

preparing for church membership

- WRF version

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"encourage one another and build each other up" ... 1 Thessalonians 5:11

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INTRODUCTION ...

This course has several possible uses. It has been enjoyed by parents preparing for the baptism of their child, young people applying for church membership, as well as Christians requesting transfer of membership from other denominations. In fact, the course may be employed profitably with any one at all who is willing to see himself or herself as an inquirer into the faith.

The course is structured with three important elements for profitable Bible study:

- seeking to understand the teaching of the Bible,
- learning from shared responses of participants during each meeting,
- reflecting on questions or reading assignments at home during the week.

The course is designed so that participants come each week, having been given the chapter notes in advance, with prepared answers ready to share. The questions set for preparation each time are factual and observational in nature leaving room for the leader to guide the interpretive questions and to develop the more intuitive issues during the meeting.

At first glance one might think this is a long series and the temptation is to conduct classes quickly and get people into membership. However there are good reasons to meet together for nine weeks.

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

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 14:26

Throughout this course, all quotations of Scripture are from the New International Version (NIV) 1984 edition, and these are used with permission.

CHAPTER 1

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

If we wish to know someone, that person has to reveal something of himself to us. If he decides not to do this, and refuses to share anything of himself with us, it's difficult to get to know him. Our knowledge of a person improves as we watch what that person does, as we listen to what he says or as we read what he writes. In fact, the more he shares his life with us the better we can know him.

So it is with our knowledge of God. God has chosen not to keep to himself, but to reveal himself to us, doing this primarily in three ways – the first two we study in this chapter, and the third we study in chapter 4 (God revealing himself in his Son: Jesus Christ).

John Piper (of *Desiring God Ministries*, Bethlehem, USA) speaks of God's two books – the book of Scripture and the book of nature. "God has two books: the Word and the world." The Bible, on the one hand is inspired and authoritative. On the other hand there is the "whole organic complex of nature and history and human culture" that, while not inspired nor authoritative, still speaks of the glory of God. Let's come to that book first.

a) GENERAL REVELATION (i.e. God's book of nature)

Read *Psalms 19:1-6*

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

In the same verses, what in particular are they saying about God's character?

According to *verses 3-6*, is there a limit to where this knowledge of God extends to? _____

Consider Paul's teaching to the Romans where he says: "*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*" (Romans 1:20)

According to this verse, what does the "creation of the world" tell us about the character of God?

HOWEVER we cannot possibly learn all we need to know about God by simply looking at nature and all God's creation. Consider by way of analogy: "How much do you learn about a watchmaker by examining all the watches he has made?"

What important issues of life would we never know about if our investigations were limited by revelations in nature?

SUMMARY:

Revelation of God in nature is not complete. If we relied *only* on God's first book then our worship of him would not be properly informed. If we actually *worshipped* nature, then we would be guilty of the same sinful attitude against which Paul writes: "*They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator - who is forever praised. Amen.*" Romans 1:25.

We need God's second book.

b) SPECIAL REVELATION (i.e. God's book of words)

Read *Psalms 19:7-11*

EXPLANATION:

The author, David, uses various words such as "law", "statutes", "precepts", "commands" and "ordinances", using them interchangeably to refer to the written Word of God, which in David's day was the early portion of the Old Testament.

In *verses 7-10*, there are eight descriptions David uses to describe the Word of God. Can you list them? Eg the first is "perfect":

In *verses 7-11*, there are six ways described by which we may benefit from reading God's Word. Can you list them? Eg the first is "reviving the soul":

SUMMARY:

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

Although David was writing about the Old Testament, the same teaching is confirmed by Jesus Christ, by both Paul and Peter concerning the whole of God's Word, eg *2 Timothy 3:14-17* and *2 Peter 1:16-21*.

To Reinforce:

With respect to **God's General Revelation** (nature, creation, etc.), read:

Acts 14:15-17

Psalms 104, esp verses 1-6 and 24-33

With respect to **God's Special Revelation** (Old and New Testaments), read:

Revelation 1:1-3

Let's now examine Special Revelation (God's Word) more thoroughly. There are two common expressions we use for the written Word of God

- "The Scriptures", which is an expression taken from the Greek New Testament meaning "The Writings";
- "The Holy Bible", where the word Bible means "book" and the description Holy means "set apart" from all others.

Read *2 Timothy 3:14-17*

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

(v. 16a) The expression "God-breathed" or, as older versions of the Bible translate it - "inspired of God", is our guarantee that everything in Scripture is true and correct. God cannot "inspire" or "breathe out" anything false, contradictory or misleading.

From this teaching (v. 16) we know that all Scripture is without error and therefore completely trustworthy in every respect.

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

(compare with *Psalms 19:7b,11*)

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

Read *2 Peter 1:16-21*

EXPLANATION:

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

(v. 20,21) - Where did the messages and teaching of Scripture originate from?

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

SUMMARY:

The Bible has a unique combination of both the personalities and individual styles of over thirty different authors, together with the overriding authority and inspiration of God. The Bible is the inspired words of God written through the agency of Holy Spirit enlightened authors. Therefore it is exactly as God intends it to be.

To reinforce:

read ...

..... *Psalm 119:160*

..... *John 10:35*

..... *John 17:17*

FOR PRIVATE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

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

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

Read again 2 *Timothy 3:14 -17*

iv) Have you been made "wise for salvation" through faith in Christ Jesus? (i.e. is the way of salvation clear to you yet?)

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

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

b) Further reading:

The theme of this study is fundamental. If you are in doubt concerning the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, then you may well have doubts about the themes of subsequent studies - all of which are built on the assumption that we accept by faith the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

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

Reading the Bible by Geoffrey Thomas (published in booklet form by Banner of Truth)

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

God's Word by D Broughton Knox (volume 1, part 2, chapter 15 of his *Selected Works*, published by Matthias Media, 2000)

- this is the best 13 pages on the subject which includes reasons to believe that the Bible is the Word of God and also FAQs which are well answered.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE

THE OLD TESTAMENT:

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

THE NEW TESTAMENT:

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

CHAPTER 2

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

D Broughton Knox writes (*The Everlasting God*, Matthias Media, 2009) "The doctrine of God is of the utmost importance, for it controls the whole of life. As a person thinks about God ... so his standards of behavior, values and relations with other people are determined."

a) THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

It is reasonably assumed that your participation in this course indicates that you believe in the existence of God. Whether you know him as your saviour and friend is a different matter, and your answers to questions (ii), (iii) and (iv) from the first study may indicate to you whether you know God personally or not. At least you believe he exists, and you are not an agnostic and certainly not an atheist. As a point of interest, do you know God's description of an atheist? (*"The fool says in his heart: 'there is no God'...." Psalm 14:1*)

You believe in God. WHY? What convinces you about the existence of God? Are you able to list reasons for your belief?

Can you prove the existence of God to another person?

YES () NO ()

You and I certainly cannot prove the existence of God. There is nothing that can conclusively prove God's existence. Belief in God is a matter of faith. (Faith being that gift of God which enables you to believe something you cannot see or prove).

Even in the Bible (God's own revelation to us) his existence is assumed and not proved. There are no arguments, no proofs ... just the plain statement that even in the beginning, God existed.

Consider:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." (John 1:1,2)

b) WHO IS HE?

Because we have finite minds, and he is infinite, God is beyond our definitions and descriptions. But what can find from God's Word that we can be sure of?

i) God is spirit

The Bible contains no definition of God. The nearest approach to it is found in the words of Jesus to the woman at the well (the Samaritan woman): "*God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.*"

Read *John 4:21-24*

What is implied in that description "*God is Spirit*"? Can you list the characteristics of God as Spirit?

(further reference: *1 Timothy 6:15,16*)

God does not have a body like we do. Of course it is understood that God the Son 'took on' a human body for the purpose of achieving our salvation. He 'took on' a human body when he was supernaturally conceived within the womb of the virgin Mary, and then he ascended into heaven in that human form (*Acts 1:9-11*). Aside from that, God has no body or physical dimensions or appearance which can be seen, drawn or in anyway represented physically.

ii) God is personal

The Bible asserts that God is not a thing, nor a power, nor just an influence, but rather that he is a personal God. To put it another way, the Bible talks of God as a person.

There are, in fact, a very large number of Bible references which speak of God's personality. Of course, the Bible doesn't talk of God as a human person, but that he is an intelligent, self aware and moral being. In other words, he is capable of thinking, feeling, desiring and acting like all living beings.

To take just one example from the Bible: *Psalms 103:8*

What are some of the marks of God's personality mentioned here, i.e. what personal attributes does he possess?

This is a very great truth. It is because God is personal that we can talk with him, and he with us. It is because he is personal that we can reach out and trust him, and we then find that he reaches down to us and enters into our experiences with help, guidance and comfort.

An impersonal force could not do this. This is further ratified by the continual use of personal pronouns (such as "he" and "him") in Scripture when referring to God.

iii) God is trinity

The Bible never uses the word "trinity", but it consistently teaches that God is one God in three persons. The Bible teaches that, while God is one, he exists in three persons called Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Within this trinity there are different functions and work, yet there is no rank, individualism or self existence.

For a reference where the three are referred to most clearly, read Jesus' words of the Great Commission: *Matthew 28:19*.

Let's look at each in turn:

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

He is firstly the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then also the Father of all Christians too. The Father is to be the object of our prayers. He is also seen, in Scripture, as the one whose function it was to plan all things - to plan his great works of creation and of redemption.

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

The second person of the trinity, the Son of God, is the Lord Jesus Christ. If we can say that God the Father planned his great work, then we can also say that God the Son is the mediator for these works, i.e. he performed the work of creation and the work of redemption (see also *Colossians 1:15-20*).

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

Describing the Father's work as planning, and the Son's as mediating, then the Spirit's work is applying and completing the great work of God. Especially with respect to redemption (i.e. our salvation) it is the Holy Spirit's task to convict us of sin and apply the work of salvation to us and work it into our hearts. He is also our teacher (v. 13).

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

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

Explanatory Note:

A final word about God the trinity. Do not worry if you cannot grasp this entirely. No one living on earth can really understand the trinity. No man-made illustration of the trinity can be of much assistance either. (All illustrations have serious flaws in them). In faith gladly accept the Bible's teaching about God the trinity.

c) WHAT IS HE LIKE?

In essence we have defined God as spirit, as personal and as trinity. Are there ways to describe what he is like in his character? In answer to this let's take three descriptions (adjectives) from the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q/A no. 4 (see the left hand column) and apply them to the characteristics (nouns) listed in the same Q/A (see the right hand column), as follows:

INFINITE ... meaning that God is not subject to any limitations in any respect. He is infinite in respect of time, presence, ability and all the descriptions mentioned in the next column. *Read Job 11:7-9*

ETERNAL ... meaning that he has all these characteristics mentioned in the next column and that he has always had them. He is above time's limitations; for him there is only an eternal present. *Read Psalm 90:1,2*

UNCHANGABLE ... meaning that in all the respects listed in the next column he is forever the same. His characteristics do not vary. He is not governed according to time, 'mood' or circumstance. *Read James 1:17*

BEING (and self-sufficiency)
Daniel 4:34,35

WISDOM (and knowledge)
Romans 11:33-36

POWER (and sovereignty)
Matthew 19:26

HOLINESS *Isaiah 6:3*

JUSTICE (and righteousness)
Psalm 145:17

GOODNESS (and love and mercy) *Ephesians 2:4,5*

TRUTH (and faithfulness)
Numbers 23:19

The table above has been set out using the pattern of the well known Westminster Shorter Catechism Question/Answer no. 4 ... "God is Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth."

Spend time reading together these verses listed from many different parts of the Bible and enjoy thinking about God.

Summary:

This is just a brief outline of some of the characteristics of our God. Remember that God has revealed these things to us about his own nature in the Bible for us to study and to learn of him. However, there is much about God we cannot possibly understand and in that sense God is beyond our reach. If we could perfectly understand God, then we would be God too!

FOR PRIVATE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Concerning the trinity

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

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

What implication can we draw from *Acts 5:3-4* about the Holy Spirit and his relationship to God?

ii) Concerning the nature of God

To really know God takes more than studying texts of Scripture. What is the most important item we must have if we are to know and please our God? (*Hebrews 11:6*)

b) Further reading:

i) The best reading you can do this week is to carefully review all that we have covered together concerning the nature of our God. Look up each one of the 10 Scripture references under (c) above (WHAT IS HE LIKE?) and ask the Lord God to help you get to know him better. Read each reference and reflect on his greatness. If we are to be useful Christians it is vital to know who it is we serve.

ii) Now is the time to do some follow up reading on the subject:

The Everlasting God by D Broughton Knox (published by Matthias Media, 2009)

- the best paperback on the subject (190 pages) - one of those mind-shifting, life-changing books that has become a classic that rightly belongs in the personal library of every Christian.

Authentic Christianity 101 by Robert L Dickie (Evangelical Press, 2007), 48 pages

- the opening chapters of this booklet on "the existence of God" and "the nature of God" are the most succinct and helpful this author has read on the subject.

CHAPTER 3

MANKIND

(WHO we are and WHAT we are like)

The previous study centered on "WHO GOD IS", and by following the Scripture passages indicated we have been able to see something of who he is and what he is like. What about us? Who are we? Why are we here? Does human life have any meaning or purpose?

a) MAN & WOMAN BEFORE THE FALL

The word "fall" is a shorthand way of referring to mankind entering into sin. So calamitous was this first sin, that we call it the "fall". This fall not only affected Adam and Eve, but has also had a permanent effect on all men and women who have descended from them.

The best word to describe the state of man and woman before the fall is "innocence". Both Adam and Eve were sinless creatures. Let's read *Genesis 1:26 -2:25*.

1:26 According to the Bible, how was the first man created? i.e. in whose likeness?

We pause here and take notice of how the first man was created. If we read again the account of the sixth day of creation, we find that each of the species of the animal kingdom was separately created, (species of domestic livestock, of creeping animals, of wild beasts etc); and then, as a separate act of creation, God made mankind. We further notice that only mankind is given the description of being made in the image of God.

The Bible's account is that we did not evolve from the animal kingdom, nor from any other lower form of life, but that Adam and Eve were created as the ultimate act of God's work. They were specially designed to exist and to function separately from the animal kingdom.

What is meant by the description "in God's image and after his likeness"? In what ways are we - and not the animals - in God's image? Can you think of at least three ways?

i) _____

ii) _____

iii) _____

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

1:26 _____

1:28 _____

1:28 _____

2:15 _____

SUMMARY:

The first two human beings were Adam and Eve. The whole human race has descended from them. Paul, while preaching at Athens, said: *"From one man God made every nation of men that they should inherit the whole earth"* Acts 17:26. God created Adam and Eve, not as babies, but as physically mature adults, and with no knowledge of sin. They had freewill with which they could freely choose between obeying or disobeying God. They lived in a state of innocence. We can describe this existence as *"paradise"* (Revelation 2:7).

b) THE FALL

Please read the whole of Genesis 3 ... *Genesis 3:1-24*

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

i) God:

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

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

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

ii) The serpent:

The serpent is, in fact, being used, or possessed, by:

_____ (read *Revelation 20:2*).

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

iii) Eve:

The first to be deceived (3:2,6 and also *1 Timothy 2:14*).

She exercised freewill and chose to disobey.

iv) Adam:

Followed Eve into sin (3:6,7). He, too, exercised freewill and chose to disobey.

Following this fall into sin, what immediate changes do we notice?

3:7 _____

3:8,10 _____

3:12 _____

SUMMARY:

To borrow from John Milton (17th century English poet who served under Oliver Cromwell) and his famous work: the world became PARADISE LOST.

In other words for the first time mankind's innocence is gone. No longer can men and women return to being innocent. The whole condition of humanity at this point is irreversibly changed. Certain consequences came into force; such consequences we feel today. The course of the history of men and women changed in this one act of disobedience.

c) MAN & WOMAN AFTER THE FALL

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

3:16 _____

3:17,18 _____

3:19 _____

3:23,24 _____

Of these it is the curse of death which must be examined more closely. If there is one word to describe the condition of men and women since the fall it is the word "death". The curse of death was declared by God BEFORE the fall (2:17), and it's delivered AFTER the fall (3:19).

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

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

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

This has a definite bearing on us. Every person born has been born with a dead spirit and a dying body. This is the fallen state into which you and I are born. We are not born innocent, but rather as sinners.

Read *Psalm 51:5*

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

Read *Romans 5:12; Romans 6:23; and then 1 Corinthians 15:21,22*

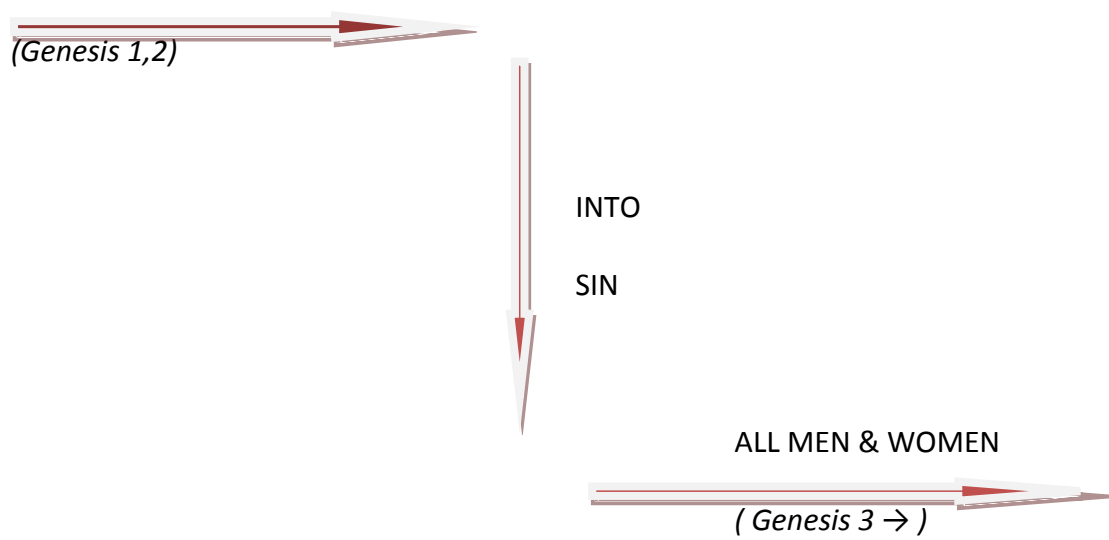
The Bible teaches that the children of Adam and Eve inherited their corrupt nature and sinful character. From that day on, the poison of sin polluted the whole of the human race.

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

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

Summary:

ADAM & EVE in PARADISE



Everyone born since Adam and Eve are born sinners:

- knowing sin
- feeling guilt
- dying
- lost

(see *Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:23; 5:12 and 6:23*)

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

FOR PRIVATE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Do you consider yourself to be a sinner?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

v) Are your sins forgiven?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

b) Further reading:

i) Read thoughtfully through the whole of *Romans chapter 5*. Read through this chapter two or three times and pray for the Lord's guidance.

ii) Now is the time to do some follow up reading on the subject. What you chose depends on how much you want to invest into this and how adventurous you want to be.

For the adventurous - wanting to be stretched: Read Thomas Boston's *Human Nature in its Fourfold State**, or at least someone who has summarised this work and maybe expressed it in a more succinct way. Boston was a significant Scottish preacher of the 18th century.

For those who need a more concise read: Read Jim Packer's *Concise Theology* and the three chapters titled: "The Fall", "Original Sin" and "Inability"**. First published in 1993 but still available, this is the evangelical "layman's language" introduction to 94 major Christian beliefs - thoughtfully arranged and refreshingly readable.

* You can find the paperback version (approx 300 pages) via Amazon.com at very reasonable prices

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

CHAPTER 4

JESUS CHRIST (WHO he is)

INTRODUCTION:

WHO IS JESUS? This is of the utmost importance. You and I must answer this question, and the answer we give is crucial. It is NOT sufficient to say, as some maintain, that it doesn't matter what you think of Jesus provided you follow his teachings.

We all know that Jesus Christ, the carpenter's son, the man of Nazareth, was a real figure of history. The whole world acknowledges this. Even the history books of the time mention him. He has far more written of him than other great figures of the same general period of time (e.g. Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great). In fact, the whole of our dating system centers on him: B.C. ("before Christ") and A.D. (anno Domini, "in the year of the Lord").

So, it's not his existence which is in dispute, but rather the question remains as to whether we are going to accept or deny the Bible's claim that Jesus Christ was "more than a carpenter", (to borrow the title of a Josh McDowell book).

a) WHO IS HE?

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

Read *Acts 10:34-43*, a record of Peter's visit with Cornelius.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first reference has already been completed as an example.

TEXT	HIGHLIGHTING HIS HUMAN NATURE	HIGHLIGHTING HIS DIVINE NATURE
<i>Matthew 1:19-21</i>	born of Mary	conceived by the Holy Spirit
<i>Matthew 3:13-17</i>		
<i>Matthew 4:1,2</i>		
<i>Matthew 4:23-25</i>		
<i>Matthew 7:28-29</i>		
<i>Matthew 8:23-25</i>		
<i>Matthew 8:26-27</i>		
<i>Matthew 9:35-38</i>		
<i>Matthew 11:27</i>		
<i>Matthew 12:46,47</i>		
<i>Matthew 16:13-16</i>		
<i>Matthew 17:1-8</i>		
<i>Matthew 21:18-19</i>		
<i>Matthew 26:36-38</i>		

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

C S Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*: “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool; you can spit at him and kill him for a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Summary:

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

We see him in human form, enduring weaknesses as we do and offering himself as man's servant. Yet, at the same time, we see him 'clothed' in the unique glory which can belong only to God himself (e.g. at his baptism, on the Mount of Transfiguration, during his healing and teaching ministry). Besides all this, he said that he was the Son of God on several occasions, and that should be sufficient.

The question about who Jesus is has been clarified by the very helpful teaching of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 21:

Q: Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

A: The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.

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

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

Read *Hebrews 4:15*

This reminds us that Jesus lived as a man, and experienced much of the human weakness, sufferings and temptations that we do, yet with one important difference:

[without _____]

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

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

Why do you think he calls himself *good*?

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

Read *Mark 10:45*

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

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

In what sense is Jesus' death a ransom?

b) GETTING TO KNOW JESUS:

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

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

Lord _____

Jesus _____

Christ _____

FOR PRIVATE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Read *Colossians 2:2-10*, especially focusing on v.9. What is taught here about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ? (try to use your own words):

ii) Read *1 John 4:13-16*, how would you sum up the main purpose of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ?

b) Further reading:

We recommend follow-up reading on this subject.

i) Peter Barnes' *Milk of the Word* (Banner of Truth) chapter 3.

ii) Jim Packer in *Concise Theology* (Evangelical Press) chapters titled: "*Incarnation*"; "*Two Natures*" and "*Virgin Birth*".

iii) For those with the appetite for a more solid exploration of the subject might try: Ligon Duncan's excellent paper on *The Divinity of Christ*, found at www.the-highway.com/divinity_Duncan

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CHAPTER 5 SALVATION

(WHAT Christ has achieved)

a) THE DILEMMA WE FIND OURSELVES IN:

IF

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

AND
IF

the conclusion we reached in chapter 3 is also correct
i.e. that all men and women are polluted (morally),
spiritually dead and opposed to God

THEN

both God and ourselves face a serious 'dilemma'
- as Job has put it (*Job 9:2*) "How can a mortal be righteous before God?"

ALMIGHTY GOD	MEN & WOMEN
- holy, just, pure, good and true	- born sinful, predisposed to sin and opposed to God
Read <i>Psalms 11:7</i> ... What does this remind us about God's nature and his attitude towards sin? _____	Read <i>Romans 8:5-8</i> ... What do these verses teach about the nature of mankind? (i.e. men and women without Christ) _____
_____	_____

b) HOW GOD HAS PROVIDED A SOLUTION TO THIS DILEMMA:

Before we became Christians, we were sinners separated from God and under his holy anger and judgment. Men and women have always thought it possible to get themselves back into fellowship with God, and there have been temporary and superficial answers put forward. For example, we have often tried to gain the attention of God (and win his favour) by dutiful attendance at religious services, or by careful attention to one's lifestyle, or by tiring ourselves out in good deeds for others.

Such efforts are like patching ourselves with band-aids when the doctors agree that we need heart-lung transplant operations. Or, to change the illustration, they are as futile as paying for an oil change at the service station when the mechanic has diagnosed that the engine needs replacing in our family car.

God has said that what sin deserves is death which means separation from God. We have sinned and are now under that sentence. Without God's intervention there would be no hope for us. The death of Jesus Christ in our place is our only hope. God's SALVATION which he has provided for mankind is so deep and broad in its effect that we find several different ways of describing it in the Bible. The most important of these descriptions are:

i) Substitution:

Discuss in the group what the word "substitution" means and in what ways the word is used in our everyday language.

What do the following Bible verses teach us about Christ's death (especially as it relates to "substitution")? See if you can describe it in your own words.

John 10:11

1 Peter 2:24

1 Peter 3:18

At this point in the study it would be very helpful to read and reflect on the book of Hebrews and its teaching on the link between the Old Testament sacrificial lamb and Jesus Christ ...

read *Hebrews 7:23-28; 9:11-14; 10:10-14*

Jesus acted as the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial lamb. He endured all the punishment that belonged to the sinner in order that the sinner might stand before God as free from guilt and condemnation as the Son of God does. We have a new status.

There has been a transaction: **our sin for his righteousness.**

N.B. Christ did not remain under the curse of death. In fact, in raising Christ from the dead on the third day, God powerfully demonstrated that he accepted his death in the place of sinners as the full and perfect payment of sin's penalty.

ii) Redemption:

Discuss in the group what the words “redemption” and “ransom” mean and in what ways these words are used in our everyday language.

What do the following verses teach us about Christ's death (especially as it relates to “redemption”)?

Matthew 20:28

Galatians 3:13,14

In Christ we find that our bondage to sin and to Satan has been broken, and that we are set free by means of Christ, who is the ransom. That is why we Christians are said to have been: *bought with a price*, i.e. the price of Jesus' own blood. In redemption there has been a transaction: **our sin for his righteousness**.

This transaction is called justification, which is the main idea Paul is conveying in Romans 3, namely: *“for 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 3:23,24.*

What is a definition of justification?

See Question 33 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

"Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone."

It is as if (like Zechariah's vision of Joshua in Zechariah 3) the Lord has taken our filthy clothes and given us new clean clothes to wear – clothes that came from God and which we did not or could not deserve.

iii) Propitiation (or, in NIV language, “sacrifice of atonement” or “atoning sacrifice”):

Discuss in the group what the word “propitiation” means. You will need a dictionary to help as the word is rarely used today in our everyday language.

What do the following verses teach us about Christ's death (especially as it relates to “propitiation”)?

Romans 3:21-25 (NIV uses the expression “sacrifice of atonement” in v. 25)

1 John 4:10 (NIV uses the expression "atoning sacrifice" here)

Explanatory Note:

There is a disappointingly confusing translation of this word in the NIV. This translation uses "sacrifice of atonement" or "atoning sacrifice". I prefer to leave the older word "propitiation" in our Bibles as it reminds us vividly that, in his death, Jesus has satisfied all the demands of God's holiness and has appeased the wrath of God which is against all sin.

iv) Reconciliation:

Discuss in the group what the words "reconciliation" and "reconcile" mean and in what ways these words are used in our everyday language.

What do the following verses teach us about Christ's death (especially as it relates to "reconciliation")?

Romans 5:1,2 and 9-11

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

When we speak of "reconciliation" we are referring to the removal of enmity between God and ourselves. In reconciliation God deals with our sin, so removing the barrier that had existed between us. He draws us to himself in peace. With our sins now forgiven, God no longer looks upon us with his holy anger, but now looks on us as his friends.

c) RECEIVING THE BLESSING OF SALVATION:

In this study so far we have focused on the great work that God has done in Christ in providing SALVATION for men and women. We haven't until now emphasised what response you and I are called to make.

i) Read *Acts 2:36-39*, *Acts 16:29-37* and then *Romans 10:9-13* and itemise all the essential responses called for if you are to know and enjoy salvation:

ii) Read *John 1:12 and 43* and then *John 3:15,16,18 and 36* and itemise all the essential responses called for if you are to know and enjoy salvation:

iii) Finally, let's read of the Thessalonian Christians and how they were converted in *1 Thessalonians 1:8-10*:

What did the Thessalonians turn from?

What did they turn to?

What was their new attitude to God?

What was their new attitude to Jesus?

FOR PRIVATE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

As a personal assessment, are you able to place a tick in the appropriate response to the following questions:

Have you:

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

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

(i.e. you believe what he has done, what he teaches and who he is)

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

(i.e. asked that he would come, forgive and renew your life)

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

(i.e. you are trusting Christ for salvation in this life and for the life to come)

b) Further reading:

Yours will be the benefit and the blessing in spending time this week with further reading and thinking on the subject of the Cross of Jesus – and what it means. Here are some suggestions:

i) Please read *The Cross* by Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones (Banner of Truth, 2009).

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

ii) Mark Dever's article, first written in 2006, "*Nothing but the Blood*" which this author thinks is the best concise explanation of the cross. It may be accessed at: <http://www.ctlibrary.com/38245>

(Mark Dever is pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist, Washington DC, USA)

CHAPTER 6 THE HOLY SPIRIT

(WHO he is and WHAT he does)

a) WHO HE IS:

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

John 14:16,26 _____

John 14:17 _____

In thinking about God the Holy Spirit, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are thinking about God. Somehow it seems easier to think of God the Father, and also of God the Son (Jesus Christ) and yet not as easy to think of God the Holy Spirit. In our prayers, and speech we should always refer to the Holy Spirit as "he" or "him", but never "it", as with the Father, and also the Son, the Holy Spirit of God is fully and completely God.

The Holy Spirit clearly stands out in the pages of the Scriptures as a person. He is described as having intelligence, feeling and will. He is portrayed as speaking, searching, testifying, commanding, revealing and interacting between God and man.

b) WHAT HE DOES:

Broadly speaking, if it can be truly said that God the Father planned the redemption of his people, and that the Son achieved it through his Calvary work, then it can be stated that it is the Holy Spirit who applies it to our hearts and brings it to completion in us.

i) Old Testament era

The work of the Holy Spirit is so broad, and has so many different aspects, that it's difficult to sum it up in just one sentence. Consider the following summary of his work as recorded in the OLD TESTAMENT:

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

Judges 6:34 *"Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet summoning the Abiezrites to follow him."*

1 Samuel 16:13 *"So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power."*

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

ii) New Testament era

It is understood that we now live in the NEW TESTAMENT ERA, living after the great Day of Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit was given to the Christians in full measure). For the remainder of this study we focus on some of the important work of the Holy Spirit which is in operation within us today:

1. The new birth:

Read *John 3:3-8*

WHO is it that produces a new heart in you? See especially verses *6 and 8*:

Read *1 Corinthians 2:12*

WHO is it who enables us to see the truth of the gospel and believe?

Consider also: *Titus 3:5 ... "He saved us, not by the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."*

N.B. This new birth, which is the act of God alone, is also described in Scripture as regeneration. See *John 1:12,13 ... "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."*

2. Assurance of salvation:

Read *Romans 8:13-17*

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

See also *Galatians 4:6,7*

The Bible teaches that once you come to Christ by faith, and are saved, you will never be allowed to fall away and be lost. Once born again by the Holy Spirit and made a child of God and promised the inheritance of an heir, this work can never be **UNDONE**, and this promise (of an inheritance) will never be revoked.

Please read:

John 6:40 and 10:28

Philippians 1:6

1 Peter 1:3,4

3. Sanctification:

Consider the following two texts from Paul's Thessalonian letters on the subject of sanctification:

1 Thessalonians 4:3

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified"

2 Thessalonians 2:13

"... from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth."

Describing it in your own words, what is this great work which, we are told, the Lord wills for us, and the Holy Spirit works in us?

What is a definition of sanctification?

See Question 35 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

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

Of course, this is an on-going, life-long process. We are perfectly sanctified (made holy) only when we die and pass into glory.

Read *Galatians 5:16-26*

In order to make progress in sanctification, what are some of the things to AVOID or SHUN?

Who gives you the ability to avoid or shun these things? (*verses 16-18*)

In order to make progress in sanctification, what are some of the things to ADOPT or STRIVE for?

Where do such qualities and attitudes originate? (*verse 22*)

CONCLUSION:

There are, of course, many other aspects of the Holy Spirit's work within the Christian. For example:

- discernment of spiritual truth
- guidance
- teaching
- praying
- worship
- unity and fellowship between believers
- various gifts of service

We can never exhaust this subject. For now it is important to realise that EVERY Christian has the Holy Spirit residing within him or her; we need to know and experience more of his work and we want to enjoy his presence within.

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

FOR PRIVATE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

Why not?

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

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

b) Further reading:

i) Please read thoroughly *Romans chapter 8*. Note how many aspects it covers of the work of God the Holy Spirit.

ii) There are many extended articles and books written on the subject of the Holy Spirit. One of the best concise articles is a series of ten meditations by Prof Pieter Potgieter (Banner of Truth booklet, 46 pages) who writes from Revelation of the vital ministry of the Holy Spirit. The booklet is entitled "*Victory: the Work of the Spirit*" and is very readable.

CHAPTER 7
THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

(When we meet together)

a) THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'CHURCH':

The Greek word for 'church', which is used over a hundred times in the New Testament, is 'ekklesia'. This word, or a form of it, is used 62 times in Paul's letters and 21 times in the book of Acts. It is also the word used to record the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ during his very important conversation with Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi (*Matthew 16:18*).

The word almost always denotes the Christian assembly, i.e. the company of the Lord's people.

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

Romans 16:3-5 ... "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus ... greet also the church that meets at their house."

Other churches were large, such as the one at Jerusalem.

Try and estimate how many members belonged to the Jerusalem church. Look up these references, and add up the membership roll:

Acts 1:15 _____

Acts 2:41 _____

Acts 4:4 _____

Acts 6:7 _____

Acts 21:20 _____

Estimated total: _____

SUMMARY:

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

b) THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH:

Read *Matthew 16:13-20*.

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

i) Whose church is it?

ii) Who is building it?

iii) How long will the church survive?

Explanatory note:

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

Read *1 Corinthians 3:11*

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

This means that in spite of the world ignoring and despising the church, and regardless of any wicked government's persecution of the church, and also taking into consideration the changes that will occur during the last days before Christ's return (such as the rise of the antichrist), THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THE CHURCH ON THIS EARTH AS A WITNESS OF THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD.

c) WHAT THE CHURCH SHOULD BE ENGAGED IN:

The marks of the true church is a subject to which the Protestant reformers gave considerable attention. Their very right to exist was constantly being called into question by "Rome". In fact, Rome declared the Protestants not to be a church at all. If John Calvin were here today to answer this question posed above, he would say that the three marks of the Church are: the word, the sacraments and discipline. We shall go further and add to these three points.

What constitutes a true congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ? Or, stating it another way, what are the necessary functions that ought to be going on within the church? For each of the following texts, can you identify the necessary function that should be in evidence in a healthy church?

i) From *Acts 2:42*

ii) From *Matthew 28:19,20*

iii) From *Ephesians 5:19,20*

iv) From *Hebrews 10:25*

v) From *Acts 14:23* and *Hebrews 13:17*

vi) From *Matthew 18:15-20*

vii) From *Galatians 6:9,10*

d) LIFE IN A HEALTHY CHURCH:

i) In *1 Corinthians 12*, Paul describes the way the Christian church operates with the help of the analogy of a human body. Read through this chapter, and then write down what you see as the two main ways in which the church ought to be operating – if it is healthy.

ii) Read *Revelation 21:1,2,9*; and *Ephesians 5:25-30*. What analogy does Paul use here to describe the Christian church, and what does this tell you about Christ's feeling for the church?

iii) Read *Ephesians 2:19-22*. What is Paul's description of the church here, and what does it mean?

e) INVISIBLE CHURCH – VISIBLE CHURCH:

The church has two aspects: invisibility and visibility. Theologians have found it helpful to speak of the church with these two words in mind. What they mean is:

The Invisible Church consists of all who are saved.

The Visible Church consists of all who have made a profession of faith and have been added to a church membership roll by local church leadership. It ought to mirror the invisible church, but because of sin there is always likely to be a mixture of both wheat and weeds within the visible church.

f) LOVING THOSE IN THE CHURCH:

Read *Hebrews 10:24,25*

When we meet together, what two things are we to spur one another on to do?

FOR PRIVATE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Are you a member of the invisible church?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

ii) Are you a member of a local church?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

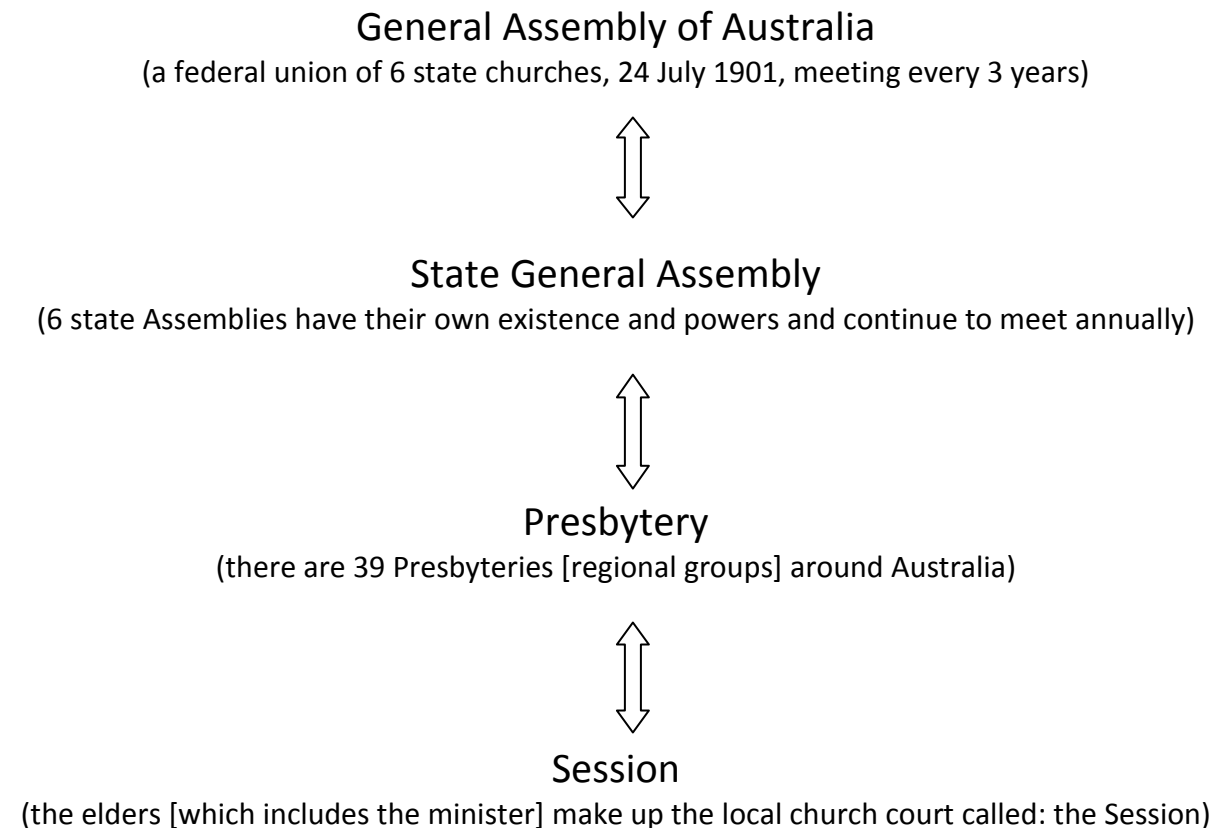
b) Further reading:

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

Again, we recommend reading Jim Packer's *Concise Theology* and the chapter entitled "The Church". One way to access this article is by going to monergism.com and typing the word "church" into the search question and the fifth article offered is this one by Jim Packer.

In Presbyterian and Reformed churches, we believe that our responsibility for care, nurture and discipline is wider than just within our own congregation. We believe that the council that met at Jerusalem (recorded in *Acts 15*) was, in some way, a pattern to follow. One congregation should not be independent of others. The Presbyterian system of church government can be summarised by the following diagram which pictures the particular structure in the Presbyterian Church of Australia:

There are a series of ascending and descending church courts:



We take as our pattern that which we find in *Acts 15*. The local issue that was at boiling point, being unresolved locally, was taken to the wider church for reference and decision. *Acts 15* seems to be a representative gathering of elders and apostles for the region. The decisions of this gathering (see *Acts 16:4*) were regarded as binding on all the churches.

CHAPTER 8

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

(Using and enjoying Christ's sacraments)

INTRODUCTION:

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

a) WHAT MAKES THESE SACRAMENTS SPECIAL?

i) They were personally instituted by Christ

Read *Matthew 28:18-20*

Baptism is to be administered in the name of _____

Read *Luke 22:7-20*

The Lord's Supper was instituted in the middle of the _____ meal,

and designed for the benefit of Christ's _____ (v.11)

ii) They are visible signs of God's blessing

In both sacraments tangible, visible and common-place elements are used as signs or symbols of God's grace and favour toward his people.

In Baptism, the element used is _____.

In the Lord's Supper, the elements used are _____ and _____.

This designates the sacraments as special because in other regular parts of Christian worship such signs are not used.

iii) They encourage believers and strengthen their faith

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

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

b) THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

i) The origins of baptism

The origins of Christian Baptism are found in the Old Testament, in the practice of its precursor - circumcision.

As recorded in the book of Genesis, God saved Abraham, and he saved Abraham in the same way he saves people today: by grace and through faith. God called this act of salvation "a covenant". It was God's promise to save Abraham and to bless his family.

Read *Genesis 17:1-14*

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

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

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

Explanatory note:

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

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

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

Summing up:

ADULT MALES were circumcised at the beginning of this new era,
as they entered into God's covenant;

AND

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

Explanatory note:

We should not think that it was circumcision that saved Abraham and his family. They were saved by grace and through faith; however, circumcision symbolised God's salvation and brought to their minds the fact that they were his people, that they were joined with God in a special covenant relationship.

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

During the Old Testament era children of believers were considered to be under God's covenant blessings, and, as a sign of their inclusion, they were given the covenant sign. In this New Testament era children of believers CONTINUE to be included in God's covenant blessings (see *Acts 2:39*) and therefore they should CONTINUE to receive the covenant sign.

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

Read *Colossians 2:11,12* where Paul refers to each covenant sign. He takes the spiritual significance of each, showing how they point to the work of God's grace in our hearts.

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

baptism points, in particular, to _____ (v. 12)

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

and _____. Baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant.

Frequently discussed issues regarding baptism:

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

Explanatory note:

The New Testament does not restrict how baptism is to be administered. When Philip took the Ethiopian eunuch *down into the water (Acts 8:38)* we have no information as to how deep the water was and how Philip proceeded.

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

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

Explanatory note:

Christians who wish to transfer across denominations and apply for church membership ought not to be persuaded to submit to a second baptism. The Presbyterian Church recognises Christian baptism of other denominations.

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

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

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

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

Explanatory note:

We are not suggesting that the act of baptism saves anyone, nor do we assert that every infant who receives baptism is automatically saved, anymore than it means that every adult who receives baptism is automatically saved. A child's baptism as a child of the covenant becomes fully effective when he responds to the Gospel. Infant baptism anticipates the cleansing of a heart in the experience of conversion.

c) THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

i) Old Testament background

Read *Matthew 26:17-30*

God the Father had so planned all things, particularly the events of this last week prior to Christ's death, that the death of his Son should coincide with the great Jewish feast of remembrance, the _____ (v.17).

We note that this festival always came at the end of the week-long Feast of _____ .

The Lord Jesus, in carrying out his Father's will, made careful plans in the arranging of this Passover meal (see *Luke 22:15*). Therefore, it was a deliberate choice to institute the new service (Lord's Supper) out of the former (Passover). As baptism was to replace circumcision, so the Lord's Supper was intended to replace the feast of Passover.

ii) What is the Lord's Supper?

Though there have arisen in church history bitter divisions on this subject, we should not allow the errors and foolishness which are entrenched in the doctrine of some denominations to spoil the beauty and significance of the Lord's Supper for us nor detract from enjoying the sacrament as God intended us to do.

Read *1 Corinthians 11:17-34* where the note the following:

1. A sacrament of thanksgiving:

Thanksgiving was always a major theme of the Passover. In Psalm *116:12-14*, what is the theme of v.12? _____ .

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

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

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

- to the _____ for choosing to save us,
- to the _____ for giving himself as a sacrifice on the cross,
- to the _____ for giving us new life and leading us to Christ.

2. A sacrament of remembrance:

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

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

What did Christ say about his body? (*Luke 22:19*) _____

What did Christ say about his blood? (*Luke 22:20*) _____

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

3. A sacrament of communion:

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

Read *1 Corinthians 10:16*

The cup is symbolising our communion (participation) in

The bread is symbolising our communion (participation) in

Explanatory Note:

Some denominations (eg. Roman Catholic) take "communion with Christ" to a degree which is unwarranted by Scripture. They maintain that the expressions "*this is my body*" and "*this is my blood*" must be taken literally. They teach

that participants are (after the supernatural power of the priest has changed the elements) actually eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ.

We maintain that taking the plain sense of Scripture and applying the usual rules, of context, grammar and figures of speech, there is no greater compulsion for taking "*this is my body*" in its literal sense than for other expressions of Jesus such as: "*I am the door*" or "*I am the vine*".

Obviously, the verb "is" has the meaning of "represents".

iii) Who should partake?

Read *1 Corinthians 11:28,29*

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

What must we avoid?

FOR PRIVATE STUDY DURING THE WEEK

a) Questions:

i) Have you ever been baptised?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

b) Further reading:

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

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

Again, we recommend reading Jim Packer's *Concise Theology* and the chapters entitled "Baptism" and "The Lord's Supper".

CHAPTER 9 THE FUTURE

(What we can look forward to)

Introduction:

The subject of 'the future' is a difficult one. There are several reasons for this:

- the Lord, in Scripture, has chosen not to reveal to us all details about coming events, but has kept some things for only the Heavenly Father to know;
- a significant portion of his revelation concerning the future is in symbolic form (as in the book of Revelation), and therefore needs careful interpretation;
- the subject has attracted its share of speculative authors whose writings have clouded the issue with overly sensational viewpoints;
- some churches have made this issue contentious and a demarcation issue among God's people, for example by advertising themselves as "Premillennial Baptist".

However, let's not draw away from the subject just because some have seen it as the ecclesiastical 'hot potato'. Let's open the Scriptures so that we may learn as much as God has revealed on this matter.

There are different ways of approaching this subject because we have no way of knowing which is to come first: our own death or Christ's return.

Let's assume that we are to die before the second coming of the Lord. Should this be the case, then there are four main events we will face.

a) DEATH:

"Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" ... Hebrews 9:27

What do the following verses teach us about our time on earth, and about our death?

Psalms 90:10

Psalms 103:13-16

b) LIFE AFTER DEATH:

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.” ... Philipians 1:21,23

Where do you expect to be after you die?
Ecclesiastes 12:1-7, especially vs 5 and 7

Also, *Luke 23:43*

c) THE RETURN OF CHRIST:

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.” ... Acts 1:11

What will occur simultaneously with the return of Christ? *1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

d) ETERNITY:

“We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” ... 2 Peter 3:13

What things will be present in, and what will be absent from, our life in eternity? *Revelation 21:22-27 and 22:3-5*

(present)

(absent)

SUMMARY:

Most of this subject is well summarised by questions 37 and 38 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

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

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

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

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

Comment: At the resurrection the believer's soul will be reunited with his body which will be fitted to be with God for ever in the new heavens and new earth where righteousness has its home (*2 Peter 3:13*).

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

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

MEANWHILE ...

The “meanwhile” is an important element of studying future things. Meanwhile, how we are to live ?

How are we to grow as Christians? What are the gifts God has provided, which, as we make diligent use of them, will enable us to make progress in our Christian life? Older writers called these gifts “the means of grace”. In fact, this phrase is still in the profession-of-faith vows of several churches: for example “Do you promise to make diligent use of the means of grace?” This refers to the means that the Lord has appointed through which we may grow in our Christian walk. Having come to salvation by God's sovereign grace, how can we now grow and mature in that grace?

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

a) THE BIBLE:

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

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

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

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” Acts 17:11

Read *Ephesians 6:10-18*. What does Paul refer to as the sword of the Spirit? _____

Horatius Bonar's statement stands true: "You will notice that those who make most use of the Word of God, make most progress in the divine life."

b) PRAYER:

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

R.A. Torrey reminds us that prayer is 'having an audience with God'. If it can be said that the Bible is the Christian's daily food, then it can also be said that prayer is the Christian's 'lifeline' to the Lord. Or, as the hymn writer James Montgomery puts it: "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air."

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

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” Mark 1:35

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

“Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” Luke 18:1

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

Read *Ephesians 6:10-18*. Having put on the full armour of God, what is it that you are then called on to do?

c) THE LORD'S DAY:

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

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

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

Some of these Lord's Day benefits include:

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

d) CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP:

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

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

The writer of Hebrews reminds us:

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25

Read *Acts 2:42-47* and then *Acts 4:32-35* and itemise below what things the early Christians shared together:

e) SERVICE FOR OTHERS:

The Lord has given every Christian gifts to use for the good of fellow believers, and also for the good of everyone else. (*"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers" Galatians 6:10.*)

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

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

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

FOR PRIVATE STUDY

a) Questions:

i) Are you afraid of death?

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

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

YES () NO () NOT SURE ()

b) Further reading:

Read through *Revelation 21 and 22*.

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

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

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