanding, revealing and interacting between God and man.

He is eternal:

The Holy Spirit is eternal – he has always existed. He is not a creation of God. The Holy Spirit was active even in the creation of the universe. Although we may immediately think of his work of awakening sinners to salvation, his work is wider than that.

b) WHAT HE DOES

i) Old Testament

The work of the Holy Spirit is so broad, and has so many different aspects, that it's difficult to sum it up briefly. Let's read of the Holy Spirit's role throughout the Old Testament times. Can you discuss in your group what each passage (below) reveals about the Spirit's work?

Genesis 1:2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

1 Samuel 16:13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

Psalms 51:10,11 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

ii) New Testament

We now live in New Testament times, living after the great Day of Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit was given to the Christians in full measure). For the remainder of this study, we focus on some of the important work of the Holy Spirit today, in particular: regeneration, assurance and sanctification.

1. Regeneration – new birth:

Don't miss these three key questions.

- Read *John 3:6-8* Where Jesus is in conversation with Nicodemus ...
Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

Q.1 WHO is it that produces a new heart in you? _____

- Read *1 Corinthians 2:12*
What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

Q.2 WHO is it who enables us to see the truth of the gospel and believe? _____

- Consider also: *Titus 3:5,6*
he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour,

Q.3 WHO is it who gives us rebirth and renewal? _____

Let's pause to consider what this means: it's the Holy Spirit who gives us:

- a new heart,
- a fresh understanding of God, and
- a renewed life.

Without this transforming work of the Spirit, no one can be saved – our fall into sin is so deep and permanent that it's fatal. Nothing but the regenerating touch of the Spirit can save us. This is grace.

As the Westminster Confession of Faith, ch 14, puts it: "The grace of faith by which the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts."

2. Assurance:

Read *Romans 8:14-16*

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

WHO is it that gives you the inner conviction (assurance) that you are a child of God?

Though doubts and worries remain with you, even for life, it's through the quiet and effective work of the Holy Spirit that you may be comforted. It's the presence of the Spirit within by which you can be certain of the love of Christ and assured of the security of salvation.

With assurance in the heart, many wonderful blessings flow. What significant blessing is offered through the Spirit in the following passages of Scripture?

<i>Romans 15:13</i> <i>May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit</i>	
<i>Ephesians 3:16</i> <i>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,</i>	
<i>Philippians 2:1</i> <i>Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,</i>	

3. Sanctification:

Being sanctified means learning how to live a holy life – a life set apart for God. This is how important sanctification is: it's both:

- the will of God for us, and
- the work of the Spirit of God in us.

Consider the following two verses from Paul's Thessalonian letters on the subject:

1 Thessalonians 4:3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified

2 Thessalonians 2:13 God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

For a definition of sanctification, see Qn 35 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

"Sanctification is the work of God's free grace by which we are renewed throughout in the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness."

Read *Galatians 5:16-23*

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In order to make progress in sanctification, what are some things to AVOID (vs.19-21)?

Who gives you the ability to avoid these things? (v.18)

In order to make progress in sanctification, what are some things to ADOPT (vs.22,23)?

Where do such qualities and attitudes come from? (v.22)

<p>What does holiness look like in us? It means looking like Jesus. This, of course, is a life-long process that is only completed only after our death – when we pass into glory.</p>
--

After we are saved the Holy Spirit goes on working in us, wanting to produce in our lives his own special fruit. These traits should be seen in all Christians irrespective of what we are like by nature. They are qualities given to us by the Spirit as a result of submitting our lives to him. Let's read *Galatians 5:22,23* again and write out the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit:

FOR REFLECTIVE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Read *John 3:5-8* ... Have you been born again?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

ii) Read *Ephesians 2:8-10* ... Do good works have anything at all to do with getting to heaven? Do they help a little?


YES () NO () NOT SURE ()


Why not?

iii) Read *1 John 3:24*. Is it permissible for a Christian to say that he knows he is saved, or is this presumption sinful?

iv) If it's true that "Once saved, we can never be lost", then can we just do as we please? Does it matter if we sin?

b) Something to read – something to watch:

 There are many extended articles and books written on the subject of the Holy Spirit. One of the best concise articles is a series of ten meditations by Pieter Potgieter (Banner of Truth booklet, 46 pages) who writes from Revelation of the vital ministry of the Holy Spirit.

 For a brief description of what it means to be born again, go online and watch a YouTube clip by Tim Keller (Presbyterian, USA): *Tim Keller: How You Know You're Born Again* (Gospel Coalition). Keller explains how new birth "turns on the lights" and warms the heart.

CHAPTER 7

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

(When we meet together)

a) THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'CHURCH':

Church is people – not bricks & mortar. The word as used in Scripture always means an assembly of people called Christians.

For those with an interest in language:

Remember how the New Testament was originally written in 1st century Greek language? To our ear, the Greek word for 'church', which is used over a hundred times in the New Testament, sounds like: *ekklesia* – a composite word made from *ek* = out and *kalein* = to call. Whatever its origins may be, the word *ekklesia* means an assembly of people.

This word (*ekklesia*), or a form of it, is used 62 times in Paul's letters and 21 times in the book of Acts. It's also the word used to record what Jesus said during his very important conversation with Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi (*Matthew 16:18*).

Sometimes this company was small and met in someone's home as for example:

Romans 16:3-5 ... Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.

Other churches were large, such as the one at Jerusalem. Try and estimate how many members belonged to the Jerusalem church. Look up these references, and add up the membership roll:

Acts 1:15 _____

Acts 2:41 _____

Acts 4:4 _____

Acts 6:7 _____

Acts 21:20 _____

Estimated total number of people: _____

Remember 'church' is not a word to describe a building structure no matter how much loved it is or how beautiful it feels; but rather it is a very precious word used to describe a company of people, a company people who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

b) THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH:

Read *Matthew 16:15-18*.

"But what about you?" Jesus asked. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

Focusing on *verse 18*, what does Jesus teach us here about the Christian church?

i) Whose church is it?

ii) Who is building it?

iii) How long will the church survive?

Explanatory note:

On first sight, it may seem as if Jesus is saying that Simon Peter is the foundation on whom the church is built; however, this is certainly NOT the teaching of Christ. His teaching is quite the opposite. Peter's statement (verse 16) revealed the true identity of Jesus Christ, and it is this Christ on whom the church was to be built, i.e. the Christ discovered by Peter.

Read *1 Corinthians 3:11* *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

iv) On whom is it built (i.e. who is the foundation)? _____

This means that in spite of the world ignoring and despising the church, and regardless of a government's persecution of the church, and also taking into consideration the changes that will occur during the last days before Christ's return (such as the rise of the antichrist), there will always be the church on this earth as witness to the living and true God.

c) WHAT DOES THE CHURCH DO?

Or, to put the same question differently: What are the marks of a true church?

The book of Acts gives us glimpses into life in the early church. While not everything that occurred in the early church under the direct ministry of the apostles is repeatable for us (i.e. 1st century church life can't be entirely replicated), nevertheless we see plenty of examples of good church practice.

In the glimpses selected below, what is it we find the church doing?

i) From the day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit to the church –

Acts 2:41,42 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

What marks of the church do we find from this glimpse?

ii) From the day that saw the Jerusalem church set aside deacons to serve tables –

Acts 6:3-4 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

What two things should we allow as priorities for the leaders (apostles) of the church?

iii) From the day that saw the Antioch church engage in their first missionary event –

Acts 13:1-3 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

What marks of good church practice do you see in this event?

- iv) Then, though not from Acts, what do we see from this instruction to any church –
Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching
-
-

- v) Finally, in answer to this question: what does the church do?

The church meets to worship God. Scripture doesn't prescribe worship for us in the exact way that it did for Old Testament believers. But it does give us sufficient guidance in *Ephesians 5:19-20* and *Colossians 3:15-17* to say that the essentials of worship are: praise, prayer and preaching.

As J I Packer says:

“Any local church anywhere that is spiritually alive will undoubtedly take its singing, praying and preaching very seriously indeed, and be jealous for all three.”

d) WHAT DOES A CHURCH LOOK LIKE?

In any good literature, powerful communication will use metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech where two things that are normally unrelated are compared to each other, such as when we might say: “The Bible is gold.” Of course, the Bible is not gold: the Bible is a book and gold is a mineral. But we say “the Bible is gold” to describe how valuable it is to us.

Can you identify the metaphor for the church in each of the following passages of Scripture, and then explain how this helps us describe what the church should look like, or perhaps how it makes us feel when we are part of it?

- i) Please read this longer passage in *1 Corinthians 12:12-27*, where Paul describes the church in a particular way.

What's the metaphor used? The Christian church is like: _____

How does this make you feel when you are part of it?

ii) Read *Revelation 21:1-2,9*, where John describes the church in a particular way.

What's the metaphor used? The Christian church is like: _____

How does this make you feel when you are part of it?

What does this metaphor tell you about Christ's feeling for the church?

iii) Read *Ephesians 2:19-22*, where Paul describes the church in a particular way.

What's the metaphor used? The Christian church is like: _____

How does this make you feel when you are part of it?

What does this metaphor tell you about Christ's feeling for the church?

e) NECESSARY, OR OPTIONAL?

God has committed himself to reach the world through the church. Even in the days of making his covenant of grace with Abraham, or saving Noah's family in the ark, or leading the covenant nation of Israel through the wilderness – that is what he was doing: God had committed himself to reach the world through the church.

Today, we who believe the message of Jesus inherit this covenant of grace. The church is the new Israel, see *Galatians 3:6-7*

*So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.*

That is why we love the church. No, it's not perfect because it's full of sinners. But, nevertheless, if it's God's idea to save the world through the church then we must love the church. In fact, it's not possible to be committed to Christ without being committed to his church. This is why we should commit to the worship, teaching, love and witness of the church, both locally and world-wide.

FOR REFLECTIVE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Are you a member of a local church?


YES () NO () NOT SURE ()


ii) Would you like to be?

YES* () NO () NOT SURE ()

* start by google search "Presbyterian Church near me"

b) Something to read – something to watch:

 There are many extended articles and books written on the subject of the Church. One of the best concise articles is by Daniel Wray (Banner of Truth booklet) who writes a booklet entitled "*The Importance of the Local Church*". Only 15 pages – and very readable.

 For a short, very powerful summary on the value of church, go to: Trip Lee's *You Need the Local Church to be Healthy* YouTube video – 3 minutes well spent.

CHAPTER 8

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

(Using and enjoying Christ's sacraments)

INTRODUCTION:

In the Christian church, we are invited to make regular and joyful use of two special gifts of worship which Christ has given: the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Lord himself has set these two gifts apart and designated them for special purposes.

a) WHAT MAKES THESE SACRAMENTS SPECIAL?

Sacraments are special because they have been given to us personally by Jesus, they remind us of what he has done for us and they are used in building up our faith.

i) They were personally instituted by Jesus

Read *Matthew 28:18-20*

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Baptism is to be administered in the name of _____

Read verses from *Luke 22*

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." ... ¹³ They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. ¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ... ¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

The Lord's Supper was instituted in the middle of the _____ meal, and it was shared between _____ and _____, and was for their benefit.

ii) They are visible signs of God's blessing

For both sacraments: tangible, visible and commonly available elements are used as signs or symbols of God's grace and favour toward his people – elements that can be seen, touched, tasted and smelt.

In Baptism, the element used is _____ (see Acts 8:36-38).

In the Lord's Supper, the elements used are _____ and _____ (see Luke 22:18, 19).

The sacraments are special because in other regular parts of Christian worship such signs are not used. They help us connect physically which helps our human comprehension of the spiritual world.

iii) They encourage believers and strengthen our faith

Each time we take part in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and each time we are part of the congregation at a Baptism service, we should find that our hearts are stirred and faith is strengthened as we are reminded again of what the Lord God has done for us in salvation.

While we are to be baptised ONLY ONCE with water, there is great profit in being present frequently at this sacrament, in order seriously to examine ourselves to see if we have been straying from the ways of the Lord. In this service, we have the opportunity to re-affirm our own vows which we made, or our parents made on our behalf, in earlier days.

There is also much encouragement to be had from meeting together and marveling at God's work in his church in saving others and working through the faithful.

b) THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

i) The origins of baptism

The origins of Christian Baptism are found in the Old Testament in the practice of circumcision.

God saved Abraham, and he did so in the same way he saves people today: by a gracious favour to the undeserving, received through faith. This was God's covenant with Abraham – his promise to save Abraham and to bless his family.

Read from *Genesis 17*

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.

⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised ..."

(v.7) In terms of the length of its duration, this covenant is described as _____;

and is applicable to Abraham as well as all his _____.

(v.10,11) God then gave a sign to Abraham which was to symbolise this covenant. This sign, symbolising God's promise of salvation was _____.

Explanatory note:

We note that the sign was to be applied to all males, both adults and infants. Males received the covenant sign on behalf of the girls and ladies of the home. As is fitting with Hebrew culture of the day, men acted as representatives of the whole family.

(v.12) We note that the sign was to be administered to _____

at the age of _____ as they were born into a covenant family.

ADULT MALES were circumcised as this era started, as they entered into God's covenant;

AND

INFANT MALES were circumcised as they were born to parents within the covenant.

Explanatory note:

It wasn't circumcision that saved Abraham or his family. They were saved by grace, through faith. Circumcision symbolised God's salvation and brought to their minds the fact that they were his people, joined with God in covenant relationship.

ii) The fulfilment of circumcision in N.T. baptism

In this New Testament era children of believers CONTINUE to be included in God's covenant blessings (see Acts 2:39) and therefore they should CONTINUE to receive the covenant sign.

Baptism fulfils circumcision and, in the New Testament era, takes the place of it. Today baptism is the sign which symbolises God's covenant with us.

Read *Colossians 2:11,12* where Paul refers to each covenant sign (old and new):

In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

He takes the spiritual significance of both circumcision and baptism, showing how they each point to the same thing – the work of God's grace in our hearts:

- circumcision points, in particular, to the work of _____ (v.11)
- baptism points, in particular, to _____ (v. 12)

Paul makes an inseparable connection between the two covenant signs of _____ and _____.

Frequently discussed issues regarding baptism (in answer to some FAQs):

1. Baptism is administered with water. Water is known as both an agent of refreshment and of cleansing, indicating that in Christ we may have a refreshed and cleansed life.

Explanatory note:

The New Testament doesn't specify how baptism is to be administered. When Philip took the Ethiopian eunuch *down into the water (Acts 8:38)* we have no information as to how deep the water was, nor how Philip proceeded.

2. Baptism is administered in the name of the TRINITY.

Read *Matthew 28:19* again. Baptism is administered in the name of the -

Explanatory note:

Christians who wish to transfer across denominations and apply for church membership ought not ask for a second baptism. The Presbyterian Church recognises Christian baptism of other denominations. Essentially as baptism symbolises the spiritual work of salvation and this is a once-only event that is complete and therefore never need repeating, baptism too, need only occur once.

3. Baptism is administered to whole families, including children. For examples:

Read *Acts 16:14-15*, whole household of _____

Read *Acts 16:33-34*, whole household of _____

Read *1 Corinthians 1:16*, whole household of _____

Explanatory note:

Baptism saves no one. Neither the adult nor the child who receives baptism is automatically saved. As a child of the covenant, a child's baptism becomes fully effective when he or she responds to the Gospel. Infant baptism anticipates the cleansing of a heart in the experience of conversion.

c) THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

i) Old Testament background

Read the *Luke 22* passage again (see above). God planned all things, particularly the events of this last week prior to Christ's death, that the death of his Son should coincide with the great Jewish feast of remembrance, the _____ (v.13).

This festival always came at the end of the week-long Feast of _____.

The Lord Jesus, in carrying out his Father's will, made careful plans in the arranging of this Passover meal. Therefore, it was a deliberate choice to institute the new service (Lord's Supper) out of the former (Passover). As baptism was to replace circumcision, so the Lord's Supper was intended to replace the feast of Passover.

ii) What is the Lord's Supper?

Let's read from 1 Corinthians 11

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1. A sacrament of thanksgiving:

Thanksgiving continues to be a major theme of the Lord's Supper.

In 1 Corinthians 11:24, what type of prayer does Christ offer? _____

Therefore, each time we meet together for the Lord's Supper, we should give thanks:

2. A sacrament of remembrance:

What word does Jesus use in v. 24 and repeat in v. 25? _____

In other words, the Lord's Supper is a memorial in which we call to remembrance specifically Christ's death. We are to recollect that Christ has died in our place.

From our Luke 22 reading again, what did Christ say about his body? (v. 19)

From our Luke 22 reading again. what did Christ say about his blood? (v. 20)

What is it that we are specifically focusing on in the Lord's Supper? (1 Corinthians 11:26)

3. A sacrament of communion:

The Lord is spiritually present with us when believers participate in faith. Therefore, in celebrating the Lord's Supper we are, in a special way, enjoying fellowship (or communion) with the Lord. This spiritual fellowship strengthens and encourages all faithful participants.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

The cup symbolises our communion (participation) in _____

Bread symbolises our communion (participation) in _____

Explanatory Note:

Some denominations (eg. Roman Catholic) take "communion with Christ" to a degree which is unwarranted by Scripture. They maintain that the expressions "*this is my body*" and "*this is my blood*" must be taken literally, rather than as metaphor. They teach that participants are (after the prayer of the priest has changed the elements) actually eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ.

Taking the plain sense of Scripture, there is no greater compulsion for taking "*this is my body*" in its literal sense than for other expressions of Jesus such as: "*I am the door*" or "*I am the vine*". Obviously, the verb "*is*" has the meaning of "*represents*".

iii) Who should partake?

Only those whose faith is in Christ. For example, this is the usual offer made in Presbyterian churches (or words similar):

"The Lord has prepared his table for all who love him and trust in him alone for their salvation. Therefore, if you are united with Christ and in fellowship with this or any other branch of the Church, you are invited to come and participate in this celebration of the Lord's Supper."

Read *1 Corinthians 11:28,29*

²⁸ *Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.*

What ought we to do prior to taking the Lord's Supper?

What must we avoid?

FOR REFLECTIVE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Have you ever been baptised?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

ii) Have you ever taken part in the Lord's Supper?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

b) Further reading:

There are many extended articles and books written on the subject of the sacraments. For further reading on the subject of baptism, we recommend the following:

- *Biblical Baptism* by Arthur Gunn (G.W. Moore)
- *Infant Baptism* by John Sartelle (Presbyterian and Reformed)

We recommend reading Jim Packer's *Concise Theology* and especially the chapters entitled "Baptism" and "The Lord's Supper".

CHAPTER 9

THE FUTURE

(What we can look forward to)

Introduction:

The best is yet to come. Meanwhile, there's so much to do here and now. Paul puts it like this: I know that the best is to come ("dying is gain"), but I have so much more I'd like to do for Christ before that happens ("living is Christ") – see from *Philippians 1* ...

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

In this final study together, we look at what lies ahead and endeavor to determine what difference knowing all this makes to living our lives for Christ now.

Will we die prior to Christ's 2nd Coming? Or will he come while we're still alive? Who knows, but God. Let's assume that we are to die before the second coming of the Lord. Should this be the case, then there are four main events to face.

a) DEATH

From both the Old Testament and the New we see clearly in both parts of Scripture the inescapable facts of life and death. Reading both together, what do they inform us of life expectancy and our death?

Psalm 90:3-6, 9-10

³ You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." ⁴ A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. ⁵ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning: ⁶ In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered. ⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. ¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

James 4:13-14

¹³ Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

b) LIFE AFTER DEATH

What follows death? Are we just annihilated into nothingness, or is there meaningful existence? Where do you expect to be after you die?

From both the Old Testament and the New we see clearly in both parts of Scripture an answer to that question. Reading both together, can you identify where you expect to be after death?

Ecclesiastes 12:1, 5-7

¹ Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"⁵ when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets. ⁶ Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, ⁷ and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

2 Corinthians 5:1-4

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

c) THE RETURN OF CHRIST & THE GREAT RESURRECTION

Luke teaches us that we should expect Christ's return. Let's read Acts 1:11

Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.

Paul describes what will happen at the return of Christ and does so clearly twice. Reading both together, can you identify what will occur simultaneously with the return of Christ?

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

¹⁵ ... we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery ... ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

d) ETERNITY:

What things will be present in our heavenly life in eternity, and what things will be absent?

Revelation 21:22-27

²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

(present) _____

(absent) _____

SUMMARY:

Most of this subject is well summarised by qns 37 and 38, Westminster Shorter Catechism:

37. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, rest in their graves until the resurrection.

38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

At the resurrection, Christ will immediately raise up in glory all believers; he will openly acknowledge and acquit them in the judgment, graciously rewarding them according to their works of faith, and they will enter into the full enjoyment of God for all eternity.

e) MEANWHILE

The "meanwhile" is an important element of studying future things. Meanwhile, how we are to live? How are we to grow as Christians? What are the gifts God has provided, which, as we make diligent use of them, will enable us to make progress in our Christian life? Older writers called these gifts "the means of grace". In fact, this phrase is still in the profession-of-faith

vows of several churches: for example, "Do you promise to make diligent use of the means of grace?"

So then, what are the things God has provided by which we grow?

i) THE BIBLE

The Lord has given us the great gift of the Holy Bible. It is the primary means through which he speaks to us and reveals himself to us. When wisely used it becomes our 'daily food'.

Q. What does *Psalms 119:105* teach us about the Bible and its usefulness to the Christian?

The Berean Christians have left us an inspiring example to follow:

Acts 17:11

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

ii) PRAYER

The Lord has also given us the great gift of prayer. It is the way we speak with him and draw strength and other blessings from him.

R.A. Torrey reminds us that prayer is 'having an audience with God'. If it can be said that the Bible is the Christian's daily food, then it can also be said that prayer is the Christian's 'lifeline' to the Lord.

The Lord Jesus, while on earth, was in the habit of prayer:

Mark 1:35

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

The Lord Jesus taught that we ought constantly to be engaged in prayer:

Luke 18:1

Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Q: What does *Colossians 4:2* teach about the Christian's attitude to prayer?

iii) THE LORD'S DAY

Q: What is the main teaching of the 4th Commandment? (Read *Exodus 20:8-11*)

In the New Testament, we see that from the day of Christ's resurrection, the Christians met for worship on the first day of the week rather than on the seventh. The basic pattern of one day in seven remains.

Remember that the Lord's Day was given to us for our benefit here and now, and for our preparation for our 'Sabbath rest' in glory.

Some of these Lord's Day benefits include:

- worshipping with the Lord's people,
- attending to preaching from the Word of God,
- participation in the Sacraments,
- encouragement of one another.

iv) CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Obviously, there is some overlap here with point (c). "Fellowship" means sharing our lives together, as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a gift of God given for our growth and our encouragement.

There is much benefit as we learn to share together the joys, the blessings and the problems of our Christian life.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us:

Hebrews 10:25

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 as you see the Day approaching.

v) SERVICE FOR OTHERS

The Lord has given every Christian gifts to use for the good of fellow believers, and also for the good of everyone else.

Galatians 6:10

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.

As we use our time, talents and treasure (money) for the use of others, so we are strengthened and encouraged.

Q: What does the Lord expect of our income? Read *1 Corinthians 16:2*

Q: What does the Lord expect of ourselves and all we possess? Read *Romans 12:1,2*

FOR REFLECTIVE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Are you afraid of death?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

ii) If you were to die tonight do you know for sure that you would enter heaven?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

iii) Read carefully the teaching of Jesus in *John 5:24-30* and itemise below all that he teaches about future events.

What changes do you expect (in yourself) at the moment of the resurrection of the dead?

b) Further reading:

If you want to take this subject any further, two of the most helpful books to purchase are:

The Bible and the Life Hereafter by William Hendriksen (Banner of Truth)

The Momentous Event by W.J. Grier (Banner of Truth)

Author:

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