



ON THIS ROCK

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS
by Keith Glasgow

“On this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18)

Foundational Truths for the Christian Life

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He returned to Australia and gave his life fully to Christ at age 21.

In 1971 Keith moved to New Zealand where he met and married Marg. For eighteen years He and Marg served the Lord in itinerant evangelism. In 1996 they returned to Australia to take up a position as Senior Pastor at Canterbury Gardens Community Church and then, after ten years, moved to Edge Church where Keith served as Senior Pastor.

On This Rock

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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Preface

My parents were missionaries in Brazil for many years, and on one occasion when visiting them, my father pointed across the street and said to me: "Look at the large crack running down the side of that house! Some builders here do not lay proper foundations". The crack was dangerously wide and long, and workmen had dug away the shallow foundations at one end of the house and were proceeding to jack up the sagging walls. My father explained that a thriving business in Brazil at the time was to repair cracked houses in this fashion, pouring a new concrete foundation to keep them from falling down.

For Christians there is great value in building our lives on a solid foundation of Bible truth. Unfortunately, without that biblical basis, our beliefs and way of thinking can be led astray and result in life choices that are not wise or good. It is always healthy to look again at the fundamentals. Even if we are established Christians, it is wise to go back to the basics and think through the essential truths on which we stand.

'Biblical foundations' goes through some of these basics of the Christian life, both in terms of what we believe and the way we should behave. It is designed for use as an individual or group setting. It is suited for church membership classes or could be used in one-to-one discipleship.

How to use this study

The course is designed around icons which represent different aspects of each lesson.

Four icons constitute the main study:



In focus - A brief summary of the lesson



Thinking it Through - The main teaching on the subject



Insight - Discussion questions for groups or individuals



Action - Personal application for life

The remaining three icons represent extra material that may be of interest to the individual student, or be referred to by a group leader.



Side Note - A related topic



Snap Shot - A closer look at one point



Digging Deeper - An in-depth study relevant to the main lesson

I. The way to get right with God



In focus

The message of the Bible could be summarized in the words "Getting right with God" (Romans 5:8-9). Deep in our hearts, most of us are aware that things are not right between God and us. God is a personal being and His purpose in creating us was that we might live in a personal relationship with Him. The experiences of guilt, the need to be loved, the desire to find God, and the sense of emptiness, are all symptoms of a broken relationship with God. They point to the deepest need of all - the need to get right with God.



Thinking it Through

A doctor can only help people who admit their need and are willing to take the prescribed remedy. God, the Great Physician, is powerless to help us until we honestly face up to our true condition.

THE FIRST STEP - ADMIT OUR NEED

1. WE NEED FORGIVENESS

Every person has done wrong, and is guilty before Him - "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God's nature is so holy (perfectly pure) that even though He is loving and kind, our sin creates an automatic rift between us.

2. WE NEED FREEDOM

When we do things we know to be wrong, it proves that we are under the controlling power of inner desires that move us to sin. In the words of Jesus 'we are slaves to our sinful nature' (John 8:34).

The Bible helps us to understand our slavery to sin in these words, "*I am ... sold as a slave to sin, for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For ... the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing*" (Romans 7:14, 18, 19).

Getting right with God involves more than being forgiven for past sins, it also involves being set free from the power that our sinful nature has over us. Jesus Christ is the only One who is able to free us. He gives a new power to rise above temptation and self-centredness (John 8:36).

3. WE NEED FULFILMENT

One of the symptoms of being separated from God is emptiness. We were made by God to have a personal relationship with Him and nothing in this world is able to take His place (John 7:37; 10:10).



Side Note

GETTING RIGHT WITH GOD IS NOT EARNED BY THE WAY WE LIVE.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not of works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

If a thief pleaded guilty before a court but asked for pardon because he had decided never to steal again, the judge would be likely to say, "*Your new resolve is good, but that doesn't change the fact that you have broken the law. Justice demands that punishment be given.*" All our good works, generous acts and upright living will never wash away those sins which we have already committed.

"He saved us, NOT because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy" (Titus 3:5).



Insight

What do we learn about sin from the following verses?

James 4:17

James 2:10

Isaiah 59:2

1 John 3:4

What happens to the person who dies without getting right with God? (John 3:36; 2 Thessalonians 1:9)



Thinking it Through

THE SECOND STEP - BE WILLING TO CHANGE

The rift in our relationship with God cannot be patched up by an outward act of getting closer to God (e.g. going to church, praying, baptism and communion). The Bible teaches that we must repent; that is, be willing to change direction from the heart and begin following God's way. *"All must repent of their sins and turn to God, and prove they have changed by the good things they do"* (Acts 26:20 NLT); *"Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the Lord that He may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for He will forgive generously"* (Isaiah 55:7).

THE THIRD STEP - TRUST IN JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the only Way for us to get right with God. The Bible shows us that *"... there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity - the man Christ Jesus"* (1 Timothy 2:5 NLT).

The sin which separates us from God and makes us guilty before Him, has been dealt with fully by Jesus Christ. We deserve death, but Jesus took our place in order to offer us the free gift of forgiveness and life. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was a sacrifice. He came into the world for the very purpose of bearing the punishment we deserve for our sin, and His death paid it in full. He was not defeated by death, but rose again and lives today as Lord and Saviour. *"He was handed over to die because of our sins, and He was raised to life to make us right with God"* (Romans 4:25 NLT).



Snap Shot

God's holiness and God's grace

In order to fully understand the gospel, and respond to it appropriately, we need to understand two fundamental characteristics of God's nature.

God's holiness - God must judge sin. Until sin is forgiven, there is no possibility of a personal relationship with God, no matter who we are or what we have or haven't done.

God's grace - God's love is free and unconditional. He does not require anything of us in order to love us. We don't have to earn His love or deserve His forgiveness. He offers the gift of eternal life purely because, in His love for us, He has made the way possible through the death of His Son.



Snap Shot

HOW DO WE TRUST IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST?

The Bible says, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21).

The idea behind calling on the name of the Lord, is that of a person crying out to Jesus Christ from a position of helplessness. It means to rely on the Lord Jesus alone to do what we cannot do ourselves.

We cannot get right with God ourselves, nor can we raise ourselves from the dead and make our own way to Heaven. Only Jesus Christ can save us, and He promises to make us right with God when we trust in Him. "Everyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame" (Romans 10:11).

Trusting in Jesus Christ involves a complete and total commitment to Him as our own personal Saviour and Master.



Insight

1. God's justice demands that the penalty of sin be paid. If we paid our own penalty for sin what would we incur? (Revelation 20:11-15, Hebrews 9:27).

2. According to Romans 5:8-9, what did God show us, and what did Christ do for us?

3. Why can we trust Jesus to save us from God's judgment?

* Because of who He is

Who is He?

John 1:1

I Timothy 2:5

* Because of what He did

What did He do for us?

I Peter 3:18

Ephesians 2:13

Romans 4:25

4. How do we trust in Jesus Christ to be our personal Saviour (John 1:12)?



Action

WHAT TO PRAY

(Read through the prayer one sentence at a time, and check that you agree before praying it in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ:

Dear Lord Jesus,

I admit that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness.

I am willing to turn from my sins, and I trust You to be my Saviour.

Please forgive me and cleanse me of all my guilt.

I believe that You are God, and that You died for my sins and then rose again.

I now invite You to come into my heart and life. With God's help I will follow and obey You as Master of my life.

Thank You for suffering and dying on the cross for me. Amen.

Signed _____

Date _____

Place _____



Digging Deeper

A closer look at two aspects of getting right with God

1. What God does FOR us - JUSTIFICATION

When a person is 'right with God' they are not only forgiven of all their sins, but they are actually made righteous before God.

The word justification means to be 'declared righteous'. The responsibility of a judge is to justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. But God justifies the wicked! As our judge, God pronounces His verdict: He declares that even the most sinful person who trusts in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour stands before His holy presence as righteous! The Apostle Paul wrote: "*Who shall condemn us now? It is God who justifies*" (Romans 8:33). Though "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*", Paul goes on to say "*they are now justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 3:23-24).

God does not ignore our sin or let us off. He says clearly that He will not clear the guilty (Exodus 34:7). How then can God remain a just judge and not condemn those who have broken His law (Romans 3:26)?

Unrighteous people who trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour are declared righteous. The righteousness of Christ is transferred to them, similar to a financial transaction. If you were declared bankrupt, and then a wealthy relative paid all your outstanding accounts as well as transferring a million dollars to your bank account, your poverty would be replaced with his wealth. In the same way we are all bankrupt before God (lacking in righteousness), but, through the death of Jesus Christ, His perfect righteousness is put to our account.

The righteousness we receive from Christ has nothing to do with the way we live, but it is God's righteousness transferred to our account. It relates to how we stand before God, not how we behave (though a justified person is called to live a righteous life).

Justification is:

- * Through faith alone - Romans 3:28; Gal 3:24

God does not accept our faith instead of righteousness. Nor is faith itself in any sense the ground of our justification. Faith is the means by which God bestows the gift of righteousness.

- * Not by works or human achievement - Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:11
- * Based on the saving work of Christ when He died for us and rose again - Romans 3:24
- * A declaration that God Himself makes and cannot be reversed - Romans 8:33

2. What God does IN us - NEW BIRTH

Justification takes place before the throne of God (*What God does FOR us*), but New Birth takes place in our inner beings (*What God does IN us*).

We enter this world with a natural life passed on through our parents, but without any spiritual life (no relationship with God). In Ephesians we read that, before receiving life from Jesus Christ, we are dead in sins (Ephesians 2:1,5). In John 3:5-6 the Lord reveals that natural birth (being 'born of water') is not sufficient. We also need to be born again, or be born of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and the Word of God combine to bring about new birth in an individual (John 3:5-8; 1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18). Simultaneous with new birth there is an inner spiritual renewal and cleansing (Titus 3:4-5; Ephesians 5:26). Thus the Christian receives a new nature through the new birth, enabling a life of righteousness and love (2 Corinthians 5:17).

According to 1 John, which was written to assure genuine Christians that they have eternal life, those who have received new birth show evidence of it in the following ways :

- * They do not continue to sin as a way of life - 1 John 3:9; 5:18
- * They love other Christians with God's self-giving love - 1 John 3:14; 4:7
- * They believe the truth about Jesus being Christ, the Son of God - 1 John 5:1

2. *Being sure you are right with God*



In focus

To have assurance of salvation is to be absolutely confident that we are saved from God's judgment and that, when we die we will go immediately to heaven.

There are those who are not right with God, yet assume they are (Titus 1:16). They have a false sense of security. Others have a right relationship with God but do not enjoy that confidence (1 John 3:19-20). For both, it is important to see that a Christian's assurance is not based on inner feelings or personal experiences. It is based on what Christ has done as our Saviour, and on what God has said in His Word.



Thinking it Through

Having trusted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, God has given us three things upon which we can base the assurance that we are right with Him and will never experience eternal judgment.

1. The truth of God's Word

The Bible is God's Word and can be trusted. It has many plain statements concerning the full acceptance by God and the unchanging position of those who trust in Jesus Christ. In 1 John 5:10b, those who do not believe God's Word are said to call Him a liar!

2. The inner confirmation of the Holy Spirit

Although the ministry of the Spirit in a believer's life is a subjective experience, it is put forward in the New Testament as confirmation that a person is a Child of God. *"For His Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children"* (Romans 8:16).

3. The evidence of a changed life

When a person is put right with God through faith in Christ, they receive a new nature from Him, and, with the presence and power of the indwelling Spirit, have all they need to live to please Him. The changes that inevitably occur are proof that the person has become a Child of God. *"Those who have been born into God's family do not make a practice of sinning, because God's life (nature) is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they are children of God"* (1 John 3:9 NLT).



Insight

1. Assurance is based on God's Word

a. What has Christ's death and resurrection accomplished for the Christian (Romans 4:25) and what does this guarantee those who put their faith in Him (Romans 5:1-2,9)?

b. What does God do with our sins when we trust in Christ (Colossians 2:13-14; Hebrews 10:17)?

c. According to God's Word, what is our relationship with God once we put our faith in Jesus Christ (1 John 3:1-2)?

What can separate us from that relationship (John 10:28-29)?

d. What truths do you find in Ephesians 1:11-14 that give assurance of salvation?

e. What can you see in 1 John 5:11-13 that gives confidence that eternal life is something we can have now, not just in the future?

2. Assurance is based on confirmation by the Holy Spirit

a. According to Romans 8:14-16 how can Christians know with certainty that they are children of God?

b. What does the Spirit do in us that shows we are indwelt by Him (Romans. 5:5; 1 John 2:20, 27)?

3. Assurance is based on a changed life

a. How do the following verses show that the way a Christian lives should give assurance of being right with God?

1 John 3:9, 14

Ephesians 2:10

1 John 4:7-8, 12



Thinking it Through

A passage that was written to give assurance is 1 John 3:19-24. John's first letter is written to a church that had been troubled by false teachers. These men had taught that the way to enter into union with God was by an initiation of special knowledge, which led some in that church to think they were not Children of God. John writes his letter to give confidence to the true believers while at the same time expose those who were not genuine Christians.

In chapter 3:19-24 he refers to their lack of confidence by saying that their hearts condemned them. He writes that they should 'set their hearts at rest' and 'have confidence before God'.



Snap Shot

A genuine believer cannot lose their salvation.

1. Once we are right with God, we are kept from falling away (1 Peter 1:4-5; Jude 24; Romans 8:35-39).
2. Jesus taught we cannot lose our salvation.

- a. John 6:38-40
- b. John 10:27-30
- c. John 5:24



Side Note

There are a few passages in the Bible that seem to teach that Christians can lose their salvation. These passages are to be viewed in their context, and understood in light of the clear and indisputable passages. The overwhelming truth of eternal security in the Bible forces a deeper look at the obscure and difficult verses that seem to teach otherwise.

The Bible has a profound unity, where each truth is taught consistently throughout the whole. All the books and letters that make up the Bible were written under the direction of the One Divine Author: God's Spirit.

For example, the Bible clearly teaches the deity of Christ. Therefore we must believe this, even though there may be problem passages which, at a glance, seem to teach something different.

So it is with eternal security. The plain and clear teaching in the Bible forces us to interpret the less clear and difficult verses accordingly.

He was able to encourage them in this way because they showed three evidences of being indwelt by God's Spirit -

1. Obedience to God's Word - they obeyed His commands (did what pleased Him),

2. Belief in the truth about Jesus - they believed in the Name of the Son of God,

3. Love for other Christians - they loved one another

These three evidences of genuine faith occur many times through the book of 1 John to both encourage the true Christian and expose the false.



Action

Share with someone what you have discovered about your relationship with God from this lesson.

1. Have you come to the place where you know that you are right with God, or are you still on the way?

2. When you stand before God on the day of judgment, why would God accept you?

3. How do you know that God loves you?



Digging Deeper

Eternal Security

You may know of a person who made a commitment to Jesus Christ, but later threw away their faith. Others say they are Christians but you see no evidence of God in their lives. As Paul said: *"They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him"* (Titus 1:16a).

The Bible teaches that genuine Christians will never lose their salvation.

At the point a person trusts Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, a number of truths all combine to assure them that their acceptance by God and relationship with Him are secure for all eternity. The most significant of these are:

A person is saved by grace, not works

If a person was once saved, then we must say that the only basis upon which they were saved, was the grace God. Their salvation could not be earned by good works or their own righteousness (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7). If then that person goes back to sinful living and we say they have lost their salvation, we have moved the basis upon which they were saved from grace to works.

If we say that a person has lost their salvation, we would be making their standing before God conditional upon their works. Christians must do good works, but these are evidence of genuine faith, not a condition for it (James 2:17,24). The Biblical view of grace cannot hold out to the sinner a free gift and a condition of works at the same time. If salvation is by works, it is not by grace. The two are mutually exclusive (Romans 11:6).

We are chosen in Christ before the world began

"He chose us in Him before the creation of the world ... He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:4-6). God's sovereign choice is one of the most positive statements in the Bible on eternal security. How can we be chosen by God in eternity past, to end up only being chosen by Him for a few years in life! Can you and I, or Satan, or anyone in all creation thwart the sovereign purposes of God? If saved means we are chosen, then we have to be chosen forever, and therefore saved forever. Would God choose you, only to lose you (1 Thessalonians 1:4)?

We are justified by God

The book of Romans shows that our righteousness is not acceptable with God. But God's righteousness is transferred to our account when we trust in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. We are declared righteous, not because we have measured up, but as a gift of His grace. *"They are justified (declared righteous) freely by His grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"* (Romans 3:24).

Salvation for the justified person is viewed as something that has happened in the past and will be completed in the future: *"Those whom He predestined He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified"* (Romans 8:30). We are not glorified yet, but in the eternal mind of God we are seen to be. Now that our sin has been put away, and our Lord intercedes for us (Romans 8:33,34) and nothing in all creation can separate us from His love (Romans 8:35-39), there is no ground whatever for a belief that salvation is probational (Romans 5:10-11).

We are brought into a living union with God

At the point when we trust in Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour, we are Baptized by His Spirit into the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). We become part of *"His body, the fullness of Him..."* (Ephesians 1:23). We are *"created in Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 2:10), and our life is *"hidden with Christ in God"* (Colossians 3:3). We are *"members of His body"* (Ephesians 5:30-32). We are linked in a permanent, vital union with Him.

We are sealed permanently by His Spirit

According to Ephesians 1:13, when we hear the gospel, and believe in Him (Jesus Christ), we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This seal speaks of ownership, and *"is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance"* (v. 14). The Holy Spirit has been given as a permanent gift, and so we need never fear that we may lose His presence within us (*"to be with you forever"* John 14:16,17).

We are born again and receive eternal life

New birth and receiving eternal life are saying the same thing. Both terms speak of the point in time when the Holy Spirit first enters and transforms an individual. In contrast to natural birth, our supernatural rebirth is permanent (I Peter 1:23 - *"born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God"*). If we lose our salvation, what becomes of our new birth? Can we be unborn-again?

We are kept by God

When we sin, our relationship with God is affected, but not completely broken. We *"have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous"* (I John 2:2). We are still His sons and daughters, and He is still our Father. Despite the sin, our relationship with Him is not severed because our Advocate, the Lord Jesus, defends us before God. The Lord Jesus stands up on our behalf (as our Advocate) and intercedes for us (Romans 8:34). He continues to save and keep us in this way right through our lives.

The Lord's work as Saviour is not finished when we first trust Him to forgive us and come into our lives. He is saving us every moment of every day, and will do so until He appears *"a second time ... to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him"* (Hebrews 9:28). If some can lose their salvation, then there is a point where our Saviour's role as intercessor and advocate is no longer effective. If He has lost them, He is not a very good Saviour!

Jesus said: *"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day"* (John 6:39). In the context of John chapter 6, Jesus is contrasting the superficial adherents who sought Him with wrong motives (v.26) with those whom the Father draws to Him (v.44).

Jesus prayed in His High-priestly prayer in John 17: *"Holy Father, keep them in Your Name ... keep them from the evil one"*. God is *"able to keep you from falling and to present You before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy"* (Jude 24). Paul was so convinced of God's keeping power, he said: *"I know whom I have believed (i.e.: that He is trustworthy) and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day"* (2 Timothy 1:12). In Philippians 1:6 we read that God will complete the good work He has begun in us. God *"will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God ... is faithful"* (I Corinthians 1:8,9). Surely we can trust the one who is the *"Shepherd and Overseer of our souls"* (I Peter 2:25)!

3. *The Bible - God's Word*



In focus

The Bible is a library of sixty-six books written by about forty different authors, and contains a wide variety of literary styles. Although much of the Bible is history, it is 'sacred history', as it records God's dealings with the human race, and in doing so, it reveals His will and His truth.



Thinking it Through

The Bible is the Word of God

The purpose of the Bible is to reveal truth about God that we would not otherwise know. It was written in such a way that people in all times and in a wide variety of cultural settings can understand and believe its message.

The word 'Bible' is derived from the Greek word "biblios" meaning "a book". The Bible is the Word of God. The human authors were led by God's Spirit to pen the very words that God desired, causing their writings to be inspired (God breathed). Thus God is the real author, though He used human instruments (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:2).

The central theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ. Only as we understand who Jesus is, and why He came into the world, can we correctly interpret any passage of the Bible. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, though parts of Daniel and Ezra were written in Aramaic; the New Testament was written in Greek.

The Bible does not contain the Word of God, the Bible is the Word of God.



Snap Shot

The Authority of God's Word

Because the Bible is God's Word, it has supreme authority. It is the only guide we have for what we are to believe and how we should live. "If it is a word from God, it has authority over people. For behind every word that anybody utters stands the person who speaks it. It is the speaker himself (his character, knowledge and position) who determines how people regard his words, so God's Word carries God's authority. It is because of who He is that we believe what He has said" (John R. W. Stott).



Insight

1. What does the Bible say about itself?

2 Timothy 3:16

Hebrews 4:12

1 Peter 1:23

2 Peter 1:21

2. What was Jesus view of Scripture?

John 17:17

Matthew 5:18, 12:40, 24:35

3. How did Jesus use Scripture in the following situations?

Mark 7:6-9

Mark 12:24-27

Luke 10:25-28

Matthew 4:10

4. What does 2 Timothy 3:16 tell us about God's purpose in giving us His Word?

5. What is God's Word able to do in our lives?

Psalms 119:11

Psalms 119:105

Psalms 119:99-100

Romans 10:17

1 Peter 2:2

Romans 15:4



Thinking it Through

The Word of God is designed to change us. We are "*transformed by the renewal of our minds*" (Romans 12:2). The world around us and our sinful nature within, are constantly pressuring us into thinking and living in a way that is not pleasing to God. We will only overcome this pressure when, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit, we fill our minds with God's Word.



Side Note

Spending time with God

Many Christians can witness to the value of carving out a small period of time each day in order to read God's Word and pray. It is a devotional time where you renew and maintain your relationship with God.

Find a quiet place and set a regular time so you form a habit.

WHAT TO DO:

a. Look to God - begin by asking God to open your heart and mind to what He wants to say to you through His Word.

b. Read the Bible - choose a small passage every day so that you can read it without haste, meditate on what it says, and apply it to your life. It is not to be Bible study, but rather a special time alone with God where you allow Him to speak to you personally.

c. Write a journal - there may be only one thought that you feel God has impressed on you. Record it in your journal or diary, and write down how you are going to apply it to your life.

There is also great value in writing out a prayer response to what God has shown you in His Word.

If you use special reading notes that go along with your Bible reading, they should only be read after you have allowed God to speak to you through His Word alone.

d. Pray to God - remember that you are conversing with a friend. Start with worship and appreciation. Follow with confession of any area in your life that God would be unhappy about. Then recommit your life to Christ and trust His Spirit to fill you. Pray then for your needs, and the needs of others.

How can we renew our minds with God's Word?

1. Hear God's Word

The purpose of Bible teachers in the church is to strengthen faith, and lay a foundation of truth that will enable Christians to stand firm. A teachable spirit is necessary in order for the hearer to benefit from the teaching: *"Humbly receive the Word planted in you"* (James 1:21).

2. Read God's Word

"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it" (Revelation 1:3).

3. Study God's Word

"They ... examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

4. Memorize God's Word

"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts" (Deuteronomy 6:6; Psalm 37:31).

5. Meditate on God's Word

"I meditate on your precepts and consider Your ways" (Psalm 119:15; Philippians 4:8).



Digging Deeper

Why can we trust the Bible to be the Word of God?

The Bible as we have it today, can be trusted to be a faithful and accurate translation from the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

The renowned Hebrew scholar Henry Green said of the Bible "it may be safely said that no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted". The Hebrew scribes were fanatics about accuracy. Scribes were called 'Sopherim' which means 'Counters'. They used a variety of counting techniques to counter check the accuracy of the text. If the count did not match, the scroll was discarded!

Sir Frederick Kenyon, former director of the British Museum and an expert on ancient manuscripts wrote "both the authenticity and general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."

In the first century every church wanted their own copy of each New Testament book, causing a vast number of ancient copies to be circulating. Of these there remain over 5,000 copies of the New Testament today (either in part or in whole) some dating back as far as 100 years after the original books were written.

Also, substantial parts of the New Testament can be confirmed from quotations by early church leaders in the second century. In fact the whole New Testament minus only 11 verses could be put together just from the letters and writings of the early church fathers. With such large numbers of copies being available, we can trust today's New Testament to be an accurate copy of the original.

What makes the Bible unique?

The Bible is a prophetic book

Prophecy is a prediction that has been inspired by God, and relates to events future to the time of the actual prediction. Bible prophecy is unique and gives great credibility to the claim that the Bible is the Word of God.

True prophecy must be:

- a. beyond human foreknowledge or influence
- b. detailed and specific
- c. not ambiguous
- d. exactly fulfilled

There is an estimated 1817 prophecies throughout the Bible, and 191 of these relate to the coming of the Jewish Messiah (Christ). They were recorded hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Here are a few examples that were fulfilled accurately and completely with the coming, life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 7:14 *"The **virgin** will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel"*

Micah 5:2 *"But you, **Bethlehem** Ephrathah ... out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from eternity"*

Psalms 22:16 *"They **pierced My hands and My feet**"*

Psalms 22:18 *"They **divide My garments among them and cast lots for My clothing**"*

Is The New Testament Reliable?

There are four historical records of the life and teaching of Jesus, with no evidence of collaboration in order to fabricate a story. Each gospel stands alone as an independent witness to the events, while at the same time verifying the others.

The events which are recorded in the gospels were not done in secret. Many of those who opposed Jesus Christ, and later became enemies of the church, could not deny the historical facts of His life and miracles, even though they desperately wanted to! This is especially true of the account of the resurrection.

Even though the gospels were written many years after the events, the apostles would have no problem writing an account of them. They were recording amazing happenings which could not easily be forgotten. Actually, the time-lag lends weight to the validity of the gospels, as lies become distorted over time and change in the face of unforeseen questioning, but the truth of an eye-witness report never changes.

There are some who find it hard to believe that the apostles could remember the exact words of Jesus over the period of 30 to 60 years before writing them down.

However:

- a. There is no reason why these sayings could not have been written down in a temporary form.
- b. The writers did not have to rely on their own memories alone.
- c. The apostles were constantly preaching, teaching and conversing about the things Jesus said and did, reinforcing their memories.
- d. The common way for rabbis (teachers) to instruct their disciples at that time was by means of memory. Even today Eastern people show a great aptitude for learning by rote.
- e. The Holy Spirit of God brought to their remembrance the things they heard and saw (John 14:26).

Finally, the Bible is unique because it has a living quality like no other book. When you read it for yourself and compare it with other religious or holy writings, it soon becomes evident that the Bible stands apart as quite different. The Bible explains why in Hebrews 4:12 - "The Word of God is living". This results in people sensing God speaking to them as they read it. And this is to be expected when it is understood that the Bible is "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16).

4. God - A Unique Being



In focus

The Bible teaches us that only one God exists and He is unique: *"I am God and there is none like Me"* (Isaiah 46:9). He is described as the only true God, the Creator of everything, the Living God, and the One who rules over the universe. He is awesome in majesty, and He alone is worthy of our worship.



Thinking it Through

What does the Bible reveal about God?

1. There is only one God

Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5; 1 Timothy 2:5.

Though the Bible refers to other 'gods', it is merely acknowledging what some people believe, and in no way supports the possibility of the existence of other beings who are worthy to be worshipped as God.

2. God exists in three persons.

Alongside the clear teaching that there is only one God, the Bible shows God to be a triune being. Although the word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible, the concept certainly is. It is not a belief in the existence of 3 gods who are one in purpose, but of one God who is revealed to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three 'persons' are all one in nature (their essence is God). But all three are distinct persons in their own right, with their own intellect, emotions and will. This concept is implicit in the Old Testament (For example, the Hebrew word for God, "Elohim", is used in it's plural form - also the use of "us" and "we" in Genesis 1:26, 3:22). The New Testament explicitly teaches God to be a triune being.

The Bible teaches:

- ♦ The Father is God - 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Peter 1:17
- ♦ The Holy Spirit is God - Acts 5:3,4; 2 Corinthians 3:17
- ♦ The Son is God - 1 John 5:20; Titus 2:13; John 1:1; John 20:26-28; Colossians 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:8.

The Bible also teaches:

- ♦ The Father is distinct from the Son - Luke 3:22
- ♦ The Son is distinct from the Spirit - John 15:26
- ♦ The Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father - John 14:25-26.

All God's attributes are attributed to each of the three persons of the Trinity. Their names are joined together in the baptismal confession (Matthew 28:19) and in the apostolic benediction (2 Corinthians 13:14).



Side Note

The Trinity

The Trinity is a difficult concept to understand with the human mind, but that does not make it untrue. It is illustrated in the scientific understanding of light.

Light passing through a prism breaks up into the colours of the spectrum. If you consider the three primary colours of red, yellow and blue, each one of these are different, but all three are the very same light that entered the prism on the other side. Thus we have one light revealed in three colours, illustrating the one God existing in three persons.



Insight

1. How can a person know there is a God, even if they do not have a Bible to read? (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19, 20, 2:15).

2. Why do you think it is difficult for people to understand what God is like?



Thinking it Through

What is God like?

Attributes are the characteristics of God that describe what kind of being He is. God has some unique characteristics that are His alone. Others of His attributes are qualities that He shares with others.

God's Unique Attributes:

1. God is eternal (Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 57:15; Exodus 3:14). God has no beginning or end. He is the eternal "I Am".

2. God is infinite (1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 145:3; Acts 17:24). This means that God has no boundaries or limits. He cannot be contained, nor can He be measured.

3. God is self-existent. He has life in Himself (John 5:26), and was not created, but has always existed as God (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1).

4. God is all-powerful. He has all power and all authority to do whatever He chooses (Matthew 19:26; Revelation 19:6).

5. God is all-knowing. He has complete knowledge of everything (Psalm 139:1-4; 147:4-5; Matthew 11:27). Nothing can be added to His knowledge, nothing can either surprise Him or deceive Him. He knows the future as well as the past.

6. God is all-present. God is not limited to one place or time. He is everywhere at all times (Psalm 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:23-24).

7. God is changeless. He may change in actions or dealings with people, but His eternal character and purposes never change (Psalm 102:27; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17).

8. God is self sufficient (Acts 17:24-25). He needs nothing at all for His own existence or to do His will. He has no deficiencies and no needs.

9. God is sovereign (Ephesians 1:11,21; Isaiah 40:13,14). As God, He has the right to do whatever He pleases (Romans 9:15). The whole universe and the smallest event are all under His complete control. He works with all events good and evil, and with all people, to fulfil His own Divine purpose.

God's Moral Attributes

1. Love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10; Ephesians 2:4,5). God's love is sacrificial, self-giving and seeks the highest good for the ones loved. It is unconditional and is not dependent on the loveliness or responsiveness of the person.

2. Wrath (Colossians 3:5-7; Romans 2:4-6). God's wrath is not emotional anger. It is His holy displeasure and settled antagonism to all evil. It is an expression of His holiness and justice.

3. Grace (Romans 4:4-5; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8; Titus 2:11). God freely bestows His unconditional love and undeserved favour toward others, even His enemies



Side Note

We would not be able to know anything about God unless He revealed Himself to us. But He has clearly revealed Himself to us in four different ways:

1. Intrinsic knowledge of God (the inner light of every human-being involves a God-consciousness and a moral conscience - John 1:9; Romans 2:15).

2. In creation (God's power and glory is seen in the universe and in our world - Romans 1:20).

3. In the Bible (God's truth revealed through the writings of His prophets and apostles - John 17:17).

4. In Jesus Christ (the complete revelation of God in human form - John 1:14,18).



Side Note

God is a balanced being. Many people today have a lopsided view of God. Some over emphasize His love, and forget that He is just and holy at the same time.

The love of God allows Him to forgive sin and show mercy to a repentant sinner. The holiness and justice of God demand that sin must be punished to the full extent of the law. It may seem that God's holiness and love are in constant conflict with one another, but God is not a man and these two seemingly opposing attributes actually work together in perfect harmony, as one balances the other.



Action

Often the problems we face in life cause great anxiety and emotional pain, because we fail to apply the attributes of God to our lives. If what we believe about God is true, we can confidently live in the light of these truths, bringing us freedom and peace.

1. Which of the attributes of God do you appreciate most when:

- ♦ you have sinned
- ♦ you need guidance about an important decision
- ♦ your prayers don't seem to be answered
- ♦ you have been deeply hurt by someone.

2. What practical applications are we told to make from the truths about God we find in Isaiah 40:28-29 and John 4:24?



Digging Deeper

The Existence of God

The Bible does not attempt to prove God, but it shows that only a fool would deny His existence (Psalm 14:1). Even when people do not have the Bible, they are able to discern the existence of God in creation (Romans 1:19-20).

4. Mercy (Exodus 3:7,17; Psalm 103:8; Matthew 9:36).

God's genuine pity and compassion toward sinners moved Him to refrain from treating them as they deserve. It is also shown in His care for the needy.

5. Holiness God is set apart from all other beings in His majestic glory, and His moral holiness. He has no evil in Him (Psalm 99:9; Isaiah 57:15), and His holiness reveals human sin (Isaiah 6:3-6) demanding punishment (Isaiah 59:2). We are called to be holy because He is holy (1 Peter 1:16).

6. Righteousness and justice (Romans 3:26; Nehemiah 9:33; Psalm 145:17; 2 Timothy 4:8).

God is completely just and impartial in His dealings with others. He is a righteous judge, and as such He demands that sin's penalty be paid

7. Truth (2 Timothy 2:13; Numbers 23:19; 1 John 5:20). God is the source of all truth and is Himself consistent with that truth - faithful to what He reveals about Himself.

8. Patience (Romans 9:22; Acts 13:18; 2 Peter 3:9). God restrains His judgment and His personal intervention in the world, and is also persistent in seeking good.

9. Wisdom (Romans 11:33; Ephesians 3:10). God has complete knowledge and perfect understanding. Together these result in His profound wisdom where He always makes sound judgments.

10. Goodness (Psalm 119:68; 145:9; Romans 2:4). God is full of kindness, goodwill and benevolence.



Insight

1. What do the following verses teach us about the sovereignty of God? (see pg. 19, #9)

Proverbs 21:1

Isaiah 14:27

Acts 4:26-28

2. According to Hebrews 11:6, what is an essential requirement to knowing God, and why do you think it is necessary?

3. What do we learn when we compare Exodus 33:20 with John 1:18?

For the Christian, there are two basic arguments for the existence of God:

1. Nothing is self originating. Science has never been able to demonstrate an endless chain coming from nothing.
2. Elaborate structures require a designer. The intricate and highly complex world we live in bears witness to a designer.

1. God the cause - creation, the effect

A purely naturalistic explanation of the origins of the universe and life as we know it implies: *"The universe came from nothing, by nothing, and for nothing"* (Professor Quentin Smith). It also implies that:

- ♦ Dead matter developed into living matter
- ♦ Mindless material developed into intelligent life
- ♦ Physical substance developed morals and conscience
- ♦ Accident and randomness developed into order and beauty.

To be strictly scientific, the law of causality is an observable, universal law, stating that every finite thing is caused by something other than itself. Either the universe had a beginning, or it came from nothing. It requires much more faith to believe that nothing created something out of nothing, than to believe that someone created something out of nothing. Robert Jastrow, founder-director of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies, and one of the world's leading astro-physicists (an agnostic) says: *"A sound explanation may exist for the explosive birth of our universe; but if it does, science cannot find out what the explanation is. The scientist's pursuit of the past ends in the moment of creation"*. He further says *"That there are, what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work, is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact"*.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:1-3).

- ♦ On a clear night you can only see 5000 individual stars, the remaining 10 octillion are only seen through powerful telescopes.
- ♦ Our galaxy (the Milky Way) has 1 billion stars (which would take a person over 100 years to count if they counted 24 hours a day at the rate of 250 stars per minute). Yet there are another 100 billion galaxies in the universe, each with a similar number of stars!

2. God the Designer - creation, the design

Frederick Ferre: *"Design is the most empirical of the arguments for God"*.

Immanuel Kant wrote: *"Reason, when once it has considered and admired so much beauty and perfection, feels a just indignation at the dauntless folly which dares ascribe all this to chance and a happy accident. It must be that the highest wisdom conceived the plan, and Infinite power carried it into execution"*.

Information theory

The very simplest cell contains several thousand different kinds of proteins, and many billions of each kind, plus all kinds of DNA, RNA and other molecules, along with many structures, arranged in an incredibly complex system. DNA, simply put, is the language in the heart of a cell – a molecular message with a set of instructions telling the cell how to construct proteins – a single cell has more information than 3 or 4 times the 30 volume set of Encyclopedia Britannica!

Recent knowledge of DNA has now changed the focus of the origin of life, to the origin of information. Information is the real measure of complexity. To change from a reptile to a bird requires vast amounts of additional complex information. A simple microbe has enough information to fill 2 volumes of 500 pages, but a human has enough information to fill 1000 volumes! Where did all the additional information come from? There is no scientific evidence that mutations and natural selection (incremental bits of good luck in every generation) add the necessary new information, nor any mathematical probability of this happening!

Prof. Werner Gitt – Director of Federal Institute of Physics and Technology (Germany) – Specialist in information theory: *"The biggest problem with the theory of evolution, is the origin of information. Information cannot come by random process"*.

Belief in God requires faith, but is not irrational. Faith is necessary, because God has willed it so: *"anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him"* (Hebrews 11:6).

5. *Jesus Christ the lord*



In focus

Many millions of people around the world follow a person who lived and died 2000 years ago.

Who is Jesus Christ?

Did He exist?

F. F. Bruce, former Rylands Professor of biblical criticism at the University of Manchester says *"some writers may toy with the fantasy of a 'Christ-myth', but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Jesus is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar"*.

The evidence that He really did exist may be convincing, but who was He, and is there truth to the claims He and His followers made of Him? Was He merely a good man or is He God?



Side Note

By claiming to be God, Jesus leaves us with only two alternatives: either His claims are false, or they are true. If false, we have two further alternatives. Either He knew that His claims were false and therefore He deliberately misled the people (He was a deceiver), or He did not know that His claims were false, in which case He was deluded. We are left with a choice: either He was who He claimed to be (God), or He was evil (a liar), or He was deluded.



Thinking it Through

Jesus is God the Son

I. Jesus claimed to be God

Jesus indirectly and directly claimed to be God. He claimed the rights and authority that were known to be uniquely Divine. He claimed to be able to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12), to raise the dead, and to Judge (John 5:21-29). He claimed that to know Him was to know God (John 8:19, 14:7), to see Him was to see God (John 12:45, 14:9), and to honor Him was to honor God (John 5:23).

One of Jesus' greatest claims to Deity is found in John 8:57-58. He had just mentioned to the Jewish leaders that He existed before their ancestral forefather Abraham. Their response was *"You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!"* Jesus then claimed: *"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I Am!"* The Jews then took up stones to kill Him, not because of His claim to have existed before Abraham, but for blasphemy. Jesus had used the name 'I Am' which is exclusively God's name (Exodus 3:13-14).

After His resurrection, He accepted Thomas' worship of Him as *"My Lord and my God"* (John 20:28-29). If He was less than God, and honest, He would have exposed Thomas' belief as wrong.

II. The New Testament reveals Jesus to be God

Jesus is called the Son of Man (Luke 19:10), the Son of God (John 10:33, 36), the Word who is God (John 1:1), the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16).

According to the New Testament, Jesus was not a created being, but was Himself the Creator (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17). He shared the Father's glory before the world was made (John 17:5).

Paul wrote in Philippians 2:5-11 that prior to becoming a human, Jesus was *"in the form of God"* (the word means He shared the very nature of God), and *"did not consider equality with God something to be grasped"*; something anyone less than God could never claim.

His Incarnation

The Lord Jesus was conceived miraculously by the Spirit of God in the womb of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:34-35). He is given the title 'Immanuel' meaning *"God with us"* (Matthew 1:23). He is the *"Word who was with God"* and *"was God"*, yet He *"became flesh"* (John 1:1,14).

His Baptism and Transfiguration

Twice God is recorded to have proclaimed from heaven His delight in His own Son. Once at Jesus' baptism, and then at His transfiguration where the glory of God shone from His face and through His clothes (Luke 3:21-22; 9:28-31; 2 Peter 1:16-17).

His Miracles

John wrote his Gospel so that the readers might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, based on his record of the miraculous signs Jesus performed (John 20:30-31). The miracles of Jesus were His credentials as the Son of God - proof of who He was. His miracles demonstrated

- His power over nature,
- His ability to create,
- His power over disease and sickness,
- His ability to give life to the dead.

Even the enemies of Jesus could not deny His miracles, but, refusing to believe, they attributed them to the power of Satan.

His Teaching

Jesus' teaching was unique - it astonished the hearers because He spoke with such authority (Matthew 7:28-29). The moral and ethical teaching of Jesus is unsurpassed.

His Death, Resurrection and Ascension

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus' death was not martyrdom, but a willing self-sacrifice. His crucifixion was part of God's plan (Acts 2:23), and in direct fulfilment of prophecy (Isaiah 53; Psalm 22). On the third day Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb. He appeared to all of His disciples a number of times over a period of forty days, proving to them He was indeed risen from the dead (Acts 1:3-9; 1 Corinthians 15:6; John 20:25-28).

The resurrection of Jesus declares Him to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4), and His ascension into heaven gives validity to His promised return at the end of the age (Acts 1:9-11).



Insight

1. How do the following verses support the argument that Jesus Christ is God?

Hebrews 1:6

John 17:5

Matthew 28:18



Snap Shot

What is true of God in the Old Testament is true of Jesus in the New Testament.

Both are called LORD (Jehovah): Isaiah 40:3 ~ Matthew 3:3

Both are called the First and the Last: Isaiah 44:6, 48:12 ~ Rev 1:17, 22:13

Both are called God Isaiah 45:22 ~ Hebrews: 1:8, John 1:1, Titus 2:13

Both are called the Creator of all things: Isaiah 40:28 ~ John 1:3; Colossians 1:16

Both are called "I Am": John 8:24,58 ~ Exodus 3:13-14

Both are called Light: Isaiah 60:20; 1 John 1:5 ~ John 1:9, 8:12

Both are called Judge: Joel 3:12 ~ 2 Timothy 4:1; John 5:21-29

Both are called Rock: Exodus 17:6; Isaiah 17:10 ~ 1 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Peter 2:6

Both are called Saviour: Isaiah 43:11; 45:21 ~ Acts 4:12; Ephesians 5:23; 2 Timothy 1:10

2. According to 1 Corinthians 15:14-19 what would have been the result if Christ had not risen from the dead?

3. What do you learn about Jesus Christ in the following verses?

a. John 8:46

b. Ephesians 1:20-21

c. 1 Peter 3:22



Thinking it Through

Jesus is human

1. Jesus had human ancestry (Romans 1:3; Galatians 4:4).
2. Jesus possessed a physical nature (1 John 1:1-3; 4:2-3).
3. Jesus was subject to the laws of human development (Luke 2:40, 46, 52; Hebrews 5:8).
4. Jesus was moved by the instincts and emotions of normal human beings. He hungered, He thirsted, He became weary, He slept, He groaned, He wept, He prayed (John 4:6; 11:35; 19:28; Hebrews 5:7-8).
5. Jesus died (John 19:30, 33-34).



Action

1. What do the following verses say about the possibility of someone believing that 'Jesus is Lord', and still not being saved?
Luke 6:46

Titus 1:16

2. If Jesus Christ is Lord, how should that affect the way we live as Christians?
Colossians 2:6

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Colossians 4:6

Colossians 3:23-24

Colossians 3:18-21



Digging Deeper

Certain religious cults misinterpret Bible passages in order to teach that Jesus was not God. Samples of these passages are explained below, in order to show that the Bible, correctly interpreted, does support belief in the deity of Jesus Christ.

John 1:1 “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*”.

One cult claims that, as there is no definite article ('the') before the Greek word 'Theos' (God), it implies that Jesus was not truly God, but merely a godlike ('Divine') being. But the word 'Theos' appears 282 times without the definite article in the NT. Even in the first 18 verses of John there are 8 occurrences of 'Theos', and only two have a definite article. The cult's translation does not consistently follow their own argument - indeed they cannot. And further to this, there is a Greek word for 'Divine' which John would have used had he been wanting to communicate that meaning.

Hebrews 1:6 “*But when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says: “Let all the angels of God worship Him” (NWT* : ‘do obeisance to Him’)*. In the cult's translation, the word 'worship' is translated inconsistently to avoid ascribing worship to Jesus Christ. The same word translated 'do obeisance' when applied to Jesus Christ in the NWT, is translated 'worship' when applied to Jehovah! The Bible makes it clear that worship is to be ascribed to God alone - “Then Jesus said ... ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’ ” (Matthew 4:10).

Also, the word 'first-born' (Hebrews 1:6) when applied to Jesus does not imply that He is the first of God's creations as some cults teach. The word is used elsewhere to mean one who is exalted over others. At the time of the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the first-born son was considered to be head over his brothers. However, the actual first son born did not always enjoy the 'first-born' position in the family. Thus Jacob, the second-born son of Isaac, inherited the first-born rights, not Esau the first son actually born. Also Jacob's son Joseph was given the first-born rights, though he was born after a number of his brothers. In Psalm 89:27 God's Word clearly states the meaning of the word first-born by saying that David was the highest ranking of all the kings at that time: “*I will also appoint him my first-born, the most exalted of the kings of the earth*”

Isaiah 9:6 “*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given ... and He will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*”

Because this passage obviously applies to the Messiah, cults teach that the term "Mighty God" is not Jehovah, the Almighty God, but that it shows Jesus was a 'lesser god', or Divine.

However, the same Hebrew word is used of Jehovah in the very next chapter of Isaiah: “*The remnant will return ... to the Mighty God*” (Isaiah 10:21) and also elsewhere: “*The Great, the Mighty God, whose name is the LORD (Jehovah) of hosts*” (Jeremiah 32:18).

* NWT = New World Translation (Jehovah's Witnesses)

6. *The Holy Spirit in a Christian's life*



In focus

The Holy Spirit was given by God to indwell Christians. The purpose is to help, teach, guide and empower. The Holy Spirit is not an inanimate force similar to electricity, but has His own personality and is in very nature God.



Thinking it Through

1. The Holy Spirit is God

The Scriptures reveal that the Spirit of God is coequal with, yet distinct from, the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

- He was involved in the creation (Gen. 1)
- He inspired prophecy (2 Peter 1:20-21)
- He possesses Divine attributes:

omnipresence (present everywhere - Psalm 139:7); omniscience (all knowledge - 1 Corinthians 2:10-11); omnipotence (all power - Luke 1:35); and eternal existence (Hebrews 9:14).

2. The Holy Spirit is a person

The Bible's emphasis on the power and invisible working of the Holy Spirit has led some to incorrectly deduce that the Spirit is the active force of God - an extension of God when He is acting in power. However, the Scriptures make it very clear that the Spirit of God is a person, on the same level as the Father and the Son.

This is revealed through:

A. New Testament grammar

In the Greek language the word spirit is in the neuter gender, and as such would be referred to as "it". However, when the word is used to refer to the Holy Spirit, a personal pronoun is used, such as "He" or "Him" (John 15:26; 16:8-14)

B. He has personal attributes

Those attributes that are uniquely true of personality are applied to the Holy Spirit:

- He has His own will - 1 Corinthians 12:11
- He has intelligence - Nehemiah 9:20; Romans 8:27
- He has knowledge - 1 Corinthians 2:10-12
- He has capacity for love - Romans 15:30
- He has capacity for grief - Ephesians 4:30

C. He does those things that only a person can do:

- He speaks - Revelation 2:7
- He intercedes - Romans 8:26
- He teaches - John 14:26
- He leads and directs - Romans 8:14
- He commands - Acts 16:6-7
- He calls people and gives them tasks - Acts 13:2



Snap Shot

The Holy Spirit is called:

The Spirit of God

Romans 8:14

The Spirit of the Father

Matthew 10:20

The Spirit of the Lord

2 Corinthians 3:18

The Spirit of Christ

Romans 8:9

The Spirit of Jesus Christ

Philippians 1:19

God

Acts 5:3, 4



Insight

1. What do the following passages teach us about the nature of the Holy Spirit?

Hebrews 10:29

Acts 5:3

Matthew 12:31-32

2. The Scriptures picture the role of the Holy Spirit in symbols. In your opinion, what do each of these symbols picture about His nature and work?

1. Water (John 7:38-39)

2. Fire (Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:3)

3. Wind (John 3:8; Acts 2:2)

4. Oil (Isaiah 61:1, 1 John 2:20; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22)

5. A Dove (Matthew 3:16)



Thinking it Through

3. The Holy Spirit's work in the life of a believer

The Holy Spirit is vitally involved in the life of a Christian:

1. Our salvation

He prepares the heart and illuminates the mind, applies the truth of the gospel, brings new birth, and then gives inner confirmation (1 Corinthians 6:11; John 14:8; 12:3; Romans 8:16; John 3:8).

2. Our growth

The Spirit of God fills us, guides us, teaches us, empowers us and changes us (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 2:27; Colossians 1:11).

3. Our ongoing relationship with God

The Spirit of God speaks to us through God's Word, helps us in our prayers and comforts us (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 1:17-18; John 14:26-27).

4. Our ministry (service)

The Spirit equips and empowers for service (1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Acts 1:8; Colossians 1:29).

5. Our worship

He brings glory to Christ and inspires worship (John 16:14; Philippians 3:3).



Side Note

The Helper

On the night before Jesus was crucified, He taught His disciples many truths related to His departure. These are found in what is called the "Upper Room Discourse" (John 13 to 16).

The instruction given included several passages concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a disciple.

In this context Jesus called the Holy Spirit "the Advocate" which comes from the Greek word 'parakletos' meaning 'one alongside'. The word can mean to come alongside to help, to comfort, or to defend. Thus the role of the Holy Spirit was to take the place of Jesus Christ who was to leave His disciples and return to heaven.

Today we do not have the physical presence of Jesus with us, but His Spirit indwells every Christian, helping and empowering them for service and witness.

This is what He meant when He promised: "Go and make disciples of all nations ... and **surely I am with you always**, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18,20).



Snap Shot

The Spirit-filled Life

Ephesians 5:18

When a person puts their faith in Jesus Christ and becomes a child of God they receive the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9,16). However, the fullness of the Holy Spirit's presence is something that must be maintained.

The word 'filled' means to be controlled. It is used in the New Testament in various ways such as "filled with (controlled by) anger". In Ephesians 5:18, Paul contrasts being filled with wine (controlled by alcohol), with being filled with the Spirit.

Spirit-filled living is a command to be obeyed and will automatically happen when a person:

- Confesses any known sin
- Submits to the Lordship of Jesus Christ (bows to His control)
- Claims the fullness of the Spirit by faith

The Results of being filled with the Spirit:

- Power to witness
- Power to live victoriously
- Producing the Spirit's fruit
- Bringing glory to the Lord Jesus

The Holy Spirit's activity initiates and maintains the whole of the Christian life. This includes:

- Giving assurance - Romans 8:16-17; Galatians 4:6
- Guaranteeing future inheritance - Ephesians 1:13, 14
- Filling the believer with His presence - Ephesians 5:18
- Teaching the truth - John 14:26
- Giving power to obey God - 1 Peter 1:22
- Directing the believer's prayers - Romans 8:26, 27
- Giving victory over sinful desires - Galatians 5:16, 17
- Producing the fruit of godliness - Galatians 5:22, 23
- Changing the believer into the image of Jesus Christ - 2 Corinthians 3:18
- Giving freedom - 2 Corinthians 3:17
- Empowering the believer to share the gospel - Acts 1:8
- Inspiring worship - John 4:23, 24; Philippians 3:3
- Comforting and helping the believer - Acts 9:31



Insight

1. In Romans 8:14 we are told that the Holy Spirit is our guide. In what way does He lead us?

2. From the following verses, what are the hindrances to being filled with the Spirit, and what do these mean?

1 Thessalonians 5:19

Ephesians 4:30

3. From Romans 8:8-11 what do we learn about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? (list two or three).



Digging Deeper

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

There are seven references to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Five of these are prophetic (they looked forward to a future event (the descent of the Spirit that was yet to take place), and one was an historical event when, on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were Baptized by the Holy Spirit.

The remaining verse is 1 Corinthians 12:13, which is the only theological statement on the subject. It clearly shows that all believers are Baptized into the body of Christ (the Church) at the time they trust Him. The verb 'baptised' is used in the past tense and speaks of a completed action.

Baptism in the Spirit is a technical term for the split-second event when a person, through faith in Jesus Christ, is connected spiritually into the body of Christ. The word baptism means to immerse or dip, and Spirit-baptism therefore carries the idea of being immersed by the Spirit into the spiritual organism of the Body of Christ.

It is not an experience, but an instantaneous event. However, the filling of the Spirit that occurs simultaneously can cause an experience for some.

7. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit



In focus

Spiritual gifts are God given capacities for spiritual service supernaturally bestowed upon Christians by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of enabling believers to serve within the church - 1 Corinthians 12:7.



Thinking it Through

Gifts are given to the church by the Risen Lord

The Lord Jesus left His disciples to fulfil His great mission - to make disciples and build the church. He sent them Holy Spirit to indwell and empower, and to give spiritual gifts, so they could fulfil their function in the great mission. Every Christian receives one or more spiritual gifts from the risen Christ (Ephesians 4:7-8).

All Christians, without exception, have received at least one gift (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10). There is a wide variety of gifts, and all are bestowed by God without partiality. The word used for spiritual gifts in the New Testament is "charismata", the root of which is the word "charis" which means grace - something undeserved or unearned.

What are the gifts?

There are four passages in the New Testament that list various spiritual gifts given to the church - 1 Corinthians 12:8-10,28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:11. Many of the gifts referred to in these passages are very general in nature, implying that the lists are not to be seen as exhaustive. For example, the gifts of 'mercy' and 'helps' would cover a very wide range of activities.



Insight

1. Who decides which gifts are given to whom, according to 1 Corinthians 12:11,18 and Ephesians 4:7-13?

2. For what purpose(s) are spiritual gifts given?

1 Corinthians 12:7

1 Corinthians 14:12

Ephesians 4:11-13

1 Corinthians 14:20-25

Hebrews 2:2-4



Side Note

Gifts and talents

There is a clear distinction between natural talents and spiritual gifts. Natural talents are part of our nature from birth, and are developed as we grow physically and mentally.

Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit at new birth (when a person becomes a Christian). They also need to be developed and exercised.

A natural talent may or may not become a spiritual gift. For example, a person may have the natural ability to sing. This is a talent. A spiritual gift goes beyond a natural ability. It involves a supernatural work of God. Thus, if a person who sings is used by God to have a spiritual impact in the lives of others, it is a spiritual gift as well as a natural talent.



Side Note

Miraculous gifts

There were special gifts given by the Holy Spirit for confirming the testimony of the apostles and prophets. They were prevalent in the early church, but lost their special relevance after the church was established. These were the gifts of miracles (ability to do wonders and signs), healing, the gift of tongues (ability to speak a foreign language unknown to the speaker), and the interpretation of tongues - 1 Corinthians 14:27- 28. (See 'Digging Deeper' for a fuller explanation)



Snap Shot

Many gifts listed in the New Testament are also general virtues that are expected of all Christians. However, a gift in that area is where God particularly uses somebody. For example, the gifts of mercy and giving. There are people who are particularly gifted in mercy and financial support, but all God's people are called to show mercy and to share in the responsibility of supporting God's work.

3. What two attitudes did Paul warn against in regarding to spiritual gifts?

1 Corinthians 12:15-16

1 Corinthians 12:21

4. Even though the Corinthian church was rich with spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:4-7), did this make them a spiritual church (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)? Why?



Action

Finding and using your gift(s)

Each of us can only function within the body of Christ in the way we are meant to, by discovering and developing our gift(s).

1. Discovering your gift(s)

First: Find those things that seem 'tailor-made' for you

As you begin to get involved in church life and ministry, you will probably be inclined toward certain areas of service where you feel more comfortable (though you may also feel inadequate). These are probably activities you enjoy more than others, and could well indicate an unrealised spiritual gift.

Second: Consider what you are passionate about

If your heart is moved with the idea of teaching others, or helping those in unfortunate circumstances, encouraging others, or sharing the Good News; your inner motivation may well reveal an emerging spiritual gift.

Third: Investigate what others think

Timothy was encouraged to use the gift God gave him, which Paul recognized and affirmed (2 Timothy 1:6 - the laying on of hands by Paul on Timothy was an outward, symbolic recognition of Timothy's gift). At times Christians can believe they have a gift, when most who know them would not agree. Seeking an honest opinion by godly, Spirit-filled Christian friends and church leaders will help identify a person's spiritual gift.

Fourth: See where God uses you

A spiritual gift is more than the ability to merely do something. It is the means God has made for Him to work through us. We discover our spiritual gift(s) when we discover where God uses us.

Summary:

Your spiritual gift is something that you are inclined to do, have the ability to do (though it may need to be developed), and you enjoy. To some extent you should be passionate about it. Others will recognize your gifting, and God uses you when you use it.

2. Developing your gift(s)

The more you use your gift, the more it will develop. There are no short-cuts to speed up the process of developing your gift. However, a person who is teachable, will develop much quicker than others.



Insight

1. What does Romans 12:6-8 tell us about the use of spiritual gifts?

2. According to 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, what is the relative importance of spiritual gifts in contrast to love? What practical application is implied?

3. What is the reason for a variety of gifts in the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:14-19)?

4. What contrasts can you observe between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 12:28-30)?



Digging Deeper

Miraculous gifts

Christians differ over whether all the gifts of the Spirit listed in the New Testament should be in operation today. There are good reasons why many believe the 'sign gifts' ceased in the first century AD. Sign gifts are those that were particularly miraculous in nature, and were signs confirming the truth of the gospel.

1. The purpose of miraculous gifts

The miraculous gifts of speaking foreign languages (which are unknown to the speaker), healing, doing miracles, and speaking prophecy, require a supernatural manifestation of God. They had a special purpose in the time of Christ and the Apostles which is no longer necessary. In Hebrews 2:3-4 we read that the message of the Gospel was confirmed to be the truth by the 'evidence' of miraculous signs: *"This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will."* Once they had served their purpose they ceased to exist. This is consistent with God's previous dealings with His people. Looking at the biblical record, there have only been three periods where miracles occurred. First, at the time of Moses, then at the time of Elijah and Elisha, and finally at the time of Jesus Christ and the Apostles.

2. The historical ceasing of miraculous gifts

In 1 Corinthians 13:8 we read that three of the miraculous gifts were only temporary. Two of these, the gifts of prophecy and knowledge (i.e. special, supernatural knowledge) would be "done away". The Greek verb used in relation to both these gifts is the same, and means to be abolished, or rendered inoperative. These gifts will cease "when perfection comes" (verse 10).

But the Apostle Paul deals with the third of these gifts differently. The gift of speaking in foreign languages will cease *by itself* (Greek - middle voice). In fact, after saying so in verse 8, he does not talk again about this gift in verses 9 and 10. The gift of tongues will cease by itself, without cause

Evidence of this is clear, in that the list of gifts in the New Testament books that were written many years later than the letter of 1 Corinthians, do not include the gift of tongues, nor the other miraculous gifts. The early church Fathers who lived after the times of the Apostles (such as Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Origen, Chrysostom and Augustine) penned copious writings but do not mention the gift of tongues.

3. The nature of miraculous gifts

A miracle is a special act of God where His supernatural power and/or knowledge interfere with the natural course of events. Miracles recorded in the Bible have several consistent characteristics:

1. They are always immediate
2. They are always completely successful
3. They are always permanent, with no relapses
4. They always glorify God

The claimed miraculous gifts of today do not measure up to those of the times of Christ and the Apostles. If they were true, our newspapers would have countless stories of the blind being made to see, the deaf made to hear, the dead raised to life and the cripple jumping and dancing for joy. Such miracles are hard to fake!

Prophecy in the early church was specific, beyond the ability of people to orchestrate themselves, and always proved to be true. Today, however, claimed prophecies are either so vague or predictable they are not miraculous, or, if they are specific, they nearly always fail to come to pass.

The only miraculous sign that seems easy to pretend is that of speaking in tongues. With enough motivation many people can speak the modern-day 'tongues' utterance. Even some non-Christian religions and Satanists have similar forms of glossolalia. But the original gift of the Holy Spirit was not merely speaking a string of unintelligible noises. It was the ability to speak an ordered message (1 Corinthians 14:6) in a foreign language that the speaker had not learned (Acts 2:6-12). The true gift of tongues constitutes a miracle that is impossible to mimic.

4. God still acts in miraculous ways today.

To hold that the miraculous gifts are not operating today does not imply that God is not working miracles. The issue is not what God can do, but what God chooses to do, and how He chooses to do it. There is nothing to prevent God from giving the same miraculous gifts today. But if He did, there would be no doubt that the gifted people would be used to perform real, indisputable miracles, where God's supernatural power was evident to all, even the skeptic.

But God is able to work in miraculous ways without individuals being specifically gifted to perform miracles. To be gifted in healing means to have the God-given authority to pronounce healing, and every time it would be successful. Clearly this is not apparent with even the most famous Christian healers today. However, God does act in answer to prayer. He also works through conventional and natural medicines. In Isaiah 38, king Hezekiah was dying and prayed for an extension of his life. God answered his prayer and promised him another 15 years. He then instructed the prophet Isaiah to "prepare a poultice of figs and apply it to the boil, and he will recover." Thus God healed the king using conventional medicine of the day.

In the same way, there are isolated events, such as when God has given people a special knowledge of a tragedy happening in a distant place and they are moved to pray, only to find out later that their prayers were answered at the exact time they prayed. God has been known to give supernatural protection and special abilities at specific times, but these do not constitute miraculous gifts. They were special acts of God, as He intervened in response to the prayers of His people. God is free to do as He will. Our responsibility is to discern whether or not any event or utterance is a genuine act of God.

8. The Church



In focus

What is the Church?

The church is not a building. It is not an organization. The church is the world wide community of people who have entered into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. They are those who follow Christ, are indwelt by the Spirit of God, and have been united together into the Body of Christ. The church involves people from all denominations and some who do not belong to a local church fellowship. The true church does not include outward members of a denomination who have never entered into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.



Thinking it Through

The word church comes from the word “ekklesia” which literally means “call out”. The church is made up of “called-out ones” - that is, people who have left sinful living, wrong beliefs and false religions to become true followers of Jesus Christ.

The Christian church was planned by God from the beginning (Ephesians 3:4-6, 10-12). The church began at Pentecost (Acts 2) when the Risen Lord sent His Spirit to indwell and empower His disciples, and will end at the return of Jesus Christ.

There are three aspects of the church:

1. The Universal Church (Ephesians 3:10; Matthew 16:18)

The universal church is everyone in every nation who are living at the present time, who belong to Christ, no matter which denominational tag or local fellowship they belong to.

2. The Local Church (Acts 11:26, 14:23, 1 Corinthians 1:2; Colossians 4:15)

The local church is the group of Christians in a district or town who meet together for worship, teaching, fellowship and prayer. Each local church is organised with leaders (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23) with Christ Himself being the Head (Acts 20:17; 28-30; Hebrews 13:17). The local church is a micro expression of the universal church.

3. The Glorified Church

All true Christians down through church history, who are now with the Lord, are also members of the church. When Christ returns, they will join those believers who are living at the time, and together they all will be given resurrection bodies and form the Glorified Church.

- They will be presented to Christ as His Bride (Revelation 19:6-9; Ephesians 5:25-27; Jude 24)

- They will reign with Christ in the age to come (Matthew 19:28-30; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3).



Side Note

Which church is to be regarded as The Church?

There is no indication in the Bible of there being any one visible church on earth that could be regarded as “The Church”. The church has no visible head on earth (such as an Archbishop or a Pope) but has an unseen head (Jesus Christ) in heaven.

Over the years many different denominations have been established, sometimes because of dynamic leaders, other times due to a group holding to special distinctives, and still other times through a disagreement over doctrine or practice.



Side Note

Symbols of the Church

The Body

Ephesians 1:22-23;
Colossians 1:18, 2:19

A Temple

Ephesians 2:20-21

The Bride of Christ

2 Corinthians 11:2;
Revelation 19:7



Insight

1. According to Jesus, what was the foundational truth upon which the church was built (Matthew 16:16-18)?

2. What do the following passages tell us about the relationship of Jesus Christ to the church?

Ephesians 2:19, 20; 1 Peter 2:4-8; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18

3. In Ephesians 5:23-24, how should we honor Christ as the head of the Body?

4. What pictures are used to describe the church and individual Christians in 1 Peter 2:4-5, and what can we learn from these?



Thinking it Through

The Purpose of the Church

Why does the church exist? All who trust Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour are quite capable of living their Christian lives without being involved in a church!

Church was God's idea. He shows us clearly in His Word that there are good reasons for uniting Christians in a church.

1. To worship God - 1 Peter 2:4-5; Philippians 3:3.
2. To share together in the mission of Christ - to reach out to the world with the gospel - Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:8.
3. For Christians to receive instruction - Ephesians 4:11-15.
4. For Christians to use their gifts and to encourage one another in the Christian life - Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Thessalonians 5:11.
5. To be accountable to those whom the Lord places as leaders - Hebrews 13:17.

Authority in the Church

Apostolic authority

There is a special place given to the authority of the twelve apostles whom Jesus appointed. They were:

1. The authentic witnesses to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ - Matthew 16:16-18; Acts 1:8.
2. The authority for the beliefs that the church was to hold - Ephesians 2:19-20; 1 Timothy 3:15.
3. The authority for what the church should practice.

After the apostles died, their authority remained, enshrined in their writings, which make up the majority of the New Testament.

Therefore the church today should accept the Bible as the supreme expression of Christ's authority in all matters of belief and practice.

Elders

The elders are called by the Lord Jesus to take care of the church. He will hold them accountable for the spiritual welfare of those in their care (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5). Elders are the ones responsible for the overall direction and health of a local church. A pastor may be employed as a spiritual leader, but the authority under Christ is in the hands of a group of godly elders.

The qualifications of an elder are listed twice, showing the importance of the example in the way they live (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

Deacons

The word deacon means servant. These men and women are called to serve the church in practical ways, freeing up the elders to minister in Bible teaching, pastoral care and in prayer (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Discipline

The elders are called to keep the church holy and righteous. If there are believers who are continuing in sinful lifestyles, the elders are to seek their willingness to repent. Should they be unwilling, they are called to publicly discipline these believers. Such discipline is normally to remove them from any area of leadership or ministry in which they are involved, while continuing to love and gently admonish them in hope that they will repent (1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Galatians 6:1-2).



Insight

1. What comparisons of the church to a human body do we find in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, and what does this teach us?
2. According to 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-19 and Titus 1:5-9, what qualities should mark those who are appointed as elders?



Action

1. According to Hebrews 10:24-25:
 - What are we to consider (think of) in a church?
 - What two things are we to spur one another on to do?
 - What are we to keep doing (without giving up)?
 - Why are we to meet together?
2. What do the following verses tell us about church life?

John 13:34-35
 Galatians 5:13; 6:2
 Romans 15:7
 Colossians 3:13
 Romans 12:10
 Romans 15:14
 1 Thessalonians 5:11.



Snap Shot

Leadership in the church

The New Testament teaches that leadership in each church is the responsibility of a group of elders. The elders' authority to lead is often delegated to a pastor or pastoral team, giving them the freedom to devote themselves to the people in the fellowship. However, a pastor should be one among equals with the other elders.

The position of an elder:

Elders are given the responsibility of being stewards (managers), and guardians of God's people (Titus 1:7; Acts 20:28). They have been placed in a position of spiritual authority over those in their care (Hebrews 13:17).

The function of an elder:

Elders are shepherds who are to care for, and guard God's people. They are to teach (not necessarily from the pulpit), correct and give direction to believers in their church fellowships. They are not to 'lord it' over the believers, nor place themselves above them as 'Father' or 'Teacher' (Mark 10:42-45; Matthew 23:1-12; 1 Peter 5:1-2; 1 Timothy 5:17).



Digging Deeper

A Synopsis of Church History

The First Century:

In the first century the New Testament writings were completed, documenting the life and ministry of Jesus and the birth and establishing of the early church. As most of the apostles were martyred, by the end of the first century a new generation of church leaders had succeeded the apostles.

Christianity spread rapidly, with the gospel being taken to most of the known world of the Roman Empire and even to regions beyond. The church began to emerge from its Jewish 'womb'. A key transition took place at the time of the Jewish revolt against Roman authority around 70 AD, as Christians did not take part in the revolt.

The first century was marked by widespread persecution, including Emperor Nero who blamed Christians for a devastating fire that ravaged Rome in 64 AD. Later, Emperor Domitian demanded to be worshiped as "Lord and God", resulting in many faithful believers losing their lives.

The Second Century:

The second century was noted for the rise of a number of heretical sects. As a result, God raised up apologists (men who were defenders of the faith) including Irenaeus and Justin Martyr to combat heresy and answer the church's opponents.

The church continued to grow despite continuing persecution, with its strongest centers in Asia Minor and North Africa. By 200 AD almost 70% of Christians were from non-white races.

The Third Century:

After a time of further persecution, there was a long period of peace for the church, leading to amazing growth. Church buildings were beginning to be built.

North Africa was a key Christian center, with Egypt alone boasting a million Christians by the end of the third century. Carthage and Alexandria were leading centers of Christian theological development with such prominent men as Origen, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria.

The Fourth Century:

The fourth century saw momentous changes take place which became pivotal turning points in the history of the church. At the beginning of the century, the church went through the "Great Persecution" orchestrated by Emperor Diocletian whose intention was to wipe it out.

Then Emperor Constantine professed faith in Christ and the church was finally given legal status as a tolerated religion. Christianity was officially made the state religion under Emperor Theodosius IX in the year 381.

In Church Councils the canon of the New Testament was confirmed – that is, final recognition was given to what was already generally recognized and accepted as the inspired books that make up the New Testament. Also, two major Church Councils in Nicea and in Constantinople formalized the church's beliefs and practice.

The capital of the Empire moved to Constantinople and, with Rome no longer being the center of power, the Roman church began to fill in the gap.

Near the end of the fourth century, Augustine was converted and became one of the most important theologians in all of church history.

The Fifth Century:

In response to error being taught, the Chalcedon creed was written to clarify the truth that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine, with the two natures existing together without confusion.

As the emperor's power declined, the Bishop of Rome's power increased. Pope Leo I (440-461) asserted authority over other bishops, claiming the bishop of Rome is the successor to the Apostle Peter.

The 'Middle Ages':

It was the time of monks and Popes, the building of Monumental Churches, a period of heroic missionary ventures that reached all of Europe with the gospel. It was the era where some reacted against worldliness with monasticism and where others joined together Church and State.

During this period there was a major split between churches in the East and the West: Islam overtook established Christian centers in North Africa and the Middle East, posing a grave threat to Christianity. When the Moslems sacked the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, Pope Urban II proclaimed the first of a number of 'crusades' to reclaim Jerusalem and liberate the Holy Land from the Moslems.

In the thirteenth century the papacy reached its greatest power. Pope Innocent III affirmed all churches were under his control. His papal power allowed him to interfere in the politics of nations. He instituted the Inquisition, joining the powers of both church and state to punish heretics.

The Fourteenth Century:

John Wycliffe, commonly hailed as “the Morning star of the Reformation” looked to the Scriptures for authority and truth. He transformed Oxford into the spiritual center of England. In 1382 Wycliffe was expelled from Oxford, and translated the Bible into English, and organized men to spread the Scriptures.

The Fifteenth Century:

Florence became the center of the Renaissance. Brunelleschi, Donatello, Michelangelo, Botticelli, and Leonardo da Vinci all created important works of art with Christian themes.

The Sixteenth Century:

The sixteenth century was tumultuous, with the explosive influence of the Reformation. The posting of the 95 theses by Luther in 1517 was not the beginning of the Reformation but in many ways a culmination of widespread developments that had been building up for generations. The Reformation involved many church leaders such as Zwingli, Calvin, Tyndale, the Anabaptists and others. These men were devoted to careful scholarship, and returned to the authority of the Scriptures and the great truths of salvation – solely by Christ, solely by grace and solely by faith.

The ‘Counter-Reformation’ by the Roman Catholic Church involved the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which reaffirmed Catholic doctrine in the light of the reformation. The Jesuit order became the defender of the Catholic faith and began sending missionaries abroad. Religious convictions produced martyrs among both Catholics and Protestants – Sir Thomas More, William Tyndale, and Thomas Cranmer were among the many who were executed.

The printing of books developed, making the Scriptures more available for the common people.

The Seventeenth Century:

The King James Version translation of the English Bible was released in 1611. Classic works of Christian literature were written during this period: John Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’; Blaise Pascal’s ‘Pensees’; and John Bunyan’s ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’.

The Eighteenth Century:

Voltaire, historian, philosopher and a deist, developed the rationalism of the “Enlightenment”, attacking Christianity, believing man to be the center of all things.

An evangelical awakening spread throughout England and America under the preaching of George Whitfield, the Wesley brothers, and Jonathan Edwards. The era of modern missions advanced with the establishment of London’s ‘Baptist Missionary Society’ and the sending of William Carey to India.

Christians Handel and Haydn wrote classical music, while Isaac Watts and the Wesleys wrote hymns for congregational singing.

The Nineteenth Century:

The nineteenth century saw protestants establishing missions throughout the world. Reform societies were formed to deal with abolition, temperance, prisons, and education.

Church doctrine came under a variety of major attacks. Many sects and cults were established, including the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Christian Science. New philosophies such as Darwin’s theory of evolution, Marx’s communism, and Freud’s psychology, attacked the traditional Christian view of life and history. German higher criticism attacked the historical validity of the Scriptures.

Great revivalists and Christian leaders Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody and Charles Spurgeon were used by God to influence many of their generation. David Livingstone and others opened the African continent to missions, while Hudson Taylor’s ‘China Inland Mission’ spread throughout China.

The First Vatican Council declared the Pope infallible in the year 1870.

By the end of the nineteenth century, 19% of Christians were nonwhite, and 81% were white. The Scriptures had been translated into 537 languages.

The Twentieth Century:

There was the emergence of charismatic Christian groups which, after a long slow start, became a major influence in the last part of the century. During this era there was the rise of the ecumenical movement. Missions reached virtually every region of the world, and the Bible was translated into the languages of 95% of mankind. It is estimated that more Christians were martyred in this century than in all the earlier centuries combined.

There was a decline of church attendance in most of the West, but an explosive growth of Chinese Christians. The century ended with approximately 1.9 billion Christians (nominal), which represented about 33% of the world population.

9.

Baptism***In focus***

Jesus commanded His disciples to: “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:18-19). In the early church, new Christians were baptized immediately upon their commitment of faith (Acts 8:12,36-39; 9:18). In the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Paul Jewett defines Christian baptism as an “initiatory washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which the risen Lord commissioned His apostles to administer to all His followers as a mark of their discipleship.”

***Snap Shot***

Outward rites of any kind do not affect the true nature of Christianity. The apostle Paul vigorously defended the gospel of salvation by faith alone when challenged by those who taught that outward religious acts held merit with God.

He used Abraham as an example. Abraham was justified by faith; that is, faith alone, apart from all moral or ceremonial works. God did give Abraham the outward rite of circumcision, but He did this after He had first declared him righteous in His sight (Romans 4:9-12).

***Thinking it Through*****Baptism is a symbolic rite**

Baptism is an outward expression of an inner faith. It is a symbolic act that is meant to accompany a spiritual reality. Becoming a Christian involves turning from a pathway of sin, committing oneself to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and receiving new life in Him. This transaction is symbolized in the act of baptism. Baptism possesses no saving virtue, or power to cleanse a person of sin.

At the time of Christ, the Jews used baptism as an initiation rite for non-Hebrew people who wanted to worship the true God. Jesus took this symbolic action and used it to portray the new beginning His disciples would need to make in following Him.

Baptism is a public confession

Baptism is a public announcement that a person has put their faith in Christ. It is a formal confession of a person's belief that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that He is their personal Saviour. That is why it is important for those being baptized to share their testimony (their story of how they came to faith in Christ). It also gives incentive to those being baptized to invite friends and relatives to attend.

Baptism is expected of all Christians

All Christians are called by God to be baptized – there is no thought in the New Testament of an unbaptized follower of Jesus.

1. Baptism is commanded by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16).

2. Baptism was practiced by the early disciples, as recorded in the book of Acts (EG: the Corinthians in Acts 18: “*Many Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized*” and Cornelius and his household in Acts 10: “*Peter said, Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.*”)

3. Baptism was taught by Paul and the other Apostles in the New Testament writings.

How is a person to be baptized?

The word 'baptize' means to dip or immerse, and was used in New Testament times to describe the colouring of a garment by dipping it into water with dye. The word implies that Christian baptism involves the complete immersion of a person in water. Therefore baptism by immersion is practiced in many churches today.

**Insight**

1. According to Acts 8:12,36-39, what do we learn about the timing and mode of baptism practiced in the early church?
2. Although new Christians used to be baptized immediately in the early church, what reasons are there for delaying baptism today?
3. What do the words *"baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:19) show about the beliefs that a person being Baptized is required to have?
4. What reasons would you give to support the belief that infants should not be baptized?

**Thinking it Through****THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM****Death, burial and resurrection**

When a person trusts Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, an inner spiritual baptism occurs. In baptism we identify ourselves with Christ: Just as Jesus Christ died, was buried and rose again, so those who become Christians are spiritually united with Him in His death, burial and resurrection. He died for (our) sin, and we die to sin (repentance). He rose to new life and we have been raised to live in the power of the Spirit. Paul writes: *"... having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead"* (Colossians 2:12).

Dead to sin

Going down under the water pictures the end (death) of your old life. This represents repentance, (turning from a sinful lifestyle). The Bible teaches that Christians should live their lives based on the foundational truth that they are dead to sin: *"Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 6:11).

**Side Note****Other uses of the word Baptism in the New Testament****1. Baptism of (or in) the Spirit**

This is described in 1 Cor. 12:13: *"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body ... and we were all given the one Spirit to drink"*. Historically, this baptism with the Spirit took place on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit baptized all the assembled disciples into the body of Christ, the Church.

The baptism of the Spirit is something that occurs in every individual Christian and is a split-second event. The filling of the Spirit, however, is sometimes confused with the baptism of the Spirit, and results in the ongoing experience of the Holy Spirit that every Christian can enjoy.

2. Baptism of fire

The baptism of fire referred to by John the Baptist, represents the active judgment of God on all who reject Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. *"He will baptize you with ... fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire"* (Matthew 3:11-12).



Digging Deeper

Is baptism essential to salvation?

Some churches teach that, apart from water baptism, there is no salvation! They actually teach that faith in Christ must be accompanied by baptism for a person to receive eternal life. They base their teaching on Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38. Some even believe that the actual rite of baptism is the means whereby God gives new birth to those who believe, using John 3:5 and Titus 3:5 as their proof texts.

The way to answer this error is to compare their beliefs with what the New Testament teaches on the subject of salvation, and also to study the texts they use, and interpret them in the light of their context.

The New Testament teaching on salvation

If salvation is conditional upon the added requirement of baptism, one would expect that when the inspired writers taught on the subject of salvation, baptism would be included, or at the very least be mentioned in context. But this is not the case. The book of Romans, which is a systematic treatise on salvation by grace emphasizes that it is faith alone that God requires in order to justify a person and give eternal life. There is no hint of any outward act being required for a person's salvation, whether a ceremonial rite or a good work.

Romans 3:23-24 *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely **by His grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"*

Romans 5:1-2 *"Therefore, since we have been justified **through faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God"*

Galatians 3:13-14 *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us ... so that **by faith** we might receive the promise of the Spirit"*

Ephesians 2:8-9 *"For it is **by grace** you have been saved, **through faith**, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, **not by works**, so that no one can boast"*

1 Corinthians 1:17 *"Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel"*

Paul could not have stated this had he believed that baptism was necessary for salvation.

Circumcision to the Old Testament Jew, like baptism, was an outward act that symbolized an inner faith. The New Testament does not carry over the requirement of circumcision into the Christian faith, neither does it replace circumcision with another outward act such as baptism. When the Apostle Paul refers to circumcision in the context of teaching salvation, he shows that it was not a condition for his salvation, but an outward sign of a hidden reality: *"Abraham's **faith** was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised"* (Romans 4:9-11).

Looking at the Bible Passages

1. *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:16).

The second part of the verse does not mention baptism at all - it is solely the absence of faith that results in a person's eternal loss. The inclusion of baptism in the first part is understandable, and consistent with the rest of the New Testament, when it is remembered that in the early church, new believers were immediately baptized - almost automatically. Thus the outward rite of baptism was so closely associated with a person's inner repentance and faith that they were seen to be one.

2. *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38).

Here Peter is calling Jews to make a clear stand for Jesus Christ. It implies that they had already believed the truth that he had just preached about Jesus, for they were to be baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ*.

Peter is calling them to show the inner belief that they had come to, by obeying the Lord in an outward act of baptism. This passage, found in an historical account of what took place on that day, cannot be interpreted in a way that contradicts the clear teaching of the rest of Scripture. In Peter's next recorded sermon (Acts 3:17-26), there is no mention of baptism in relation to the response of the listeners to the message. Further, the book of Acts goes on to show that a person can be baptized yet **not** be saved (8:13-23), and others can be saved before they are baptized (10:44-48) - where their baptism was ordered because it was obvious they were already saved.

3. *"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5).*

There is no clear indication that Jesus is speaking of baptism in this verse. The next verse contrasts the supernatural birth of the Spirit with the natural birth of water (*"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit"*), so the context would associate birth by water with physical birth.

4. *"... this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also; not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21).*

At first glance this verse seems to say that baptism does save, but the actual message of the verse is that baptism is the outward, visible marker that represents the time when a person's sins were forgiven (*"pledge of a good conscience"*). Salvation is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not something we do.

5. *"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:4-7).*

Once again, there is no clear indication here that Peter is referring to baptism when he uses the word 'washing'. Regeneration (new birth) does involve a cleansing and forgiveness (1 Corinthians 6:11). Also, the whole emphasis of the passage is the free grace of God in providing salvation apart from works, based solely on His mercy: *"But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, 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, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life"*.

10. Communion



In focus

Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, breaking of bread, or the Eucharist are terms used of an ordinance that Jesus instituted for the church. Communion is a simple thanksgiving 'meal' where Christians come together to remember their Lord's death for them, and to worship and praise Him for the blessings of salvation.



Thinking it Through

Jesus instituted the celebration of communion with His disciples on the night before He was taken captive, tried, and eventually crucified. Jesus clearly anticipated His impending death, and used the Passover Feast of the Jews to institute a new supper in remembrance of His sacrifice.

He took bread and wine, which were two of the elements used by the Israelites to celebrate their deliverance from slavery, and invested new meaning into them. The simple tokens of bread and wine now illustrate a new deliverance, and point to the basis for a new covenant between God and people of all nationalities.

The bread and wine represent two crucial aspects of Jesus' sacrificial death. The bread portrays His body, willingly given up to be nailed to a cross. The wine represents His blood that was shed to set us free from the penalty of sin, and to bring about a new relationship between us and God.



Insight

1. Review the first Passover observance given to Israel in Exodus 12:1-14.

What was the purpose of the Passover?

What part did the lamb have in the observance?

2. What is the primary purpose for Communion?

3. What does the expression "Christ our Passover" mean (1 Corinthians 5:7)? (See also Isaiah 53:7 and John 1:29)



Snap Shot

The connection between the Israelite's Passover and Communion was made by Jesus. He used the memorial of Israel's national deliverance to point to the greater one He would provide: the deliverance from sin and judgment through His death on the cross.

The Passover occurred at the very beginning of Israel's history as a nation. They were oppressed as slaves in Egypt, incapable of liberating themselves, so they cried to the Lord for deliverance.

On the night of the Passover, all Israelite families were instructed to take a lamb and kill it, placing some of its blood on the entrances to their homes. They then roasted the lamb and ate it in preparation for their journey the following day. That night the judgment of God came upon the land, and all those homes with the lamb's blood on their doorways were spared. As a result the Israelites were set free and left Egypt under the leadership of Moses.

In commemoration of that great deliverance, God called Moses to institute an annual celebration called the Passover Feast.

In similar manner, Christians are called to regularly commemorate the deliverance that the Lord Jesus provided.



Side Note

False ideas about communion

1. There is no power in the sacrament

A person does not partake in communion to receive forgiveness of sins. The sacrament has no power to give life or effect any part of a person's salvation. Communion is not a fresh 'sacrifice' of Christ (as believed by those who participate in Mass). It is simply a rite that accompanies worship and remembrance, done in obedience to the command of Christ, in anticipation of His soon return, and to show forth His death (1Corinthians 11:24-26).

2. The bread and wine do not change into the body and blood of Jesus

Some believe that the bread and wine change into the actual body and blood of Jesus when ingested by a believer. However, there is no support for this in the New Testament. The emblems are symbols only. When Jesus instituted communion He said: "This is my body ... this is my blood"; but did so before He had been crucified. He referred to the elements as mere symbols of His body and blood that would later be given in sacrifice.

Others believe that the bread and wine remain unchanged, and Christ is spiritually present in the bread and wine. Again, there is no biblical support for this belief.

The reference Jesus made to believers eating His body and blood (John 6) has to do with lost and sinful people receiving eternal life through the sacrifice of Himself on the cross.

4. According to 1Corinthians 11:23-26 what do we proclaim by partaking in communion? What does this mean?



Thinking it Through

The right approach to communion

Only those who have been born into the family of God have the right to share in communion, as it celebrates deliverance from sin, and fellowship with the Lord Jesus, which is only true of those who have trusted in Him as Lord and Saviour.

Approaching with reverence

In the book of Corinthians Paul talks of Christians who were disciplined by God because they had shared in communion without dealing with sin in their lives. That is why we read in 1 Corinthians 11:28 that Christians should examine themselves before they eat and drink communion.

The communion feast is not a simple eating and drinking of the elements. There is a deep, spiritual significance to this observance and it should not be taken lightly. The cost of delivering us from sin, death and hell was enormous. Jesus instituted communion as a remembrance of this costly sacrifice.

Approaching with thankfulness

The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to give every believer the opportunity to personally remember the cost of their salvation and express their thanks to the Lord for His sacrifice on their behalf. The word used when the Lord Jesus "Gave thanks" is the Greek verb *eucharisteo*, from which we get the english word Eucharist.

Approaching with anticipation

In 1 Corinthians 11:26 we read that the Lord's Supper is an interim feast of remembrance "until He comes". Participation in the Lord's Supper allows a backward look in appreciation for what Christ has done for us, and a forward look in anticipation of the soon return of Christ.

Approaching in a spirit of unity

The word 'communion' means sharing together ('participation' - 1Corinthians 10:16). This term indicates the fellowship that occurs with other believers and with Jesus Christ during the Lord's Supper celebration. It speaks strongly of the unity that should exist among all Christians. That is why in verse 17 Paul says: "Because there is one loaf (*of bread*), we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf".



Insight

Look at Luke 22:14-20, and consider the following questions:

1. What do the words “... *in remembrance of Me*” (v. 19) indicate regarding our primary focus during communion?

2. What is the relationship between the cup of wine (or grapejuice), and the new covenant that Jesus introduced (v. 20)?



Action

What to do during communion

1. Preparation

The Bible teaches us to examine ourselves before taking communion. We should confess any known sins - especially any that are a denial of the truths that are symbolized in the Lords Supper such as disunity or broken relationships in the Family of God.

Normally communion is taken during a worship service. It is important to enter into the worship with our hearts, and use the prayer and praise to personally express to the Lord our love and appreciation of Him.

2. Participation

When you take the bread and eat it, close your eyes and meditate on the Lord's goodness and grace. Consider how unworthy you are to be a child of God, and think of the Lord's willingness to give up His body to be nailed to a cross so you could be forgiven. Pray and worship the Lord quietly in your heart, telling Him of your gratitude and love for Him.

Similarly, when taking the wine or grapejuice, meditate on the fact that Jesus shed His blood for you, and through His death on the cross you have received eternal life. Thank Him personally.



Digging Deeper

Worship

Worship is the noblest activity a human can do. It involves a spiritual communion of the highest part of our being (our spirit) with the living God (John 4:23-24). True worship can be defined as 'giving all glory and honor to God with reverence and awe, because He alone is worthy'. The Apostle Peter calls the church to be a community of worshippers (1 Peter 2:4-10).

Reasons we worship

God alone is worthy of our worship

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being" (Revelation 4:11).

We are the people of God

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2: 9-10). Worship expresses a person's relationship with God. Having been brought out of darkness and into light; out of alienation into a personal relationship with God, the response of a true believer is to worship. *"For it is ... we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:3).

We are part of a worshipping community

"You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (v5)

Right through the Bible there is a major emphasis on corporate worship. In the New Testament the church met together for worship, teaching, prayer and fellowship. The first letter of Peter clearly states this, declaring that those who come to Christ, come into a spiritual temple where worship is offered. That temple is not a physical building, but a fellowship of believers - a community of faith.

We are priests

A priest is not just a person who offers sacrifices on behalf of others, but someone who has right of access to God. Priests in the church are not a special class above the normal Christian. All believers are priests. Every believer has the same right of access, with the privilege of being able to offer acceptable worship to the Lord.

Responses in worship

We approach Him in worship

Peter writes *"come to Him"*, using a word that carries the idea of approaching a dignitary. Our worship involves drawing near to Him - not to an earthly altar, nor to a statue, a person or a building. As priests we come directly to Him and personally offer up our worship.

We show appreciation in worship

We are to *"declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you ... had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy"* (1 Peter 2: 9-10).

Our worship is to be God-centred. As we consider His love, and all that He has done, we look beyond the actual blessings and appreciate the One who blessed! We worship Him for who He is, by considering what He has done.

We offer spiritual sacrifices in worship

In the Old Testament the people offered physical offerings such as thank and peace offerings. These were abolished in the New Testament, and we now bring spiritual offerings. These include praise from our lips and practical acts of service with our hands. *"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased"* (Hebrews 13:15-16). *"Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"* (Ephesians 5:2). *"(gifts of money) are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God"* (Philippians 4:18). In fact, true worship involves a complete and continual offering of ourselves totally to the Lord (Romans 12:2).

True worship must come from the heart - a genuine response of love and appreciation that goes far beyond words. It effects the whole life. Any other worship is vain and unacceptable to God. *"These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain"* (Matthew 15:8-9).

II. Prayer



In focus

Prayer is communicating with God, and involves offering up our praise, thanksgiving and worship, and making our requests to Him. It is simply talking with God and allowing Him to talk with us. Prayer expresses the relationship we have with our loving and wise Father, and is the means by which we love Him, trust Him and learn from Him.



Thinking it Through

Prayer is an expression of our faith - it reveals our dependence upon God. True prayer flows from a sense of helplessness (Jesus told His disciples: "without Me you can do nothing").

Prayer is not giving God a list of our wants and desires, nor twisting God's arm to do our will. Prayer is not merely giving God information, because He knows everything!

Prayer has more to do with relationship than requests. Through prayer we discover God's mind (Ephesians 5:10, 17), and are brought into line with His purposes (Matthew 9:38; 10:5).

Prayer can be likened to a person in a row boat without oars, who throws a rope to a big power-boat, and is pulled into line with the direction it is going. Through prayer we throw a line to God, who pulls us into the direction that He wants us to go.

Our prayers should be directed to God the Father (Acts 12:5), in the name of Jesus (John 14:13), through the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18).



Insight

1. When Should We Pray? (Psalm 5:3; 88:13; Mark 1:35)

Why is the morning a good time?

2. How often did David pray according to Psalm 22:2; 42:8?

3. How often did Daniel pray according to Daniel 6:10?

4. How often does Paul say that we should pray? (1Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18)



Thinking it Through

Jesus and prayer

Jesus was a man of prayer. He rose early in the morning (Mark 1:35), and at times He prayed all night (Luke 6:12). Jesus was always doing the will of His Father (John 5:19), and prayer was His means of communication. There were times when He prayed out loud so that those listening could benefit from His prayers (John 11:41-42), but most times He was in a vital, dynamic relationship with His Father that was maintained through prayer.

Jesus' teaching on prayer included two parables. These both emphasize one important truth - perseverance. He also taught the same in the words: "ask, and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). This could be translated: "ask and **keep on** asking..., seek and **keep on** seeking..., knock and **keep on** knocking...".

The pattern prayer that the Lord taught His disciples (which has been called 'The Lord's Prayer') gives a model to guide us how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13). The first 3 petitions show the importance of seeking what would please God (worship, reverence and obedience). The second part of the prayer involves requests for personal needs (material needs, maintaining right relationships, and seeking God's help to overcome evil).

Some of Jesus' teaching on prayer has incredible promises linked with it (John 15:7, John 16:23, 24).



Insight

1. From Jesus' pattern prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, what do we learn about forgiveness?

2. What did the church pray for in Acts 12:5?

What happened? (Acts 12:7)

3. Besides answers, what else does God grant to those who pray? (Philippians 4:6, 7)

4. Does God promise to give us everything we ask for?

5. What does God promise to give us? (Philippians 4:7)



Thinking it Through

Conditions of prayer

The Bible teaches that God has attached certain conditions to prayer. In His grace, God sometimes answers our prayers, even when we do not meet some of these conditions. But for us to enjoy a fruitful prayer life alongside a close relationship with God, it is imperative that we meet His conditions.

1. We must pray in the will of God - Romans 8:27; Matthew 26:39; 1 John 5:14
2. We must forgive others if we are to expect God to hear and answer our prayers - Mark 11:25.
3. We must pray in faith, believing - Mark 11:24; James 1:6, 7.
4. We must keep His commandments - 1 John 3:22.
5. We must abide in Christ - John 15:7.
6. We must pray in the Holy Spirit - Jude 20; Ephesians 6:18
7. We must pray in the name of Jesus - John 16:24.



Insight

How would you describe the difference between a person who recites prayers and a person who actually prays?

What does this teach us about true prayer?

Identify the hindrances to effective prayer -

Psalms 66:18

Proverbs 21:13

Ezekiel 14:3

Malachi 1:8-9

Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25

James 1:6-7

James 4:2-3

1 Peter 3:7



Side Note

Three kinds of prayer

1. Private prayer

Jesus said that we should go into a small room and pray in secret and our Father in Heaven will hear what is done in secret and reward you (Matthew 6:5-6).

2. Corporate prayer

In Acts 4:23-31 we have the written record of the first church prayer meeting.

3. Continuous prayer

Paul calls us to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17).



Action

How do we learn to pray?

- We learn from God's Word - read through the actual prayers of Jesus and the Apostle Paul.
- We learn from the Holy Spirit - one of His roles is to help us to pray (Romans 8:15, 16, 26, 27)
- We learn by doing - regular prayer, praying alone and with others, and brief specific prayers when needs arise.
- We learn from people - the example of others around us who pray or from reading books.

Developing personal prayer

1. Pray at a time when you are alert (e.g. in the morning).
3. Pray with a specific list of prayer needs. Keep a prayer diary with space for answers to be written in (review the list regularly).
5. Begin with worship, praise and thanksgiving.
6. Continue with confession.
7. Before you pray for your own needs pray for the needs of others.



Digging Deeper

Answers to prayer

Does God answer all of our prayers? Yes, but God's answers come in several ways. Lehman Strauss defines five kinds of answers that we receive from God when we pray.

1. Direct Answers (Acts 12:5-11; James 5:17, 18)

Expecting God to give us exactly what we ask for can be presumptuous, when we contrast His limitless knowledge with our human limitations. Yet God often does answer directly. He may do so simply out of His grace as a loving Father. Or He may have led us through previous prayer or the Spirit's prompting, to pray specifically. Direct answers to prayer encourage our faith.

2. Delayed answers (John 11:3-6, 14, 15)

Jesus delayed when He heard news of Lazarus' sickness. He knew the outcome - His delay resulted in a far greater miracle that brought greater glory to God than if He had acted immediately. His response to the news, His timing and His words reveal His Divine authority and control.

3. Denied answers (Luke 9:54-55)

The disciples asked Jesus to call fire down from heaven to consume a village of Samaritans, but the Lord wanted to save them, not destroy them. God's denials are always for the ultimate good.

4. Damaging answers

Israel asked God for a King, not because they believed it to be His will but because they wanted to be like the other nations around them. It was an expression of their rejection of God and resulted in a King who turned out to be a failure.

5. Different answers (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

God sometimes answers our prayers in a way that meets the need we face, but does so in a different way than we anticipated. His answers are always for our ultimate good. Paul prayed that he would be healed of a physical ailment so he could serve God better, but God answered by giving him special grace to enable him to serve God with special power, while remaining weak.

12. *living Victoriously*



In focus

When we become Christians by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, He saves us from the penalty of sin (we are forgiven). But that is not all He does. He also saves us from the power of sin.

He not only was our Saviour at that one point in time, He continues to be our Saviour right through life. We are able to live victoriously over our sinful nature and its desires when we learn to experience His saving power in our daily lives.



Thinking it Through

The problem of sin

We do what we do because we are what we are!

We have inherited a sinful nature from our parents (originating with Adam), so from birth we have struggled with selfishness, sinful desires, and all forms of sin.

The source of sin is our sinful nature - what the Bible calls 'the heart'. Jesus said: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean" (Mark 7:21-23). Our natural condition before trusting in Christ is to be "deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures" (Titus 3:3).

In Jeremiah 17:9-10, God reveals that the heart is deceitful, and it's true nature is unsearchable to any but God alone.

As Christians we are given a new heart and indwelt by God's Spirit, but we are still not exempt from the "deceitful desires" of the sinful nature (Ephesians 4:22). Paul warned against presuming that we had 'arrived': "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Even when helping a Christian who has failed, we are to "watch ourselves lest we also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).



Insight

1. How thoroughly are we as human beings affected by sin - what has sin corrupted in us (Romans 7:5,18,25; Galatians 5:19-21)?

2. How does seeing sin as it really is, help us to be victorious over it?



Thinking it Through

Three major influences

In Ephesians 2 we find three ways we are influenced towards sin.

Even though Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the inner desire for holiness He produces is met by opposition on three fronts: the world, our own sinful nature, and the Devil. All three exert a powerful influence on us to sin.

1. The world (1John 2:15-16)

The world is best described as all humanity opposed to God, rejecting His rule and living independently. It is the godless society we live in that can have a powerful influence in how we think and behave. The Bible teaches that the world, with its values, beliefs and morals, is under the control of Satan (John 12:31; Ephesians 2:2).

2. The sinful nature (Romans 7:21-23)

The sinful nature involves our inner bias towards selfishness and sin, that move us to go beyond the boundaries that God has set. The powerful influence of our sinful desires is seen in many areas such as gluttony, lies, anger and sexual sins.

3. The Devil (1 Thessalonians 3:5)

The devil is the enemy of God, and is opposed to all who follow Christ. The devil is a personal, active, and intelligent agent of evil, enticing and seducing people away from a life that pleases God. In the Bible he is called the tempter (Matthew 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 3:5). The devil's activities include casting doubt on, or opposing God's word, oppressing people physically, mentally and spiritually, and lying (often using subtlety to lead people astray from the truth).

4. We are powerless

When we try in our own strength to live a life that is free from sin and selfishness, we try to do the impossible. We are forced to admit the powerlessness of any promises we make or resolves we may set our minds to. When faced with temptation, our inherent weakness becomes all too apparent!

The victorious life is not living by a catalogue of laws, but is a gift from God to be continually received by faith. Just as our salvation is a gift, which we do not deserve or earn, victory over sin is also a gift (Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).



Insight

1. What are some beliefs and attitudes that your friends or the media have that you recognize as being contrary to God's will?

2. Why do you think the influence of the world is so powerful?

3. Think of some ways that we can cross moral boundaries we have set for ourselves, even though we may determine not to do so, because of the power that our sinful nature has over us.



Thinking it Through

There are three important principles that enable us to live the victorious life:

1. Identification with Jesus Christ

Romans 6:1-10 teaches that victory is found in our identification with Jesus Christ. We identify with Him by knowing what He has done for us, and then applying that knowledge to the way we live our lives.

We know that Jesus' death and resurrection is the only means of our salvation. We also know that our salvation is not just from the penalty of sin, but also from the power of sin in our daily living. Therefore the only way to experience power over sin is through the death and resurrection of Christ, applied to our lives each day.

a. Identification with His death - We died with Christ (verses 5-6). When Jesus died, He did not only die as our substitute (taking our penalty upon Himself), but as our representative. His death was not just for those sins we commit, but for our propensity to go on sinning! He has not only set us free from the judgment we deserve, but also from the bondage we experience.

A person who is in deep financial debt, who then marries a billionaire, is not only free from every cent they owe, but can enjoy the freedom of living debt free every day. In living the married life, they identify with their new status: having 'died' to their old life, and having 'risen' to their new debt-free life.

b. Identification with His burial - We were buried with Christ (verse 4). Burial provides proof of death: the old life is over.

c. Identification with His resurrection - We rose with Christ (verse 5). His victory over death is shared with those who trust in Him. The day by day experience of His resurrection life is the spiritual resource God gives to be victorious over sin (verses 4, 6, 8, 10).

2. Reckoning ourselves dead to sin

The truth of our new freedom from sin's power through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ will only effect the way we live if we reckon it to be true and apply it to our daily lives. Using the illustration of a debt-ridden person marrying a billionaire; If they do not reckon the truth of their new status to their lives they will continue to live as they did before being married, and live in poverty rather than in plenty! Immediately after the wedding they can purchase whatever they need without fear their credit card will be declined!

3. Yielding our bodies to Jesus Christ

Living victoriously involves a choice - now that I belong to Christ I have a free will, and can choose whether to follow the sinful desires of my heart or choose to obey the Lord (His Spirit and His Word) - Romans 6:13, 16, 18; 12:1-2



Snap Shot

What God has done for Us

The three sources of temptation (the world, the flesh and the devil) have been completely conquered by Christ.

1. The defeat of the world

In John 16:33 Jesus said that He has completely overcome the world. As a result the Christian can say that they are crucified to the world and the world is crucified to them (Galatians 6). See also John 12:31; 1Corinthians 11:32.

2. The defeat of the sinful nature

Jesus Christ broke the power of the sinful nature when He died on the cross (Romans 6:6). He frees the believer from the power of sin so that we can always safely say "I need never sin - I can be victorious because I am free to choose to live God's way".

3. The defeat of the Devil

This was accomplished by Jesus Christ when He died on the cross (John 12:31; 16:11). Satan's power over Christians has been broken (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14). We are called to resist the devil and he will flee (James 4:7).

Yielding our bodies to Christ means a complete submission to His will in all we say and do. It means living each day in a way that pleases Him, and making changes when He reveals them to us.

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: Sexual immorality impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5)



Insight

1. Think of some ways in life where we can find out something to be true, and when we live in the light of it, that truth can change our lives.

2. What are some practical ways that we can set ourselves up to live in light of knowing that we have been set free in Christ?



Thinking it Through

Temptation

Temptation is a strong attraction or allurement to say or do something that we know to be wrong. God does not tempt us, but He uses temptation for His own good purposes, drawing out faith and integrity, and developing us to maturity (1 John 2:13). It is not a sin to be tempted, but it is a sin when we give in to temptation (James 1:13-15).

The two natures

A Christian can be a walking 'civil war'. Having received a new nature from God, but also retaining the old sinful nature, a battle looms whenever a moral decision needs to be made. There is the strong pull to yield to the desires of the sinful nature, and the counter pull to follow the desires of the indwelling Spirit, who inspires our new nature (Galatians 5:17).

We have been set free from being mastered by our old nature, and are free to obey the Lord. However, a choice always has to be made.

Our new nature is not a doctored-up old nature (2 Peter 1:4), we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24). God's divine nature has been planted inside us (1 John 3:9).

Now we are to live by obeying the leading of the Spirit. Paul writes that if we live by the Spirit, we are to keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).



Action

In practical terms, living victoriously will flow from a clear understanding of our freedom in Christ. It will occur when we practice His presence, become sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting, and constantly yield ourselves to God.



Snap Shot

Transformation

The New Testament uses the word transform when referring to the change that occurs as Christians live out the victorious Christian life. The Greek word is *metamorphoomai* from which we derive our English word *metamorphosis* (used of a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly).

In Romans 12:2 Paul writes that this transformation results from the renewing of our minds. He says that this transformation is gradual it's goal is likeness to our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). In Romans 8:29 he writes that God predestined all believers to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.

When we yield our bodies to God they become instruments of righteousness, love and peace. It involves always choosing to follow our Master, and in doing so, to trust Him for the power to follow through and complete what we choose to say or do.



Insight

1. What do we learn about temptation from:

- James 1:13-15

- 1Peter 5:8

- 1John 2:15-16

2. Reading Genesis 3:1-6 and Joshua 7:20-21 what progression do you see from temptation to sinful action?

3. What are two major truths from 1 Corinthians 10:13 that are helpful in overcoming temptation?



Action

1. What are some preventative measures we can take to overcome temptation?

- Psalm 119:9-11

- Matthew 26:41

- 2 Timothy 2:22

- James 4:7

2. What should we do when we fail (1John 1:9) and what is the promise in verse 7?

3. In Colossians 3:12-15 what should be seen in our lives when we are living victoriously ?



Side Note

Grace

Regardless of how victorious we live, or how much we fail, we are always in need of God's grace. God's grace is His undeserved favor that brings us to faith (we are not saved by our good living or obedience, but by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ). This same grace keeps us on the journey of faith.

We are never going to live worthy enough to deserve His blessing. If God blesses us only when we 'perform' we would never be blessed, for even our best efforts are infused with sin (impure motives and selfishness). If we think that we can earn God's blessings through our obedience, we do not realize how completely depraved we are by nature, and how sin and self stains everything we do.

"Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace" (Jerry Bridges).

We are to live every day relying on His grace.



Digging Deeper

Legalism

At the time of Christ and soon after the New Testament was written, legalism was accepted by most as the means of living a holy life that pleased God. The Pharisees were strict legalists and placed on the people an incredible burden of rules and regulations. In addition to the Law of Moses, they catalogued thousands of rules that are recorded in a book called the Mishna.

When Jesus came onto the scene He challenged these legalistic views and called people to Him, saying that to be a disciple of Jesus frees you from the wearisome burden of living under the law (Matthew 11:28). At the same time He upheld the law as a revelation of God's holiness - *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law ..."* (Matthew 7:17-20).

Today we have to face two forms of legalism - one of placing ourselves under the Law of Moses and obeying its regulations, and the other of well intentioned people making rules and imposing them on others.

1. The Law of Moses

To what extent is the Christian expected to keep the Law of Moses?

Some say that the Christian should only keep the ten commandments, and others say that Christians should only keep the moral laws but not the ceremonial laws that relate to the nation of Israel.

The Law is viewed in the Bible as a unit. The word "Law" in Hebrew is always in the singular when referring to the Torah - the Law of Moses (not the 'laws' of Moses). There is no biblical basis for separating the Ten Commandments from the rest of the Law which contains many additional commandments. All 613 commandments are a unit called the Law of Moses.

The purpose in God giving the Law of Moses

The Bible clearly states that the Law was given to Israel and not to the Gentiles or the Church (Deuteronomy 4:7-8; Psalm 147:19-20; Malachi 4:4).

The purpose of the Law of Moses was to reveal the holiness of God, and to reveal the standard of righteousness that God demanded of His people.

The Law was given to reveal sin - to cause people to realize they constantly broke God's law and needed a Saviour (Romans 3:19-20; 5:20; 7:7; Galatians 3:24).

At no time is it taught in the Bible that the Law of Moses is or was the means of salvation.

The Law of Moses has been rendered inoperative

The New Testament teaches that the Law of Moses has been rendered inoperative with the death of Jesus Christ. The Law no longer has authority over any individual (Romans 10:4; Galatians 2:16; Hebrews 7:19).

The Law of Moses brought death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:2-11). Paul clearly shows that the Ten Commandments are no longer in force, as the Law has passed away ("rendered inoperative").

With the Law of Moses having been done away with, we are now under a new law. This new law is called the Law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), and the Law of the Spirit of Life (Romans 8:2).

The form of legalism that places a requirement on Christians to obey some or all of the Law of Moses in order to please God (and, for some, in order to obtain or keep salvation), cannot be supported by the New Testament teaching on law and grace.

However, the New Testament does give freedom for Christians who may have personal convictions about obeying certain decrees of the Law, to do so. For example, a person may wish to keep the dietary laws and not eat pork or offal. But the moment they prescribe this for other Christians as a necessary means to be accepted by God, it becomes legalism.

2. The rules people make

The second form of legalism today is seen in those who live by a list of do's and don'ts in order to gain God's favour or blessing.

"I don't do that, and therefore I am pleasing God."

Or *"If only I could do this or not do that, I would please God."*

In Galatians 5:1 we read: *"Do not lose your freedom by giving in ... plant your feet firmly therefore within the freedom that Christ has won for us, and do not let yourselves be caught again in the shackles of slavery"* (J. B. Phillips version).

Legalistic people live by rules they have set, and impose them on others (either overtly or by implication). They often judge others who do not live by those same rules. They are joy-killers.

Legalistic people can have a powerful effect on others, making them feel guilty for failing to live as a Christian should. They are mostly sincere, and believe they are doing God a service.

Legalism is condemned by Paul in Colossians 2:16-23:

"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ ... Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to it's rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

Legalism has no power - it is void of the Spirit and, as Paul wrote to Timothy, it has *"a form of godliness"* but has no power (2 Timothy 3:5).

Charles Swindoll writes: *"One of the most serious problems facing the orthodox Christian church today (as in Paul's day) is the problem of legalism. In every day it is the same. Legalism wrenches the joy of the Lord from the Christian believer, and with the joy of the Lord goes his power for vital worship and vibrant service."*

Nothing is left but cramped, somber, dull, and listless profession. The truth is betrayed, and the glorious name of the Lord becomes a synonym for a gloomy kill-joy. The Christian under law is a miserable parody of the real thing."

Eugene Peterson says: *"The one place on earth where we would most expect to be set free is, in fact, the very place we are most likely to be placed into slavery: the church. Surely, that must grieve God". Legalism takes the joy of the Lord from the Christian. Living under law is a miserable parody of the real thing. Legalistic people with their rigid do's and don'ts, kill the spirit of joy and spontaneity of those who wish to enjoy their liberty."*

Legalism is ultimately based on pride. It fosters an attitude of self-righteousness and self-exalting arrogance. A legalist assumes the place of authority and when left unhindered, can gain an illegitimate control of others.

"Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires ... the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:5-6).

13. *Mission*



In focus

The word 'mission' embraces all that we are sent into the world to do. We are called to be an influence (like salt) and distinctive (as light). We are to love our neighbours and care for the needy. Above all we are to share the good news of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and establish church fellowships.

The command Jesus gave His followers was: "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18-20). Mark records it with the words: "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). This command is the church's mandate for mission.

Each local congregation is called to be involved in spreading the gospel in the area where God has placed them, as well as to the whole world. It is a mandate that affects all believers personally, as each Christian carries the responsibility to be witnesses, and also to support those who go as missionaries.



Thinking it Through

God's mission before Christ came

God's goal in creation was that all things would fulfil His purpose and thus to bring glory to His Name. But mankind rebelled and turned away from God, frustrating His loving purpose.

Over the generations following, most people turned away from what knowledge they had of their creator, with sad consequences (Romans 1:18-32).

God then chose one man, Abraham, and promised that through him and his descendants all nations of the earth would be blessed. God's intent has always been to bless all people everywhere. This is God's mission (Acts 3:25-26; Galatians 3:8,14).

The book of Exodus reveals the next step in God fulfilling His mission – He chose the nation of Israel to be His special possession "that the name of the Lord be proclaimed in all the earth" (Exodus 9:16). God's plan was for Israel to be a witness to the other nations (Isaiah 43:9-12). But Israel failed, so God sent prophets to condemn their sin and also predict the coming of Messiah (a Saviour-King). They foretold that He would suffer for the sins of His people, die and rise again.

His coming as Saviour, however, was not just for Israel, but for the whole world (Isaiah 51:1-6).

God's mission through Christ

Jesus Christ who was a descendant of Abraham is the fulfilment of all these prophecies. He is God's King who came to be the Saviour of the world. His grace and mercy extends to all people including the Gentiles (Galatians 3:8,14). He came to "seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10) and "that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).

God's mission after Christ

The mission of Jesus Christ was to die for the sins of the world, and rise again to be a living Saviour for all who trust in Him. Therefore an obligation is placed on all Christians to make this good news known. *"How can they hear without someone preaching to them?"* (Romans 10:14).

All Christians are missionaries. The word 'missionary' means 'sent one' - a person who is sent out with the important role of sharing the gospel with others. Though all Christians are missionaries, there are some who are "set apart" for missionary work. They are sent out and supported by local churches in order to work in cross cultural evangelism and church planting, as well as some who go in supportive roles.

God's mission fulfilled

In the book of Revelation, at the end of the age, we read that God's mission will be fulfilled by the presence in heaven of saved people from every people group.

"... with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

"... a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne ..." (Revelation 7:9-10).



Insight

1. From Romans 1:20-25 what do we learn about the state of the people in the world?

2. According to Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:18-20, what are the things we are required to do in order to make disciples, and what does Jesus promise us when we obey this command?

3. How did Jesus resource the church for the mission (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8)?



Thinking it Through

Paul the missionary

The apostle Paul is a great biblical example of a missionary.

Paul's call: *"This man is My chosen instrument to carry My Name before the Gentiles"* (Acts 9:15).

Paul was called by Christ at his conversion to be a missionary. Those who are sent out as missionaries today may not have as dramatic a call, and would rarely know it when they first put their faith in Christ, but they should have a call. The Lord personally exercises the heart and communicates to the mind the conviction of being called to serve God.



Snap Shot

The Mission of Jesus was to all the world

The angels:

"...good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10).

Simeon:

"My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles ..." (Luke 2:30-32).

John the Baptist:

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Jesus:

"For God so loved the world ..." (John 3:16).

"I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32).



Side Note

Missionary Statistics

Christ said that the biggest need back then, which is true also today, is the lack of labourers (Matthew 9:37). The need for people who are willing to go is also matched by the need for people who are willing to support those who go.

According to **Nazarene Missions International**:

In today's world the statistics are...

Unreached people - 24% of the world's population receives one-half of 1% of dollars given to Christian missions (There are 38 "unreached" countries plus many people groups)

Evangelized non-Christians - 43% of the world's population receives 5% of dollars given to Christian missions

Professing Christians - 33% of the world's population receives 94.5% of dollars given to Christian missions

Major Religions:

Christians 2.3 billion

Muslims 1.6 billion

Hindus 952 million

Nonreligious 658 million

Buddhists 468 million

Chinese folk-religions 458 million

Ethno-religions 269 million

Paul's Commission: *"The Holy Spirit said ... 'set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2-3)*

The church leaders recognized the Spirit's leading and so the church formally commissioned Barnabas and Paul to serve as missionaries.

Today church leaders are to do the same - identify God's call on a person's life and release them to serve Him with their blessing. Once Barnabas and Paul had completed the first phase of their missionary work, they returned to their home church and reported to them the mighty things God had done, how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

Paul's strategy: *"...we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1:5).*

Paul had a clear strategy in his mission work:

1. Though he was specifically called to the Gentiles, he first shared the gospel with his fellow Jews in every place he went.
2. He concentrated on taking the gospel to unreached territories (where others had not preached).
3. He focussed on urban centres (cities).
4. He established churches, appointing elders and seeking to teach as much as he could while present (Acts 20:25-27).
5. He revisited and wrote letters to the churches he had established to encourage, teach and rebuke where needed.
6. He prayed constantly for the churches he had established.



Insight

1. How did Paul become "all things to all people" according to 1 Corinthians 9:19-23?

What, in your opinion, are some ways that missionaries may need to adapt to the people they are reaching today?

2. How did Paul show the genuineness of his concern for the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:7- 9)?

3. Why did Paul the 'missionary' commend the Phillippian Church (Philippians 4:14-19)?

How does he describe their giving?



Digging Deeper

KNOWING WHAT OUR MESSAGE IS

We are all missionaries and are called to share the gospel. The word 'gospel' means 'good news' and refers to the wonderful truths attached to the coming of Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Put simply, the ABC of the gospel is:

All have sinned

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world

Come to Me (Jesus said)

a. ALL HAVE SINNED

Sin is an offence against God's moral law. Sin is defined as lawlessness (1 John 3:4), selfishness (Isaiah 53:6), rebellion (Isaiah 1:2), knowing to do good and failing to do it (James 4:17), and acting other than by faith (Romans 14:23). All sins are ultimately against God: *"the sinful mind is hostile to God"* (Romans 8:7).

Jesus taught that the heart (our sinful nature) is the source of *"evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly"* (Mark 7:20-23).

DEATH and JUDGMENT

Death and judgment result from our sinful condition. God's character is such that, while sin stands in the way, it is impossible for any person, no matter how 'good' in their own eyes, to be accepted before Him and able to enter into a relationship with Him. Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, showing that their sinful condition before they trusted Jesus Christ was *"alienated from the life of God"* (Ephesians 2:1; 4:18). They were "made alive" when they trusted in Christ; which means they passed from a state of separation from God, into a relationship with Him.

GOD'S CHARACTER (*Attributes of God that are helpful when sharing the Gospel*)

* Holiness

God is holy. This attribute separates God from all that is corrupt or evil, and demands punishment on all sin. God cannot look on sin approvingly (Habakkuk 1:13). His moral excellence makes Him morally and spiritually separate from sinful humans (Isaiah 57:15).

* Wrath

God's wrath is the response of holy anger when He is faced with evil. It is His settled attitude toward sin. God loves the sinner but hates the sin. God's wrath is not a vindictive, 'heated' anger, such as we can have. It is His consistent antagonism to sin and evil.

* Righteousness and Justice

God's justice is an extension of His holiness. He is responsible to see that justice is always administered in His universe. He does not show partiality or favoritism. He is fair in all His dealings with mankind. As a just God, He could not 'let us off' our sins. The only way to save people from judgment was for Himself to provide the payment. *"He is entirely fair and just in this present time when He declares sinners to be right in His sight because they believe in Jesus"* (Romans 3:26 NLT).

* Love

God is love. It is impossible for His love to waver, change or cease. God's love does not depend on the attractiveness or goodness of the object. Even those who crucified His Son were forgiven when they repented. In mercy, God does not give us what we deserve (judgment), and in grace, He gives us what we don't deserve (forgiveness and heaven).

b. BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

The Gospel is not merely about Jesus Christ - it **is** Jesus Christ! We do not merely share facts about a historical figure - we introduce people to a Person. Our message is twofold: *"Jesus Christ"* (Who He is) *"and Him crucified"* (what He did for us)" (1 Corinthians 1:21-23; 2:2).

I. WHO JESUS IS

He is the Son of God - the source of life and salvation

He is God the Son who became a human (John 1:1-14).

Jesus said of Himself *"I am the way"* and *"no one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6). He does not show the way, nor merely make the way - He **is** the way. He **is** the Saviour.

Jesus Christ must be presented to people as Lord. *"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord..."* (2 Corinthians 4:5). It is faith **in Him** that saves, not belief in a doctrine about Him!

II. WHAT JESUS DID

He died as the sacrifice for our sins

In the Old Testament, God required animals to die as a substitute for those who sinned. The animal was innocent and did not deserve to die, but took the place of the sinful person. The blood of animals could never take away sin, but they were pictures pointing forward to the one great sinless sacrifice where: *"Christ died for sins ... the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God"* (1 Peter 3:18). The innocent took the place of the guilty, the sinless One was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; John 1:29; Isaiah 53:4-6).

He rose again and is alive today

All the gospel messages given by Peter and Paul (recorded in Acts) present the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the focal truth to be believed. In Romans 10:9 Paul states that no one can be saved without believing *"that God has raised Him from the dead."*

Romans 4:25 teaches that Christ was *"raised to life to make us right with God"*. In 1 Corinthians 15:17, Paul argues that if Christ had not been raised from the dead, our faith would be futile and we would still be in our sins. If Christ had not been able to overcome the power of death Himself, He could scarcely save anyone else! But *"He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, because He lives forever..."* (Hebrews 7:25).

The resurrection is convincing proof that the claims of Jesus are true - He is God's Son. If He had been a religious con-man or a deluded fool, then God would not have raised Him up. The Bible says that He is: *"declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead"* (Romans 1:4).

c. COME TO ME (Jesus said)

Repentance

Repentance means to turn. To repent means to have a radical change in one's thinking and direction. Repentance changes the heart and mind, which then results in a new lifestyle of following Jesus. Paul preached that people should *"repent, and turn to God, and prove their repentance by their deeds"* (Acts 26:20). Repentance is an essential part of our message: *"repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His Name to all nations"* (Luke 24:47. See also Acts 20:21 and 2 Peter 3:9)

Faith

Faith is one of the most important concepts in the New Testament. The word is used 98 times in John's Gospel alone. It is insisted on as essential to the Christian life from beginning to end: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...for in the gospel a righteousness of God is revealed that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith"* (Romans 1:16-17). Important as faith is, most people do not really understand it.

- * Some think faith is a mystical quality that certain people are endowed with (*"I wish I had your faith!"*)
- * Some think of faith as a belief in God which you either have or don't have (*"Oh, I have faith!"*)
- * Some think faith is a head belief, independent of their moral conduct. (*"I believe in God!"* or *"I believe that Jesus died and rose again!"*)
- * Some think faith is something they did when they prayed a prayer, repeated a doctrinal statement, or joined a church.

True faith is the appropriate response to God's revelation of love and grace. All the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 acted in a "faith-response" to what God told them. Their faith in God's Word was to them *"the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* The supreme revelation of God is found in His Son, and so the ultimate expression of faith is to trust in Jesus Christ.

* Faith involves knowledge

You cannot believe what you have never heard or cannot understand. *"How can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard?"* (Romans 10:14).

*** Faith involves mental assent**

Faith involves more than hearing. There must be an acceptance of what is heard or read, even if it is not understood. Faith is more than believing that Jesus died for our sins. God calls us to believe "in the Name" of the Son of God (John 3:18; 1 John 5:13). "The Name" represents all that Christ is revealed to be. Faith involves accepting the Bible's teaching that Jesus Christ is God's Son (He is God), that He died for our sins, and that, being risen from the dead, He alone is able to save all who trust in Him.

Faith is progressive - gradually developing over a period of time until it focuses completely on Christ.

*** Faith involves commitment**

The Greek word for faith used by the New Testament writers is found in other Greek literature of the time. It often conveyed the sense of entrusting something valuable into the hands of another (eg trusting an important letter into the hands of a courier).

Paul said: *"I know whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day"* (2 Timothy 1:12).

The commitment aspect of faith leads to a life of obedience. The Bible clearly shows that genuine faith is shown by obedience: *"The obedience of faith..."* (Romans 1:5). *"Faith without works is dead"* (James 2:17). The invisible quality of someone's faith can be seen by God, but it is hidden from other's eyes. The only way we can tell if a person has faith is by the fruit of obedience it produces.

New birth and eternal life

New birth is a personal miracle which takes place in an individual at the time they put their trust in Jesus Christ. It marks the moment when a person receives eternal life - the commencement of the indwelling of Spirit, and the new nature which is "created to be like God" (1 Peter 1:23-24; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 4:24).

Jesus said that new birth meant being "born of the Spirit" in contrast to our natural birth where we are "born of the flesh" (John 3:3-7).

The eternal life a Christian receives at new birth continues on into eternity after death. It is the guarantee of heaven (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14).



Action

One way you can be a missionary is to seek opportunities to share your personal testimony with your family and friends. Your testimony is the story of how you became a Christian, and of God's work of grace in your life since that time.

The basic ingredients of a testimony:

a. WHY you became a Christian

What events, people and other factors led you to become a Christian (fears, problems or intellectual processes etc.)?

b. HOW you became a Christian

Use your testimony to share the gospel. In the context of the story of your own personal experience, share the basics of the gospel message. Include two or three Bible verses to lend authority.

c. WHAT has changed since becoming a Christian

Share how you have 'proved God' - how you have experienced the reality of Jesus Christ in your life since trusting the Lord. For those brought up in Christian homes where the change may not have been significant, share honestly what part the Lord has in your life today. Speak of His grace and help in dealing with issues or problems (eg loneliness, resentment, anger, selfishness). Make sure that they do not get the impression that you see yourself as a saint! Rather, talk about what the Lord is still doing in your life.

- * Keep it brief, on track and relevant
- * Keep it Christ-centred
- * Be personal - do not be preachy
- * Be gracious and sensitive - never condemn others
- * Be ready to give it - anytime, anywhere (1 Peter 3:15)
- * Don't exaggerate - stick to the facts

14. The Return of Christ



In focus

The return of Jesus Christ is mentioned by every New Testament writer and is referred to over 300 times. It is the logical conclusion of the life, death and resurrection of the Son of God. Many Old Testament prophecies concerning the reign of Messiah (Jesus Christ) on the earth are yet to be fulfilled, along with a number of New Testament prophecies in the same vein. Jesus promised He would return (John 14:3) and would come with great power and glory (Mark 13:26). The Bible ends with the last great prayer "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).



Thinking it Through

The return of Christ to fulfill messianic prophecy

The Messiah is to reign in Jerusalem (Isaiah 24:23), subdue the nations under the feet of Israel (Psalm 47:3), make Israel dominant (Zechariah 8:23), rule the world (Psalm 2:6-8; Psalm 110:1-3) and establish the throne of David's kingdom for ever (2 Samuel 7:13). The disciples were thinking of these and similar scriptures, no doubt, when they asked Him just before the ascension "*Lord will You at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6). Jesus' response to them was that this event was yet to take place.

The return of Jesus Christ in relation to the Church

• The rapture

Christ will come to receive the church (all who belong to Him both dead and alive) - 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.

The word "rapture" is from the Latin word meaning "to seize", referring to Christians being "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air. (2 Corinthians 5:1-4; Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:52).

• The judgment seat of Christ

After all Christians have been gathered to the Lord, He will sit in judgment (1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Timothy 4:8), which is not a judgment that brings condemnation (life or death) but an evaluation of the Christian's life with regard to reward - Romans 14:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:19; James 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4.

• The marriage supper of the Lamb

The Lord Jesus Christ is regarded as the great bridegroom (Matthew 9:15; 25:1-6) and the church is seen to be the bride of Christ (Revelation 21:9). Christ will return to claim His bride which is likened to a pure virgin (2 Corinthians 11:2). Then He will hold the marriage feast as a celebration of the uniting of all His people with Himself (Revelation 19:7-9).



Side Note

The purpose of Christ's return

1. To complete the salvation of His people (Hebrews 9:28)
2. To receive us to be with Himself (John 14:3)
3. To bring to light the hidden things of darkness (1 Corinthians 4:5)
4. To judge (2 Timothy 4:1)
5. To reign (Revelation 11:15)
6. To be glorified in His saints (2 Thessalonians 1:10)
7. To destroy death (1 Corinthians 15:25, 26)



Insight

1. What did Jesus promise His disciples according to John 14:2-3?
2. In Luke 13:35, 21:27 how does Jesus describe His return?
3. According to 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 what will happen to Christians who are still alive at His return?
4. What does Jesus say about the timing of His return (Mark 13:32; Acts 1:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9)?
5. How did the angels in Acts 1:9-11 describe the promised return of Jesus Christ to the earth?



Thinking it Through

The return of Christ in relation to the world

The Lord's return will be preceeded by a time of escalating troubles on earth. There will be seven years of "tribulation" where God's judgment will be poured out on the world. It will be a time when the nation of Israel, along with all the countries of the world, will face war, famines, earthquakes, pestilence and bloodshed. It is a time which, unless shortened, would result in the total extermination of all humanity (Matthew 24:21-22; Revelation 3:10; 7:14). The entire earth will suffer during this period (Isaiah 24:1, 3, 6; 19-21, 26:20-21). The book of Revelation shows us that Satan will be very active during this period, and he will have two human agents through whom he will work, the Antichrist (called 'the Beast') and the false prophet.

At the end of the seven years Jesus Christ will return with His Saints (Jude 14; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). At that time the Lord Jesus will overthrow the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:8), and he and the false prophet will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20-21). Then Jesus will judge the nations (Matthew 25:31-46). Believers who die during the tribulation will be raised (Revelation 20:4, 5) along with the Old Testament saints (Daniel 12:1-2).



Snap Shot

There are three Greek words used in relation to the return of Christ.

1. Parousia - Personal presence
2. Apokalypsis - Revelation
3. Epiphaneia - Appearing

These three words signify that there will come a time when Christ will return in a public, yet personal way, that will be a revelation of Himself to the world.



Side Note

How Is Christ coming

1. Secretly at the rapture - 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Matthew 24:44, 50.
2. Publicly at His revelation - Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:30; Titus 2:13.

The manner of His coming

1. In the clouds - Matthew 24:30.
2. In the glory of His Father - Matthew 16:27.
3. In His own glory - Matthew 25:31.
4. In flaming fire - 2 Thessalonians 1:8.
5. With power and great glory - Matthew 24:30.
6. As He ascended in bodily form - Acts 1:9-11.
7. With a shout and the voice of the Archangel - 1 Thessalonians 4:16.
8. With His saints - 1 Thessalonians 3:13.
9. Accompanied by angels - Matthew 16:27.
10. Suddenly - Mark 13:36.



Snap Shot

The sequence of end-time events

1. **The rapture** 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.
2. **The tribulation** Matthew 24:21
3. **The battle of Armageddon** Revelation 16:12-18.
4. **Christ's return to earth** Zechariah 14:1-4 (see also Revelation 19:11-16).
5. **The judgment of the nations** Matt. 25:31-41.
6. **The millennium** (1000 year reign of Christ on earth) Revelation 20:1-6. (see also John 5:28-29)
7. **The great white throne** Revelation 20:11-15.
8. **The new heaven and earth** 2Peter 3:10-13 (see also Revelation 21:1-10).

The return of Christ in relation to the Kingdom of God

Although anyone today can enter the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:3-5), the outward, visible kingdom will not be established on earth until Jesus Christ Himself reigns from Jerusalem, as promised in the Old Testament (Zechariah 14:9 see also Revelation 11:15).

This rule of Jesus Christ on earth will be for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2-6) and is often called the Millennium. At that time the nation of Israel will fully occupy the land promised them by God (Genesis 15:18) and will live as a special people set apart to the Lord. They will be a blessing to the nations, and Jerusalem will be the world capital (Zechariah 8:13, Isaiah 2:2-3, Jeremiah 3:17).



Insight

1. How do the following passages demonstrate that the second coming of Christ is not to be confused with the coming of the Holy Spirit?

John 14:16, 26, 16:7

Acts 2:32-33.

2. What do the few words "in like manner" (Acts 1:11 KJV) or "in the same way" (NIV) tell us about the way that Jesus will return?



Action

How should the return of Christ affect Christians today? (2 Timothy 4:8, James 5:7, 8, 1 Peter 1:13, 1John 3:2, 3, 1 John 2:28)

According to Mark 13:33 and 2 Peter 3:10-14 how is the Lord's return linked to our behaviour?



Digging Deeper

The millennium

What is the millennium?

After the rapture of the church and the subsequent seven year period of tribulation, Jesus Christ will return in glory as King and reign over all the earth for one thousand years ('millenia' = one thousand).

Some of the basic characteristics of the kingdom are:

1. It will be paradise regained.
2. It will be the climax of human history.
3. God will restore Israel fully and Christ will reign in Jerusalem.
4. It will be a time of health and peace for humans, with life expectancy to be greatly extended.
5. It will be a time of perfect peace and justice among all people and nations and there will be harmony in the animal world.

Without the Millennium, God would break unconditional promises to Abraham.

"For all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever" (Genesis 13:15).

"The Lord made a covenant with Abram saying: 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates....'" (Genesis 15:18)

God said to Abraham: *"I give to you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:8).*

Without the Millennium, the parables of the kingdom by Jesus and His promise to return and reign would have no fulfilment.

The duration of the millennium

In Revelation 20:1-10 we have a description of the kingdom which clearly shows it to be 1000 years in duration. It will begin after the Lord's second coming (in Revelation 19) and end before the great white throne judgment and the eternal kingdom (in Revelation 20 to 22).

These verses make it clear that the millennial kingdom will be for one thousand years by saying so six times. At the start of the 1000 years, Satan will be bound and kept from being an evil influence in the world. Then the first resurrection will occur - the raising of Old Testament saints (Daniel 12:2-3; 12:13) and those saints who died during the tribulation. This resurrection is not to be confused with the resurrection of the Christians at the rapture.

The beginning of the millennium

He will return the way He left

"After He said this, He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as He was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "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" (Acts 1:9-11).

Every eye will see Him

"Look, He is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7).

"I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.... He is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron.... On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:11-16).

The government of the millennium

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Israel during the millennium

"In that day the Lord will extend His hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of His people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea" (Isaiah 11:11).

In Matthew 19:28 - Jesus said : *"I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways....'" (Isaiah 2:2-3).

The end of the millennium

"And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city..." (Revelation 20:7-9).

15. Stewardship



In focus

Stewardship is the word used to define a Christian's management of money and resources. All Christians are managers of the earthly possessions and abilities that God has entrusted to their care. They are responsible (and accountable to God) for the way they use those things that are entrusted to them.

Stewardship is based on two fundamental truths:

1. Everything a Christian possesses comes from God
2. Everything a Christian has should be consecrated (dedicated) to God.



Thinking it Through

A steward is one who manages the property of another person. We are stewards of our own lives, our bodies, our time, our wealth and possessions, and our talents and gifts.

Stewardship is taught in many of the parables of Jesus, where He speaks of the absent Lord who leaves His people with certain responsibilities, and, upon His return, they will be judged according to how they have managed His resources. In 1 Corinthians 4:7 Paul writes: *"What do we have that we have not received?"*

Stewardship is judged upon the following criteria:

- a) Faithfulness with what is given (1 Corinthians 4:2).
- b) Honesty (Luke 16:11).
- c) Productivity (Matthew 25:20, 21).
- d) Loyalty (Luke 19:13, 14).



Insight

1. What are some every day responsibilities where we are entrusted with something (or someone) that belongs to someone else? Give examples of what it means to be a good or a bad steward in those areas.

2. What does God look for in a steward?

- a) Matthew 24:45-51
- b) Matthew 25:1-13



Side Note

A steward is one who manages the property of another. We are all stewards of God's creation because *"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it"* (Psalm 24:1) and 1 Chronicles 29:14 says *"Everything comes from You (God), and we have given You only what comes from Your hand."*

Christians should care for the earth and the environment. God has entrusted every human with His creation, and Christians should be careful to honor Him in looking after the land, the sea, the air and animals.

c) Matthew 25:14-30

d) Luke 19:11-27

3. What do Luke 12:42 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 teach about the event when all Christians will be judged for their stewardship?

4. What area of stewardship is the focus in 1 Corinthians 3:8-15, and does this apply only to church leaders or to all believers?



Thinking it Through

Areas where God holds us accountable as stewards:

1. Time

Our times are in God's hands (Psalm 31:15) and we are to number our days so that we can apply our hearts to wisdom (Psalm 90:12). In Ephesians 5:16 we are to 'redeem the time', which means to use it wisely. Time is precious and we should be using it for the glory of God. The biblical principle of setting aside one day of the week shows God's plan for us to dedicate time to Him.

Whether we are a CEO of a multinational organization or a garbage collector, an astronomer or truck driver, a surgeon or grocery clerk, each of us has 24 hours 7 days a week!

In our society, time is money, and many people use so much of it in pursuing earthly gain or recreational pursuits that the time left for God is minimal.

2. Talents and gifts

Our talents (abilities) and skills have been given to us by God (1 Corinthians 4:7) and we should use them for the building up of the body of Christ. Our spiritual gifts likewise (1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 1 Peter 4:10-11). For us to have received from God certain skills and gifts yet only use them for our own ends will bring God's disapproval at the judgment seat of Christ.

3. The body

A Christian's body belongs to God – it has become the temple of the Holy Spirit – *“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies”* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

4. Wealth and possessions

Our society is caught up with materialism. It is the prevailing mindset. Every area of life can end up being evaluated by financial gain or loss.

The Christian is called to live a life with only one master. Jesus said: "You cannot serve God and money" (Luke 16:13). On the one hand, the use of our money can gain friends for eternity as we invest it in the lives of others (Luke 16:9). Conversely, it can be misused and bring tragedy and God's judgment (James 5:1-3).

God is not as interested in the amount of money we give, as the heart of the giver (Mark 12:41-44; 2Corinthians 8).

5. God's truth

The gospel is a sacred trust. God has given us His truth so we can know it, and then share it with others. We are indebted to those who are lost (Romans 1:14), and are responsible for teaching it to God's people (Acts 20:20; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5).



Insight

1. Why is the good stewardship of our time so important (James 4:13-15)?

2. What does Christ charge us to do as stewards of time until He comes again? (Mark 13:33-37)

3. How is Jesus an example of the way we are to regard our bodies? (Hebrews 10:5-7)

4. According to I Corinthians 4:7 and Romans 12:4-5, what should be our attitude to our natural gifts and our spiritual gifts?



Action

1. Keeping track of how you spend your day can be of great value in evaluating the stewardship of your time. On a normal week, record the number of hours you spend on business, class, sleep, Christian service, recreation, etc. Evaluate your research, and prayerfully consider any changes that would please God.

2. Make a list of the things that God ultimately owns, over which He has made you a steward.



Digging Deeper

Giving to God

There are various principles in the Bible in relation to our giving.

- 1. Giving is an act of worship** - Matthew 26:7-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:37, 38.
- 2. Giving can be sacrificial** - 2 Samuel 24:24; Malachi 1:8; 2 Corinthians 8:2-15.
- 3. Giving to God should be based on the principle of the tithe**

Many Christians tithe their income (giving one tenth to God) as a minimum. This is not commanded in the New Testament, but the principle is found in the Bible:

- a) Tithes were given before the law of Moses, showing that tithing is a principle to guide us rather than a law to obey.
- b) Tithes were commanded under the law of Moses for the nation of Israel.
- c) When the people of Israel failed to give their tithes they were condemned by God as having robbed Him (Malachi 3:8-10).
- d) At the time of Christ, tithing was practiced (Luke 11:42; 18:12).

There is no command in the New Testament, nor even a mention of the tithe after Pentecost in the book of Acts or in the Epistles. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 we read that the believers are to give regularly (*"on the first day of the week"*), that all should share in the grace of giving (*"every one of you"*), systematically (*"lay aside"*) and proportionately to one's income (*"as God has prospered Him"*).

When tithing it is important we do not think we are giving God a part of what we earn. We must remember that we only have what God gives us, a better view is to realize that we are actually keeping 90% of His money for ourselves.

The basis for giving is:

1. All we have belongs to God.
2. Christ gave His all for us that we should live not for ourselves but for Him - 2 Corinthians 5:15
3. Giving should flow from a prior commitment where we first give ourselves to God - 2 Corinthians 8:3-5

How should we give:

1. Cheerfully - 2 Corinthians 9:7.
2. Sacrificially - 2 Corinthians 8:2.
3. Following the example of Christ - 2 Corinthians 8:9.
4. Systematically - 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2

The results of being a good steward

In 2 Corinthians 9:8-11 our trust in God's provision for us is married to our giving to others. When we are generous, God will 'make His grace abound to us' (be generous to us)! God's promise of giving generously to us is not for our selfish benefit, but in order that we can continue to use our wealth and possessions for the blessing and benefit of others.

Notes

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Notes

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