

ESSENTIALS

A Course Outlining Christianity's Fundamental Doctrines



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*Unless otherwise noted,
Scripture quotations
are taken from the NIV.*



LESSON ONE. The doctrine of salvation.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 in your Bible.

- In those verses, there are four key concepts which we need to understand. They are listed below. Next to each bullet point in the list, write the verse references¹ where these key concepts are mentioned. One has been done for you.
 - **sin**
 - 2:1
 - **grace**
 -
 - **faith**
 -
 - **works**
 -
- The word “transgression” is used in verse 1 alongside “sins.” The Greek word used there² can also be translated “trespass.” What does “trespass” or “transgress” mean?

God explains in the Bible that all humans are sinful. We all do that which we ought not do, and we fail to do that which we should do. A section of the Bible called “The Ten Commandments” is often used as a quick overview of this teaching. The Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20, and also in your Small Catechism. **In reverse order, read through the Ten Commandments and their explanations in your Small Catechism.**

- *Which of the Ten do you think seems hardest to keep? Which seems easiest?*

¹ We'll talk about the way the Bible is divided into chapters and verses in lesson five.

² Lesson five will also cover the languages of the Bible.

Read the following Bible passages. Which of the Ten Commandments do they reference?

- **Matthew 5:21-22**

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

- **Matthew 5:27-28**

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

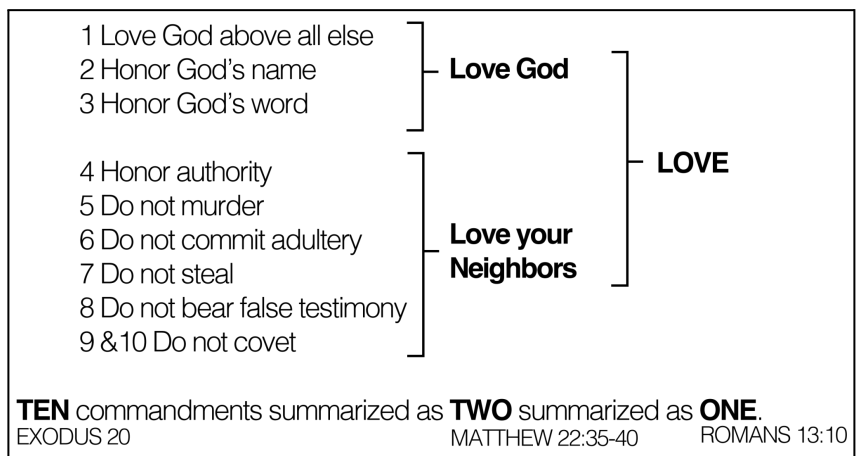
- **1 Corinthians 6:1-8**

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord’s people? Or do you not know that the Lord’s people will judge the world? [...] I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.

Look at the graphic below, then read the two Bible passages which follow. Where do you find what the graphic describes taught in those passages?

- **James 2:8-11**

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.



- **Romans 13:9–10**

The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

When we read the Bible, we find that sin is present in everyone’s life. The Bible is quite clear about that. **What does that mean for us? Read the following Bible passages.**

- **Romans 3:23, 6:23**

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... The wages of sin is death.

- *What are “wages”?*

- **Deuteronomy 24:16**

Each will die for their own sin.

- **Ephesians 2:3 (in our beginning reading)**

- **Matthew 25:41-45**

“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. [...] Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment.”

Sin is that which violates the will of God. We can sin actively or by omission (that is to say, by doing that which we ought not do, or not doing that which we ought do). Either way, sin deserves God’s punishment.³ How, then, will we avoid God’s punishment? **Read Ephesians 2:4–5 in our beginning reading again. Look for our second key concept word.**

We learn in those verses that we are saved “by grace.” We’ll want to understand that word next. Let’s work on a definition.

- *When would you use the word “grace” in normal, conversational English?*
- *The words “grace” and “mercy” are conceptually related. What do they mean?*

³ We’ll return to these two thoughts in lesson seven.

MERCY

Not receiving a deserved _____

GRACE

Receiving an undeserved _____

A definition which covers most uses of “grace” in the Bible would be, “God’s gift-giving love.”
Read Ephesians 2:4-9 again, but substitute “God’s gift-giving love” for each “grace.”

If grace means “gift-giving love,” then the question is, *what is the gift that was given?* Read the following Bible passages.

- **John 3:16**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

- **Matthew 20:28**

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- **1 Peter 1:18-19**

It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

The gift God gave, which saved us from the punishment our sin has earned, was his Son’s life. Jesus did not deserve to die. He was perfect.⁴ In Jesus’ undeserved death, all the penalty for human sin was gathered into one place and administered at once. This is what the Bible calls “**justification**” (Romans 3:21-26). The *doctrine of justification*⁵ is that God declares people “justified” (innocent of charges against them) for the sake of Jesus.

Ephesians 2 tells us that this gift of justification from God becomes ours “through faith” (verse 8). **What is faith?** That’s the next of our key concepts. The following Bible passages give us words to express “faith.”

- **Hebrews 11:1**

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

- **Psalms 91:2**

“I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’”

⁴ Lesson three will cover Jesus’ person, life, and work in depth.

⁵ The doctrines of justification and of salvation, although tightly connected, are not identical.

- **Isaiah 12:2**

“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.”

Faith is simply “trust in God’s promises.” How do we come to faith? By hearing God’s promises, he brings faith to life. Read the following Bible passages to find that being taught.

- **Romans 10:17**

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

- **Acts 2:2-4**

The apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. [...] Many who heard the message believed.

In the Bible, God tells us that sin deserves punishment. But God also tells us that, in his grace, he has visited that punishment on his Son rather than on us. If we can be sure that we deserve God’s punishment (and we can!), we can also be sure – we can **have faith** – that God has declared us forgiven and reconciled to him through Jesus.

- **John 11:25-26**

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

“Saving faith” – faith which determines whether or not someone is a Christian – is trust in God’s promise of forgiveness through Jesus. And through faith, what God promises to us becomes ours. Even faith itself is a gift (Ephesians 2:8). So **everything about our salvation is entirely the work of God, not ours. That’s it, really!** But we do have one more key concept: *works*. That’s mentioned in Ephesians 2:10. Let’s wrap up this first lesson by defining “works.”

- **Ephesians 4:1-3**

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

- **1 John 2:3-6**

We know that we have come to know Jesus if we keep his commands. Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as he did.

In your Small Catechism, there's a section called the "Table of Duties." This is a helpful section where short selections from Scripture are given that illustrate the way Christians should live in various common life roles. We'll see this section again in lesson eleven. **For now, glance over the Table of Duties. What sections apply to you?**

The relationship between *faith* and *works*, these last two key concepts, is very simple. By faith, we trust that God's Word is true. This means we trust that he has indeed forgiven our sin and welcomes us as his children on account of Jesus. It also means that we trust the guidance and direction for living life which his Word has for us.⁶

We will always struggle with that trust throughout our lives. At times, we will struggle to believe that God has indeed forgiven us. At other times, we will struggle to believe that his Word is truly the reliable guide which he tells us it is. Romans chapters seven and eight express this struggle:

- **Romans 7:21-8:1 (selected verses)**

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.
What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! [...] Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

What is the Christian doctrine of salvation?

All people are sinners, and because of our *sin*, we deserve God's condemnation to eternal punishment. But in *grace*, God sent his Son Jesus to suffer that punishment in our place, and God now announces to us the good news that we are justified (*entirely forgiven*), and will live with him forever. This is **salvation**.

This promise of forgiveness brings *faith*, which is trust in God, to life in our hearts. By faith, we individually receive salvation. Faith also leads us to show our thanks to God by *works* of love toward others.

⁶ We call these two ideas "Gospel" and "Law" (usually expressed in the other order). We'll deal with those in more detail in lesson five. (Can you tell that that's going to be a long lesson yet?)



LESSON TWO. The doctrine of God.

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3 in your Bible.

- We are introduced to God at the very beginning of the Bible. **Based on what you read, what words would you use to describe God?** Write your thoughts below.

Along with the descriptive words which you wrote above, we find an intriguing – perhaps confusing – self-disclosure made by God. **Read 1:26 again. What is strange about the way God speaks there?**

We're going to look at a number of other Bible passages to find what more God reveals about his unique nature. Read the Bible passages below and answer the accompanying questions.

- **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**
Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
 - **How many gods are there?**
- **John 1:1-14**
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [...] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
 - **How many “individuals” are named in this passage?**

- **Mathew 28:16-20**

Then [after Easter] the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

- **Whom do the disciples worship?**
- **How many names are to be used in baptism?**

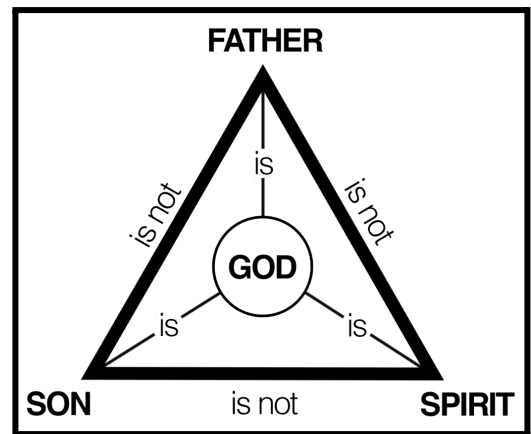
- **2 Corinthians 3:17-18**

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

- **Who is referred to as “the Lord” here?**

The Bible gives us God’s self-revelation as a singular entity who not only speaks of himself as a plurality, but indeed exists as a plurality. This is a God who is beyond our understanding. Where can $1+1+1=1$? Only in the existence of the almighty and incomprehensible single Creator-God of the universe

Christians have invented a word to describe this entirely unique God: Trinity, or “*three-unity*.” The Trinity is expressed with the graphic to the right.



In the early days of the Christian Church, Christians formulated statements of belief which we call “creeds.” Three of these creeds are known as the “ecumenical creeds.” These are the **Athanasian Creed**, the **Nicene Creed**, and the **Apostles’ Creed**. All Christians, regardless of particular denomination, agree with the truths expressed in these three statements.¹

¹ The existence of denominations will be explored in lesson nine.

The Apostles' Creed is the most ancient of the three, and the shortest. It's reproduced in your Small Catechism, and also below. Here, notes are included to show where you can find each statement taught in the Bible.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian² church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Isaiah 44:6 and 45:5; Genesis 1:1;
John 1:1-3; Acts 14:15*

*Luke 2:11; John 20:28 and 3:16
Luke 1:27, 35
Luke 23:23-25
John 19:20; Acts 4:10
1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 1 Peter 3:18*

*1 Corinthians 15:4; Matthew 28:1-10
Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:11
Mark 16:19; Hebrews 1:3
2 Timothy 4:1; John 5:22*

*John 15:26; 16:7-8, 13-14; Acts 13:2
Galatians 3:26-29; Revelation 19:14; Hebrews 10:25
Luke 7:48; 1 Thessalonians 4:16;
John 6:39, 10:28, 17:2-3*

As we read our opening reading from Genesis, we got to see some of God's *character* on display in his creative action. Look back to the list of descriptive words we formulated at the beginning of the lesson. **Did you have any "character descriptions" in your answers? What are they?**

We'll read some further Scriptures and draw out any words that describe God's *character*.

- **1 John 4:7-9**

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

- **"God is..."**

² The word used here is sometimes also translated into English as "catholic" (lower-case C) or "universal."

- **Deuteronomy 4:23-24**

Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

- **“God is...”**

- **Isaiah 58:3-6**

“Why have we fasted,” they say, “and you [God] have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?” Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high... Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the kind of fasting I [God] have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

- **“God is...”**

- **Luke 18:9-14**

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

- **“God is...”**

What is the Christian doctrine of God?

God is a spiritual entity who has always existed, has unlimited power, and is defined by love. He created all things, and he alone sustains what he has created. God alone deserves worship and faith from that which he has created.

On the basis of God’s own self-revelation, Christians use the word “Trinity” to further describe our entirely unique God, who has eternally existed as three persons (Father, Son, and Spirit). These persons are not separate gods. They are one God.

ESSENTIALS

A Course Outlining the Fundamental Doctrines of Christianity



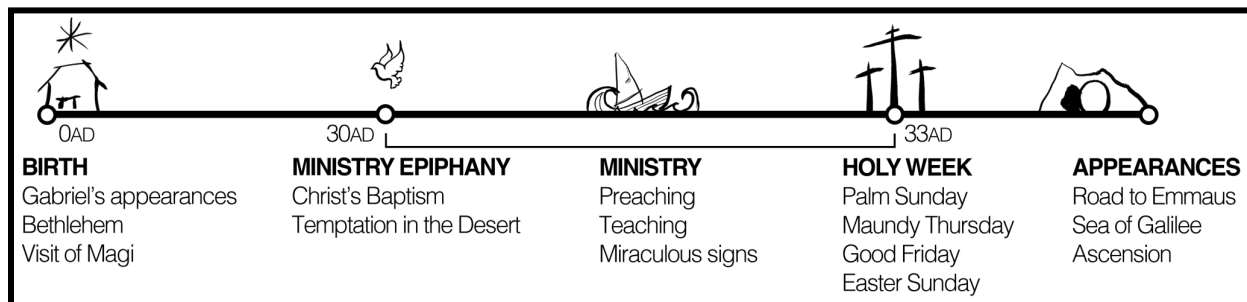
LESSON THREE. The doctrine of Christ.

Read Mark 1:1-2:12 in your Bible.

- In that reading, **what things does Jesus do? What names and titles are given to him?** Write your thoughts below.

What we read took place around 30 AD. **Jesus was born around what we now call the year 0 AD** (with a couple years' margin of error). He was unknown to history for most of his life until about 30 AD, when **he became a well-known traveling rabbi in the Roman province of Judaea**. Three years after beginning his public teaching (which we read about), Jesus was arrested and tried by Roman and Jewish authorities.

Both civil and religious charges were levied against him. He was accused of inciting insurrection against Rome, as well as blaspheming and deceiving his religious followers. **Jesus was crucified, probably in 33 AD**, by the soldiers of Pontius Pilate, a Roman politician (likely a former military officer) who served as Judaea's governor for a decade (around 26 AD to 37 AD).



However, a few days after his death, **Jesus' followers began saying that he had come back to life**. They told each other, and others, that they had seen, and were continuing to see, Jesus appearing to them and demonstrating in various ways that he was bodily, physically, alive.

- **Matthew 27:57-28:10**

[Read this section together.]

- *How many days total do these verses span?*
- *What happened when the stone was rolled away from the tomb?*

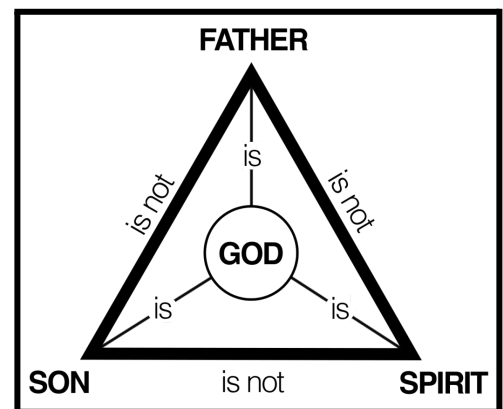
- **Luke 24:36-44**

While they [*the disciples*] were still talking about this [*the reports of Jesus being alive again*], Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

- *Why would Jesus ask them for something to eat?*

So, Jesus was a traveling Jewish teacher about two thousand years ago, who was killed by the Roman government, and who rose from the dead on the third day after his execution.

Christians, however, make an additional claim about Jesus. As we saw in the last lesson, with the graphic on the right, the Christian claim is that Jesus is God. Why do Christians believe this? We’ll now look at some Bible passages which undergird this belief.



- **Colossians 2:9-10**

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

- *What is “Deity”?*

- **John 1:1-14 (selected verses)**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- **Who is “the Word”? What happened to “the Word”?** (See the second to last sentence.)

- **Luke 1:26-35 (selected verses)**

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

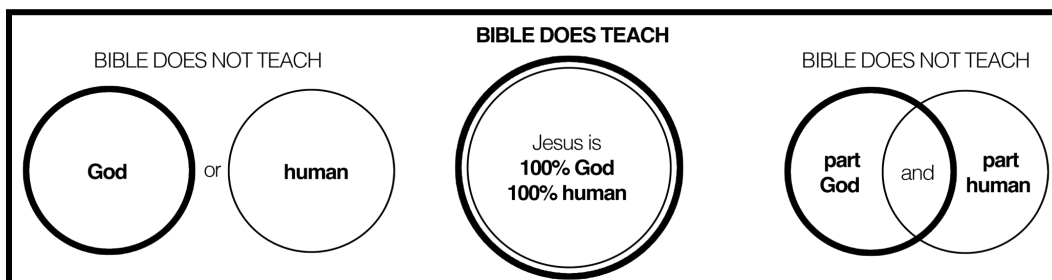
- **How was Jesus conceived?**

- **Whose son is Jesus?**


- **Matthew 27:50-54 (selected verses)**

When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

- **What did Jesus’ death demonstrate about him to those who witnessed it?**



Over the Christian church's history, many groups and individuals have rejected the notion of Jesus as the **Godman**, teaching something different about his identity.

<p>Adoptionism (220 AD) – Jesus is not God, but an exceptional man whom God has elevated to high status.</p>		<p>Arianism (280 AD) – Jesus is neither God nor man. He is God's most eminent created being (perhaps an angel, or an entirely unique sort of being).</p>
<p>Docetism (100 AD) – Jesus only appeared to be a man. He may have been God, or some sort of angel, but he was not a flesh-and-blood human being.</p>		<p>Marcionism (120 AD) – The “God” of the Old Testament was a false god. Jesus was the real God, who set himself against the Old Testament “God.”</p>

Look back to the Bible passages we saw on pages 13-14. Which of the erroneous ideas in the table above do they counter? (You may have multiple answers.)

- **Colossians 2:9-10 counters...**
- **John 1:1-14 counters...**
- **Luke 1:26-35 counters...**

How about our very first reading for this lesson, from Mark 1 and 2? Where in those verses do you find an answer against...

- **adoptionism?**
- **Arianism?**
- **docetism?**
- **Marcionism?**

¹ image credit, Leremy at flaticon.com

Historically, Christians have said that the answers to these next two questions are very important. **Who is Jesus? Did he really die and rise from the dead?**



We've seen some portions of the Bible that answer those questions. Let's now look at some Scriptures which explain *why* these answers are important.

- **Psalm 49:7-8 (ESV)**

Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice,

- ***Can a human being die to save another human being from death?***

- **Hebrews 9:22**

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

- ***Does a spirit have blood?***²

- **Romans 3:21-25**

Righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.

- ***How did God make Jesus a “sacrifice of atonement”?***

- **1 Corinthians 15:17-22**

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

- ***If Jesus didn't rise, are we forgiven?***

- ***What would it mean to have hope “only for this life”?***

² John 4:24, “God is spirit.”

What happened after Jesus rose? Forty days after Jesus' resurrection, he gathered his disciples for one last conversation with them.

- **Acts 1:1-9 (selected verses)**

In my former book, Theophilus,³ I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

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

- **Colossians 1:15-20**

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

What is the Christian doctrine of Christ?

Jesus Christ ("*Messiah*") is the Son of God and the Savior sent by God. He is the Godman, fully God and fully human in one person.

Born of a virgin, he lived on this earth to give his life on behalf of all people, in order to reconcile us to God. Having risen from death, he now rules all things from heaven, from where he will one day return.

³ The writer Luke wrote both the book we call "Luke" and the book of "Acts." He dedicated both to someone named "Theophilus," and mentioned Theophilus in the beginning of each. Here at the beginning of Acts, he's referencing *Luke* as his "former book."



LESSON FOUR. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

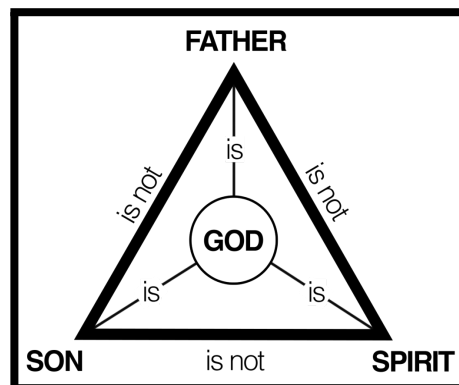
Read Romans 8:1-17 in your Bible.

- Why is there “**no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**”? (Refer back to the last lesson.)
- Verse 5 draws a contrast between **living “according to the flesh”** and living “**according to the Spirit.**” What do you think this means?
- According to verses 14-16, what relationship with God does the Spirit create for us?

Our last two lessons have both included the triangle graphic that’s reproduced again here. The Holy Spirit is understood by Christians to be truly God, alongside the Father and the Son. The Spirit is sometimes referred to as “*the Third Person of the Trinity.*”

Turn to page 9 and refer to 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (printed there).

- *How does that verse teach the Spirit’s divinity¹?*



¹ “Divinity” means “being God.”

The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit and his work. Read through that article, and (if you have a Small Catechism) the Explanation of the Third Article.

- What **human inability is emphasized** in the first paragraph of the explanation?
- In this explanation, **who is credited** with answering that inability?

Bringing faith to life

This is the first work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to bring us to believe in Christ as Savior (*see page 6, Romans 10 and Acts 2*). By faith, we are justified before God.

The Bible uses a particular illustration to describe the Spirit's work of creating faith in human hearts. Read the passages below. What is the illustration they have in common?

- **John 3:5-8**
Jesus answered [*Nicodemus*], "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."
- **1 Peter 1:23**
You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.
- **Titus 3:4-5**
When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing² of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

When the Spirit has brought about our rebirth through the Gospel message (has brought us to faith), his second work begins **simultaneously**. Look at our introductory reading from Romans 8 again, and see verse 14 specifically. **What action is attributed to the Spirit there?**

² "Washing" here is a reference to the Sacrament of Baptism. We'll cover the Sacraments in lesson six.

We read in Romans 8:14 that the Holy Spirit “leads” believers. Where does he lead them?

- **Psalm 143:8-10**

Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life... Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

- **Where does God’s Spirit lead people?**

Sanctification

This is the second work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Sanctification is the daily process of God leading his people to live out love for and toward our neighbors.

As with the first work of the Spirit, the Bible uses illustrations for the Spirit’s second work. Read the following passages. What illustration is used for this process in these passages?

- **Galatians 5:16-26**

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh... The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

- **Luke 6:43-45**

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit... A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart.”

- **Luke 13:6-9 (the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard)**

- **John 15:1-17 (“I am the vine, you are the branches”)**

In sanctification, it is important – *deeply important!* – to remember that the Holy Spirit actively aids us in that process. **God does not bring us to faith, call us to love others, and then take a step away from us to see how we do.** The Holy Spirit remains ever active in our lives.

- **John 14:15-17**

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

- **What is an “advocate”?**
-

It is also important – *again, deeply important!* – that we maintain a distinction between sanctification and justification.

Justification, as we noted in lesson one, is God’s declaration of our innocence before him for the sake of Jesus alone. When, through the good news of that justification, we have been brought to faith, the Holy Spirit **immediately** begins his work of sanctification in our lives.

Here’s the key thing to remember from that summary. **Justification** _____ **sanctification**. God’s forgiveness, given for Jesus’ sake alone, comes before we bear good fruit.

It is always a temptation to flip this order around. Naturally, we always assume that our good works will earn God’s love. **But the truth proclaimed in the Bible is that forgiveness precedes faith**. Indeed, the existence of forgiveness, proclaimed in the Gospel, is what creates faith.

- **Romans 4:5-7**

To the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”

To be clear: The Bible does not teach what’s known as the doctrine of *universalism*. As we saw in lesson one, some people will spend eternity with God. Others will spend eternity apart from God. But **if God declares forgiveness prior to any works we might do, why aren’t all saved?**

To answer that, we look again to the first work of the Spirit. By faith, God’s promised blessings are handed over to us. Without faith, God’s blessings are not received.

What is the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Triune God, equal to both Father and Son in his divinity. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is credited with bringing faith to life in our hearts (*bringing about our “rebirth”*) and leading us to live daily as God’s children (*sanctification*).

LESSON FOUR ADDENDA - Charismatic practices; filioque.

There are many ideas which different churches teach about the Holy Spirit (*both his person and his work*). We'll look at a few in this addendum.

“Speaking in tongues”

The practice of *glossolalia*, also called *speaking in tongues*, is one which some churches attribute to the Holy Spirit. Usually, this manifests as people speaking unknown “languages.”

The first reference we have in the Bible to “speaking in tongues” comes in Acts 2, where the disciples of Jesus are miraculously given the ability to speak in many different human languages to share the Gospel with a crowd gathered in the city of Jerusalem. **In this instance, it is clear that the “tongues” in question are known languages.** Two more instances follow in Acts, in which it is not clear whether or not these were known languages.

The only other references to “speaking in tongues” come from 1 Corinthians 12–14. In these instances, it is not clear that “tongues” refers only to known human languages. In 13:1, Paul writes of speaking in “*the tongues of angels*.” In 14:2, he says that “*anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.*” **Speech in an unknown language does seem to be a possibility here.**

Whatever is meant by “tongues” in these places, however, we must note Paul’s words around the phenomenon. Here are his comments from 1 Corinthians 13: “*If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.*” Paul also asks regarding such spiritual gifts, 12:30–31, “*Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.*”

Whatever “tongues” are, Christians entirely reject the teachings

- 1) that tongues should be expected in the Christian life;
 - 2) that a lack of this gift represents a “*spiritual handicap*;”
 - 3) or that in any other way suggest “*tongues*” experiences to be normative.
-

“Direct revelation and prophecies”

Another topic, often connected in practice to glossolalia, is the possibility of direct revelation from God to individuals within the church. Reading the Bible, we clearly see such things taking place in the history of God’s people. The question then is not “*Can such things happen?*” but “*Do they still happen?*” and “*How would I evaluate someone’s claims in this area?*”

As to whether they still happen, we cannot answer that with a firm “no.” God has not lost the ability to directly reveal truth to his people. Our God does not change.

So the question which remains is, how ought we evaluate claims of prophecy? Scripture gives us two simple points for evaluation.

1. Does the alleged prophecy agree with Scripture? (1 John 2, 4; Jude)
2. Does the prophecy come true? (Ezekiel 13; Jeremiah 23)

If the answer to either of the above questions is “no,” the claim of prophecy is false.

What if the answers aren’t “no”? Again, it is not impossible that God could miraculously reveal truth to someone. But we can be certain that in the Bible, we have “*all things that pertain to life and godliness*” (2 Peter 1:3 ESV). We need not fear missing out on anything necessary for our lives as God’s children. What we need for living our lives of love and praise, God has surely provided to us.

“Miraculous healing”

This issue is similar to the last one. Yes, we are sure that by God’s power, people have been healed miraculously throughout history. Many of these stories are recounted in the Bible. The question here is, “*Should we expect healing as a guarantee to believers?*”

This doctrine is taught by, among others, what’s known as the “Full Gospel” movement. They redefine “Gospel” to include the promise of divine healing. This goes beyond the definition which the Bible itself gives for “the Gospel.” Paul defines the Gospel this way in 1 Corinthians 15: “*By this gospel you are saved: Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; he was buried; he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures.*”

We are encouraged, in our prayers, to ask for healing for ourselves and others (James 5). But we are never told that God guarantees healing.

“Baptism in the Spirit”

Certain verses of the New Testament refer to a “*baptism in/with the Spirit.*” At times, this baptism is explained as being distinct from “water baptism.” This view is mistaken.

In John 3, Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus speak about baptism. Jesus there calls baptism “[being] born of water and the Spirit.” After that conversation, Jesus and his disciples leave for the Jordan Valley to perform baptisms for their new followers.

Years later, Jesus’ apostle Paul writes to his congregation in Ephesus, “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

The suggestion of two baptisms, one “*in water*” and one “*in Spirit*,” cannot be reconciled with Jesus’ own use of water baptism and his apostle’s affirmation of “*one baptism*.”

“The filioque”

This is an interesting one, and perhaps more obscure than the others above. But obscure doesn’t mean unimportant.

Between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity, one theological point which has contributed to division is the “*filioque*.” That word is Latin for “*and from the Son*.” That phrase is not found in the original text of the Nicene Creed. See below the section in question, with the *filioque* included.

And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

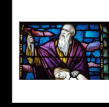
Western Christian churches (ie, the churches which would eventually be known as the Catholic Church) added the phrase in the 500s during arguments with particular heretics.

However, this decision had unintended effects. The Eastern and Western churches were already somewhat estranged. The West’s seeming arrogance in adding a clause to an ancient statement of the faith, without approval given at an ecumenical council, stuck in the craw of the East. They condemned the addition not only as ecclesially improper, but as heretical.

History aside: Is there anything actually wrong with the phrase? No. Both East and West, over a millennium removed from the conflict, have now acknowledged the theological points each makes when they either affirm or negate the phrase.

ESSENTIALS

A Course Outlining the Fundamental Doctrines of Christianity



LESSON FIVE. The doctrine of the Bible.

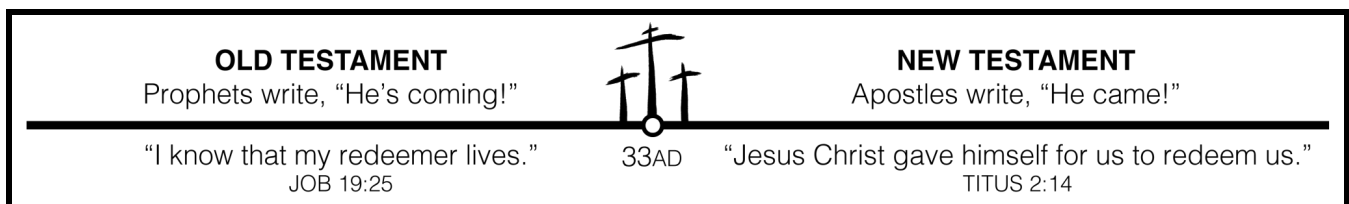
Read 2 Peter 1:12-21 in your Bible. In that reading, we hear from the apostle Peter, one of Jesus' close companions during his ministry.

- **Why does Peter say he is writing to his audience?** *See verses 12-15.*
- **Why does Peter say he should be trusted?** *See verses 16 and 18.*
- **What is Peter calling “something completely reliable” in verse 19?**

The Bible is a fascinating book. For one, it's not technically “a book.” It's actually a collection of sixty-six books, written over a millennium and a half (*roughly 1400 BC to 100 AD*).

Imagine collecting a set of books that starting fifteen centuries ago and ended today. What would you even choose? Best sellers from each century? The most influential books of the time? You might end up with an incredibly strange, completely incompatible set of books.

But the Bible is not an incompatible, random collection. Running through every single book of the Bible is a single theme: **God interacting with the world which he created.** The central event of that theme is the life of Jesus Christ.



בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ
Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυιδ
υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ.

The Bible, as noted in the graphic on the last page, is divided into two major sections. The larger first section is the Old Testament, written from 1400 BC to 400 BC. The smaller second section is the New Testament, written from 30 AD to 100 AD.

The New Testament was written in _____, and the Old Testament in _____ (with small portions in Aramaic). You can see a sample of these languages to the left. These samples are the first verses of Genesis and of Matthew, respectively.

If you consider all the Bible’s books and try to categorize them, you could use the four broad categories laid out below. Reading any portion of the Bible, you will probably quickly get a sense of which category you’re reading.

HISTORY	PROPHECY	WISDOM	LETTERS
These books relate events in world history and in the lives of various individuals. The people mentioned in these books are often the writers of the other books.	These books can vary greatly, but they all include proclamation of future events. God often speaks directly through the writers.	The wisdom books hold words about thoughtful living, correction, and prudence. They tend to be universally applicable.	Letters are books that were originally written to particular recipients. Like the wisdom books, they speak words of correction and encouragement.

Open your Bible to the first verses of the books noted below. To which category do they belong?

Luke	Philemon	Ecclesiastes	Malachi
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That instruction, to open “to the first verses,” touches on another topic. When we open our modern Bibles, we are used to seeing numbers sprinkled throughout the words on the page. These are “chapter” and “verse” numbers.

Because the Bible is such a large book, finding a specific point in it can be difficult. In **1227**, a Christian named **Stephen Langton** divided the Bible into large sections called “_____.” In **1555**, a French Christian named **Robert Estienne**, who was a printer by trade, divided the Bible text into even smaller “_____,” and placed numbers alongside these verses in the Bibles he printed. Langton and Estienne’s inventions help us navigate the Bible more quickly.

If you open your Bible to the beginning of any book, you're at "that book, chapter one, verse one." Books have more or less chapters, depending on how long they are. Chapters are not consistently the same length, but they fall around thirty to forty verses. Verses are usually a sentence or two long. So a chapter in the Bible is generally thirty to forty English sentences.

The last lesson focused on the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. A study of the Bible itself is an appropriate way to follow a study of the Holy Spirit, because (as we read in that lesson) the Holy Spirit uses the Bible to bring us to faith and guide us in our sanctified lives.

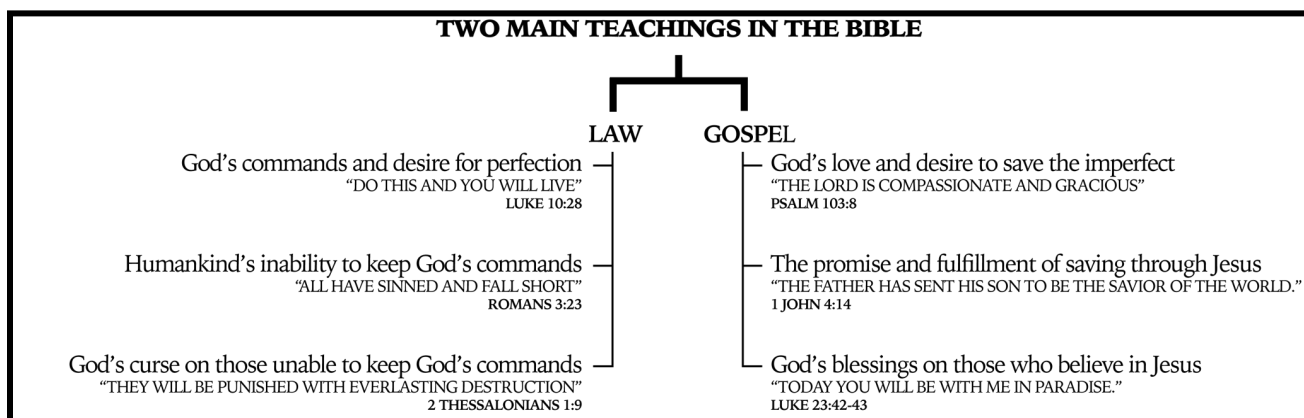
- **2 Timothy 3:15-17**

From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- **What are the Scriptures (another name for the Bible) "able to" do?**
- **What does it mean that Scripture is "God-breathed"?**

Remembering the connection between the Holy Spirit and the Bible is important. **God the Spirit doesn't create faith in our hearts out of the blue, in a random and unpredictable way. He creates it through contact with his Word.**

Something more needs to be noted about God's Word. Earlier, we saw two major sections in the Bible; Old and New Testament. **There is another major division in the Bible.** In some places in the Bible, we read a message called **the Law**. In others, we read the message called **the Gospel**.



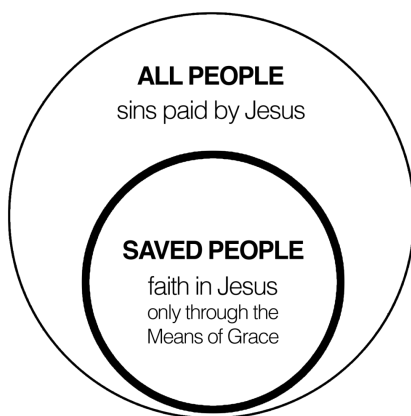
We have already interacted with these two concepts. **In lesson one, from pages two to four, we covered the Law.** Go back to those pages and glance over the Scriptures we read in that section.

- *Where do you see God's commands and desire for perfection expressed?*
- *Where can you find the truth taught that humans cannot keep God's commands?*
- *Where do these Scripture passages speak of God's curse on those who break his Law?*

In that same lesson, we also covered the message which we call the Gospel. Page five, in particular, touches on that topic. Glance over the Scriptures there.

- *Where do you find those passages speaking of God's love and desire to save?*
- *Where do those passages promise salvation through Jesus?*
- *What blessings are promised in those passages to those who believe the Gospel?*

When we say that the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to create faith, we can be yet more specific. **The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel, in particular, to create faith.** The Holy Spirit does use the Law to show us our sin. But the Law does not create faith. Only the Gospel does.

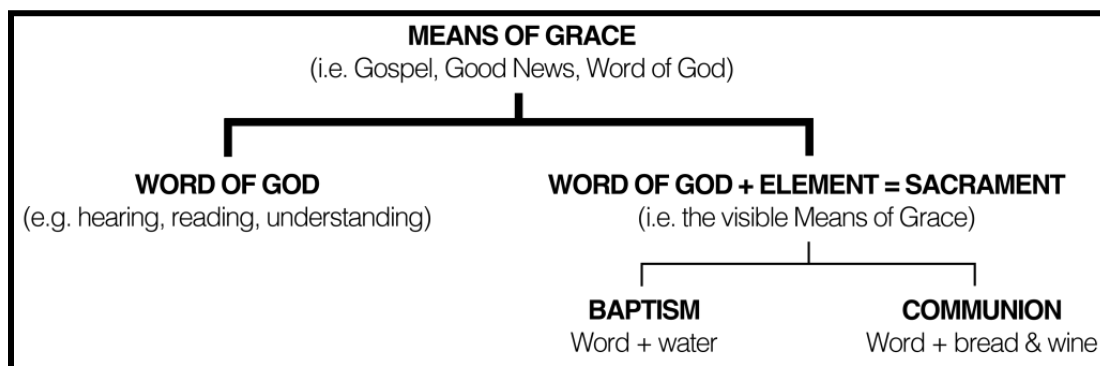


- ***Romans 10:17***
Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.
- ***Acts 4:2-4 (selected verses)***
The apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. Many who heard the message believed.
- ***Ephesians 1:13***
You also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

Romans 10:17, on the last page, uses an interesting term for “the Gospel.” It calls it “the word about Christ.” Here is a shorthand way of expressing the difference between Law and Gospel. **The Law is a message ABOUT you. The Gospel is a message FOR you, ABOUT Jesus.**

The Gospel message is the **means** by which God creates faith in our hearts. When we hear the Gospel, the Holy Spirit works through it to bring faith to life. The Gospel is, fundamentally, a promise. God promises that we are forgiven and reconciled to him because of Jesus. Just like any promise, that promise can create faith. **The difference between this promise and any other promise we may hear in our lives is in the One making the promise.**

Because the Gospel is the *means* by which God, in his *grace*, brings us the benefits of what Jesus did through his death and resurrection, we call the Gospel **the means of grace** (see the graphic in the middle of page 12). The spoken Gospel is used alongside physical elements in two particular sacred rituals, which the Christian Church calls “sacraments.” These are *baptism* and *communion*.



We will discuss the sacraments in greater depth next lesson. They’re included here to make the point that **the power of the sacraments comes not from the rituals themselves, or from the elements used, but from the Word of God**, which is present in the action of the Sacraments.

What is the Christian doctrine of the Bible?

The Bible is a collection of many books, all of which are God’s Word. It is all inspired by him; God the Spirit was the writer behind the human writers. When we read the Bible, we are reading God’s Word. It is through God’s Word, and God’s Word alone, that God has promised to make himself known to us.

God has two messages for us in the Bible: The Law, which shows us our sin, and the Gospel, which promises forgiveness and life through Jesus our Savior.

LESSON FIVE ADDENDA - Translation issues.

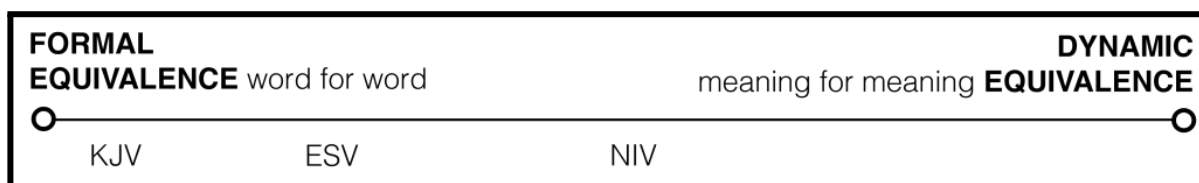
As this lesson notes, the Bible was not written in English. Let's look at how we get our English Bible translations.

“How do we get Bible translations?”

There are over a hundred complete translations of the Bible into English. As of October 2023, the ten most popular Bible translations in the United States were:

1. New International Version
2. King James Version
3. English Standard Version
4. New Living Translation
5. Christian Standard Bible
6. New King James Version
7. Reina Valera (*Spanish*)
8. New International Reader's Version
9. New American Standard Bible
10. New Revised Standard Version

All of these translations are perfectly acceptable translations of the original language biblical texts. When translating any text, a translator can take different approaches. The graphic below outlines these approaches on a spectrum.



One way this takes place is when the translator has to decide, “Should I use the same word in the new language as I used for this original word before, or should I use a similar but different word?” **Let's see an everyday example and a biblical example.**

“Ella lo ve todo color de rosa.”

This Spanish sentence literally says, “She sees everything [*as the*] color of a rose.” What it means is, “She doesn't worry,” or, “She sees everything positively.” In English, we have the phrase “She sees everything with rose-colored glasses.”

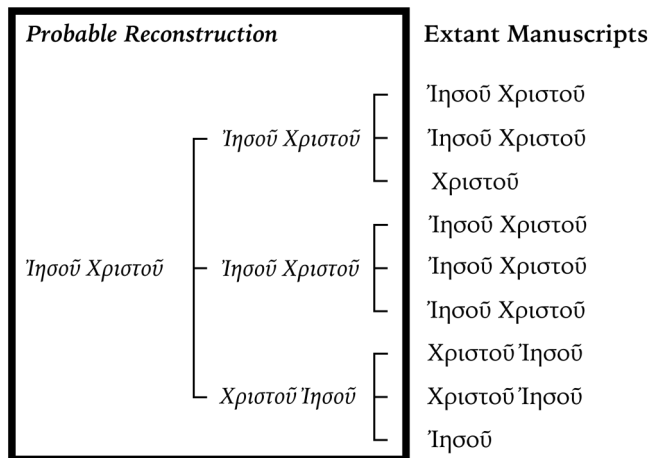
When translating, then, you have these options:

- 1) **directly literal** (first translation above)
- 2) **using an English idiom** (last translation above)
- 3) **expressing the meaning in English without an idiom** (second and third translations above)

Παῦλος δοῦλος
Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ

These are the first words of Romans 1:1. They're pronounced *Paulos, doulos christou iesou*. The word "doulos" is the tricky one here. In modern English, we could translate this word as either "servant" or "slave." Those mean rather different things in modern English. Which one better gets across the idea Paul wanted to express?

The second example also explains one of the issues which creates slight differences in modern Bible translations. We do not possess any of the original writings of the Bible. We have copies (many copies!) handed down to us over many years. There are, on occasion, differences between those copies. For instance, some copies of Romans have "Christ Jesus" in 1:1, while others have "Jesus Christ." Which one is actually what Paul wrote?



This graphic illustrates the hypothetical process by which a minor difference like this could arise in the hand-copying process.

Bible translators will differ on which manuscripts (*hand-made copies*) should be used in our modern translations, and this disagreement leads to differences. However, as Rev. Dr. Luke Thompson explains,

There are hundreds of thousands of variants between the more than 5,000 manuscripts we have. But if we remove the variants that are repeated in two or more manuscripts (in other words, if we are counting only unique variants), then the number is reduced to 10,000 variants (compared to the 138,000 words in the NT). Most of these 10,000 variants are simply differences in spelling or word order. This leaves only a very small number where the original is debated. And not one variant changes a single bible teaching [doctrine]. We can be certain that the original message of the authors of the New Testament is preserved.¹

For a deeper dive into "textual transmission," I recommend you find Thompson's excellent course, "*The Light in the Dark*," at resourcefulchurch.com. He also has recordings of the course on YouTube. The main takeaway from that course: *So long as our English Bibles faithfully reflect the meaning of the original text, we have God's Word in front of us.*

On the next two pages, you'll find examinations, critical and commendatory, of different modern English translations.

¹ From the appendix to "Rogue Religion," article entitled "Is the New Testament Reliable?" Emphasis mine.

Translation	Notes and analysis	Example text, Luke 11:2-4	Example text, John 1:1-3
<p>New International Version</p> <p>NIV</p>	<p>As noted above, the NIV runs a middle ground between “formal” and “dynamic” equivalence. Its current iteration was released in 2011. The first edition was released in 1978, with a long-lived and highly popular minor revision in 1984.</p> <p>The 2011 revision has received criticism for preferring “gender-neutral” language in certain places (primarily the Psalms and some portions of the New Testament).</p>	<p>“When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’ ”</p>	<p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.</p>
<p>King James Version</p> <p>KJV</p>	<p>The King James Bible was first translated in 1611, and its text was standardized in 1769 after a number of “modernized” print runs. This standardization involved some translation changes based on updated scholarship, but was focused on spelling and typographical issues.</p> <p>The King James’ distinguishing feature is its use of the <i>Textus Receptus</i>, a critical edition of the Greek New Testament produced by Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1516, and of the <i>Masoretic Text</i>, a rendering of the Old Testament’s text designated as authoritative by rabbinic Jews between the 7th and 8th centuries AD. Most modern Bible translations use textual witnesses beyond solely the MT or the TR.</p>	<p>When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.</p>	<p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.</p>
<p>English Standard Version</p> <p>ESV</p>	<p>The ESV leans in the “formal equivalence” direction, but uses the same textual basis as other modern translations (ie, not solely the MT or TR).</p> <p>It was published in 2001, and enjoys broad usage among American Protestant churches, especially those in the Reformed traditions.</p>	<p>“When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”</p>	<p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.</p>
<p>The Passion Translation</p> <p>TPT</p>	<p>Introduced in 2011, this is not a translation, nor truly a paraphrase. TPT regularly inserts entirely unfounded phrases and thoughts into the text.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the author (Brian Simmons) has promoted it as essentially a newly-inspired, miracle-worked text, leading to its acceptance in some charismatic churches.</p> <p>This “Bible” does not accurately reflect the message God delivered to the apostles and prophets.</p>	<p>“Our heavenly Father, may the glory of your name be the center on which our life turns. May your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us. Manifest your kingdom on earth. And give us our needed bread for the coming day. Forgive our sins as we ourselves release forgiveness to those who have wronged us. And rescue us every time we face tribulations.”</p>	<p>In the beginning the Living Expression was already there. And the Living Expression was with God, yet fully God. They were together—face-to-face, in the very beginning. And through his creative inspiration this Living Expression made all things, for nothing has existence apart from him!</p>

<p>Evangelical Heritage Version</p> <p>EHV</p>	<p>Produced over 2013-19, this translation was a project undertaken by pastors and scholars of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. Largely, these were WELS and ELS pastors. Like the ESV and NIV, the EHV uses an “eclectic” textual basis.</p> <p>It falls on a similar position as the NIV in terms of formal vs. dynamic equivalence, but it steers away from the “gender-neutral” language of the NIV. It is not a widely used translation, but its scholarship is solid.</p>	<p>“When you pray, say, ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’”</p>	<p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made.</p>
<p>The Message</p> <p>MSG</p>	<p>Pastor Eugene Peterson was the sole translator behind this project. He is quick to clarify that the Message is not truly a “translation,” but a paraphrase. His goal was to explain the Bible’s meaning.</p> <p>His scholarship is sound, and all of his choices are defensible, but MSG is not what’s properly called a “translation.” It is better understood as a periphrastic commentary on the whole Bible.</p>	<p>When you pray, say, Father, Reveal who you are. Set the world right. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.”</p>	<p>The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him.</p>
<p>New Living Translation</p> <p>NLT</p>	<p>A newer translation with a particular focus on making the language of the Bible flow in ways that sound “normal” to modern English ears. Much more “meaning for meaning” than other popular translations. This could be called a paraphrase in places.</p> <p>NLT is accurate in capturing the meaning of longer sections, but its wording doesn’t always capture fine nuances.</p>	<p>“This is how you should pray: “Father, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. Give us each day the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation.”</p>	<p>In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.</p>
<p>New American Bible: Revised Edition</p> <p>NAB:RE</p>	<p>English-speaking Catholics know this as the Bible used during Mass. It is not a particularly accurate translation on either end of the formal vs. dynamic continuum.</p> <p>Many Catholics will use the New Revised Version, Catholic Edition (NRSV-CE) in personal reading.</p>	<p>“When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test.”</p>	<p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.</p>
<p>New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures</p> <p>NWT</p>	<p>The NWT is the product of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. In many places, it’s a fine translation. However, because Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the divinity of Jesus, any passage which deals with this topic is significantly changed in their translation. It was first released in 1961, with a recent major revision in 2013.</p> <p>There are very few significant differences between NWT and other modern translations elsewhere, so there’s no reason to recommend the NWT for regular use by Christians.</p>	<p>“Whenever you pray, say: ‘Father, let your name be sanctified. Let your Kingdom come. Give us each day our bread according to our daily needs. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is in debt to us; and do not bring us into temptation.’”</p>	<p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god. This one was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through him, and apart from him not even one thing came into existence.</p>



LESSON SIX. The doctrine of the sacraments.

Read Numbers 21:4-9 in your Bible. This takes place around 1400 BC (three and a half thousand years ago), in the midst of what's called the *Exodus story*.

- **Who are the “Israelites”? Who are the “Canaanites”?**
- **Why are snakes sent into the Israelite camp?** *See verse 5.*
- **How does God answer the Israelites' repentant request?** *See verse 8.*

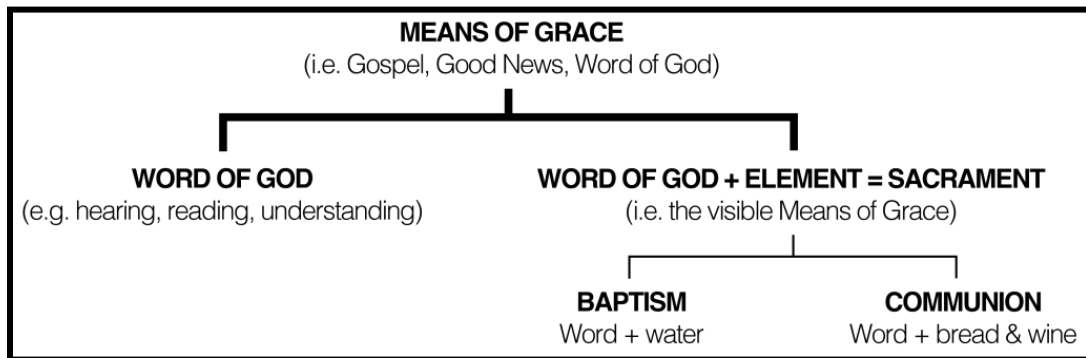
The reading gives one example of something which we see over and over in the Bible. **God uses physical means to deliver blessings to his people.** In that story, he used the bronze snake on a pole to heal snake-bitten Israelites. When his people were threatened by enemies during the times of the judges, he would raise up champions to lead Israel to victory. When Jesus carried out his own ministry, he occasionally used physical elements as part of his miracles.

- **John 9:1-7 (selected)**



Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam.” So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

 - **What physical elements were involved with this miracle?**
 - **What blessing was delivered through these elements?**

The topic of today's lesson was introduced at the end of the last lesson, with this graphic.



The word which we're using here, "sacrament," is not one that we find anywhere in the Bible. **It's a word Christians developed to categorize two specific rituals** observed in Christian churches. It simply means that these are particular special, "sacred" rituals.

 Baptism	 Communion
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water is applied to the participant (by pouring, by immersion, or in another way)• Words from Matthew 28 are spoken	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants eat bread and drink wine²• Words from 1 Corinthians 11 are spoken• Also known as <i>the Eucharist</i>, <i>the Lord's Supper</i>, or <i>the Sacrament of the Altar</i>

If you've been in a church for any amount of time, you've probably seen these rituals take place. But let's do some Bible reading to answer this question: *Why do we do these things?*

- **Matthew 28:18-20**

[After his resurrection] Jesus came to his disciples and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

- ***What things does Jesus command his followers to do here?***
- ***What promise does Jesus end with?***

¹ images by freepik and by surang, respectively. flaticon.com

² For reasons of health or conscience, some people prefer to receive grape juice in Communion. There is nothing wrong with either choice. Jesus and the disciples used wine when Communion was first instituted.

- **1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

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

- ***The apostle Paul wrote these words a few decades after Jesus' ministry. What "night" is he referencing?***
- ***Paul says that we "proclaim the Lord's death" by celebrating Communion. "Until" when will we do this?***

So, if we ask "Why do Christians observe the sacraments?" one simple answer is, "Jesus told us to do so." He told his first disciples to baptize new disciples in all the world, and promised that he would always be with his people as they did so. He instructed his disciples to regularly celebrate this special bread and wine meal until his return.³

But that answer isn't all we can say! Let's look at some more verses from the Bible which give us another "why" answer.

- **Acts 2:38-39**

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all."

- ***The apostle Peter said these words on the day of Pentecost. What did he say happens in Baptism?***

- **Matthew 26:26-28**

Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

- ***For what purpose does Jesus say his blood was "poured out"?***

³ Jesus' return will be discussed in lesson ten.

- **Acts 22:16**

“Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away.”

- **These words were spoken to the apostle Paul when he became a believer. What was he told that Baptism does?**

- **Galatians 3:27**

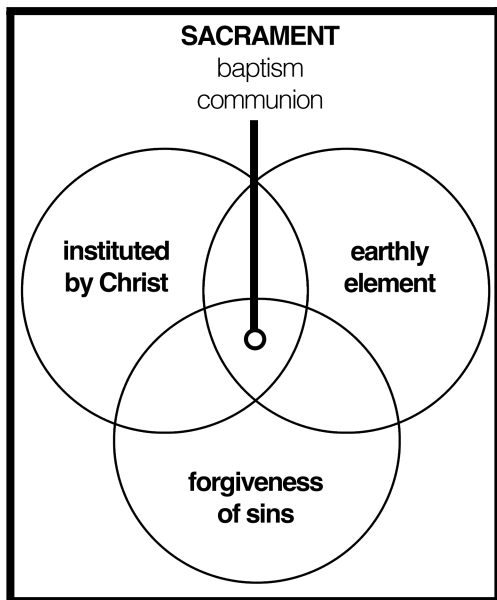
All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

- **What does it mean to be “clothed with Christ”?**

- **1 Corinthians 10:16-17**

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

- **What benefit do we receive as we receive Communion together?**



So, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated still by Christians because, **first**, Jesus commanded them, and **second**, God delivers forgiveness of sins through them to his people.

Sometimes this takes people aback. “Wasn’t forgiveness the point of Jesus’ death on the cross? Why did he die if we get forgiveness in these rituals?” It’s a fair question to ask, but it is simply answered.

First, **the forgiveness which the sacraments offer is not a separate forgiveness from that which Jesus won.** The forgiveness which Jesus won on his cross is that which the sacraments offer. This is particularly clear from the words Jesus spoke at the institution of the Lord’s Supper (see Matthew 26 above).

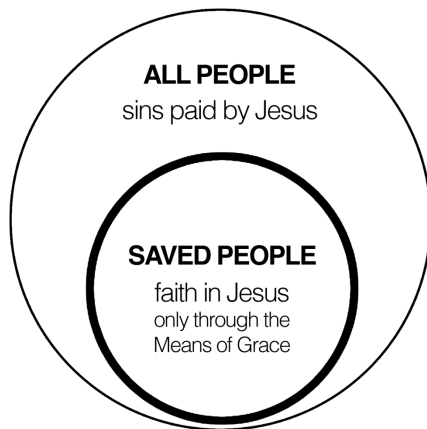
The apostle Peter also makes this clear in regard to Baptism in 1 Peter 3:18–22. “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit... Baptism now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand.”

Second, **how else would the forgiveness which Jesus won on his cross be applied to us personally?** Christianity does not teach universalism⁴. As we saw in lesson one, salvation (which is a free gift given by God) is received by faith. Whoever does not have faith, that person will not be saved.

So how is faith brought to life? (*Find Romans 10:17 in lesson one*).

- **Romans 10:17**

Faith comes from _____ the _____.



Faith comes to life through hearing God’s promises in his Word. **When God makes promises to us, whether alone or attached to the sacramental elements, his promises have the power to create and sustain faith.**

Go back to pages 27 and 28.

- *What promises from God, regarding the sacraments, do you find in the Bible passages on those pages?*

Some Christian churches use the word “sacrament” more broadly to describe various activities that may take place in a Christian congregation (weddings, funerals, prayers, worship itself, etc). Because the word “sacrament” isn’t a biblical word, they are free to do so. But for the sake of clarity, our study of the Bible will use the word “sacrament” to refer only to these two rites, commanded by Jesus, which promise to create and sustain faith through forgiveness of sins.

There is one last point which should be addressed regarding the sacraments. **Who should participate in these acts?** For Baptism, the answer is quite simple. We find it given in some of the passages above. **Refer to Acts 2:38-29 (page 27) and Matthew 28:18-20 (page 26) to answer these questions.**

- *Whom did Jesus command the disciples to baptize?*
- *For whom does Peter say the “promise” of baptism is meant?*

⁴ **Universalism** is the teaching that all people will be ultimately saved (“universal salvation”).

So, Baptism is meant for all people. No one should be baptized against their express will, but the Bible does clearly teach that baptism's promise is given for adults and children alike. **There is no reason to exclude anyone from this gift.** For the Lord's Supper, the answer is not the same. Let's look at a passage from the apostle Paul's teaching on the Lord's Supper.

- **1 Corinthians 10:21, 11:28-29**

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons...

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

- ***What warning does Paul express about the way we should receive the Lord's Supper?***
- ***What does the apostle say that everyone who intends to participate in the Lord's Supper "ought to" do?***

"To examine oneself" (the answer to that second question) means nothing more than to be able to see one's own sins. This requires some maturity, both in the Christian faith and in one's own bodily life. Children don't participate in the Lord's Supper until they have developed the ability to carry out this self-examination (usually in adolescence). Adults who are new to the faith are also instructed in the Ten Commandments before participating. Martin Luther's Small Catechism offers twenty questions which helpfully guide Christians in self-examination.

To be clear, self-examination is not practiced to see whether we "deserve" the Supper. No one does! **We self-examine to see where we need the forgiveness which the Supper offers.**

What is the Christian doctrine of the sacraments?

The sacraments are two particular rituals commanded by Jesus for the New Testament church to observe. They are Baptism and Communion. In both these rituals, God grants forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He does so through his Word, which is attached in the sacraments to specific physical elements (*water, or bread and wine*).

The sacraments have different purposes and roles in the life of believers. Baptism is a one-time event, and is offered to young and old alike. Communion is repeated, and is reserved to those who can examine their lives and recognize their daily need for forgiveness.

LESSON SIX ADDENDA - Sacramental disagreements.

Baptism and Communion are explained and taught differently in various Christian traditions. Let's examine different teachings, and compare them with what the Bible says.

“Does the method of baptism matter?”

When someone is baptized, there are different methods, or *modes*, used by different Christian churches. Some churches completely immerse the person being baptized. Others pour water on the head. Still others sprinkle the person with water. Some churches insist that one method is superior to others, or even that certain modes are invalid. Below is one example of such an insistence on immersion.

What is the proper mode of baptism?



ANSWER

The simplest answer to this question is found in the meaning of the word “baptize.” It comes from a Greek word which means “to submerge in water.” Therefore, baptism by sprinkling or by pouring is an oxymoron, something that is self-contradictory. Baptism by sprinkling would mean “submerging someone in water by sprinkling water on them.” Baptism, by its inherent definition, must be an act of immersion in water.

Before we go any deeper, we'll set this out clearly. **The mode of baptism does not matter.** What matters is that water is connected with God's Word in the form commanded by Jesus.

As you see in the example to the left, the insistence on immersion comes from the claim that the Greek word “baptize” (βαπτίζω) means “submerge in water.” **This is simply not true.**

The best English word to translate βαπτίζω is “wash.” One may certainly **wash** by submerging an item in water. But pouring water on something may also wash it.

In Jesus' day, the word βαπτίζω was used not only to describe effective washings, but also ceremonial washings, which were nothing more than sprinklings. We see plainly below that the Greek word can describe actions other than full submersion of an object.

Indeed, the Pharisees and all the Jews; if with their fist they don't clean their hands, they don't eat. They hold to the tradition of the elders. And when coming from the markets, if they don't **baptize themselves**, they don't eat. And many other things there are which they've received to hold onto; **baptisms** of cups and pitchers and kettles and dining couches.

(Mark 7:3-4 with variant UBS5a4; translation by Tim Walsh)

οἱ γὰρ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐὰν μὴ πύγμα ἰνύονται τὰς χεῖρας οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν, κρατοῦντες τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, καὶ ἀπ' ἀγορᾶς ἐὰν μὴ **βαπτίζονται** οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν, καὶ ἄλλα πολλά ἐστὶν ἃ παρέλαβον κρατεῖν, **βαπτισμοὺς** ποτηρίων καὶ ξεστῶν καὶ χαλκίων καὶ κλινῶν.

So, when Jesus commands us to “baptize,” he is not commanding us to “immerse in water.” He is commanding us to apply water to someone alongside the Word of God. And in that action, no matter what mode is practiced, we have God’s promises that he

- **washes us from our sins,**
- **clothes us with Christ,**
- **and adopts us into his family,**

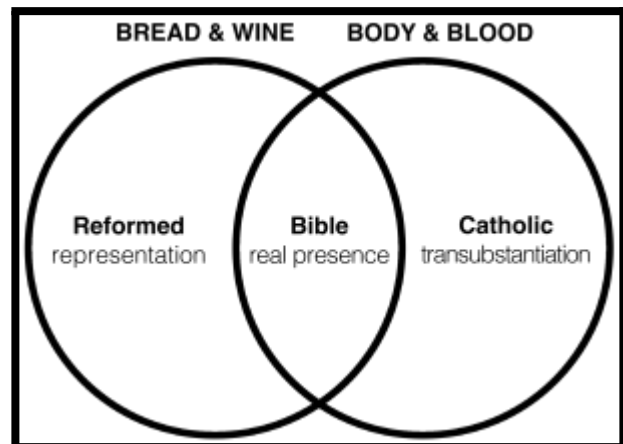
among other wonderful promises.

“Are Jesus’ body and blood present in the Lord’s Supper?”

Different churches also explain exactly what is happening in the Lord’s Supper differently. Broadly, the three views which exist are laid out in the graphic below.

In Roman Catholicism, the teaching is that **the bread and wine cease to be bread and wine.** The elements become the body and blood of Jesus, despite appearing to be bread and wine. The *substance* is *transformed*.

In churches coming from the Reformed tradition (most Protestants, especially American Protestants), the view on the left side is held. The elements simply *represent* Jesus’ body and blood.



Both of these views err. Yes, there is symbolic representation in the Supper’s elements, but it is not merely symbolic. Yes, Christ’s body and blood are present in the Supper, but so are bread and wine. Here is the Bible’s teaching, as explained in the Book of Concord.⁵

The Sacrament of the Altar is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by the Word of Christ to eat and to drink. As we have said that Baptism is not simple water, so here also we say the Sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine, such as are ordinarily served at the table, but bread and wine comprehended in, and connected with, the Word of God.

Christ, when at the table during the Supper, offered His disciples natural bread and natural wine, which He called His true body and true blood. At the same time he said: “Eat and drink.” In view of the circumstances, this command evidently cannot be understood otherwise than of oral eating and drinking; however, not in a gross, fleshly way but in a supernatural, incomprehensible way.

⁵ Selections are edited and taken from the Large Catechism (first paragraph) and from the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord (second paragraph).

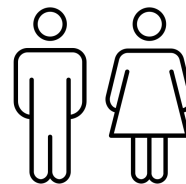


LESSON SEVEN. The doctrine of humankind.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 in your Bible. This was written by a man named Solomon, who was the son of David, king of Israel. Solomon became king after David, and he ruled over the most prosperous era of Israelite history.

- **Are you surprised by what you read here? Why?**
- **What overall impression of life on earth do you get from Solomon's words?**

In lesson two, we read the Bible's account of creation (Genesis 1 and 2). There was a particular phrase used when God created humans. God made Adam and Eve (the first man and first woman) "in the image of God."

¹

As we consider the Bible's teachings about who we are as humans, and what human life is all about, we'll start by considering this phrase. Read through the following Bible passages from Genesis and answer the questions.

- **Genesis 1:26-27**

God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

 - **Who was made in "the image of God?"**
 - **For what purpose(s) were people made in God's image?**

¹ image credit, iconriver at flaticon.com

- **Genesis 5:1-5**

This is the written account of Adam's family line.

When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them "Mankind" when they were created. When Adam had lived years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years. Then he died.

- **When Adam had a son, in whose image was that son born?**

- **Genesis 9:6-7**

"Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind. As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."

- **What does God say gives human life special value?**

This phrase "image of God" is an important one to incorporate into our anthropology (our *understanding of what humans are*). Humans were created in God's image, which is to say, we were created to reflect God to the world and to one another. We were meant to do so while ruling over God's creation.

We read the story of creation in lesson four, but until now, we haven't read another important part of the Biblical story. How do we go from a good creation, and being made in God's image, to a fallen and broken world, where children are born in human image? **Open up your Bible to Genesis 3, and we'll read verses 1 to 8.**



Another way that we can explain "*the image of God*" is to use the language of *faith and works* which we saw in Part One. Faith, as we discussed there, is trust in God and his Word. Faith naturally leads to what we can call "good works." We trust God, and therefore we use his Word to guide our lives.

Humans, created in God's image, initially trusted him and trusted his word as the guide for our lives. But sin has separated us from God. As natural sinners, we no longer innately trust God or his word.

² image credit, Unknown Depths at flaticon.com

That lack of trust was the essence of the very first sin, and it's the essence of all sin since. **Although that natural faith in God was lost when Adam and Eve sinned, the fact that we were initially created in God's image gives human life special value.**

While the natural image of God, and natural faith in God, was lost through Adam and Eve's sin, the Bible teaches that faith is recreated anew in our hearts through the Gospel (*see lessons one and six*). And what is restored in us when faith is created in our hearts? **God also restores his image in us when he brings us to faith, through the power of his Word.**

2 Corinthians 3:18

We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 15:49

Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

Again, to understand what this means, we can use the language of *faith* and *works*. God begins restoring his image in us when he brings us to faith, and he works through his Word daily to show forth that image more and more clearly. **Where do we show God's image? In our acts of love, which flow from our faith.** In lesson one, we discussed these topics as we looked at the relationship between faith and love. Our study of anthropology naturally leads us back to these same thoughts.

Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

A study of anthropology also leads us to studying the physical world of creation. Humans are, inherently, both physical and spiritual.

Genesis 2:7

The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Matthew 16:26

What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

This truth is opposed by two erroneous teachings: *Materialism*, and *gnosticism*.

Materialism is the idea that only what is physical is real. Materialism denies the existence of spirits, souls, or anything which cannot be directly observed.

Gnosticism is the idea that only what is spiritual is real. Gnosticism claims that physical matter is either evil, or simply "lesser" than spiritual things.

Both of these teachings are untrue, and the Bible rejects them. All throughout the Bible, God reveals to us the reality of spiritual powers and entities, and our own nature as ensouled beings. Yet the Bible does not teach that spiritual things are inherently better or purer than material things. **God is the good and wise Creator of all things, both spiritual and material.**

Read through the following Bible passages and determine whether *gnosticism* or *materialism* are rejected by their content. (You might answer *both* for some.)

- **Romans 13:1-10**

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established... Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

- ***Does this passage reject materialism, gnosticism, or both? How?***

- **John 2:1-12**

[When invited to a wedding, Jesus miraculously changed water into wine so that the party could go on.]

- ***Does this passage reject materialism, gnosticism, or both? How?***

- **Genesis 2:7-9**

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

- ***Does this passage reject materialism, gnosticism, or both? How?***

- **1 Corinthians 15:19-20**

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

- ***Does this passage reject materialism, gnosticism, or both? How?***

- **John 13:1-5**

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress... so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist... and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel.

- *Does this passage reject materialism, gnosticism, or both? How?*

- **Hebrews 2:14-17**

Since [human beings] have flesh and blood, [Jesus] shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death... For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way.

- *Does this passage reject materialism, gnosticism, or both? How?*

- **John 1:14**

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

- *Does this passage reject materialism, gnosticism, or both? How?*

What is the Christian doctrine of humankind?

Humans are jointly physical and spiritual beings. All creation was made to receive God's love. But humanity was specially created in God's image. This means that we were created to reflect God's character in the world he made.

Since the fall into sin, we no longer naturally show forth God's image. When God brings faith to life in our hearts, however, he restores his image in us and in our lives, as we are led by his Spirit to imitate Jesus.



LESSON EIGHT. The doctrine of angels and demons.

As we noted in the last lesson, human beings are not merely physical entities. We are physical-spiritual beings, composed of both body and soul. And these two aspects of creation interact with one another. The physical can affect the spiritual, and the spiritual the physical.

We'll start this lesson by **reading Mark 5:1-20**.

- What **emotions** are felt by the various characters in this account? (*The possessed man, before and after; the demons; the townspeople...*)

If we want to give this lesson a theological title, we could call it, *“angelology and demonology.”* But to do so might confuse one point: **Angels and demons are the same kind of being.** We aren't sure when during creation God made them, but they were created at the same time, for the same original purpose. The Bible shows this very clearly when it refers to demons as “angels” at times.

¹



- **Revelation 12:7-9**

War broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

- *This passage describes a battle which took place millennia ago. Who were the combatants?*
- *What was the result of the battle?*

¹ image credit, Ian Welch at paramentics.com

Although angels and demons are the same type of being, they have very different goals as they now exist. Satan, and the angels who accompanied him, now work to lead as many humans into eternal ruin alongside them as possible.

2 Peter 2:4

God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment.

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.

Matthew 25:41

Then [Jesus] will say to [unbelievers], ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

Angels, on the other hand, exist to serve God and God’s people at his command. They protect us, and often serve as his messengers. This was the purpose for which all angels were created, and the ones which remained with God still carry it out. (The word *angel* itself simply means “messenger” in Greek.)

Psalm 91:11-12

[God] will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

Hebrews 1:14

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Both angels and demons, throughout the Bible, are shown to have greater power than human beings. They are grand and glorious. They instinctively provoke reactions of fear and worship. **God’s angels, however, always reject such worship, and direct people to worshipping God alone.**

- **Revelation 22:8-9**

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things... I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!”

- **Who is John?** (For help, consult Mark chapter one, which we read in lesson three.)
- **What is the angel’s reply when John begins to worship him?**
- **What title does the angel give to himself?**

- **Colossians 2:18-19**

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

- ***The apostle Paul warns here that people will always be tempted to worship angels. What will the speech and conduct of such people be like, according to Paul?***
- ***Who is “the head,” from which such people have been disconnected? (See Colossians 2:9-10 on page 13 and 1:15-20 on page 17.)***

While angels serve as God’s messengers, we’re also warned to evaluate any message an angel might bring by comparing it to the message in the Bible.

- **Galatians 1:8-9**

Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!

- ***What is the gospel?***
- ***What would “another gospel” sound like?***

- **2 Corinthians 11:14-15**

Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

- ***Why would Satan pretend to be “an angel of light”?***

- **1 John 4:1**

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

- *How would you apply this verse to preachers and teachers, as well as angels?*

James 4:7

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

While Satan and his angels are powerful and cunning, we have two promises from God in the face of such enemies. **One**, we have his Spirit, who equips us to evaluate this enemy’s lies. **Two**, those who belong to God through faith are able to resist their attacks.

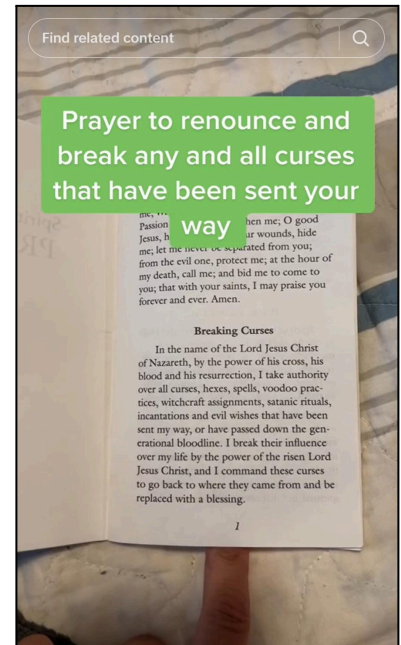
In our introductory reading, we read the account of a demon-possessed man. The Bible presents such things as real occurrences and possibilities. Events such as those depicted in movies like “*The Exorcist*” and “*Paranormal Activity*” do occur. (Not with the same level of cinematic drama, however.)

Some Christians are led into great fear by the existence of these powers. There is certainly reason to be cautious regarding spiritual things. Christians avoid occult or magical rituals; tarot cards, ouija boards, or fortune-telling, for instance. **Anything which calls on spiritual forces other than the Triune God for help and/or enlightenment is dangerous.**

But this fear can be taken too far. Contemporary “*deliverance ministries*” and “*spiritual warfare*” influencers advertise rituals and products to prey on worried Christians. An example from TikTok is found at the right.

The services and wares they are selling are not attached to any promise from God, and are therefore to be rejected. Instead, as we regard the spiritual world, we rely on God’s promise to protect us at all times.

Don’t find your teaching and perspective on the spiritual world from teachers you don’t know on social media. Find it in God’s Word. And what God teaches and promises in his Word is that he is active in his Word and Sacraments, and through them, his Spirit has come to dwell in you. His, and no other.



We'll close with a selection from the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church. As we do so, let's ask: **What does Paul identify in this section as that which protects us from Satan and his powers?**

- **Ephesians 6:10-17**

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

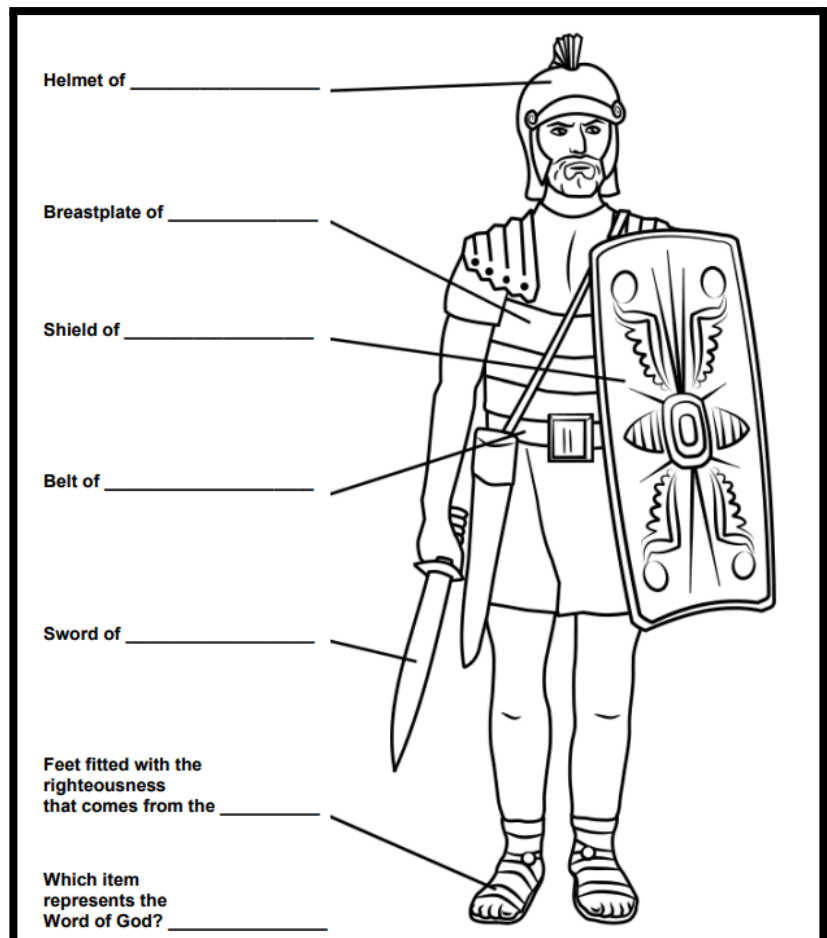
Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.²

What is the Christian doctrine of angels and demons?

Angels and demons are spiritual beings. They were created sometime during the six days of creation to be God's servants.

A number of these beings rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven. We know them as "demons," and their leader as "Satan," or, "the devil."

The spirits who did not rebel, we call "angels." They continue to serve God and God's people at God's command. God sends them to protect us each and every day, and he promises that his Spirit, who dwells in us, equips us to resist our spiritual enemies.



² illustration credit, www.kidssundayschool.com



LESSON NINE. The doctrine of the church.

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 in your Bible. This comes from the same book of the Bible we read during to begin lesson one. The letter to the Ephesians gives a well-rounded picture of what the Christian church is.

- **Various phrases and names in this section refer to gathered groups of Christians. What are those names? What do they all mean?**
- **“Unity” is an important theme here. What words do you find which emphasize it?**

1

Sometimes when we hear the word “church,” we think of the particular building we gather in to hear God’s Word and worship. We can drive by it, point at it, and say, “*That’s my church.*” But as the Bible uses *church*, it doesn’t mean “a building.” It means “*the group gathered around God’s Word.*”



- **1 Corinthians 1:1-3**

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes: To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- ***Where is the word “church” in that passage?***
- ***What other names are given to that group of people?***

¹ image credit, Dreamstale at flaticon.com

When the word “church” is used in the passage above, it’s referring to what we’d call “a local church,” **a particular group of believers who gather around God’s Word in a particular location.** That doesn’t need to be a singular building. If a group of people in one region regularly gather around God’s Word at a few different locations, they are still a congregation, permanent building or not. Early Christians rarely had dedicated church buildings. They usually gathered for worship in private homes, and sometimes in isolated public spaces.

<p>Romans 16:3-5 <i>Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus... Greet also the church that meets at their house.</i></p>	<p>The Octavius <i>We [Christians] have neither temples nor altars.</i></p>	<p>The Didache² <i>Baptize ... in running water. But if you have no running water, baptize in other water... Pour water three times on the head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.</i></p>
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The custom of having dedicated church buildings developed over time, as Christianity became legal in the Roman empire. In its early years, Christianity was often outlawed or culturally rejected. Only once Christians could count on legal protection were they able to establish dedicated meeting places. In many countries today, it is still difficult for Christians to openly worship, and the custom of house churches continues. **The important thing is not whether a church meets in a house, a public place, or a dedicated building, but that the group gathered there gathers to hear God’s Word and to share it in faith and love with their neighbors.**

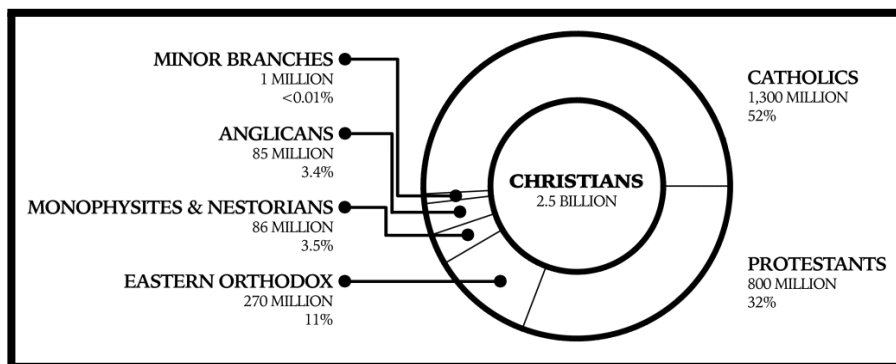
The word “church” doesn’t only mean “a local group of believers.” It does generally mean that in the Bible, but it also means, “all people of all times and places who believe in Jesus as their Savior.” The following Bible passages use the word “church” in that sense.

<p>Galatians 1:13 <i>For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.</i></p>	<p>Ephesians 3:20-21 <i>Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.</i></p>
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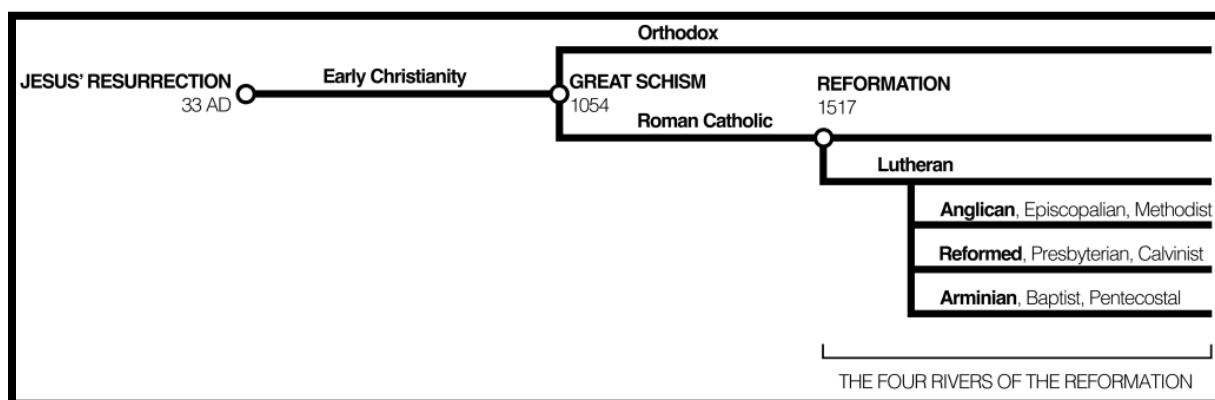
In our initial reading from Ephesians 4, Paul said that God gave the people we would call “ministers” to the church as a whole. Pastor, teachers, preachers, and other people who work at sharing God’s Word are God’s gifts to his people. **Look back at that reading and ask this question: Why does God give these people to the church?**

² The Octavius and the Didache are not books in the Bible. They are writings by early Christians about what the Christian faith is. Essentially, they are Bible studies, like the one you’re reading. They present the truths of the Bible in an ordered way.

As we look at the whole of Christianity, we notice that the Christian Church isn't simply divided into local groups. There are also larger groups of churches within the Christian Church. **What are these groups? And why are they separate?**



The graphic above denotes a number of these larger groups. Many names are used for such groups: “Denominations,” “networks,” “synods,” and more. The existence of distinct groups of local churches came about through historical events.



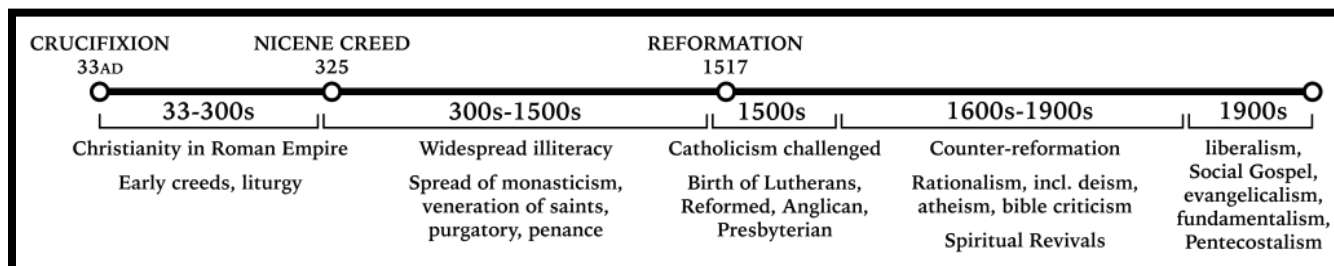
When Jesus rose from death, his followers began sharing that good news with others. This created what we call “the early Christian church.” At that time, there were no formal divisions between local churches. There were disagreements, however.³

Within the first few hundred years of Christianity, a system of supervisory authorities had developed. These overseeing ministers were called “bishops.” They were pastors in local congregations who were also given oversight of other local churches. Sadly, among these overseers, conflict arose over who oversaw the other overseers. In the event called “**The Great Schism**” on the timeline above, **the bishop of the church in Rome excommunicated⁴ the bishop of Constantinople.** This created the earliest large division in Christianity, between those who are now called Roman Catholics and those who are called Orthodox. However, there were already some smaller groups that operated outside the supervision of Rome or Constantinople, such as the *St. Thomas Christians* of India, or the churches of Ethiopia.

³ The books of Acts, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and 1 John, among others, testify to these disagreements.

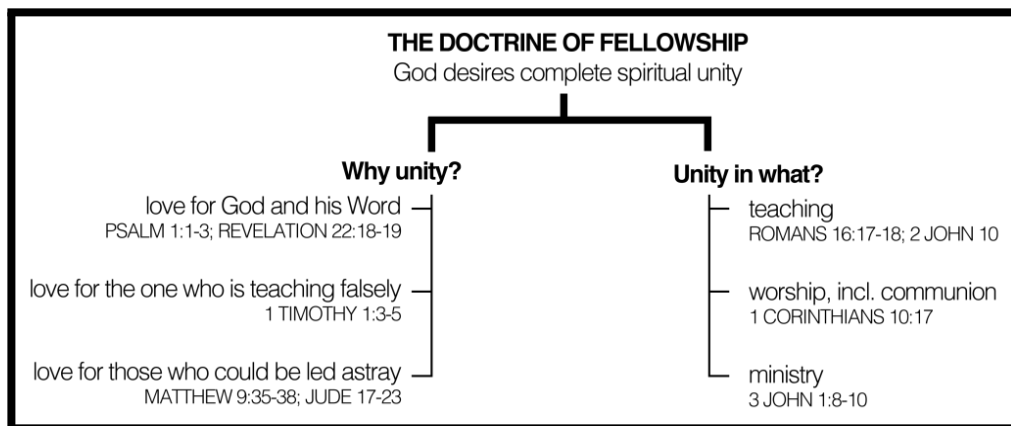
⁴ “Excommunication” means declaring that someone who claims to be a Christian is actually not. The concept is biblical, and it comes from some words of Jesus in Matthew 18: “*If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along... If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan.*”

Five hundred years later, the event called the **Reformation** further split European Christianity. Spurred by the teachings of a former Roman Catholic monk in Germany named **Martin Luther**, the Reformation quickly grew beyond his camp. Other teachers such as **John Calvin**, **Jacob Arminius**, and **King Henry VIII of England** broke from the Roman Catholic church for various reasons. Divisions and reunifications within various branches of Christianity have continued worldwide to the present day.



Not all the divisions are functionally important. For instance, churches in the Lutheran tradition are often organizationally divided by ancestry, but not in any other way. In North America, for example, there are two Lutheran church networks, the **Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS)** and the **Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)**, which are only separate because their founders came from different immigrant groups. The immigrants who formed the ELS came mostly from Northern Europe, while WELS came about as German immigrants joined together to support church work in their communities.

Despite their organizational division, these two church networks work together and share pastors, ministries, and other resources with each other.



Not all church bodies have that level of “fellowship,” or joint ministry. Why not? Generally, it’s because they teach different things about aspects of the Christian faith. Below are some theological questions which separate churches. (This is NOT a complete list!)

<i>Should we baptize babies?</i>	<i>How are we saved?</i>	<i>Is the Bible totally God’s Word?</i>
<i>Should we rebaptize?</i>	<i>What shows someone to be a Christian?</i>	<i>What qualifications does the Bible have for ministers?</i>
<i>To whom should we pray?</i>	<i>What is the Lord’s Supper?</i>	

The sad fact of division between churches results from holding two Biblical truths in tension. *One*, God desires his people to be united. Yet *two*, God desires that our unity comes from a shared faith in his whole Word.

- **Psalm 133:1**

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

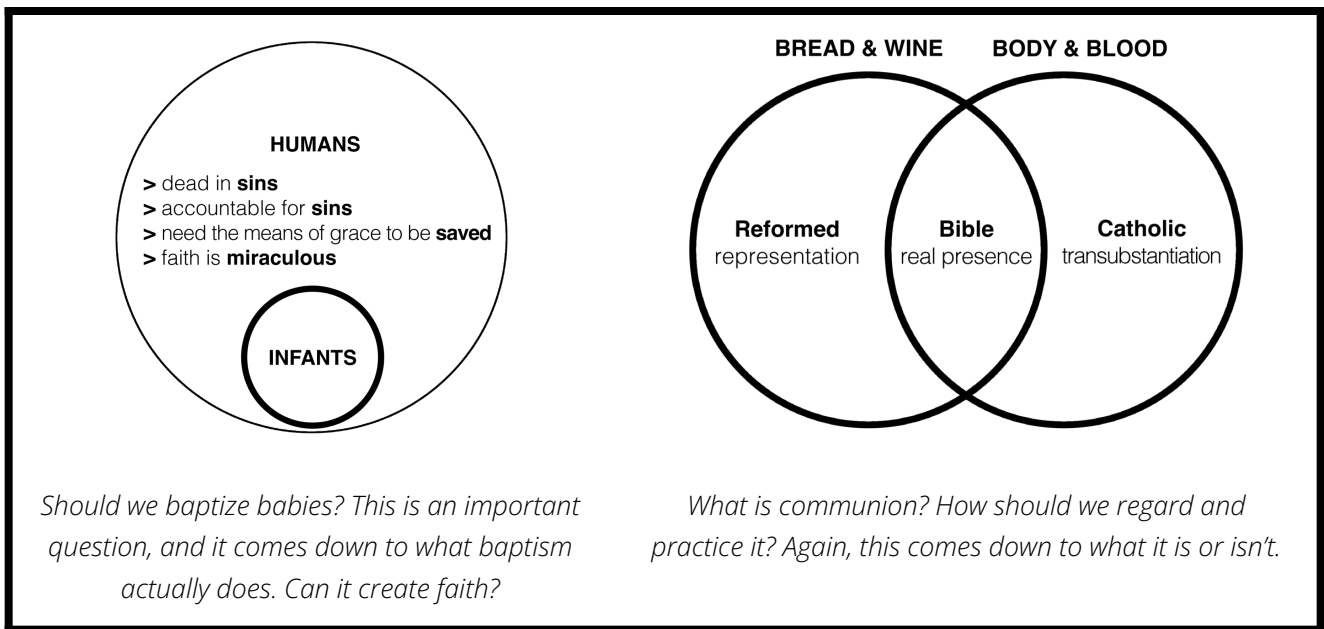
- **What is "good," according to this passage?**

- **Romans 16:17**

Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way contrary to the teaching you have learned.

- **For what should we "watch out" in the church?**

The topic of lesson six, the Sacraments, is a very clear example of this. Various churches speak about these things very differently, and practice them very differently. These are not unimportant issues!



It is important that, while Christians care deeply about God's Word, and that they seek a local congregation which teaches it clearly and completely, we also not characterize other Christians as not Christian. **The necessary element to being a Christian is not "perfect expression of every Biblical teaching."** It is faith in Jesus as one's Savior, which is brought about by God through the Gospel message.

If you're reading this with a cup of coffee, this next illustration will make sense right away. If not, go pour yourself a cup! As you do, notice that the bottom of the cup gets harder to see as more coffee comes in. Coffee is not completely opaque. You can see through to the bottom through a small amount of coffee. But the more you have, the harder the bottom is to see.

5



Now picture the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus alone as the “bottom” of the coffee cup. **Any teaching which obscures that message is “coffee” being poured in. A little, and the bottom can be seen. A lot, and the bottom disappears.**

So how can we determine whether or not any local congregation is teaching something contrary to the Bible? That's hard! **Ultimately, it can only be done through studying the Bible, and through patient examination of a church's preaching and teaching.** So this Bible study intends to give you a solid grounding on the central doctrines of Christianity.

Ultimately, God wants Christians to gather with one another. He wants us to gather as communities around his Word. **Find that truth in the following Bible passages.**

Hebrews 10:24-25

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love... not giving up meeting together... but encouraging one another.

1 Corinthians 14:26

When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

1 Corinthians 11:26

Whenever you [together] eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Acts 2:42

[The believers] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Hebrews 3:13

Encourage one another daily.

Romans 16:16

Greet one another with a holy kiss.

What is the Christian doctrine of the church?

The Christian Church is the entire group of all people ever who believe in Jesus as their Savior. They are brought together by God's Word, through which God creates the faith that unifies them. This Church has existed ever since the first humans were created with natural faith in God, and it exists wherever God's Word is preached and taught.

A local church is a particular group of those believers, gathering together in particular times and places. A Christian should evaluate the teaching of any local congregation by comparing it to the Bible, and should joyfully join with a group that preaches faith in Christ and love for neighbor according to God's Word.

⁵ image credit, Freepik at flaticon.com. (While I like this illustration, it saddens me to picture coffee as a bad thing.)

LESSON NINE ADDENDA - Bible history; the church year.

The Christian church has existed since the beginning of time. But it has looked quite different, outwardly, at different points. This addendum traces the history of the church from the world's beginning to the end of this age, as the Bible reveals such to us.

The church history given on pages 54-55 picks up where this outline ends.

4000 BC	God creates the world, with humanity as his crowning creation. When humanity falls away from him into sin, God issues the first promise to send a Savior for all people.	Genesis
2000 BC	Early humanity variously seeks after and rejects God. After some of the better-known Old Testament Bible stories (<i>the Flood, the Tower of Babel</i>), we zoom in on the family of a man named Abraham . God chooses him to be the father of a new nation, through which he will send the Savior. Abraham's twelve great-grandsons through his grandson Jacob are the patriarchs , whose families become the twelve tribes of Israel.	Job
1900 BC	During a widespread famine, the family of Jacob settles in Egypt , where God has raised up a leader (Jacob's long-lost son Joseph) who provides for them. God preserves Jacob's family there in Egypt for four hundred years, and they grow into a great nation.	
1500 BC	But when a new Egyptian king enslaves the people of Jacob (who are now called <i>the Hebrews</i>), God rescues his people from Egypt through the ministry of a man named Moses . Moses leads the people to Mount Sinai , where God gives them the laws that mark Israel, the Old Testament visible church, as a distinct people.	Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy
	After forty years spent living in the deserts, Israel is led by Moses' successor Joshua into Canaan (the land which we know today as Israel and Palestine). Having settled into their land, the new nation grows and faces both spiritual and material challenges. God preserves them, but often allows them to suffer hardship when they distance themselves from him. But throughout, he is faithful to his regularly unfaithful people.	Joshua
1000 BC	Eventually, God raises up a king, named David to lead his people. God promises that one of David's descendants will always sit on the throne. However, during the rule of David's grandson, civil war breaks out, and Israel divides into northern and southern kingdoms. David's family continues to rule in the south, while other usurpers war over the north.	Judges Ruth 1 and 2 Samuel 1 Kings 1 Chronicles
930 BC		Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon
	During this period, called the <i>Monarchy</i> , much of the Old Testament is written. Through various prophets, God urge his people to turn back to him and his Word.	Isaiah Jonah Nahum Amos Hosea Jeremiah Lamentations Micah
*722 BC	The northern kingdom is consistently more hostile to their God and his	Zephaniah Habakkuk

*587 BC	<p>prophets. God eventually allows them to be conquered and removed from their land. We know them as the Lost Ten Tribes. History does not record their ultimate fate. The southern kingdom hangs on longer, but ultimately meets the same sad end. The Babylonian Empire conquers Jerusalem, the capital, and deports all its people to their land as slaves.</p>	<p>2 Kings 2 Chronicles Ezekiel Obadiah Daniel</p>
*540 BC	<p>After seventy years of captivity, God raises up another conqueror, the Persian emperor Cyrus. Cyrus conquers Babylon and allows the captive Israelites (now known as “Jews”) to return to their land and rebuild Jerusalem. God has once again been faithful to his people!</p>	<p>Esther</p>
*538 BC	<p>The rebuilding takes much time, but it is eventually completed. It is during that period that the Old Testament ends.</p>	<p>Ezra Nehemiah Haggai Joel Zechariah Malachi</p>
400 BC - 1 AD	<p><i>Between the Old and New Testaments are four hundred years of history. The Bible does not recount them, but we read of them in other history books. We're told in them of other conquerors who attempt to capture Israel. Eventually, the Roman Empire does conquer Israel and renames it “Judaea.” When Jesus is born, the Romans still rule over the Jews.</i></p>	<p>[The Apocrypha]</p>
3 BC - 1 AD	<p>Jesus is born during a time period called the “<i>Pax Romana</i>,” when the Roman Empire had conquered nearly all its enemies. His life is spent almost entirely within Judaea.</p>	<p>Matthew Mark Luke John</p>
30 AD	<p>At about thirty years old, Jesus begins publicly teaching and ministering. After three years, he allows himself to be captured and executed by Roman and Jewish authorities during the Passover Festival. Three days later, he rises from the dead and shows himself to his disciples. He is the Savior who had been promised long ago!</p>	<p>Acts</p>
33 AD	<p>Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus returns to heaven, where he now rules over all things for the good of his people. Ten days after his return to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to equip his church to share his good news of forgiveness and eternal life with the whole world.</p>	<p>James Galatians 1 and 2 Thessalonians 1 and 2 Corinthians Ephesians Philippians Colossians Philemon</p>
60 AD	<p>Over the next few decades, the Christian church grows rapidly. It spreads throughout the Roman world and beyond. The followers of Jesus begin to write down their records of his words, and to make copies of the teaching passed down by his followers. These writings become the New Testament.</p>	<p>1 and 2 Timothy Titus Hebrews 1 and 2 Peter Jude 1, 2, and 3 John</p>
*70 AD	<p>After a failed revolution in Israel, the armies of the Roman emperor Trajan destroy Jerusalem and its temple. God allows this to show that his Gospel message has found its fulfillment in Jesus. The temple in Israel is no longer needed. The Christian church, which went worldwide in under a century, now proclaims the saving name of Jesus, and his promise to return, to all the ends of the earth.</p>	<p>Revelation</p>
100 AD		

The next addendum to this lesson continues on page 60.

The church year.

This page and the next are best printed in color.

There is tremendous variety in style of worship among Christian churches. If you've attended services at any different Christian churches, you've seen this firsthand! Some Christian churches put on large, highly-produced events for worship, rivaling some concerts in their scale. Other churches have smaller groups gathered in smaller venues, with perhaps only a piano to provide music. (Some Christian churches don't use any instruments!)

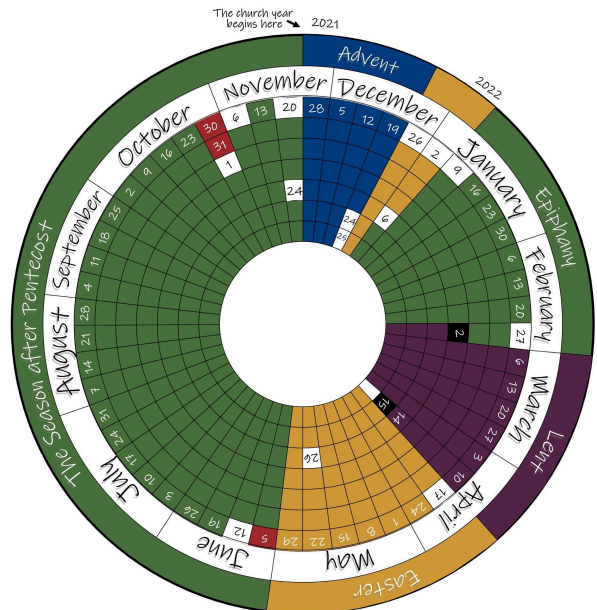
This variety speaks to the nature of Christianity. **Christianity is not, fundamentally, a set of rules about the proper way to be.** Christianity isn't centered on our actions, but on the actions of God, who sent Jesus to save us sinners. Therefore, Christians enjoy wide freedom in worship style.

Christian worship of all stripes, however, is united by the major festivals of Christmas and Easter. These annual celebrations mark the birth and the resurrection of Jesus. Around these two festivals, Christians who worship in a more traditional style often observe what's called "the church year," or "the liturgical calendar." The church year isn't laid out in the Bible, but was developed over the last two thousand years.

The graphic on the right depicts the church year that ran from 2021-2022. **The church year doesn't line up with the regular calendar.** It's similar to the "fiscal year" or the "school year." Certain dates and occasions move from year to year, and it ends and begins at a different point.

Every church year begins toward the end of November, or in very early December. Very often, this happens right after American Thanksgiving.

The church year is structured around Jesus' life. Each new church year gives us the opportunity to read again about the major events of his life and three-year ministry, as told through the church seasons. The next page breaks each season down.



The four weeks of Advent begins the church year looking ahead to Christmas. We decorate in either *blue* or *purple*; blue as a color of **hope**, purple as a **royal** color for the King to be born.



Christmas is the first major festival of the year, celebrating the birth of Jesus. The two Sundays after Christmas itself are also included in this small season. White or gold are used in this season. **January 6 is the festival of Epiphany.** This festival is usually observed on the Sunday before or after, depending on where January 6 falls that year. Epiphany remembers the wise men visiting Jesus with their gifts (Matthew 2). The same color is used as was used at Christmas.



For a few weeks after Epiphany, we enter what's called "Ordinary Time." *Ordinary Time* is simply what we call any portion of the year that isn't celebrating a particular festival or theme. This Ordinary Time can last from four to eight weeks, depending on the date of Easter.

Ordinary Time uses the color green, which is associated with a focus on personal growth. The Bible readings during this season feature selections from Jesus' early ministry (Matthew 4-8 or Luke 4-8, for example).



In February or March, we observe Ash Wednesday. Christian churches are decorated in black or purple, and Christians receive ash crosses on their foreheads or hands to remind us of the consequences of our sin. "*The wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23).

The season of Lent, which lasts for five Sundays (six if you include Palm Sunday), is a contemplative and somber season, during which we consider our need for Jesus as our Savior. Lent uses purple exclusively. We hear readings from the latter parts of Jesus' ministry (Luke 10-20, for example).



The week from Palm Sunday to Easter is called "Holy Week." There are four festivals in these eight days: *Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.*

Palm Sunday marks Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem before his death. Maundy Thursday (also called "Holy Thursday") celebrates the institution of the Lord's Supper. Good Friday remembers the day Jesus died on his cross. And Easter is the celebration of his resurrection! The colors in this week change from purple, to black, to gold and white.

The stories we read during Holy Week are found in Matthew 26-28, Mark 14-16, Luke 22-24, and John 13-20.



Easter's celebratory colors continue for **the next fifty days, until we celebrate Pentecost.** Pentecost took place fifty days after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2), when he sent the Holy Spirit to his disciples, to equip them to share his message. The red color of this festival symbolizes the flames in which the Holy Spirit appeared.



And after Pentecost, we enter a long Ordinary Time! This season lasts around five to six months. During this season, we read Bible selections that help us think through our daily lives as God's people. We cover lots of ground in the life of Jesus, from his early and late ministry.

At the end of this Ordinary Time, we usually read selections in which Jesus teaches about the end of the world. Other minor festivals also take place throughout this season.



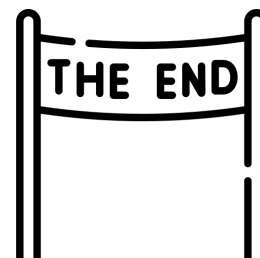


LESSON TEN. The doctrine of the end times.

Today, we'll start with one of Paul's letters. Open up your Bible to **1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11**.

- In 4:18, Paul says that he wants to “encourage” Christians with these words. What is “encouraging” in them?
- Paul refers to “the day of the Lord” in 5:2. By this, he means, “*the day when the world will end.*” How does he characterize the way in which that day will arrive?

¹“The end of the world.” “Armageddon.” “Doomsday.” “Judgment Day.” You’ve heard these phrases before. Often, **when we use them in modern English, we mean something less dramatic than a true world-ending event.** We use “doomsday” to talk about layoffs at a company, or “*the end of the world*” to talk about someone’s reaction to bad news.



But when these, and other related phrases, come up in the Bible, we are actually talking about the end of the present world. As we saw above, the apostle Paul called that future event “*the day of the Lord.*” While it’s given various names in the Bible, all the names refer to the same event: Jesus’ return to this world, a final judgment of all people, and a remaking of creation.

After Jesus’ resurrection at Easter, he spent 40 days appearing to his disciples at various times and places. He showed them that he was truly physically alive by eating and drinking with them (*Luke 24:42 and elsewhere*). He reminded them of the things he had told them during his three years of ministry among them. And then, on the fortieth day after his resurrection from the dead, he took himself up to heaven.

¹ image credit, Freepik at flaticon.com

- **Acts 1:1-11 (selected)**

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God... [Then] he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

- ***This was written by a man named Luke. His "former book" is the book we call Luke. What does he say that book was about?***
- ***The "men dressed in white" who appear to the apostles are angels. What promise do they have for the men?***

The clear teaching of the Bible is that Jesus, who bodily and visibly went to heaven, will bodily and visibly return to earth one day. His return, as Paul explained in 1 Thessalonians (our starting reading), will be *sudden and impossible to predict*.

All throughout the history of the world, various people have denied the truth of the statements above. Generally, they have done so by claiming to have calculated a date for Jesus' return. This is in clear opposition to the Bible's teaching, which is that no human can predict the timing of the end of the world or of Jesus' return. **Below are a number of Bible passages where Jesus himself speaks about the timing of his return, and the world's end:**

Matthew 25:13

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Mark 13:33

"Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come."

Matthew 24:42-44

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Luke 12:40

"You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

In all of the passages above, as well as in Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians, we are told, "Be ready!" That phrase is why people become scared, and try to find out the time of Jesus' return. They misunderstand what it means to "be ready."

So let's clarify. What makes us "ready" for Jesus? What will allow us to stand before God when he judges all people?

- **Ephesians 2:8**

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

- *Paul says we have been saved by _____. What does that word mean?*

- **Romans 5:1-2,9**

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God... Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

- *To "be justified" means, "to be declared innocent in view of a judgment." We are justified through _____, Paul says here. What does that word mean?*

- **1 Peter 1:3-5**

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

- *Peter calls our eternal life with God "an inheritance." Is an inheritance something that must be earned?*

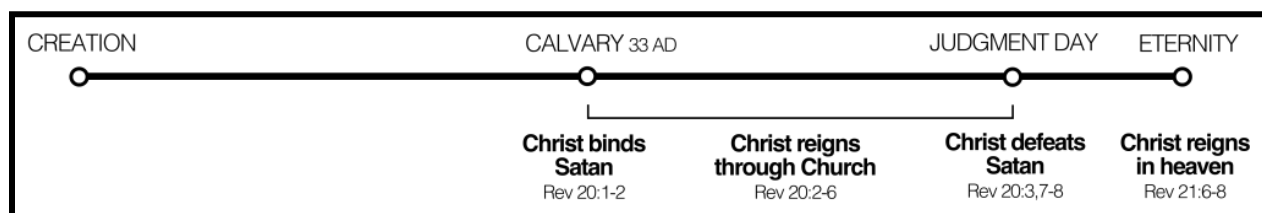
With the passages above, we're returning to lesson one. It is not anything which we bring before God that will allow us to stand in his judgment. It is Jesus, plain and simple, who will allow us to stand in God's judgment. This is true right now, and it will be true on the last day. **We always and ever stand before God by his grace alone.**

When we think about the end of the world, it can be a frightening thought. Another thought connected with it (which can also be frightening) is the thought of our own death.

Just as the Bible teaches that the world will one day end, it also teaches that we will each personally end one day (unless Jesus returns first). **The comforting truth about both of those “ends” is that we will stand on God’s grace, and not on our works.** Still, it’s natural to wonder about death. Even when we know it’s not something to fear, we can still be curious! So let’s explore the Bible’s teachings on what happens after we die.

<p style="text-align: center;">Ecclesiastes 12:7</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Luke 17:19-23</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">1 Corinthians 6:14</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Revelation 21:3-4</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”</i></p>	<p>Solomon refers to our bodies as “dust.” As we saw in lesson seven, humans are not simply material creatures. An immortal soul departs the body at death.</p> <p>Jesus’ story of the Rich Man and Lazarus clearly depicts an afterlife in which souls exist in two different locations.</p> <p>Our final state will be as embodied, ensouled beings once more, just as Jesus now exists.</p> <p>The differences between our bodily existence now and future are summed up as the absence of sin and its effects (pain and suffering).</p>
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One book of the Bible which can cause confusion about the end of the world is Revelation. John, one of Jesus’ disciples, tells us at the beginning of the book that Revelation records a series of visions regarding history from John’s own time to the world’s end. **It is important to take John at his own word!** The visions in Revelation should be understood symbolically.



Let's sum up the Bible's teaching about "**the end**" with the following questions.

- **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures... [and] was raised on the third day.

- *Jesus _____ rose from the dead on the third day after his death.*

- **Acts 24:15**

There will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

- *As Jesus physically rose, so all people will _____.*

- **Matthew 25:31-32**

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

- *Will anyone be exempt from judgment at Jesus' return?*

- **2 Peter 3:12-13**

The day of God... will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells

- *What will exist after this world's end?*

- **1 Peter 3:15**

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

- *What is our responsibility as we wait for the return of Jesus?*

What is the Christian doctrine of the end times?

One day, this world as it now exists will end. No earthly event will give us a final warning. Jesus will simply return to judge and to remake his creation. We do not need to fear that judgment. We are ready for it, not by our own deeds, but by God's love, in which we trust.



LESSON ELEVEN. The doctrine of prayer.

In this lesson, we'll be looking at what *prayer* is. To begin, we'll want to revisit a concept we discussed in lesson one and six: *faith*.

- **Hebrews 11:1**

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

- *What words could you take from that passage to define “faith”?*
 - *What other words might you use to explain “faith”?*
-

As we talk about prayer, let's remember two things about faith. One: **Faith is something God gives us.** It's not something we create in ourselves. And two: **Faith is, at its core, trust** in someone (or something) *outside* of ourselves.

Our starting reading for this lesson is **Luke 11:1-13**. Open up your Bible, and let's read!

- **In verses 5-8 and 11-13, Jesus uses two human relationships to picture prayer. What are those relationships?**
 - **Jesus uses the word _____ to describe humans in verse 13. How does that word remind us that our faith in God comes from God, and not from ourselves?**
-

The prayer Jesus taught his disciples in that selection is what we call “the Lord’s Prayer,” or the “Our Father.” Luke records a slightly shorter version of this prayer than we usually speak in worship. Matthew’s Gospel has the more familiar, longer wording.

Below is Matthew’s recording of the Lord’s prayer, from Matthew chapter six. On the right is an explanation of each section of the Lord’s Prayer, as written by a pastor named Martin Luther.¹

Our Father in heaven,	“God here urges us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father.”
hallowed be your name,	“God’s name is holy in itself, but here we pray that it may become holy among us also. This is done when God’s Word is taught in truth and purity, and when we as the children of God also lead holy lives in accordance with it.”
your kingdom come,	“We pray here that God bring His kingdom upon us, which occurs when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life here in time and later in eternity.”
your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.	“God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and scheme which would not let us hallow His name, nor would let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh. Instead, He strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end.”
Give us today our daily bread.	“Surely even without prayer, God gives daily bread, even to the wicked! But we pray in this petition that He would lead us to see His hand in all our provision, and to receive our daily bread with thankfulness. Daily bread is everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as food and drink, clothing, shelter, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse and pious children, pious and faithful magistrates, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.	“We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor deny our prayers on account of them. Certainly we are not worthy of anything for which we pray, neither have we deserved them. He grants them all to us in His grace, for we daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So will we verily, on our part, also heartily forgive and also readily do good to those who sin against us. “
And lead us not into temptation,	“God certainly tempts no one. What we pray in this petition is that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us, nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and gain the victory. We also ask here that He graciously spare us from trial and testing.”
but deliver us from the evil one.	“Here we pray that our Father in heaven would deliver us from all manner of evil, of both body and soul, and when our last hour comes, that he grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself.”
Amen.	“We should be certain that these petitions are acceptable to our Father in heaven and heard; for He Himself has commanded us so to pray, and has promised that He will hear us. So we say heartily Amen, which means, Yea, yea, it shall be so.”

¹ Explanations adapted from the wording found at <https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/the-lords-prayer/>.

Look over those explanatory paragraphs again. Where can you find a reference to **faith** in each of them?

- **Address** (“Our Father...”)
- **First Petition** (“Hallowed...”)
- **Second Petition** (“Kingdom come...”)
- **Third Petition** (“Will be done...”)
- **Fourth Petition** (“Daily bread...”)
- **Fifth Petition** (“Forgive...”)
- **Sixth Petition** (“Not into temptation...”)
- **Seventh Petition** (“Deliver from evil...”)
- **Amen**

2

The Lord’s Prayer, as we speak it in worship, generally also includes what’s called the doxology. This means “a word of praise.” The doxology of the Lord’s Prayer as spoken in worship is, “**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.**” This doxology is not originally part of the prayer as Jesus taught it. Its wording comes from a prayer offered by King David in the Old Testament:



- **1 Chronicles 29:10-11**

David praised the LORD, saying, “Praise be to you, LORD, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.”

 - **Circle each of the words in this passage which are part of the “doxology.”**

The doxology was attached to the Lord’s Prayer early in church history. The *Didache*, an early³ Christian book, includes a (shorter) doxology to conclude the Lord’s Prayer. We continue to use the doxology because, although it wasn’t an original part of the Lord’s Prayer, early Christians found it suitable for concluding the prayer in worship, and its content is entirely biblical.

² image credit, freepik at flaticon.com

³ The *Didache* was possibly written as early as 95 AD. We saw a quote from it in lesson nine. While not as old as the New Testament itself, the *Didache* is among the oldest non-biblical Christian writings which still exist.

Praying is, simply, asking God to grant requests, and giving him thanks for the blessings he has given. By faith, we recognize that God is our loving Father, and we trust that he will always do what is best for us. The following passages speak about the *attitude* with which we pray.

- **1 Timothy 2:1-4**

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

- ***For whom should we pray?***
- ***Why does God want us to pray for these people?***

- **Matthew 6:5-8**

“When you pray, do not... pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others... But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need.”

- ***What instructions does Jesus share with us here about WHERE, WHEN, and HOW we should pray?***

- **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**

I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

- ***Will God always answer our prayers with a “yes” to our specific requests?***

On the next page, you’ll find some resources for your personal prayers. The “collect form” is a useful way to express ourselves in prayer. You’ll also find two daily prayers written by Martin Luther, called *the Morning Prayer* and *the Evening Prayer*.

A MODEL FOR PRAYER – “THE COLLECT FORM”

The “collect form” is a model for prayer which helps to think about prayer in a focused, simple way. Traditional Christian liturgies include a collect-style prayer as the Prayer of the Day.

An address to God, based on his character or actions.

A petition or word of thanks related to that expression of God’s identity.

A Christocentric, usually Trinitarian invocation and doxology, followed by *amen*.

Almighty God, you see that we have no power to defend ourselves.

Guard and keep us both outwardly and inwardly from all adversities that may happen to the body and all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul;

through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.⁴



I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger.

Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You.

For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.



I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day.

Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night.

For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

As a final “prayer resource,” the biblical book of Psalms is essentially all prayers. Christians have long drawn on the vocabulary and pictures of the Psalms to enrich and guide our prayers. **If you want to find words for your own prayers in the Bible, read the Psalms.**

What is the Christian doctrine of prayer?

Praying is simply bringing requests and words of thanksgiving to God. Prayer doesn’t create faith; it results from faith. When we pray, we ask God for all that we need or desire, because he is our good and loving Father. We also thank him for everything which he has given. As we do, we trust that even when he says “No,” he is always working for our good.

⁴ Second Sunday in Lent, Year C, in *Christian Worship Altar Book*, © 2021 Northwestern Publishing House.

⁵ image credits, kosonicon and Fluffy Bee at flaticon.com



LESSON TWELVE. The doctrine of vocation.

Many thanks are owed to Pastor Philip Schroeder for his contributions to this lesson.

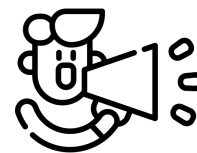
Read Ecclesiastes 11 and 12 in your Bible. We read from this book in lesson seven, as we studied the doctrine of humankind.

- **What do you remember as the message of that earlier reading (1:1-11)?**
- **How would you summarize the message of this portion?**

1

As we close our overview of the Bible's essential doctrines, the doctrine of *vocation* will bring together themes we've already covered.

The word "vocation" itself comes from Latin, and it means, "a calling." The New Testament uses the idea of "a call" as a picture for God bringing us to faith through the Gospel.



- **11 Peter 2:9-10**
You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
 - **Where is the word "called" in that passage?**

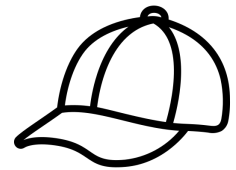
¹ image credit, Freepik at flaticon.com

As we use this word “vocation,” we’re going to be talking about the *roles* we have in our daily lives, especially where our lives interact with the lives of other people. **As believers, our first vocation is that vocation; believer.** We can use various other names for that vocation; *child of God, disciple, follower of Jesus, Christian.*

- ***How would you describe the “role” of being a Christian?***
- ***Where, specifically in your vocation as “a Christian,” does your life interact with other people?***

2

But “Christian” is not the only *vocation* which you and I have. All the various roles which you have in life are *vocations*. Think of all the roles you have as different hats which you put on. As you wear each of those hats, you are carrying out a calling to which you have been called by God.



- ***Take ninety seconds and write out as many different roles as you can think of which you play in life.***

A Christian’s roles in life do not automatically change when they are called to faith by God through the Gospel. In calling us to faith, God does not necessarily call us to upend our lives and leave behind every role or relationship which we previously had. What he does do, is change our outlook on them. **Read 1 Corinthians 7:10–24.**

- ***What does the apostle Paul say here...***
 - ***about a new Christian’s view of the relationships which existed in their lives before they came to faith?***
 - ***about the roles which they already had?***

² image credit, Smashicons at flaticon.com

In an essay on Psalm 147, Martin Luther used the phrase “masks of God” to teach the doctrine of vocation. **What is he picturing with this idea of a “mask”?**

Exposition of Psalm 147 (Luther’s Works, Volume 14)

“God could easily give you grain and fruit without your plowing and planting, but He does not want to do so. What else is all our work to God—whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government—but just such a child’s performance, by which He wants to give His gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are God’s masks, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things.

“Make the bars and gates, and let Him fasten them. Labor, and let Him give the fruits. Govern, and let Him give His blessing. Fight, and let Him give the victory. Preach, and let Him win hearts. Take a husband or a wife, and let Him produce the children. Eat and drink, and let Him nourish and strengthen you. And so on. In all our doings He is to work through us, and He alone shall have the glory from it.”

In a sense, all people have vocations. Every person exists with relationships to other people, and God uses every person to carry out what is necessary for the daily life of all his creation.

- **Romans 13:1-6**

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God ... If you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing.

- **According to this passage, who are “God’s servants”? What is their God-given role?**

- **Acts 17:24-27**

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.”

- **According to this passage, does God need anything from us?**
- **What goal does God have for each person’s life, according to this passage?**

So, all people have *vocations* in a general sense. But we usually reserve the word *vocation* to talk about the way that Christians approach their roles and duties in life, because only through our primary vocation (the Gospel's call to faith) can we rightly see our secondary vocations.

Our secondary vocations are not a way for us to earn God's _____. Rather, through our secondary vocations, we thank our gracious God as we love our neighbors.

This is counter to our natural way of thinking. We naturally assume that, if there is a God who will judge our deeds, we must do good to earn his favor. But the Christian doctrine of vocation places *justification* (God's declaration of our innocence for the sake of Jesus alone) before *sanctification* (our lives of love, guided by his Spirit).³

- **Luke 18:9-14**

Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God."

- **Who has "done good" in this parable?**
- **Who ends up "justified" in this parable?**

Another natural assumption is to think that God must be most of all interested in "religious" or "spiritual" activity in our lives. We assume that if we want to show our thanks to God, it will be by *praying*, or *reading the Bible*, or *becoming a minister*, or *starting a charity*. All these things are good, certainly! **But they are no better than carrying out our ordinary roles.** In fact, when "religious" activity leads us to neglect our other vocations, it's *worse*.

- **Micah 6:6-8**

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings?... Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?... He has shown you, O mortal, what is good... To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

- **What "offering" does God actually desire, according to this passage?**

³ You can revisit these concepts in lesson four.

This is counter to our natural way of thinking. We naturally assume that, if there is a God who will judge our deeds, we must do good things, or we must worship him, to earn his favor. But the Christian doctrine of vocation places *justification* (God’s declaration of our innocence for the sake of Jesus alone) before *sanctification* (our lives of love, guided by his Spirit).⁴

Neither the doctrine of vocation nor of justification is an excuse for sin. But **both these doctrines rightly declare that God’s grace precedes our good works.** Let’s see the four key concepts from lesson one again.

As *sinner*s (born and active), we do not deserve God’s love.
Yet God is *gracious*, and through his Son Jesus, brought about our reconciliation.
When that good news is shared with us, God creates *faith*, or *trust*, in our hearts.
The *faith* which God brings to life expresses itself in *love* for others.

SIN
GRACE
FAITH
WORKS

The *Table of Duties* from the Small Catechism was mentioned at the end of lesson one. Open your Catechism to that section once again. **How does placing *justification* before *sanctification* affect how you evaluate yourself in your vocations?**

What is the Christian doctrine of vocation?

Vocation means “calling.” Christians are people who have been called to faith in God through the Gospel. Along with that primary calling, God also calls us to reflect his love toward our neighbors. We do so not to earn God’s favor, nor to keep it, but to thank him.

God’s call to love our neighbors is found in the roles we have in life, and in the everyday opportunities we have to care for others.

⁴ You can revisit these concepts in lesson four.

AFTERWORD.

Friend, I pray that you have been blessed by your time spent in God’s Word through this study.

This is the second version of ESSENTIALS, which was first released as a complete study in early 2024. If you used that version, you will notice some significant changes in the structure of the study. However, the broad outline remains the same (indeed, lessons seven to eleven are nearly identical to their 2024 counterparts.)

I owe a great debt to others who have done marvelous work writing on the essentials of the Christian faith. **“The Four Key Concepts”** used in lesson one (and throughout the study) are adapted from a study created by Pastor Jon Hein. Much of the conceptual framing within the study comes from the work of Pastor Luke Thompson (so much, in fact, that it’s impossible to decide what to credit him with). In particular, Pastor Thompson created many of the uncredited graphics used throughout the study. Lastly, Mister Scott Pierre’s drive and interest was crucial in making this project something more than a few outlines on Google Docs.

If you personally know me, it’s likely that you and I went through this study together. Perhaps another pastor used this material to introduce you to the Christian faith. But these days, it’s very possible that you ran across this yourself. **If so, do you have a church? Are you baptized?**

You’ve gone through this study, so I’m not telling you anything new by saying, there’s no reason the answer to those questions should be “No.”

You can use this link, <https://linktr.ee/walshtimothyjohn>, or scan the QR code below to access a tool that will help you find a church near you. You can also call me – even if you don’t live anywhere near my church! – and I’d love to help you find a family that gathers around this Gospel message which you’ve come to know.

May the Lord bless and keep you, friend.

May the Lord’s face shine upon you, and may he be ever gracious to you.

May the Lord look on you with favor, and give you his peace, which surpasses understanding.



*Pastor Tim Walsh
Dix Hills, New York
March 2025*