

Christianity 101

A Discipleship Guide for New Believers

1. What Is God Doing?

A. Who Is God?

■ His Being and Essence

- God is attractive and a relationship with him is to be desired above all things. (Ps. 27:4).
- **Illustration:** Young maiden.
- **Keach's Catechism**, Question #8: What is God? A: God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. (*1 Tim. 1:17*)
 - Spirit (Invisible)
 - Infinite
 - Eternal
 - Unchangeable
 - Wisdom
 - Power
 - Holiness and Righteousness
 - Justice
 - Wisdom
 - Goodness and Mercy
 - Truth

■ Creator

■ Trinity

- **THE TRINITY:** God is one being, having one essence, in three persons, each with a definable personality and role. Each person is eternal and preexistent and each member of the Godhead participates fully with one another. We confess this great doctrinal truth in our creeds and in our prayers. (*See Matthew 28:19 and 2 Cor. 13:14.*)
- **ILLUSTRATION:** We can have a single egg, composed of three distinct elements – shell, white, and yolk. Under certain conditions, water can be liquid, solid (ice), or gas (vapor). Although these examples do not adequately explain either the existence of the relationship of the Trinity, they do show us how one thing can also be several.

B. Why Does God Save?

- God has brought about salvation on his own terms and for his own glory.

■ For His Own Glory and Name's Sake

(*John 17:3, Isa. 66, 1 Tim. 1:17*)

■ To Make Us Right With God

- God desires to be in relationship with us
- God's must balance his Goodness with his Holiness and Justice
- Man's Sin – total depravity

- **RECONCILIATION:** The process by which estrangement or enmity is overcome and relationship or unity is restored.

C. How Does God Save?

■ The Father Chooses

- **ELECTION:** The sovereign, eternal decree of God who chooses certain persons for salvation in Jesus Christ.

■ Jesus, the Son, Provides the Perfect Sacrifice

- **PROPITIATION:** The turning away of wrath by an offering – in this case the perfect sacrifice of Christ Jesus.

■ The Spirit Applies and Secures

- God with Us

- **REGENERATION:** The enlivening and animation of the heart and the renewing of fallen human nature through the gracious, sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit.

Application/Assignment

DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTIONS:

1. Ask the new believer how he or she used to view God. Did they have a positive or negative view? How has that estimation changed following accepting Christ into their lives?
2. What do you think about the concept of the Trinity?
3. Can we really trust God? Is he worthy of our honor and praise? How will this affect their appreciation of corporate worship?

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2. What Does It Mean to Believe?

In order to best describe the nature of saving faith, we need to speak of believing in terms of more than simple assent or belief in a set of facts or events. Saving faith conveys the fuller sense of trust and dependence on the object believed in and upon: the Lord Jesus Christ.

- **Illustration:** A Wedding – before you marry, you must take care of legal issues and make a public vow.

A. Who Is the Object of our Faith?

■ Jesus Christ

- **Historical:** *Gal 4:4-5, John 1:14, Luke 2:1-2.*
 - Virgin Birth
 - Gospel Narratives: The person and work of Jesus Christ are infallibly revealed in the four gospel books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- **Divine and Human Natures:** He is perfectly God and perfectly man (*Heb 4:14-15*).

• **DUAL NATURE OR HYPOSTATIC UNION:** The union of the two natures, of deity and humanity, in one person – Jesus Christ. These natures exist in the God-man “without confusion or mixture, without change, without division and without separation” (Council of Chalcedon 451 AD). The manner in which this is accomplished is both mysterious and wonderful.

• **Discipleship Question:** Why does he need to be both human and divine?

• **Savior: Mediator and Messiah:** *Rom. 3:25-26, Col 1:19-20.*

- The Cross: We must trust that Jesus is who he said he is – the promised savior of God’s people and the one who restores them to relationship to God. His sinless life and substitutionary death on the cross fully accomplished these roles.
- **Illustration:** Pool and Preservers

• **MEDIATOR:** The role of a mediator is to bring reconciliation between two parties. In the case of the Lord, Jesus Christ, he brings together sinful man with a holy God by being both the priest who offers an atoning sacrifice, and by taking the place of a perfect offering himself – in the shedding of his own blood. Jesus fills this role both by passively submitting to death on the cross in order to provide a perfect sacrifice, and by actively fulfilling the Law of Moses through his obedience to God’s commands during his life.

■ By Believing in Christ Alone

Christ is the central object of our faith. But that does not leave out the father (who sends) and the spirit (who reveals), who all have loved us.

- **Illustration:** Gambling – put all your chips on Jesus.

• **JUSTIFICATION:** The process by which God pardons and accepts humans, so that they can have a righteous standing before their Creator and Judge. Active vs. Passive obedience. Keach: An act of God’s free grace whereby he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteousness in his sight – only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.

• **ILLUSTRATION:** The judge in a court of law.

• **ILLUSTRATION:** When the teacher overrules the “F” you earned and gives you an “A” at the expense of another student.

- *Examples of Traditions that teach you need to add to Christ* (Gal 1:8):
 - Catholic Condition
 - Pentecostal Condition
 - Evangelical Condition: Feelings
- Fundamentalist Condition: Good Works
- Making a Decision
- Baptismal Regeneration

B. How Do We Believe?

The Father freely gives us what we need to believe upon the name of His Son and to have salvation. But we do need to accept that gift and to recognize the cost of following a holy God.

■ The Free Gift of Faith: Eph. 2:8

- **Not without Obligation.**
- *Illustration:* Adopted Cat

- **GRACE:** God's unmerited favor toward us
- **ILLUSTRATION:** When a transient steals food from you but you still feed him (Pink).

■ True Repentance and Acceptance

Faith is not in our ability to believe but the righteousness of Christ alone. (*Acts 2:38, Rom 10:9-10*)

- *Discipleship Question:* Why is having faith not enough to save? *Answer:* Perfect righteousness is the only thing that can make us right with God, not the act of believing in something.

C. What Does Saving Faith Look Like?

Faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation is also a faith that works. We need to trust that God will provide for all our needs and that we can really live for him – even when this world tries to convince us he is not there. *James 1:6. Luke 17:5-6*

■ Faith in God's Promises

■ Exercising our Faith

- **Faith at Work:** The Spirit reveals the extent of God's work in us (*James 2:26*).
- **Faith Alone but not Faith that Remains Alone**
- **Faith that Overcomes the World**
- *Illustration:* Britney Spears.

DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTIONS : .

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3. How Can We Know God Better?

Now you know that God is acting favorably toward you – wouldn't you enjoy having his continued presence? We have already spoken of pardoning grace; now we turn to strengthening grace. And God has provided the means to maintain relationship with him. Often, we don't take advantage of the opportunities to make use of the means of grace. We need to develop correct feeding habits so that we will know God better. (John 15:4-5, 2 Cor. 3:18)

- **Picture:** A meal or banquet. Of course we will all be invited to the wedding banquet in heaven.
- **Illustration:** The seed has been planted and now it needs to grow. It needs to be given nutrients and watered so that it can sprout.
- **Illustration:** Greek figure fought by Hercules who lost his strength from the earth when lifted up off the ground.

A. How Does God Speak to Us?

God gives us clear direction from his Word and hears us and communicates to our souls in prayer. The bible is wholly reliable and infallibly imparts to us God's will for our lives. It's interpretation and authentic prayer involves the participation and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

■ The Word of God

God has given us everything we need to know him in his Word. In fact, Jesus Christ himself is that eternal Word (Ps. 19:7-11, 1 Tim. 4:4-5, John 1:14). Therefore, knowing God's Word is both desirable and necessary for us to know our Savior better (Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12, 2 Tim. 3:14-15, Rom. 15:4).

- **Illustration:** A baby crying in the hospital, longing for pure milk.

- **INERRANCY:** Scripture is the sufficient, certain, and infallible written Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and accurately recorded for our benefit. Therefore the bible is authoritative in all matters relating to faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Although we have many modern language translations, the original words and meaning are wholly trustworthy – and we even trust in God's providence to preserve that meaning in our translations.
- **THEOPNEUSTIS:** God breathed (see 2 Pet. 1:20-21 and 1 Thes. 2:13).

- **Discipleship Suggestion:** Review the book, *How We Got our Bible*, by Lightfoot.

■ Prayer

Prayer is communication with God. Use the ACTS formula for how we are to approach God in prayer. Then we also need to listen to hear what God will speak back to us – inaudibly, but clearly, and to the deepest parts of our soul. We pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, and through the Holy Spirit. (1 Thes. 5:16-18).

- Adoration
- Confession (1 John 1:9)
- Thanksgiving
- Supplication (Eph. 6:18)
- **Illustration:** Warning regarding Christian musicians who claim their songs are inspired.

B. How Can Meet with God? Public Worship

God uses certain tools and methods of regularly communicating with us. It is his plan to make use of certain means in the church. A new baby needs a family to help care for him or her. Remember also that the people of Israel worshipped together in one places as one congregation (Acts 2:42, Heb. 10:23-25).

Ps 87:2: The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the {other} dwelling places of Jacob.

- **Warning:** A common trap for new believers is that they believe they don't need the church. But God has also given teachers to the church as a gift. When we decide to avoid public worship, we are not doing anyone else in the body any good.

- **Illustration:** What if one radio preacher says one thing and the next day a different personality contradicts? If you simply view a service on t.v., is that worship? You may be learning, but what are you contributing? You need a church to help direct you and teach you to discern what is good and true. Christians need to develop a discriminating palette, rather than indulge in all kinds of junk food or those high in fat and empty calories.

■ Worship

We should be pleased to meet together in worship as one Body, praising our God with one voice and delighting in his presence. If you say you love God but can't worship with your brother, scripture tells us you don't really understand God's expectations. Also, the Word of God is powerfully manifested when his people come together. In worship, we preach the Word of God, publicly read from it, and pray for God's will to be made known to us and for his assistance. The proclaimed Word as preached and explained in worship can have a powerful impact on the heart of the Christian.

- Psalms
- Hymns (Ps. 95:2)
- Prayer (1 Tim. 2:1)
- Scripture Reading (1 Tim. 4:13)
- Offering (Ps. 96:8)
- Sermon
- **Keach's Catechism:** Q#2: What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

■ Ordinances

- **Baptism:** Baptism is a sign of initiation into the body of Christ and serves as public confession of our faith. Likewise, it represents both the washing of our hearts in regeneration, and immersion likewise identifies us with the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20, Acts 2:38). Baptism does not save – it is a sign that we are saved.
- **The Lord's Supper:** This observance is a continuing public declaration of our faith in the the Lord and his provision for our salvation. Because it is the Word of God pictured as a sign, it follows the preaching of the Word, and involves the participation of the entire local church..
- **Warning:** Private participation misses out on the proclamation of the Word, the symbolism of corporate unity ("wait to eat"), the public proclamation of Jesus' death (family misses out), and the result of God communicating to the whole body.

- **ORDINANCE VS. SACRAMENT:** We refer to these prescribed practices as ordinances because they were given to us by our Lord to commend the faith, and we obediently observe them. In the most basic and traditional sense, they served as "sacred signs" which carries the meaning of the word "sacrament". However, the use of sacrament up to modern times often is taught to mean being made holy through participation, and this scripture does not state.

- **Illustration:** Puritans and Martha's Vineyard indians.

C. How Do We Communicate Daily with God? Private Devotions

■ Private Devotions

God has not left us as orphans, and desires regular contact with us through these means. Therefore, we are to engage in regular bible reading as well as prayer to hear God speak (Ps. 119:15-16, Josh. 1:8).

- **Key Spiritual Disciplines**
 - Bible Reading and Study
 - Prayer
 - Fasting
 - Silence
 - Simplicity
- **Illustration:** The words of Pastor Steve's old professor, Dr. Gannett.

■ Family Devotions

What will be the center of your home? There are benefits for the family or couple to stay on the same page in learning from God. And just as in the church, husbands and fathers are to take the lead (when available) (Deut. 11:18-19, Ps. 78:4-5).

DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTIONS: .

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4. How Can I Lose Sight of God's Beauty?

God has given us everything we need to live for him (2 Pet. 1:2-3). We are also called to live holy lives before the Lord and to submit our lives and bodies to him. We desire to do this so we can continue to behold him in all his beauty and glory. But we still wrestle in the flesh, and contend with the influences and temptations of the world – as well as our enemy, the devil.

- *Heb. 12:1-2:* Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- **Picture:** Sin tries to become more beautiful than God. But really, it is only a cheap imitation or knockoff – costume jewelry.
- **Illustration:** Telemarketer calling when you're focused on enjoying you're the company of your family or fiancé.
- **Illustration:** The couple in a New York apartment. They are invited to attend a symphony for a time only to come back and find their apartment has been ransacked.

- **SIN:** Any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. It misses the mark of God's perfection. Fundamentally, sin is rebellion against God and the serving of ourselves. In fallen humanity, this corruption runs throughout everything a person does (Rom. 3:10-18). *Keach's Catechism:* Q18: What is sin? A. Any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

A. Why Do We Still Struggle?

■ We Are New Creatures in Christ

God has given us the ability to respond to him and to live victoriously in this life. He both expects us and equips us to overcome (2 Cor. 5:17).

- **PERFECTIONISM:** The unbiblical teaching that we can please God in the body. John Wesley sought and taught it but never found it. Neither are the marks and signs of our sanctification found in second blessing gifts (prophecy, speaking in tongues, etc.).

■ Although We Have the Spirit, We Continue to Wrestle in the Flesh

Temptation is not sin (James 1:13-14). Christ himself was tempted, but he passed the test. But giving in to temptation is sin. Sin can obscure our picture of God, the one we love, and separate us from his presence for a time. Read Rom. 7:18-20, Rom. 8:6-8, Gal. 5:16-17.

- **Example:** Exegetical analysis of Romans 7 of how are our two natures war within us.
- **Illustration:** We may unwittingly see or desire something that stimulates, but are not obligated to return to it.
- **Illustration:** Bible characters, such as Peter in Galatians; Paul's thorn (2 Cor.); Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians.

B. How Do I Resist Temptation?

Temptation tries to tell us there are things that are more beautiful or desirable than God. And sin can be so devious, insidious, lying hidden in our members. Three basic drives call to us 1 John 2:16:

- Lust of the flesh: the passion for pleasures
- Lust of the eyes: the desire for possessions; greed
- Pride of life: the drive for power

- **Illustration:** Example of Christ's temptation; Achan; and Ananias and Sapphira.
- **Illustration:** Sin is like candy-coated cow dung. It tries to appear attractive, but scripture refers to it as death, vomit, rotting, a poison, a dirty rag, gangrene, a disease, a plague, a festering sore, filthiness, and blackness.

■ We Must Know Our Enemies

There is an unholy trinity that works to take our devotion away from God. First, we are our own worst enemy when we follow the desires of our flesh and live contrary to the Spirit. But we also suffer persecution from the world and spiritual attacks by our enemy, the devil. But God yet call us to resist these temptations and persevere.

- **Warning:** C. S. Lewis' makes a distinction between the animal (natural desires twisted) vs. the diabolic sin (James 3). The first is rebellion against God; the second against God and others.
- **The Flesh** (Rom. 7:22-23, Rom. 13:14, 1 Pet. 2:11)
- **Illustration:** Sexual sin provides a false intimacy. Consider the man who walks into a pornography shop looking for intimacy with God, but fulfilling it with a lesser source.
- **The World** (John 15:18-19, John 17:14)
- **The Devil** (1 Pet 5:8-9, James 4:7, Eph 6:10-13)

■ The Lord Gives Us Power to Resist

Don't underestimate the power of sin and temptation – but also recognize that God has given us the grace and the help we need to overcome (1 Cor 10:13, Heb 2:18). He provides this to us through regular use of the means of grace, through personal accountability and encouragement, and through beholding his beauty together in worship. We will stumble and fail sometimes and give in to the temptation to sin, but through Christ, we have a way back to the Father when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

- **Example:** The Lord's prayer asks that we not be lead into temptation – and deliver us from the evil one. We want to be kept safe from the deceptions and schemes of the devil.
- **Illustration:** Climbing the mountain – slipping and sliding, but not all the way to the bottom.

DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTIONS: *Pursuit of Holiness*, by Jerry Bridges.

C. How Do We Overcome?

■ We Are Called to Be Holy and Separate

We have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ and are encouraged to live up that high calling. This means we are to resist our former lusts and to strive to live purely before God. Read 1 Pet 1:14-16, 1 Pet 2:5, 1 Cor 5:10-11, 2 Cor 6:17-18, Rev 18:4.

- **HOLINESS:** Perfection as found in God, separate from sin and rebellion. This state is both sacred and complete.

■ We Are to Crucify the Desires of the Flesh

We are called to sanctify or set aside ourselves for the purpose of holy living, and to put to death the desires of our flesh. We must seek to please God over ourselves (Rom 6:11-13, Gal 2:20, Gal 5:24-25).

- **SANCTIFICATION:** The process by which something is made holy and separate, devoted or set aside to sacred service. We are not sanctified by legalistically keeping the law (Rom. 6:22, 1 Thess. 4:1-7).

■ The Spirit of the Lord Gives Us the Power and Faith to Overcome

1 John 5:4-5 tells us that our faith in Christ overcomes the world. The call to be holy and live for God is also the call to seek growth and to mature in the faith.

- **Challenge:** It comes down to faith – is God as attractive as he says he is, or is sin to be desired over devotion to him? Do we go to the means of grace when our faith is weak or we feel we are being tempted beyond our strength?
- **Titus 2:11-14:** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*

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5. How Do I Display God's Beauty?

Once we recognize that we have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus, and that we are to continually behold his beauty through regular participation in the means of grace, as well as to seek to live in a way pleasing to him according to the way we deal with sin and temptation, we are also called to represent and reflect the beauty of the Lord in the testimony of our lives. God is attractive and our walk should be in such a way that others may desire to have a relationship with the Lord as well. Also, we now bear the very name of our Holy Lord, and we better not bring dishonor to him.

In fact, when you fall in love, you want to tell the whole world about the object of your affection, as well as the way he or she makes you feel. With God, we are to do this openly and publicly, not as secret Christian spies in the world, or like those who are ashamed to be different.

- **Picture:** We are not to be ashamed to admit who we love, nor to justify the actions we take to please that person. There is an authenticity to our love when we back it up with both words and actions.
- **Example:** Different kinds of relationships that declare love.
- **Illustration:** Commercial where woman in a restaurant mistakenly receives an engagement ring in her cake and immediately calls her mother.

A. How Will People Know I'm a Christian?

Because we ourselves did not do anything to deserve God's love, we should present the gospel to others with all humility. There is no room for spiritual pride or self-righteous defensiveness when we deal with loved ones and coworkers who are still lost. The Gospel is a stumbling block to unbelievers already; don't add to their resistance by becoming personally unbearable.

■ The Witness of our Mouths: Confession

Rom 10:9-10: that if you confess with your mouth Jesus {as} Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

- **Read:** 1 Pet 3:15, 1 Tim 3:16.

- **THE GOSPEL:** The good news that Jesus, the Son of God, has appeared in the flesh to save mankind from their sins. Jesus' claims are backed up his life and character in the four "gospel" accounts in the bible. Any accurate representation of the gospel message must include 1) God's holiness and mercy; 2) Man's need for salvation from sin; 3) the provision for our release in the person of Christ; 4) an appeal to personally accept the free gift of faith in Jesus and repent of our sins; and 5) a call to live for God in this world, and the promise that we will dwell with him forever in the next.

■ We Must not Be Shy or Ashamed

Rom 1:16: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

2 Tim 1:7-8: For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with {me} in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,

Matt 10:32-33: "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

- **Illustration:** Incident in Russia, where the KGB bursts in and tests a secret cell of Christians.

- **DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTION:** It is better for a new believer to tell people right away about his or her faith.

■ The Holy Spirit Will Teach Us What to Say

Matt 10:17-20: "But beware of men, for they will hand you over to {the} courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. "For it is not you who speak, but {it is} the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Col 4:5-6: Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, {as though} seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

- **WITNESS:** A witness is one who has seen and been personally convinced of the evidence, and then bears public testimony of that reality. To witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, is to bring that testimony of “good news” to our family, friends, and neighbors, and to maintain a walk that backs it up.
- **DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTION:** Use personal testimony as a tool.

■ **Example: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper**

- **Truth:** When new Christians are baptized as adults, their relatives may be insulted and claim they have denied their faith in regard to an infant baptism. But there is actually no better way to testify of a new, personal relationship with Christ than to do this. Read Rom 6:4-5 and 1 Cor 11:26.

B. How Do I Back Up My Confession?

We need to put our money where our mouth is.

■ **The Witness of our Lives: a Godly Example**

- **Warning:** In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis uses the words of the senior demon Wormwood, to frustrate the testimony of a new Christian who focuses on the spiritual state of his loved ones alone: “It is, no doubt, impossible to prevent his praying for his mother, but we have means of rendering the prayer innocuous. Make sure that they are always very ‘spiritual,’ that he is always concerned with the state of her soul and never with her rheumatism.”
- **Illustration:** Response of Dick Hunter’s relatives and friends to the care offered by this church to him, and Lucy and Nino.

Titus 2:7-8: in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, {with} purity in doctrine, dignified, sound {in} speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

James 2:26: For just as the body without {the} spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

■ **There Can Be No Contradiction between our Words and our Actions**

Others must be able to discern integrity in our character.

- **Example:** Be careful that you are not one person in church and another in your home. If you speak pleasantries openly when you are here, and then bad mouth people or have “poached pastor” for Sunday dinner, your family may well become polluted by such attitudes. And remember: Your kids talk!
- **Illustration:** Example in High School.

James 3:8-12: But no one can tame the tongue; {it is} a restless evil {and} full of deadly poison. With it we bless {our} Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come {both} blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening {both} fresh and bitter {water?} Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor {can} salt water produce fresh.

2 Pet 2:22: It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, {returns} to wallowing in the mire."

- **HYPOCRISY:** To say one thing, but to refute with our actions.

C. How Can I Bring Others to Christ?

■ **The Great Commission**

You can’t actually save them yourself; that is God’s work alone. But you can exhibit a godly testimony and behavior that recommends a real relationship with the Lord. And you can accurately represent the promises held out in the gospel call so that people will be able to respond to the very words of life in the Word of God.

Matt 28:18-20: And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matt 24:14: This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

- **EFFECTUAL CALL:** The infallible work of God in drawing the elect to himself. The general call of the gospel to repent and live for God goes out to all men, but only those to whom it has been given to possess saving faith will authentically respond. We are responsible to present the general call; God must effectively call and save them.

■ **Evangelism**

■ **Missions**

- **DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTION:** More Than a Carpenter by Josh McDowell or The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel.

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6. How Do I Relate to Others?

The bible is very clear that the quality of our vertical relationship with God will impact and direct our horizontal relationships here on earth. Christ has come into our hearts by faith to be the center of our lives and become our truest friend and highest love. We want to spend all our time with him because the relationship we now have with God is better than any we can experience with other people. But we will continue to have relationships with those from our past, as well as others who will cross our path, and we need to know how to best handle these.

- **Picture:** Now that we love God and have declared our affection for him and our adoration of his beauty, it's time to take the Lord, our beloved, home to meet our family and friends.
- **Correction:** We don't add Christ as a way to make our existing relationship better; Christ comes first, and then our relationships are to be based on our higher devotion to him. This order allows us to serve God above all, but also to have and see beauty in our relationships with others.

How does God expect us to handle our earthly relationships? We are called to avoid pleasing men, but also to serve them. We must uphold the truth found in the Word of God, but also demonstrate the reality and beauty of that truth in the way we treat others (I Jn. 4:20-21).

- **Illustration:** Sometimes, family and friends will tell you they think you have given up too much to follow your new love with the Lord, or even call you a fanatic or say you have joined a cult.
- **Warning:** There is a danger of insulting our families and friends when we stand up for the truth. But we must be careful not to write them off if they don't understand our new relationship with Christ, or repudiate all our former relationships.

A. How Do I Treat or Select My Spouse?

■ A Believing Spouse

We count ourselves blessed when we find ourselves already married to a believer or when the Lord leads us to a Christian mate. Scripture is very clear that we are to honor our spouses and love them in the same selfless way Christ has loved us.

- **Example:** Christ's sacrifice for his beloved – the church (Eph 5:22-33).

■ An Unbelieving Spouse

We are not to seek to marry an unbeliever (see "unequally yoked" below), but if we are already in such a relationship, the bible gives us some clear instructions as to how to preserve that union. We are to serve an unbelieving spouse, even if they don't treat us well (1 Pet 3:1-7), and to remain married as long as they will have us (1 Cor. 7).

- **Point:** A non-Christian spouse will likely desire not to be a part of your new relationship. But we must do nothing to aggravate the situation further.

■ Dating

Possessing this new, exclusive devotion to the Lord poses a problem with the issue of dating. We are not to seek such intimate relationships with unbelievers, and therefore even dating them or allowing room for romantic possibilities can be dangerous. This is particularly true of teenagers and those in their early twenties who naturally seek romantic or loving relationships as they build their lives, but need to weigh carefully who they may one day partner with.

- **UNEQUALLY YOKED:** This condition is one that scripture tells us to avoid with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14-18), particularly when we seek marriage or when we are about to enter into any other kind of binding relationship. The picture is one where two different kinds of animal are yoked together to do a task and do not remain in step with one another. When a Christian has a holy calling to serve the Lord, and dreams and goals that put God first, it is impossible to fully share these with an unbeliever, or to gain sympathy and understanding for our first love.

- **Clarification:** There may be different levels of dating, such as going out with a group or attending school dances. But even these low-key contacts are fraught with potential long-term difficulties, and Christians need to take specific steps against being drawn into any intimate relationship with an unbeliever.

B. How Do I Deal with my Family?

■ Parents

Although God now comes first in our lives, we are still to honor our parents and obey them (Eph. 6:1-3), to the extent that it does not contradict God's expectations (Acts 4:19-20).

- **Illustration:** Dick's father's disapproval of his going to Bible school.
- **Warning:** Our parents may not understand the transformation that has occurred in our lives, and may even resent our new relationship with Christ (Luke 21:16-17, Luke 14:26).

■ Children

Regardless of whether or not our kids are Christians we will have the duty to disciple them and seeing to their education about the things of the Lord (Deut. 6:7). This includes leading them into relationships in the church and with other Christians.

- **Example:** Family devotions (see Chap. 3).
- **Point:** Males need to accept spiritual leadership in the home, just as in the church.
- **Illustration:** The Columbia shuttle pilot, a Christian, left a devotional video for his kids to watch each day while he was in space.
- **Question:** What about rebellious children? Don't be too strict according to a new biblical standard alone (Eph. 6:4). You need to always exhibit understanding and love, and preserve your primary duty to protect them and raise them well.

■ Relatives

- **Challenge:** When it comes to a decision to attend a family function or to be at worship with your church family, it becomes necessary to weigh our obligations to both groups, as well as to do the thing that best serves the Lord. Although you may disappoint or even anger your family if you leave them to go to church, this may be just the thing you need to do to communicate to them the seriousness of your relationship with God and the depth of your devotion to him. Also, it is better to invite family members to come with you, rather than allow them to persuade you to stay with them rather than seek God.

C. What Kind of Friendships Should I Retain?

■ Friendships with Believers

We are to treat other Christians as brothers and sisters (Matt. 12:47-50), and with them we can have a new kind of intimacy and common experience (I Jn. 1:6-7). And as the church functions properly as the Body of Christ, they will encourage, support and build us up (1 Cor. 12).

■ Bosses and Coworkers

We must not contradict our testimony concerning our devotion to God with a poor example or attitude in the workplace. We are to obey our bosses, and to treat our co-workers with respect (Eph. 6:5-8). Those of us who are bosses are to remember our own Master who is in heaven, and to treat employees fairly (Eph. 6:9).

- **Challenge:** This includes our obligation to obey those who govern us. Christians are to pay taxes and obey the laws of our country.
- Rom. 13:7-8: Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

■ Unbelieving

We cannot have the same kind of intimate relationships or fellowship with unbelievers that we can have with other Christians. But we can be friendly with our old acquaintances, school friends, and neighbors. Teens should interrelate with their classmates, but also openly honor Christ in their relationships at school. We may help our unbelieving neighbors, but not go with them into immoral or unbiblical behavior (1 Cor 5:9-10).

- **Illustration:** Not leaving Jesus in your locker (bible or poster).
- 1 Pet. 4:4: In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you;

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7. What Are the Blessings of a Relationship with God?

There are often many misconceptions and false expectations of what life as a new believer is supposed to be like. In fact, in the scriptures, God promises us all we need to know and enjoy him, but never a perfect life here on earth. Sometimes he blesses us with times of happiness and earthly comforts, but more often he trains us to desire him above all else and purges us of lesser dreams through the process of trials and disappointments. The Upper Room discourse and Last Supper are the will and testament of Jesus Christ to his followers, and serves as a perfect model for understanding what the Christian should expect out of his or her relationship with the Lord.

- **Picture:** We remain in relationship with a loving spouse or significant other, not because of what they can do for us, but for who they truly are and for the positive effect and pure pleasure of their presence with us.
Eph. 1:3: Blessed {be} the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly {places} in Christ,
- **Illustration:** When you get married, you may be looking for the perfect relationship, but it is soon to manifest arguments, disappointments, and even some heartache. In dating, the man is traditionally imagined to be knight in shining armor – until he makes a mistake. But does our view of a loved one’s worthiness lessen their true value, or were our expectations just out of whack?

A. What Does God Promise to Give Me?

In his Word, the Lord promises that we can have a new and loving relationship with him, both on this earth and in the world to come. It is a shame that God’s own presence, a pardon for sin, and the grace he bestows on us daily don’t seem to be enough for some -- but these are the very things he does promise to us. If we can’t get excited about these blessings, then we don’t really know what it is to love the things of God.

- **Illustration:** Knowing and being in fellowship with God is sometimes like being in on the joke with your close friends. You know who the Lord is and what he wants, and it only takes a few words or motions to “get” what he says. When you have this mindset, it’s possible to find humor in so many things, seeing how screwed up the world is and realizing that God is still in charge of it all.

■ God promises his presence.

The best thing we can hope from the one we love is their presence in our lives. Consider this list of the blessings Jesus promises his followers in the Upper Room discourse (John 14-17):

- A place with God (John 14:2-3)
- Jesus reveals the Father (John 14:7-10)
- His abiding presence (John 14:20, 23)
- The Holy Spirit (14:16-17, 26)
- Grant requests... in His Name (14:14, 16:23-24)
- Promise we will do great works (John 14:12)
- His peace (John 14:27)
- Pruning (15:2)
- His love (15:9)
- Friendship (John 15: 15)
- Joy (John 16:20-22)
- His Words (17:8)
- Intercessory Prayer (17:9-21)
- His Glory (John 17:22-24)

Note: These passages are not about what we personally want to get when we use the name of Jesus in prayer, but rather when we, as servants of the Lord, go into the world in the name of Jesus to do his bidding.

We have been adopted into God’s own family and made fellow heirs with Jesus, so that we share in his inheritance. This means we will be honored and glorified with him – even though he earned that place for us – as well as live with the Father forever.

- **Adoption: Keach’s Catechism:** Q38. What is adoption? A. An act of God’s free grace whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.
- **Illustration:** We don’t get sent back to the orphanage or agency when we are bad. When God takes us in, we are adopted forever and it is our new, perfect parent who guarantees that enduring relationship.

- **Discipleship Question:** What do I do when I feel forsaken? If I don't sense God's favor upon me, am I still blessed? *Answer:* The distinction is between God's felt presence vs. his actual presence. While we may go through times when we feel alone, God has promised to never forsake us, or leave us as orphans. It is true that you need to seek God afresh, but don't manufacture positive or holy feelings.
- **Illustration:** Consider the example of David in the psalms as he pours out his heart and then waits upon God (Psalm 46:10). Also, read about the Shulamite woman in Song of Songs who treasures her beloved's presence while he is there and then laments when that moment comes to an end.

■ God grants us more grace.

God also promises his power to us, so that we can endure all that comes our way in life and to overcome such difficulties. We experience this strengthening grace as a work of and by the renewed filling of the Holy Spirit.

- **GRACE:** The unmerited favor of God toward us. We experience this blessing both in the form of saving (or pardoning) grace -- whereby we are elected by God, justified by Christ Jesus, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit -- and strengthening grace, which refers to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in both conforming us to the likeness of Jesus, as well as granting us the faith that overcomes the world.

■ We have the promise of eternal life with God.

Not only can we have a full life of joy with the Lord here on earth, but we are promised that we will live with him forever in the life to come. In fact, we will be all the more blessed when we see him face to face, both in knowing God fully, and in having our sinful nature taken away, being clothed with a new, heavenly body. *See Chap. 8.*

B. What Does God Not Promise to Give Me?

The problem is not that God withholds blessings from us, but that certain teachers, along with our own preconceived notions, have promised us more than what the bible does. Therefore, although it may be God's good pleasure to grant us earthly comforts and a respite from pain, we are not to look for our reward here on earth (Luke 6:24-26).

■ No Promise of health and wealth, peace and prosperity

God never intended for this life to become heaven on earth. Everything that happens to us -- sin, sickness, death -- is a sign of just how bad and fallen this world is, and our negative experiences are partly intended to wean us from our love of this earthly existence. We look for home and kids and a promotion, as well as freedom from all pain, but the Lord never intended us to live lives of leisure, or to selfishly rest while others labor. True discipleship involves sacrifice and service.

- **Illustration:** We may enjoy going on vacation and spending some days at an amusement or theme park, but then we get back to our lives and jobs. Those who want the fun all the time are like those who want to stay in the amusement park full-time.
- **Clarification:** We find in the O.T. numerous promises of earthly blessings for the people of Israel. But in what way do these hold true for the believer today? Consider the words of the Beatitudes (Matt. 5).
- **Warning:** The use of the so-called Prayer of Jabez. Recent reports of pastors here in Lynn.
- **Challenge:** Until we take up the tent pegs holding us down in this life, or pull up our anchor from the dreams this world offers, we will never know the blessing of Christ as the anchor of our souls, nor will we desire to dwell in our heavenly tent, waiting for us in glory.
- **Discipleship Question:** When God does not heal believers. What about suffering on a deathbed? Was the focus of Christ's ministry to heal everyone?

■ God does not endorse self-esteem.

The world tells us that we need to get everyone to feel good about themselves so that they can be productive and treat others with respect. In fact, many professionals and theorists blame the Christian doctrine of sin for bringing people down and telling them that they are not good. But the true value of the believer comes from knowing God and becoming more like Christ. We do not need to have a high view of our own value in and of ourselves, because God himself has esteemed us to the extent that he sent his son to redeem us.

- **SELF-ESTEEM:** To consider oneself worthy of value.

- **WARNING:** Robert Shuller of the Crystal Cathedral teaches that we must love ourselves and be happy in order to be attractive to God. He says that we must first love ourselves in order to love others. But as selfish sinners, this is not something we need to learn; we already serve ourselves first and that is a form of self-love. Instead we need to apply those same energies in serving others -- in effect, placing them first.

- **ILLUSTRATION:** Pastor Steve's own experience with esteem.

■ **God's blessings are not conditional.**

Just as we do not earn our salvation, we likewise do not serve God in order to receive blessings or rewards. We obey God and love him because he deserves to be honored and adored (Luke 17:10). Whatever he give us back is his free choice to bless us or to train us to improve our relationship with him.

- **Warning:** Don't expect God to preserve your marriage or save your children just because you belong to him.
- **Illustration:** Believe it or not, even Christians do go through the heartrending circumstances of divorce. Sometimes they bring it upon themselves due to poor relational choices and sin, and other times the separation is forced upon them by the actions of the spouse. But this is not a sign that God has abandoned his child, nor that we can never love again.
- **Clarification:** But God does go above and beyond even what he has already promised, according to his own good pleasure (Eph. 3:20). Sometimes he chooses to give us blessings here on earth – not because we deserve it or as a means of buying our devotion. So we praise God when he saves our spouse or children – but he is not required to do it.

C. What Kind of Life Can I Expect?

In the Upper Room before he was betrayed, Jesus told his disciples what they could expect in this world. A new believer also must be warned to prepare for the storms of life. But we are still to have joy in the Lord even in the midst of our struggles.

- **Illustration:** A general or captain not telling his men they are about to encounter the enemy.

■ **God uses shattered dreams.**

God often shatters our preconceptions and earthly dreams in order to get us to focus back upon him once again. But the hope of the Christian is that although our pain can become intense, God is still working everything out for our good (Rom. 8:28), and will still care for us. He restores the broken ones and comforts those who mourn.

- **SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD:** The biblical teaching that God is king, supreme ruler, and lawgiver of the entire universe. He has both the right and the power to dispose of all things in the way that he wills, and he exercises control at all times over his creation. He has ordained all that transpires in the form of eternal decrees, working out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Eph. 1:11 – see also PREDESTINATION and PROVIDENCE). For the Christian, it is comforting to recognize that God works all things out for our good.

- **Illustration:** Our beloved desires our attention to share their beauty with us, but we are consumed with the business of our day or seeking entertainment elsewhere. He or she needs to unplug our t.v., music, or video game, in order to snap us out of our selfish reverie.
- **Illustration:** Naomi; James the apostle; Paul's thorn (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
- **Challenge:** Until we rearrange our earthly priorities designed to bring us comfort, and unplug from worldly entertainments, we will not have the time to focus on the will of God, nor be able to place our affections upon the Lord in the way that he asks.

■ **We need to be ready for persecution.**

Jesus promises his followers that they will be persecuted and hated by the world (John 16:1-4). If you aren't sensing any persecution, are you sure you're living a life pleasing to God? The Christian needs to be ready for suffering, even to the point of martyrdom.

2 Tim 3:12: Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

- **Point:** Such attacks often come from within the church or from those who claim to be religious. Christ and the disciples were persecuted by the religious leaders of their day.
- **Illustration:** Bob Scully and his brother's gay choir.

■ **The Christian can have personal peace and a clear conscience.**

We have a firm hope that God is working everything out and that we are entirely in his hands. For this reason, we know the peace that passes understanding (John 14:27, Phil. 4:7), and we can also have a clear conscience that whatever we endure in this life, we are serving the Lord and will be rewarded in the next (2 Cor. 1:12, 1 Tim. 1:5).

- **DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTION:** *The Pressure's Off* by Larry Crabbe.

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8. What Happens When We Die?

One of the greatest blessings we receive is the invitation to live with God forever, even after this life is over. And we look forward to the day when we will go to live eternally with the one we love most. For the believer, heaven is more than an afterthought; it is our ultimate destination and true home. And although all people will stand in judgment before their creator and savior at the end of time to answer for their life, Christians have nothing to fear because the Lord Jesus has covered our sins and God has already adopted us into his family.

- **Heb. 9:27-28:** And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.
- **Read:** Matt. 25:1-13 – the Parable of the Ten Virgins.
- **Picture:** Just as a virgin bride, we look forward to the day when the groom comes to take us to his own home and when we can live together with him apart from all our other attachments. In a first century Jewish Wedding, the groom would give a legally-binding pledge to marry his intended. Then up to a one year engagement – during which separation and yearning would be experienced – was endured, while the bride prepared for her impending marriage, and the bridegroom prepared a place for them (John 14:1-2). Then, unannounced, the bridegroom would lead a posse of his closest male friends to take her away to the wedding party. She would immediately go with him along with her own attendants, and a day or more of feasting would be observed. Then the bridal chamber would be opened, while the party was still being held, and in the presence of the guests, the bride's veil would be lifted, so that could fully behold her husband's face and then be accepted into his family.¹

A. When Will We See God?

When will Christ come back again to take us to heaven and judge the heavens and the earth? Many have tried to read the signs of the times or interpret the prophecies of the bible to set a date, but this is contrary to Jesus' own words to his disciples. Instead, we are simply to look for his coming and to prepare our hearts and lives to meet him on that day – whether he returns or when we meet him after we die.

■ The Kingdom of God Has Already Been Established

Many have taught that the Kingdom of God has yet to come (misinterpreting the words of the Lord's Prayer), and so missed the fact that the reign of Christ has already begun. Because the Kingdom has already been established, all the prophecies relating to its appearance and the power Jesus promised to his disciples are in effect during this age (Matt 4:23, Luke 4:21). We refer to the time of Jesus coming 2,000 years ago until the day when he returns again as "the Last Days", and it is the time when the Church continues his work (Joel 2:28-29).

- **THE INAUGURATED KINGDOM:** The Kingdom of God was established on earth with the earthly ministry of Jesus, according to testimony of his words and according to the power he exercised over both sin and sickness. He likewise committed his Kingdom into the care of his disciples upon his ascension into heaven, promising that they would exercise authority in his name to carry on his Father's work (Matt. 28:18-20). But the full manifestation and power of God's Kingdom on earth has yet to be consummated, and this will occur when Christ comes back to judge the heavens and the earth. Therefore, we refer to the Kingdom as being "already, and not yet." It has been established and Christ's work is accomplished here on earth, but the his uncontested reign over creation will not be seen until he has disposed of all his enemies – including death – in a final, conclusive manner.

■ Jesus Is Coming Back Again

Too many Christians have tried to come up with a scheme to explain when and how Christ will return, but the old confessions say it best: Jesus is coming back again. When it's all said and done, the only thing that will matter is that he does return as he promised, and he takes us away to live with him forever. Furthermore, his return will be public and once and for all, just as was his being taken up into heaven after his resurrection (Acts 1:11). Although it may seem that he is taking his own good time about it, this is in order that all his children will be saved (2 Pet 3:8-9).

- **DISPENSATIONALISM:** The teaching that history is to be divided into seven distinct ages under which God requires different standards for relationship with him. This theology is found in the popular “Left Behind” series, and is also found in many movies, books, and even the Ryrie study bible. Concepts like the Rapture of the church and a time of Tribulation are explained in great detail, even though scripture is quite vague on these subjects (Acts 1:7). The biggest problems with this system is its overemphasis on the coming of the antichrist and the conditions of what they call “the last days”, as well as the relegation of biblical promises to an age either past or yet to come. Furthermore, it is a recent theological development (19th Century), and it misuses many texts and prophecies.

■ We Are to Look Forward and Have Hope in the Return of Christ

We call the waiting for Christ’s return “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). And we do not need to fear his coming because we have the seal of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts, guaranteeing our reservation in heaven. Instead we long for Jesus’ appearing in order to put an end to sin and death forever. The church is to be the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5). Our job is to keep ourselves pure and to be prepared for his sudden return (Matt 25:10-13).

- **2 Pet. 3:11-12:** Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

B. What About Those Who Don’t Know Christ?

God will surely judge all people for what they have done in their lives, and that means that just as heaven has been prepared for those Christ died for, a place of punishment also awaits those who flaunted his Law and his will. God’s justice displayed will be displayed on the final day – both his mercy and his holiness – in order that all should recognize him and the sacrifice of his son.

■ We Will All Stand Before the Lord

The scripture promise that all must stand in judgment before God (2 Cor. 5:10). But for the believer, this results not only in the declaration that he has been cleared of all charges (see JUSTIFICATION), but also in God being proved right and his enemies punished (Rev. 20:12-13).

- **Point:** Jesus alone will judge and we need to consent in our hearts to allow him do his job. The eternal destination of any man will not be left up to our sensibilities., but rather to his perfect judgment.

■ Judgment Will Fall on Those Who Do not Believe

All who did not love and serve God in this life will not share in the life to come nor in the blessings of heaven. Even according to the concept of earthly justice, those who transgress the law must be punished and their victims assured that the legal system will protect them. And believers are free from any condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

- **Picture:** The judgment is described as the separation of the sheep and the goats. Christ’s sheep know his voice and follow him, but the wild, willful ones who refused to recognize him will be lead away to punishment.
- **Question:** What about those who never hear the gospel? *Answer:* Acts 4:12 (amongst others).

- **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** Why would God want people who refuse to love him to be in fellowship with him forever? Would they want to be there (see *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis)? Would you want to have them with you in heaven?

- **Challenge:** Do you want to stand next to Hitler praising God in heaven?

■ Punishment in Hell Awaits Those Who Do not Love the Lord

The wrath of God is indeed poured out on those who do not recognize him nor seek to follow his righteous commands. The condemnation of the wicked must be executed in order for God’s righteousness to be established, and this means a real, literal hell, as described in scripture. This condition will be one of purposeful and enduring punishment; non-existence is never implied (Matt. 26:24). Furthermore, the final judgment also consigns the devil and his minions to eternal punishment (Rev. 20:14-15).

- **ANNIHILATION:** In Christian thought, the teaching that the soul of the unbeliever ceases to exist after death. The main concern is that if such souls were to be punished in hell, then God’s love and ultimate victory over sin would be incomplete. Even valued Christian teachers like John Stott have popularized this view. But the concept fails to account for the overwhelming biblical evidence, as well as the fact that God’s righteousness is not challenged by the existence of hell.

- **Question:** What about my unsaved loved ones? **Warning:** When we over-sympathize with those who will be condemned, we take their side against God. Instead, we need to stand up for God's justice.

- **DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTION:** The sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" by Jonathan Edwards.

C. What Happens When I Die?

After this life is over, and all these things have come to pass, what can we really look forward to? Sometimes it seems that it easier to conceive of the torments of hell more strongly than the pleasures of heaven. But God wants the most beautiful bride for his son, so he goes about choosing her and preparing her for their life together – into all eternity. And they will dwell with him forever in peace and perfect love.

■ Death and the Resurrection

The Christian does not need to fear death. Our resurrection and glorification are guaranteed by the fact and power of Christ's resurrection (John 10:18, Rom. 6:4). We do not have to fear death, because to be absent from the body is to be present with our Lord forever – and that is what we have been looking forward to (Rev 20:6).

- **Read:** 1 Thes. 4:13-18 and 1 Cor. 15:20-26.

■ The New Creation

Just as God will give us a new, sinless body (1 Cor. 15:42-44), he will also renew all of creation. He promises to bring about a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet 3:13), and we will be lead to the Heavenly City (the perfect Jerusalem or Zion – Rev 21:1-2).

- **GLORIFICATION:** The concept that at the appearing of Christ, his people will receive a new, resurrected body, completely free from a sinful nature or suited to our new existence in heaven. We will still be human, and not become angels, but we will reign with Christ forever.
- **Keach's Catechism:** Q#42 What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection? A. At the resurrection, believers become raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity.

■ What Will Heaven Be Like?

Whatever details we cannot arrive upon, we can certainly say that our life above will be better than this one, and better even than the one enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the Garden. All pleasurable sensations will be fully experienced, but in a purer and more enjoyable manner. God himself will be a temple in our midst and all suffering and fear will be permanently abolished (Rev 21:3-4). We have been invited to the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev 19:9), where we will enjoy God's presence and see him face to face forever (1 Cor 13:12). All the promises will come true, and we will see our reward for remaining true to our savior and friend (Rev. 2-3).

- **Picture:** The strongest image of our heavenly existence is that of praising God forever. We will be fully focused upon his worthiness and glory, and he will always be our first thought and truest love.
- **Illustration:** Perfect love will at last be truly found in heaven. Just as a fiancé speaks poetically to his loved one of being together forever and needing nothing more than her presence, we will experience that joy in heaven.
- **Clarification:** Will we receive eternal rewards of crowns, mansions, and jewels, or will there be equality? One way of looking at it is that everybody's cup will be full but each has a different sized cup. No matter what the rewards, you'll be happy for everyone else's love affair with God, and not at all envious.
- **Question:** Will I have all my earthly delights? Do we get everything we always wanted? **Answer:** Our values will have changed. The promises are rather of God's eternal presence, serving and adoring him, and knowing him more deeply.
- **Question:** What about near-death experiences where people see a light? **Illustration:** The contrast between modern and medieval reports. In the past, Christians reported seeing hell and purgatory, and it has only been the last hundred years or so that modern people report experiencing a heaven-like state. This shows clearly how much of that experienced is colored by what we have been taught.

- **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** Will I recognize my loved ones? Are my relatives watching me now? **Warning:** Many people say they want to go to heaven to see their loved ones again, rather than God himself.
- **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** How long will we be there? The concept of time in heaven will certainly be different, given that we will no longer reckon its passage by decay and the need to refresh.

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9. How Is God's Work Seen on Earth?

While we await the Lord's return and his coming to take us away to live in his house forever, we have his work to do here on earth. The Church was created out of all believers to display his glory and to carry out the Great Commission to take the good news of Christ to all the nations. The Church it is not a building or an institution. It is not a club. It is the gathering of all believers, and in the local sense, of believers the Lord has placed together.

- **Point:** As the Bride of Christ on earth, the church is not a single person or a group of individuals. It is one body, composed of all those he has called to love him. Self-sufficiency and rugged individualism have never been Christian virtues.
- **Picture:** Consider this ideal picture of marriage from Eph. 5:25-27. The husband is so loving that the Bride cannot help but submit to his perfect, loving lead. The husband has his job and we as the bride supports that work. He is perfecting his beloved as well as adding to it. The Bride must also represent her Lord while he is away. Therefore, we do not neglect our obligation to our beloved, and neither do we ignore or despise others that make up our body.
- **Challenge:** If the church is the one he loves and died for, how dare we say it is pointless or that we don't need it.

A. What Is the Church?

■ It Is Christ's Own Body on Earth

Christ's Body on earth is visible (Matt. 5:14-16). Because it is alive, it is an organism, not just an organization. And Christ loves his Body, his Bride.

- **Clarification:** The church building is not holy, nor the platform (or "altar") where the Word is presented. God is where his people are.
- **Challenge:** How can we say we love the bridegroom (Christ), but hate his Bride, the one he loves most.

- **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** Why do I need the church? A. The church is the means by which God first communicated the gospel to you, in that it is the organ that has maintained the true, biblical standard and taught everyone who is now evangelizing. Now you need the church because the Body of Christ is a corporate entity and together it is carrying on the work of the Kingdom in Christ's name.

■ The Church – including each local assembly – Is Composed by the Spirit

The work of the Church is not optional. It is the vehicle God has chosen to display his power through. God draws us into fellowship both with himself and other believers and the Spirit equips us to serve one another. It is the first activity we find believers engaged in following Pentecost (Acts. 2:42).

- Eph 4:11-16: And He gave some {as} apostles, and some {as} prophets, and some {as} evangelists, and some {as} pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all {aspects} into Him who is the head, {even} Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.
- **Point:** God has so composed the church that it has all that it needs to minister among its members in order to bring about growth.
- **Illustration:** Football (or any other sports) draft.
- **Challenge:** When we withhold our presence or service from the local church, we steal both from them and God. And if the Lord leads us to a congregation, who are we to separate ourselves?

■ God Appoints Leaders to Guide the Church

Leaders provide interpretation of the Word (see Chap. 3). They shepherd, which as much disciplining as it is leading and encouraging (Acts 20:28,). They are likewise to equip the assembly to serve successfully (1 Pet 5:1-3). It is clear that God expects his leaders both to be obeyed and respected (1 Tim 5:17-19, Heb 13:17). We need to get to a situation where we fear God and trust each other.

- **Point:** Qualifications for leaders taken from 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.
- **Illustration:** The pastor is an undershepherd appointed to take care of the sheep, but who is also still in need of being ministered to as a fellow sheep.
- **Illustration:** Pioneer Girls have been making cards to show their elders they appreciate them. What a great way to train them early.
- **Challenge:** What expectations do we have of our leaders? What are they called to do vs. what we want them to do for us? We want them to be confident, look good, and rescue us at all times. Avoid surrogate savior syndrome.
- **Warning:** Be careful of maligning authorities, particularly in front of your family. It leads to a lack of respect for all those who lead, including parents.

B. Do I Need the Church?

■ The Body of Christ Needs to Grow Together

This means that the people of God need to gather together on one day (Sunday) to worship, and to build each other up. The Lord is pleased to dwell among his people, and to meet with them when they come together (Matt. 18:19-20).

- **Clarification:** What is worship? We engage in pure, simple adoration of God and consideration of his truth. The church is most like her Lord when she gathers together on the Lord's Day to worship together. It is a picture of everyone experiencing the same teaching and challenges together – and being on the same page. The power of God's people praying and worshipping together, where the Holy Spirit is moving among them in a profound and mysterious way, should never be underestimated (Acts 4:31).

- **REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE:** The principle that we are only to include in our worship and service that which God has specifically commanded. The opposite view teaches that we can introduce anything that is not forbidden, but this argument from silence is fraught with potential disaster. In the O.T., the Lord specifically instructed the children of Israel regarding the manner in which they were to participate in worship, and in order to be sure we are truly meeting with God today, we had likewise better stay within his commands.
- **KEACH'S CATECHISM:** Q#57: What is forbidden in the second commandment. A. The second commandment forbids the worshipping of God by images or any other way not appointed in his word.

- **Clarification:** We can and do worship God on our own, but we are also called to assemble together and worship him corporately (Heb 10:23-25).
- **Challenge:** We cannot separate over musical preferences.

- **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** Do I need to go to church every Sunday? A. Your dedication to being in worship with God's people each week will reveal your understanding of the necessity of Christ's Body operating here on earth, as well as a desire to be obedient to the Word of God. We are not condemned for missing occasionally, and should not attend out of slavish duty or an attempt to appease the Lord, but we should always make an effort to be with God's people on the Lord's Day.

■ We Need Fellowship

Even though we have the Lord's presence in our lives, we still need to be encouraged by other believers, and to benefit from their experience. Likewise, the church provides accountability and comfort in times of trial. This is the process of "connecting" and building each other up in the Lord.

- **Clarification:** True fellowship is what you can do only with other Christians. What you can do with others must be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. It is more than chatting around the table or sharing a meal. Discussing sitcoms, sending emails, talking about our trips are poor examples of fellowship. Instead, we should be sharing our experiences with God, as well as honestly confessing and testifying.
- **Challenge:** If you are cutting down the church or other believers – engaging in gossip or slander -- you're actually accomplishing the opposite of fellowship. The result must be the profit or growth of those talking as well as those being discussed.

■ **Membership Has Its Benefits**

It is God himself who places you in fellowship with the local assembly. And there are benefits for those who truly belong to a local assembly. We also have obligations to one another. We also need to carry out the Great Commission together, as the Body carries on Christ's work in adding new people to the Kingdom.

- **Example:** Church Covenant.
- **Illustration:** Just attending is like living together, rather than taking on the vows of a marriage.

• **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** Do I need to belong to a church? A. What do you accomplish by remaining on your own? Are you afraid of commitment or accountability? Do you lack trust that God is placing you in the place where you can serve others and be ministered to?

C. **What Standard Does the Church Need to Set?**

The job of the church is to proclaim and reflect the glory of God, maintaining truth and obeying his commands. We need to accept our high calling and live accountably.

■ **The Church Needs to Uphold God's Truth**

The Church must stand up for the truths of scripture (Eph 4:4-6, 1 Tim 3:15). It is always to be correcting and protecting from error. When we speak of God's truth, we mean the unadulterated word and a pure Gospel message.

- **Warning:** False gospels.

• **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** What makes a real church? Why are there so many denominations? What about Unitarians? What is the one true church? (See THE GOSPEL from Chap. 5.)

■ **The Church Is to Be Holy – but not yet Perfected**

The Church must remain representative of Christ's own example and character, and is so called to be holy and separate from worldly infatuations. But we are all still sinners, and the local church assembly will always have sin and error in its midst. We will never quite do everything the way Jesus did, but we must continue to strive to carry out his work in the manner he himself demonstrated.

- **Illustration:** God demonstrates his search for a pure bride in the story of Hosea who was required to marry an unfaithful prostitute.

■ **Discipline Is a Necessary Mark of the Church**

We need to also protect the church, as well as to correct and critique those who have fallen into error. To fail to weed out error and remove those who deny their faith by their actions is to hate the church. Blatant sin must be cast out and we must follow biblical instructions (1 Cor 5:10-13, Matt 18:15-18). If we fail to do this we both endanger the rest of the congregation and present a poor example to the world.

- **Illustration:** Need for discipline in families. Consider the character of children who have always been encouraged and allowed to do whatever they pleased.

Christianity 101

A Discipleship Guide for New Believers

10. How Do I Serve the Lord?

Now we believe God has a plan for us to serve in his kingdom and to become a part of his Body – the Church. But we also want to know the will of God for our lives on an individual level. What specifically will he have us do out of love for him?

- **Picture:** When you are in love with someone, daily chores are not a duty. There are things that have to be done but we can do them out of love and care rather than obligation. It is our privilege and pleasure to serve the Lord as a response to all that he has already done for us.
- Rom 12:1-2: Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

A. How Can I Serve God?

■ The Will of God and the Commands of Scripture

If God has a plan for my life, how do I find out specifically what it is? Although God does have a specific call or “vocation” for us to pursue, he also has left general commands in scripture for all Christians to carry out. Do those things first, and then seek a specific course for your own life.

- **Illustration:** Rolling out of bed in the morning and going to work no matter how you feel. You’re not supposed to ask God if it is his will that you go to work and support your family – that is the minimum that is expected. How you do your job and represent Christ in the workplace is a matter for prayer.
- **Warning:** Don’t be waiting, afraid to do anything, until God specifically reveals what his will is. We can’t hold off and remain inactive until the bolt from heaven strikes us or God shows us how to connect each dot.
- **Illustration:** Hudson Taylor’s call to go to China. Did he wait until he “found the dot?” Did he go where God told him, or where the church needed him?

- **THE WILL OF GOD:** There are at two main ways of describing both what God wants to bring about as well as what he has purposed to occur. We talk of his commands and call for us to live holy lives as his prescribed or “perceptive” will (according to the precepts he has laid out), and the way he causes everything to pass as his “decretive” will (dictated by his eternal decrees). The distinction is important when the Christian feels he has violated the commands of scripture and gone against what God tells us to do, in that we know that the Lord has also ordained for this path in our life to occur, and that we can trust him to bring us back to his plan for our eternal good, and so strive once again to please him with our obedience.
- **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** How can you be sure you have found his will – especially if it is not in accord with what we find in scripture. Are we doing our own thing or is it just fear that is holding us back?

■ Spiritual Gifts

God has gifted us with spiritual aptitudes to serve others and we need to know how to recognize and make use of these (1 Cor 12:4-11, Rom 12:6-8, 1 Pet 4:10-11). Apart from identifying the ones we have been given, we must pray concerning where the Lord is leading us, then submit to the judgment of the leaders in the church to recognize these in us. Other believers will also confirm their existence and encourage their use.

- 1 Cor 12:4-11: Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all {persons.} But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another {various} kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.
- **Warning:** If you feel you lack a gift, that doesn’t give you the right to avoid ministering in the most simple, obvious way.

- **SPIRITUAL GIFTS:** These are special abilities, above and beyond even our natural aptitude and talents, which God bestows upon us to serve the church and minister to the body. Each believer possesses at least one, as determined and activated by the Holy Spirit. In scripture, these gifts are described as those of service, helping, mercy, hospitality, teaching, encouragement, extraordinary faith, giving, and others which may not even have been listed.
- **WARNING:** Test to see if you serve yourself or the Lord with your “gifts”. Are they subject to the criticism of others or are you driven by the calling God himself has given you. Their proper use results in joy rather than burnout.
- **CLARIFICATION:** The extraordinary gifts of prophecy and tongues as described in the New Testament were given specifically to bring the to memory the Word of God to a generation who did not possess the full, written collection of the scriptures. They were received at the laying on of hands by the Apostles, and little convincing evidence of their use appears to have survived the First Century. Today, many counterfeit expressions and descriptions of these gifts abound, and we must be careful to discern the benefit of all manifestations of the spirit according to the written Word of God.
- **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** Aren’t spiritual gifts a short cut so we can do ministry without proper training or preparation?
- **DISCIPLESHIP TOOL:** Spiritual Gifts test.

■ Calling

God has gifted us, and now we need to plug in. The Spirit gives us certain gifts, but that doesn’t always necessarily determine where and how we will serve. He also specifically calls us to minister in a certain place, and again this will be confirmed by the church. This will help us avoid going off on an impulse vs. the recognizing the true calling of the Holy Spirit. Also, in addition to raw qualifications, certain circumstances and conflicting responsibilities will also determine when and where we serve.

- **Illustration:** Try out as long as it doesn’t contradict. Service doesn’t always involve a life-long commitment.
- **Illustration:** Spurgeon’s words that if you can do anything else than be a pastor, do it. Not many should desire to be teachers and Christ is already the head.
- **Illustration:** On the other hand, why is the appendix the largest organ in the church body?
- **Example:** Progressive calling into ministry for Steve (Gary).
- **Warning:** If you have some gifts but not all those required or character for office, don’t pursue at this time. If God grants a woman leadership qualities and the ability to teach, does that mean he intends for her to serve as a pastor – in opposition to the words of 1 Tim. 2 and 1 Cor. 14?

B. What Kind of Job Should I Do?

Once we determine how God has equipped us to serve, what about our lives in the secular world. Can we serve the kingdom in our jobs and family responsibilities? God’s intention is that his people work, and show a positive example to the world even as we conduct the most routine of tasks.

■ Vocation

Similar to calling within the church, God has granted to each a vocation – a way to serve him in this world. It is necessary to earn money to support both the family and the church. But we should also be discerning when where we choose to work and seek to maintain a clear conscience in whatever job we move into. For those who come to Christ and already have a career, they should seek to remain, as long as they are not called to deny the Lord or his commands.

- 1 Thes 4:10-12: But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, also that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.
- **Illustration:** Man who wanted to take on a prison chaplaincy, but was unable to complete course of study set before him by the elders to be qualified.
- **Question:** Should we be working in tobacco, alcohol, pornography, gambling fields?

- **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTION:** How do I serve God in a secular job? Can we be content where we are? What about serving in the military. Can lawyers and salespersons be Christians. What about playing the stock market.

- **MILITARY SERVICE:** Should Christians kill in the service of their country. Certain Protestant denominations often have historically opposed.

■ Honoring God in all We Do

Where God places us, we will work to the best of our abilities (2 Cor 1:12).

- **Point:** The example you set as a Christian transforms even secular work into Kingdom work (Col 3:22-24).
- Col 3:22-24: Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who {merely} please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

■ Ministry Opportunities

Where should my extra time go? We are to serve where needed and let the world take care of its own business (Matt 8:22). Even our common sense and vocational skills can be applied at the church. Setting the right priorities for service will determine how many things we can really do for the Lord (Gal 6:10, Rom 12:10-13).

- **Example:** Bezalel and Oholiab in Exodus 35:30-35.
- **Challenge:** Do we spend all our time on extra-curricular events, sports, or other worldly concerns. Shouldn't our free time go to the Lord first?
- **Warning:** Don't withhold service or contributions to the church in order to follow or help another ministry outside the local church.

C. What Attitude Is Required for Ministry?

■ What Kind of Ministries Would God Have Us Carry Out?

Submission is key to any successful ministry. If we want God to bless a ministry, we need to do it his way. Just as in worship, we apply the "Regulative principle" to ministry in seeking biblical venues for service. We do not engage in random acts of kindness, but rather in ministry that clearly represents the gospel and the call to be saved. Primarily, this means working out of the church, under ordained leadership, and accountable to the local body, before helping out charitable organizations or para-church ministries.

- **Warning:** Working outside sanctioned ministry is how cults get started.

■ A Life of Gratitude and Service

We serve the Lord and his church out of gratitude for what he has already done for us, and recognize that we are here to serve one another instead of ourselves. Therefore, we don't strive for our own way all the time, and are willing to submit to the Spirit and to other believers in order to honor the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf.

- Heb 12:28-29: Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.
- **Example:** Mary in Romans 16 who worked "hard".

■ Servant Mentality

Christ did not come to be served, but to serve – and that is now our calling. It is not a question of what we get out of service – whether the satisfaction of a job well done or the gratification that we have been of use – but rather how God ministered to us and to others through our labor (Matt 20:26-28; John 15:12-13).

- **Warning:** If you're in this for applause, stop now.
- Phil 2:3-5: Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not {merely} look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
- **Illustration:** Foot washing.
- **Warning:** People are not required to respond to your service according to the expectations you set or in recognizing the sacrifice you feel you've made.

- **DISCIPLESHIP SUGGESTION:** *Decision Making and the Will of God* by Gary Friesen.

- Heb 13:20-21: Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, {even} Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom {be} the glory forever and ever. Amen.