

The Nature of God

Introduction

It comes as a great surprise to those who have spent their entire lives in a city. The first time they are in the desert at night—really in the desert, far from any other sources of light—they see stars. Not just the puny dozen or so you can see through the city lights. Not even the ones on the astronomy charts they saw in ninth grade science. Stars; thousands of them. It brings a sense of awe, followed by a sense of wonder. Where did all this vast universe (of which our eyes can see very little) come from?

From the beginning of mankind we have reached for an explanation of how the universe came about. One explanation has stood the test of time: God created it. In this lesson we will be examining the God of creation—and we will discover that we already know quite a bit about him.

God as revealed in nature

What can we learn from nature about this God? Those who have pursued this in the philosophic sense have been able to come up with a fairly good list.

Let's start with a rather obvious observation: nothing in this universe ever caused its own existence. But the universe is clearly here. What do we conclude?

- God is the creating God—the one who made all things which have been made.
- But since he is not a created thing, his existence must be somewhat different from ours. He is not made of matter—because if He were, He'd be a part of the universe (and how then could he have created it?) Therefore God is not material; therefore He must be spirit.

Another observation is this: the universe obeys fixed laws. Those laws are not fully within man's comprehension (which keeps physicists gainfully employed), but it is clear that the universe is a well designed and well ordered thing. From the art you will know the artist. Not only is God the creator; He is the one who knows all things. It could not be oth-

Genesis 1:1-28

John 4:24

See, for example, Isaiah
40:27-28



We are not trying to “prove” the existence of God in this lesson. Indeed, it is worth noting that the Bible starts by assuming you know he exists—and then explaining what he did in creation.

This is roughly the same argument that Paul makes at the beginning of the Book of Romans.

We are speaking here primarily of God the Father—though the distinction will have to wait for a while.

See, for example, Exodus 3:14—where God introduces Himself to Moses as “I AM”.

Matthew 19:26

Psalms 139:5-12

erwise. This is called omniscience.

Consider one other observation of the universe—let's get personal here. If your mother had told your father she had a headache that night, you wouldn't be here. There is nothing in the universe which requires you to exist. Indeed, for each of us, we are “contingent” beings—we depend upon someone else to cause our existence. Your grandfathers and grandmothers take it back one more step. But it's easy to see that this chain has to stop somewhere. Somewhere back there, trace it how you will, the first link in the chain is someone who is not contingent. That someone is God—and now we know that his existence *is* required. He is said, therefore, to be Self-Existent.

We can take things a bit further by noting that the universe is in motion. You don't need too much in the way of physics to know that nothing ever set itself in motion—there is always a cause. Trace that back through the history of the universe. Somebody had to give things the initial shove. That's God; the prime mover—and that implies that he has all power over the universe. He is omnipotent.

Finally, we notice that the universe had a start date. If the universe was eternal, we know from the laws of physics that it would be completely run down, nothing moving. But we see that this is not so; therefore the universe had a time of beginning. But we also note that “time” does not apply to the one who created the universe; he is beyond its control. He is, therefore, eternal. He is spirit, we know—and therefore he is everywhere present in the universe which is his creation.

So—what do we know from nature? God is

- Self-existent—eternal, uncreated.
- Creator—omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent.
- The uncaused cause; the only necessary being.

That would be good enough for some. Indeed, many would prefer to stop here—after all, this God might want something from me. But we have another source of information. It's the Bible. In a very real sense the Bible is nothing less than the record of God's intervention in human affairs. Over the course of about 1500 years He sent messengers to tell the world just what He is like—and what He wants from us.

From the root “omni” meaning “all” and our word “science”, meaning knowledge.

“omni” + “potent” - figure that one.

If you want to get into this, it's the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Try to stay away from any theory in particular about the creation—the physicists are still exploring the problem.

You might want to point out here that if God chose not to reveal himself, this would be what we would know.

It's worth noting that the description of God at this point says nothing about either compassion or righteousness. From these observations alone He might be only a philosophical footnote.

Learning from the Bible

It is fascinating to note that the Bible nowhere attempts to prove the existence of God. It's as if the authors did not wish to waste ink on what was an obvious point. Why is it obvious? Well, the first five books of the Bible were written down by a fellow named Moses. His experience in dealing with God showed so much miraculous power that it would never have occurred to him to ask if it was all a hallucination.

What else, then, has been revealed about God in the Bible? It's a pretty long list.

The list of attributes of God revealed in the Bible is rather extensive. It is convenient to divide them into two categories: those dealing with his compassion and mercy, and those dealing with his righteousness.

Love

1 John 4:8-10

We are explicitly told in the New Testament that God *is* love. This is the culmination of the picture of the Old Testament, where over and over again God is described in two words:

Psalms 103:8-10

- He is *compassionate*. Once you see this, you can see that God is not a "force" - but a person. He is in great sympathy with our weaknesses and desires to aid us in our misfortunes.

Micah 7:18-19

- He is *merciful*. When the time comes for judgment, His desire is to be merciful to those He loves. But "merciful" implies a God who judges us, doesn't it?

Righteousness

From your earliest days you have believed that there is such a thing as "right and wrong." We may not all agree on what is right in a particular situation, but we do agree (at least most of us) that right and wrong exist. The Bible reveals to us righteousness in God's character. We find three aspects of that character:

Psalms 71:15

- He is *righteous*—in the sense that He cannot do anything morally wrong. We also call this being sinless.

Psalms 33:4-5

- He is *truth*—everything He reveals to us is trustworthy; He is not capable of lying to us.

Psalms 104:24

- He is *wisdom*—not only sinless and trustworthy, but He has "the right

C'mon, you've all seen Charlton Heston as Moses in "The Ten Commandments" - same story!!

"Being a person" does not equal "having a body". Rather, it means that he has a personality.

If you are not on trial, what need do you have of mercy? Even in mercy we see His righteousness.



What a puny list this is! We are skipping so much about the character of God. The best reference to find out more: Nave's Topical Bible. Just check under "God."

2 Samuel 22:31

answer” every time.

The Hebrew people had a word for this: *emeth*. It can be translated “truth” or “wisdom” - but the closest English language phrase just might be “holds water.” Whatever God tells us, therefore, we should be wise enough to hear.

That’s why Christians read the Bible so much. It is the record of God speaking to man—and every word of His is flawless.

We will cover this more in detail later, but for right now we can say that this applies to God the Father most explicitly. We’ll deal with Jesus and the Holy Spirit in future lessons.

What’s that got to do with me?

Good question.

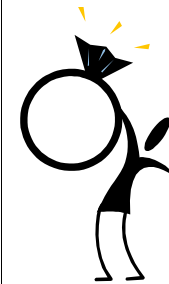
Psalm 8

Did you ever wonder why we begin our worship service with praise songs about God? It’s not just to warm up the crowd. It’s because the character and actions of God deserve our praise.

“Deserve” our praise? Yes. His character is so far superior to ours that nothing less than praise is the right reaction to God. The reasons we have seen here; the actions are recorded for us in the Bible.

If God simply wanted us to read His press clippings this would be rather dull stuff. He has another purpose, however. It is his desire that man would know Him and enjoy Him forever. If you’ve ever wondered why some Christians seem lost in ecstasy when singing God’s praises, there is a reason. Only in song can the Christian actively love God with all heart, soul, mind and strength.

This is what Christians know about God. God’s righteousness carries with it a bitter implication. He is completely righteous. We’re not. So we should expect a God who is angry with us—and not because it’s His fault. As Pogo once said, “We have met the enemy—and he is us!”



The parallel to the diamond is worth exploring. As you hold up a large gem and turn it in your hand, you see new depths in it. The greater the gem, the more varied the depths. The Bible is such a gem; Christians who read it regularly find that its depths are ever new.



This would be a good question to ask the class, & get 2-3 minutes of discussion on the subject.



Pogo was a comic strip running from the 1940s into the 1960s. It usually featured homely wisdom with a wry punch line.

The Nature of Man

Heavenly Argument

It happened this way. Two angels, Michael and Gabriel, were having coffee in the lounge and discussing how to resolve a bet. Michael thinks that man is basically good—what does man in is a combination of upbringing, environment and misunderstanding. Gabriel thinks man is rotten to the core. The question is, how do we resolve the bet?

Michael: The first thing have to do is eliminate childhood. That's where most of man's bad habits are formed.

Gabriel: In other words, we get The Boss to create a man who is already and adult?

Michael: Right. No parents, no problems, Gabe.

Gabriel: OK—but an “adult” means sex. What are we going to do about that?

Michael: Got that one covered too. We get The Boss to create a woman, same way.

Gabriel: That's not going to work. Two creations—they'll have each other to blame.

Genesis 2:23 Michael: OK—we get The Boss to make her from some part of him. That way, no finger pointing.

Gabriel: The first time that woman puts on a miniskirt your theory is going to be shot to blazes, Mike.

Genesis 3:7 Michael: Good point. We can't have a pair of prudes running around the place—sexual inhibitions cause a lot of problems. Can we get them so they're naked—but don't know it?

Gabriel: You might as well; but is The Boss going to go for this?

Michael: You know how He likes to create things; he'll love it.

Gabriel: OK, that will do for heredity. What about environment?

Michael: We make a garden for them—just for them. Fill it full of fruit trees and useful plants. They get the best possible environment—one that supports them completely.

Gabriel : Better make them the gardeners—we don't want them being idle. Idle hands, the Devil's workshop.

The original version of this story is found in Genesis, chapters 2 and 3

But see Proverbs 22:6 for another look at childhood.



This section may sound a little strange to you at first. But remember: there are a lot of people out there who are convinced of evolution. Don't get sidetracked with that. Whether or not they believe in evolution is *trivial* compared to believing in Christ. Presenting Adam and Eve as an experiment doesn't contradict either the Bible or evolution. The key point we're trying to make here is this: Man is by his very nature a sinner. If they don't think so, ask them to name somebody who's perfect.

2 Thessalonians 3:11

Isaiah 14:12

Michael: Oooh, forgot about old Satan. What are we going to do with him?

Gabriel: Well, we have to test these two somehow. It's not like he wouldn't be willing to provide the temptation.

Michael: Yeah, but we don't let him in any way he wants—we let him in the way we want.

Gabriel: Here's what you can do for the test. Put one tree in the middle of the garden, and tell not to eat from it.

Michael: We have to give the man a fair chance at this. We have to warn him about it—and really threaten him if he does eat.

Gabriel: OK, we'll give them the death penalty if they eat.

Michael: The death penalty? For one piece of fruit? Gabe, isn't that a little extreme?

Gabriel: Look—what could be more clear cut than this: Only one thing that you could possibly do wrong—that eliminates any shades of gray ethical problems. They get a perfect childhood and a perfect environment, and the death penalty if they screw up. What could be more convincing a test?

Michael: I'm sold. But what are we going to do about Satan? If he shows up in great power, it will confuse them no end.

Gabriel: Piece of cake, Mike—we only let him enter in the form of a snake. People just naturally loathe snakes. That should set off the alarm bells for these two.

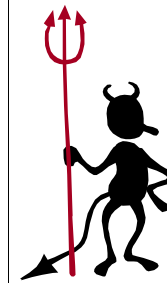
Michael: Done deal! Let's go see The Boss.

The Boss

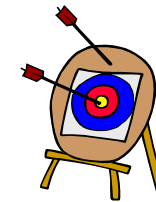
It turns out that God has already conducted this little experiment. Only He would have the power to do so. It is a demonstration so clear that only one conclusion is possible: Man, by his very nature, is a sinner. Not one of us is perfectly righteous.

But the experiment in the Garden of Eden tells us a few other things too.

- We can see that God intended man to be good—He created us that way.
- But—by our own choices—we are sinners. Because God is righteous, He can have no dealings with sinners.



Satan? It may be necessary to point out that Satan is not the cartoon character in red tights and a tail. But it's also a good idea to keep in mind that Satan is *not* the opposite of God. Evil is not equal and opposite to good. Evil is the corruption of good. Satan was an angel of light before his fall. By pride he fell; in pride he is the enemy of our souls.



Keep in mind that sin is missing the mark. We'll go over that in detail in a later lesson.

Many Christians are bothered by the fact that the story of Adam and Eve is an allegory. It is (despite what you've heard). But that doesn't make Adam and Eve any less physical reality. If you think that's something God would never do, read the book of Hosea—an allegory in all senses. But Hosea was just like one of us.

Romans 3:11-12

This explains a lot about human behavior. Why is it, we ask, that the people around us can be kind, generous and loving at times—and the same people can watch someone being beaten to death without bothering to call the police? The answer is found in the fallen nature of man.

We are not mixtures of good and evil; we are not like an alloy. When we are righteous, our righteousness can be as pure as God's. How do we know? Go back to Genesis—and see that we are created in God's image. We have the capability of being like Him. But because of our sinful nature, we can't keep it up all the time. At times we rebel against what we know to be the truth.

Rebellion

Proverbs 17:11

Understanding human behavior is much simplified if you know that we are in rebellion against God. He is merciful and compassionate (and if not we'd see a lot more lightning strikes). But He has a rebellion on his hands.

Romans 7:14-25

You think not? Let's take this into down home cooking. When you are "plump" your doctor will soon tell you that you need to go on a diet. Now, eating a chocolate bar is a matter of will. You can say no. It's an easy word to pronounce. You know the right thing to do—but the chocolate bar keeps calling your name, doesn't it? Immediately after this indulgence, you promise yourself that you will never do that again. It doesn't take too long for "never" to expire. The more often you indulge, the more you bulge—and regret it.

The usual question at this point is, "What can we possibly do about it?" But that question presupposes one condition: that there really is anything we can do about it. Pitchmen for all kinds of diet pills get rich when we try to do something about it. If you want the right answers you must first ask the right questions. The right question? "What can God possibly do about it?"

At first the question seems rather simple. God can do anything, therefore God can fix this. Please remember: any idiot can place the words "God can" in front of something stupid. Can God decree that yellow will be round on Tuesdays and square the rest of the week? God, the Scripture



One of the difficulties we have with English is that we have no continuous tense. Sometimes we see sin as an "only did it once" verb; other times we mean that someone sins continuously. The students may not have made this distinction—which can be confusing in some Bible passages (and sermons, and lessons).

This is as old as Aristotle, who divided the impossible into the possible impossible and the impossible impossible. The latter is this kind of nonsense; the former we call miracles.

1 Corinthians 14:43

tells us, is not the author of confusion. So we recognize that God does not act like a circus magician. He must be true to his character.

Solving it ourselves

When you present this to smart people, their reaction is pretty predictable. "I can handle it myself."

Matthew 7:21-22

- Some see God the cosmic bean counter. If the good things I do add up to more points than the bad..... It doesn't make any difference—God is pure righteousness. You have to be perfect.

Galatians 6:3

- "Well, at least I'm better than (insert name of local louse here)." God's answer to that is, "So what. You're both sinners."

Acts 17:22-31

- "I'll just pretend I didn't know about this. God wouldn't blame me for my ignorance, would he? Especially when I'm so sincere?" Yeah, right.

There are a few more choice methods for this—but they all end the same way. Not one of us can handle this problem.

The Divine Dilemma

Now you see the problem that man's rebellion poses for God:

- His loving, merciful and compassionate side wants to take us into his arms and tenderly bring us to perfection. He knows we can't do it ourselves.
- But his righteous side says this cannot be done: sinners must pay the penalty for their sins. And as we saw in the Garden, the penalty of sin is death.

So what does God do? Does he toast the planet and start all over with some other species? Or does he announce blanket forgiveness—and watch as we take advantage of His good-hearted nature? This is the divine dilemma—how to treat sin as it deserves while loving the wayward sinners. That's the problem. The solution we shall see in Jesus, the Christ.

The key to this section is simply this: left to our own ways of doing things, we will soon turn to self-justification. And it doesn't work.

The "score" doesn't count. It's not a game.

Remember back in chapter 1—omniscience?

You might ask the class how people handle guilt—the answers just might be very interesting.

About that bet: neither of the angels had it right. Man is neither intrinsically good nor intrinsically evil. Man was created in the image of God; he is therefore the creating creature. He is also the fallen one.

"Much more difficult than the usual parent-child 'rebellion needs discipline' scenario."

-Jean Warner

Christ, the Atonement

We left the last lesson with a dilemma: how does God deal with sin, both in mercy and in justice?

It turns out that God laid groundwork for his solution in the Old Testament. One of the difficulties in reading through the Bible is Leviticus. To a young Christian it appears a series of rather boring rituals. But hidden within them, when you piece together the details, is the secret of atonement.

Atonement

Atonement means to make amends for your sins—to wipe out the penalty for them. The one consistent pattern for atonement sacrifices is this: the sacrifice must be perfect—no defects allowed. So if you had an animal in your flocks that was blemished in some way, you could not use it for an atonement sacrifice.

Why is this important to the Christian today? Because these Old Testament regulations give us a picture of what was to happen when Christ came. It also gives us confirmation of one very important thing: Jesus came to be the atonement sacrifice for our sins. So he had to be “unblemished” in the spiritual sense—meaning, He was without sin. Therefore, under the law of the righteous God, he could be the one who paid the penalty of our sins.

Everything about Jesus points to that one fact. But there is more than that; we need to take things in order to understand just how much of a sacrifice this truly is.

In the Beginning

Jesus—the man of Galilee, the Son of David, and all those other human titles—was God. You heard it right: Jesus of Nazareth, a man with a body just like the rest of us, was and is God in the flesh. The Bible clearly gives us detailed statements about this.

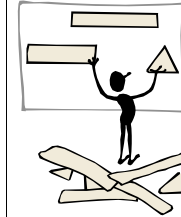
First, like God the Father, he exists before time. Indeed, he is said to be the agent of creation and the sustainer of creation. He is eternal.

Next, He was born of a virgin. If you've ever sung the Christmas carol

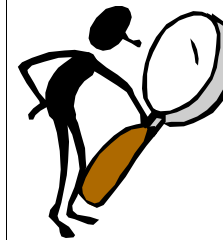
Galatians 3:13

John 14:6-11

Colossians 1:15-20



A key point is this: God had this planned from the very beginning. This is not something that went astray and God is trying to fix it. This is Plan A.



This might be a good time to point out that “Christ” and “Messiah” are the same thing—and that Christ is not Jesus’ last name. The name means “Anointed.” Prophets, priests and kings were anointed—and Jesus is all three.



Look at it this way: if you're in debt, do you ask your poor brother to help—or your rich uncle? Only the sinless can atone for the sinner. Sinners are broke.

“Silent Night” you might remember these words:

‘Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy Infant so tender and mild”

Matthew 1:18-25

That’s a reminder of the virgin birth. Why is that important? Let’s go back to Adam and Eve. The Bible clearly teaches the idea that anyone born in the usual way inherits Adam’s fallen nature. This baby is to grow and live a sinless life. That can’t be done—unless the Holy Spirit (also God) is involved in the pregnancy.

Hebrews 4:14-15

Try to catch the magnitude of the change. Being one who is equal to God, he becomes man. It would be like you volunteering to become an earthworm—so you could save the earthworms.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

That’s the reason He came: to be our Savior. He preached for about three years before the Crucifixion; the record of that preaching is found in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). At the end of that preaching—and at exactly the right moment based upon the Old Testament laws—he died. He died the horrible death of one who is nailed to a cross after being beaten, and then left to die. It was considered merciful to stick a spear in someone like that. For sport, the Roman soldiers who carried out such executions would often take a large mallet and shatter the leg bones—leaving the man to hang by his hands in excruciating pain.

Philippians 2:5-11

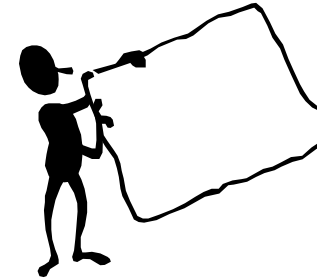
He died a physical death—like all of us are likely to die, and all who have gone before us. But God’s plan was not yet complete. He died on a Friday. Sunday morning, God raised him from the dead—in a physical body. “He is Risen” - the watchword of the church.

Summary

Let’s review the key points:

- Jesus is God in the flesh—completely human, completely God.
- He lived a sinless life, preparing him to be our atonement.
- His purpose in coming was to save us from our sins.
- He died on a cross—a physical death.
- He rose from the dead by the power of God—a physical resurrection.

Try to keep Mary as seen by the Roman Catholics out of this. So much has been added to the Mary in the Bible that she is practically unrecognizable.



It can also be stressed here that the reason we believe this is not because it makes a pretty religion (it doesn't) but because of the evidence.



This is the key fact of the faith. Along with the doctrine of grace, it is essential. That’s why most cults and sects either deny the resurrection or deny grace.

We list these points for a reason: they are the ones that all fraudulent versions of Christianity attack. Such attacks are called “heresies.” For your reference, we list a few here:

Jesus wasn't really sinless—he took over someone else's body. He was born of a virgin—the mother who followed her son to his crucifixion.

It's really easy for Jesus to be sinless, because he's God. So his being sinless doesn't really count. No, he's also completely man as well as completely God.

He didn't really die; it was just a swoon. Tell that to his apostles; they hid in fear after they saw him die.

He wasn't really a human; he was some sort of ghost. Ghosts don't eat breakfast with their disciples.

There really was no resurrection; it's all a myth. Of the twelve apostles, all but one died a violent death because of their faith in him. Men don't die for a myth.

Jesus is really inferior to God—like an angel. No, fully God as well as fully man.

The Bridge

The matter can be reduced to a simple illustration. Suppose you wish to build a suspension bridge over a river. It's not very much use to have a tower on one side of the river if you don't have a tower on the other side as well. Jesus can be thought of as our bridge. On our side is human frailty and sin. On God's side we find heaven and perfection. But which of us could bridge that gap? Only the one who was able to be completely on one side and also the other. Only one man ever fit those qualifications: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of man and the Son of God.

You may want to point out that this is not a Catholic vs. Protestant thing—we are talking about cults and heresies here.

Why do we have such heresies? Because the Atonement, death, burial and resurrection, fully human, fully God are the essentials of the faith—and Satan will do anything he can to undermine that.

The concept of a bridge is more commonly referred to as mediation. Christ is our mediator with God.

The Nature and Work of the Holy Spirit

If you've been paying close attention to the first three lessons, you will note that we seem to have more than one person who is God. That's not a misprint. The Bible clearly reveals three persons in one Godhead:

- God the Father—unseen, a spirit, eternal.
- God the Son—visible in a human body—but also, somehow, eternal.
- The Holy Spirit—unseen and (so far) very mysterious.

Deuteronomy 6:4

John 14:9

The Bible also tells us that God is one. Jesus tells us that he and the Father are one; if you've seen him, you've seen the Father. How can God who is one be three?

The question has not escaped the notice of the best minds of Christendom. Indeed, for at least 1500 years the Trinity has been a subject of lively debate. The concept is made all the worse by the fact that God is so far beyond human comprehension (remember who made the universe?) that we can only draw word pictures to illustrate a solution. So, remembering that great minds before us had a lot of trouble with this too, we'll see if we can make this clear. But if this illustration doesn't work for you, try finding others that do. There are many out there to be found.

The Novel

A story is told about the night on which Harriet Beecher Stowe met Abraham Lincoln. It was a formal reception. As her name was called out, Lincoln said, "Oho—so you're the little lady who caused all this fuss." He was referring, of course, to her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It had a tremendous impact on the common people of her time, inflaming a great hatred of slavery. In a sense one could say, "The novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* started the Civil War."

Let's take that a step further: what do we mean when we say, "The novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*..."?

- We could (possibly) mean the idea for the novel in Harriet Beecher Stowe's head. Writers will tell you that they often have a detailed conception of the work before putting the first mark on paper. We'd use that meaning if we said, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* preoccupied Harriet

The word "Trinity" never appears in the Scripture; it's just shorthand for this problem. 1500 years ago St. Augustine wrote a lengthy book on the subject. The explanations haven't stopped since.

The illustration given here is taken from Dorothy L. Sayers book *The Mind of the Maker*. It's well worth your time to get a copy and read through it.

Beecher Stowe's mind for years before she wrote it.”

- We could also mean the physical copy of that book. We might use that as, “I have a signed, first edition copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.”
- Or we could use it in the sense Lincoln meant it. Not the idea, nor the physical book, but the effect it had on Americans.

We can take this trio of meanings—which should be familiar enough—and describe something in parallel as God.

John 6:46

- There is God the Father. No one has seen him at any time; He is spirit. That's like our novel in the mind—you can never see inside the mind.

Colossians 1:15

- There is Jesus, God the Son. His coming in the flesh is said to be his “Incarnation.” That means being made in the flesh. We can see, feel and touch him (or at least, the people back then could.)

1 Corinthians 3:16

- There is the Holy Spirit—who is the Spirit of God living in us.

If we as mortals can understand something as commonplace as a novel to be “three, yet one” then we can surely accept that as fact concerning God.

Role of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 6:9

As in our book example, the Holy Spirit is God living in me. Indeed, we are told that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the Bible also tells us that Christ lives in us. You can see from that how difficult it is to pry the oneness of God apart. We'll learn more about this in a later lesson when we discuss the church. But there are some things that we should know about the Holy Spirit:

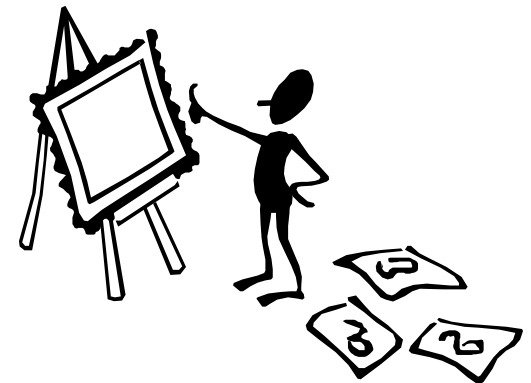
Galatians 2:20-21

John 16:5-15

- He is our counselor—the one who brings God's wisdom to us.
- He is the one who guides the church into all truth. (For example, he is said to have inspired the writers of the Bible).
- He is also the one who convicts the world of sin and judgment.

The role of the Holy Spirit seems (from the Old Testament) to be rather mysterious—usually involving creativity. For example, certain Old Testament artisans were said to have been given the Holy Spirit for the purpose of creating the original Tabernacle. But what does that mean to us

There are several other explanations; this might be a good time to solicit some from the class.



God is the creating God—and since the Spirit is what is supposed to live in man, it's easy to see that when God needed artists He sent his Spirit to certain men. But unlike in the times of the Old Testament, we now have the Holy Spirit indwelling all Christians.

John 14:16

today?

Most Christians, when you ask them what the Holy Spirit does, will reply with one word: “Comforter.” The troubles of life happen to us all. All of us will die (unless our Lord returns first), and those left behind will be asking the same questions and feeling the same feelings that human beings have had for thousands of years. The Spirit is our comforter.

1 Corinthians 6:9

How close is our relationship? The Bible teaches us that Christ lives in us—in the person of the Holy Spirit. This is the reason that Christians are forbidden to abuse their bodies: your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Comfort alone, however, is not the reason for the Holy Spirit living in us. You have already encountered one of the teachings which the world finds so incredible: the resurrection of the dead. How do you know that there is going to be such a resurrection? The one man who has done it tells you so.

Ephesians 1:13

But how do I know it applies to me? God says that the Holy Spirit is a “deposit” on this. It has the same meaning in spiritual terms as in human terms. If you plan to buy a house, you might be required to put down a deposit. This is money you would lose if you backed out of the deal. That’s us; we seek assurance in every transaction we think important. What could be more important than salvation? God, understanding our needs, has provided the Holy Spirit as just such a deposit.

The Unforgivable Sin

Once in a while you will hear about the “unforgivable sin.” It sometimes seems to Christians that such a thing could not happen—after all, God is love and should always be willing to forgive, right? We can see why some things would be unforgivable to us; we’re just sinful human beings, after all.

Where did this “unforgivable sin” come from? Right from the mouth of our Lord Jesus:

The Holy Bible, New International Version

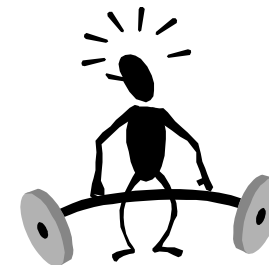
³¹ And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² Anyone who

Isn't it also clear we are not to abuse someone else's body—since that too may be the temple of the Holy Spirit?



One of the surest guides to conduct is to see how Christians handle their money. It works well with God too—he knows we need a deposit. Where

your checkbook is, there your heart will be also.



The story hasn't changed at all. If we try to life the burden of sin from ourselves, we will find it too much to bear. If we persist in tugging at the bar, and ignore the Holy Spirit, we cannot be forgiven.

speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Matthew 12:31-32

Now we know that there is such a thing, how can we avoid it? One quick answer is this: if you think you've committed the unforgivable sin, you haven't. Why?

Let's take three aspects of the Holy Spirit, and see what might be the opposite that would seem so sinful:

- The Holy Spirit is our counselor. If we refuse to listen to him, can you not see that you are ignoring God?
- In the form of the Spirit, Christ lives in me. If I reject the Holy Spirit, then I am rejecting Christ—*after* I have taken him as savior.
- Finally, the function of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin and judgment. If you refuse to be so convicted, why would you ever repent? If you refuse to repent, why would God forgive?

So you can see that this sin is fatal because it rejects the counsel, comfort and conviction of the Spirit—who is God living in you.

Galatians 2:20-21

John 14:16

Cheer up, then. The forgiving God is still there. Most of us will see the Spirit as Comforter, because all of us need comfort now and then. Even Jesus himself needed comfort and strength in the Garden of Gethsemane. God knows what you need—and has provided.



Don't sweat too much over the unforgivable sin. This is here just to round out the section on the Holy Spirit—and also to plant a seed for the next lesson. There we will discuss the process of salvation—which starts with repentance, which means the Spirit has been active in the sinner's life.

Spare Tires and Salvation

It will eventually happen. You're driving down the freeway, confident in your vehicle and you hear, "BLAM!" You pull over to the side of the road and examine the pathetic, shredded remains of what used to be a rather expensive tire. Looking about, you see no sign of the Highway Patrol (where are these people when you need them?) or the Auto Club.

Not to fear; you have a spare in the trunk. You excavate the trunk, carefully keeping all those aluminum cans you're going to recycle some day, until you get down to the flat bottom surface. Under there, the dealer promised, is your spare tire.

You lift the felt liner, pull up the hardboard flooring and see. What is that anemic black doughnut staring back at you? Surely not a spare for your high performance driving style! No, this thing comes with clear instructions like, "Do not go over 50 miles per hour," and "Not valid for more than 50 miles." In other words, just enough to limp into the nearest tire store—and no more.

Some folks ask about salvation in the same way. They've heard the word and decided that they ought to get saved. But they don't want to invest a nickel more than necessary! Those are the folks who would ask, "What's the bare minimum I need to do to be saved?" These are the same people who designed your spare "tire."

Fortunately there are those who ask, "What do I need to do now?" They've heard the word, they believe, and they want to know what to do next. Isn't it typical of those who are sincere that they ask for directions rather than explanations? So in this lesson we're going to lay out what's the right answer to "What do I do next?" To understand this, we are going to spend some time describing the personal relationship known as "faith." Faith is what gives the full life of the Christian.

The Faith Relationship

The deepest of human relationships revolve around the concept of trust. Should you have the privilege of a successful marriage, you will find that trust in your spouse is an absolute essential. This mutual trust relation-



a falling safe on his way to baptism. This is about Joe Ordinary.

If someone asks "what's the minimum I have to do?" you might remind him that if you want the right answers you need to ask the right questions. And is that a question you'd like to put to God Almighty, face to face?



Another common approach: the endless list of rules and regulations to keep. Some of us would rather keep elaborate rules than accept grace from God.

ship is called *faith*. The word is used in many different ways, but in this lesson we will focus on the relationship aspect.

Trust relationships are often made between equals—for example, you and your spouse, you and your friend or even you and your business partner. The faith relationship, however, is *not* a relationship between equals. It's a relationship between you and God. Because it's not between equals, your role and his role are not the same.

For example, this is not a “mutual benefit” relationship. God doesn't need anything his creation can provide. So we can't approach this relationship from a “you scratch my back, God, and I'll scratch yours” point of view. God defines the terms.

It also means that the relationship won't work if you're a skeptic or a cynic. Indeed, God is quite specific about the fact that unless you trust Him completely, this relationship is very weak at best. But if you will trust him completely, it will grow in power and strength. The cynic who sneers or the skeptic who demands proof will get nothing out of the relationship—because they put nothing into it.

That causes some a little difficulty. After all, if he's God, what's wrong with a few miracles just to convince me? Remember: this is not a relationship between equals. You are asking the Almighty to perform tricks like a dog at the end of a leash. He just might refuse.

John 14:6

What, specifically, does he want you to have faith in? Simply this: that Jesus is indeed who he claimed to be—the Christ, or Messiah. That he died on a cross for our sins, and that believing this to be the truth (and acting on it) is both necessary and sufficient for eternal life.

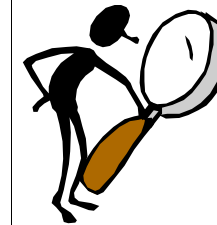
Salvation by Grace

Romans 5:1-2

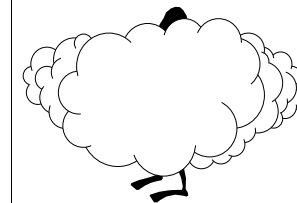
Of course, God is not asking you to do this just because He's a nice guy. He offers salvation to you. We say that this is salvation “by grace.” You'll hear that phrase a lot; It is God's way of saying that he's taken all the risk out of this for you.

Grace, you see, is God's gift to those who will accept it. It is his “unmerited favor.” We call God our Heavenly Father, and like earthly

God defines the terms—that's a covenant.



Look at it this way: if you hired a detective to find out if your wife is faithful or not, how is she going to react when she finds out you doubted her?



In a fog on this? Welcome to the club. Many people have tried to condense the faith down to a simple set of statements. Most, like our written by our eldership, read like things written by a committee. The

best of the early ones would probably be the Apostle's Creed. It's somewhat like Justice White's definition of pornography: “I can't define it, but I know it when I see it.”

Romans 3:22-24
1 Timothy 2:3-4

fathers he gives without asking anything in return. Anyone who has a two year old can give you a working definition of grace. Trust this father of three—it really is unmerited favor, driven by love.

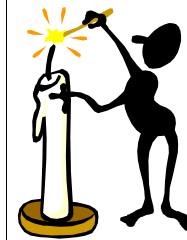
That doesn't mean that grace is cheap, or thrown at everyone no matter whom. Indeed, this grace cost the life of Jesus on the cross. Therefore, it is extremely precious, and we should treat it with the utmost of respect and gratitude.

What should our reaction to grace be?

- First, there is gratitude. Your mother taught you to say “thank you” and now you have all of eternity to say it.
- More than that, there is praise. Salvation is an extraordinary gift, and could only be given by the Heavenly Giver. He is worthy of our praise; he's earned it.
- Finally, there is a sense of awe. Ever have a narrow escape from a traffic accident? Did you ever say, “God was really looking out for me that time?” Consider that without his grace you were headed straight for hell—but he rescued you.

You may find it strange, but God makes no attempt to sort out the “worthy” sinners (such as you and I) from the “unworthy” sinners (well, you know who). He offers this grace to all who will apply to him for it. We have the choice to accept it or reject it. We call that ability to choose “free will.”

- Notice that he does not use force in this. It is a trust relationship; in such a relationship, force has no place. The Omnipotent One has voluntarily limited himself in this.
- Though some Christians disagree, it means that we ultimately decide. God does not predestine us to become Christians or not. (If you think not, then perhaps you're predestined to believe in predestination, and I'm not).
- Because of that free will, some will say no. Some of those who say no will be people whom we love. This can be very frustrating. But our Lord used no force to convince others, neither should we.



Does it seem strange that Christ beckons “whosever will?” Aren't some people so bad that God wouldn't want them? That may seem like a reasonable point of view; perhaps it's just that Jesus Christ is unreasonable

- If he drew such a line, we'd be back into the Old Testament Law and legalism again. He came to liberate us from that.
- Besides, the greatest sinners make the greatest saints. Ask Paul

It's a hard saying, but true: “They've chosen their own consequences.”
(Jean Warner)

Steps in the plan

All this chatter about faith and trust must ultimately come down to action. Your wife may love you deeply, but one of the two of you is going to have to take out the garbage. But even taking out the garbage can be an act of love.

So what is it that God wants me to do? Not the bare minimum to get by, not the exercise routine for SuperChristian, but just the ordinary human being; what's he supposed to do?

Repent

Acts 26:20

He first tells you to repent. "Repent" is now such a church word that most people really have no idea what it means. It means (in simple English) to make a U-turn in your life. Whatever it is in your life that you know has been wrong, renounce it, keep away from it and ask God to help you do that. This is the start of the new life.

Confession

James 2:14-17

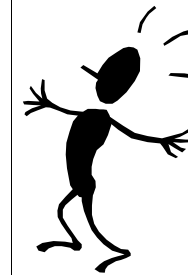
This sounds a little odd at first, but think of it this way: if you're really turning your life around, it sure helps to announce the fact. That way the rest of us know just whose side you're on.

Obedience

If repentance is the U-turn, obedience is continuing to go in the right direction. This is how we keep in touch with God in our new lives.

- Obedience removes the barrier of sin between us and God. If you have small children, you know that disobedience must be punished before you can go back to being Mr. Nice Dad (or Mom, or whatever).
- Obedience also sharpens our spiritual sight. This is really pretty easy to understand; you are practicing the Christian life and therefore you get better at it.
- Finally, there is the question of reward. God knows that we need to be rewarded. He promises that reward at Judgment Day—to all those who have been obedient.

Acts 2:38



Yeah, but what does he say to the person who's been good all their life? Somebody who was raised in the church? Well, Nicodemus my friend, he tells *you* to be born again.



Does this all sound too simple? Consider it this way: it's an approach that *must* work for everyone, no matter how smart or dumb, rich or poor. If you want to get to the right place, you have to turn onto the right road.

Baptism

God commands that all new Christians be baptized. There are many forms of baptism practiced by various church bodies. In our congregation, we've reduced the problem to simply this: what did Jesus' disciples do? If they did it, we're safe in imitating it.

They performed baptism, as far as we know, in this way:

- They baptized by immersion. The word in the original meant "to submerge." It symbolically represents death, burial (in a watery grave) and resurrection.
- They did not baptize infants. Some churches recognize this as valid; in general, we do not.

It should be acknowledged that good, sincere Christians disagree on this. But it's really tough to go wrong in doing what Christ and the Apostles did.

Titus 3:9
Deuteronomy 29:29

We've spent a fair amount of time on some of the most argued-over sections of Christianity. It can be confusing. One church believes in predestination; another does not. One church pours water over you; another sprinkles it on you; we immerse. How are you supposed to decide?

May I give you a test that has been helpful over many, many years? It comes from a Medieval monk named Thomas a Kempis. It is simply this: Suppose you really knew the right answer. What would you do differently?

Suppose we really are predestined; would we do anything different? Suppose God thinks sprinkling is OK, but you've been immersed. He'll take that too.

If you can't come up with a practical difference in your daily life, then maybe it's nothing but theological hairsplitting. Which may explain why monks were bald.

Recognize that there are two questions which can be asked here:

1. "My late Aunt Millie was a devout (whatever) and she was sprinkled. Is she in heaven?"
2. "I'm thinking about being baptized—what's the right way?"

We're answering the second question, not the first. God gets to answer the first question, and we trust him to get it right.

You may have to point out—to the literal minded—that baptism *by itself* means nothing. It's the outer sign of an inward life changed by God.



Focus, please, on the question "What should I do?" You might want to point out that people who like this kind of hairsplitting usually are the ones who aren't doing anything at all—just looking for an excuse to delay real repentance.

Body Life

Most Americans think that your religion is something that you keep to yourself. It's supposed to be conducted in private, and of course it would have no impact on the rest of your life.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Nowhere in the Bible will you find any support for the idea that Christianity is a solo flight. On the contrary; our God knows that it's tough to keep being a Christian—and therefore he created the church so that we could help each other. In this lesson we will see three things:

- Just exactly what is “the church?”
- How has God equipped that church?
- What should the church be doing?

Church—a definition

Ask most people what a church is and they'll reply that it's a building. That's not how the early church saw it. During the early years of Christianity the church met in peoples' homes, often in fear of persecution. Only when Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire did the concept of “church = building” have any meaning.

So when you read about the church in the Bible, you need to realize that it doesn't mean a building. What does it mean? The writers of the New Testament used it in two ways:

- You will see phrases like “the church at Corinth.” That means all the believers who happen to live in Corinth.
- You will also see “the church” without a geography. This refers to the church as a whole.

Church—the original word in the Greek meant “assembly” - means a collection of people. So when we talk about the church without geography, we are talking about all the people of all times in all places who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Note that this definition transcends the human barriers of Protestant and Catholic; it pays no attention to denominational or geographic lines. It doesn't even matter if you are in your body or out of it!

This is typical of the “underground church” in China today.



The church includes believers from all *times*? Well, think about it. Would you throw St. Paul and St. Peter out just because they happen to be dead?

Acts 2:36-38

Most churches enforce some form of entrance requirement for formal membership. In our case, for example, we ask that the individual who wants to be a member have a trusting faith in Jesus. Here are our particular steps:

- Acknowledge publicly that Jesus is indeed Lord and Savior.
- Repentance of sin
- Baptism by immersion (the way the Apostles did it).

Other local churches and denominations have differing views on this. Some are fairly elaborate; others simple, like this.

When the authors of the New Testament set down what we need to know about the church, they used three word pictures which are still useful to us today.

Building

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

The church is compared to a building. In particular, the church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Anyone who's ever built a house knows that if the foundation isn't solid, the building won't stand.

It's the same with the church. Lots of leaders have come along and established their own version of the church. They built on themselves; the waters of time have washed them away.

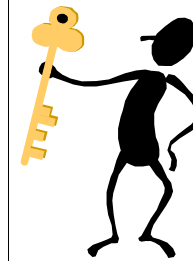
Body

1 Corinthians 12:27

The church is said to be the "body of Christ." That picture carries with it two strong facts about the church:

1 Corinthians 12:4

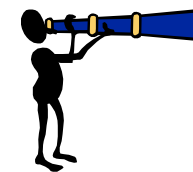
- Like a human body, it's made up of differing parts. Each of us has a job to do in the church. The Holy Spirit is said to hand out "gifts of the Spirit" to enable the church to perform its tasks. Some of those gifts are miraculous; most are not. But whatever gift you have been given, you are to use it for God's purposes.
- It also means that we are to do what Christ wants done on earth. We are the arms and legs of the Gospel; it's up to us to do the things that Christ commands. There is no place for a lazy Christian.



You should note that this is not something dreamed up by the leadership, but an imitation of the practice of the early church.



Of course, you need to know how to build as well. That's why we have so many letters in the New Testament that talk about how the church should be built.



Some people are looking for God—shouldn't they see you? You are, after all, a little Christ—a "Christ-ian."

Revelation 21:9

Bride

Finally, the church is said to be the “bride of Christ.” This is a powerful word picture:

- It means that the church is in submission to her Lord Jesus Christ—she takes her direction from him alone.
- It also means that the love between Christ and his church is the deepest love possible.

There are many other pictures in the Bible for the church; but these are the ones most commonly used.

Spiritual Gifts

“Wait a minute,” you say. “You almost slipped one by me there. I’ve heard about spiritual gifts. Isn’t that like speaking in tongues?”

That’s one of the spiritual gifts. Unfortunately, some people have used spiritual gifts to divide the body of Christ. Our Lord makes it particularly clear that the church is to be united. Sometimes you hear them tell you that if you *don’t* speak in tongues, you’re not a real Christian. So—let’s take it from the basics:

John 17:11,21,22

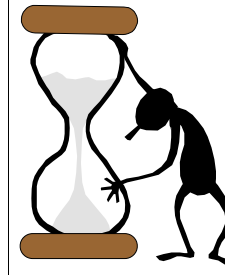
Acts 2:38

1 Corinthians 12:4-9

- All Christians get “the gift of the Spirit” - the indwelling presence of God’s Holy Spirit, to guide us, comfort us and reassure us of our place in the church.
- In addition, all Christians receive varying “gifts of the Spirit” - note the plural there—to make them useful for work in the church.
- Most of these gifts are rather ordinary—teaching, preaching—but there are miraculous ones (such as tongues) as well.

This matter so divided the early church that Paul was compelled to issue some pretty strict regulations on the matter. His objective was to preserve order in the church. Order helps maintain unity.

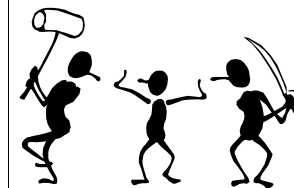
This system is really for our benefit. The simple truth is that if you want to be a big shot in the Kingdom of God, the way is wide open. God tells us that whoever wants to be the ruler of all must become the servant of



Have a little patience on that word “submission.” We will get to the why and wherefore of submission in a later lesson.



Why gifts? So that none of us can boast about what we gave to Christ. We are the ones receiving the gifts. Otherwise, think how proud we would be to do God a favor!



Note the difference: it’s unity, not uniformity. We are parts of the church, but not interchangeable parts.

Mark 9:35

all. With hard work and the right gifts you can go right to the bottom—which is the top, in the church. It's called servant leadership. If God gives you a gift, put it to work for him.

When I was a young child, my father used to take me for long walks. We'd talk about all those things that bother you when you're a boy. Once in a while I'd complain about something, and I usually ended with, "Somebody ought to do something about it!" My dad would just look at me and quietly reply, "You're somebody. Do something."

That's how it is in the kingdom of God. You are now somebody, the child of the Heavenly King. So do something.

What to do?

Matthew 28:19

OK—so what are you supposed to do? The church has one objective. That objective was given to the church by Christ as he ascended into heaven. In two words: Make disciples.

That generally involves two steps: evangelism and discipleship.

Evangelism

Evangelism is the process of telling people the good news about Jesus Christ and bringing them to know him as Lord and Savior. Some people are given the gift of evangelism, but it's something every Christian should do. So, you need to be telling others about Christ.

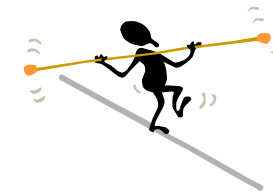
2 Timothy 3:12-13

This is going to cause you some trouble. Remember the "cockroach principle" - when the lights go on, the cockroaches scatter. You are now the light of the world because you know Jesus Christ. Those who don't will find this very unpleasant. They will not like to have someone around who reminds them of what sinners they are.

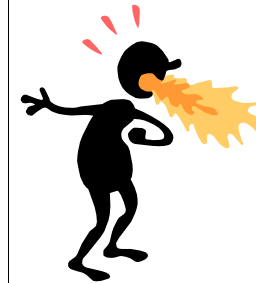
How do you evangelize people? Your way! You are the leading expert on what God has done for you. You are the personal witness of the change in your life that comes from God. You are the arms and legs of Christ's body, visible in the world. Don't miss the chance to share the good things God has given you.

Discipleship

You often hear people who have been evangelized described as being



Teachers have a very hard time with servant leadership—because we're on display. The key is to remember that this is your gift *from* God, not to Him.



Remember—the Holy Spirit lives in you. The mission of the Spirit is to convict the world of sin and judgment. So really, it's not you they're mad at.

“born again.” There are many ways to understand that phrase, but one is fairly obvious. Anyone who’s just been born again needs to mature. We call that maturing process “discipleship.”

The word, as you can see, comes from the same roots as “discipline.” We often think of discipline as something unpleasant and very much undesirable. But if you think of it in terms of a “disciplined athlete,” you have the idea that is being used here. Each of us needs to be in training to become fit as mature Christians.

This has very little to do with your physical age. If you’re a new Christian at the age of 80, you still have some growing and changing to do. That’s another reason Christ gave us the church—so that we would not lack for those to help us grow.

So, then, where do you find such growth?

- One place is in the sermon each Sunday. The preacher spends quite some time preparing this for your benefit.
- Another might be a Bible class. This is where you get to ask questions—and share experiences with others.
- A very good one is in a small group setting. This helps you remain accountable (keeps you out of trouble).

In doing all this, remember Christ’s words: “that they might be one.” The unity of the church (not uniformity, unity) is Christ’s prayer. Do all you can to make that happen.

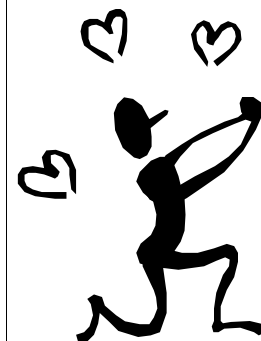
Let me share the secret that has informed Christians for two millennia. It’s expressed in our time by WWJD—what would Jesus do? Our ancestors would have expressed it more eloquently as the imitation of Christ. In any circumstance you should ask: what would Jesus do? Let the answer be your guide.

Of course, to know what he would do you have to know him well. That comes by prayer, reading the Scriptures and hearing the word of God as it is taught and preached. If your actions are informed by his character and motivated by love for him, you cannot go far astray.



Being “born again” has a rather Southern Baptist, bible thumping tone in our time. It’s worth noting again that most of the sinners Christ met were NOT told to be born again—they were told to repent. Only one person was told to be born again—Nicodemus, who was a godly man.

It’s a good idea to have the list of Promise Keepers, Trust Keepers and Adult Bible Fellowships handy at this point.



“Love God,” said St. Augustine, “and do as you please.” If you truly love him, you will know his word. If you love him and know his word, you will do his will.

Elements of Worship

Introduction

It's not something you hear too much about. When people talk about the worship service, it's usually to complain that the music is too loud. So let me ask you a question: how would you know if a worship service is a good one?

Remember: a good one, not one that pleases you. What's the difference? Supposed the preacher gives forth with a mighty sermon that causes you to repent of some sin in your life. That's a good worship service—but not one that pleased you.

To understand why we worship the way we do, you need to learn two preliminary concepts:

- *Ritual is symbolic communication.* Think of it this way. How many times have you seen a wedding where the bride and groom exchange rings? It's very common. But ask that bride if she'd care to part with that wedding ring and you'll find it's not for sale. To her, that ring symbolizes her wedding. We use symbols to convey the thing which are deep and profound in life. Ritual is simply symbolic communication, acted out.
- *Worship and Service are the same thing.* If you look at the Greek of the New Testament, you'll find that the same word is translated "worship" and "service." This reflects a truth: what you symbolically do in worship, you are to put in practice the rest of the week.

Now you can see why the worship is so important. It's the church reminding herself, week after week, of the essentials. We're going to take some elements of worship and examine their daily life impact.

Praise

We spend a lot of time in praise, in song. Indeed, the Scripture frequently commands us to "praise the Lord." We do this in song, for it is in song that we praise Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. So our praise to God, in those few minutes, takes every bit of who and what we are.

This is as it should be. We have a personal relationship with Jesus; any



I am indebted to Athanasius for this point. He is better known as the defender of the Trinity against the Arians.

See Psalm 134 for a short example.

personal relationship starts with knowing who the other person is. If you know him, you know he is worthy of our praise. It's a natural human reaction to give praise where it is due (think about cheering at a ball game). We praise God for two things: his character and his actions.

We should carry this over into our daily lives. Those around you should hear from you on this subject. There are things God has done for you; tell others about it. You rely on his character; tell others why. Praise should not be limited to Sunday morning.

Scripture Reading

In older churches you may still see two pulpits. One was used for preaching; the other for Scripture reading. This practice is very ancient; the Jews were told read the Law aloud. They did so with great ceremony.

When we read the Scripture in church, we are portraying the Bible reading we should be doing during the week. As it is done every week, so you should read every day. It is done with respect; you should read the Bible with respect. Indeed, the ancients were commanded to post it on the walls!

Deuteronomy 11:19

Jeremiah 23:29

2 Timothy 3:16-17

James 1:22-25

If you will do this, God promises great reward. First, you will be convicted of your sins (which means you can then get rid of them). You will be equipped as a Christian ought to be. But take warning: don't be just a reader, but be a doer.

Tithing

Genesis 14:14-20

Leviticus 27:30-33

Malachi 3:8-12

Tithing—the giving of a tenth—is ancient; it goes back to the time of Abraham, at least. The ancient Jew understood the principle quite well: the tithe belongs to God, so you might just as well give it to him. Otherwise, he'll come get it. You wind up with no blessing and parting with the tenth anyway. Indeed, God warns us that to fail to tithe is to rob God! Why does God want us to tithe?

Simple enough: we tend to put our mouth where our money is. He wants your mouth proclaiming him. Tithing involves three things:

- It's a recognition that God has blessed you. You don't tithe what you don't have.



The key point of tithing is not mathematics; it's using the tenth for God. How you use that tenth—that's stewardship. God gave you the money in the first place; He expects you to handle it with wisdom. We proclaim responsibility, not rules and regulations.

- It also is a symbol of sound stewardship—if you can't part with the tenth, you aren't managing your money very well.
- Tithing is a recognition of the sacred. God commands it; you obey in a way which is most clear.

Prayer

Prayer is a subject on which volumes have been written. But public prayer—prayer from the pulpit—tells the world something about us.

- Public prayer is a form of praise.
- Public prayer tells the world that we are depending not on our weakness but God's strength.
- Public prayer acknowledges our sins, and asks forgiveness.
- Public prayer commonly is used to pray for others.

Take those four points home with you; you'll need them.

Communion

Of all worship elements, this is the most sacred. It is in this ritual that we proclaim the death of Christ as the atonement for our sins. The Scriptures tell us of the exceeding importance of Communion. Communion is also the ritual which gives us the most guidance during the week:

1 Corinthians 11:28

- *Self-examination.* We are to examine ourselves before taking Communion. We should do this during the week as well, recognizing that all of us are sinners. We should then confess our sins and repent.

1 Corinthians 10:17

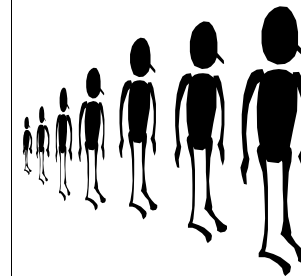
- *One body.* Just as Christ had one body here on earth, the church is one body. By eating Communion together, we proclaim our unity. We also recall that Christ washed the feet of his disciples on the night of the Last Supper; we should serve in like humility. Indeed, as we are one body on Sunday, so we should be during the week. Therefore we proclaim our willingness to help our brothers and sister in Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:26

- *Hope of the resurrection.* The Bible tells us to do this “until He comes.” By taking communion we proclaim not only the death, burial and resurrection but also our hope of his return. This carries over during the week. Is your attitude different towards death, knowing that our Lord's return will bring your resurrection from the grave? Is your sense of urgency that others need to be saved sharpened by this?



The key point is that prayer in worship should guide our prayers in daily life. It's an example to all of us.



That Communion proclaims we are one body can be a bit of a surprise, since we take it in private meditation. Most Christians of most times took Communion as a group.

1 Corinthians 11:29-30

- *Forgiveness.* The reason for repentance is to receive forgiveness based upon Christ's atonement. Forgiveness is "one person's willingness to bear the consequences of another person's sin." As we ask for forgiveness during Communion, we should forgive during the week. Christ forgave us unconditionally; we should do likewise. In this we bring about reconciliation and the unity of the church.

1 Corinthians 11:26

- *Proclamation.* Most profoundly, in Communion we proclaim the central truth of the faith: that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, died for our sins on the Cross; was buried, raised by the power of God. He is returning to judge the living and the dead. We need to live like it day by day.

In Communion you eat a wafer of bread. It symbolizes Christ's body. You take some grape juice, which symbolizes His blood. Our Lord understood ritual and symbolic communication; that's why we have this ritual—to proclaim the most important matter of the faith. Most of all, remember his death, burial and resurrection. His death, because it paid the price for your sins. His burial, so that you know it was a death like you and I will experience. His resurrection, because it means that at His return, we shall rise from the dead.

What you proclaim in worship on Sunday morning should be what you do in service the rest of the week. Worship and service mean the same thing.



Most of think of "proclamation" as something the preacher does. We forget that our actions are watched and they proclaim what we really believe. You're the only Jesus some will ever see.

You should note that most Christians of most times have used *wine*, not grape juice. It's a better symbol, and it also is that which Christ used.

The center of worship is Christ; the center of memory the Cross—the two combine in Communion.

On The Scriptures

You might have noticed that we pay a lot of attention to the Bible—the Scriptures, as they are also known. The word “Bible” starts with a capital “B” in the English language. This is a reflection of the place of esteem this book has held for centuries.

But lately it seems that “everyone knows” the Bible is untrustworthy. In this lesson we will examine the evidence for the Bible, see what its proper use truly is, and suggest some habits you should form in reading it.

Authenticity

The myth goes something like this: “well, the Bible was never written down until several centuries after the time of Christ. He probably did some cool things—but how can we know which parts are authentic and which aren’t?”

Great sounding statement; only one problem—it’s false. Let’s take this problem in three easy steps:

- How do I know the original documents of the Bible are trustworthy? In particular, how do I know they’re old enough that the eyewitnesses to Jesus read them?
- Given that I have a good original, how do I know that all those monks didn’t mess up the copies?
- And given those two, how do I know I have a good translation?

Let’s consider the original documents first. If the original documents date from the time of the Apostles, you know that they’re likely to be correct. If they don’t, then who knows what errors might have crept in, right? So what about those documents? A few facts:

- The time we are concerned about runs up to about AD 70—when Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans. St. Paul died in AD 64, so we would be looking for indications that the originals existed in Jerusalem before AD 70. Is there any such indication?
- The myth says there’s nothing there. But—by way of example—there is an almost complete copy of the Gospel of John (one of the



The best known of these folks call themselves “The Jesus Seminar.” The liberal press adores these people, so they get a lot of publicity. They have very little to do with the real Jesus, and everything to do with their own pride.



Notice that we are talking about the New Testament here. The literature of the Old Testament is quite a bit more complex, and well beyond any short explanation.

later books—which has been carbon dated to AD 120. It was found in a monastery in Egypt. That means that it's not the original, and that the original must have been copied several times before this copy was made.

- There is also the internal evidence of the book itself. Look at the book of Acts, for example. There are dozens of place names and ruler names—minor rulers whose names would have been forgotten after a few years (can you tell me who was mayor of Los Angeles in 1933?). That book ends with Paul still living. We know from history that he died in AD 64. Acts is either an extremely well researched hoax—or it's genuine.
- There are other witnesses, too. The enemies of Christianity—mostly Roman—quoted the Gospels extensively during the second century AD. Their quotations track quite nicely with the Gospels. This evidence tells us that the Gospels were well known by about AD 100.
- Other evidence is found in the fact that complete translations of the New Testament into other languages show up starting about AD 120.
- Iraneus—a Christian writer—gives us a summary of the Gospels. The undisputed date for this is AD 170.

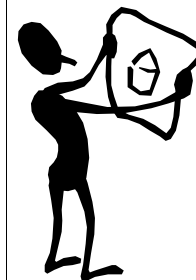
With all this evidence, why is there such a myth? Simple. Until the 4th century AD, the New Testament was available only in pieces—book by book. When Constantine—the first Roman emperor who was a Christian—took over, he commissioned an Imperial set of copies of the New Testament. This was about AD 325. One of those copies is still in existence. But making official copies is very different from writing down the legends.

Now, let's take up the "Xerox problem" - how do we know we have good copies? There are two answers to that:

- First, there are something like 15,000 manuscripts of the New Testament (or parts thereof) which date before AD 1000. Just in sheer numbers alone this dwarfs the copies of any other ancient book. (The Odyssey of Homer is second—with less than two hundred).
- More to the point, have you every considered how people know there are thousands of mistakes in the Bible? It's because scholars have

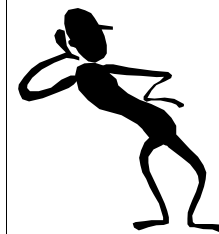


It's like a detective story, piecing together the trail of the documents. This goes by the name of "lower criticism" and is actually a very well developed discipline.

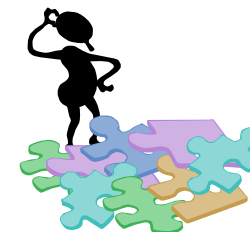


There is one fragment, called "The Jesus Fragment," at Oxford which is a part of the Gospel of Mark. It has been dated to AD 47—and you can imagine how the liberals can't stand that. Debate continues; but it's interesting to note that no one rejected it out of hand—there's just too much real evidence.

And if you know where to purchase it, you can get a copy in English.



This book, or codex as they were called, is in the Vatican library. Two other early versions exist as well. They are thought to be first generation copies of that codex.



Other counts run higher; it depends on whether or not you count two fragments from the same place as one or two.

been able to trace the origins of these mistakes from copier to copier. If you know how many mistakes there are, you must have a pretty good idea of the correct answer.

One other thing: most of the earliest copies were not made by monks, but by professional copiers. You went down to the local *scriptorium* and asked for a copy to be made. The slaves who did it checked their work by adding all the letters in the rows, and in the columns—and checking those totals against the originals. Some of those tallies can still be seen in manuscripts today.

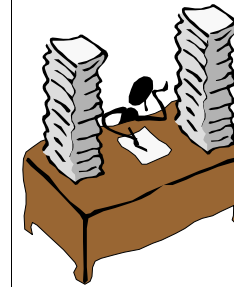
One last: how do I know I have a good translation? Since the time of the King James we've known how to do that. James (the king, not the apostle) had a problem—all the existing English translations were riddled with someone's bias. He had a kingdom to unite. So he commissioned two groups of scholars to work on the translation. A scholar would translate the work to start with; his work would be reviewed by a small group; their work would be reviewed by the entire company. When finished, the two companies got together to hash out the differences. The result was the King James Bible—the standard of the English speaking peoples for almost 300 years. The method was so successful that it is still used for modern translations today.

Inspiration

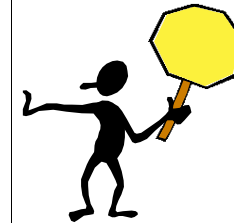
Now that we've disposed of the question of authenticity, we need to know what to do with the Bible. All Christians agree that the Bible is "inspired." What they don't agree on is what "inspired" means.

- Liberal Christians hold that much of the Old Testament is composed of Jewish myths (particularly in Genesis), and that only the later parts of the Bible are accurate. The later parts certainly have more manuscript evidence, but is this sufficient to draw such a conclusion?
- At the other end of the spectrum we have conservative Christians who claim that every word is literally, infallibly correct. But only when read from the King James—the 1611 version of the King James.

Maybe we ought to take a look at what the Bible says about the Bible.



Which, of course, explains the types of errors which are most common—switching two letters, or simply adding something on.



Of course, you knew this wouldn't last forever. The most popular modern version, the New International, is about to introduce their "gender accurate" (radical feminist, politically correct) version.



One such believer in this "myth becomes fact" idea was C. S. Lewis. Don't think so? Pick up a copy of *Mere Christianity* and look for a chapter titled, "Myth Become Fact."

It does get worse. There are those who hold to the "automatic writing" theory—that the writers of the Bible did so in a godly trance. It's hard to picture Paul writing I Corinthians in a trance.

Most hammers are not very good at driving screws; they're even worse at mending broken pottery. So if you want to know how to interpret the Bible, perhaps you should start with the purpose of the Bible. That's found here:

The Holy Bible, New International Version

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

So now it's clear: whatever your view of the Bible's inspiration, it's God's book which is intended to

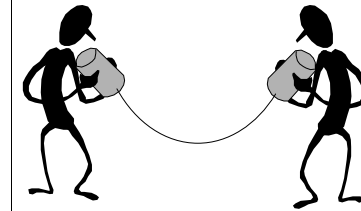
- Teach us what to do right
- Rebuke us when we do wrong
- Educate us in righteousness
- Equip us for good works.

Use of the Bible

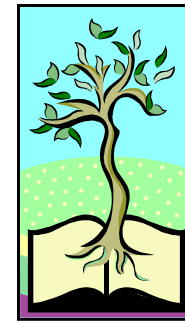
If you want to do this the wrong way, go out and get a massive looking copy of the Bible. One with plenty of pictures and sections added on. Put it on your coffee table—and never read it.

But if you want that Bible to do what God intended it to do, here are some ideas:

- Buy a translation that you can *read*. The King James is magnificent, but not very readable today.
- Use a program of daily Bible reading. Make it a habit—at the same time each day, read the Scripture reading for the day. You should be able to read through it all in a year.
- *Memorize*. In times of trouble the key verses you memorize will come back to comfort you.
- Attend a regular Bible study—once a week—either on Sunday morning or during the week (both, if you can arrange it).



The phrase “God-breathed” is translated “inspired” in other translations.



**Teach
Rebuke
Educate
Equip**

Does it sound like too much work? There are actually Bibles arranged in a daily reading format. It will take most readers about 15 minutes a day to read enough of the Bible to get through it in a year. There are also helps like daily devotionals to encourage your reading.

“But what if I don’t understand part of it?” Nobody, but nobody, understands all of God’s mind. If it bothers you, ask. (You’ll give your Bible teacher something to worry about.)

“I get bored with genealogies!” So do the rest of us. For the most part, you can skim over them—just remember they are there to tell you that you’re reading about real people who had ancestors and descendants. That’s not the stuff that myths are made of.

Mining the good stuff

The Bible is a collection of writings. Sometimes it helps to know where to look. So here are some high spots:

- Feeling like you have something to say, and don’t know how to say it? Go to Psalms—there is a Psalm for almost any mood.
- Want to know Jesus better? Read his life story in the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- Everyone can use a little wisdom now and then—so read Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and James.

Beginners should stay away from...

...Prophecy. Particularly the book of Revelation. Why? There are a lot of opinions out there, some of them very much half-baked. If you want to know about prophecy (and you will, eventually) then get into a Bible study that takes it step by step. And take each step with a grain of salt. Your first trip into prophecy should be with an experienced guide.



There’s a reason we go to a card shop—to get the right words. The Psalms are the “card shop” of the Bible



One reason to stay away is that understanding prophecy usually starts with reading someone else’s opinions on the subject. It’s normal for us to stand on the shoulders of preceding generations so that we can reach higher in wisdom. But in this instance, there are so many contradictory scholars that it’s difficult to make wise choices.

Authority, Submission and Obedience

Galatians 3:28

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, ...” This the opening line of the Declaration of Independence. These are words which bring tears to the patriot's eyes, for in these words our forefathers cast off the idea that your class at birth determined your worth. There is a parallel to this some 1700 years earlier. “In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek, ...” going on to the point of proclaiming that there is neither male nor female. In our society we have taken this to heart—to the point of absurdity.

To understand this, we will need to look at this on two lines: legal and Christian.

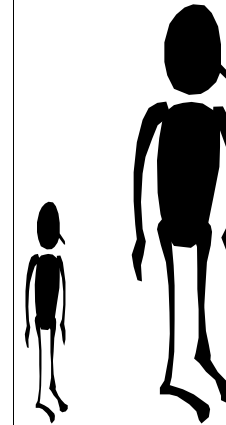
Legal

It is the pride of our legal system that all who come before it are presumed equal. It is, of course, false. It is, however, the most convenient of legal fictions. It's false—but a lot closer to the truth than any other system we can devise. By proclaiming our equality in court, we help prevent the miscarriage of justice.

Christian

The church, however, has no room for fiction. You will note that we are equal “in Christ.” What does that mean? It means when God sees us “in Christ” he sees us as sinless—and therefore pure, like Jesus. But in our discussion today, we shall have to deal with the sinners. And those come in all shapes and sizes, and are not equal at all.

If you want to understand the nature of equality, and how it works in the kingdom of God, you will need to study the basic relationship between God and his follower: submission. It may seem a strange spot to start, so let me give you a worldly example. Are you in submission to the traffic cop? If he turns on his flashing lights, are you going to pull over—or assert your fundamental equality with him by driving right on? No, you pull over. But you don't pull over because he is somehow “better” than you. You pull over because you are obedient to the police. We're going to take a long look at that traffic cop today—he has much to teach us



Don't think so? How many Samoan players do the Lakers have this year? Are they prejudiced against Samoans? Don't we have discrimination here? Or does short and stout really mean something in basketball?

Matthew 28:18
Romans 13:1

about submission. To understand it clearly, we will begin with the concept of authority.

Authority

Let's begin by establishing one thing: we are talking about legitimate authority here—not authority which is abused. That's tyranny. How do I tell the difference? All legitimate authority is descended from the authority of Christ—for He has all authority. Is the policeman's authority from Christ? Yes it is; God ordains governments.

But what kind of authority does the traffic cop have? He has authority over (it's blindingly obvious) "traffic." But to use this as an example to get to the principle, *his authority is determined by his task.*

Why does he have such authority? Because without such, people will not obey the traffic laws. This is a general reflection of the fact that authority is parceled out in this world because of sin and disobedience. But here's another obvious point: who gets the benefit? It's not the sinner (we hope); it's those of us who are law-abiding.

One more thing: his authority is not nearly as wide as our submission. We have to obey him any time he directs it; but he has authority only when circumstances require it. *So submission is much wider than authority.*

Let's summarize:

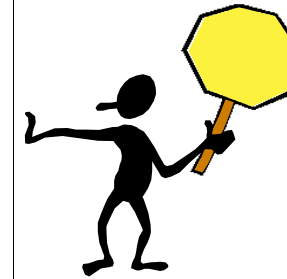
- Authority is determined by the task assigned.
- Legitimate authority comes from God
- The reason authority is given is that this is a fallen world.
- Submission is much broader than the authority commanding it.

Easy so far? Let's take a look at submission itself.

Submission

It may come as a surprise to you, but all Christians are in at least one submission relationship—their relationship to Christ. We call him Lord. But most of us are in submission relationships in many ways. We've talked about the traffic cop, but how about these:

- You are in submission to your doctor—he tells you that you need this surgery—and you let him carve on you! How submissive!



Please note that we are talking about the honest cop—not the one who needs six more tickets for his quota. We're speaking of legitimate authority, not tyranny.

Have you ever asked yourself, "Where's a cop when you need one?"

Hebrews 13:17
(You didn't think I had a reference for that, did you?)

- You are in submission to your teachers in the classroom
- You are in submission to employers, and many others.

In short, being in submission is a common relationship. Indeed, it is not uncommon to be in authority over and in submission to the same person at the same time. The key to making the relationship work is two-fold:

- The authority must be righteous—given by God, and exercised in his will.
- The submission must be the right response to that authority.

What's the right response? Believe it or not: whatever it takes to make that authority's task a joy.

Submission is a voluntary relationship. Why would anyone volunteer to be in submission? *Because the chief beneficiary of the relationship is the person in submission.*

- The traffic cop is the terror of the reckless; but have you ever been cut off by some idiot and wished you had a motorcycle officer in view?
- Doctors are well paid—but they exist so that patients might get well.
- Teachers are poorly paid—and their task is for the benefit of their students.

Aha! Now we understand! The reason we volunteer for submission relationships is that they benefit the person in submission.

So, summarizing:

- Legitimate authority descends from Christ.
- The nature of submission depends upon the authority given.
- Submission is voluntary.
- Submission relationships exist to deal with sin.
- The primary beneficiary of the relationship is the person in submission.

Ephesians 5:22-24 (but see also the verse right before).

Now let's apply that to women in the church—particularly in marriage. First, let it be clear that women are commanded to be in submission to their husbands. This is not just a passing thought, but is specifically tied to a very graphic idea:

The marriage relationship is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church.



Not necessarily explicitly given, but rather can be traced. For example, a doctor's authority is based on knowledge—and knowledge is ultimately the province of God.

Note, please, that if the relationship primarily benefits the one in authority, that authority is most likely a tyrant. Indeed, that is the test of tyranny—those in submission didn't volunteer, nor do they benefit. If you have authority solely for your own benefit, you are not a prince but a tyrant.

Ephesians 5:21 makes it clear that husband and wife (like all Christians) are in submission to each other. For example, his body is not to have sex with anyone but her—because it's her body too.

God gives the man in the relationship the authority of Christ. Which is to say, the same kind of responsibility as Christ (remember that responsibility or task determines authority in the kingdom?) What authority is that? Christ's authority is absolute and complete dominion over the church—for the purpose of presenting that church to himself as a spotless, radiant bride. Look behind the picture image: Christ's primary concern for us is not whether or not our socks match; it's our spiritual welfare. That's the primary concern of the Christian husband as well—*he is required to be the spiritual leader in his house.*

Let's take a reality check here. Walk into a Sunday morning Bible class containing women over 40. Even in a mixed group, there will be several women there who are SOS—single on Sunday. But there will be very few, if any, men in that condition. Why? God had it right; the man is the spiritual leader.

Take another reality check: look at your friends with teenage children. Some of them have real problems keeping them under control; others seem to go through those years with little trouble. In which households is the man the spiritual leader? Ah ha!

Why does this work? Children need a sense of place. If they can play Mom off against Dad, they quickly conclude that no one is really in charge.

Ladies, let's take stock of what we've learned and apply it to you and to your marriage.

- The Bible tells you that you are to be in submission to your husband. So his authority descends from Christ; it is therefore legitimate authority.
- Your submission to him is a complete submission, for he has the same authority over you that Christ has over the church.
- That submission is voluntary. (He can't draft you into marriage.)
- That relationship exists to deal with sin. Interestingly, in this instance it's *his* sin we're talking about.
- *The primary beneficiary of this submission relationship is you.*

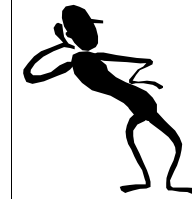
Which brings us, neatly, to the husband.

You, sir, have the tougher part of the job. It is no surprise that men in general have acquiesced to woman's liberation—it spares them much



This has nothing to do with who earns the money, who does the dishes, who takes the trash out. The man is the spiritual leader of the family, whether he wants to be or not. And it works much better if he wants to be.

This works particularly well when Dad makes sure that the kids go to Mom first. There's a reason behind asking, "What did your Mother say?"



One key thought: "in submission to" does not mean "inferior to."

James 3:1

work. Work? Yes—for the Christian model of authority is *servant leadership*—as modeled for us by Christ. This is the Jesus who washed his disciples' feet. You have the authority; you also have the responsibility. Do remember that those in authority will be judged more severely. You are responsible for the spiritual welfare of your house—first your own, then your wife's and then your children. In all this, you must be motivated by love.

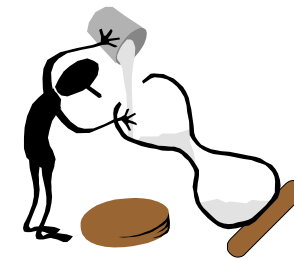
Does this sound difficult? I hope so. But let me put it to the ladies: if your husband was a servant-leader, whose every action was motivated by love for you and your children, just how difficult would submission be?

Let an old saint give us a hand here:

Do you want your wife to be obedient to you, as the Church is to Christ? Then be responsible for the same providential care for her, as Christ is for the Church. And even if it becomes necessary for you to give your life for her, yes, and even to endure and undergo suffering of any kind, do not refuse. Even though you undergo all this, you will never have done anything equal to what Christ has done. You are sacrificing yourself for someone to whom you are already joined, but He offered Himself up for one who turned her back on Him and hated Him. In the same way, then, as He honored her by putting at His feet one who turned her back on Him, who hated, rejected and disdained Him, as he accomplished this not with threats, or violence, or terror, or anything else like that, but through his untiring love; so also you should behave toward your wife. Even if you see her belittling you, or despising and mocking you, still you will be able to subject her to yourself, through affection, kindness and your great regard for her. There is no influence more powerful than the bond of love, especially for husband and wife. A servant can be taught submission through fear; but even he, if provoked too much, will soon seek his escape. But one's partner for life, the mother of one's children, the source of one's every joy, should never be fettered with fear and threats, but with love and patience. What kind of marriage can there be when the wife is afraid of her husband? What sort of satisfaction could a husband himself have, if he lives with his wife as if she were a slave, and not a woman by her own free will? Suffer anything for her sake, but



Note that this doesn't touch on the situation where a woman is submissive to her non-Christian husband in order to win him to Christ.



A very old saint indeed. This is by John Chrysostom, and dates back to about AD 400.

never disgrace her, for Christ never did this with the Church.

So this lesson is about wives—but mostly about husbands. Submission sounds strange to our ears. But if you will remember what Christian submission is—the righteous response to righteous authority—you will have little trouble enjoying the practice. Husbands, pick up your authority and exercise it—as a servant-leader. If you will follow Christ in this, your wife will make this task a joy.

Submission in church discipline

You will find it a fairly common practice that women are denied certain positions in the church. This again is based upon the practice of the Apostles. Usually, the restriction is on becoming an elder, as the guidelines in Scripture are rather specific here.

Titus 1:6

But here is where servant leadership shows its true beauty. If you see a task in the church that needs doing, you will usually find that no one will check you for submission if you volunteer to do it. The way you rise in the church is by service, not by pomp or title.

Matthew 20:16

Indeed, all church discipline is based upon the nature of submission and obedience. The steps in church discipline are very simple:

1. If you see your brother or sister in Christ sinning, you are to go to that person, privately, and attempt to gently bring them back to the truth.
2. If that doesn't work, you are to take two or three others with you and try it again.
3. Only if that doesn't work are you to take it to the church as a whole.

The purpose? The benefit of the sinner in submission. If you are administering the discipline, you get the pains of servant leadership. The sinner is the one who is rescued. Each step is designed to return a sinner quietly and without disgrace to them, or to the church.

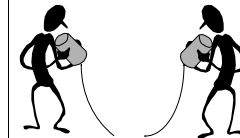
Galatians 5:21

But did you catch one thing? *All Christians are in submission to one another!* For example, the wife (so submissive in the paragraphs above) is to assume the authority of Christ—to keep her husband from sinning. Do you now see that the husband is in submission to the wife in this in-



You may find that the chief complaint is that “he won’t listen.” It should be fairly obvious that a servant-leader gets the facts before he makes a decision. Fairly obvious, but evidently not fairly common.

A war story: the church we were in went through a debate about whether or not we should have deaconesses. It was finally decided we should. But when we approached the selected women asking them to please volunteer, we got a very interesting reaction. As one put it to me, “You mean I get to do all the things I’m doing around the church already, plus I get to attend meetings that you men complain are boring? No thanks!”



The first step is NOT to run to the phone and tell everyone you know just what he’s done. That makes discipline much worse, not better.



Remember: it’s discipline, as in disciplined athlete—not punishment.

stance? She now has the authority of Christ. But just as she would not want to be ridiculed in public, so she should now speak to her husband privately.

Christians and the state

In many countries of the world the relationship between the church and the state is very antagonistic. In most Muslim countries, it is a capital offense to be a Christian or to attempt to speak to anyone about Christianity. In communist countries the technique is to have a state sponsored church—which does nothing effective.

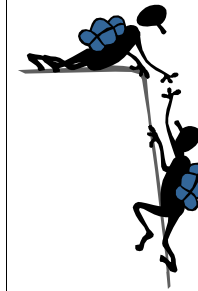
Why? Any time the state proclaims itself supreme, the Christian must decide: state, or God? Our forefathers knew this well; in their time, the attempt was to prescribe a state religion. Hence the now twisted amendment to the constitution. The original purpose was to keep the state's nose out of the church. The purpose now is to eliminate any public presence of the church.

How do we know when the state has overstepped its bounds? The test is very simple. If the state claims the submission of the Christian, then the Christian must be the beneficiary of the relationship. (Go back and read the preamble to the constitution). If the primary beneficiary is the state, that is not authority; that is tyranny. Our forefathers knew it and rebelled against it.

Do you need examples?

- The schools can teach Islam, transcendental meditation and other “scientific” religions—but the mere possession of a Bible is grounds for expelling a student or firing a teacher.
- Since 1991, with the demise (after 800 years of use in law) of the legal doctrine of “urgent necessity”, the government now has an almost unlimited right to bar the church from anything. There's a case in California right now in which a church wants to construct a building *on land they own*. The city is telling them they must sell the land to a developer who can put in a strip mall.

Ask yourself this: why do they fear Christ so much? Surely if he is as irrelevant as our government proclaims, they would not bother. The problem is, He isn't. And they know it.



Remember: the objective is not to win the debate, but to help each other remain faithful in Christ. That's why the first step is one on one.

Perhaps it is time to review what our forefathers knew so well. Here is the second paragraph of the constitution of the United States:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Written and approved by an overwhelmingly Christian body of men, *they* understood authority, submission and obedience. A pity their heirs have so perverted it.

Romans 12:21

What's a Christian to do? We must remember the basics:

- All legitimate authority comes from Jesus Christ. If the government turns itself to tyranny, the authority is no longer legitimate.
- The Christian's basic method of dealing with this is *longsuffering*. Are your children having their heads stuffed with lies at the public school? Then make the sacrifices necessary to send them to Christian schools. Yes, it is expensive. Yes, you will suffer for it. But did not your Lord warn you of this?

The problem is not an easy one, nor will it go away soon. But remember this: if God is for us, who can be against us? There is a reason the ACLU and the teachers' unions have set out to destroy the church. They know their real enemy.

I leave you with one thought: the Christian response to authority—be it submission or outright rebellion—depends upon how that authority is related to Jesus Christ. It is the easiest thing in government to obtain the obedience of the Christian. You simply need exercise all the authority God gave you (and no more).

Winston Churchill, in his *History of the English Speaking Peoples*, speaks of Magna Carta, the great charter of English liberties. Surprisingly, this document does not contain sweeping, grand statements of liberty. The respect it so rightly deserves comes from its establishment of one doctrine: the king is not superior to the law. Churchill tells us this:

“The underlying idea of the sovereignty of the law, long existent in feudal custom, was raised by it into a doctrine for the national State. And when in subsequent ages the State, swollen with its own authority, has attempted to ride roughshod over the rights or liberties of the subject it is to this doctrine that appeal has again and again been made, and never, as yet, without success.”

“As yet.” The challenge is still before us. May we prove to be worthy heirs of the 800 years of English and American freedom.

The solution is not to overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good.



It may interest you that St. Paul commanded obedience to the Emperor—whose name was Nero.

The End

The aspect of Christianity in this last lesson is fittingly titled. We are to study today the end of all things as we know them.

A word of caution is provided first. The subject of prophecy, particularly with regard to the book of Revelation, is a source of hot partisanship. Regrettably, it is not uncommon for personal invective to be a major factor. So, in roughly their order of appearance in the church, here are the three major views of Revelation. It all depends on when you think the millennium happens:

Amillennialism

It sounds very much like this view says there is no millennium. That's not quite the case; they simply state that we are in that period. This view was first put forth in detail by St. Augustine. Generally speaking, this view tends to emphasize the poetic aspects of the book of Revelation, but does not deny the historical imagery. They are a little vague on what that imagery means. The reason is simply this: very little study will convince you that the city of Rome plays a key role in prophecy. That role is definitely a villainous one. This is the preferred interpretation by the Roman Catholic church—which is obviously not anxious to play that part. The view is held by many scholars.

Post-millennialism

As the name implies, this view says that the return of Jesus Christ (on which more later) happens at the end of the millennium. This view sees most of Revelation as history, and assigns very specific events to various passages. Not all followers of this theory use the same assignments. This method arose during the Protestant Reformation. It is highly anti-Catholic, and assumes that the Rome of Revelation is indeed the Roman Catholic Church. This view was the main view of the Protestant churches up until World War I.

Why World War I? The followers of this system were convinced that a golden age, brought on by the acceptance of Christianity (Protestant, of course) was just around the corner. Seen through the eyes of late Victo-

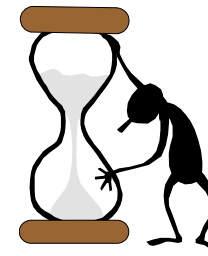
You didn't expect that at the beginning, did you?

One sermon put it this way: "I don't know any post-millennialists. I don't even know anyone who eats Post Toasties!"

You should point out that "millennium" means "thousand years."



How can this be? The Millennium is only mentioned in Revelation 20:1-5. You'll see that it starts when Satan is thrown out of heaven and bound in the pit. This theory says that has already happened. You're sure that can't be right? See Luke 10:18—where Jesus says he saw Satan fall like lightning. The sign that he is bound is simply that all new religions since the time of Christ have been perversions or heresies of Christianity. No longer are the demons allowed to seek worshipers. But—he must be released for a little while.



This is the view that gave us most of the interpretive literature on Revelation. It hinges on tying certain events on certain dates.

rian England, this seemed very likely. There had been no war since 1815; technology was viewed as making leaps and bounds with no negative effects; and Christian leadership in the political arena was at its height in dealing with things like child labor. The “golden age” looked very plausible. Then came World War I. The death rate from that war seemed like God’s own rejection of this theory.

Premillennialism

This is the theory most commonly associated with Hal Lindsey, the author of *Late Great Planet Earth*. Most of the popular writing today on the subject takes this viewpoint. It provides an excellent starting point for fiction writers, as in this view everything in the book of Revelation from Chapter 4 on happens after the Christians leave the planet. Hence Jesus’ return is before the Millennium.

This theory spread rapidly after World War I. One reason for this is that the denominations which espoused it were very forward thinking in their evangelistic efforts. They used the new invention of commercial radio to put forward their ideas. Since that time, this theory has grown in popularity to the point of being the most popular. Its exponents are still highly evangelical, a characteristic unique to this view.

And the winner is...

Which of these points of view is right? That’s a good question. We don’t really know, so we allow all three. Premillennialism is the most popular, but Christian liberty permits polite disagreement. The reason for the “no stress” attitude is simple: it really doesn’t make any difference.

So what does make a difference? Simply this: what the church does to prepare for such events. So to make it clear, we’re going to have a quick review of what happens at the end of time. There are seven things which are agreed upon by all interpreters. These are the things we need to prepare for.

The Seven Last Things

Please note that these are not in any particular order, and that good schol-

Point out that “most popular” and “correct” aren’t necessarily the same thing.

Think of the impact today if one point of view controlled all television broadcasting.

The fact that it’s evangelical doesn’t make it better. One could also call this a fault in the other theories.

This is not to say we shouldn’t do as good a job as we can in interpreting Revelation. We just need to recognize that the specific interpretation is not an essential of the faith. The Seven Last Things, however, are a constant for virtually all writers on the subject.

A homely analogy might be this: the thief is coming—but we don’t know if he’ll use the front door, the back door or a window. But just because we don’t know which doesn’t mean we wouldn’t prepare.

Revelation 7:14	<p>ars disagree as to the order. They are placed here in a logical grouping which is not necessarily chronological.</p>	
Revelation 16:13-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Tribulation.</i> One theory holds that this has already happened, but all agree that there will come a time when the persecution of Christians will become very intense. Some hold this to be a seven year period of trial. 	The word “tribulation” only occurs in Revelation.
Revelation 16:13-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Armageddon.</i> The “last battle” to be fought is viewed as being a battle between good and evil. The location for this battle is known; it is in Palestine. The result of this battle will be an immense slaughter. 	The site is still known as Har-Megiddo.
Daniel 12:1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Resurrection of the Dead, or Rapture.</i> All views agree that at the end the dead will rise from their graves. Those Christians still alive at the time will rise into the air with the resurrected ones. This is usually (but not always) associated with the next event. There is vigorous debate as to how many separate resurrections there will be, and for what purpose (e.g., judgment). 	By way of example, Hal Lindsey posits six separate resurrections, including Christ. The key point is that this is not some fuzzy, ghostly resurrection but a bodily one.
Acts 1:11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Second Coming.</i> All interpretations agree that Jesus is returning in bodily form. He ascended into heaven after his resurrection; he is returning the same way. 	Stress point: <i>bodily</i> return.
Matthew 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Judgment.</i> Often referred to as the Great White Throne Judgment, this is a time when all will be judged. Those who are true Christians will be rewarded for their deeds; non-Christians will be judged for their sins. 	Point out that judgment is not always negative—this should be a time of reward for Christians.
Revelation 20:1-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Millennium.</i> Literally “thousand years,” it is the time when Satan is restrained. This is often connected with passages which suggest that a golden era for mankind is coming. At the end of this period, Satan is released for a little while. 	In the Greek, the word for “thousand” and the word for “a large number” are the same word—myriad.
2nd Peter 3:10-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>New Heaven, New Earth.</i> At the very end God recreates all things; there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Contact with God will be very close; death will no longer happen. 	This is taken by most scholars to be something unimaginable—but there are many who hold the description of the “city foursquare” in Revelation to be a literal one.
	<p>The immediate reaction to this is something like, “Huh?” After all, this collection of events seems almost unthinkable. Only in the last century did we possess the means to slaughter so many people in one battle as Revelation portrays Armageddon. The rest of these seem kind of far-fetched.</p>	

That they may be; but the prophecies concerning the time of the end date back to the time of the Old Testament. Scholars disagree on which passages refer to what, but all agree on this: if you believe in Jesus Christ, you accept his word for the fact that these things are going to happen. It's likely enough that none of these theories has the scope of things entirely right—but then, our imaginations can't compete with God's creative power.

“All well and good,” you say, “and very exciting I'm sure. But what should I do about it?” Good question!

What not to do about it

Don't become a fanatic partisan of one point of view over all others. Remember that intelligent Christians, reading the same Bible you read, have disagreed about this for years.

What you should do about it

Mark 13:37

Jesus tells you exactly what to do: “Watch!” By this he means for us to be on the lookout for these things. This is not so that we can impress our friends and neighbors with our prophetic ability. It's so that when these things happen—especially his return—we will be ready.

The key to this is to be always ready. Jesus often illustrated this idea by telling a parable of a man who went away on a journey—and returned later at a time unannounced. What would he find? Would he find the household servants doing their jobs, and the place neat and clean? Or would he find them slovenly? Once the boss walks in the door, there is no time to catch up!

So what should we be doing? The ordinary, day to day things of the kingdom. Reading the Scripture, prayer, good works, worship—all these things on a regular basis will prepare us. It's just like your employer: the best way to make sure that he never sees you goofing off—is to never goof off. The best way to be sure you're ready for his return is to be ready every day.

