



“you turned to God...”



Basic Christian beliefs



In ancient times, the city of Thessalonica was a thriving metropolis with a harbour on one of the most important highways of the ancient Roman world- the Egnatian Way- linking Rome with Asia.

When the Apostle Paul visited the city we are told that he "reason from the Scriptures" with those who were in the synagogue, "explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead (Acts 17:3)." What followed was that some of the Jews, "were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women (Acts 17:4)." A church was formed that was made up of people from mixed backgrounds- both Jews and Greeks.

But no sooner does there seem to be a work of God, than trouble comes and Paul and his companions flee the city at night. In one sense, you wouldn't expect anything to come of the church. You would expect it to die out, yet that did not happen for God was at work.

Later when Paul wrote these young Christians he reminded them of how they had "turned to God... to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9)." That is my prayer with this booklet. It gives an introduction to basic Christian beliefs. Yet, in reading it I pray that you will meet the "living and true God" who lives forevermore.

God bless,  
Graham Barnes

## How can I know God? -Part 1 of 2

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Who is God? What is he like? How can I know Him? The wise teacher of Ecclesiastes said that God “has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”

Yet, it is also true that God has not left us completely blind to Him. When the Apostle Paul spoke to the people of his day he said that God is “actually not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27).” In the first place, we can know something of God through what He has created. God speaks to us through His creation, yet without words. In Psalm 19 David says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” This voice goes out “through all the earth.” The physical world around us, including our own bodies and the fact that you can read this page, testifies to God as Creator.

Although God speaks through His creation, it does not give us a completely accurate picture of who He is. Our sin and its consequences, both specific and general, has marred God’s “very good” creation (see Gen. 1:31). Nonetheless, for all our physical sicknesses and the brokenness of our world, what we see around us still tells us there is a Creator. Recently my watch broke and was not working properly, yet I still recognise that there was a Watchmaker who made it. Understanding that God is our Creator should cause us to praise Him: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. <sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:13-14).”

In addition to speaking to us through creation, God has also written His law on our hearts (see Rom. 2:15). We often call it our conscience. C.S. Lewis observed that when two

people are quarrelling and someone says, "How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?" they are appealing "to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about."

Some people say, isn't it simply the expectations that our culture puts on us?

That is, isn't this sense of

***Prayer is "a sincere pouring out of the soul to God." – J.C. Ryle***

right and wrong simply something different cultures have made up for themselves? But God's Word tells us there is an eternal law that is binding on all people, both Christian and non-Christian. It defines our basic moral obligations to God and to others (see Ex. 20:1-17; Matt. 22:37-40). We are all equipped with a sense of right and wrong by virtue of being created in God's image (see Gen. 1:27). Thus, even those who have never heard of God have some sense of right and wrong.

The consequence of this is that we are inherently moral people who are accountable to God and who have a responsibility to obey Him. Those who believe there is no God have to reject this. Richard Dawkins says there is "no evil and no good... DNA neither knows nor cares." Logically, it must lead to the conclusion that there is no such thing as "goodness." In 1880, Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote *The brothers Karamazov*, in which one of the characters asks, what if God is "an idea made up by men? Then, if He doesn't exist, man is the king of the earth, of the universe. Magnificent! Only how is he going to be good without God?"

God's law written on our hearts is powerful and something we should be thankful for. Yet, just as sin has corrupted creation, so too it corrupts our thinking, emotions,

desires and every part of our being. Again, C.S. Lewis admits what is true of all of us, "I do not succeed in keeping the law of Nature very well, and the moment anyone tells me I am not keeping it, there starts in my mind a string of excuses as long as your arm." Our conscience can be dulled and distorted so that God's law is blunted in us. Sin becomes more and more acceptable to us.

The final problem that we face is that although the world around us and our consciences tell us that there is a God, it is not enough to save us. It is only enough to condemn us and to leave us without excuse before God (see Rom 1:18-21); we all know the shame of a guilty conscience. God is near to us all- to which we are grateful, yet if we are to truly know Him and understand what He is like then we need more than creation and His law written on our hearts.

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## How can I know God? -Part 2 of 2

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We can know something about God from the twin testimonies of creation and His law written on our hearts. These are true and powerful testimonies, but as John Calvin says, if this is all that we know then we are like a traveller passing through a field during a storm. Suddenly, a flash of lightening allows us to see for a brief moment before we are again plunged back into darkness and lost for direction.

Yet, God has not left us in this position. He has always been a God who has revealed Himself to people. The writer to the Hebrews said that in the past He spoke through the prophets at many times and in various ways. Sometimes God often spoke to people in unusual ways; He spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Ex. 3:2); He spoke to Elijah as a still, soft voice (1 Kings 19:12); He revealed Himself to Isaiah in a vision that overwhelmed the prophet (Isa. 6:1); He in some way walked with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8); and even whilst Joseph was in prison the LORD was with him and, "showed him steadfast love (Gen. 39:21)."

Today, God's speaks to us is through His Word- the Bible (meaning "book" in Greek). The Bible did not come to us in a mechanical way, nor was it dropped to us from the sky. It comes to us as a collection of 66 individual books written over a period of 1500 years, with each of the human authors having their own style of writing. You only have to read a page of Matthew's Gospel and John's Gospel to realise that they are different people. Amongst its authors are kings and princes (Moses, David and Solomon), fishermen (John and Peter), a shepherd (Amos), a tax collector (Matthew) and a Greek physician (Luke). Yet, overarching this is the truth that the Bible is also a single book with one divine Author behind

it (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). The main difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament is where they stand in relation to Christ Jesus. The Old Testament saints looked forward to His coming and all that this means. Whilst the New Testament, looks back to what He has done and all that this means for the present and future.

God's Word reflects His character, and so some conclusions we can draw about the Bible are that it is;

- **Eternal**- the Bible never 'grows old.' It speaks afresh to each generation. We are like grass which withers in time, but "the word of the Lord remains forever (1 Peter 1:14)."
- **Trustworthy**- God's Word is always true and inerrant in all that it says. The accounts of the resurrection of Jesus must be harmonised, but they give a true and inerrant record of what occurred.
- **Sufficient**- God's Word is all that we need for faith and life. This doesn't mean that the Bible reveals everything that could possibly be known about God and his ways- God is an inexhaustible person! (Deut. 29:29; John 21:25; 1 Cor.13:12) Yet, it does reveal all about God that we can know this side of heaven. There is no greater revelation that we need.
- **Clear**- although all things in Scripture are not clear to understand (2 Peter 3:16), those things which are necessary for us to know, believe and obey are clear for all people, both learned and unlearned (Psalm 119:105, see also the *Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1.7*).
- **Christ-centred**- Ultimately, the Bible is about God. It reveals who He is and who we are in light of Him. The Bible points us to the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14).



In 1967, Peter Hitchens (the brother of the famous atheist Christopher Hitchens) set fire to his Bible on a playing field in Cambridge. At the time he thought he was setting himself free, he said, "I could behave as I wished, without fear of eternal consequences and (if I was cunning and could get away with it) without fear of earthly ones either". Hitchens thought he could be good and virtuous without God. Yet, years later he came to recognize his sin and embraced the Bible as God's Word.

If the Bible is what it claims to be, then several implications come from this;

- **Firstly**, I am to read and study God's Word both privately and publically. I must prepare my heart and mind before I read. As a suggestion, be disciplined in finding a regular time to read, and read as much as you can take in and absorb. I must always ask, "What does this passage tell me about God and myself?"
- **Secondly**, I cannot add or take from God's Word. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for adding to God's Word (Mark 7:1-13) as it leads to false worship.
- **Thirdly**, I am to obey God's Word, even when it is not to my liking.
- **Finally**, I am to be encouraged that God's Word is ultimately sweet to me. Psalm 119 says that we are blessed if we seek the LORD with our whole heart (v.2). It says God's Word helps us to guard our way (v.9). It is as valuable as riches (v.14) and better to me than wealth (v.72, 127). It comforts us in our troubles (v.50). God's Word is our hope (v.114, 147) and it is sweeter to taste than honey (v.103).

## Question: How was the Bible written?

***“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” -2 Timothy 3:16***

The above verse affirms that the Scriptures come from God and must, therefore, be consistent with His nature. Just as God is true in all that He says and does, so too, His Word is true in all things (“*inerrant*”). The Bible is a reflection of its Author. The Lord Jesus affirms the authority, inspiration and reliability of the Old Testament (see Matt. 5:8; Matt. 15:3; John 10:35). Yet, the question remains, how was the Bible written and copied?

It is an important question to ask as the issue of the Bible’s inspiration from God (“*God-breathed*”) is connected to the question of how reliable it is. Christianity claims to be historical. Unlike other religions, Christianity is first and foremost the “*good news*” of what God has done in history through His Son, Jesus Christ and therefore, it has to be reliable.

### **How were the books of the New Testament originally written?**

Writing in the ancient world was far more difficult and expensive than it is today. Whilst some New Testament writers may have written themselves (see 2 Thess. 3:17), it was common for them to dictate to a secretary who wrote down their words. For example, at the end of Paul’s letter to the Romans it reads, “*I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you* (Rom. 16:22).”

The New Testament books were likely written on papyrus scrolls originally. Papyrus is a reed that grew in various parts of the Mediterranean and especially the Nile delta (the pith of the plant was called *biblos*, from which we get *bibliography* and *Bible*). Sheets of woven papyrus could be glued together to form a scroll. The longest scrolls were approximately 9-10 metres long. This is just long enough for the longest New Testament books, the Gospels of Matthew or Luke, to be written on. Reed pens with ink were used for writing. It was only approximately 50-100 years after the New Testament was written that books (called *codex*) started to replace scrolls, with Christians being quick to take up this new technology.

Importantly, the writers of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were either eyewitnesses or they relied on the reports of eyewitnesses. Luke makes this clear in his opening verses: “*just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed*

*good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus* (Luke 1:2-3; see also 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 John 1:1-3).” The result of Luke’s careful investigation is that Theophilus (and we too) can be confident of the truth of the things he has learned.

### **How were duplicate copies of the different New Testament books made?**

None of the original manuscripts (called *autographs*) of the various New Testament books are available today. Presumably they have all perished over time. In the ancient world there was no way of duplicating documents, except slowly and painstakingly by hand (printing presses didn’t become widely used for the Bible until the 15<sup>th</sup> century).

### **What ancient manuscripts of the Bible do we have today?**

Ancient manuscripts for anything are very rare. As an example, in A.D. 116 the Roman historian Tacitus wrote a well-known history of the Roman Empire called *Annals of Imperial Rome*. Yet, today the earliest manuscript for this work is a copy from approximately 700 years later (it is kept in a library in Florence).

In comparison, there are approximately 5800 manuscripts and manuscript fragments for the whole of the New Testament. In addition there are thousands of translations into Coptic, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopic and other languages. Whilst the vast majority of these manuscripts were copied over 500 years after Jesus, there are many manuscripts that are less than 500 years after Jesus, in fact, far more than for any other ancient piece of writing.

The earliest fragment of the New Testament that has survived until today is called “*P*<sup>52</sup>.” It is commonly dated to A.D. 125, or within about thirty years of when the last of the New Testament books was written (it is on display in Manchester). This small piece of papyrus has John 18:31-33 on one side and verses 37-38 on the opposite side. Having writing on both sides means that it was probably part of a book, not a scroll (although see Rev. 5:1).

Another important manuscript available today is called *Codex Sinaiticus* (i.e. “book of Sinai”). It was copied approximately A.D. 350 and is the oldest complete copy of the New Testament (it also contains the Greek Old Testament as well as some other Christian books). It was discovered in 1844

in a monastery on Mount Sinai and is now kept in the British Museum. It was written on vellum parchment (tanned skins), which is far more durable than papyrus. Over 300 calves and sheep were used to produce this Bible!

### **What manuscripts are used when the New Testament is translated into English today?**

As more and more copies of the New Testament were made, it is only natural that the number of variations between the copies increased. Mostly commonly, these are the result of differences in spelling (e.g. *John* is spelt with a double *n* in one manuscript), errors in spelling, or insignificant changes in grammar etc. There is an example of variation in 2 Timothy 3:14 where Paul says, “*continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.*” Some manuscripts have “whom” as singular (probably referring to Paul himself), whilst some manuscripts have “whom” as a plural (probably referring to Paul, Timothy’s mother and grandmother). A good translation assesses each of the thousands of manuscripts before deciding on the most accurate word or phrase to give. Obviously, some translations of the Bible are better quality than others, yet we trust that as God oversees the task of translation we can be sure that what we hold in front of us is the Word of God.

### **Given all this, how are we to read God’s Word?**

Since the Bible is God’s Word to us, here are two implications;

- Firstly, we must ensure that we have a humble spirit before we come to read it. In connection with this, we should pray beforehand and resolve ourselves to follow all that it commands us. Our task is to surrender our own interests for the interests of God and seek His will.
- Secondly, we must understand *why* it was given and *how* we are to use it. Beware of reading the Bible aimlessly, or to prove a point to ourselves. As Paul says, it was given to “make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” The Bible teaches us about God and ourselves, and our need for God. It exposes my sin, yet points me to my Saviour. Then, it instructs us in how to live, equipping us for every good work.

## What is God like?

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On 12<sup>th</sup> April 1961, the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space. After his return to earth, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev is reported to have said, "Gagarin flew into space, but didn't see any god there." Sadly, Gagarin died on a training accident in 1968. More recently, Richard Dawkins has tried to assure us that there is almost certainly no God. The bible has a sober response to this: "The fool says in his heart there is no God (Ps. 14:1)." Interestingly, when we look at the Bible it does not give us a set of arguments proving the existence of God- it simply states that God exists, and this is true right from the very first sentence: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1)."

The question the Bible is more concerned with is "*what is God like?*" We must beware of the god of our imaginations! To begin with, God's character is infinite- His greatness has no limits (1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 145:3; Jeremiah 23:24; 1 Timothy 6:16), and since this is true, there is no greater knowledge than knowledge of who He is. There is a legend that when Alexander the Great reached India he looked back at all the lands he had conquered and he wept, for there were no more worlds for him to conquer. In more recent times, Boris Becker won Wimbledon twice (once as the youngest ever winner), yet he later recalled, "I was rich. I had all the material possessions I needed ... [Yet] I had no inner peace. I was a puppet on a string." The things of this world are by their nature explorable and finite- hence even the greatest experiences in life can leave us with a sense of emptiness and dissatisfied.

Yet, God is infinite in His person and being. He is not constrained by either time or space like we are. God is present everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:23-24), He is all-powerful (Job 42:2; Daniel 2:21; John 19:11) and He knows all things (1 John 3:20; Psalm 139:4). God has no need for anything, including our service (Acts 17:24-25); God does not change (Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6); God is eternal, having no beginning and no end (Psalm 90:2; Revelation 1:8). God is infinitely holy (Leviticus 11:44; Isaiah 6:3); God is just (2 Chronicles 19:7; Luke 18:7; Acts 17:31); God is love (Exodus 34:7; 1 John 4:8); God is jealous (Exodus 34:14); God is free to act in His wisdom (Daniel 4:35; Romans 11:33).

***Our aim in prayer is “God’s glory and our own true happiness”- and God has “twisted” these together.  
- Matthew Henry***

Importantly, we cannot say that God possesses more of one characteristic than other. For example, we cannot say that He is more loving than He is just. Instead, we rightly say He is perfect in His love and perfect in His justice. All His attributes stand together perfectly.

In addition to this, one of the ways that we know what God is like is by the names that He is given. Some of the names given to God in the Old Testament include;

- **“The LORD will provide”**- when the LORD provided a ram to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac, Abraham called the name of the place “the LORD will provide (Genesis 22:14).” In the New Testament, Paul says that God, “will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).”

- **“The LORD our righteousness”** - Jeremiah says this is the name that Jerusalem will be known by (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16). It is Christ Jesus who fulfills this (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- **“God most high”** - this name comes from the Hebrew word meaning to “go up,” meaning the highest. In Genesis 14:18, Melchizedek blessed Abram by “God most high.”
- **“The LORD of Hosts”** - this name of God is used especially from the time of the Old Testament monarchy onwards. In doing so, it shows that the LORD is the true ruler in charge of the armies of Israel and the hosts of angels.
- **“The LORD our shepherd”** - when Jacob blessed Joseph he acknowledged God as his shepherd even into old age (Genesis 48:15). Similarly, in Psalm 23 David looks to the LORD as his shepherd. Whilst not strictly a name, “the LORD our shepherd” teaches us that God doesn’t simply wind up the world and let it go. Instead, He is personally involved in leading His people.

There are implications to knowing who God is. By our natures we tend to think that our happiness is the centre of things- perhaps with God as a part of it. Yet, knowing who God truly is means that we understand that He is the centre and we are to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Francis of Assisi’s response should be ours:

*Praise, Praise the Father,  
Praise the Son,  
and Praise the Spirit,  
Three-in-One.  
O Praise Him, O Praise Him,  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!*

## God is three persons in one

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There are certain things that we can know about God from looking at the universe around us, for example the order in the world reveals a Creator who is powerful and majestic (Romans 1:19-21; Psalm 19:1-4). Yet, simply by looking at the world around us we cannot know that God is three persons in one being. All the science and philosophy of humanity cannot discover the true nature of God, unless He had revealed it to us more directly in His Word.

Both the Old and New Testaments declare that there is one God, our Creator, who alone is to be worshipped (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Isaiah 44:6; Mark 12:29-30; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 1 Timothy 2:5). Yet, the Bible also reveals that God is three persons- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is not a contradiction. It is saying that God is of one essence and three persons. There are signs of this in the Old Testament, for example in Genesis 1:26 God says, "Let *us* make man in *our* image." Surely, God is speaking to Himself here as He is the only person involved in making mankind. Isaiah looked forward to a *child* Messiah who would be called "Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6)," and Daniel looked forward to "one like a son of man" who would be worshipped/served and given an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14).

What is veiled in the Old Testament becomes clear in the New Testament. The Father is fully God, the Son is fully God and the Holy Spirit is fully God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are of one essence; co-eternal, co-equal and our salvation would not be possible without the involvement of each person. The Father planned and purposed salvation (Ephesians 1:3-6). The Son died upon the cross in the place of



sinners (1 Corinthians 15:3). The Holy Spirit brings sinful people to repentance and faith in Christ, and seals God's people until the final day (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Ephesians 1:13). Three important verses that teach about God are;

- **The baptism of Jesus-** *"And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:16-17)." At this moment in time, marking the beginning of Jesus ministry, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are present and distinct (see Isaiah 42:1).*

- **The Great Commission-** *"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-19)." Here at Galilee the disciples worshipped Jesus, despite the doubts of some. Jesus' commands to them are in the *singular* name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

- **Doubting Thomas-** After Jesus' resurrection from the dead, doubting Thomas put his finger into the nail marks on Jesus' hands and into His side that had been pierced by the soldier's spear. Thomas responded by declaring to Jesus, *"My Lord and my God! (John 20:28)"* – and Thomas is not blaspheming!

There are errors that we must avoid in our beliefs about God. There are *not* three Gods. There is only one God. The Son and the Spirit are *not* lesser Gods; they are fully God. There is not one God who appeared in three different forms-

Father, Son and Holy Spirit- because the Father was not crucified, and the Son prays to the Father (Luke 23:34). There is one God, three persons. Likewise, we must beware of using analogies to explain God. For example, you may have heard it said that God is like H<sub>2</sub>O, which can be in a liquid, gas or solid state. Such analogies always fall short of the reality of who God is and will likely lead into error. Above all, it is idolatry to create an image of God- either a physical image or in our minds. The God of our imaginations will always be wrong; it is the God who has revealed Himself in His Word who we are to know and love.

We must admit that this is very difficult to understand and nobody can fully understand the depth and complexity of God. Yet, when we believe what the Scriptures reveal about God, then we can

***“LORD God Almighty, I ask not to be enrolled among the earthly great and rich, but to be numbered with the spiritually blessed.” – The Valley of Vision***

know God in a true and genuine way. The entire structure of our redemption and how we are to then live as Christians is dependent upon God being three in one. If Jesus is not God incarnate then how can He be a perfect savior? Similarly, if the Holy Spirit is not God himself living and working within us then how can we be sure that our experience is true? Praise God for who He is and that He has given Himself fully for our redemption- Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

## What does it mean to be human?

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*"A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert--himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt--the Divine Reason."* - G. K. Chesterton, 1908.

In recent years there has been no greater challenge to the truth of Christianity than the challenge of what it means to be human. Gender and sexuality have become the touchstone issues of today, yet we must remember that they are merely the symptoms of a far greater problem that we all face and must address.

In order to understand what it means to be human, we must also understand God. It is only in light of Him that we can make sense of ourselves. Biblically, the starting point for understanding who we are is creation. The opening pages of the Bible begin with the special place of humanity in God's creation. Genesis 1:26-28 tells us that humans are;

- Created in the image of God
- Created male and female
- Blessed by God and given a position over the rest of creation

Being created in God's image means that we are spiritual beings who share some of God's characteristics in some way. We are both body and soul/spirit, created to love our Creator and accountable to Him. In 400 AD, Augustine wrote a book called *Confessions*. He begins by confessing to God: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you." It is worth thinking

about when sharing the gospel that the Bible begins by saying that we are created in God's image, before it says that we are sinners (also Acts 17:26-28).

A consequence of being created in God's image is that *all* people have an inherent value, no matter what ethnicity, gender, age, religion ability or disability etc. As such, God's law protected those who were most vulnerable from being disrespected or exploited (see Deuteronomy 27:18 and Leviticus 19:14), also forming the basis of a Christian's care for the poor and helpless in society.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God it scarred the image in which we were created, yet without destroying it. All people still retain God's image. Despite this, the impact of that first disobedience against God is seen in the rest of the book of Genesis- Adam and Eve's relationship with God is broken (3:22-24), Cain kills Abel (4:1-16), Noah and his son, Ham, are estranged (9:22-25), the people are

***“Despite our lowness,  
human beings aspire to  
praise You, though we be  
but a particle of Your  
creation. You awake in us a  
delight in praising You. You  
made us for Yourself and our  
heart is restless until it finds  
its place of rest in You.”  
– St Augustine***

proud (11:4), marriage is distorted (16:2), homes are divided (16:4-6) and there is terrible sexual sin (19:4-8; 34:7). And so it continues to today, right the way into your life and my life.

The result is that our experience of life is mixed; it is essentially good, but also marred by sin. There is no such thing as a perfect life and family. The effects of sin for every person who has ever lived are that it has broken our

relationship with God, it causes troubles in our relationships with other people, it causes us to exploit God's good creation and it even harms ourselves. Again, it is important to remember that all these terrible events are symptoms of our greatest problem- we no longer reflect God's image as we were created to. When Adam first disobeyed God, he was not merely setting a bad example for us. It was far deeper than that. The consequences of that first sin are that we are now "*in Adam* (1 Corinthians 15:22; also Romans 5:17-19)" and, therefore, we are *dead* before God (Ephesians 2:1-3). In short, we sin because we are sinners. The solution is not that we need to try to improve ourselves and make ourselves better humans. We need a whole new nature. Biblically, we are lifeless, before God came to rescue us.

The promise God's word gives us is that those whom God "*foreknew* he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (Romans 8:29; also Ephesians 4:41-24 and Colossians 3:10)." And so, the image of God in which we were created, *is* and *will* be restored in those who are redeemed. This begins when we come to faith in Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit works within us. Piece by piece God's perfect image is restored until we are complete in heaven.

Thomas Chalmers was one of the greatest leaders of Scottish Christians in the nineteenth century. Towards the end of his life, as he thought about what it means to be human, he said, "The older I grow (and I now stand on the brink of eternity) the more comes back to me the first sentence in the Catechism, which I learned when a child, and the fuller and deeper its meaning becomes, 'What is the chief end of man? To glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.'

## Who is Jesus Christ?

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Jesus certainly existed, but who is He? It is a question that is asked several times in the Gospels. After Jesus calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples asked themselves, "Who is this, that even the wind and the waves obey Him?" On another occasion, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am (Mark 8:29)?" And in the days before His crucifixion, Jesus asked the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" Who Jesus is, along with what He has done, stands at the heart of the Christian faith and salvation. Therefore these are important questions to answer correctly. Yet, in the early church, as today, there have been many incorrect answers. Some common errors about who Jesus is include;

- *Jesus is God, but not man.* At the time of the Apostles there was a group who became known as Docetists. They believed that Jesus was God, but that He only *seemed* to be human (the Greek word *dokeō* means "seem"). His physical body only appeared to be crucified. They wrongly taught that the physical world is inherently evil and therefore, God who is good would not enter it.

- *Jesus is not God, but the highest of God's created beings.* In the early church a group called Arians taught this. Their leader, Arius, said that there was a time when Jesus did not exist. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses believe the same error.

- *Jesus was only a man and not God.* Today, many people believe that Jesus was just a good man. In 2014, Bart Ehrman published "*How Jesus became God*" in which he claimed that the early Christians *made* Jesus divine. In the early church, the Ebionites were an early Jewish group that

believed that Jesus was God's Messiah, but that He was only a man.

Against these errors, the Westminster Larger Catechism (Q36) states: "The only Mediator of the covenant of grace is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father, in the fullness of time became man, and so was and continues to be God and man, in two entire distinct natures, and one person, forever."

**Divine**- Jesus Christ perfectly reveals God to us (John 1:14). God, who is invisible and infinite, came as a man to a finite world. Matthew's Gospel opens by telling us that Mary's baby, Jesus, is *Immanuel*- "God with us." It is more than a name; it is a statement about who Jesus is. It is a remarkable claim to make- one which neither you or I could make. Later, after Jesus rose from the dead, Thomas the sceptic places his hands in Jesus' wounds and declares, "*My Lord and my God!*" Thomas- a first century Jewish man- was convinced of Jesus' divinity!

**Man**- Jesus was completely human. He was hungry (Matthew 4:2), thirsty (John 19:28), tired and weary (John 4:6), He wept (John 11:35) and was troubled (John 12:27; Hebrews 5:7). Yet, Jesus never sinned; "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth (1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21)." Where Adam failed and we fail, He was perfectly obedient and is now our representative before God. God had to become human to achieve salvation. Romans 5:19 says, "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

Why is it significant that Jesus is both God and man? In Jesus, the vast gap separating us from God is bridged at both

ends. He was divine and became human; then everything He did, including at Calvary, was as both God and man. Now the great confidence that we have before God is that Jesus is our sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 4:15). What a comfort this is! It is the most amazing act of love- He "*emptied Himself of all but love*"- identifying with all our weaknesses in order to redeem and save His people.



## Who is the Holy Spirit?

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The Holy Spirit is our advocate or helper. On the night before His crucifixion Jesus said to His disciples, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever (John 14:16)." Just as Jesus was with His disciples, strengthening and helping them, so today God the Holy Spirit is with believers to do the same.

The most important thing to know is that the Holy Spirit is God and He is a person. Unlike the teachings of many cults, He is not a force like gravity or karma. God the Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son. Hence, we can lie to the Holy Spirit and to lie to Him is the same as to lie to God (Acts 5:3-4). Because He is a person we can tempt Him (Acts 5:9), we can grieve Him (Ephesians 4:30), but the greatest wrong against the Holy Spirit is to blaspheme Him (Matthew 12:31).

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was active at creation (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4). He gave people the ability to lead and serve God's people (Judges 14:19; Exodus 31:3). The Holy Spirit was "in"

***"Our ultimate position as Christians is tested by the character of our prayer life. It is more important than knowledge and understanding. Do not imagine that I am detracting from the importance of knowledge. I spend most of my life trying to show the importance of having a knowledge of truth and an understanding of it. That is vitally important. There is only one thing that is more important, and that is prayer."***

***– Martyn Lloyd Jones***

Joshua (Numbers 27:18). He “clothed” Gideon (Judges 6:34). He “rushed upon” Sampson (Judges 14:6), David (1 Samuel 16:13) and Saul (1 Samuel 10:10. Note, the Holy Spirit later “departed” from Saul in 1 Samuel 16:14). In the book of Ezekiel (593 BC to 573 BC) the Holy Spirit is promised in a new and powerful way. God will give a new heart and spirit to His people, saying, “I will put my Spirit within you (Ezekiel 36:27).” Joel too, looked forward to a time when God said He would, “pour out my Spirit on all flesh.” After Jesus’ resurrection from the dead the Holy Spirit comes in power and the disciples realize that Joel’s prophecy was now being fulfilled (Acts 2:15-21).

Some of the powerful things that the Holy Spirit does in the life of a Christian are;

- Firstly, He makes us Christians, that is, He makes us born-again (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5). He does not add anything to what Christ Jesus achieved in His death and resurrection, but He brings us to believe these truths. John Calvin says, “The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectively binds us to Himself.”
- He convicts us of sin and the righteousness of God (John 16:8). No amount of finger pointing can cause a person to repent, but only the work of the Holy Spirit within them. The great comfort we have in this is that the Holy Spirit is able to reach where we cannot.
- He draws our attention to Christ Jesus. In one sense He is *out of view* in order that Christ Jesus will be glorified. In John 16:14 Jesus says, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”
- He lives in us, taking up permanent residency (John 14:17).

- He “seals” us and guarantees us that God’s promises to us are true (Ephesians 1:13-14).
- He gives every Christian spiritual gifts to serve God and to build up His people. These are to be used for the “common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-13).”
- He makes us more like the Lord Jesus Christ, producing in us His fruit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Think about the great comfort it is to know that God the Holy Spirit lives within. Although we battle with ongoing sin, His work is powerful and we rightly praise and worship Him. In 1740, Charles Wesley wrote the following words, which are the prayer of every Christian;

*Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire;  
Let us Your influence prove,  
Source of the old prophetic fire,  
Fountain of life and love.*

## The Atonement

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What happened at the cross? Was it the tragic death of an innocent man- an ugly example of how justice can be corrupted? Or was it merely a great example of God's love? Whilst there is some truth in each of these, in God's plan to save His people something was achieved at the cross: atonement for sins resulting in reconciliation with God. Christ's death is of such importance that the Apostle Paul told the church in Corinth, "I was determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2)." In the same letter, he says that the cross is a stumbling block to some and foolish to others, but for those who know salvation it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18 and 23).

Understanding who God is, is the starting point for understanding the cross. One of the things that you realise as a Christian is that when you grow closer to God it is bittersweet. There is nothing sweeter than being assured of God's love and knowing His comfort, yet the closer that we come to God the grubbier our sin looks. God's holiness exposes our sin. It is a humbling experience.

***"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."***  
***– Matthew 6:6-8***

Adam's sin- which we share in- brought death to humanity (Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12-19): "The wages of sin are death (Romans 6:23)." God's holiness means that He cannot overlook sin or bear sin or sinners in His presence (Exodus 34:7). Thus the tabernacle and temple were to be kept holy, just as the New Jerusalem will be holy (Revelation 21:27). Yet, Christ Jesus' death perfectly pays sin's price that was ours to pay.

***Christ's perfect obedience-*** Jesus lived the life that we do not and cannot live. He perfectly obeyed His Father (Matthew 26:39; John 4:34; 18:11), including drinking the bitter cup of God's righteous wrath to the end (Philippians 2:7-8; Hebrews 5:8-9; 10:8-10). Even at the time of His death, Jesus' behavior towards His killers is an example to us of how we are to behave (1 Peter 2:21-23) and an example of the love that we are to show to other Christians (1 John 3:16). It is His perfect obedience that is the basis for the atonement (Romans 5:19).

***Christ's perfect atonement-*** In fulfilling the Old Testament, Jesus is both priest and sacrifice. As a priest He deals with a holy God on our behalf (Hebrews 4:14-16). As sacrifice He gave of Himself to perfectly satisfy divine justice (Hebrews 10:10-12). At the cross God the Son is forsaken by God the Father, bearing His wrath and under His curse (Matthew 27:46; Galatians 3:13). God's wrath against sinners is appeased or *propitiated* by Christ's death (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10)- and God in His justice cannot demand payment for sin twice, once from Christ and then from us! In this way, the cross perfectly demonstrates the justice of God in that sin is dealt with, and it perfectly demonstrates the love

of God in that Christ Jesus freely died for His people. Some people stumble at this point, but a Christian is filled with a sense of love and gratitude to God for His love towards us. His atonement covers His sheep (John 10:11,15) or the church (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25)- all who trust in Him for salvation and hear His voice.

Christ's complete and perfect atonement results in justification (Romans 8:30), adoption into God's family (John 1:12-13), salvation (Acts 4:12) and sanctification (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Thomas Brooks said it well: "Our sins are debts that none can pay but Christ. It is not our tears, but his blood; it is not our sighs, but his sufferings, that can satisfy for our sins... Christ must pay all, or we are prisoners for ever. We stand in need of one that is rich in goodness. We are a needy people..."

## Repentance and Faith

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Sometimes a person can feel sad for their wrongdoing, yet it is not true repentance. Paul calls this “worldly sorrow” and he says it “produces death (2 Corinthians 7:10).” It can be more like remorse or regret- it is a sorrow at what has happened and maybe at the consequences, but it is not a true turning from sin to God and it does nothing to change the heart. When King Ahab heard God’s judgment against him, he “tore his clothes and put sackcloth on” and God relented (1 Kings 21:25-29), but it didn’t result in anything lasting for in the next chapter Ahab refuses to listen to God. The warning is that a little repentance is a dangerous thing for it can get us thinking we have done well, but if it is not genuine sorrow before God then Paul warns us that it only results in death.

In contrast, “godly sorrow produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret (2 Corinthians 7:10).” Godly sorrow leads us to God, albeit in painful way. We start to hate the things that God hates, including the sin that we see in our own lives. This type of repentance is no mere outward show or shallow response. In Psalm 51, King David is at his lowest point, broken by his sin as he comes before the LORD. Likewise, on the day of Pentecost there were some who were “cut to the heart” by what they heard, yet they repented, were baptized and they were happy (Acts 2:37-38, 46-47). Joel pictures this repentance as tearing our hearts and we are told to return to the LORD with all our heart (Joel 2:12-13). Repentance is not simply a once off prayer, it is the constant attitude of a Christian who knows God. True repentance always leads to change in a person’s life (Matthew 7:17; Luke 3:8; John 8:11; Acts 26:20). Seventeen years ago Dr. Rosaria

Butterfield began her walk from pride, which showed itself in sexual sin, towards God (she is now married to a minister of the *Reformed Presbyterian Church*). She later wrote: *“There is only one thing to do when you meet the Living God; you must fall on your face and repent of your sins. Repentance is bittersweet business... Repentance is the only no shame solution to a renewed Christian conscience, because it only proves the obvious: God was right all along.”*

Faith goes side-by-side with repentance, for when I turn away from my sin I turn in faith to Christ Jesus. Yet, just like repentance, there is a danger that faith can be faulty or fall short of salvation. In John 4:47, Jesus rebukes the crowd for needing to see signs and wonders. A faulty faith looks for signs and wonders. More seriously, a person may profess to be a Christian, yet their motives and attitudes show that they are not. Simon Magus was baptized, yet he thought that he could buy the “gift of God” and Peter has to tell him that his heart is not right before God (Acts 8:20-21). Similarly, it is common for people to say that they believe that there is a God, but this is not enough. James warns us that even the demons believe this- and shudder (James 2:19)! True, saving faith receives Jesus Christ and rests on Him alone for salvation. It is believing all that the Bible tells us about Him. The question is *not*, is my faith strong enough to save me? But, *where* does my faith lie? We are commanded to repent and trust in Christ (Matthew 4:17; Acts 17:30; 1 John 3:23); and repentance and faith are gifts from God (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25; John 6:37, 44; Ephesians 2:8).

In the story *Pilgrim’s Progress* when Christian comes to Jesus’ cross and sees his burden fall from his shoulders and roll into the grave he is left *“gazing at the cross, wondering*



how the sight of the cross could so relieve one of guilt and shame... He was so thankful and so full of joy that the tears began to flow."

The promise that God's word

gives us (three times!) is that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

***"We should believe that nothing is too small to be named before God.***

***What should we think of the patient who told his doctor he was ill, but never went into particulars?"***

***- J.C. Ryle***

## The world, the flesh and the Devil

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There are three great enemies we face: the world opposed to God, our own sinful desires (the flesh) and the Devil. In Ephesians 2:1-2 we read of all three killing us before God: *"...you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air (i.e. the Devil)."*

**The dangers of the world-** God's "very good (Genesis 1:31)" world shows us something of His glory and power (Romans 1:20). But now, it is frustrated (Romans 8:20) and worse still, it is often opposed to God. John says, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15)."* The world has a way of strangling us spiritually. In the parable of the four soils, the seed that fell amongst the thorns represents, *"the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful (Matthew 13:22)."* Sometimes the world's dangers are obvious, but more often they are subtle. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land Moses warned them, *"when you eat and are full- take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Deuteronomy 6:11)."* There is such a thing as a contented worldliness.

**The dangers of the flesh-** In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul gives a list of *"works of the flesh"* that flow out of our sinful nature. They include sexual immorality, enmity, jealousy, fits of anger, drunkenness etc. Yet, sin is also far deeper than the behaviors that we display. It begins in the heart and mind and is evidence that our own sinful natures (i.e. the flesh) are opposed to God and battle against us. Paul says, *"the mind*

*that is set on the flesh is hostile to God” and those who live according to the flesh “cannot please God (Romans 8:7-8).” John Owen said that, “The vigor, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the killing of the deeds of the flesh.”*

**The dangers of the Devil-** the Devil, or Satan is our adversary (“Satan” means “adversary”) and accuser (Revelation 12:10). Satan has some freedom to harm believers (Job 1:12). Peter says he is like a *“roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).”* Yet, we are to resist him and stand firm in the faith. Many professing Christians fall into the danger of thinking there is no Devil- no doubt that pleases him! The opposite error is to take an unhealthy interest in him and believe he is stronger than he is. Satan’s task is to oppose and tempt Christians away from God. His dishonesty is such that he even *“disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).”*

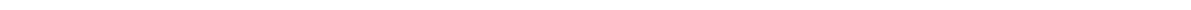
***I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD...”***  
***- Psalm 121:1-2***

**The victory of Jesus-** despite these three great dangers against us we must remember that our Lord, Christ Jesus, has defeated them all. On the night before His death, Jesus said to His disciples, *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).”* Although Jesus shares our humanity He did not sin, but overcame sin (Hebrews 4:15). Moreover, He breaks the power of sin in us (Romans 6:6), so that Christians now live *“according to the Spirit”* and seek the *“things of the Spirit (Romans 8:4-5).”* Jesus deals with the root of sin within us,

which then changes our outward behavior. Finally, Jesus by His life, death and resurrection has defeated the works of the Devil (Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

John Newton had it right;

*“Lord, be my Shield and Hiding-place,  
that sheltered near Your side;  
I may my fierce accuser face,  
And tell him You have died.”*



## What does God require of us? – God’s law

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God as our Creator made us to live by His laws. We owe God obedience as a matter of right, yet God’s laws are also a source of blessing. Psalm 119 begins by saying, *“Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.”* Psalm 19:7 says, *“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul... more to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey...”*

Despite this, as gospel-Christians we are often unsure of the place of God’s laws in our lives. A good starting point is to realize that both law and gospel came from the same God. John Calvin summarized the three main uses of God’s law as being;

- To show us our sin, and so lead us to Christ Jesus. Like a mirror, God’s perfect law shows up the ugliness of our sin. In Romans 3:20, Paul says that the law *cannot* set us free, *“since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”* When I read that I am to love God with all my heart and my neighbor as myself I realize that I haven’t done this. This is the first step in leading me to Christ my Saviour. Martin Luther summarized it this way: *“The law discovers the disease. The gospel gives the remedy.”*

- To restrain evil- at least to a degree- in both Christian and non-Christian. If a person knows that stealing is wrong then they are less likely to steal.

- To show us what pleases God and therefore, how we as Christians are to live. Christians delight in God’s law because it comes from God and it pleases Him when we obey Him. Jesus said, *“If you love me, keep my commandments* (John 14:15).”

It is also necessary to see that the law had different functions at different times in history. The Westminster Confession (I think helpfully) divides God's law into three basic categories. God's *Moral law* (e.g. the ten commandments) is eternal and is written on the hearts of all people, albeit it is distorted by sin (Romans 2:14-15; Hence, even before the ten commandments were given Cain knew that it was wrong to kill Abel). The Lord Jesus summed up this law by saying we are to love God with every fibre of our being and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Additionally, God gave His Old Testament people *Ceremonial laws* (e.g. laws about sacrifice, feasts, clean and unclean food etc) and *Civil laws* that were specifically for Israel as a nation (e.g. Leviticus 25:29, "*If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, he may redeem it within a year of its sale...*").

When Jesus Christ came, He said that He did *not* come in order to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). He "filled up" or attained the goal of the law.

***O LORD God, You have  
commanded me to believe in  
Jesus; and I would flee to no  
other refuge, wash in no other  
fountain, build on no other  
foundation, receive no other  
fullness, rest in no other relief.  
- Valley of Vision***

Jesus *did* what God requires of us- He fulfilled the law, perfectly obeying His Father, and He fulfilled the *Ceremonial* and *Civil* parts of the law. In this way, the Old Testament laws about ceremonial cleanliness, clean and unclean foods and various sacrifices are not done away with because they are outdated; they are done away with because they are fulfilled

by Jesus (Mark 7:18-19; Galatians 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:15-16). At the cross, Jesus' death cancelled the "*record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross* (Colossians 2:14)." We are no longer under the condemnation of God's law and forgiven by Him. Yet, grace also confirms God's law. The freedom that we now have from obeying Jewish ceremonial laws is *not* replaced by a freedom to do what we like, but a freedom to obey His will. We are still called to fulfill "*the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2)." It is this desire to obey God and fulfill the law of Christ that is one of the marks of a true Christian.

## What is worship? – Part 1 of 2

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You and I are spiritual beings and therefore worshipping beings. God's image within us means that we have both a duty and a need to worship. Psalm 95 calls everyone to worship: "Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! (v.9)"

Worship is the right response of people to the graciousness of God by humbly bringing Him the honour and glory that is due to His name. In simple terms, "True worship is a valuing or a treasuring of God above all things (John Piper)." Whilst these definitions are a good start, they only scratch the surface of the true depth of what it means to worship God. God is the reason and the centre of worship with love for Him compelling us to worship. Worship involves far more than our feelings. Just as Jesus said we are to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength (Matthew 22:37), so too worship involves every part of our being. Worship begins as a matter of the heart and then shows itself outwardly. The great tragedy is that although God has made us to glorify and enjoy Him forever (Revelation 4:11), we refuse to recognize this and we end up worshipping the things that God has said that we mustn't worship (Romans 1:21-22).

The Bible is abundantly clear that only God is to be worshiped. Deuteronomy 6:13-15 says, "*It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God.*" Jesus says the same to Satan in Matthew 4:10 (see also Acts 10:25-26; Acts 14:8-18; Revelation 19:9-10 and 22:8-9). In the Old Testament



Abraham worshipped God (Genesis 22:5). Under the law of Moses worship was centred on the tabernacle and later the temple as the place where God met with His people and sin was atoned for. One of the principles of the Old Testament is that you become like that which you worship. Psalm 115 praises God's steadfast love and faithfulness, yet says that those who trust in idols become like them. Everyone is a worshipper- and we become like the thing or person that we worship.

True worship is always centred on God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We lift our minds to God knowing that our worship is only acceptable because of God the Son, Jesus Christ. Without redemption we could not worship, but by His death the temple curtain separating us from God has been torn (Matthew 27:51). It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the desire and correct attitude to worship. As Christians, we are those who "worship by the Spirit of God" and we "glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:3)."

We must beware that our worship not be meaningless- and even worse, a mockery of God. Worship can become an outward show or duty and lose its meaning. We are warned against taking vows without meaning it (Ecclesiastes 5:5). The Lord Jesus said of the Pharisees (quoting Isaiah 29:13), "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Hypocrisy in worship is appalling to God. In the time of Ezekiel, worship in Jerusalem had become so corrupted that the glory of the LORD departed from the temple (Ezekiel 11:22-25). Similarly, Jesus cleansed the temple twice during His ministry (John 2:13-22; Mark 11:15-19). We worship God when we gather together on the Lord's Day (Sunday) and we worship God in what we do in our lives throughout the week.

These two must be in harmony. Worship is not separate from love for God and obedience to His Word. It is hypocrisy to come and sing praise God, but then to live as I like during the week and excuse my sin.

In the next newsletter I will try to give some more practical applications as we think about worship, but for now worship God, because of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

## What is worship? – part 2 of 2

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Worship is the worth that we owe to God as our Creator. It is part of obeying the first commandment- “You shall have no other gods before me (Exodus 20:3).” We are called to “to *worship and glorify [God] accordingly, by thinking, meditating, remembering, highly esteeming, honoring, adoring, choosing, loving, desiring, fearing of him; believing him; trusting, hoping, delighting, rejoicing in him; being zealous for him; calling upon him, giving all praise and thanks, and yielding all obedience and submission to him with the whole man; being careful in all things to please him, and sorrowful when in anything he is offended; and walking humbly with him* (Westminster Larger Catechism, question 104).”

Worship must be, as the Lord Jesus said, “In spirit and in truth (John 4:24).” True worship is an exercise of faith that only Christians can do. It is an inward matter of the heart that is then seen in how we live our lives. Yet, the Bible also anticipates that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Philippians 2:10; see also Revelation 15:3-4).” Worship is always in response to what God has revealed about Himself, foundationally in His Word.

In the following points, offer some basic thoughts on worship together for you to think over with the prayer that these will lead us deeper in our love for and enjoyment of God;

- Music is to aid us in praising God. In Psalm 150, the LORD is praised with a variety of musical instruments (e.g. trumpet, flute, cymbals, harp). Yet the focus is on the LORD, not on the instruments.

- There are dangers in entertainment worship (see Ezekiel 33:32). So too, there are dangers in self-denial or austerity as the focus of worship (Colossians 2:23).
  - As the Puritans believed, we are to worship God together only as He has told us He is to be worshiped (“regulative principle of worship”). For them, this meant that anything that was not mandated by God’s Word was avoided.
    - Again, as the Puritans believed, we should worship God in simplicity. Whilst we should be sensitive to culture, we should seek for simplicity of worship over worship that is culture driven.
      - We worship God as we listen to His Word read and preached. Richard Baxter said that after church, “Chew the cud, and call up all when you come home in secret, and by meditation preach it over to yourselves.” Al Mohler has written that, “Expository preaching [i.e. bringing out from the Bible what is there] is central, irreducible, and nonnegotiable to the Bible’s mission of authentic worship that pleases God.”
        - Our worship together is to be edifying or “building up” of others (1 Corinthians 14:26). Worship is individual and communal (John 17:20-23; 1 Corinthians 10:17; Hebrews 10:24-25). Whilst nothing kills public worship like an air of cold formalism without any passion (i.e. going through the motions), likewise, nothing distorts worship like ill-discipline. Paul tells the church in Corinth, “all things should be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).” If it does not build up our brothers and sisters in Christ, then it should be avoided.

To rightly worship God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit- brings nourishment and refreshment to our souls in a way that nothing else can.

## What is church?

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Before my father became a Christian, he thought that churches were simply another club that people who were a little religiously minded could decide to join. It was only after he came to faith that he realized that the church is God's people united to Christ Jesus, brought together by Him and for His glory. Its origins are entirely supernatural, as it is God who brings us together. Various denominations arise, at times necessarily, yet there still remains only one church.

As Christians, we are united with believers from the Old Testament. Paul describes gentile Christians as "wild olive shoots" that have been grafted into and share the same root as Jewish believers (Romans 11:11-24). We hold to the same promises and salvation as Old Testament believers (Hebrews 11). This means that what is said of Israel (Exodus 19:6) can be applied to the Church (1 Peter 2:5). Yet the church is also a *new* community, because Christ Jesus is superior to the old covenant with Moses with its earthly tabernacle and priests. He is the supreme high priest (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:23-25). In addition, from the time of Pentecost in Acts 2, we have the Holy Spirit poured upon us in a greater way than Old Testament believers knew.

As a consequence of Christ Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit, it doesn't matter whether people are rich or poor, slaves or free, old or young, we meet together as God's people. Ethnic divisions are also done away with as the "dividing wall of hostility" between Jew and Gentile is broken down (Ephesians 2:14). Our ancestry is unimportant. This has profound implications; it means that when I meet a believer from another country, even though I cannot speak their language, we are nonetheless brothers and sisters in Christ!

The church in the New Testament is commonly pictured as being;

- Christ's bride. He has committed Himself to us (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 21:9-10);
- Christ's body. He is the head and we His body, all with different roles and functions, so that, "the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (1 Corinthians 12:21 and Ephesians 4:15-16);
- Christ's branches. We only find our life and fruitfulness by being in Him (John 15:1-8).
- Christ's family (Matthew 25:40 and Hebrews 2:11).

It is important to recognize that *outwardly* the church will never be pure. Our task is to reform to God's Word, yet Martin Luther also said, "Farewell to those who want an entirely pure and purified church. This is plainly wanting no church at all." The church always has and always will have its charlatans. Jesus said there would be the people who call Him, "Lord, Lord" and yet He never knew them (Matthew 7:21-23). He warned of "ravening wolves" dressed in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15)." Yet, He said we can recognize them by their fruits (v.16).

***"So how is God glorified by prayer? Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that he will provide the help we need."***  
***- John Piper***

The pattern in the New Testament seems to be that God has given each local church *elders* to shepherd them

spiritually (1 Timothy 3:1-8 and Titus 1), and *deacons* to care for people's needs (Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Hebrews 10:25 tells us: "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." You will find that as you grow in love for God, you will also grow in his love for God's people. In New Testament times local churches met in people's homes (Romans 16:3) or perhaps other spaces, such as the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9).

Often when we think of the church, both local and worldwide, it looks weak and likely to crumble. Yet, remember that it is God's church and just as He reserved for Himself 7000 who did not bow the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18 and Rom.11:4), so too we trust that He will always have His own people. Christianity will look fragile, but it will never become extinct, as God will keep us.

## What happens after I die?

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What happens after I die? It is one of the most difficult and yet pressing questions that we can ask. Some people ignore the question; for others it causes great unrest. The Bible makes clear that death is *not* natural. God's creation was "very good," but death has intruded as a consequence of sin (Romans 6:23; 5:12-14). God is the God of life and as people created in His image perhaps that is why death rattles us so much. Despite this, death is inescapable. The Apostle Paul called death "the last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26)." It is God's enemy and our enemy. It can be delayed, but there is no cure for it.

In the Old Testament the word *sheol* is generally used to describe the place where all people go after they die. The book of Hebrews makes clear that, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (9:27)." Life is not reincarnated, nor recycled, nor does the body simply decay in the ground, but one day we must face God. Jim Packer says, "Death is decisive for destiny. After death there is no possibility of salvation for the lost (Luke 16:26)- from then on both the godly and the ungodly reap what they sowed in this life (Gal. 6:7-8)."

Heaven and Hell are both clearly taught in the Scriptures. In fact, nobody spoke more about hell in the Bible than Christ Jesus. He called hell "*Gehenna*;" the burning rubbish dump outside of Jerusalem, and He compared hell to a prison (Matthew 23:33), to "outer darkness (Matthew 22:13)" and to "a fire (Mark 9:43)." C.S. Lewis described hell as a place where people get their own selfish desires- "I am my own," yet without God it never satisfies. Yet hell is ultimately, God's righteous and eternal punishment for sin



and sinfulness. If we are saved it is entirely by the grace of God, and if we face God's judgment it is due to our own sin. God is, and will be, forever just.

**The death of Death-** in the same chapter that Paul calls death the "last enemy," he also says that the risen Lord Jesus has given Christians the victory over death and sin (1 Corinthians 15:56-57). He has achieved this by first dying and rising Himself: "... in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20)." We are like fruit that comes later in the season; after Him, the Firstfruit.

What happens to a believer at the moment of death? Surely, Christ Jesus gives the clearest answer to the thief on the cross. He said, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise (Luke 23:43)." Often this is called the intermediate state, that is, the time between a person's death and their final resurrection when Christ returns. The thief's body would have decayed in a crude grave outside the city, but his soul went immediately to be consciously and contentedly with the Lord Jesus. There he awaits the final resurrection of the body (Philippians 3:20-21). This gives us great comfort and it is the reason why a Christian's funeral will have a different tone to it than other funerals. Whilst we are sad, we do not grieve like those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). John Newton prayed, "Let me live a life of faith; Let me die thy people's death." Just as the material things of God's creation were originally good, so too the new heavens and new earth will be physical or material; not just spirit.

Despite this, a Christian may still fear that they do not have the strength to face their death. Our trust at this time is

that the Lord will give the strength we need at the moment that we need it- and not before. Even though our death may be difficult, "the Lord of faith makes the waters low, to suit the state of His beloved ones (William Mason)." Among John Knox's final words were, "Live in Christ, live in Christ, and the flesh need not fear death."

## Christ Jesus' return

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The world cannot continue in its present state for eternity; an end must come. In November 2016, the famous scientist Stephen Hawking gave a time limit for how long he thinks humanity can survive on earth before destruction: "I don't think we will survive another 1,000 years without escaping beyond our fragile planet." Then in January 2017, Lawrence Krauss (another famous scientist) in front of the media showed the "Doomsday Clock" only 2 ½ minutes until midnight. He thinks the world is the closest it has been to catastrophe since 1953. The Bible says that although there may be disasters, "the last day (John 11:24)" will come when Christ returns. This can cause great confusion and disagreement amongst Christians, yet several things are clear;

- The date of His return is unknown; not even Christ Himself knows. So we must not try to guess! (Matthew 24:36)
- Before He returns, the gospel will go to the ends of the earth (Matthew 24:14).
- Before He returns, times of great trouble will come: "that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first (2 Thessalonians 2:3; also Matthew 24:12; 2 Timothy 3:1-7)."
- Before He returns, many will abandon the truth (2 Timothy 4:3-4).
- Before He returns, "all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26)."
- Before He returns, many antichrists and an antichrist will come (1 John 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; maybe Revelation 13:1-10).
- Before He returns, signs and wonders will be seen (Matthew 24:4-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:9).

Christ's return will be in His glorified body (Acts 1:11), it will be as unexpected as "a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3)," it will be seen by all (Revelation 1:7) and it will be the beginning of the final judgment (John 5:28-29). At this time even the creation will be freed from its frustration and corruption (Romans 8:19-21). How do we know this will happen? The Apostle Paul tells us that, "God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world... and of this he has given assurance to all by raising [Jesus] from the dead (Acts 17:31)." Christ's resurrection from the dead is the proof of God's coming judgment. Some people may ask, why is the Lord is so slow in bringing justice? Peter's response in the first century was simply: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9)."

***"I rest my soul on Jesus,  
This weary soul of mine,  
His right hand me embraces;  
I on his breast recline.  
I love the name of Jesus,  
Immanuel, Christ, the Lord..."***  
- ***Horatius Bonar***

There are some Christians that hold that the "thousand years (or *millennium*)" spoken of in Revelation 20:1-10 will be a literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth (*premillennial*). Other Christians hold that the number is symbolic and refers to the time between Christ first and second comings (*amillennial*), and still other Christians believe that Christ will return *after* this period when there will be a time of peace and justice on the earth as the gospel spreads (*postmillennial*). Whichever way it is understood the point of many of Jesus' parables is simply that we are to be ready and prepared for

His return (e.g. Mark 13:33-37; Matthew 24:36-44; 45-51; 25:1-13 and 25:14-30). Being prepared *never* means to passively sit back and wait. It always means to trust in God's promises and to give of ourselves to Him and His kingdom. Richard Baxter said: "To do no harm (i.e. nothing) is praise fit for a stone, not of a man." God expects fruitfulness from us.

What is Christ Jesus doing now as He awaits His return? The answer given in Hebrews 7:25 is that He ever lives to pray and intercede on our behalf (see also Romans 8:34). Jesus is now praying and interceding on our behalf.

*Christ is coming!*

*Let creation from her groans and anguish cease...*

*Come O blessed Prince of Peace.*

- John Ross Macduff, 1818-1895.