

Lesson 1 | Your God and His Word

**God wants to
deal with you
only through His Word.**

In 1539, commenting on Psalm 119, Luther wrote, "In this psalm David always says that he will speak, think, talk, hear, read, day and night constantly — but about nothing else than God's Word and Commandments. For God wants to give you His Spirit only through the external Word."

JOHN 1: THE WORD MADE FLESH

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John (*Note: This is John the Baptist. The Apostle John, who wrote this Gospel is a different person*). ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

¹⁹Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

²²Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

²⁴Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶"I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

What questions do you have about this section of God's Word? What observations did you make? Were there any verses you found to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

WHO IS GOD?

Many cultures and religions expect God or the Ultimate Force of this universe to function in basically the same way. On the one hand, God in his transcendence is by definition morally perfect and holy, and on the other hand (if we're honest) not one of us is morally perfect. How should God respond?

Below are excerpts from three major world religions addressing the way God relates to people and responds to sin or evil.

What theme stands out to you?

I swear by Allah, the One in whose hands my life is, continue to order and guide people towards virtuous deeds, and prevent people from immoral acts and sins. Otherwise, Almighty Allah will surely send His severe punishment upon you. If you then turn to Allah and pray, your prayers will not be accepted.

Mishkát Sharif, Muslim writings, p.436

He alone is a Sikh, a friend, a relative and a sibling, who walks in the Way of the Guru's Will. One who walks according to his own will, O Siblings of Destiny, suffers separation from the Lord, and shall be punished.

The Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Sikhism

Isoko Religion begins with Cghene the Supreme Being, who is believed to have created the world and all peoples, including the Isoko. He lives in the sky which is a part of him, sends rain and sunshine, and shows his anger through thunder... Cghene always punishes evil and rewards good.

Anthropological notes on Isoko, Traditional African (Southern Nigeria) religion

In general, people have seen God responding in two ways: either God is actively punishing our evil, or else God is a distant, transcendent, dis-interested force. But that's not how the God of the Bible responds. He rebels against our expectations. He reacts in a way everyone least expected. Instead of expecting *us* to make things right, he made things right *himself*. Instead of condemning *us*, he condemned *himself*. Instead of being transcendent and dis-interested, he came down and makes his home with us. And so we see how God upended everything humanity *thought* we knew about him.

This course, Illumine 101: Foundations of the Christian Faith, will take us through the major parts of a single gospel, John. Here, we're going to meet the most unexpected God in history: Jesus. To see two more beautiful examples of God's love and to understand his heart, pause and read these two passages found in God's Word:

Luke 15:11-32 | The Parable of the Lost (or Prodigal) Son.

1 John 4:7-19 | ⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

In a word, how might you describe God? What might you or others find challenging about a God who deals with people the way in which the father dealt with the son? What do you find comforting?

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF GOD'S LOVE? LOVE THAT NEVER FAILS!

Take a look at the tour de force of Gospel promises below. Your God guarantees all of this.

Why are you able to trust in God? What's the foundation of your trust?

Isiah 55:10-11 | *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

John 10:27-30 | *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.*

John 16:33 | *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Deuteronomy 31:6 | *Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*

Proverbs 3:5 | *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.*

Romans 8:28 | *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.*

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF GOD'S LOVE? LOVE THAT NEVER LIES!

God asks us to trust him in one very special way:

He speaks to us in his Word, and he asks us that we trust everything he says in Word to be true. Is that possible?

What characteristics does God's Word have based on the below passages?

2 Peter 1:19-21 | *We also have a prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophesy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophesy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

Let's point out three things we can say about Scripture based on 2 Peter 1.

1. **The Bible is God's Word.** Although humans wrote it down, its origin is clearly from God.
2. **The Bible is truth.** After all, if prophets were carried along by God, and God is totally good and never lies, his words have to be entirely true. That's why Peter calls it 'reliable.'
3. **The Bible has divine authority.** Again, if the Bible is God's Word, it carries God's authority.

[Want to read more about the reliability of God's Word?](#)

Check out these articles in the Appendix.

- Is the New Testament Reliable?
- What do historians have to say about the resurrection?
- When was the whole N.T. recognized by the church?

HOW DOES GOD MAKE HIMSELF & HIS LOVE KNOWN?

What knowledge of God is accessible to all people everywhere?

Psalm 19:1-2 | *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands...There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the earth.*

Romans 1:20 | *Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what had been made, so that men are without excuse.*

Romans 2:14,15 | *When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by law... they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.*

From the created world around us, we can learn that a powerful being created everything. From the morality we find within our hearts (what we call our consciences), we learn that this powerful creator wants us to act a certain way. This **natural revelation** of God is available to everyone, why there are so many religions that teach people they must act a certain way to have a relationship with God.

But there are some things about God we can never learn from natural knowledge.

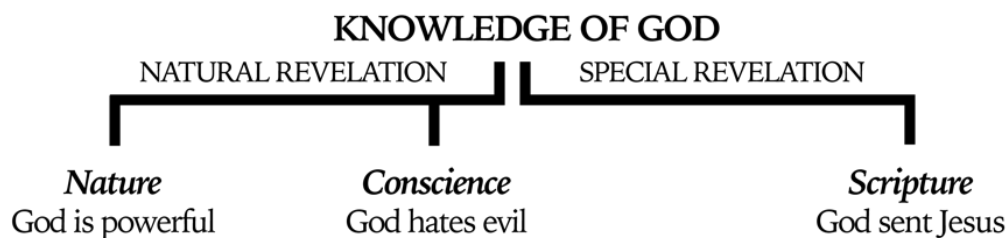
What does God need to tell us directly?

1 Corinthians 2:9 | *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*

2 Timothy 3:15 | *From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 1:16-17 | *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes... For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*

Only through the Bible (or God's **special revelation**) can we learn of God's love. That is, only in Scripture do we learn that we will never be able to fix our relationship with God, and that only through his gracious gift of Jesus' life and death can we be saved. When it comes to our salvation, **God wishes to deal with us only through his Word.**



DOES THE BIBLE ADD ANYTHING MORE TO NATURAL REVELATION?

Regarding nature and the creation of the universe.

Read Genesis 1:1-31

How does the Bible say the world began?

God created the universe, the earth, and all living things in six 24-hour days. Especially take note of the themes and repeated phrases in the creation account. Also note the differences between the Bible’s account of creation and an atheistic evolutionary explanation:

	Creation	Atheistic Evolution
Time	6 days	Billions of years
Method	God speaks things into being	By chance or accident
Mankind	A special creation	A superior animal
Man’s purpose	To serve and honor God	To survive
Man’s responsibility	To steward his creation	None

If God created the universe, and everyone has a natural knowledge of God, why do so many people today believe that he did not create the world?

Hebrews 11:3 | *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

Romans 10:17 | *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

How God created the universe is part of his **special revelation**, and only through faith created by reading and hearing the Word of God found in the Bible can a person learn where we truly came from.

Regarding conscience, God’s Law, and the Gospel.

Since sin infects even the conscience, so much so that we disagree what is God’s will. The Bible tells us clearly how God demands we should act. This clear message, and how we fall short of those demands, we call God’s **law**. The message that he has saved us through Jesus we call **gospel**.

CORE CONCEPT

Law and Gospel

The Law and Gospel are the two major teachings in the bible. Both are found in the Old Testament, and both are found in the New Testament.

What is God’s Law?

Romans 13:10 | *Love is the fulfillment of the law.*

Matthew 22: 35-39 | *An expert in the law tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*

CORE CONCEPT

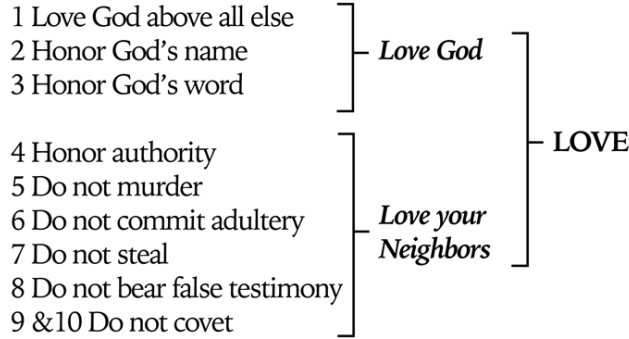
Law

God’s will for how we ought to live, how we fall short of God’s will, and how God responds to us falling short of his will. Summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), the Two Commands (Matthew 22:35-40), and the Law of Love (Romans 13:10).

How can we summarize God's law?

Maybe you've heard of *the Ten Commandments*. The Bible also summarizes God's law in two commands, which in turn can be summarized with one word: *love*. Further, the Bible describes the *function of the law* in three ways:

- As a *curb*, the law works in everyone's heart to curb each person from sin. (Romans 2:14-15)
- As a *mirror*, the law shows us our sin. (Romans 3:19-20)
- As a *guide*, the law leads Christians to a proper way to live to God's glory. (Ephesians 4:17-24)



TEN commandments summarized as TWO summarized as ONE.
EXODUS 20 MATTHEW 22:35-40 ROMANS 13:10

What is God's Gospel?

The Gospel means "Good News." The Gospel is the Bible's central story about the Word becoming flesh so that forgiveness might be ours. Because of Jesus, we can have eternal life with God, freely given to us. The **Gospel** is what humanity could not and would not have known were it not for God's special revelation and the gift of our Savior, Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1).

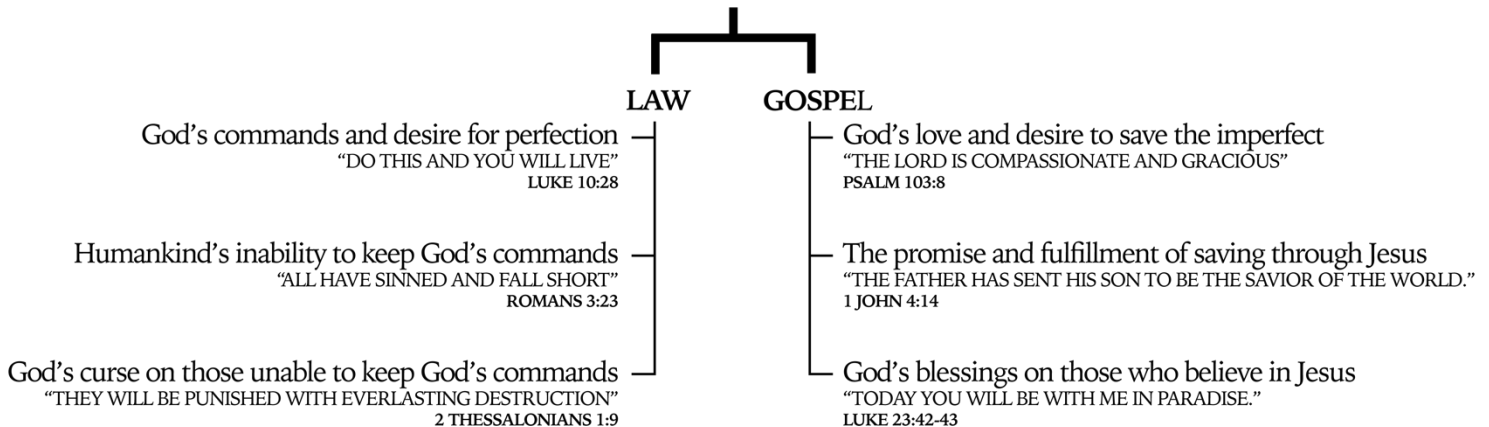
John 3:16-17 | For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Ephesians 2:8 | For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

CORE CONCEPT
Gospel

From the Greek word for *good news*. The good news is that God has saved us through Jesus' death on the cross.

TWO MAIN TEACHINGS IN THE BIBLE



HOW DO WE INTERPRET WHAT GOD'S WORD SAYS?

Here are 5 rules that will help you understand what God's Word is saying as you study it.

1. Understand that without faith, the Bible cannot be correctly understood.
2. Pay attention to context.
3. Take a passage literally unless the Bible indicates that it's figurative.
4. Use simple portions of Scripture to help you understand more difficult portions.
5. Consider all passages in light of the clear, chief truths of God's Word.

LET'S DISCUSS!

1. Today skepticism (doubt about claims to knowledge and distrust of traditional educational authorities) is in vogue. How might you respond to a friend who thinks you're naïve for trusting every word of the Bible?
2. Can you think of times contemporary society's most popular views will directly contradict what the Bible reveals about God's will and how he wants us to live?

AGREE OR DISAGREE?

Do you agree with the statement below? Why or why not? What would you say based on God's Word? See if you can find Bible passages to back up your answer.

3. Since the Bible was written almost 2000 years ago, we can't be sure that our Bibles today contain the true word of God.
4. God promises to never leave me or forsake me. (Deut. 31:6) So everything will go great for me for the rest of my life.
5. Since the Bible is God's Word and 100% true, I'll never be confused about what God is trying to tell me in it.
6. Since the Bible is God's Word and 100% true, I'll always be clear about what God has given to me in Christ.
7. Many people know in their hearts from their consciences that they need a Savior.
8. You must keep God's law perfectly to be saved.

LAW OR GOSPEL?

Read the following passages and write whether the passage is law or gospel. After that tell what our response is to the passage.

Matthew 5:27-30 | "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Ephesians 6:4 | Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

1 John 1:8-9 | If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

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.

Romans 6:23 | For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Before Lesson 2, read John chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4.

As you read, write down or make note of any questions you have, observations you make, or verses you find to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

Lesson 2 | Jesus, Sin, and Grace

Jesus saves by grace alone.

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh ^m and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:1-9

JOHN 3 & 4: JESUS COMES TO GIVE GRACE TO SINNERS

^{3:1}Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

³Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

⁴“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

⁹“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” ^v

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

^{4:7}When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” ⁸(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

¹³Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

¹⁶He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

¹⁷“I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

¹⁹“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

²⁵The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

What questions do you have about this section of God’s Word? What observations did you make? Were there any verses you found to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

If God created the world perfectly, then where does the Bible say that sin, death, and trouble came from? Like all good stories, the Bible’s account of the story of our universe follows a basic plot: the introduction of conflict, the anticipation of a hero, an epic climax in which the hero overcomes evil, and us living in the aftermath.

This lesson covers Jesus, Sin, and Grace – the amazing, the true story of our Salvation.

WHERE DID SIN COME FROM?

All of Scripture is built upon the fact that the fall into sin at the Garden of Eden is a true story. Every explanation the Bible gives for sin goes back to Adam, Eve, and Satan. At this point, set aside all questions of historicity, any scientific skepticism, and simply listen to the story and ask yourself whether anything rings true to you emotionally and psychologically.

Genesis 3:1-5 | Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

God did not create sin, but rather Satan, Adam and Eve brought sin into this world through their rebellion against God. The Bible describes angels that rebelled against God called demons. Satan, the chief demon, is known as the devil. (Revelation 12:7-9) Satan was in the serpent and tempted Adam and Eve to sin.

WHAT EXACTLY IS SIN?

What does the Bible teach about humanity?

Matthew 15:19 | *Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.*

Romans 7:18 | *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.*

Psalms 10:4 | *In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.*

Psalms 51:5 | *Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

Ephesians 2:1 | *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.*

Isaiah 64:6 | *All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*

Hopefully we can all agree: no one is perfect. The Bible teaches this, but goes even further. God's Words clearly states that imperfect (or *sinful*) actions flow from a human's imperfect (or *sinful*) nature. This **sinful nature** affects everything we do with this imperfection, what the Bible calls **sin**. And at the center of our sinful nature is the desire to do things our own way, regardless of what God thinks. Since we're unable to fix our relationship with God because of our nature, the Bible calls us spiritually dead. And this sinful nature is handed down from parents to children, affecting all people.

God is, by definition, morally perfect and just.

Given our sin, then, what does the bible teach God's relationship to humans is like?

Leviticus 19:2 | *Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy. ("Holy" means "perfect" or "without sin.")*

James 2:10 | *Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*

Isaiah 59:2-3 | *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you.*

Romans 5:12 | *Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin.*

1 John 3:15 | *Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.*

God is, by definition, perfect (or *holy*, or *righteous*). To remain perfect, God can't allow any imperfection (or sin) to exist. He can't tolerate even the smallest amount of imperfection (or sin). God is also by definition eternal, and so God's response to sin is this: eternal separation from imperfection, or sinful humans.

WHAT DID GOD DO ABOUT SIN?

Why didn't God destroy the ruined world and start over? Because he loves us and wants to be with us, not separated from us. And that's exactly why he sent Jesus.

Genesis 3:6-15 | *⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹²The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

*¹⁴So the Lord God said to the serpent. "Because you have done this... **¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers: he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."***

Q: Notice the effects of doubting God's goodwill: (1) shame, (2) fear of God, and (3) blaming others. **When Adam and Eve sinned, what did God do about it?** He had a plan. God showed both his grace and his justice by giving them a unique promise that would restore mankind's relationship with God while at the same time destroy Satan's plans.

Take a closer look at v15 (bolded). Slowly work through all the pronouns and note everything this passage tells us 'the woman's offspring' will be: (a) a human, (b) a male, (c) a single individual (not plural), (d) able to defeat the devil.

Q: Who is the only person who fits this description?

1 John 4:9,10 | *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

2 Corinthians 5:21 | *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

1 Timothy 2:3-6 | *This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.*

Ezekiel 33:11 | *"As surely as I live," declares the Sovereign LORD, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."*

Does God want to be eternally separated from humanity? No. He's their creator and loves them. Since humans in their imperfection could not fix their relationship with God, out of love God fixed the relationship by sending Christ. God showed both his grace and his justice in giving this unique solution that would restore mankind's relationship with God.

How did Jesus fix our relationship with God?

1 John 3:8 | *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.*

John 3:16-17 | *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Hebrews 4:15 | *We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -- yet was without sin.*

Colossians 2:9 | *In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form. ["Deity" means "God"]*

2 Corinthians 5:21 | *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

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

Jesus lived the perfect (or righteous) life we couldn't. Then, on the cross, Jesus took all of sins upon himself and died, taking upon himself all God's wrath for imperfection and sin. And Jesus gave his perfect and righteous life to us, so that when God looks at us, he sees and declares us as innocent, perfect, and righteous people. This declaration we call **Justification**. This undeserved act of love by God we call **grace**. God's greatest act of grace was sending Jesus to live and die for us.

CORE CONCEPT

Justification

A legal term which means to declare someone *not guilty*, to describe what God has done for us through Jesus. We have been saved through a simple declaration of not guilty that God makes in light of Jesus' death for us.

CORE CONCEPT

Grace

An undeserved, unmerited gift. God's chief grace to humans is Jesus.

ONE WAY LOVE

From an article by Tullian Tchividjian in, "What is Grace?" Article accessed at www.tullian.net/articles/what-is-grace.

As you read the article below, **highlight or underline at three sentences** that stand out to you as

helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

The definition I give for grace in my book One-Way Love comes from Paul Zahl:

Grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return. Grace is love coming at you that has nothing to do with you. Grace is being loved when you are unlovable.... The cliché definition of grace is "unconditional love." It is a true cliché, for it is a good description of the thing. Let's go a little further, though. Grace is a love that has nothing to do with you, the beloved. It has everything and only to do with the lover. Grace is irrational in the sense that it has nothing to do with weights and measures. It has nothing to do with my intrinsic qualities or so-called "gifts" (whatever they may be). It reflects a decision on the part of the giver, the one who loves, in relation to the receiver, the one who is loved, that negates any qualifications the receiver may personally hold.... Grace is one-way love.

Grace, in other words, doesn't make demands. It just gives. And from our vantage point, it always gives to the wrong person. We see this over and over again in the Gospels: Jesus is always giving to the wrong people—prostitutes, tax collectors, half-breeds. The most extravagant sinners of Jesus' day receive his most compassionate welcome.

Grace is a divine vulgarity that stands caution on its head. It refuses to play it safe and lay it up. Grace is recklessly generous, uncomfortably promiscuous. It doesn't use sticks, carrots, or time cards. It doesn't keep score. As Robert Capon puts it, "Grace works without requiring anything on our part. It's not expensive. It's not even cheap. It's free." It refuses to be controlled by our innate sense of fairness, reciprocity, and evenhandedness. It defies logic. It has nothing to do with earning, merit, or deservedness. It is opposed to what is owed. It doesn't expect a return on investments. It is a liberating contradiction between what we deserve and what we get. Grace is unconditional acceptance given to an undeserving person by an unobligated giver.

It is one-way love.

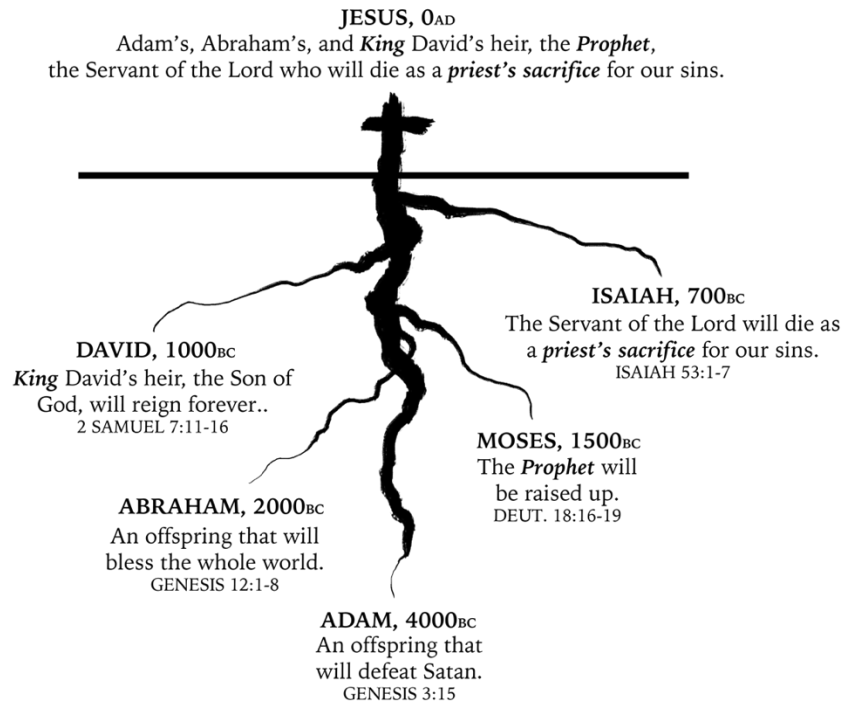
Other Notes, Highlights, or Questions.

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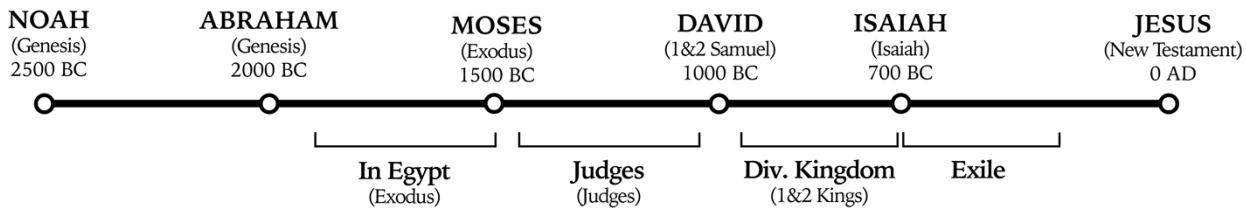
WHAT IS THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Genesis began what we're going to call the Bible's **Metanarrative of Salvation**. (A meta-narrative is a narrative or story that's above all other stories, the highest storyline that all smaller stories fit within.) We saw how conflict entered into God's good world, but that God promised a Savior, someone who would "crush the serpent's head" and restore humanity's relationship with God. The rest of the Old Testament (the first 39 books of the Bible) tell the history of God slowly unveiling more and more of his plan of Salvation. He gave many more promises (or *prophesies*), threads that will all eventually lead to the person and work of Jesus.

The Old Testament is also a record of the promises (or promises) God gave to Abraham's descents or *Israel*, that a Savior would come from them. Below we'll note some important moments in history that God made promises (or *prophesies*) to Israel. Slowly, a picture of the promised Messiah will begin to take shape. What will that Messiah look like? How will he function? In the promised heir of Adam and Abraham, God promises a coming Prophet, King, as a sacrifice for sins.



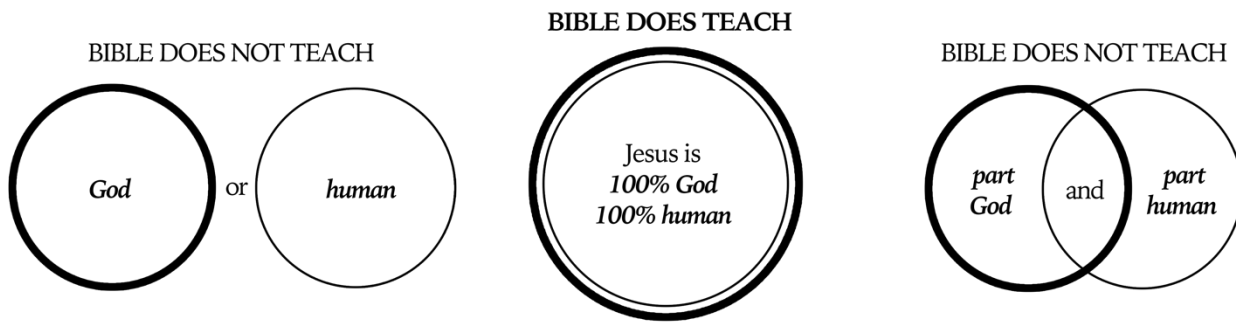
The history of the Old Testament can be summarized by remembering 6 major figures (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, and Jesus), and four major periods between these individuals (the captivity in Egypt, the period of the Judges, the Divided Kingdom of Israel, and the Babylonian captivity) roughly 500 years long. (To aid memorization, all dates on this page are a very rough approximation.)



WHO IS JESUS?

John 1:1-3, 14a | In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Remember these words from the beginning? What does John tell us about the very special nature of Jesus? Jesus **was, is, and always will be God**. These words tell us who Jesus is God and why he came. But John also says "He became flesh." And so, while being entirely God, Jesus **is and always will be fully human**. The act of God becoming a human in Jesus we call the **incarnation**.



Many other Bible passages tell of Jesus’ humanity: he was hungry (Matthew 4:2), thirsty (John 19:28), grew up (Luke 2:40), felt pain, grew tired and slept (Mark 4:38), and even cried (John 11:35). Yet, many other Bible passages tell of Jesus’ divinity: he is often called God (Romans 9:5), he raised the dead (John 11:38ff), controls nature (Matthew 8:23ff), talks as if he is God (Matthew 9:6), and knows all things (John 21:17).

IF JESUS IS GOD, THEN WHO IS THE FATHER AND SPIRIT?

Malachi 2:10 | *Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?*

John 14:10-12 | *The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.*

CORE CONCEPT
The Trinity

The bible teaches clearly that there’s only one God, yet three persons we ought to worship and depend on for salvation. And so we sometimes call our God the **Trinity**.

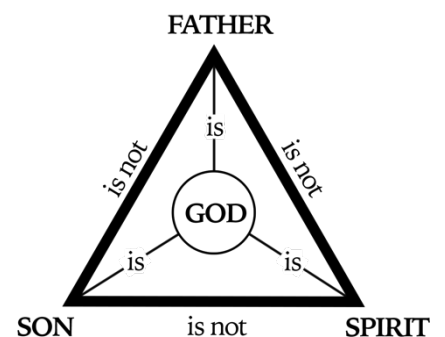
Why do we call God our Father? Because he created us. But if Jesus was not created by God the Father (since he’s God), why would Jesus call God his Father? Jesus had a very real relationship with the Father, where he considered himself a Son of his Father. And by giving us his righteousness, Jesus made God our spiritual Father. Yet he clearly taught that he and the Father were one.

John 14:15-17 | *“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

Acts 2:38 | *Repent and be baptized every one of you... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Deuteronomy 6:4 | *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*

If Jesus is God, and the Father is God, then who is the Spirit? (Remember him from baptism?) He, too, is God. He is a person and an advocate and helper sent by God to create faith and maintain faith in Jesus. The Spirit played a very special role in the birth of the Christian church, giving the spread of the gospel a powerful kick-start.



How can Jesus be both 100% God and 100% man? How Can Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit all be God, yet there be only one God?

Deuteronomy 29:29 | *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever.*

HOW MIGHT YOU SHARE JESUS WITH FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER?

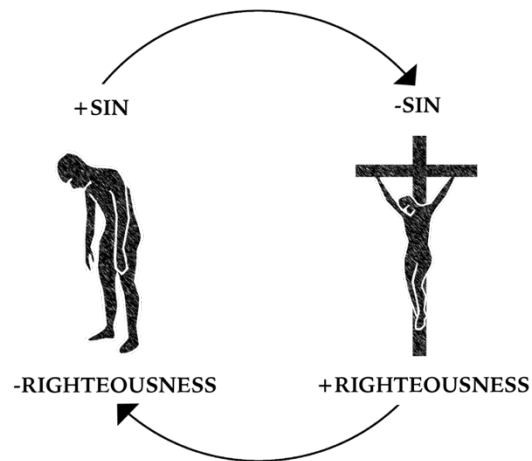
Now that you have an awesome handle on the differences between Christianity and all other religions ([review pg. 5 if needed](#)), and you've now thought clearly through who Jesus is and what he's done in history for all humankind ([review pgs. 8-9, 36-37 if needed](#)), how might you share this? One possible way, which involves summarizing shortly and concisely some key concepts, is called the **Great Exchange**. Look at it below. Draw it out a couple times on another piece of paper and consider: How might you use this to share Jesus with a non-Christian friend?

Bible passages for presenting the diagram below:

Lev. 19:19 | *Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am Holy.*

Romans 3:23 | *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

2 Corinthians 5:21 | *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*



LET'S DISCUSS

THINKING CRITICALLY

1. Why do you think God would create a world in which people would sin and fall away from him? Why not create a world in which sin can't exist?
2. Re-read Genesis 3 above. Notice how the serpent attacks (1) God's Word, (2) God's conception of morality (that is, God's Law), (3) Eve's pride and self-interest, and (4) Eve's belief in God's good will. From this point forward, the Bible writers will describe humanity as struggling with these four. What are some of the ways God's Word is attacked today? How are elements of God's revealed account of the Creation of the Universe attacked? How are elements of his law & gospel attacked?
3. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre writes, "The only way I can answer the question, "what am I supposed to do", is by answering the prior question, "What Story am I a part of?" How does knowing the Metanarrative of Salvation give meaning and purpose to your life?
4. Imagine you have a Jewish friend that doesn't know much about Jesus. Summarize the different promises God made of sending a Messiah. Which promises do you think are the most important to be able to remember and talk about?

5. You've seen how the Bible is brutally honest about the human condition, and God's response *not* rejecting them or making them work to get back on his good side. He simply sent a solution. That's it! This means the Bible teaches an approach to religion and spirituality radically different than anything else in this world. Consider the following quotes and summaries from other religions and philosophies. How is the Bible's story of **grace** different?
 - a. **In Islam**, many believe that to be saved, Muslims must put into practice "five pillars": (1) the Profession of Faith, (2) daily prayers, (3) alms-giving (giving to the poor), (4) fasting during Ramadan, and (5) pilgrimage to Mecca at least once (if possible). For example, "The first thing among their deeds for which the people will be brought to account on the Day of Resurrection will be prayer. Our Lord will say to His angels, although He knows best, 'Look at My slave's prayer, is it complete or lacking?'" (attributed to Mohammed by Abu Hurayrah)
 - b. **Mormons** use Christian language, but they teach "however powerful the saving grace of Christ, it brings exaltation to no man who does not comply with the works of the gospel." "Each command we obey sends us another rung up the ladder to perfected manhood and toward godhood; and every law disobeyed is a sliding toward the bottom where man merges into the brute world." (LDS President Spencer W. Kimball)
 - c. Many traditional **Buddhists** teach a person can reach a state of omniscient, godlike one-ness with the universe (enlightenment) by mastering the eight ideals: right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right-mindedness, and right contemplation.
6. If the Bible ultimately teaches us that God freely forgives us, that he doesn't demand anything from us in order to fix the problem of sin in this world, why do you think people often reject this central message? What might have been (or are) your hang ups with God's story of salvation?
7. Evaluate the statement: "There are many religions older and more historical than Christianity. Jesus was alive around 30 AD, but Hindus and Buddhists have texts and teachers from hundreds of years before Jesus."

Agree or Disagree?

Do you agree with the statements below? Why or why not? What would you say based on God's word?

8. Although children learn bad habits from others, basically they are good and want to do right.
9. Some people are able to live a life that conforms perfectly to God's Law.
10. The Bible tells us that God is loving. Therefore, God wouldn't actually send anyone to hell.
11. Sinful actions (such as killing someone or stealing) are worse than sinful speech (such as lying or cursing). And sinful speech is worse than sinful thoughts (such as lust or hatred).
12. God loves all good people.
13. Some people are more deserving of God's grace than others.
14. Jesus' main job was to show us how to live a God-pleasing life.
15. What do you think? Are all the sins that were committed after Jesus' death still paid for? What about the sins I will likely commit tomorrow, and the next day, and 25 years from now?

Before Lesson 3, read John chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

As you read, write down or make note of any questions you have, observations you make, or verses you find to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

Lesson 3 | Faith, Works, and The Life of Christ

**Like faith, good works
are not a DIY project.
Like faith, they are a gift.**

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10.

JOHN 6, 8: “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

^{6:26} Jesus answered, “...²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

³⁰ So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

⁶⁰ On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe.”

⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷ “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

^{8:31} To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

³³ They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

³⁴ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸ I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.”

³⁹ “Abraham is our father,” they answered.

“If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do what Abraham did. ⁴⁰ As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹ You are doing the works of your own father.”

“We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. ⁴³ Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

What questions do you have about this section of God’s Word? What observations did you make? Were there any verses you found to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

Steve Jobs (co-founder of Apple) is quoted as saying, “Technology is nothing; What’s important is that you have a faith in people, that they’re basically good and smart, and if you give them tools, they’ll do wonderful things with them.” What do you think Jobs means by the word faith? And what do you think of how he’s applying it? Is his faith warranted?

This lesson builds upon the previous (**sin** and **grace**), introducing two more key concepts, **faith** given through the Holy Spirit, and **works** done out of love for Jesus.

WHAT’S DIFFERENT BETWEEN THOSE SAVED AND NOT SAVED?

If Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, does that mean everyone has their relationship restored with God?

1 John 2:2 | He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 3:16-18 | For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

The Bible teaches that the distinguishing characteristic between those saved and not saved is **faith** (or belief, John 3:16).

But what exactly is this faith?

Romans 10:10, 17 | It is with your heart that you believe... faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Hebrews 11:1 | Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Psalms 78:22 | They did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.

It’s more than head-knowledge, that is, simply knowing certain facts. It’s rather heart-knowledge, or an active trust or belief that Jesus has saved you. In sin, we naturally rebel against God saving us, instead wanting to do everything ourselves. Faith is a change of heart, changing from relying on oneself to trusting in Jesus as the only way to be reunited with God.

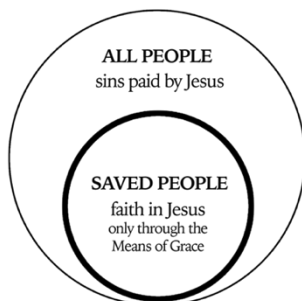
If by nature we’re rebels against God (as discussed in Lesson 1), how does a person get this change of heart?

Ephesians 2:8 | For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:13,14 | From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 2:8 | But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

God creates faith when a person hears the **gospel** (or *good news* – see Lesson 1), that God in his grace sent Jesus to die for our sins. So, we do not choose to have faith. It’s a gift. But we can choose to reject God’s grace. The only way a person can be saved, then, is through hearing the gospel. And so, we call the gospel message God’s **Means of Grace**.



CORE CONCEPT

Means of Grace

Hearing the gospel (or good news) about Jesus is the only way through which a person gets life-giving grace. God has packaged the gospel in three ways: the word of God on its own, the word of God connected with water (baptism), and the word of God connected with bread and wine (communion). So, there are three means of grace, all with the common feature that the gospel message is present.

DO OUR GOOD WORKS HELP US GET SAVED?

Do I contribute at all to my being saved through good deeds I do in life?

Romans 3:28 | *We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.*

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.*

Galatians 5:4 | *You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*

The Bible clearly answers, no. The Bible uses the word **Justification** (See Lesson 2), a legal term which means to declare someone *not guilty*, to describe what God has done for us through Jesus. We have been saved through a simple declaration of not guilty that God makes in light of Jesus' death for us.

CORE CONCEPT

Justification

A legal term which means to declare someone *not guilty*, to describe what God has done for us through Jesus. We have been saved through a simple declaration of not guilty that God makes in light of Jesus' death for us.

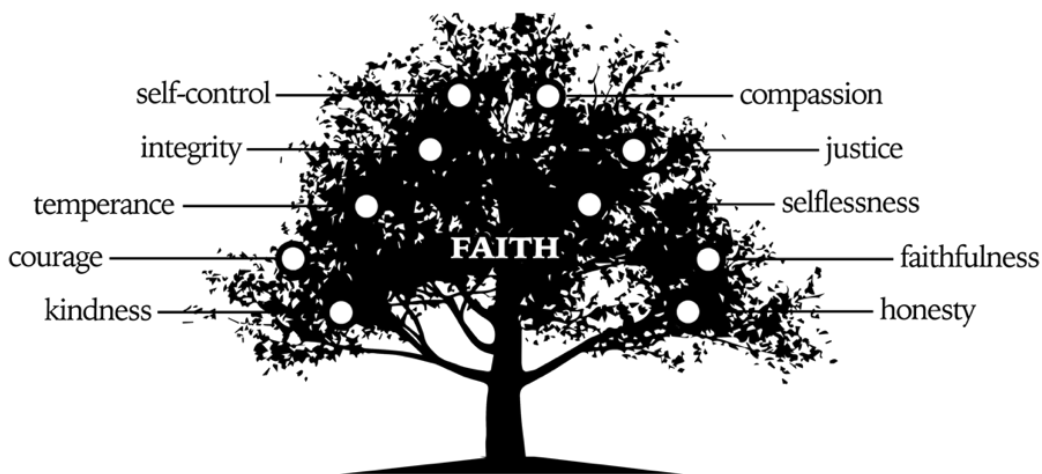
Why, then, do we strive to do good deeds (or, as the bible calls them, **good works or fruits of faith**)?

Psalms 56:4 | *In God I trust; I will not be afraid.*

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 | *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

Galatians 5:22 | *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

Ephesians 2:8-10 | *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*



CORE CONCEPT

Good Works

Good deeds or actions flowing from the right motivation: love for Jesus. By nature, humans can't do these. But through faith, God gives us the ability to do them. We don't do them out of fear or to earn God's favor. We already have that. We do them because we want to, out of love for what Jesus has done for us.

CORE CONCEPT

Fruits of Faith

Christians don't strive to do the right thing out of fear of God or to earn his love. So the Bible describes the works of Christians as *fruits of faith*, naturally made from knowing what Jesus has done for us.

We don't do **Good Works** because we're afraid God will punish us if we don't. God has forgiven us of every sin! Instead, we do good works because our faith in Jesus produces good works naturally, like a tree producing the right kind of fruit. That is why we call good works **Fruits of Faith**. A work is only good if it has the right motivation; that is, love for Jesus. And here's a fact that demonstrates the amazing completeness of God's grace; God gives us that motivation as a free gift. The aspect of a Christians life in which they do such good works is called **Sanctification** (well discuss Sanctification more in Lesson 7.).

CORE CONCEPT

Sanctification

The work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. The Holy Sprits sanctifies believers. Sanctify means to "set apart to be holy." The Holy Spirit sets us apart from the unbelieving world by calling us to faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit sets us apart more and more from sinful behavior by strengthening our faith, again, through the means of grace, thus motivating our hearts to produce good deeds in our lives out of thankfulness to God for his grace. Sanctification is an ongoing process that is never "finished" until we reach heaven.

Where does our ability to do good works come from?

Philippians 2:13 | *It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 | *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

If we were spiritually dead in our sins, then God through his grace gives us new life with the ability to do good works. And the Bible is our ultimate guide. In his grace, God gives us salvation through Jesus, faith in Jesus, and the ability to thank Jesus.

THE FOCUS HAS SHIFTED

An article by Tullian Tchividjian accessed at www.tullian.net/articles/the-focus-has-shifted

As you read the article below, highlight **at three sentences** that stand out to you as helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

A shift has taken place in the Evangelical church (*NOTE: in this article "Evangelical" is used to reference the majority of Christian churches in North America*) with regard to the way we think about the gospel and it's far from simply an ivory tower conversation. This shift affects us on the ground of everyday life.

In his book *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, famed Dutch Theologian Herman Ridderbos (1909 – 2007) summarizes this shift which took place following Calvin and Luther. It was a sizable but subtle shift which turned the focus of "the gospel" from Christ's external accomplishment to our internal appropriation:

While in Calvin and Luther all the emphasis fell on the redemptive event that took place with Christ's death and resurrection, later under the influence of pietism and moralism, the emphasis shifted to the individual appropriation of the salvation given in Christ and to its and moral effect in the life of the believer. Accordingly, in the history of the interpretation of the epistles of Paul the center of gravity shifted more and more from the forensic to the pneumatic and ethical aspects of his preaching, and there arose an entirely different conception of the structures that lay at the foundation of Paul's preaching.

Donald Bloesch made a similar observation when he wrote, "Among the Evangelicals, it is not the **justification** of the ungodly (which formed the basic motif in the Reformation) but the **sanctification** of the righteous that is given the most attention."

With this shift came a renewed focus on the internal life of the individual. The subjective question, "How am I doing?" became a more dominant feature than the objective question, "What did Jesus do?" As a result, generations of Christians have been taught that Christianity is primarily a life-style; that the essence of our **faith** centers on "how to live"; that real Christianity is demonstrated foremost in the moral change that takes place inside those who have a "personal relationship with Jesus." Our ongoing performance for Jesus, therefore, not Jesus' finished performance for us, has become the focus of sermons, books, and conferences. What I need to do and who I need to become is now the end game. Christianity, in other words, has become defined by its fruit, rather than its root.

To be sure, the Bible has plenty to say about our becoming like Jesus. But our transformation is not the foundation of the Christian **faith**. The foundation of the Christian **faith** (the root) is Christ's substitution—the fact that Jesus became like us. The modern church has sadly reversed the order. The focus of the Christian **faith** has now become the life of the Christian.

Believe it or not, this shift in focus from "the forensic to the pneumatic", from the external to the internal, has enslaving practical consequences.

When you're on the brink of despair--looking into the abyss of darkness, experiencing a dark-night of the soul--turning to the internal quality of your **faith** will bring you no hope, no rescue, no relief. Too much preaching and counseling these days is the equivalent of giving a drowning man swimming lessons: "Paddle harder, kick faster." We assume that people possess the internal power to get things right so we turn them in to themselves. But, as many already know, every internal answer will collapse underneath you. Martin Luther had a term for the debilitating danger that comes from locating our hope and certainty in anything inside us: *monstrum incertitudinis* (the monster of uncertainty). Therefore, turning to the external object of your **faith**, namely Christ and **his finished work** on your behalf, is the only place to find peace, re-orientation, and help.

The gospel always directs you to something, Someone, outside you instead of to something inside you for the assurance you crave and need in seasons of desperation and doubt. The surety you long for when everything seems to be falling apart won't

come from discovering the dedicated “hero within” but only from the realization that no matter how you feel or what you’re going through, you’ve already been discovered by the “Hero without.” For certainty of **faith**, the believer must look outside himself to that word of the gospel: the promise of forgiveness of sins and **justification** because of Christ.

As Sinclair Ferguson writes in his book *The Christian Life*:

*True **faith** takes its character and quality from its object and not from itself. **Faith** gets a man out of himself and into Christ. Its strength therefore depends on the character of Christ. Even those of us who have weak **faith** have the same strong Christ as others!*

By his Spirit, Jesus’ continuing subjective **work** in me consists of his constant, daily driving me back to **his completed objective work** for me. **Sanctification** feeds on **justification**, not the other way around. The gospel is the good news announcing Christ’s infallible devotion to us in spite of our lack of devotion to him. The gospel is not a command to hang onto Jesus. Rather, it’s a promise that no matter how weak your **faith** may be, Jesus is always holding on to you.

Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been **justified by faith** we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is a bonafide peace that’s built on a real change in status before God—from standing guilty before God the judge to standing righteous before God our Father. This is the objective custody of even the weakest believer. It’s a peace that rests squarely on the fact that we’ve already been “reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (v. 10), **justified** before God once and for all through **faith in Christ’s finished work**. It will surely produce real feelings and robust action, but this peace with God that Paul describes rests squarely on the **work** of Christ for us, outside of us.

The truth is, that the more I look into my own heart for peace, the less I find. On the other hand, the more I look to Christ and his promises for peace, the more I find. So, when pressed in on every side, look up. In God’s economy, the only way out is always up, not in.

Other Notes, Highlights, or Questions.

WHAT IS THE BASIC STORY OF CHRIST'S LIFE?

Now that you are reading deeper into John's Gospel, take a moment to peruse an overview of Jesus life. Use the following pages as a reference as you continue to read John's Gospel.

Christ's life can be summarized in five major parts: his birth, the epiphany (revealing) of his public ministry, ministry, Holy Week, and resurrection appearances. Let's look closely at each part and their corresponding Old Testament prophecies. Work through the timeline below to see the significance of every major part of Christ's life. Note how Jesus functioned as our **Prophet, Priest, and King**.

0 AD. | Christ's birth

Christ's birth is riddled with the fulfillment of prophecies. Note those below, which is simply a sample of those the Bible records.

- **An offspring of Adam:** Genesis 3:15 → Luke 3
- **An offspring of Abraham:** Genesis 12:1-8 → Matthew 1
- **The virgin birth:** Isaiah 7:14 → Matthew 1:22-23
- **A birth in Bethlehem:** Micah 5:2 → Luke 2

30 AD. | EPIPHANY of Public MINISTRY

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his public life, identifying him as David's heir, the Son of God. Jesus' temptation in the wilderness demonstrates his ability to stand up to Satan:

- **Baptism:** 2 Samuel 7:11-16 → Matthew 3:13-17
- **Temptation in the Wilderness:** Matthew 4:1-11

30-33 AD. | Jesus' public ministry

Jesus' ministry was primarily a teaching and preaching of the good news of salvation from sins. Jesus also did many wonderful miracles in his ministry. Jesus' miracles emphasized him as:

- *the fulfillment of the OT promise for a **Prophet**:* Deut. 18:16-19 → John 5:39-47, 10:38
- *possessing divine power as Savior:* Matthew 9:1-7

33 AD. Holy Week

During Holy Week, Jesus' mission, as well as all Old Testament prophecies and anticipations, came to its climax. The majority of the gospels is dedicated to these eight days.

- **Sunday:** *Triumphal entry into Jerusalem.* Matthew 21:1-11
- **Monday:** *Jesus cleanses the temple.* Matthew 21:12-17
- **Tuesday:** *Jesus teaches openly.* Matthew 21-26
- **Wednesday:** *Jesus rests.*
- **Thursday:** *Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper.* Matthew 26
- **Friday:** *Jesus is tried and crucified, our ultimate **Priest** and sacrifice.* Isaiah 53:1-7 → Matthew 27
- **Saturday:** *Pilate sends guards to the tomb.*
- **Sunday:** *Jesus rises from the dead. He proves that he is our **King** who will rule eternally.* Matthew 28

Resurrection Appearances

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to many people, to confirm to the world that he was who he claimed to be, God come to earth as a man to save sinners from their sins. Major events include the women at the tomb, Thomas and the disciples behind locked doors, and the ascension into heaven.

The Life of Jesus recorded in the bible is meant to be the clear continuation of the Old Testament, and so the continuation of God’s revelation and story about a coming Messiah. As a demonstration of how closely tied together Old and New Testaments are, compare Psalm 22 with excerpts from the gospels below.

PSALM 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
 Why are you so far from saving me,
 So far from my cries of anguish?
 My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
 by night, but I find no rest...

But I am a worm and not a man,
 scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
 All who see me mock me;
 they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
 “He trusts in the Lord,” they say,
 “let the Lord rescue him.
 Let him deliver him,
 since he delights in him...

Dogs surround me,
 a pack of villains encircles me;
 they pierce my hands and my feet.
 All my bones are on display;
 people stare and gloat over me.
 They divide my clothes among them
 and cast lots for my garment.

Matthew 27:46

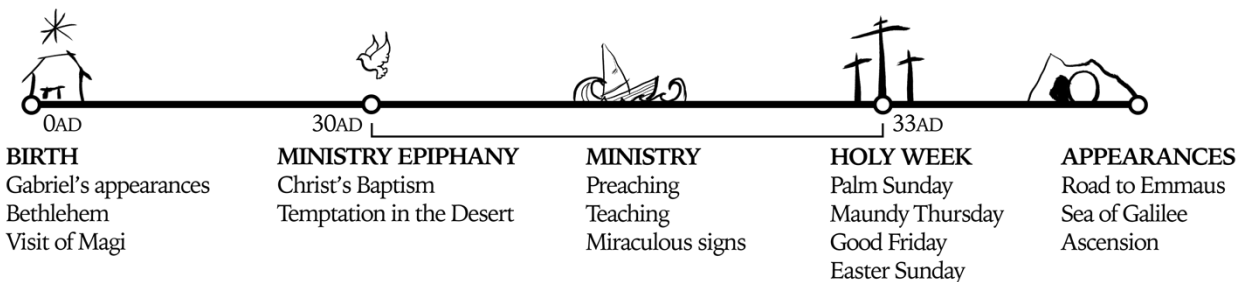
About three in the afternoon Jesus cried in a loud voice, “Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?” (which means **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**)

Mark 15:29-31

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!”

John 19:22-24

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. **“Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.”** This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled that said, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” So this is what the soldiers did.



WHAT BOOKS OF THE BIBLE RECORD JESUS' LIFE?

God has preserved four records of the life and ministry of Jesus. Each of the four authors of these gospels (books that tell the good news of the life of Jesus) had his own specific background, perspective, and specific audience. If we keep this in mind as we read them, it will clear up any alleged discrepancies we might notice.

Matthew: An Un/Expected Jesus

Audience: Jewish Christians. This is made clear by the facts that (a) his gospel points to Old Testament prophesy fulfillment more than any other, (b) he presupposes an understanding of Jewish practices and customs, as well as a knowledge of Israel's geography, and (c) he especially focuses on Jesus' engagements with Jewish religious leaders and Pharisees.

Purpose: Demonstrate Jesus is certainly the prophesied Messiah. And so Matthew emphasizes more than the other gospels (a) the fulfillment of OT prophesy, and (b) although not what the Jewish community was expecting, Jesus was every bit the Messiah.

Mark: Superhero Jesus

Audience: Mark most likely writes to Western gentiles. Clement of Alexandria records that Mark wrote down the teachings of Peter in Rome. This is supported by the facts (a) Mark includes added explanation for Jewish practices and customs, (b) and Mark stresses Jesus as courageous and powerful, fitting for a Roman populous that valued above all else courage and valor.

Purpose: Provide a gospel account for the Roman world. Mark stresses (a) Jesus rules over all things, whether demons, the elements, or disease, and (b) Jesus willingly gives himself completely to his purpose of redemption, yet remains in control. These two themes are emphasized in Mark's choice of material: Mark includes the greatest number of miraculous events.

Luke: Global Jesus

Audience: The Gospel of Luke and Acts were meant to be one unified work written for Gentiles. Considered together, Luke and Acts tells the story of the gospel's departure from Jerusalem (the center of the Jewish world) to Rome (the center of the Gentile world).

Purpose: Demonstrate that Jesus is a world issue. The universality of the gospel is stressed. Consider Luke's genealogy that goes back to God himself, as well as his especial attention to gentiles, women, and social outcasts. Luke also stresses the historicity of the life of Christ within the world for the world.

John: MY GOD and my Friend, JESUS

Audience: John wrote his gospel in Ephesus around 90 AD. Christianity had grown, as well as misunderstandings and false teachings regarding Jesus and his nature, with which the Church is struggling against. And so John writes to Christians who are asking, "Was Jesus really God or a lesser creation?" "Was Jesus really a human?" "What is the nature of faith, and is it necessary to be saved?"

Purpose: John writes for two major polemic and apologetic purposes, (a) to make the nature of Jesus clearly understood (Christology) and (b) to make the nature of how he saves us through faith understood (Soteriology). As one of Jesus' closest disciples, John also stresses the heart of Jesus for us, his friends.

LET'S DISCUSS

1. Why does God choose to save through faith? Why could he not simply declare all people innocent and leave it at that?
2. You can say a Hindu, or a Muslim, or a Buddhist have faith. You could even say that they have strong faith. But if you say that, how are you defining faith? Could you say those people have saving faith?
3. Order the following from most important to least: That Jesus died for our sins, that God has given us faith through his Word, or that we now can do good works?
4. Your friend points out that Mormons, Muslims, or people of other faiths can live good lives and do good works just like Christians, so what's the big deal with Christianity? How do you respond?

Agree or Disagree?

Do you agree with the statements below? Why or why not? What would you say based on God's word?

5. Jesus paid for the sins of those people who are in hell.
6. We will go to heaven if we believe in Jesus and try to live according to our faith.
7. Faith comes to those who pray for it.
8. We have the power to keep our faith strong.
9. A good pastor will bring many people to faith.
10. You can't live a perfectly holy life until you become a Christian.
11. The work of Jesus Christ gives us the chance to win eternal life by following his example.
12. I deserve some credit for the good works I do.
13. Christians, who are justified, still continue to commit sins.
14. When I sin, I lose my salvation.

Before Lesson 4, read John chapters 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

As you read, write down or make note of any questions you have, observations you make, or verses you find to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

Lesson 4 | The Sacraments, Baptism, and The Holy Spirit

**I
~~was~~
am
baptized!**

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Romans 6:1-8

JOHN 14: Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

¹ Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

²⁸ "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. ³⁰ I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹ but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

"Come now; let us leave.

What questions do you have about this section of God's Word? What observations did you make? Were there any verses you found to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

This lesson focuses on the means through which God creates faith in the hearts of people. In other words, it focuses on sharing the message of Jesus' death and resurrection so that the Holy Spirit can do his work of making Christians.

WHAT ARE THE MEANS OF GRACE?

What's so special about God's Word?

Read Acts 2:22-41.

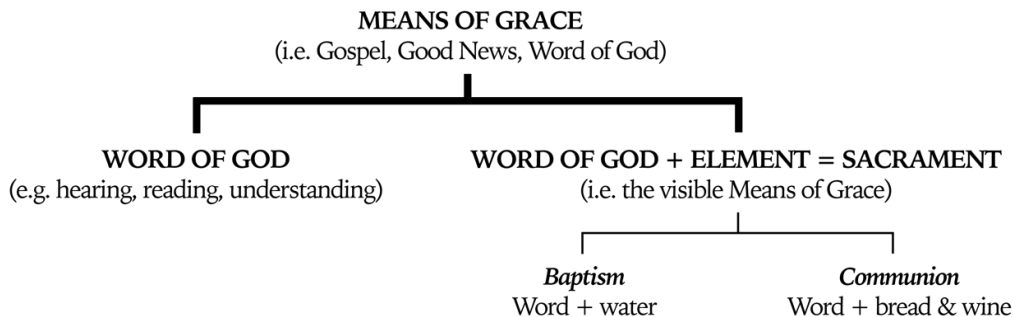
When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, he had Peter preach law and gospel, and many people responded. Their response to the law was repentance and their response to the gospel was faith.

Read the two passages below. Summarize what is God telling us.

1 Corinthians 12:3 | *No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 10:17 | *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*

You will recall from our earlier study on faith that faith only comes from hearing the word of God. The methods through which God has chosen faith to be planted in human hearts we call the **Means of Grace**. If being connected to God's Word is necessary for faith, what does that tell us must be a common element in all Means of Grace? God's Word will always be present. God's promise of forgiveness through Jesus will always be a necessary component of any means through which God gives his gift of grace to humankind. The graphic below demonstrates that all of God's means of grace are simply different forms of delivering the Word of God.



What is the definition of a *sacrament*?

Apart from the gospel being spoken plainly, Jesus commanded us to share the gospel in two other very special ways. The Lutheran church uses the word **sacrament** to set these aside as particularly special. We define a **sacrament** as:

- A sacred act that Jesus commanded
- An act using certain physical elements connected to God's Word
- An act by which God gives forgiveness, new life, and salvation

God gives us forgiveness of our sins through his word, when it is preached and when it is attached to these special commanded acts. So we must keep in mind that sacraments are a work of God, not a work of man. Otherwise we stand to lose all the joy and comfort God wants us have in the sacraments. A sacrament only goes one way: from God to us.

And so there are three Means of Grace: hearing God's Word, hearing God's Word when it is connected with water in **baptism**, and hearing God's Word when it is connected with bread and wine in **communion**. The latter two Means of Grace we call sacraments.

Which member of the trinity is primarily responsible for working through the Means of Grace?

John 3:5,6 | *Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."*

Titus 3:4,5 | *When the kindness and love of God our Savior 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.*

Acts 2:38 | *Peter replied, "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."*

The Means of Grace are the tools, which the Holy Spirit uses to give spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead, provides strength to those who are alive in Christ, and preserves all God's Children for eternal life in heaven, and equips Christians for all our struggles on earth.

CORE CONCEPT

Means of Grace

Hearing the gospel (or good news) about Jesus is the only way through which a person gets life-giving grace. God has packaged the gospel in three ways: the word of God on its own, the word of God connected with water (baptism), and the word of God connected with bread and wine (communion). So, there are three means of grace, all with the common feature that the gospel message is present. The Means of Grace are the tools, which the Holy Spirit uses to create and strengthen faith, offer the forgiveness of sins, and grant salvation.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Acts 1:4-11, 2:1-4 | ⁴On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

¹¹"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."

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

He, too, is God. We baptize in his name as much as in the name of Jesus and the Father. He is a person and an advocate and helper sent by God to create faith and maintain faith in Jesus. The Spirit played a very special role in the birth of the Christian church. Jesus promised to send him after his ascension into heaven (John 15:26). The Spirit came with power, as Jesus promised, and gave the spread of the gospel a powerful kick-start. The Holy Spirit wants one thing: that we focus on Jesus.

Deuteronomy 6:4 | *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*

1 Corinthians 8:4 | *There is no God but one.*

Are there three Gods? The bible teaches clearly that there's only one God, yet three persons we ought to worship and depend on for salvation. And so we sometimes call our God the **Trinity**. Next worship service, count the number of times we make reference to our Triune God.

WHERE IN THE BIBLE DOES CHRIST COMMAND BAPTISM?

Where in the Bible did Jesus command baptism?

Matthew 28:18-20 | *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Jesus says that our mission is to make disciples of all nations. In the original Greek, baptizing and teaching are clearly identified as means by which people are "made disciples."

Where in the Bible does it say that through baptism God saves sinners?

1 Peter 3:21 | *This water (the water of the flood at the time of Noah) symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*

Acts 2:38 | *Peter replied, "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 22:16 | *Ananias said to Saul, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on [God's] name."*

Ephesians 5:25-26 | *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.*

Titus 3:4-5 | *When the kindness and love of God our Savior 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.*

A common misconception that people have about baptism is that it is only a symbol by which the believer shows their dedication and commitment to Christ. That is not how the Bible describes baptism. There are no New Testament references to baptism where baptism does not actually impart some spiritual blessing springing from God's grace.

In Baptism, God saves sinners. God clearly states that he saves us from our sins through baptism in 1 Peter. Baptism guarantees us salvation and a clear conscience before God through Christ. In Acts, Peter promises the repentant Jews they will receive forgiveness through baptism. For example, your baptism assures you that:

- You are part of Christ's family. (Galatians 3:27)
- You have the power to say no to sin. (Romans 6:1-7)
- You are saved from eternal death in hell. (1 Peter 3:18-22)

So, who should be baptized?

Psalm 14:3 | *The LORD says, "There is no one who does good, not even one."*

Romans 3:23 | *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Isaiah 59:2 | *Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*

Genesis 8:21 | *Every inclination of [mankind's] heart is evil from childhood.*

Psalm 51:5 | *Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

John 3:6 | *Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh." (Note: The Greek word translated flesh is often used in the sense of sinful flesh, i.e. flesh that has been corrupted.)*

WHY DO WE BAPTIZE INFANTS?

Since the bible never excludes children from baptism (e.g., Acts 16:33), the burden of proof is on those who would want to exclude children from baptism. Consider the following truths:

- Our children are sinners from conception and accountable for their sins. (Psalm 51; Ezekiel 18:20)
- God promises forgiveness through baptism. (1 Peter 3:18-22)
- God does not limit baptism to any age group. (Matthew 28:19)
- Faith is miraculous, whether with adults or children. (Ephesians 2:1-10). And so babies can have faith. (Luke 18:15-17: The Greek word translated “babies” is used only for infants and the unborn.)



Frequently Asked Questions About Baptism

Why do some churches not baptize infants?

They view Baptism as an act an individual does. They call baptism an “outward sign of an inward change.” Since the individual must do the action, only those who know about it and can ask for it will be baptized. We would say that this is going the wrong way down the one-way street. It is taught nowhere in the bible and came into practice during the 1600's through the Anabaptists.

Did the early church baptize infants?

Absolutely, because the early church held that baptism was a means which God used to apply grace to the individual. Numerous inscriptions on the graves in the catacombs, dating back to the very first centuries of Christianity, testify to the fact that the early Christians baptized their children. Here is one: “Aristus lived eight months. He was recently baptized.”

Does it matter how much water is used in baptism?

No! Scripture nowhere specifies an amount of water to be used. On some of the catacombs dating as far back as 165AD there are pictures of baptisms by pouring water over the head. It is not the water that has the power but the Word of God applied with water in the name of the Triune God. Baptism is a wonderful gift from God. How God works through baptism is no less mysterious than the Trinity itself. He does not ask that we understand it, but only that we faithfully use this gift and enjoy its benefits throughout our entire lives.

“I AM BAPTIZED” VS “I WAS BAPTIZED.”

An excerpt from *“The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart”* by Harold L. Senkbeil, pages 100-102.

As you read the excerpt below, highlight **at three sentences** that stand out to you as helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

Pastors baptize people in to the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Baptism is not just water, but the water included in Christ’s dominical command and ordered discipleship: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). Thus, you could say that baptism is a kind of visible word, a “watered word” in this case. God’s word always does what it says. And sure enough, mighty things are accomplished by the application of water with the word – or to be more precise, by application of God’s word in that baptismal water. In baptism sinners are buried with Jesus into his death and joined with in his resurrection. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4). Thus baptism constitutes the inauguration of the soul’s life with God. In a very real way it is the dawning day of eternity for every soul born into this world in captivity to sin; blind, dead and an enemy of God spiritually speaking (see Ephesians 2:1-9). Baptized into Christ, the soul is reborn to life eternal. That’s the rebirth by water and the spirit that [all Christians experience] when [they] are plunged into the death and resurrection of Jesus by the washing of water with the word.

Being washed in the powerful name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a person is cleansed of all sin and given a whole new life to live. All sin inherited from Adam and committed by that person himself is drowned and dies in that water. In a very real way Jesus takes the sinners, sins and all, along with him into death and buries those sins in a watery grace, never to rise again. Yet from that very water a new man emerges, created in the image and likeness of the Lord who by his sacred blood has ransomed every soul and cleansed it from all impurity (see Ephesians 5).

Baptism thus is an indispensable instrument in the soul’s healing. Pastors baptize a person only once, but the significance of this watery grave for sins continues every day. For the rest of that person’s earthly life he or she daily returns to that washing by contrition and repentance so that the old Adam continually dies each day and a new person regularly emerges and arises to live before God in Christ’s own righteousness and true holiness.

Baptism thus forms the hinge of the new life in Christ. [The life of a Christian is in many ways ongoing baptismal therapy; constantly applied to the Christian is one aspect or another of Christ’s magnificent baptismal gifts to the soul that is burdened with guilt or broken by hurt and shame.] At the heart and center of baptism lies the remission of all sins in the shed blood of Jesus: remission for sins we’ve committed against God and sins others have committed against us. Though baptism is a one-time event, such remission meets our collative on-going need for spiritual health and healing. The forgiveness of sins is the daily bread and butter of every baptized soul.

Other Notes, Highlights, or Questions.

LET'S DISCUSS!

1. If a husband said "I love you" to his wife on their wedding day and then never again; what would we say about that marriage? How is God expressing his love to you through the sacraments similar to a healthy marriage?
2. Imagine you were asked to build a birdhouse, you were given all the tools to do so, and yet you attempted to build without using any of the tools. Why do you think people try to build their faith/ others' faith/the Church without the tools God gave us, that is, the means of Grace?

Agree or disagree?

Do you agree with the statement below? Why or why not? What would you say based on God's word?

3. Without baptism no one can be saved.
4. It makes no difference whether you are baptized or not.
5. Babies who die without baptism are not saved.
6. Babies are too young to understand baptism.
7. Babies are too young to believe in Jesus.
8. Babies should be baptized as soon as possible.
9. Only pastors may perform a baptism.
10. We lose the blessings of baptism when we don't act like Christians.
11. It is wrong to baptize by immersion.
12. If you were baptized as a child in another denomination but then become a Lutheran, you must be rebaptized.
13. If you were baptized but lose your faith and later became a Christian again, you must be rebaptized.

Before Lesson 5, read John chapters John 15-17:19

As you read, write down or make note of any questions you have, observations you make, or verses you find to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

Lesson 5 | Communion and Forgiveness

“...this is...FOR YOU...”

¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given **FOR YOU**; do this in remembrance of me.”

²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out **FOR YOU**.

Luke 22:19–20 (emphasis added)

These words, “Given and shed **FOR YOU** for the forgiveness of sins,” show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

– **Martin Luther’s Small Catechism (emphasis added)**

MATTHEW 26 and JOHN 15, 16, & 17: The Last Supper

^{Matt 26:26} While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

^{John 15:1} “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

^{15:26} “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

^{16:12} “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

^{17:13} “I am coming to you (*God the Father*) now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”

What questions do you have about this section of God’s Word? What observations did you make? Were there any verses you found to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling?

This lesson focuses on the sacrament of Communion—its institution, its many blessings, and Christ’s guidelines for its usage among Christians today. We celebrate how we have been saved through Jesus’ body and blood.

WHAT IS COMMUNION?

Where in the Bible did Jesus command Communion?

Matthew 26:26-29 | While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Luke 22:14-20 | When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

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

Mark 14:22-25 | While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”

²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

²⁴ “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. ²⁵ “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 | For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Communion is the sacrament Christ instituted and commanded on the night before his death. This is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s gospels as well as in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

Like the Thanksgiving turkey, birthday cake, and 4th of July barbeque; celebrations and food go together. We use special meals to commemorate special events. We mark family and friendships by gathering around the dinner table. Jesus used a special meal too. We call it the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion, for it was first celebrated by Jesus with his disciples on the night before he died. Christians have been eating this meal ever since. However, the Lord’s Supper is unlike any other meal.

Are Christ’s body and blood really present in the sacrament?

Matthew 26:27 | ²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood...

Luke 22:19 | And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 | ¹⁶ Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

Communion involves eating bread and drinking wine through which God gives us Jesus' body and blood. Jesus doesn't take time to explain how (see passages at top of page). Jesus only assures us his body and blood are present. **We call this Real Presence.** We accept His words in faith without trying to explain it. Further, Paul explicitly says that Christ's body and blood are present in the Sacrament, but just as Jesus, he does not explain how. As with other truths of Scripture that we cannot fully comprehend, we do not have to understand it in order to believe and enjoy the benefit of it.

CORE CONCEPT

Real Presence

The miraculous presence of Jesus' real body with the bread and of his real blood with the wine in the Lord's Supper.

Arguments Against the Doctrine of Real Presence

Argument | The doctrine of Real Presence is unnecessary for the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. God offers forgiveness through his Word.

Response | It is true that God offers forgiveness through his Word. The Old Testament believers are proof that we don't "need" the Lord's Supper at all. Even the Bible limits who should partake of the Lord's Supper. However, it is not logical to assume that because God offers forgiveness one way (through the Word) that he would not/could not offer it in other ways as well (through Baptism and the Lord's Supper). In his love God desired to connect forgiveness to something we can touch in order to make the message of forgiveness even more clear and vivid. It would not be absolutely "necessary," but God chose to do it none-the-less.

Argument | Jesus was speaking figuratively when he said, "This is my body. This is my blood."

Response | Jesus makes no mention of doing so. This is a dangerous road to go down. For if we can say that Jesus was speaking figuratively at the Lord's Supper, how can we be sure he isn't speaking figuratively when he makes statements such as "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25). Good principles of Biblical interpretation say that we let the text itself tell us if it is meant to be taken figuratively. The Bible loses all sense and meaning if we abandon this principle.

Argument | Jesus indicated he was speaking figuratively when he said, "This do in remembrance of me."

Response | That statement is not an indicator of figurative speech. Reversing the words of institution demonstrates this. Imagine Jesus had said, "Take and eat, this is bread... Do this in remembrance of me." Would we then assume that Jesus was distributing something other than bread? No. When we receive the Lord's Supper, we obviously remember what Christ did for us. However, the recollection and remembrance of Christ's redemptive work is not hindered by the doctrine of Real Presence, but only enhanced.

Argument | It is repulsive to think of eating Jesus' body and blood.

Response | This is not an argument but an emotion, one that is born from a misunderstanding of the doctrine of Real Presence. The bread does not become a piece of Christ's flesh. Nor does the wine turn into a quart of blood like you might give at a blood bank. This error has sometimes been called Capernaite Eating. The Bible teaches that the body and blood of Christ are truly there, but in a miraculous way.

Argument | Jesus body and blood couldn't be present in the Lord's Supper. With the millions of people who have taken the Lord's supper throughout the years, Christ's body and blood would have been used up long ago.

Response | This is an attempt to rationalize a doctrine of God's Word that proclaims the miraculous. Similar to the previous argument, it approaches the Lord's Supper with a strictly physical understanding. The miracle of the Real Presence cannot be rationally comprehended any more than the Trinity, the union of Christ's human and divine natures, the six-day creation, etc. It is simply believed by faith (cf. Hebrews 11:1).

Human reason is a gift from God. The ability to think about things logically and rationally help us solve problems and understand our world. But is everything that God's Word tells us reasonable? No. Think about the doctrine of the Trinity—one God in three persons. That is not reasonable.

Or consider the following three statements. God cannot die. Jesus is true God. Jesus died on the cross. All those statements are completely true. Yet, they do not logically or reasonably connect with one another. We simply believe all three statements, though we do not totally understand how they can all be true. Some teachings found in God's Word, including the doctrine (or teaching) of Real Presence, can be grasped only by faith, not by human reason.

WHY SHOULD I RECEIVE COMMUNION TODAY?

Luke 22:19 | *And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

1 Corinthians 11:26 | *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

We should receive Communion because Jesus commanded it saying that we are to continue celebrating Communion in the church in order to remember him and his work in our behalf. Paul writes we also have an opportunity to proclaim Christ's redeeming work to others when the sacrament is administered.

What are the blessings and benefits of receiving Communion?

Hebrews 9:15 | *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins.*

Romans 11:27 | *God said, "This is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."*

Jeremiah 31:31a, 34b | *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant... I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

1 John 1:7 | *The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

Romans 5:9 | *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

Ephesians 1:7 | *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.*

Matthew 26:28 | *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

Romans 10:17 | *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*

Communion is a means by which God gives his forgiving grace to the individual. We receive concrete confirmation that our sins are forgiven. Whenever we hear this gospel, in addition to receiving actual forgiveness from God, our faith is strengthened. God's word, his means of grace to us, not the bread or wine, is what gives Communion this power. The one-sided agreement where God gives his one-way blessings of love and forgiveness to us – asking nothing of us – Scripture calls the new covenant.

Who may receive Communion?

1 Corinthians 11:27-29 | *Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment upon himself.*

Whereas baptism is for any person who wants to become a child of God, Communion is a little different. God has certain warnings for Communion. Because the Lord asks that we examine ourselves before taking the Sacrament, only those who are able to examine themselves should receive Communion. Examination involves *confession* (see below) and *acknowledgment* that Christ's body and blood are really present.

It should be stressed that the phrase *unworthy manner* does not mean *too sinful*. The Lord's Supper is precisely for those who have a conscience burdened by sin. Instead, we take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner if we think we have no need for forgiveness. Someone who would do this would be sinning against the body and blood of Christ. He receives Christ's body and blood, not for his forgiveness, but to his judgment. Therefore, since it is possible to harm our faith by taking the Lord's Supper, Scripture says we should examine ourselves before we eat this meal.

What questions we would ask to examine ourselves before Communion?

Am I repentant (sorry) for my sins?

1 John 1:9-10 | *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.*

Do I believe the Son of God died for my sins?

1 Corinthians 11:26 | *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

Do I believe Jesus gives me his body and blood in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of my sins?

Matthew 26:28 | *Jesus said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins."*

Do I intend to use the strengthening I receive in the Lord's Supper to resist the temptation to go on sinning?

Romans 6:1,2 | *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!*

Anyone who humbly acknowledges his need for forgiveness and who understands that Christ gives us forgiveness by sharing his real body and blood in the Lord's Supper, has examined themselves and is prepared for Communion.

Can we celebrate Communion with Christians of other denominations at our church or other churches?

1 Corinthians 1:10 | *I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

Romans 16:17-18 | *I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.*

1 Corinthians 10:14-17 | *My dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.*

Here is another way in which Communion is different from baptism. God issues another warning for Communion, namely, that Communion is only to be celebrated among those who share the same faith. Communion is not only an expression of the **union** we have with God through Jesus' forgiveness, but it is also a close, intimate expression of the **unity** we have with our fellow Christians. This is why it is sometimes referred to as Holy Communion. (There is also the **union** of Christ's body and blood with the bread and wine.)

God's Word urges that celebrating Communion be an expression of common fellowship and shared correct belief in Jesus. For this reason, those taking Communion together ought to be in complete fellowship and union with each other in what they believe about Jesus and the Bible. Therefore, it is appropriate and desirable that fellow Christians study Scripture together before taking the Lord's Supper together. This enables them to first confess what they believe to one another. Celebrating the Lord's Supper on the basis of this confession of faith is known as **close Communion**.

CORE CONCEPT

Close Communion

The practice of admitting to the Lord's Supper only those who have confessed unity of faith with the body of believers.

If you feel weak in your faith should you come to Communion?

Matthew 11:28-29 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*

Absolutely. Come to Communion confessing your sins and weaknesses. Look for his grace and forgiveness to strengthen your faith. Ask Pastor Matt to stop and read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

DO I NEED TO CONFESS MY SINS?

Psalm 51.

Note: King David wrote this psalm when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,

and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

¹⁸ May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

We can learn a lot from David's psalm. When a Christian falls into temptation and sins, the natural response is to seek God's forgiveness and be confirmed in that forgiveness through hearing God's promises. We call this **confession**. The warrior poet, David, knew this well when he confessed his sins of adultery and murder to his God.

How often should believers confess their sins or repent?

CORE CONCEPT

Repentance

Repentance is when a person humbly feels sorrow over his or her sin AND confidently trusts in forgiveness through Jesus. Repenting results in turning away from sinful ways and habits and toward sanctified living that flows from a heart that gives thanks to God.

Acts 3:19 | Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

1 John 1:8-10 | If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

James 5:15,16 | If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other.

John 20:21-23 | Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Peter, in Acts 3:19, is speaking to unbelievers. John and James are speaking to Christians. Not only when a person becomes a Christian do they confess their sins, but they begin a life of constant confession and renewal in the gospel. This is why we often call confession the *heartbeat of the Christian*. This, too, is why we confess our sins at the beginning of every worship service.

We might list the essential parts of confession and **absolution** (being *absolved* of your sins is being forgiven) as follows:

- 1) Acknowledgment of God's law (e.g., a mental review of the Ten Commandments)
- 2) Acknowledgment that you have broken God's law and need forgiveness.
- 3) Acknowledgment that Jesus has died for your sins and you are at peace with God.

LET'S DISCUSS!

1. You and I know that confessing your sins regularly actually leads to less guilt and more spiritual peace in life. But our culture often believes the opposite. How can you explain to your friends that Christian confession (which includes absolution) leads to happiness?
2. Why do you think Jesus would institute Communion? It probably seems pretty weird to the non-Christian world, and even to some Christians. Why might Jesus tell us to eat his body and blood?
3. What can you say to a friend who says, "But it doesn't look like there's body and blood present?"
4. Compare Communion to baptism. Which do you think is more important for your daily faith life?
5. The teaching of close Communion may be seen as exclusive or unloving by some. How would you tell a friend or family member (who is not a member at our church) about the teaching of close Communion? How can you be true to God's Word and, at the same time, be as loving, gentle, and sensitive as possible?

Agree or disagree?

Do you agree with the statement below? Why or why not? What would you say based on God's word?

6. The Lord's Supper and Communion are two different names for the same thing.
7. Everyone who goes to Communion receives Jesus' body and blood.
8. Everyone who goes to Communion receives the forgiveness of sins.
9. It is not necessary to go to Communion more than once a month.
10. Receiving the Lord's Supper is absolutely necessary for one's salvation.
11. Some will not be saved because they didn't go to Communion enough.
12. We should not go to Communion if we have sinned the same day.
13. Children may not take Communion until they are confirmed.
14. We go to Communion to earn the forgiveness of sins.
15. As long as he believes in Jesus, anyone may go to Communion.
16. We should not go to Communion if we don't feel the need for it.

Before Lesson 6, read John 17:20 through chapter 19 and also chapter 21.

As you read, write down or make note of any questions you have, observations you make, or verses you find to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

Lesson 6 | Christ's Love, Your Love, and Your Vocation

“God doesn’t need your good works, but your neighbor does.”

– Martin Luther

Our vocation comes directly from our justification.

The righteousness of Christ frees us from being curved inward and propels us outward toward our neighbor in vocation. Vocation assumes freedom from the burden of pleasing God. If the Christian’s time and energy are exhausted in an attempt to earn favor with God, there is nothing left for the neighbor.

It is true that vocation is in the realm of law. It is how God uses Christians to love the world. My work in vocation is not how I am saved. Vocation is not gospel. Vocation is not for heaven. Yet vocation is only possible because heaven is secure. Only the justified in Christ can work with Christ in the Father’s economy of love.

God’s grace, empowering us to love our neighbors through the simple acts we do daily – that is vocation.

– From “Vocation: The Setting for Human Flourishing” by Michael Berg

JOHN 17-19 & 21: CHRIST'S DEATH, HIS RESURRECTION, & YOUR CALLING

What do these sections of John's Gospel teach you about your calling or vocation?

17:20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

^{18:15} Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, ¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

¹⁷ "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter.
He replied, "I am not."

^{18:33} Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

³⁸ "What is truth?" retorted Pilate.

^{19:25} Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

^{19:38} Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

^{21:1} Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way:

^{21:15} When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

What questions do you have about this section of God's Word? What observations did you make? Were there any verses you found to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

This penultimate lesson focuses on the many opportunities we have to serve God and others in our life here on earth; that is, through our vocation.

At this point it's clear: the driving plot of this universe's metanarrative is God's unstoppable and unfathomable love for humankind in Christ. This truth will necessarily, radically change the way we think of love. While we're on the topic of love: What are the ways that we show love in our culture? What's the difference between the ways someone would show love for someone they're dating, a spouse, a parent, or a neighbor? What's similar or common in all the ways we express love?

WHAT IS CHRIST-LIKE LOVE?

Ancient Greek has several words to describe several concepts for which we use only one word in English: **love**. Let's focus on four of those words to understand God's love better.

How are the loves different from one another?



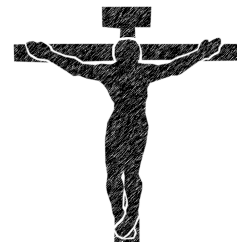
Storge
parental love



Phileo
friendship



Eros
erotic/romantic love



Agape
unmerited compassion

Note that the first three are based on self-interested (sometimes reciprocal) relationships. **Storge love** is built often on a biological relationship, such as a parent for a child. We don't expect parents to have the same *storge love* for other children as for their own. **Phileo love** is built on common interests and other qualities, such as in friendships. We don't expect people to have the same depth of friendships with all people. **Eros love** is built on erotic attraction. We recognize people have different levels of sexual attraction based on the qualities one finds sexually attractive in another. And so, people don't have the same *eros love* for everyone.

What is the difference between the agape love Christ shows us and the other types of love?

What is God's love for us based on compared to what the other loves are based on?

Romans 5:6-8 | *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own [agape] love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 8:37-39 | *In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the [agape] love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Agape love, then, is the love Christ has for us. In his perfect justice, God finds no qualities within us to love us (lack of perfection), but only qualities to repel us (presence of sin). Yet, he chooses to love us anyway, demonstrated most vividly in his death for us on the cross. Thus, this love is *not driven by qualities* (and takes no account of merit), but is entirely selfless. And the love expresses itself in complete and utter service and self-sacrifice. (Remember the *Good Shepherd in John 10* and see if fulfilled in *John 20* and *21*.)

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO AGAPE LOVE?

If God has loved *you* with *agape* love (and he most certainly has), how does the Holy Spirit motivate you to respond?

Galatians 2:20 | *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved [agape] me and gave himself for me.*

Matthew 22:37-39 | *Jesus replied: “ [Agape] Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘[Agape] Love your neighbor as yourself.’*

Exodus 20:2,3 2 | *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3 “You shall have no other gods before me.*

Ephesians 5:25 | *Husbands, [agape] love your wives, just as Christ [agape] loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

Romans 3:23-24 | *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.*

Ephesians 4:22-24 | *22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*

An important distinction to make in regard to God’s love is what we call the distinction between justification and sanctification. **Justification is God’s verdict that he has acquitted us of sin.** In God’s eyes we are righteous, since Jesus has given us his righteousness (See Lesson 2 for more on Justification.). **Sanctification is Christ’s call for a Christian to live a holy life.** Living for Jesus sets Christians apart from the unbelieving world (See Lesson 3 for more on Sanctification.). Justification is done. Nothing more needs to be done. Sanctification is ongoing. **There is always room to grow in our Christian life of Sanctification, and there is only one way to grow: being connected to God’s Word and Sacraments.** (See Lesson 4 & 5 for more on the Sacraments.).

Therefore, what is our response to God’s *agape* love? Our life of Sanctification is the response to God’s love. In other words, **Sanctification is our Spirit-empowered response to Justification.** Our first response to God’s *agape love* is to love, honor, and worship God as True God, Lord, and Savior. Our God put us and our salvation first; we now respond by putting him first.

The second response is to mirror God’s *agape love* by showing *agape love* for others. The rest of this lesson will focus on the different areas of our life where that happens. First, however, let’s note one important aspect about our life of Sanctification.

Is it possible, in regard to our Sanctification, to live perfect, holy lives with the help of the Holy Spirit?

Romans 7:14-25 | ¹⁴ *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. ¹⁹ For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*

²¹ *So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?*

²⁵ *Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

When it comes to our lives of sanctification, we notice very quickly that there is a battle that wages within us, a striving between what the Bible calls the **old self**, that is, our old sinful nature, and our **new self**, the new creation or identity we have in Jesus built on faith and the Holy Spirit living within us. In heaven, the sinful nature will be done away with and only the new creation will remain.

1 John 1:8 | If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Romans 6:11-12,14 | Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires... For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Is it possible, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to do good works? Even though God uses Christians to bless the world through their actions and fruit of the Spirit, every attempt to do a perfectly good work by the Christian is tainted with sin. Yet, God considers the Christian covered in the blood of Christ, and sees it only as righteousness. In this sense, even though the Christian will carry the sinful nature with its effect into every aspect and action of life, the Christian has been set free from sin and its penalty of eternal death. **We are simultaneously sinners and saints.** While we are not perfect, Christ is. Therefore, God sees us perfectly Sanctified **for Christ's sake.**



WHAT IS VOCATION AND THE GOSPEL-MOTIVATED LAW OF LOVE?

How does God call us to *agape love* each other? What does this look like in action?

Matthew 5:38-40, 44 | You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

1 John 3:16 | This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Romans 13:8-10 | Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

God has given you many different roles in your life and connected you to many different people. We call these places God has called you your **vocation**. Consider which of the following apply to you: employee, employer, citizen, friend, co-worker, manager, artist, craftsman, counselor, scientist, student, teacher, neighbor, church member, church leader... The list is endless. You can (and the new creation within you wants to) serve God in all of these roles. Search God's Word for how he wants you to serve in these roles. First, review what Good Works and Fruits of Faith are and why we do them.

CORE CONCEPT

Good Works

Good deeds or actions flowing from the right motivation: love for Jesus. By nature, humans can't do these. But through faith, God gives us the ability to do them. We don't do them out of fear or to earn God's favor. We already have that. We do them because we want to, out of love for what Jesus has done for us.

CORE CONCEPT

Fruits of Faith

Christians don't strive to do the right thing out of fear of God or to earn his love. So the Bible describes the works of Christians as *fruits of faith*, naturally made from knowing what Jesus has done for us.

The word vocation is from the Latin root for “called out.” One’s vocation refers first to the fact that God has called you out of this sinful world and into his family, and second to the fact that God places you back in this world to do work for him in various roles: wife, husband, mother, father, son, employee, employer, artist, craftsperson, citizen, neighbor, etc.

VOCATION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God calls you to conform to his will, to have a new identity through Jesus.

What does that mean? What does it look like?

Romans 12:1,2 | Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Philippians 2:1-4 | Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 | *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, ¹¹ and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.*

Ephesians 5:21 | Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Out of his grace and mercy, God has given his children not only his love, but also gifts to serve others. Through the power of the Holy Spirit God calls us to use our gifts in service to others and to him. Our vocation, therefore, has little to do with us and our gifts, and is entirely focused on serving the needs of others.

VOCATION AND THE ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN

The Bible teaches unequivocally that men and women are of equal value in God’s eyes. Both are sinful, and both have been given God’s *agape* love gift, Jesus’ death. (Genesis 3; Romans 3:23,24) Further, it teaches:

- violence against women (whether physical, emotional, or psychological) simply cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. (Deuteronomy 22:25-27; Malachi 2:16; Psalm 11:5; Colossians 3:19)
- it’s virtuous for women to be independent and educated. (Proverbs 31)
- the sexual objectification of women is wrong. (1 Peter 3:7)

The Bible also teaches, though, that, although absolutely equal in value, God designed different roles for men and women. Consider the following instructions the Bible gives to men and women when talking about authority in the church:

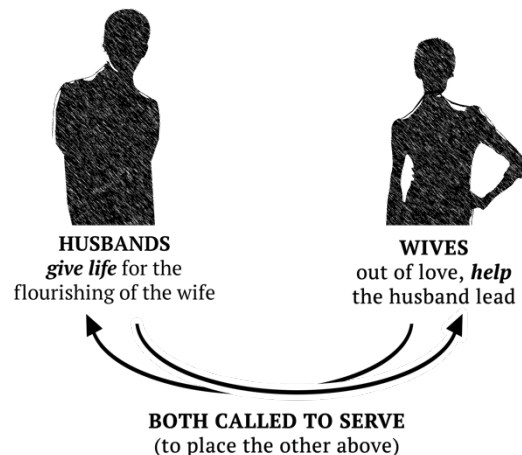
1 Timothy 2:12 | *I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man.*

Ask Pastor: How do we seek to apply God’s word in 1 Timothy 2 in our context at Illumine Church?

VOCATION AND MARRIAGE

Ephesians 5:22-27 | Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.



What instructions does the Bible give to husbands and wives in marriage?

The **essence** of marriage is shown in God's creation of the first marriage. We note three ingredients to marriage as God intended it.

- One **man** and one **woman**. From the beginning God has intended that marriage be heterosexual. Homosexuality is clearly taught as sinful in the bible. (See Romans 1:21-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)
- "A man will leave his father and mother." This means each are **able** and **eligible** to be married.
- "Be united to his wife and they will become one flesh." The two will be welded together by a public, lifelong **commitment** to be faithful to one another until death separates them.

We also note the **purposes** of marriage based on the Genesis account.

- **suitable companionship**. They were created to need each other. They were created to meet each other's need. In perfection they met those needs perfectly.
- **sexual happiness**. Sex is a gift of God to be enjoyed in the context of the committed love of marriage. Sex is giving as much as it is receiving. (See also 1 Corinthians 7:3-4)
- **children**. Children are a blessing. Children are an asset to families and society. And children are responsibility given by God. (See also Malachi 2:15, Psalm 127, Psalm 128)

What does God tell us about divorce? God hates divorce. (Malachi 2:16) However, God will allow a Christian to divorce if a spouse has destroyed the **essence** of marriage, but not just because the marriage is falling short of its **purpose**. The essence of marriage is destroyed if one partner has committed adultery (Matthew 19:3-9), or one partner has abandoned the marriage. (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

God loves sex. He created it. And, in the right context, he wants people to have lots of sex. What's the right context?

Hebrews 13:4 | Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Mark 10:6-9 | "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

1 Thessalonians 4:3,4 | It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable.

Based on everything we've learned so far, how does God feel about people practicing a homosexual lifestyle?

Romans 1:26-28 | ...Women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another... God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

The Bible unequivocally teaches that practicing homosexuality is sexually immoral. That said, homosexuality is not singled out as worse than other sins in the Bible. Homosexuality is simply one of the many ways we've come up with to sin.

Does Jesus love those practicing homosexuality? Let's ask it this way: did Jesus die for those practicing homosexuality?

The Bible unequivocally teaches that Jesus did die for people practicing homosexuality. Therefore, how does God call us to act towards them? We are to show them the same radical *agape* love we show to all of our neighbors.

VOCATION AND THE FAMILY

Does God have special directions for family members?

Ephesians 5:21-6:4 | 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." e 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—3 "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." h 4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

The Bible is very descriptive in our unique roles in the marriage and family. Note verse 25. **Husbands** are to sacrifice all for their wives, just as Christ did for the church. And note verse 22. **Wives** are to submit to their husbands and allow them to lead, just as the church submits to her loving Savior. And so, together, husband and wife can actually model and share the gospel by how they treat each other. **Children** are expected to obey their parents, and **parents** are expected to love their children, and to especially love them enough to teach them God's Word.

VOCATION AND THE CHURCH

How does Christian *agape* love affect the way we see our vocation, illumine Church, worship, our study of the Bible, and our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Hebrews 10:25 | *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.*

Malachi 3:10 | *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*

1 Timothy 2:1-2 | *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

2 Peter 3:18-20 | *Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

How does Christian *agape* love affect the way we see our vocation, our money, possessions, and time and energy with those in need and with the gospel ministry of the church?

Acts 20:35 | *In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

Matthew 6:19-21 | *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

2 Corinthians 9:7 | *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Acts 20:35 | *We must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

How does Christian *agape* love affect the way we see our vocation, those unchurched, and the work of evangelism?

Ephesians 4:32 | *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Matthew 5:16 | *Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

Romans 10:14-15 | *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

Matthew 28:18-20 | *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

WHAT IS MY VOCATION?

Save this page for class. We'll work through it together.

(_____ 's Name)

(Your Title)

(_____ 's Name)

(Your Title)

(Your Name)

child of God

(Your Title)

(_____ 's Name)

(Your Title)

(_____ 's Name)

(Your Title)

LET'S DISCUSS!

1. The Church Father, Augustine of Hippo, famously wrote that the Christian ought to strive to love things in the right order. That is, know what things you ought to love more than other things. At the top of the list, we've learned, is God. He's to be loved above all. How do you think you'd arrange things under God? Where does family, community, friends, enemies, animals, nature, possessions, etc. relate to each other?
2. Given everything we've learned about God's will for relationships and our sexuality, what are the pros and cons of making a shared Christian faith a priority in who you date and decide to marry?
3. God calls wives to *submit* to your husbands. Does this mean that you blindly obey? Does this give your husband license to do as he pleases? How do the passages below apply to wives when husbands either sin or attempt to pull their wives into sin? Look at the following passages for help.

Acts 5:29 | We must obey God rather than human beings!

Matthew 18:15-17 | "If brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

4. To love God above all means you are willing to let God's desires for your life trump your own desires. It also means you are willing to let God shape the way you think. What are some popular cultural ways of thinking that you know by now are not God's ways of thinking? Think of politics, ethics, and lifestyle choices. Make a short list.

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Now look at that list. Christians are motivated by the love of Jesus to reshape how we live in this world. Are you ready to conform to God's ways of thinking about those things rather than the world's ways? Is there anything that God teaches that you're not ready to conform to? Why?

AGREE OR DISAGREE?

*Do you agree with the statement below? Why or why not? What would you say based on God's word?
See if you can find Bible passages to back up your answer.*

5. Since it's impossible to fully conform to the standards God desires, we shouldn't be too hard on ourselves when we make mistakes.
6. The reason I want to conform to my new identity in Christ is to make God happy.
7. The most important element in marriage is love for each other.
8. Anyone can get married to anyone else, as long as they love each other. (See Romans 1:21-32 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)
9. Sex outside of marriage is okay if the couple is committed to each other.
10. Since the Bible didn't know about certain people being genetically predisposed towards being gay, we should rethink the Bible's teaching on same-sex relationships.
11. What's most important in a husband's life is the spiritual, emotional, and physical flourishing of his wife.

12. To love God above all things will mean I might need to make some major changes in my life.
13. When a person becomes a Christian, they automatically begin to love God above all things.
14. With hard work and help from the Holy Spirit, I will be able to model a life of giving and self-sacrifice perfectly.
15. Christians ought to give at least ten percent of their income to my church family.
(See Deuteronomy 14:22-24. A tithe is a tenth.)
16. Unless I'm able to give without a grudging heart, I shouldn't give anything to my church family or to charities.
17. If I do not share my faith and the message of the gospel with other people, I am sinning.
18. A Christian who has a basic understanding of foundational teachings of Christianity is secure in their faith.

Before Lesson 7, read John 20 and also chapter 21.

As you read, write down or make note of any questions you have, observations you make, or verses you find to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

Lesson 7 | The Church and Illumine Church

Empathy is not endorsement.

“Empathy, it turns out, is a key ingredient in getting conversations off the ground, but it can feel very vulnerable to be empathizing with someone you profoundly disagree with. So, I established a helpful mantra for myself:

Empathy is not endorsement. Empathizing with someone you profoundly disagree with does not suddenly compromise your own deeply held beliefs and endorse theirs. It just means that I'm acknowledging the humanity of someone who was raised to think very differently from me.”

– *Dylan Marron, writer, performer, and host of the podcast “Conversations with People Who Hate Me.”

**Dylan is someone that Christians would disagree with on certain moral premises (...you can Google him.) That's the point of quoting him in this lesson on fellowship. This lesson explores what it means to be part of God's family, the church, and what it does and does not mean to have fellowship with other Christians while at the same time loving everyone like Christ did. The lessons essentially explores not only why there is only one family of God, but also why that family today is scattered throughout so many Christian denominations. We'll look at how the biblical doctrine of fellowship is messy because it is paradoxically both inclusive and exclusive at the exact same time.*

John 20: Go, Tell, Love, Believe

¹Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ²So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

¹⁷Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’””

¹⁸Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²²And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

What questions do you have about this section of God’s Word? What observations did you make? Were there any verses you found to be most helpful, encouraging, eye-opening, or troubling.

HOW MANY CHURCHES ARE THERE?

1 Peter 2:4-10 | ⁴As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house ^c to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once 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.

Ephesians 2:19-22 | Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

There is only one **Holy Christian Church** on earth; one group of people set aside as God's family who will join him in eternity.

CORE CONCEPT

Holy Christian Church

Consists of all those who have been called out of a sinful life and into a life of faith in Christ. (See Ephesians 3:14-21) It is called holy because all its members have had their sins removed. It is called Christian because it is built upon Jesus Christ, the Savior. It is called a church because it is a distinct group of people (called out of the darkness). We distinguish the Holy Christian Church from Christian denominations.

How does a person become a member of the Holy Christian Church?

Romans 10:13-17 | ¹³"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" ¹⁶But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" ¹⁷Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

When someone hears the gospel message, the Holy Spirit works through that message and creates faith. Wherever God's Word is being preached, members of the Holy Christian Church are present. Wherever the Word is not, members are not present.

How do we know who's a member of this Church?

1 Samuel 16:7 | But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Only God can read hearts and God alone knows who has true faith in Christ. Therefore, the Holy Christian Church is often called an invisible church.

If there is only one Christian church, why are there so many denominations?

1 Corinthians 1:10 | I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Romans 16:17-18 | I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

All people are sinners with a sinful nature that rebels against God and the truth. On the one hand, Paul desires that all Christians gathering at church ought to be completely united in what they believe the Bible teaches. On the other hand, Paul commands us to confront those not united in the truth and avoid participating with them if they persist in false teaching. (See also John 17:13-23, Mark 3:22-29, Acts 15, Galatians, Revelation 22:18-19)

HOW DOES GOD WANT US TO STRIVE TOWARD UNITY?

Since we can't read hearts, what should we to base our unity on?

Revelation 22:18-21 ¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. ¹⁹And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. ²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:3-8 | Command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer ⁴ or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith.

⁵ The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶ Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. ⁷ They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

⁸ We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

Jude 17-23 | ¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

²² Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

We've seen clearly that Paul stresses unity around whether or not what it taught and preached is the truth. And the Bible never teaches that one truth revealed by God in the Bible is less important than any other revealed by him. And so, God desires complete unity in **confession**. (Here confession means one's public statement of what doctrines one believes and how to put them into practice.) In other words, don't pretend to be in unity when you are not. Sincere believers will always separate themselves from false teaching for three reasons – really one: love!

- Love for God and his Word. (Psalm 1:1-3; Revelation 22:18-19),
- Love for the one who is teaching falsely. (1 Timothy 1:3-8)
- Love for the unlearned in God's word lest they be deceived. (Matthew 9:35-38; Jude 17-23)

Does the Bible instruct us in any other ways to strive towards unity?

Titus 1:5-11 | ⁶ An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. ¹⁰ For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. ¹¹ They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

2 Timothy 4:1-5 | In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

We work toward true unity when we demand that our pastors and teachers have a thorough knowledge and faith in all the Scriptures, and when we expect people joining our churches to join us in learning accurately the saving truths of the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:14-17 | ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Romans 16:17-18 | ¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

Titus 3:9-11 | ⁹ But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹ You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

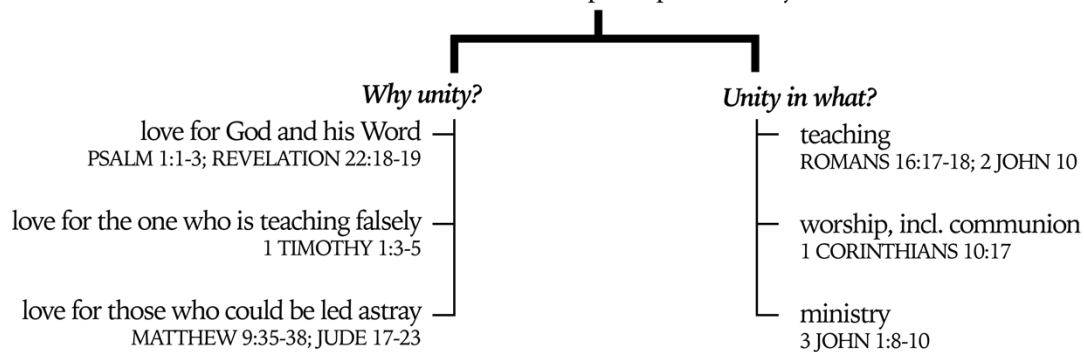
Some churches seek unity with others without agreement on the teachings of the Bible because of two presuppositions to which they hold:

- They teach that Scripture is unclear on some things; therefore, we should not be adamant about such things. However, Scripture is clear. (2 Timothy 3:14-16)
- They teach that true spiritual love means you must tolerate those who disagree with you. However, we cannot tolerate false teaching. (Romans 16:17 and Titus 3:9-11)

Even though there is one Church, there are many different denominations because different groups have decided to pick and choose what to teach, and maybe have even added to God's teaching. The Bible clearly teaches that Christians are to both seek unity with those who agree in Biblical teaching and to separate from wrong teachers and their teachings. This is called the **doctrine of Christian Fellowship**. The chart below summarizes the reasons *why* we demand complete unity around God's teaching, and what areas in the life of the Christian and church family this affects.

THE DOCTRINE OF FELLOWSHIP

God desires complete spiritual unity



CORE CONCEPT

Christian Fellowship

This doctrine is the teaching that God instructs us to unify around the truths of the bible, and to correct or, if needed, those who teach something other than what's found in the bible. God wants this true unity when it comes to Christians not only teaching together, but also worshipping together (including communion), and doing ministry work together.

Are the people who have faith in Christ as their Savior but who belong to churches that teach error going to heaven?

Joel 2:32 | Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Yes, they will go to heaven. However, it will be in spite of the false teaching they held to. (See 1 Corinthians 3:10-15) But those that knowingly hold to false teachings will be lost if they hold onto known sin. (James 3:1 and 2 Timothy 2:14-19)

What does it mean to be a “member” of a local church?

The space below is intentionally left blank for you to write your thoughts on the question above.

What does it mean to have a pastor?

The space below is intentionally left blank for you to write your thoughts on the question above.

LET'S DISCUSS!

Hebrews 5:11-14 | ¹¹ *We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.* ¹² *In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!* ¹³ *Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.* ¹⁴ *But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

1. Explain this statement based on the Hebrews passage above: "We appreciate the doctrine of fellowship more as we grow in the faith and knowledge of the Scriptures."
2. Explain this statement: "Toleration in society and in the church are different things."
3. Explain the difference between the One Holy Christian Church and the many different types of Christian denominations.
4. Some churches (and even groups of churches) call themselves "non-denominational." Do you see anything odd about calling yourself that?
5. How would you explain to friend or family member (who does not have a church) the blessings and importance of having a faith family and a pastor?

Agree or Disagree?

Do you agree with the statement below? Why or why not? What would you say based on God's word?

See if you can find Bible passages to back up your answer.

6. The invisible church includes all who have the true teaching.
7. Everyone in the invisible church is going to heaven.
8. Only God knows who belongs to the invisible church.
9. You shouldn't worry about getting every teaching correct.
10. As long as you believe in Jesus, it doesn't make any difference what church you join.
11. When it comes to dealing with someone who is openly sinning or someone with whom you are not in fellowship with, you can show empathy without endorsement.
12. It is wrong for a Lutheran to worship in a Methodist church.
13. Lutherans of different synods should not worship together.
14. Joining together in prayer at public events (e.g. sports) is a beautiful expression of a diverse group of people's shared faith in Jesus.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Congratulations on completing Foundations! So, what's next?

Let's read below and answer that together.

Matthew 13:1-10, 16-32

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear."

¹⁰The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

¹⁸"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²²The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Key Concepts

Adiaphora: Actions or decisions which a Christian is free to either do or not do because Scripture does not provide clear directives or principles. E.g, worship music style or gambling. Scripture *does*, though, provide principles for how to judge whether to do the action given certain conditions: Is it constructive and edifying (i.e. builds up others in their faith)? Are you considering and seeking the good of others? And will it cause anyone to stumble in their faith? See Appendix, “*What About Actions the Bible Neither Commands nor Forbids?*”

Actual sin: See *sin*.

Atonement: The act of making reparations or payment for wrong-doing so that two separated parties might be connected once more (“at one”-ment).

Baptism: A Means of Grace and sacrament. Luther describes it this way: “Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s Word. Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God’s word which his in and with the water, and faith which trusts this word used in the water.” (*Small Catechism*)

Close Communion: The practice of limiting participation at the Lord’s Supper to those who have been instructed from God’s Word and have confessed agreement with our church’s teachings. This both prevents accidental spiritual harm (1 Corinthians 11:27-29) and also ensures that all who are partaking are one in their confession of faith (1 Corinthians 10:17)

Communion: A Means of Grace and sacrament. Luther describes it this way: “It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ together with the bread and wine, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink. ...We receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation in this sacrament.” (*Small Catechism*) Paul gives directives on how this sacrament ought to be carried out (1 Corinthians 10-11).

Confession, absolution: Confession is when the Christian seeks God’s forgiveness. It is a fruit of faith. Absolution is God’s response in his Word to our confessions: through Jesus, you’re forgiven. We might identify three essential parts to confession and absolution: (a) acknowledgment of God’s law, such as a mental review of the Ten Commandments, (b) acknowledgement that you have broken God’s law and need forgiveness, and (c) acknowledgement that Jesus has died for your sins and you are at peace with God. Note the law and gospel in confession and absolution. (2.4)

End Times: Jesus taught that we are living in the End Times right now. This is the period of time between Jesus’ death and when he comes back again on Judgment Day. During the End Times, despite the hardship of being a Christian, Jesus is reigning victoriously through his Church and the spread of the gospel.

Faith: Heart-knowledge, or an active trust or belief that Jesus has saved you from your sins and eternal separation from God. Faith is a gift of God, given through hearing the gospel.

Fellowship: This doctrine is the teaching that God instructs us to unify around the truths of the bible, and to correct or, if needed, those who teach something other than what’s found in the bible. God wants this true unity when it comes to Christians not only teaching together, but also worshipping together (including communion), and doing ministry work together. (3.2)

Function of the law: The bible describes the Law of God functioning in three ways: As a **curb**, the law works in everyone’s heart to curb each person from sin (Romans 2:14-15); as a **mirror**, the law shows us our sin (Romans 3:19-20); As a **guide**, the law leads Christians to a proper way to live to God’s glory. (Ephesians 4:17-24)

God the Father: First member of the “trinity,” often described as the creator and preserver of our world.

God the Son: Second person of the “trinity,” also known as **Jesus Christ**, who came into our world by taking on human flesh, lived a perfect life, died, and rose from the dead in order to save all who believe.

God the Holy Spirit: Third person of the “trinity,” who is often called “the shy member of the trinity” because his work takes place “behind the scenes,” in human hearts. The Bible identifies the work of the Holy Spirit as creating and strengthening faith through the Means of Grace, and helping us to live out that faith in our Christian lives.

Good works: Good deeds or actions flowing from the right motivation: love for Jesus. By nature, humans can’t do these. But through faith, God gives us the ability to do them. We don’t do them out of fear or to earn God’s favour. We already have that. We do them because we want to, out of love for what Jesus has done for us.

Gospel: From the Greek word for *good news*. The good news is that God has saved us through Jesus’ death on the cross.

Grace: An undeserved, unmerited gift. God’s chief grace to humans is Jesus.

The Great Exchange: What Jesus did on the cross for us. Jesus took our sins in exchange for his righteous life.

Holy Christian Church: Consists of all those who have been called out of a sinful life and into a life of faith in Christ. (See Ephesians 3:14-21) It is called holy because all its members have had their sins removed. It is called Christian because it is built upon Jesus Christ, the Savior. It is called a church because it is a distinct group of people (called out of the darkness). We distinguish this one Church from Christian denominations.

Incarnation: God becoming a human. God became incarnate when he was born as the baby Jesus. (Luke 2) The bible teaches that Jesus was 100% God and also 100% human. (3.1)

Judgment Day: The day, unknown to everyone except God the Father, on which Christ will return again to judge the world. The bodies of all mankind will rise from the grave. Bodies of unbelievers will go with their souls to eternal suffering in hell, while bodies of believers will go with their souls to everlasting happiness in heaven (John 5:29)

Justification: A legal term which means to declare someone *not guilty*, to describe what God has done for us through Jesus. We have been saved through a simple declaration of not guilty that God makes in light of Jesus’ death for us. Justification is a powerful, one-time declaration of God which declares that nothing further must be done in order for those who believe to enter eternal life.

Law: God’s will for how we ought to live, how we fall short of God’s will, and how God responds to us falling short of his will. Summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), the Two Commands (Matthew 22:35-40), and the Law of Love (Romans 13:10).

Law and Gospel: The two major teachings in the bible. Both are found in the Old Testament, and both are found in the New Testament. See independent definitions for *law* and *gospel*.

Means of Grace: Hearing the gospel (or good news) about Jesus is the only way through which a person gets life-giving grace. God has packaged the gospel in three ways: the word of God on its own, the word of God connected with water (baptism), and the word of God connected with bread and wine (communion). So, there are three means of grace, all with the common feature that the gospel message is present.

Natural Knowledge of God: See *Revelation, natural*.

Old self and new self: The bible describes people before conversion being dominated by their sinful nature the *old self*. The Holy Spirit, working through the gospel, brings to life a new creation (or *new self*) at conversion. And so, during the earthly life of the Christian, these two are at war within the Christian.

Testaments, Old and New: The bible is 66 documents divided into two parts. The first 39 documents, written from roughly 2000 BC to 400 BC, we call the Old Testament. It's main gospel theme is that the Messiah is coming and that God preserves that promise through the Israelite nation. The last 27 documents, written from around 50 AD to 95 AD, we call the New Testament. And it's main gospel theme is that the Messiah has come in the person of Jesus.

Original sin: See *sin*.

Prophet, Priest, and King: A good way of summarizing what Jesus means to us is by describing him in three roles. Jesus is the ultimate Prophet, that is, someone who speaks God's words. Jesus is the ultimate Priest, giving himself as a sacrifice for our sins. And Jesus is the ultimate King, establishing a kingdom of peace with God and conquering sin, death, and the devil through his death. The book of Hebrews especially makes Jesus' functions in these offices evident.

Repentance: When a person humbly feels sorrow over his or her sin AND confidently trusts in forgiveness through Jesus. Repenting results in turning away from sinful ways and habits and toward sanctified living that flows from a heart that gives thanks to God.

Revealed knowledge of God: See *Revelation, special*.

Revelation, natural: Also called the *natural knowledge of God*. How God reveals himself to all people throughout all time. There are two types of natural revelation: knowledge of God from the created world, and knowledge of God from conscience. All the natural revelation of God tells us about him is that he is powerful and ethical in nature (hates evil and wills that we live good lives).

Revelation, special: Also called the *revealed knowledge of God*. What God tells us about himself though the bible alone. Only through the bible do we learn the details of how this world was created, why there's sin and evil in the world, and how God sent Jesus to die for us and overcome sin and evil.

Sacraments: The Lutheran church uses this term to designate something very unique in the bible. We divide the definition into three parts: (a) sacred acts that Jesus commanded (b) that involves using physical elements connected to God's Word (b) through which God gives forgiveness, new life, and salvation. Only two special commands from Jesus: baptism and communion. (2.2)

Sanctification: *The work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. The Holy Sprits sanctifies believers.* Sanctify means to "set apart to be holy." The Holy Spirit sets us apart from the unbelieving world by calling us to faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit sets us apart more and more from sinful behavior by strengthening our faith, again, through the means of grace, thus motivating our hearts to produce good deeds in our lives out of thankfulness to God for his grace. Sanctification is an ongoing process that is never "finished" until we reach heaven.

Sin: The bible's word for moral and spiritual imperfection. Analogous to evil. The greatest sin is humanity's rebellion against God. There are two parts to sin: **The sinful nature** is what humans are born with (also called **original sin**). The sinful nature only produces sin (that is, imperfection and rebellion against God). **Actual sin** is sinful thoughts, words, and actions that flow out of our sinful nature and into our lives.

The Ten Commandments: Given to Moses and the Israelites on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20), these are the first laws given to the Israelites to set them apart as a special nation. But these laws are not just for them, but function as a God-given summary of God's moral will for people.

Transubstantiation: The Catholic teaching that the priest sacrifices Christ all over again during Communion, by permanently changing the bread and wine into only body and blood.

Trinity: God reveals himself in the bible as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet the bible clearly teaches there is only one God. How there can be one God that is three persons is incomprehensible, yet this is who we worship. (3.1)

Vocation: From the Latin root for “called out,” refers first to the fact that God has called you out of this sinful world and into his family, and second to the fact that God places you back in this world to do work for him in various roles: wife, husband, mother, father, son, employee, employer, artist, craftsperson, citizen, neighbor, etc.

Luther's Small Catechism

The Ten Commandments

The First Commandment: You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.

The Second Commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not curse, swear, practice witchcraft, lie or deceive by His name, but call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.

The Third Commandment: You shall keep the day of rest holy.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

The Fourth Commandment: Honor your father and your mother, that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not despise our parents or superiors, nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love and esteem them.

The Fifth Commandment: You shall not murder.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do no bodily harm to our neighbor, but help and befriend him in every need.

The Sixth Commandment: You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed, and that husband and wife each love and honor the other.

The Seventh Commandment: You shall not steal.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not take our neighbor's money or

goods, nor get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his goods and means of making a living.

The Eighth Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not lie about, betray or slander our neighbor, but excuse him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.

The Ninth Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not craftily seek to gain our neighbor's inheritance or home, nor get it by a show of right, but help and serve him in keeping it.

The Tenth Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is his.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not tempt, force or coax away from our neighbor his wife or his workers, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

Conclusion: What does God say about these commandments? "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, and showing mercy to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments."

What does this mean? God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. Therefore we should fear His wrath and do nothing against these commandments. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we should also love and trust in Him and willingly do according to His commandments.

The Apostles' Creed

The First Article:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean? I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; that He richly and daily provides me with food and clothing, home and family, property and goods, and all that I need to support this body and life; that He protects me from all danger, guards and keeps me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I am in duty bound to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

The Second Article:

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean? I believe that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary; and that He is my Lord, Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death; in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness; even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

The Third Article

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; just as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives me and all believers all our sins; and at the last day He will raise up me and all the dead, and will grant me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

The Lord's Prayer

The Introduction: Our Father, Who art in heaven.

What does this mean? God would hereby tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him with all boldness and confidence, as children ask their dear father.

The First Petition: Hallowed be Thy name.

What does this mean? God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be holy among us also.

How is God's name hallowed? God's name is hallowed when His Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God live holy lives according to it. This grant us, dear Father in heaven! But he who teaches and lives otherwise than the Word of God teaches dishonors God's name among us. From this preserve us, heavenly Father!

The Second Petition: Thy Kingdom come.

What does this mean? The kingdom of God certainly comes of itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.

How does God's kingdom come? The kingdom of God comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity.

The Third Petition: Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

What does this mean? The good and gracious will of God is certainly done without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done also among us.

How is God's will done? God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will, which would not let us hallow His name nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world and our own flesh; but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith until our end. This is His good and gracious will.

The Fourth Petition: Give us this day our daily bread.

What does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to acknowledge this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread? Daily bread includes everything needed for this life, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, fields, cattle, money, goods, God-fearing spouse and children, faithful servants and rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, order, honor, true friends, good neighbors, and the like.

The Fifth Petition: And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor on their account deny our prayer; for we are not worthy of anything we ask, neither have we deserved it. But we pray that He would give us everything by grace, for we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment; and we on our part will heartily forgive and readily do good to those who sin against us.

The Sixth Petition: And lead us not into temptation.

What does this mean? God certainly tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world and our own flesh may not deceive us nor lead us into

misbelief, despair and other shameful sin and vice; and though we be thus tempted, that we may still in the end overcome and retain the victory.

The Seventh Petition: But deliver us from evil.

What does this mean? We pray in this petition, as the sum of all, that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil of body and soul, property and honor; and at last, when the hour of death shall come, grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

The Conclusion: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

What does "Amen" mean? Amen means that we should be sure that these petitions are acceptable to our Father in heaven and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us so to pray and has promised to hear us. Amen, Amen: that is, Yes, Yes, it shall be so.

Baptism

THE NATURE OF BAPTISM

What is Baptism? Baptism is not just water, but it is the water used according to God's command and connected with His Word.

What is that Word and command of God concerning Baptism? Jesus says: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you." Matthew 28:18-20.

THE BLESSINGS OF BAPTISM

What does Baptism give or profit? Baptism effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, just as the words and promises of God declare.

Which are these words and promises of God? Christ our Lord says, Mark 16:16: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

THE POWER OF BAPTISM

How can water do such great things? It is not the water that does these things, but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is simply water, and no baptism; but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says, Titus 3:5-8: "According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that having been justified by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying."

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

What does such baptizing with water mean? Such baptizing with water means that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts; and that a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written? St. Paul writes, Romans 6:4: "We are buried with Christ by baptism into death, that just as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

The Office of the Keys and Confession

What is the Office of the Keys? The Office of the Keys is the special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth: to forgive the sins of the penitent sinners, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent.

Where is this written? The evangelist writes, John 20:22-23: "Jesus breathed on His disciples and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; and if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"

What is Confession? Confession consists of two parts: one, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the pastor or confessor as from God himself, and in no way doubt, but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess? Before God we should acknowledge ourselves guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know about, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. But before the pastor or confessor we should acknowledge those sins only which we know and feel in our hearts.

Which are these? Here consider your own situation according to the Ten Commandments, whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, employer, employee; whether you have been disobedient, dishonest, lazy; whether you have injured anyone by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted anything, or done any harm.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

THE NATURE OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

What is the Sacrament of the Altar? The Sacrament of the Altar is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself, for us Christians to eat and to drink.

Where is this written? The holy evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, together with St. Paul, write thus: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, 'Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also He took the cup after supper, gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it all of you; this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"

THE BENEFIT OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

What benefit do we receive from such eating and drinking? The benefit which we receive from such eating and drinking is shown us by these words: "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins," namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

THE POWER OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? It is not the eating and drinking that does this, but the words here written, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." These words, along with the eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament; and whoever believes these words has exactly what they say, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

THE PROPER RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

Who then receives this Sacrament worthily? Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." But he who does not believe these words, or doubts them, is unworthy and unprepared; for the words "for you" require truly believing hearts.

PRAYERS FOR DAILY USE

A MORNING PRAYER

In the morning, when you rise you shall make the sign of the holy cross, and you shall say:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, you shall say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Then you may say this prayer:

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray You to protect me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

And then you should go with joy to your work, after a hymn, or the Ten Commandments, or whatever your devotion may suggest.

AN EVENING PRAYER

In the evening, when you go to bed, you shall make the sign of the holy cross, and you shall say:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, you shall say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Then you may say this prayer:

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray You to forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

And then lie down in peace, and sleep.

PRAYER BEFORE EATING

The eyes of all wait upon You, O Lord, and You give them their food in due season; You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these Your gifts which we receive from Your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER AFTER EATING

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for His mercy endures forever.

We thank You, Lord God, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, for all Your benefits, You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

TABLE OF DUTIES

PASTORS AND PREACHERS

A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence...not a novice....holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convict those who contradict. (1 Timothy 3:2-4,6; Titus 1-9)

WHAT THE HEARERS OWE TO THEIR PASTORS

Obey those who have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do it with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17) Eat and drink such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. (Luke 10:7) The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:14.) Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (Galatians 6: 6-7) Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

CIVIL GOVERNMENT

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you then want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who does evil. (Romans 13:1-4)

CITIZENS

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. Matthew 22:21. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. (Romans 13:5-7)

I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior. (1 Timothy 2:1-3)

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work. (Titus 3:1)

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. (1 Peter 2:13-14)

HUSBANDS

Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)
Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. (Colossians 3:19)

WIVES

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord...as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are as long as you do good and are not afraid with any terror. (Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:6)

PARENTS

Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

CHILDREN

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

EMPLOYEES

Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. (Ephesians 6:5-8)

EMPLOYERS

Masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (Ephesians 6:9)

THE YOUNG

You younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. (1 Peter 5:5-6)

ALL CHRISTIANS

You shall love your neighbor as yourself...I exhort...that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men. (Romans 13:9; 1 Timothy 2:1)

Q&A FOR Communion Preparation

Drawn up by Dr. Martin Luther for those who intend to go to the Sacrament of the Altar

After confession and instruction in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Supper, the pastor may ask, or one may ask himself:

1. Do you believe that you are a sinner?

Yes, I believe it; I am a sinner.

2. How do you know this?

From the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept.

3. Are you also sorry for your sins?

Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God.

4. What have you deserved from God by your sins?

His wrath and displeasure, temporal death and eternal damnation. Romans 6:21 and 23.

5. Do you also hope to be saved?

Yes, such is my hope.

6. In whom, then, do you trust?

In my dear Lord Jesus Christ.

7. Who is Christ?

The Son of God, true God and man.

8. How many Gods are there?

Only one; but there are three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

9. What, then, has Christ done for you that you trust in Him?

He died for me and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

10. Did the Father also die for you?

He did not; for the Father is God only, the Holy Ghost likewise; but the Son is true God and true man. He died for me and shed his blood for me.

11. How do you know this?

From the holy Gospel and from the words of the Sacrament, and by His body and blood given me as a pledge in the Sacrament.

12. How do those words read? "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, 'Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also He took the cup after supper, gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it all of you; this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"

13. You believe, then, that the true body and blood of Christ are in the Sacrament?

Yes, I believe it.

14. What induces you to believe this?

The word of Christ: "Take, eat, this is My body....Drink from it, all of you; this...is...My blood."

15. What ought we to do when we eat His body and drink His blood, and thus receive the pledge?

We ought to remember and proclaim His death and the shedding of His blood, as He taught us: "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

16. Why ought we to remember and proclaim His death?

That we may learn to believe that no creature could make satisfaction for our sins but Christ, true God and man; and that we may learn to look with terror at our sins, and to regard them as great, indeed, and to find joy and comfort in Him alone, and thus be saved through such faith.

17. What was it that moved Him to die and make satisfaction for your sins?

His great love to His Father and to me and other sinners, as it is written in John 14; Romans 5; Galatians 2; Ephesians 2.

18. Finally, why do you wish to go to the Sacrament?

That I may learn to believe that Christ died for my sin out of great love, as before said; and that I may also learn of Him to love God and my neighbor.

19. What should admonish and incite a Christian to receive the Sacrament frequently?

In respect to God, both the command and the promise of Christ the Lord should move him; and in respect to himself, the trouble that lies heavy on him, on account of which such command, encouragement, and promise are given.

20. But what shall a person do if he is not aware of such trouble and feels no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?

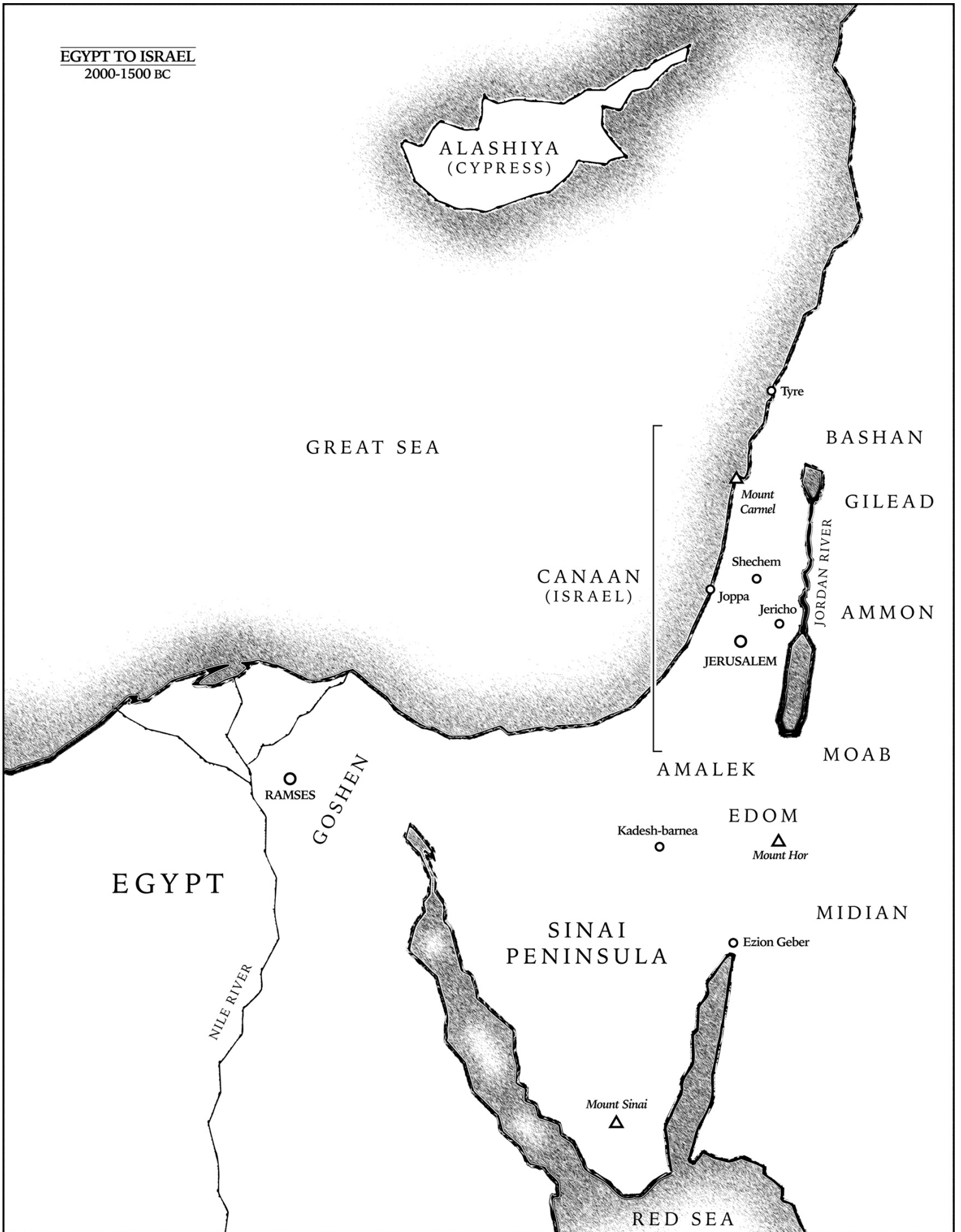
To such a person no better advice can be given than that, in the first place, he put his hand into his bosom, and feel whether he still have flesh and blood, and that he by all means believe what the Scriptures say of it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7. Secondly, that he look around to see whether he is still in the world, and keep in mind that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15 and 16; 1 John 2 and 5. Thirdly, he will certainly have the devil also about him, who with his lying and murdering, day and night, will let him have no peace within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; 2 Timothy 2.

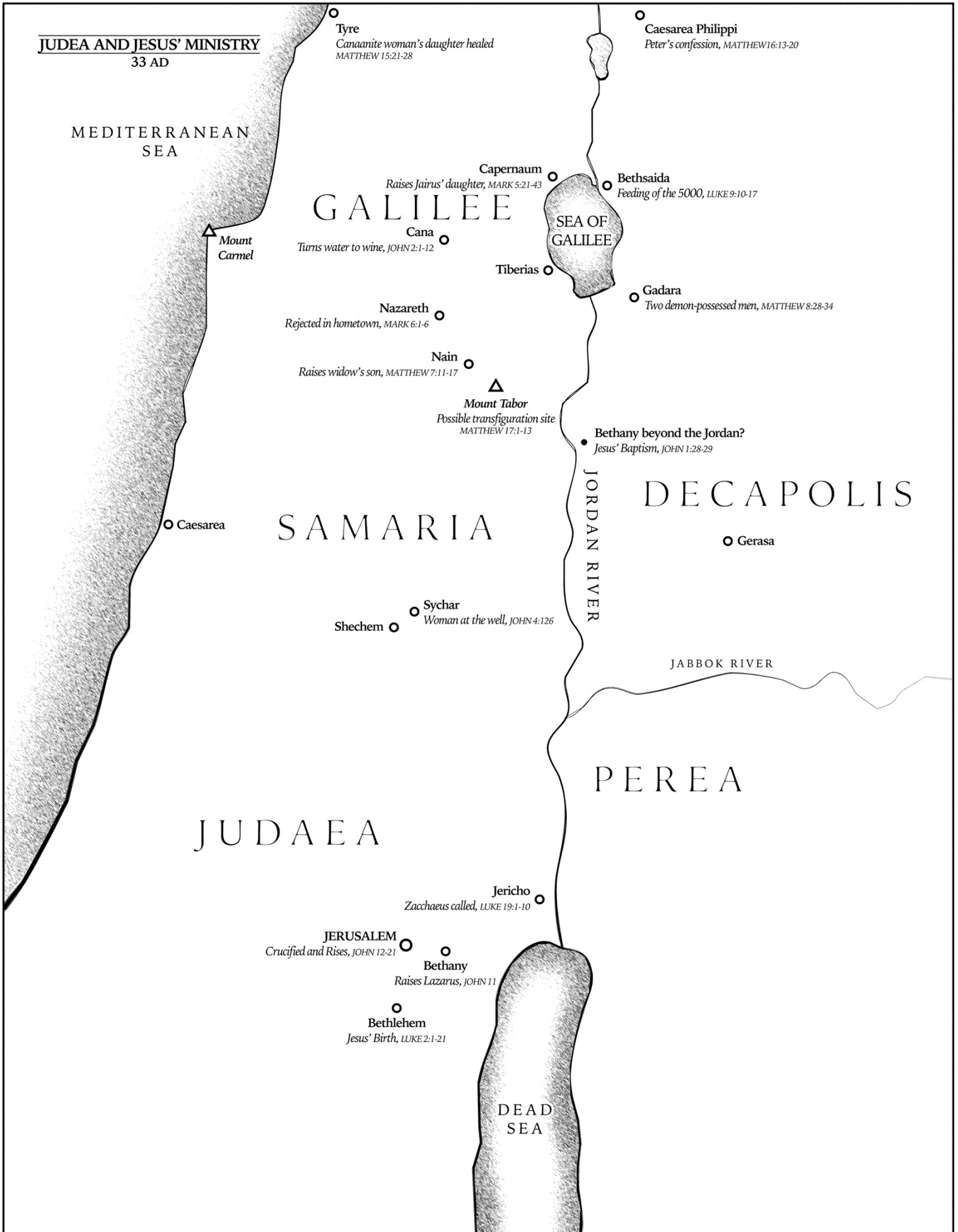
Note: These questions and answers are no child's play, but are drawn up with great earnestness of purpose by the venerable and pious Dr. Luther for both young and old. Let each one take heed and likewise consider it a serious matter; for St. Paul writes to the Galatians, chapter six: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked."

—M.L.

Appendix

EGYPT TO ISRAEL
2000-1500 BC





OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY AND THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

8-4,000—2000	2000 BC—1650	1650—1200	1200—1000	1000—587	587—516	516—332	332—0
PRE-FLOOD	PATRIARCHS	SLAVERY IN EGYPT AND WANDERING	CONQUEST OF CANAAN	PERIOD OF THE JUDGES	UNIFIED KINGDOM OF ISRAEL	DIVIDED KINGDOM	REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE
Pentateuch: Genesis 1-11	Pentateuch: Genesis 12-50	Pentateuch: Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Historical: Joshua	Historical: Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 1-12	Historical: 1 Samuel 13-31 2 Samuel 1 Kings 1-11 2 Chronicles 1-9	Historical: 1 Kings 12-22 2 Kings 2 Chronicles 10-36	Historical: Ezra Nehemiah Esther
Wisdom:							
Job							
				Wisdom:			
				Psalms			
				Proverbs			
				Ecclesiastes			
				Song of Songs			
				Major Prophets:		Major Prophets:	
				Isaiah		Jeremiah	
						Lamentations	
						Daniel	
						Ezekiel	
				Minor Prophets:		Minor Prophets:	
				to Israel:		Haggai	
				Hosea		Zechariah	
				Amos		Malachi	
				Obadiah			
				Jonah			
				Nahum			
				to Judah:			
				Zephaniah			
				Habbakkuk			
				Joel			
				Micah			

Note: Dates are estimates meant to provide a general outline for 4,000 years of history. The majority of Psalms was written during the *United Kingdom*, but may include authors from as early as *In Egypt* to as late as *Rebuilding of the Temple*. The date *Job* was written is not certain.

THE LIFE OF JESUS

CHILDHOOD

Matt 1-2 Luke 1-2 John 1:1-18

Angels appear to Mary, Joseph, and Zechariah

Jesus is born in Bethlehem, is presented in the temple

Jesus receives a visit from magi from the East

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus flee to Egypt and live there 3 to 5 years

The family then moves to Nazareth in Galilee

Nothing else is known of Jesus' childhood other than a Jerusalem trip at age 12

EPIPHANY OF PUBLIC MINISTRY

Matt 3:1-4:11 Mark 1:1-13 Luke 3:1-4:13 John 1:19-2:11

The Ministry of John the Baptist begins

John baptizes Jesus

Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness

Jesus calls the first disciples

Jesus performs his first miracle at the wedding in Cana

EARLY JUDEAN MINISTRY

John 2:12-4:43

Jesus travels to Jerusalem for Passover, cleanses the Temple for the first time

Nicodemus visits Jesus at night

GALILEAN MINISTRY

Matt 4:12-13:58 Mark 1:14-6:13 Luke 4:14-9:6 John 4:43-4:54

Jesus calls Peter, James, Jon, Andrew, and the other 12 disciples and begins his formal

ministry of teaching, miracles, and casting out demons.

Jesus stills the storm on the Sea of Galilee

Jesus raises Jairus' daughter from the dead

The Sermon on the Mount is delivered by Jesus

Jesus teaches the Pastoral Parables

In Nain, Jesus raises the widow's son from the dead

WITHDRAWALS

Matt 14:1-18:35 Mark 6:14-9:50 Luke 9:7-9:50 John 6:1-71

John the Baptist is beheaded

Jesus feeds the 5,000 and teaches the Bread of Life discourse

Jesus feeds the 4,000

Peter professes his faith and the passion is foretold

The Transfiguration of Jesus takes place

LATER JUDEAN MINISTRY

John 7:1-10:42

Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, heals a man born blind

Jesus delivers the Good Shepherd sermon

Jesus remains until the Feast of Dedication, claims to be God, is almost stoned

PEREAN MINISTRY

Matt 19-20 Mark 10 Luke 9:51-19:28 John 10:42-11:53

Jesus journeys to Jerusalem one last time, by way of Perea.

Jesus blesses the little children

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

HOLY WEEK

Matt 21-27 Mark 11-15 Lk 19:29-23:56 John 11:54-19:42

On a donkey, Jesus enters Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)

Jesus cleanses the temple a second time

Jesus teaches his End Times parables, 7 woes

Jesus institutes **Communion**

Jesus has his last discourse with his disciples

Judas betrays Jesus, the Temple Guard arrests Jesus.

Jesus is on trial before Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod

The crucifixion

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus

Guards are sent to guard the tomb

RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

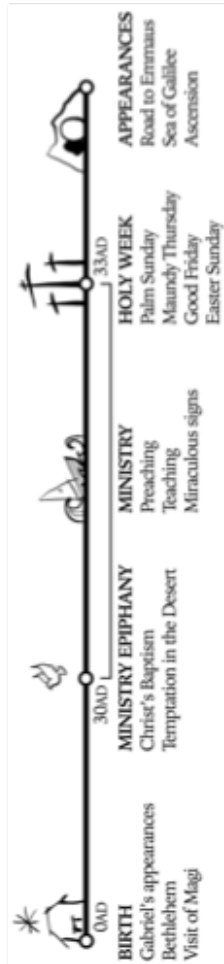
Matt 28 Mark 16 Luke 24 John 20-21

Jesus rises from the dead, appears to women and disciples (except Thomas)

Jesus appears to disciples on the road to Emmaus

Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem, at the Sea of Tiberias, and on the mount of Galilee

Jesus ascends



LOCATIONS AND LETTERS IN PAUL'S CHRISTIAN LIFE

32-46	CONVERSION AND EARLY TRAVELS	Ac 8:1, 9:1-31, 13:1-3
	32 Conversion	Ac 9:3-19; 22:6-18; 26:12-19
	32-35 Damascus, Arabia, Damascus, Jerusalem	Ac 9:19-22, Ga 1:15-17, Ga 1:18
	35-44 Tarsus and Cilicia	Ac 9:29-30; Ga 1:21; Ac 15:23,41
	45-46 Antioch	Ac 11:25-26
	46 Jerusalem for famine visit	Ac 11:27-30; 12:25; Ga 2:1-10
	46 Antioch	Ac 12:25
47-48	FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY	Ac 13:4-14:28
	47-48 Seleucia, Cyprus (Salamis and Paphos), Perga of Pamphylia, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch	Ac 13:4-14:28
	48 Galatians written from Antioch	
	49 Jerusalem Council	Ac 15:1-30
49-52	SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY	Ac 15:36-18:22
	49-50 Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Troas, Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth	Ac 15:30-18:17
	50/51 1 Thessalonians written from Corinth	
	50/51 2 Thessalonians written from Corinth	
	51-52 Cenchrea, Ephesus, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch	Ac 18:18-22
53-57	THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY	Ac 18:23-21:17
	Galatia and Phrygia, Ephesus	Ac 18:23-19:41
	57 1 Corinthians written from Ephesus	
	Macedonia	Ac 20:1
	57 2 Corinthians from Macedonia	2Co 2:13; 7:5
	Greece	Ac 20:2
	57/58 Romans written from Corinth	
	Macedonia, Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Togyllium, Miletus, Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea	Ac 20:3-21:14
	58 Jerusalem	Ac 21:21-23:22
	58-60 Caesarea (Felix, Festus, Agrippa)	Ac 23:23-26:32
61-63	FIRST ROMAN IMPRISONMENT	Ac 27:2-28:31
	61-62 Adramyttium, Sidon, Myra, Fair Havens, Malta, Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, Forum of Appius, Rome	Ac 27:2-28:31
	62 Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians written from Rome and delivered together by Tychicus	
	63 Philippians written from Rome	
63-65	FOURTH JOURNEY	
	63/64/65 1 Timothy written from Macedonia	
	63/64/65 Titus written from or on the way to Nicopolis	
66-67	SECOND ROMAN IMPRISONMENT	
	66 2 Timothy written from Rome, right before imprisonment	
	67 execution under Nero	

The Four Key Concepts

Ephesians 2:1-10 is a beautiful summary of four key concepts in the bible. If you have a firm handle on exactly how the bible teaches these four concepts, you have the perfect foundation for exploring the rest of the bible. Everything in Scripture is rooted in these concepts.

Sin

All humans do sinful things because they have a sinful nature. This makes them unable to do anything perfect in God's eyes. The bible calls this spiritually dead, and so we are the object of a perfect God's wrath. We call the full teaching of this the **law**.

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Grace

But God also loves us, and so he sent Jesus to live a perfect life and give us his perfect life. So in God's eyes, we're perfect. This undeserved gift (or grace) is the first part of what we call the **gospel** (or good news).

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved...

Faith

God credits the perfect life of Jesus to those who have faith, which he also graciously gives. This is another aspect of the **gospel**.

through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

Works

We don't need to do good works to be saved. Jesus did it all. But out of love for Jesus, we want to, and so God gives us the ability and opportunity to show our love for him and others. This is yet another important aspect of the **gospel**.

⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Is the Moral Law UNIQUE to Christianity?

Although we can't see it, we have never doubted the reality of an objective moral law until recently. For almost every major philosophy and religion, it has more than made sense: it has been indispensable. C.S. Lewis once compiled a list of moral laws found throughout the world and history to demonstrate the resemblance between them and the universality of the idea of morality. Consider the following:

- Terrify not men or God will terrify thee. (Egyptian, Precepts of Ptahhetep)
- Love thy wife studiously. Gladden her heart all thy life long. (Ancient Egyptian)
- A sacrifice is obliterated by a lie and the merit of alms by an act of fraud. (Hindu, Janet)
- Speak kindness... show good will. (Babylonian, *Hymn to Samas*)
- Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you. (Ancient Chinese, *Analects of Confucius*)
- Every good man, who is right-minded, loves and cherishes his own. (Greek, Homer, *Iliad*)
- Natural affection is a thing right and according to nature. (Greek, Epictetus)
- By the fundamental Law of Nature Man [is] to be preserved as much as possible. (Locke, *Treatises of Civil Government*)

Lewis calls this moral law found in all cultures and people the **Tao**. We would simply call it God's law found in each person's conscience. Paul describes this:

Romans 2:14,15 *When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by law... they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.*

C.S. Lewis further writes that the moral law has functioned as a common-sense guide for people, giving us the ability to see shortcomings and the inability to keep the law in ourselves:

*"This conception [of the moral law] in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike... what is common to them all is something we cannot neglect. It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are. Those who know the Tao can hold that to call children delightful or old men venerable is not simply to record a psychological fact about our own parental or filial emotions at the moment, but to recognize a quality which demands a certain response from us whether we make it or not. I myself do not enjoy the society of small children: because I speak from within the Tao I recognize this as a defect in myself--just as a man may have to recognize that he is tone deaf or colour blind." **

* C.S. Lewis, "The Abolition of Man," *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (HarperOne, 2002), 701. Ethics quotes above found in 731-738.

Does Faith Save?

2 Thessalonians 2:13,14 *From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The bible makes it crystal clear that the difference between those saved and not saved is faith in Jesus. And that faith, as Paul says above, is a gift. So then how would you answer the question, “Does faith save us?” Or perhaps if we wanted to ask the question more specifically, “Does faith in and of itself save us, or does the object of our faith (Jesus Christ and his righteousness) save us? It is clearly the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, who saves us, even though faith is necessary.

The relationship between faith and salvation can be illustrated in the following way: Think of sin as a terrible disease and God’s gracious gift of Jesus Christ and his righteousness as the antidote. Think of faith as a hypodermic needle to inject the antidote. What really saved you, the needle or the antidote? The hypodermic needle had to be there, or you wouldn’t have received the antidote. But you know that the needle isn’t what saved you, but rather the antidote. The needle was simply the means through which you received the antidote.

Likewise, faith has to be there if someone is going to be saved (cf. John 3:16 or Acts 16:30,31). However, we know faith isn’t the cause of salvation. Faith isn’t what saves, but rather Jesus Christ. Faith is simply the means through which you receive the righteousness of Christ. Salvation is the result of the object of our faith, Jesus Christ. Through faith we receive the benefits of his work.

How do you know that you have faith?

“The thing to notice about that first question is the way it turns you inward. The question gets you examining yourself and your own experience. Personally speaking, the longer I spend at this, asking questions about myself—just how strong is my belief, how renewed is my life—the less sure I become... I continually find that when my faith is burning brightest, I am not thinking of faith all. Everything is Christ. How do I know I am a Christian? Change the question: How do I know God loves me? Faith—genuine, true, alive—answers, “Jesus.”... You would not desire him if he weren’t first drawing you in with cords of everlasting love.”

Mark Paustian, Prepared to Answer

Is the New Testament Reliable?

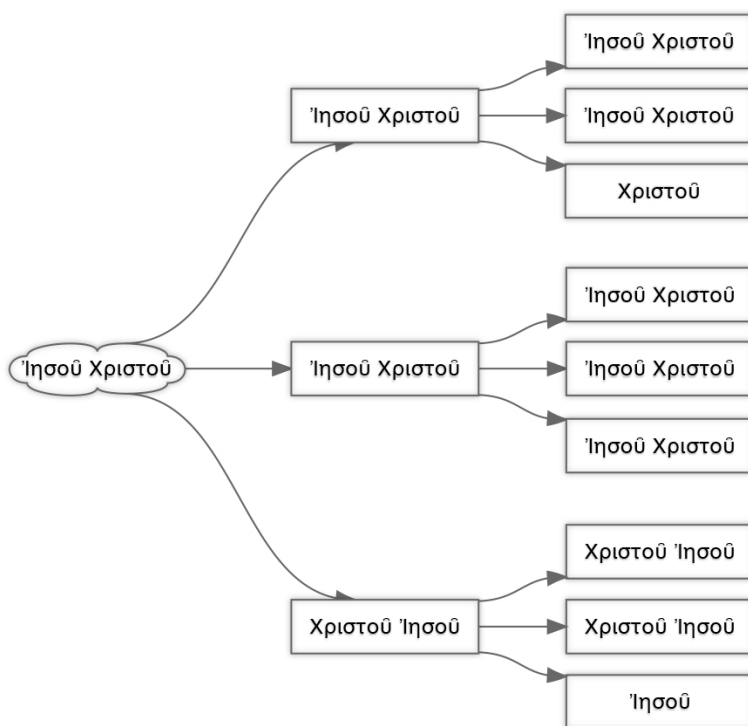
The Reality and the Proposed Problem

Jesus died between 30 and 33 AD. The books of the New Testament were written from around 45 to 90 AD. For example, Paul's earliest letter, Galatians, was written around 48, and his last letter, 2 Timothy, around 66 AD. The last book written was John's gospel, around 90. The printing press began to be used in the 1400s. This means for 1300 years, bibles were copied by hand. When a document is copied by hand, there is a high probability that the copyist will make at least *some* scribal errors (differences between the original and copy). And if copyists are also copying the scribal errors made before them, over the period of 1300 years, these errors will almost exponentially increase.

And so, if the bible has been hand-copied for 1300 years, which means the bible has amassed 1300 years of scribal errors, how can we be sure that the bibles we have today are anything close to what the original authors intended? They ought to be littered with scribal errors!

How Historians Determine Whether Manuscripts Are Reliable

This is an issue not only for the New Testament, but for every other ancient document that we have. Before the printing press, all ancient documents were hand-copied and so have scribal variants (differences in word or spelling between copies) that historians must take into account when determining what the original manuscripts might have been. The more manuscript copies historians find, the better the historians can reconstruct the family lines of copied manuscripts. Using carbon dating, analyses of the papyri or parchment, and other methods, historians can tell when and where manuscripts were written. The earlier copies most likely have the original variants, later copies from the same region that have similar variants were most likely copies of certain manuscripts, and so forth. **The more manuscripts, and the earlier the manuscripts**, the more confidence historians have of reconstructing the precise wording of the original texts.



How do the NT Manuscripts compare with other ancient manuscripts?

Most famous works of antiquity have very few surviving manuscripts. And very few of these surviving manuscripts are early copies. For example, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote the *Annals*, one of our most important histories of Rome. Of the *Annals'* 16 books, we have one manuscript from 850 AD of books 1-6, books 7-10 are entirely lost, and 30 manuscript copies of books 11-16 all copied from one manuscript from 1050 AD.

God has preserved over 5,000 manuscript copies of the Greek New Testament. This is a staggering amount. And manuscript fragments survive from as early as 117 AD, possibly only 20 years after the book was written. We have complete copies of the entire New Testament in one manuscript collection from the early 300s, only 200 years after the completion of the canon. This means the New Testament has considerably more and earlier copies of manuscripts than any other work of antiquity. In fact, no other ancient document comes close.

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Number of Copies
Caesar	1 st Cent. BC	900 AD	10
Livy	1 st Cent. BC		20
Tacitus' Annals	1 st Cent. AD	850 AD	31
Thucydides	5 th Cent. BC	900 AD	8
Herodotus	5 th Cent. BC	900 AD	8
Demosthenes	4 th Cent. BC	1100 AD	200
Homer	6 th Cent. BC		643
New Testament	1 st Cent. AD	130 AD	5,000+

Does our New Testament have 200,000 errors?

There are hundreds of thousands of variants between the more than 5,000 manuscripts we have. But if we remove the variants that are repeated in two or more manuscripts (in other words, if we are counting only unique variants), then the number is reduced to 10,000 variants (compared to the 138,000 words in the NT). Most of these 10,000 variants are simply differences in spelling or word order. This leaves only a very small number where the original is debated. And not one variant changes a single bible teaching. We can be certain that the original message of the authors of the New Testament is preserved. No other book from Western antiquity comes near the amount of manuscript evidence that has been preserved, and so we can be confident that we are reading the New Testament as it has been written.

What do historians have to say about the resurrection?

The Minimal Facts

What if you're talking to someone who believes the bible is just an old book full of fairy tales? Dr. Gary Habermas developed an interesting way of talking to those who believe this by focusing on the historicity of Jesus and his resurrection. He believes that even if you concede (for the sake of the conversation) that the bible is simply an ancient document like any other from its time, and so you only will allow as fact those which the vast majority of scholars (regardless of religious or philosophical orientation) agree are fact, you can still come to the conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead is the most probable thing that happened:

"Throughout my publications my emphasis has been to build a case for the resurrection of Jesus from the bottom up, like a brick wall. Each brick represents a historical fact. But in no case do any of these facts rest upon the overall reliability or inspiration of Scripture... Rather, I have employed here what I have termed the "minimal facts methodology." This approach uses only those data that have two primary characteristics: (1) Each fact is multiply attested by sub-facts that carefully establish its historicity. (2) Due to this strongly established groundwork, each of these facts is generally accepted as historical by an exceptionally large majority of the critical scholars who study this subject, whatever their discipline or theological outlook.

- **Jesus died** due to the process of Roman crucifixion.
- **The disciples had experienced** what they thought were actual appearances of the risen Jesus. The disciples were utterly transformed by their conviction that they had seen the risen Jesus, even being willing to die for this belief. The apostles' proclamation of the resurrection dates from an exceptionally early time after Jesus' death.
- Once a persecutor of Christians, **Paul became a believer** because of an experience that he believed was an appearance of the resurrected Jesus.
- **James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic, was converted** after experiencing what he also thought was an actual appearance of the risen Jesus.

From more than one strand of eyewitness testimony, both singly and in groups, to exceptionally early reports, to the conversion of skeptics, all of which produced believers who were in the proper place to know whether the risen Jesus had appeared to them yet were willing to die for this event, creates quite a case. That each of these evidences is both multiply attested and often confirmed from more than one angle increases the depth of the considerations... Since alternative theses have failed to account viably for these experiences in natural terms, as most scholars also agree, the best conclusion is that the early believers actually saw the risen Jesus." †

† Gary Habermas, "The Minimal Facts Approach," *Tough-Minded Christianity*

When was the whole N.T. recognized by the church?

The Bible ends with the completion of the work of Jesus and his revelation to his prophets and apostles.

Hebrews 1:1-3 *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

John 17:20 *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." [Jesus to his apostles]*

Ephesians 2:19-20 *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*

At the end of the apostolic age, the early Church quickly gathered the New Testament together. Within a few decades from the time the last book of the bible was written, almost the whole NT has been circulated and was recognized as authoritative by the Apostolic Fathers. After centuries of widespread persecution, church councils officially canonized the NT (not for the purpose of deciding what was Scripture, but to defend the Canon from claims that there were other scriptures). See the following chart. Note that certain books (such as Hebrews and James) did not receive wide dissemination until later than other books, which is why they were not recognize universally until late 2nd century.

	Matt	Mark	Luke	John	Acts	Romans	1 Cor	2 Cor	Galatians	Ephesians	Philippians	Colossians	1 Thess	2 Thess	1 Tim	2 Tim	Titus	Philemon	Hebrews	James	1 Peter	2 Peter	1 John	2 John	3 John	Jude	Revelation		
Apostolic Fathers (c. 94-150)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○		○			
Irenaeus (c. 130-202)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	○			●		
Clement of Alex. (c. 150-215)	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○			●	●		
Tertullian (c. 150-215)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			○	○	
Canon of Muratorian (c. 150)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Origen (c. 185-254)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Old Latin Translation (c. 200)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-86)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Eusebius (c. 325-40)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Council of Nicea (c. 325-40)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Codex Vaticanus (c. 325-350)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Jerome, Vulgate (c. 340-420)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Athanasius (c. 367)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Council of Hippo (c. 393)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Council of Carthage (c. 397)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Augustine (c. 400)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Old Syriac Translation (c. 400)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	

Named as authentic: ● Cited or alluded to: ○ Named as disputed: ?

Why did the Israelites have so many other laws?

Genesis 12:3 "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Romans 3:23-24 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

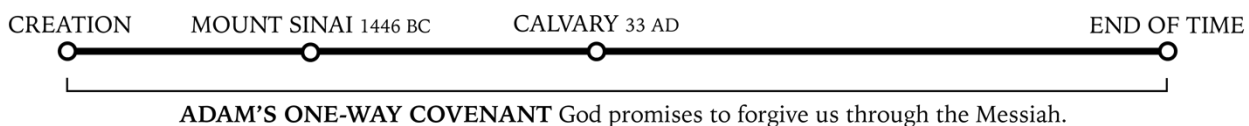
The bible is the history of how humankind fell into sin, and how God graciously delivered them from sin through a Messiah (savior), Jesus. God attaches no strings to this promise of deliverance. He told Abraham he would simply bless the whole world. Paul, reflecting on what God did through Jesus, simply states the fact that we are justified (declared innocent of sin) freely. Nothing more needs to be done. Through faith, this forgiveness is ours. It's a **one-way covenant**, God simply promising to bless us.

Exodus 19:5-6 "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Colossians 2:16 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.

Within this history is another history, that of the nation of Israel. Since God would take several thousand years to send a Messiah, he chose the Israelites to be a special people for him, a priesthood that would preserve this promise of a Messiah. But to be this special beacon of hope to the world, the Israelites had to act the part. God gave them special laws and a special life that would teach them more about their need for a Savior. And God told the Israelites that they would remain his special people as long as they continued to keep the promise of a Messiah alive through keeping these special laws. We call this God's **two-way covenant** with Israel.

Although Israel failed miserably at this, God continued to preserve the nation until the Messiah came. But once Jesus did come, the special laws and lifestyle that were meant to teach and point to Jesus were no longer needed. And so this two-way covenant ended. Paul calls these laws shadows of Jesus. But now that Jesus is here, why look at the shadows? Christians today have no use for the two-way covenant, except to study and recognize how God had preserved his promise of Jesus for us through Israel.



MOSES' TWO-WAY COVENANT
If Israel keeps special laws, they will be God's special people,
preserving the promises of the one-way covenant.

How did the laws given to the Israelites point to Jesus?

On Mount Sinai, God gave Moses and the Israelite people over 600 laws to set them apart as God's chosen people. But these laws did more than simply make Israel a unique nation. They also instructed the Israelites on their relationship with God, their need for a Savior, and aspects of what that Savior (or Messiah, as they called him) would look like. Below we will examine a select few ways that these laws pointed to Jesus, the Messiah they were waiting for.

How did the Sacrificial System Point to Jesus?

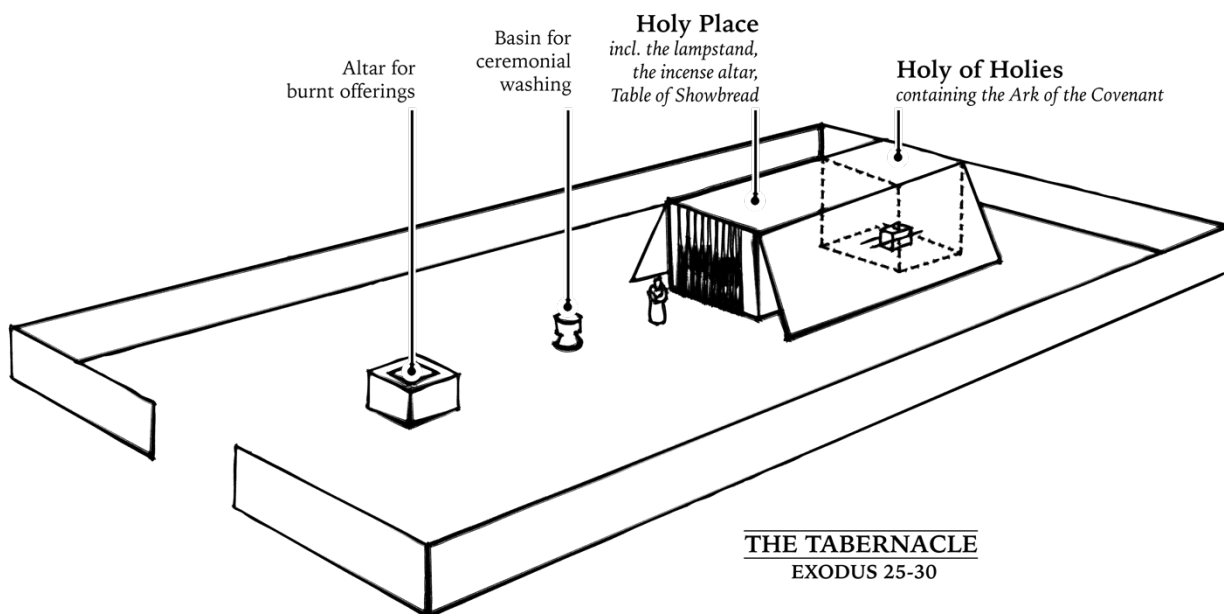
Hebrews 7:26-28 *Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*

God commanded the Israelites to regularly offer animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of their sins at the Tabernacle. They would give the sacrifice to a priest, and the priest would ceremonially wash and then slaughter and burn the animal. Once a year the High Priest would take the blood of a sacrifice into the Holy of Holies, which represented God's presence. The symbolism was clear. Humans are separated from God because of their sin, and only innocent blood would atone for sin. After his resurrection, the apostles taught clearly that Jesus was the ultimate High Priest and sacrifice combined giving himself as the sin offering, opening the way to God for us through his own blood.

How did the Passover Festival Point to Jesus?

1 Corinthians 5:7 Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Once a year, the Israelites would reenact the Passover meal from their Exodus from Egypt by sacrificing a spotless lamb. This sacrifice had spared the Israelites from the tenth plague, the Angel of Death. After his resurrection, the apostles taught clearly that Jesus was the ultimate Passover Lamb, not only sparing Israel from the Angel of Death, but all who trusted in his innocent blood.



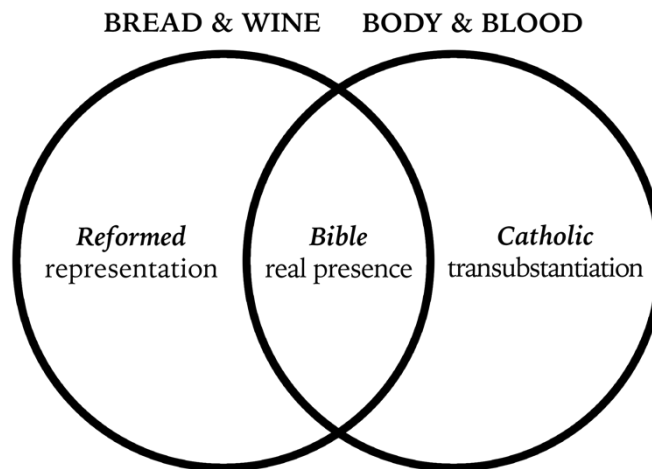
What do other churches teach about Communion?

The Catholic Church teaches:

- Communion is an unbloody sacrifice of Christ all over again: “In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] par 1367)
- The priest through using the Words of Christ changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. (Transubstantiation): “It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but he who was crucified for us, Christ himself...This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered.” (CCC par 1375)
- The Masses can be offered on behalf of others, even the dead: “From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice...The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead...” (CCC par 1032)
- The forgiveness of sins offered in the Mass is received even if the person does not believe (*ex opere operato*).

Most Protestant churches teach:

- Jesus’ words, “This is my body... This is my blood” actually mean, “This represents my body... This represents my blood.”
- The Lord’s Supper is a memorial meal only and not a Sacrament through which we receive forgiveness. It is special to them, only it is not sacramental.



How do we know if something is truly from the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is given special emphasis in the bible when it comes to creating, maintaining, and strengthening faith through hearing God's word. He is the source of our gifts of understanding the gospel message and power behind us when we share the gospel message. Today, many claim to be led by the Holy Spirit to say this or do that, yet often two people claiming to be led by the Holy Spirit will contradict each other! So, how can we tell if something is from the Holy Spirit?

***John 15:26** When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.*

The Spirit testifies about Christ. If the message is not about Jesus being the Son of God come to earth to save sinners, it is not from the Spirit.

***John 16:13** But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you in all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears.*

He will always keep the focus on Christ, not himself. The Spirit keeps Christ and the gospel message in the center of things. The goal of the Spirit is to let you know about developing a relationship with Jesus, not with the Spirit. If the focus shifts to anything else other than forgiveness through Jesus (like success, health, empowerment, even the Spirit himself), then it is not from the Spirit.

***John 4:1-3** Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.*

We're commanded by Jesus to test people who say they're inspired by the Spirit. We test them by comparing what is said and done to what we know to be true in the bible. If the two don't line up, it's not from the Spirit. And again, it's going to be all about Jesus saving us from our sins.

Read 1 Corinthians 12-14.

The gifts of the Spirit will always seek to edify (build up) others in their faith in Jesus as their Savior. Those things that are from the Holy Spirit focus on Christ and seek to help others grow in their knowledge of Christ.

What does the bible teach about Homosexuality?

Does God allow gay marriage?

Genesis 2:18,21-24 *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ...So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

Ephesians 5:31,32 *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

According to Genesis, marriage is more than a promise between two people. God created marriage to be monogamous (one man and one woman), because man and woman were created to be complementary. If the essence of marriage is destroyed through a homosexual union, it can no longer serve God's complimentary design.

And for Christians, according to Ephesians, God gives marriage a second purpose: it's one of the most beautiful ways we can reflect our faith. God calls husbands to mirror Christ and wives to mirror the Church. To change marriage is to take away one of God's pictures of Christ and his Church.

Is engaging in homosexuality sinful?

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 *Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ^[a] nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. [NIV translation note on [a]: The words *men who have sex with men* translate two Greek words that refer to the passive and active participants in homosexual acts.]*

All sins separate us from God, and the bible clearly identifies engaging in homosexuality as sinful behavior. As the NIV translation note points out, there is simply no way around this in the original languages. See also Romans 1:18-27 and 1 Timothy 1:10. But note Paul in the 1 Corinthians passage above clearly says the sins of homosexuality are just as much forgiven through Jesus as the other sins listed.

How should Christians treat those practicing homosexuality?

Titus 2:11,12 *For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.*

We shouldn't expect unbelievers to understand or embrace the full breadth of Christian ethics. This knowledge comes through believing God's Word. Our chief concern is sharing Jesus, which means sharing law and gospel as the opportunity arises, with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15)

What is the Image of God?

Genesis 1:27 tells us that God made humanity in **the image of God**. But what does this mean? Some people teach that it refers to humanity's self-consciousness, rationality, ethical nature, or relationship with God. Many of these ideas touch upon the truth, but looking at other bible passages creates a very clear picture for us.

Genesis 5:1-3 *When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man." When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image.*

2 Corinthians 4:4 *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Genesis 5 teaches us that after the Fall people no longer bear the image of God. Scripture makes mention of no other human born bearing God's image, except one, Jesus.

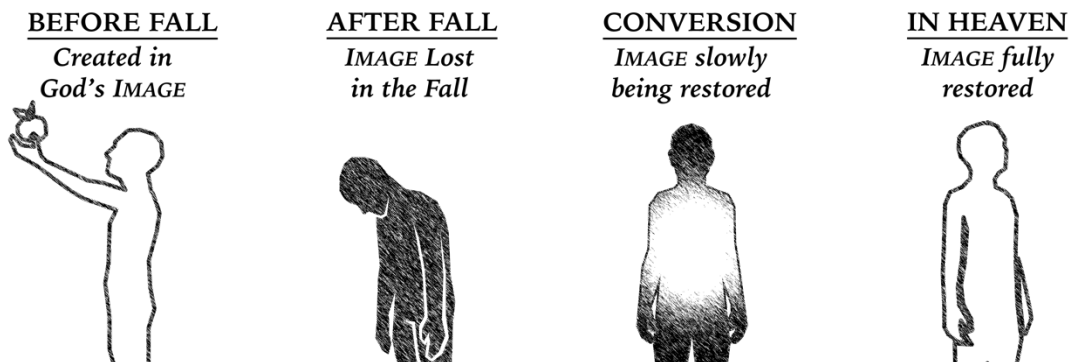
Romans 8:28-30 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Colossians 3:9-10 *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Further, Scripture teaches that, when a person becomes a Christian, the image is slowly being restored in the individual. So, after an inventory regarding everything else Scripture teaches clearly, what can this image be referring to? What is it that:

- Adam and Eve had it but lost it in the Fall,
- all people now no longer have it *except* Jesus,
- and when we become Christian, it is now slowly being restored?

This can only refer to one thing: **holiness**, that is, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which creates a **new self with a will aligned with God's**. We call this process of the image being restored **sanctification**. And this means the image of God in each of us will be fully restored in heaven. Note that every time the word *image* is used in the bible, it is not necessarily referring to this, and other references to Genesis 1:27 may be referring to other aspects of the created order, not just humanity's ability to do the will of God.



The HISTORY of THE Christian Church in 1000 Words‡

100-300

Within several hundred years, congregations of believers were worshipping in Greek throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, in Latin in the Western Mediterranean, and in Syriac throughout the Middle East. Despite being treated with suspicion, abuse, and occasional official persecution, the church continued to grow. As it did, it developed more formal worship practices (liturgy, pericopes, and the church year). It organized its leadership with priests/pastors assisted by deacons overseeing local congregations, and bishops overseeing city-wide churches. The bishops met regularly in church councils to ensure consistent teaching and practice. Statements of faith like The Apostles' Creed were used by new Christians to confess their faith at baptism. The Nicene Creed was developed to express true Christian teaching against the false teaching that Christ was not eternal God (Arianism). Intense Bible study resulted in more detailed descriptions of the Triune God, the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, original sin, and man's inability to contribute to his own salvation.

300-1500

During the fourth century within the Roman Empire, Christianity first became legal, and then became the only legal religion. This led to rapid growth, but also to new problems. Some came into the church bringing their pagan superstitions with them. Others thought the church had become worldly, and went into the deserts and mountains to live as monks. Early church heroes, including Mary, began to be given special honor, eventually leading to the practice of venerating and praying to them as saints. After confessing and repenting of their sins, Christians did not just receive absolution, but also were told to make earthly satisfaction, leading to unbiblical doctrines like purgatory and indulgences. As education declined in Europe after the barbarian invasions, clergy received less education and the laity also became less literate in Christian teaching. Performing the liturgy and sacraments was seen as continuing or restoring a right relationship with God, and the work of Christ receded into the background. Meanwhile the Gospel continued to be spread to Northern Europe by the Latin church, to India and China by Syriac-speaking missionaries, and to Russia by Greek missionaries. But the church in the Middle East was overrun by Islamic armies and Christianity became a minority religion there.

1500s, The Reformation

By 1500, Europe saw an educational revival as universities developed and the Renaissance flowered. God used these to promote a Reformation of the western church (known as the Roman Catholic Church) through men like Martin Luther. He based all teaching on Scripture alone, showing how salvation came simply by believing that Christ died in our place so that we could live eternally—a totally free gift from God. Luther and his teaching was rejected by the Catholic church, and so the Lutheran Church was born. Similarly, John Calvin formed a new church that spread in Switzerland and Holland (the Reformed Church), and in England the church was put under royal control as the Anglican or Episcopal church. In Scotland, the new church became known as the Presbyterian Church. These churches all rejected many Catholic traditions and took their teaching directly from Scripture, but their view of the sacraments and the use of reason in interpreting the Bible led each to hold some teachings distinct from each other. Others, known as Anabaptists, were more radical in seeking direct guidance from the Spirit more directly (not just through Scripture), in rejecting clergy, and denying the authority of the state. The Baptist church developed as a hybrid of Reformed and Anabaptist teaching.

1600s-1900s

The Catholic Church sought to fight the Reformation by re-affirming its teachings and spreading them through a Counter-Reformation, led especially through the new monastic order of the Jesuits. Its teachings were carried to the newly discovered Americas and to Africa and Asia by Catholic missionaries. But the new churches also sent missionaries to spread the Reformation teachings to the lost. The nineteenth century became the great mission century.

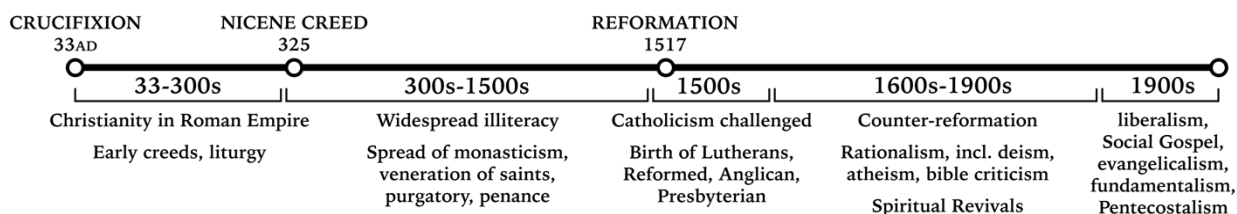
‡ Written and contributed by Dr. Glen L. Thompson (Asia Lutheran Seminary).

But rationalism, which had become part of western thought during the Enlightenment period of the 17th-18th centuries, became a new threat. It caused many to view the Bible and its teaching as superstition. Some came to believe in an abstract creator who no longer involved himself in the world (Deism), or became atheists. Some Christians tried to find a middle ground by developing rational systems of Christian theology or by purifying the Bible of myths and superstitions (Bible criticism). Both of these developed into liberal movements within the church. Some Bible-believing Christians responded by emphasizing inner-spiritual experience over doctrinal teaching (Pietism), or stressing the need for people to personally commit themselves to Christ (Arminianism). The Methodist church was one example of these developments. Pietism also led to several “Great Revivals” in 18th century Britain and North America. In the century that followed, churches heavily influenced by Arminianism and individualism proliferated across America—Baptists, Methodists, and a host of new “free church” denominations that made each congregation almost totally independent from any larger church body. Clergy were de-emphasized and the church and its doctrine became more democratic.

1900s to Today

The twentieth-century began with liberal Christians supporting new scientific and evolutionary approaches to the Bible and its teaching, stressing the church’s role in changing society (Social Gospel). They were opposed by the Fundamentalists who emphasized traditional Bible teaching. As travel and communication made the world smaller, there was a push for all branches of the church to cooperate, and even unite (Ecumenism). But increasingly the church was divided into liberals who controlled the older “mainline” denominations, and conservatives who founded new churches stressing “simple” Bible teaching (Evangelicals), but often down-playing or even rejecting the traditional denominational labels that had grown up since the Reformation (Non-denominationalism). All these groups were also increasingly influenced by the growth of charismatic (Pentecostal) teachings, and rededicated themselves to spreading the Gospel through personal evangelism, mass-media, and foreign missions. Thus evangelical Christianity became a prominent movement in Africa, South America, and Asia. The older Lutheran churches of Europe were thoroughly infected with rationalism, liberalism and Bible criticism, but the biblical teachings of Luther continue to be taught in smaller Lutheran denominations throughout the world.

Today there are many different churches with huge variations in Bible teaching. Although God still works wherever his Word is preached to bring people to faith in Christ, it is up to each Christian to make sure that he is hearing and his church is spreading the clear and accurate message of God’s free gift of salvation.



Are Lutherans Evangelicals?

What is an Evangelical?

The term evangelical broadly refers to church bodies that formed after the Reformation, motivated by Luther's break from the Catholic church and based on the teaching we are saved by grace alone. According to this definition, **WELS Lutherans are evangelicals**. The term evangelical more narrowly refers to church bodies that have their roots in the revival movements in Britain and North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to this definition, **WELS Lutherans are not evangelicals**. This is the definition that will be used for the rest of this summary.

How are evangelicals similar?

In general, evangelicals recognize the need to focus on the gospel, teach justification by faith alone, and have a high view of Scripture (that is, consider it the inspired and inerrant word of God). These are all good things. Evangelicals also tend to practice fellowship loosely (*ecumenicism*), have a low view of sacraments (e.g., communion is not a means by which God gives us his grace but just a remembrance of Christ's death), and stress religious experience and reason in conversion. These are not biblical things.

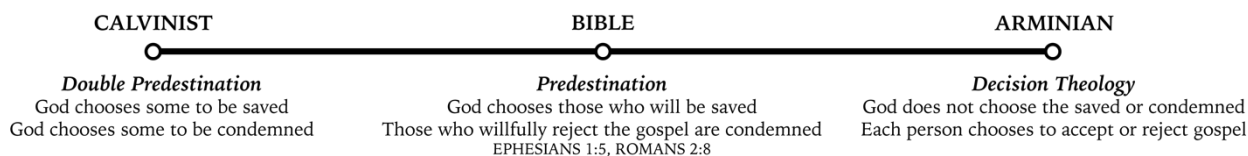
How do the main evangelical church bodies differ from each other?

CALVINISTS: Also called Reformed, based on the teaching of John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvinists focus on God's sovereignty and **double predestination**, that God not only elects some to be saved (which the bible teaches), but elects others to be condemned (which the bible does not teach). This has the unintended consequence that Christians can focus on whether they are elected rather than on whether Jesus has died for their sins, and so focusing on one's life of sanctification as evidence that you are one of the elected.

ARMINIANS: Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) taught what he believed were corrections to Calvin's teaching. This included a form of **decision theology**, that is, with the help of the Holy Spirit, a person needs to make a conscious free-will decision to become a Christian. This has the consequence of Christians focusing on whether or not they made the right decision rather than on whether Jesus has died for their sins. This can further lead to focusing on one's life of sanctification as evidence that one has really made this life-changing decision. Many Arminians are also influenced by the Pentecostal focus on supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit as evidence that one truly is a Christian. Some groups also teach **perfectionism**, that in this life one can attain a state of lacking all voluntary sin. Many also teach **dispensationalism**, that the world goes through several stages ending in some type of millennial rule by Christ.

BAPTISTS: Historically traced to the English Separatist Movement (16th century). Baptists reject confessional statements and insist on the complete autonomy of each congregation. This results in a wide diversity in biblical teaching. Many lean towards Arminianism, some lean towards Calvinism, while some borrow from all traditions. The only unifying teachings are congregational independence and baptism—insisting that infants should not be baptized, and that the only valid form of baptism is immersion.

NON-DENOMINATIONALISM: Today many Christians from Calvinist, Arminian, Baptist, and Pentecostal backgrounds prefer to join churches that have no denominational links or identity. These churches stress the unifying fundamentals of traditional Christianity, but remain shallow in their biblical teaching in order to avoid controversy over disputed teachings.



How are Lutherans Different from Catholics?

In 1517, Martin Luther, a monk and Catholic professor, nailed *The 95 Theses* to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral to question certain teachings within the Catholic Church. In 1530, only 13 years later, the Catholic Church officially condemned Luther's teachings at the Diet of Augsburg, marking the split of the Lutherans from the Catholic Church. What follows is a simplified treatment of the reasons why Lutherans have separated from the Catholic Church. The three *solas* below were slogans from the Reformation.

Sola Scriptura (By Scripture Alone)

Ephesians 2:20 [The Church is] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

The bible teaches that only the Bible is a legitimate source of God's revelation to man and message concerning God's plan of salvation. And so, all doctrines can come only from Scripture. If someone claims to be speaking for God, the Bible tells us to measure it against God's revelation within the Bible.

The Catholic Church uses more than the bible as a source of God's revelation. Believing falsely that the apostolic line and authority of Peter is present in the Papacy, the Pope's official pronouncements are considered divine additions to Bible teaching. Catholics also look to church councils, traditions, and the Apocrypha as sources for church teaching. Many false teachings within the Catholic Church are from these non-biblical sources: purgatory, false beliefs about Mary, praying to Saints, indulgences, the clergy celibacy and many more.

Sola Fide (By Faith Alone)

Romans 3:28 We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Luther taught that the central issue "by which the church stands or falls" is justification by faith alone. And the Bible agrees. We are declared innocent by God because of the work of Christ, and that declaration becomes ours when the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts. We contribute nothing, nor could we.

The Catholic Church teaches that people can perform certain meritorious works that contribute towards salvation in addition to faith, such indulgences (gifting money to the church in exchange for a shorter time in purgatory), masses for the dead, and the necessity of works of penance after confession.

Sola Gratia (By Grace alone)

Ephesians 2:4-5,8 God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions... For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

The Bible teaches clearly that only one person deserves any credit for our salvation. God died on the cross for us, God creates faith in our hearts, and God works through us to do good. All good things we have are gracious gifts from God.

The Catholic Church teaches people not to seek help, aid, and grace from God alone, but also from Mary and the Saints. They teach that a Christian's own meritorious works can help complete God's justification in his life. And they believe certain spiritual acts have power in themselves to bring about God's grace (*ex opera operato*).

Are Lutherans Mainline Protestants?

What is a Mainline Protestant?

The term typically refers to a group of Christian denominations that were dominant in North America until the mid-20th century, now a minority. They are called *mainline* because they have ties to older denominations that pre-date the newer denominations with roots in the Great Awakening and Pentecostal movements of North America. Note that many branches of Protestantism (such as Reformed) have divided and now have both Evangelical and Mainline Protestant church bodies. Mainline Protestant church bodies are recognized for their liberal theology and heavy involvement in social issues, such as the Social Gospel movement, civil rights, and equality for women. Denominations and traditions include:

- United Methodist
- Episcopal and Anglican
- Presbyterian and United Church of Christ/Canada (Reformed)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCC)
- Unitarianism

What do Mainline Protestants Teach?

Mainline Protestants are particularly active in the Social Gospel movement, which seeks to apply Christian ethics to social problems: global poverty, social injustice, racism, the environment, war, etc. Although clearly Christian ethics can be applied to these and all problems, the Social Gospel movement errs in placing the main emphasis of the church's activity on fixing these social problems rather than preaching the gospel.

An increasing majority of Mainline Protestants affirm the ordination of women as pastors and bishops, the practice of homosexuality, and liberal politics. Mainline Protestants are also more likely than Evangelicals to teach theistic evolution, and to deny Christ's virgin birth, miracles, and bodily resurrection.

Why do Mainline Protestants Teach these things?

Many Mainline Protestants have been heavily influenced by *higher criticism* in biblical studies. This often means treating the Bible as a text that has changed throughout time, and that a person cannot discover the one natural meaning of a passage intended by the original author. Mainline Protestant scholars often believe we can be certain about few details of Jesus' life, and so about God's plan of Salvation.

Mainline Protestantism is also at the center of the *ecumenical movement*, which privileges working together for common social and political goals over addressing doctrinal differences. These denominations rarely have detailed confessional statements, and denominations merge without addressing clear historical differences in doctrine. Consider the United Church of Canada as an example: This denomination is a union of Methodists, Presbyterians, and Brethren.

Although most Lutherans in North America are Mainline Protestants, WELS Lutherans are not. We teach what the bible teaches: that a united commitment to all the Bible teaches is more important than ecumenicism, that preaching and preserving the clear gospel is the priority of the church (not social or political involvement), and that we do not change what we believe the bible teaches when societal norms change (such as views on homosexuality).

How can churches' teachings be so different?[§]

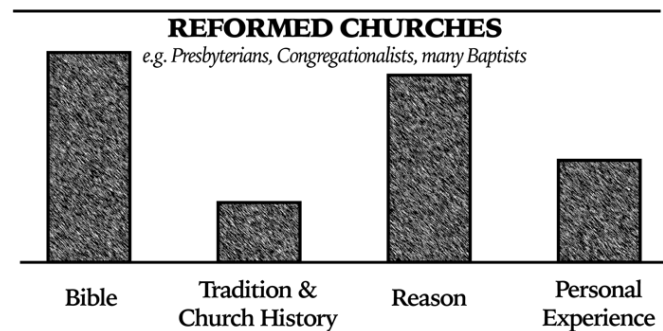
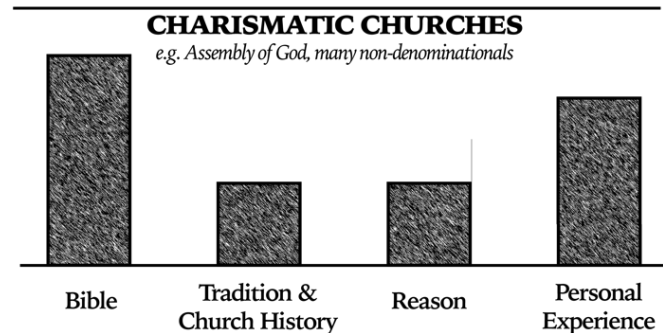
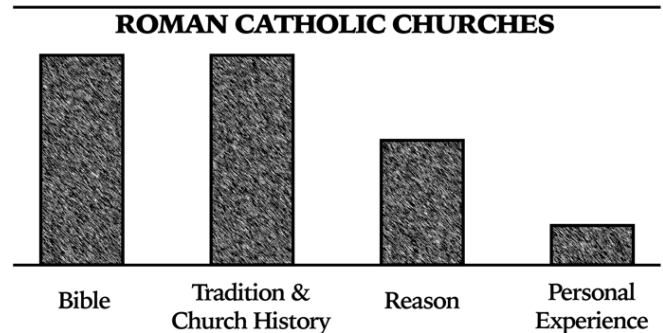
Just about everybody says, “My church’s teachings are based on the Bible.” But if that’s true, why do churches teach such different things? The “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” (named after John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church) can be a helpful way to look at the differences in how church bodies establish their doctrine. John Wesley said that there are four “pillars” that every Christian (and Christian denomination) uses to filter their beliefs: (a) **the Bible**, (b) **tradition or church history**, (c) **reason**, and (d) **personal experience and emotions**. The beliefs of Christian individuals and groups depend on which pillars they most emphasize. This is the reason for the many different teachings within Christianity. While every Christian church uses the Bible to some extent, the Bible’s authority may be challenged or even trumped by other perceived sources of truth. Let’s look at a few examples.

The **Roman Catholic Church** accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Nevertheless, the decree of “papal infallibility” declares that the leader of the Catholic church has the authority to reinterpret the doctrines of the Bible as he wishes. This has led to a number of unbiblical doctrines such as purgatory, prayers to Mary and the saints, and justification by good works.

Charismatic churches tend to focus on personal experience (emphasizing “the day I decided to become a Christian”) and human emotion (emphasizing an “emotional high” in worship.) The gospel is still preached in these churches, but sometimes the emphasis on our feelings can lead to “flash-in-the-pan” Christianity – that is, I believe it as long as I can feel it, and when I can’t feel it anymore I drift away.

Reformed churches generally follow the theology of John Calvin, a humanist lawyer. Calvin believed that if God gave us our reason, he also wouldn’t give us anything in the Bible that we can’t understand. This led to teachings such as “Double Predestination” (the belief that in addition to predestining believers for eternal life, God also predestined other people to eternal damnation.) While this may be a logical conclusion, it clearly disagrees with Scripture, which says “God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (2 Tim 2:4) The biggest danger with a purely logical approach to Scripture is that God does illogical things all the time! The main teachings of the Bible – creation, redemption, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our hope of eternal life in heaven – are not “logical” and “reasonable” by any means. Thus Calvin’s theology led people to doubt and question their salvation, rather than simply accepting the promises of a God who operates above and beyond our logic.

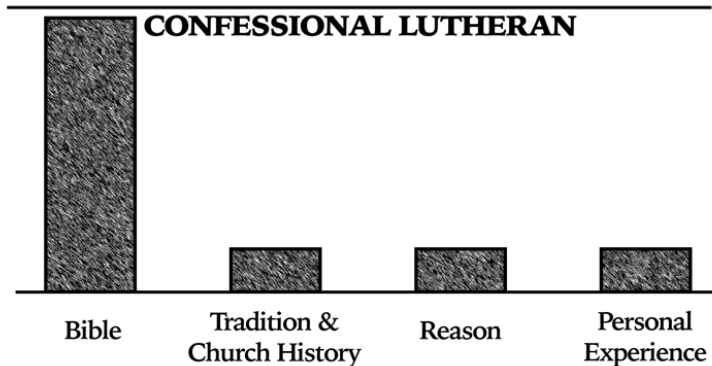
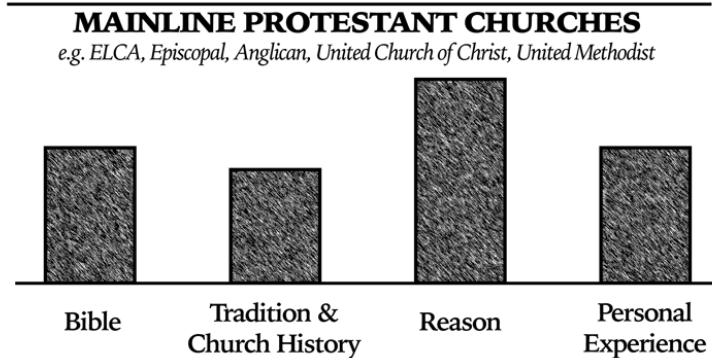
Mainline Protestant denominations have been slowly shrinking for years now, in part because even they don’t know exactly what they stand for anymore. This is inevitable when the Bible, tradition, reason, and personal experience are all given roughly equal roles in determining truth. In fact, one could argue, what is the point of even using the Bible if



[§] A summary of an essay written by Pastor James Hein (Milwaukee, WI). For the full essay, go to <https://pastorjameshein.wordpress.com/tag/wesleyan-quadrilateral/>

everybody is free to change and interpret it however they wish? When Scripture is not the primary source of truth, it ceases to be a source of truth altogether.

Confessional Lutheranism gives the Bible the role God always intended it to have: our ultimate source of spiritual authority. Paul writes, "All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3:16)



Confessional Lutherans follow faithful believers who have gone before us, but only because their teaching was in line with God's Word. They use their God-given reason, but also understand that many things in the Bible are above and beyond our reason, and must simply be accepted by faith. They have experienced the work of God in their own lives, and feel strong emotions when they recognize God's love for them. However, the reason they know that God is always with them (Matt. 28:20), working all things for their good (Romans 8:28) is that God has promised them those things in the Bible, whether they feel it or not. Many Christian churches say, "Our teachings are based on Scripture." Confessional Lutheran churches say, "Our teachings come from Scripture alone."

DO ALL LUTHERANS BELIEVE THE SAME THINGS?*

Galatians 5:9 A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.

In 1971, Dr. Lawrence Kersten (who at that time belonged to the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) was Assistant Professor of Sociology at Eastern Michigan University. He did a study in the three-county area of metropolitan Detroit to determine the impact of religion on the attitudes and values of the Lutherans in that area, and to see if Biblical, traditional Lutheran beliefs remained viable in 20th Century America. The results were published by Wayne State University Press in 1971, in a book called, *The Lutheran Ethic*.

Kersten surveyed a random sample of the members of the congregations of the different Lutheran groups, parish pastors of the different groups (241 parish pastors completed questionnaires), and students from the four groups. Below is listed a sample of the data collected from the pastors. The synods involved were the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LC-MS), and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). **The number after each statement represents the percent of pastors who agreed with the statement.**

	LCA*	ALC*	LC-MS**	WELS
The Bible is God’s Word and all it says is true.	10%	19%	74%	100%
The Bible contains some human error.	76%	74%	18%	0%
The account of Adam and Eve falling into sinfulness is simply a story which did not take place in reality.	83%	72%	20%	0%
A child is sinful at birth.	67%	74%	96%	100%
Only those who believe in Jesus as their Savior can go to heaven.	43%	52%	84%	100%

These church bodies didn’t start by questioning whether Jesus was the only way to heaven. They started when error or false teaching was tolerated in their midst as “minor”. When these church bodies started questioning whether practicing church fellowship principles was important or they grew tired of practicing them, error snowballed. Soon even the most fundamental teachings of Scripture were endangered. A little yeast **does** work its way through the whole batch of dough!

We thank God for those Christians and pastors who remain faithful to the truth of God’s Word in those groups. At the same time, we recognize the tremendous danger that exists for their faith. Jesus’ words will remain true unto the end of time: “If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

* On 1 January 1988, the LCA and ALC merged (along with a third group) to form “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” (ELCA). Sadly this group has become what is today the most liberal Lutheran church body in the United States. The Canadian church body in fellowship with ELCA is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCC).

** The Canadian church body in fellowship with LC-MS is the Lutheran Church Canada (LCC).

**Originally created by Prof. Tom Kock (Mequon, WI), edited by Pastor Jeremiah Gumm (Liverpool, NY).

What are the differences between WELS and LCMS?††

The Wisconsin (WELS) and Missouri (LCMS) Synods were in full doctrinal fellowship for about a hundred years until the mid-1900's. By God's grace the Wisconsin Synod has been largely spared from any serious doctrinal controversies throughout that time, but sadly the same cannot be said for Missouri, especially during the mid-1900s. For the most part the Missouri Synod has much to commend—it is very solid in its core salvation truths and so the souls of its people are in good care—but the following are some lingering differences between the WELS and LCMS that keep them from being in fellowship with each other today.

God's Word Issues

WELS has always believed that the whole Bible is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible Word. The official teaching of LCMS currently is the same as WELS. However, the break between WELS and LCMS was first caused by LCMS theologians throwing out the principle of Scripture's divine inspiration. This led the synod to damaging relationships with other similar church bodies that only corrupted each other further. Though that issue has now been largely resolved in LCMS and the people who first espoused it are gone (Seminex, 1974), its influence may still spook around those who studied under those theologians.

Fellowship Issues

WELS has always taught that all forms and expressions of fellowship should be based on total agreement in doctrine and practice (Ephesians 4:3-5, John 17:20-23, see lesson 3.2). This is called the *unit concept* of fellowship. LCMS practices what's been called *levels* or *degrees* of fellowship. Only LCMS pastors may lead LCMS worship services and (officially) only LCMS members may commune in their churches. Yet, other forms of worship and expressions of fellowship with any other Christian person or group (prayer, ecumenical services, weddings, etc.) are at least periodically tolerated because total agreement in doctrine and practice is overlooked. This has especially led to tolerating churches lax in upholding close communion. This issue is dangerous because "Bad company corrupts good character." (1 Cor. 15:33)

Church and Ministry Issues

The WELS position has always been as Jesus said: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). This is just as true for the synod at large as for the local congregation. LCMS holds that the local congregation is the only true church gathering; schools or the synod as a whole are merely human arrangements that have no special institution or authority from God.

WELS also holds that public Gospel ministry can be carried out in any number of visible forms which may vary by need and circumstance – not just the pastoral office. "It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers..." (Ephesians 4:11-13). The LCMS position is that only the office of the parish pastor is God-ordained and called, and that all other forms of ministry in the church, school, and synod are subordinate (or at least auxiliary) to that.

†† Written and contributed by Pastor Mark Reichert (St. Paul, Norfolk, NE), edited by Luke Thompson.

Fellowship

Agreement in all scriptural teachings is required for all forms of fellowship.

The same scriptural principles apply to all forms of church fellowship.

All joint prayer is an expression of fellowship.

Only those in confessional agreement may receive the Lord's Supper together (close Communion)

Full agreement in doctrine is required only for pulpit and altar fellowship.

Full agreement is not necessary for worship at occasional joint Christian celebrations, Reformation services, convocations, rallies, meetings of theologians, etc.

There can be joint prayer that is not an act of church fellowship.

The official position holds to close Communion, but numerous pastors and churches practice "open Communion," allowing joint communion with those not in doctrinal agreement.

Church and Ministry

The pastor of a local congregation is only one form of the divinely instituted public ministry. Other forms are teachers, professors, called administrators, etc. The specific form is determined by the church's call.

The official position seems to be that ***the only divinely instituted form of the public ministry is that of pastor*** in a local congregation. All other positions are auxiliary to this.

Men's and Women's callings in the church

Can women be pastors and serve in other roles of authority?

1 Timothy 2:1,8-11 ¹ I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people... ⁸ Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. ⁹ I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰ but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. ¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.

Paul writes to the young Pastor Timothy that he expects all Christians to worship together and pray out loud together for all people. Paul has special directions, though, when it comes to how the congregation is to organize this worship and prayer, and who ought to have authority. God's command is for men to lead, both in and outside the home, and this carries over to the church. And God's command is for women to not have roles of authority over men. This does not mean women cannot teach ^{††} or work together with or contribute in major ways to church work with men. But he does want men to retain the roles of authority over the congregation. Practically, this certainly means God does not desire women to be pastors or have other congregational roles of authority over other men (such as board chairpersons, and congregational presidents).

What roles does God encourage women to serve in?

God certainly encourages women to engage in their roles as members of **the priesthood of all believers**, which includes giving encouragement, sharing one's faith whenever the opportunity arises, and discussing, sharing insights, and asking questions about the Bible. Women may also serve in roles of authority over groups that do not include men, such as women's organizations, authoritative teaching over children and teenagers, and formal ministry to other women.

A word to the men

This biblical teaching is, on the one hand, so incredibly politically incorrect today and, on the other hand, so often abused by men, that Christian male leaders have double reason to carry out their roles as God commands them. To fail at these imperatives is to fail not only the women, families, and ministry God has entrusted to you, but your God. And so God promises to judge you more strictly (James 3:1):

- Lead a life above reproach, that is, morally faithful, upright and outstanding (1 Timothy 3:1)
- Lead without anger or disputing (1 Timothy 2:8), but self-controlled (1 Timothy 3:2)
- Lead with a servant-like attitude (Matthew 20:26), only considering the interest of others (Philippians 2:4)
- Work together with women in the mission of the church (Philippians 4:3)
- Fight against the objectification, abuse, and mistreatment of women (1 Peter 3:7)

^{††} Prof. Rich Gurgel and Kathy Wendland in their *Heirs Together*, write, regarding 1 Timothy 2:12, "[Paul] is not issuing two directives: a woman can't teach and a woman can't have authority over a man. Rather, the second statement helps define the first. A recent English translation of the Bible (*God's Word to the Nations*) captures that close connection quite well. It translates this verse: '**I do not permit a woman to teach in such a way as to have authority over a man.**' What Paul addresses is the kind of teaching by a woman that would violate the headship God has given to man."

Can I lose my faith?

Matthew 10:22 *The one who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

Romans 11:19-21 *You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.*

Although God's Word is powerful and active, it is not irresistible. That is, although the Holy Spirit gets all the credit for creating faith, people can resist and reject the gospel message. They can also become Christians and then later reject the gospel. And so the Bible is full of warnings to not reject the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:27, 10:12; Ephesians 6:13; Hebrews 3:12-13)

How does one reject the gospel?

The Bible lists several marks of behavior that can lead to rejecting the gospel, and so becoming an unbeliever:

- Refusal to stay connected to God's Word (Mark 4:16-17)
- Refusal to repent and work towards sanctified living (Romans 8:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6:12)
- Despair over sin, that is, believing my sin is too great to be forgiven (Matthew 27:1-10)
- Falling into and becoming entrenched in works righteousness (Galatians 3:3, 5:5)

These actions in and of themselves do not cause loss of faith. If a person believes Jesus is her Saviour, no sin is too great to be forgiven. Yet, if not addressed, they will in time lead to doubting and separating from the gospel and God's Word. Faith disconnected from God's Word eventually dies. And so God even goes so far as to tell Christians to treat other Christians that behave this way as unbelievers. These are Paul's instructions for dealing with a man refusing to turn from a sinful lifestyle of sexual misconduct:

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 *So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.*

And it seems that, after taking these measures with the man, he repented, and Paul urged the Corinthians to welcome him back with open arms of forgiveness. (2 Corinthians 2:5-11)

Have people in the Bible lost their faith?

Saul was called by God to be the first king of Israel. (His life is chronicled in 1 Samuel). Many indications are given that God chose a believer. In fact, 1 Samuel 10:6-9 describes the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him to give him the gift of prophecy. But Saul abandoned faith in his God and died in despair.

Judas Iscariot was called by Jesus to be one of his closest disciples. No indication is given in the beginning of Jesus' public ministry that he chose an unbeliever. Rather, Judas was involved in the ministry of the disciples as a Jesus follower (Acts 1:17). But Jesus himself tells us Judas died an unbeliever (John 17:12).

What about Actions the Bible Neither Commands nor Forbids?

The Bible is not a manual to direct every decision a Christian can make in life. The Bible's primary purpose is to preserve the promise and historical fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior. The Bible's secondary purpose is to provide principles for Christian living. The principles are clear, even though, when sinful people like us try to apply the principles to our lives, it's not always so simple.

1 Corinthians 10:23-24, 31-33 *"I have a right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything,"—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others... So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God—even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.*

In circumstances where we need to decide whether to do something, and there are no clear principles in the Bible for that particular action (these are called by the Church **adiaphora**), Paul gives us general directions on how to decide. Note all the very clear principles he provides:

- Even though you have the *right* to do something, first consider whether it's wise and beneficial.
- A Christian is always seeking the most constructive thing to do for the sake of *others*.
- Even though you have the *right* to do something, if it causes someone to stumble (i.e., bothers a person's conscience, whether rightly or wrongly, or hinders his faith), don't do it. In cases where the person should know better or is leading many astray, Paul tells you to stand up for your Christian freedom. (Colossians 2:16)

As a practical example, the Bible provides very few guidelines regarding what style of music is appropriate for worship. If a group within a congregation is considering making a major change in worship style, even though it is well within their freedom, this group must first consider (a) how beneficial is it, (b) is it beneficial to *other* people, not just the ones desiring the change, and (c) how can the change be made so that no one's conscience is bothered by the change?

For further discussion, consider these other passages from the Bible:

Romans 14:5,6,14,22,23 *One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ¹⁴ As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. ²² So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³ But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

Matthew 18:6,7 *But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!*

Romans 14:13 *Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.*

Ephesians 4:3 *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

How much should I give to the church?

Why do I need to give offerings?

Proverbs 3:28 *Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops. Then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

Psalm 116:17-19 *I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord.*

James 2:17 *Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

First off, you don't *need* to give anything to God. On the one hand, he's God, and so he *needs* nothing. On the other hand, you're his child justified by the blood of Christ, and so you don't *need* to do anything to be loved by him. Rather, giving offerings to your congregation is a fruit of faith: it's what Christians naturally do. We *want* to give glory to God through our offerings to show our trust in him and belief that it all comes from him, and we *want* to support the gospel ministry in our community and throughout the world. It's an important way God expects us to say, "thank you," "I want to serve you," and, "I trust you."

Exactly How much should I give?

2 Corinthians 9:7 *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

1 Corinthians 16:2 *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.*

Proverbs 3:9 *Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.*

2 Corinthians 9:11 *You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.*

Malachi 3:10 *"Test me..." says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."*

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were commanded to **tithe**, that is, give ten percent of all their income to the Lord. God does not give New Testament Christians a similar specific direction. Instead, the New Testament approaches giving to the church almost entirely from gospel motivation. Seeing what Jesus has done for us, we will simply want to give as much as possible (in some cases *more* than ten percent) back to our Lord. After all, he's given us eternal life; what's a fitting response to that?

Yet, although specific amounts are not spelled out, we can deduce principles of giving for the New Testament Christian:

- (1) God desires we give *generously* in *proportion* to our material blessings.
- (2) God desires our giving is *regular* and *planned*, not a last-minute response.
- (3) God desires we give *first fruits*, not leftovers. Decide first how much you will give to God, *then* plan the rest of our budget and lifestyle. If you do this, God promises to take care of you.

And note this is just one aspect of our lives of stewardship. God expects us to not only give a proportion of our **treasures**, but also a proportion of our **time** and **talents**. The principles above apply just as much to these gifts from God as it does to money.