

INTERVARSITY

Doctrinal Bible Studies

**FAITH,
VISION,
& THE GLORY OF GOD**

Ten Bible Studies on the Doctrinal Basis
of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

by Thomas L. Trevethan and Daniel J. Denk



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Our Doctrinal Basis

We believe in:

The only true God, the almighty Creator of all things,
existing eternally in three persons
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit full of love and glory.

The unique divine inspiration,
entire trustworthiness
and authority of the Bible.

The value and dignity of all people:
created in God's image to live in love and holiness,
but alienated from God and each other because of our sin and guilt,
and justly subject to God's wrath.

Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine,
who lived as a perfect example,
who assumed the judgment due sinners by dying in our place,
and who was bodily raised from the dead and ascended as Savior and Lord.

Justification by God's grace to all who repent
and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

The indwelling presence and transforming power of the Holy Spirit,
who gives to all believers a new life and a new calling to obedient service.

The unity of all believers in Jesus Christ,
manifest in worshiping and witnessing churches
making disciples throughout the world.

The victorious reign and future personal return of Jesus Christ,
who will judge all people with justice and mercy,
giving over the unrepentant to eternal condemnation
but receiving the redeemed into eternal life.

To God be glory forever.

*Adopted by the Board of Trustees
October 20, 2000*



Vision & the Doctrinal Basis

An introduction to the doctrinal Bible studies

By Thomas L. Trevethan

“Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18a KJV).

Perhaps you have heard this sentence solemnly intoned in a “vision talk” by a leader who suggests that “without a plan, we are dead in the water.” The implication is for people to just go along with the plan and get down to work. However, [this saying from Proverbs 29:18](#) reaches deeper than just advocating planning as a significant aspect of human flourishing. This deeper layer of meaning is the spirit in which we offer this set of [Bible study discussions](#) on [InterVarsity’s Doctrinal Basis](#).

Two words in [Proverbs 29:18](#) need to be examined more closely. “Vision” is a word drawn from the orbit of Hebrew prophecy. It is “prophetic vision.” It describes what prophets see or know from the LORD that they are called to pass on to the people of God. (There are Old Testament examples of this prophetic vision in [Isaiah 6](#), [Ezekiel 1-2](#) or [1 Kings 22](#).) “Vision” is a medium of God’s revelation of himself and his plans. In its broadest sense, it means “God’s revelation.”

The other key word is “perish” which is only one possible interpretation of the original Hebrew word. Its basic meaning is “run wild” or “run amok.” It is the verb used to describe the wild, orgiastic rebellion of Israel in the incident of the Golden Calf in [Exodus 32:6](#). This “running wild” into idolatry resulted in the death of thousands who perished, quite literally. Also, the prophet Amos used this word to describe Israel’s gradual but remorseless decline into idolatry. They became deaf to God’s words and lived in rebellious idolatry that resulted in spiritual death.

These two ideas of “vision” and “perish” provide a more accurate translation: “Where there is no revelation from God, the people descend into idolatry, moral decadence, and spiritual ruin.”

This translation is reinforced by the next line in [this verse](#), “. . . but blessed is the one who keeps the law.” Most of the sentence-long proverbs contain two lines that re-echo and reinforce one another. This is an example of the basic Hebrew poetic convention of *parallelism*. In this case, the lines reinforce and deepen one another by contrast. If the absence of revelation from God brings disaster, “keeping” God’s fatherly instruction (*torah*) leads to blessing, richness, peace and joy.

Unless our plans, goals and personal lives are receptive and submissive to God’s revelation, we, too, decline into idolatry, evil, disorder and spiritual death. Conversely, when we embrace and obey God’s revelation, we can expect authentic life and goodness and growth. What we do with the revelation of God, how we understand and embrace it, and how we put it into action will mark out the way of spiritual blessing for ourselves as disciples and for the Christian communities in which we participate and serve as leaders.

What has all this to do with [InterVarsity’s Doctrinal Basis](#)? This short statement is a succinct summary of the basic truths disclosed to us in God’s revelation in Scripture. A close and persistent reading of the Bible has characteristically led Christian disciples to receive and believe these truths throughout 2,000 years of human history. We invite you to deepen your understanding of the

revelation of God by testing it against carefully selected passages of Scripture in this Bible discussion guide. This modest effort to deepen an understanding of God's truth can pay enormous benefits by forming clarity, zeal, courage, and conviction in you and in your fellowship. Discover the ways of God that lead to peace, joy, spiritual power, and blessing.

Consider using the Doctrinal Basis as your basic Vision Statement. Let it form your understanding of what you are called to do and why you are called to do it. The Doctrinal Basis will not give you a specific set of plans for your life or for your fellowship. But it will give you the vision of God that sets directions, tests your priorities and interests, and informs and transforms your understanding of what you are called to do -- and called to be -- now and into eternity.

Note: The individual studies in this guide do not address every detail in the Doctrinal Basis. Rather, we have chosen Biblical passages that are at the foundation of the Doctrinal Basis and that seemed both most basic and most contested. These are the truths that are apt to be squeezed out of us in the spiritually hostile environment of the contemporary university. More importantly, they are also the most foundational issues for understanding and growing in Christian faith. These are the truths that have fired the zeal of faithful believers through the ages. These are the truths that ordinary men and women have confessed as they followed the Lord in suffering service -- even martyrdom. These are the truths that have been the vehicles of revival and renewal in many cultures over many years. These are the first and the eternal things. Engage them with eagerness, fidelity and hope.

Also, each passage of selected Scripture contains doctrinal truth *and application to life*. Do not evade the applications! God's revelation is always designed to lead us into richer, fuller, more holy living. Note especially that the Doctrinal Basis begins with "*We believe ...*," and concludes with "*to God be glory forever.*" The [final study](#) asks you to reflect on this framework in light of Psalm 115 to lead you to a new depth of gratitude and worship.

Finally, each study concludes with some suggestions for further reading, deeper reflection, and more study of Scripture. We hope that these studies will encourage eagerness for further learning. They are only a bare beginning, and we pray that you will be led into the life-long joy of learning and understanding the revelation of our God.

We pray that this discussion guide will be a tool in the hand of Almighty God to bring doctrinal renewal to [InterVarsity Christian Fellowship](#), starting with your fellowship and your life. May the living God -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- pour out a clear *understanding* of God's truth, a zeal for obedient *practice* of God's truth, and eternal *rejoicing* in the God of all truth.

To God be glory forever!

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

Here are suggestions for more study and reading for a valuable overview of Christian theology:

J. R. W. Stott, [Basic Christianity](#) (IVP Classics) (InterVarsity Press, 2007). A model of clarity and simplicity, this work shows how a profound grasp of Christian truth empowers evangelism. John Stott is one of the most outstanding evangelical leaders of the last generation.

J. I. Packer, [*Knowing God*](#) (InterVarsity Press, 1993). For decades, J. I. Packer's best-selling classic has helped Christians around the world discover the wonder, the glory and the joy of knowing God. This is a masterful exposition of core Christian convictions by an eminent theological teacher.

Bruce Milne, [*Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*](#) (InterVarsity Press, 1999). This textbook-like survey of Christian theology provides self-paced assignments for personal study and excellent suggestions for further reading.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THESE BIBLE STUDIES

"Give me understanding according to your word." (Psalm 119:169b)

Our purpose in creating these Bible study and discussion guides is to *teach* the doctrinal truths in the [InterVarsity Basis of Faith](#) *through a thoughtful, inductive Bible study* of carefully selected passages of Scripture. Thoughtful inductive Bible study forms us theologically, as well as morally, spiritually, and missionally. Growth in doctrinal understanding helps us become more faithful and deeper students of Scripture. This has been true for Christian disciples for 2,000 years of the worldwide Christian movement and so it will be for you. *Thanks be to God!*

These study and discussion guides are designed for personal or group use – or both. In a small group, the insights of others as they are led by the Holy Spirit will enrich your understanding and challenge what you already know!

When used by a group, the guides assume you will gather together around an open Bible and seek to understand the Bible passage in each study. The questions in each guide promote group discussions. The primary function of the study leader is to help the group come to grips with the passage. This is most basically what *inductive* Bible study is about. The leader seeks to promote rich, broadly-based, engaging discussions by using the questions in the guide.

Note: Leaders should freely adapt the guide to their particular group. However, because the questions in the guide are thoughtfully designed, we recommend that the leader follow the guide, especially the new and inexperienced leaders. Remember that rich and animated discussions are not the leader's goal; the goal is to understand the teaching from the Lord through discussions. Bible study discussion groups of this sort have had a long and fruitful history in the InterVarsity movement, and we hope you will come to know the joy of this particular spiritual practice.

MANUSCRIPT STUDY

"Manuscript study" is another common method of inductive Bible study which has been a blessing to our InterVarsity movement. In fact, manuscript study makes the same three basic assumptions:

- the Biblical text
- a group seeking understanding
- a leader who directs the group into the text by facilitating discussion.

These guides have real value for those who use the manuscript method. Here are three simple and basic suggestions for manuscript study leaders:

- *Use the carefully selected Biblical passages to create your manuscript for each study.* The passages are primarily didactic and aim to teach. They are the most critical passage for the doctrinal truth being considered, and they are powerful passages that have been repeatedly used by the Lord to advance his kingdom and renew his people.
- *Use the study questions since they are designed to get at the doctrinal content and application of the passage.* Don't use them slavishly. Modify and restate the questions, or add other questions to clarify the group's understanding. But if the study questions don't arise in your group, please do not take this as a sign that you can take a pass. If you really want to understand these important didactic texts, you must engage with the types of questions raised in the guide. If the questions don't occur to the people in your group, raise them for discussion. Otherwise you will not be leading the group into what is most critical in these important Scripture passages. And your group may not fully grasp the important tenet of the Basis of Faith under consideration.
- *Make a list of the questions from the guide that seem most critical to you as issues to be raised.* Keep this list in mind as you assemble questions from the group and discuss them.

MORE GUIDELINES

- These studies do not address every detail in the Basis of Faith. Many Biblical passages read together have a place in forming each of the statements in the Basis of Faith. Some feel that we should and must explore texts throughout Scripture. But, this guide is only a beginning. We have chosen one primary Biblical passage for each statement in our Basis of Faith that is at the foundation of each doctrinal belief. Each selected Scripture is the most basic -- and often the most contested -- for each doctrinal teaching.

The selected passages teach the truths that are apt to be squeezed out of us in the spiritually hostile environment of the contemporary university. More importantly, they raise the most foundational issues for understanding and growing in Christian faith. These are the truths that have fired the zeal of faithful believers through the ages. These are the truths that ordinary men and women have confessed as they followed the Lord in suffering service -- even martyrdom. These are the truths that have been the vehicles of revival and renewal in many cultures over many years. These are the first and the eternal things. Engage them with eagerness, fidelity and hope.

- Also, each passage of selected Scripture contains doctrinal truth *and application to life*. Do not evade the applications! God's revelation is always designed to lead us into richer, fuller, more holy living. Note especially that the Doctrinal Basis begins with "*We believe . . .*," and concludes with "*To God be glory forever.*" The [final study](#) asks you to reflect on this framework in light of Psalm 115 to lead you to a new depth of gratitude and worship.
- Finally, each study concludes with some suggestions for further reading, deeper reflection, and more study of Scripture.

We hope that these theological Bible study guides will encourage eagerness for further learning. They are only a bare beginning, and we hope that you will be led into the life-long joy of discovering and understanding the revelation of our God.

These studies are a work in progress. We invite your feedback and suggestions. [Contact Collegiate Ministries.](#)



God the Glorious Trinity

John 14:1-31

By Thomas L. Trevethan

We believe in the only true God, the almighty Creator of all things, existing eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, full of love and glory.

This intimate dialogue in [John 14:1-31](#) between Jesus and his disciples takes place on the night of his betrayal and under the approaching shadow of his death on the cross. Read [John 14:1-14](#) aloud. Because it is a dialogue, consider assigning parts to Jesus, Thomas, Phillip and Judas.

1. Jesus begins by calming the disciples (v. 1). What was troubling them? Look at [John 13:33-38](#) for Jesus' statements that may have created anxiety for them.
2. Jesus' instructions in John 14 divide naturally into two segments: vv. 1-14 and vv. 15-30. What is distinctive about each section? What similarities can you notice? What title might you give to each section to summarize its theme and remind you of these verses?
3. What *promises* did Jesus make to his troubled disciples to comfort them? How do these promises comfort you today?
4. What *challenges* did Jesus give his disciples (vv. 15-24)?
 - What is the relationship between love and obedience in this chapter?
 - Why is this challenge particularly important for the future of these disciples?
 - How can these verses make a difference in your InterVarsity chapter or church?
5. In this chapter, what *statements* did Jesus make about his identity? Where in the text are these claims found? How would you summarize them?
6. Look through the entire chapter and observe the relationship between Jesus and the Father.
 - What does the Father do?
 - What does Jesus do?
 - How are they distinct from another?
 - What do they do that is a simultaneous action? Write down your observations.
 - How do the statements in v. 28 and 30 compare with the statements in vv. 1, 7, 9 and 10? It could appear that Jesus is less divine than the Father when he says "the Father is greater than I" or "I do exactly what my Father has commanded me?" When you consider all of these verses together, how would you describe the relationship between the Father and the Son?
7. Jesus focuses on teaching his disciples about the Holy Spirit in vv. 15-30. Observe everything you can about the identity and deeds of the Holy Spirit in these verses.
 - What statements indicate that the Spirit is a Person and not a thing or a force?

- If the Spirit is a Person, does that indicate that “he” is, therefore, less than fully God?
 - In what ways does the text indicate and suggest that the Spirit is indeed fully divine? Write down your observations.
8. Review the whole chapter and summarize your observations about the relationship between the Father and the Spirit and between Jesus and the Spirit. Again, write down these observations.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

In discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, Gerald Bray writes:

“The Christian doctrine of the Trinity did not emerge from some kind of philosophical speculation about God, but from the realities of the Christian spiritual experience of him. From the beginning, that experience was definitive for the new faith, and so it has remained ever since. To confess God as a Trinity is to worship him in our hearts, as those hearts are stirred by the Spirit of the Son, crying, “‘Abba! Father!’” ([God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice](#), p. 84)

- How is the truth about the Trinity related to your mission on campus? Think specifically about the promises and challenges of John 14.
- How should the knowledge that God is a Holy Trinity shape the way you pray?
 - How might this awareness direct your praise to “the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God in glory everlasting?”
 - How are the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit involved in your prayers? To whom do we address our petitions?

Spend time praying together and worship God in his greatness, mystery, and tri-personal reality. Sing a hymn of praise to the Trinity, such as the familiar hymn, [“Holy, Holy, Holy.”](#) Claim the promises of John 14, especially [vv. 12-14](#), as you plan to lead your fellowship. Seek the love and obedience that mark the disciples of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father.

GOING DEEPER

Defining the Doctrine of the Trinity: Notice that questions 5-8 above introduce the main aspects of the Trinity, which can be summarized in the following statements:

The whole Bible teaches and assumes that there is one Creator God whose majesty and glory necessarily exceeds our greatest human capacities to understand. The knowledge of God revealed in the Bible is true, but all of those truths lead us to an awe-filled mystery before the uncreated greatness of the Most High God.

- In the Bible, especially in the New Testament, we encounter three distinct, fully divine persons, all of whom are worthy of our praise and worship.
- These three persons in the one God relate to one another in the fullness of eternal love.

- The three persons have differing and distinctive roles and works in achieving the salvation of sinners.

Discussion Questions:

- Which of these doctrinal truths are clearly raised and discussed by Jesus in John 14? Which ones are only alluded to or briefly mentioned?
- Which doctrinal truths are not mentioned at all in John 14? How do you account for this absence?

Other Scripture passages that will supplement your understanding of the Trinity:

- Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 1:10-11; John 1:1-3,14; Isaiah 11:1-4, 61:1-2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Colossians 1:15-20, Acts 5:3-4, Titus 3:4, Hebrews 1:1-4.

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

Michael Reeves, [*Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*](#), InterVarsity Press, 2012. Here is a rich and enjoyable portrayal of the basic beliefs of Christianity that opens up the profound and life-changing truths of our faith.

Brian Edgar, [*The Message of the Trinity*](#), InterVarsity Press, 2002. This excellent survey of the whole Bible expounds the main passages relevant to the conviction that the living God is triune.

[*God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*](#), ed. Timothy George (Baker, 2006). A collection of essays written by Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant scholars that demonstrates the centrality of the Trinity to the entire Christian tradition and considers some of the contemporary challenges to this foundational Christian teaching and conviction.

Gerald L. Bray, [*The Doctrine of God*](#) (InterVarsity Press, 1993). Bray addresses the full range of the doctrine of God, but he focuses his exposition on the Tri-unity of God in a wonderfully insightful way. This is a tremendous resource for more advanced study.

Listen to a three-part audio series on [Enjoying the Trinity](#) by Michael Reeves at [Theology Network](#).



The Bible

Matthew 5:17-48

By Thomas L. Trevethan

We believe in the unique divine inspiration, entire trustworthiness and authority of the Bible.

[Matthew 5:17-20](#) is a part of the “Sermon on the Mount,” perhaps the most profound and far-reaching sermon ever preached. In this wonderful teaching, Jesus describes the way of Christian discipleship, the kind of life that is consistent with the Kingdom of God. His introduction is a brief sketch of the inward character (5:1-12) and cultural influence (5:13-16) of his disciples. Then Jesus immediately turns to the place of the Law and Prophets, the Old Testament Scriptures, in the life of his disciples. The extent and depth of his teaching suggests something of its importance. Jesus says many other things about the Old Testament in the course of his ministry, but this statement is something of a thesis statement, a perspective-setting manifesto.

1. Read [Matthew 5:17-20](#) aloud. What false impression is Jesus seeking to correct? Why might his contemporaries have thought that he was trying to “abolish the Law and Prophets?”
2. Focus more closely on vv. 17-18. How does Jesus characterize his relationship with the Old Testament? What does he mean by “fulfill?”
 - Think through the meaning of his statement about “the smallest letter” and “the least stroke of a pen.” Jesus begins the statement in v. 18 by saying, “Truly I tell you...” What is the principle in these verses and why is it of such great significance?
 - What have you learned so far about Jesus’ basic belief on the nature of Holy Scripture? How does his teaching reflect a commitment to the “divine inspiration” and the “trustworthiness” of the Bible?
3. Now look at vv. 19-20. Verse 19 sets up a contrast between two different practices or approaches to Scripture. What are these two contrasting stances?
 - How have you been tempted to “set aside” the commands of Scripture? Have you seen situations where someone has effectively taught others to “set aside” a commandment?
 - Notice that both “practice” and “teaching” is mentioned. Why would Jesus emphasize both aspects? How might this help us understand v. 20? What does this suggest to you about the seriousness of our beliefs about Holy Scripture?
4. [Matthew 5:21-48](#) is a series of six case studies of scriptural interpretation in light of the basic perspectives set in 5:17-20. Read vv. 21-48 silently, looking for the repetitions in each of the case studies.

- What does Jesus mean by “*You have heard that it was said . . . ?*” Does he refer to the text of the Old Testament with these words? What evidence in the passage gives you the best basis for answering this question?
 - What do you learn from the repetition of “. . . *but I tell you that . . . ?*”
5. Focus on the first (vv. 21-26) and last (vv. 43-48) of these interpretive case studies. Consider digging into the other four case studies on your own.
- What is the commandment under consideration in vv. 21-26? What does Jesus say is spiritually and morally equivalent to murder? What is the difference between being “angry” toward a brother or sister and saying “*Raca*” (meaning, “*you are stupid*” or “*you fool*”)?
 - What do the two examples in vv. 23-26 add to the teaching of Jesus?
6. What commandment is under consideration in vv. 43-48? Can you find the command, “*hate your enemy*,” anywhere in the Old Testament? What light does that shed on the meaning of “*You have heard it said . . . ?*” Who would his contemporaries have viewed as enemies? What does Jesus call for in our relationship to enemies?
- Who do you think of as an enemy? How can you move toward these adversaries in obedience to the command to love your neighbor, even your enemies?
 - What do you learn from this case study about Jesus’ approach to the commands of Scripture? In what way is his method different from that of the religious leaders?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- When you are faced with a temptation to compromise morally, how might a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture help you in this crisis?
- How should a high view of Scripture guide your planning for the life of your campus fellowship? Think, for example, about your large group gatherings. Do they include teaching that faithfully comes from the Bible? Do they “set aside” some of the more challenging teaching from Scripture? Do they include searching, inwardly challenging applications of Scripture to the situations of your fellowship and its members? Ask the same questions about your small group gatherings.
- As the leaders of the fellowship and sponsors of those gatherings, remember Jesus’ words about who is “least” or “greatest” in the Kingdom. How might this be a warning and encouragement for leaders?

GOING DEEPER

Jesus not only taught obedience to the Scriptures, he put them into practice. Look at these poignant stories of costly obedience in the temptation of Jesus ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)) and in his final crisis at the cross ([Matthew 26:47-56](#)). Discover other important teachings on the inspiration and authority of the Bible in these passages: [2 Peter 1:16-21](#), [2 Timothy 3:14-17](#), [Isaiah 55:9-11](#), [Psalm 119:9-16](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

John Wenham, [*Christ and the Bible*](#) (Baker, 1984). Wenham provides an unsurpassed grounding for a high view of Biblical authority. He surveys the four Gospels to discover Jesus' teaching and view of the Old Testament and how that bears on the meaning and authority of the apostles.

J. I. Packer, [*God Has Spoken*](#) (Hodder and Stoughton, 2005). This is a classic exposition of a high view of Scripture that is thorough, thoughtful and compelling. Packer argues for the view expressed in the IVCF Doctrinal Basis thoroughly, thoughtfully, compellingly.

Telford Work, [*Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation*](#) (Eerdmans, 2002). Telford Work is a younger evangelical theologian who offers a fresh, faithful and high view of Scripture with an eye on the challenges of our post-Christian and post-modern age.



Created in God's Image

Genesis 1–3

By Daniel J. Denk

We believe in the value and dignity of all people: created in God's image to live in love and holiness, but alienated from God and each other because of our sin and guilt, and justly subject to God's wrath.

This is a familiar passage of Scripture to many. Read [Genesis 1–3](#) through as a unit, using several readers, to see the big picture and the flow of the story. This foundational account of our origins tells the story that we as humans were designed for good, but damaged by evil. Try to take a fresh look at it. Notice the progression of events.

1. Look again at Genesis 1:1-26. Notice the sequence in the creation account and observe God's wisdom and power. What can you say about the creation of the first humans (v. 26)? What is the significance of humans coming as the final act of creation?

Leader's note: Try not to get sidetracked on the question of evolution and creation. We are taking the Genesis account at face value to look for the essential teaching, not to make a judgment on whether God completed his creative work in six days or guided a long process.

2. Now look specifically at the creation of the man and the woman (Genesis 1:26-31).
 - The creation account clearly states that humans were uniquely made in God's image and likeness. Why do you think God made two genders?
 - Much has been written on what it means for humans to be made in the image of God, as intelligent, moral, creative beings. What clues from the immediate passage (1:26-31) help us with this question? Make a list of activities and characteristics of the first humans that might help us understand what it means to be created in God's image.
 - Look at vv. 26, 28. What do you think is implied by the responsibility to be "co-rulers" (vice-regents) with God? Many refer to this as the Creation Mandate, or Cultural Mandate. Since God is clearly still the great King, Creator and Owner of the whole creation, what does it mean to rule under his leadership?
 - How does this understanding of being made in the image of God affect our respect for the dignity and value of all humans?
3. In chapter 2, how does the second account of the creation complement the account in chapter 1?

Leader's note: Some critical scholars have argued that Genesis 1 and 2 are completely independent and alternative accounts of creation. Different names for God are used -- Elohim in Genesis 1, Yahweh in Genesis 2. However, we can easily see Genesis 2 as a complementary account giving more detail about the creation of the man and woman. It also adds important details about God's covenant relationship with them (Yahweh is the covenant name for God).

4. As you look at Genesis 2:4-6, what differences do you see about the details of the creation of life? About the creation of the first man? What is suggested by the verbs “formed” and “breathed?”
5. Read Genesis 2:4-17. Describe the Garden of Eden in your own words, based on the information provided by these verses.
 - What is Adam’s role, or job, in the Garden? How does this relate to the earlier mandate to “rule and subdue” the earth (Genesis 1:28)?
 - What is the significance of the one prohibition given to the man (Genesis 2:17)? What further dimension does this condition add to life in the garden?
6. Read Genesis 2:18-25. What is the significance of the man naming the animals? What is the relationship between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom?
 - There was one thing that was “not good” in the original creation. Among all the creatures God made, none was a suitable helper, or partner, for the man. The creation of Eve seems to provide the solution for what Adam was lacking. He declares, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” What does this suggest about the nature of their relationship?
7. Genesis 3:1-24 records the account of the Fall and the introduction of the Serpent (or Satan, the Devil in [Rev. 20:2](#).) Trace the progress of the temptation (vv. 3:1-7). What is the appeal used by the Tempter? What is at the heart of the choice made by the first couple?
 - Notice the disastrous results of this terrible choice in the relationships between the humans and God, and between the man and the woman (8-13). How are these relationships changed?
 - Describe how God’s judgment creates changes for the serpent, the ground, the man and the woman.
 - In Genesis 2:17, God had warned, “You will surely die.” The serpent said, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Did they die? In the Bible there is both physical death and spiritual death, meaning separation from God. In what sense did Adam and Eve die? What is suggested by being driven outside the Garden of God, east of Eden, away from the Tree of Life (vv.23-24)?

Consider again the tremendous loss in the Fall of the first humans. Compare the quality of life in chapter 2 with life under sin and death in chapter 3.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- God’s summary verdict on all he had made is that “it is very good” (Genesis 1:31). Why do you think this comment is included? How should we respond to this?
- What can we conclude about the nature of human beings from this account of their origins (Genesis 1-3)?
 - How is the image of God still seen in us?

- We also see plenty of evidence of the conflicts, pain, frustration, and alienation among people and between people and God, their Maker. As humans, we have a sense that this is not the way it's supposed to be—that something is terribly wrong with this world? How does the Genesis account offer an explanation for these realities?
- When you consider your own heart and mind, how does the Genesis account offer an explanation of your thoughts and motives, both good and bad?

GOING DEEPER

- Consider [Genesis 9:6](#). After the flood, God re-established his covenant with Noah. How is the teaching about the image of God applied in this case? What are the implications for our understanding of the sanctity of human life? Human life is of unique value and is not to be disposed of cheaply or treated with contempt.
- [Genesis 2:18-25](#) is usually understood as God's establishment of the marriage covenant. Jesus refers back to these foundational verses in his teaching about marriage in [Matthew 19:4-6](#). How would you define marriage based on this passage? Notice the term "one flesh." What is implied by this description of marriage?
- Look closely at [Genesis 3:15](#). As part of the curse upon the serpent, God declares war (enmity) between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. There is an important cryptic prophecy in this verse. In this war, the serpent's seed will bruise the heel (a wound) of the woman's seed, but the woman's seed will bruise the head (fatal blow) of the serpent's seed. Notice the singular pronouns, "he" and "you." What might be meant by the "seed of the woman" (see also [Genesis 4:25](#), [Galatians 3:16](#), [4:4](#); [Revelation 12](#))?

Note: This verse is sometimes called the "Proto-gospel" (*protoevangelium*), meaning the first promise of salvation as part of God's plan of rescuing people from the Fall by Christ conquering Satan and sin and death on the cross.

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

[In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis](#), by Henri Blocher, InterVarsity Press 1984. This is an excellent treatment of Genesis 1-3 covering issues of science, the image of God, and covenant.

[The Message of Genesis 1-11](#), by David Atkinson, InterVarsity Press 1990. Genesis shows us how and why we are. This valuable resource is part of [The Bible Speaks Today Series](#).

["Enter Sin and Death."](#) This audio recording by Bob Fyall provides an overview of Genesis 1-2, with some in-depth treatment of the Fall in Genesis 3.



Jesus Christ

Hebrews 1:1 – 2:18

By Thomas L. Trevethan

We believe in Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, who lived as a perfect example, who assumed the judgment due sinners by dying in our place, and who was bodily raised from the dead and ascended as Savior and Lord.

To describe Jesus as “fully human” and “fully divine” is both an idea and something to be embraced. Expand your understanding of Jesus Christ with these remarkable descriptions from the book of Hebrews. See why Jesus is an example to follow in the midst of our own suffering, failures and spiritual drifting.

1. Read [Hebrews 1:1-4](#). The author of Hebrews refers to God speaking through the prophets, but does not feel the need to explain either the prophets or the various ways they speak. What does this tell you about the author of Hebrews and his audience? Take a moment to recall and look up some of the Old Testament prophets. What are some of the various ways in which God spoke? What does this tell you about God’s commitment to speaking to us?
 - The word “but” in Hebrews 1:2 indicates contrast. How is the word spoken through the Son different from the word spoken through the prophets?
 - What do vv. 1:1-3 tell us about who Jesus is (in relationship to God, in relationship to the created order, his accomplishments)?
 - Focus on the phrase “the radiance of God’s glory” as a description for Jesus, the Son. What does this metaphor claim about his identity in relationship to God, the Father? What does it claim about Jesus as the one who reveals God?
 - We have noted that Jesus is superior to the prophets as the supreme revelation of God. In [vv. 5-14](#), the writer quotes several Old Testament passages to also make the case that Jesus is superior to angels. Summarize his argument in these verses.
 - What would be a fitting response on our part to this description of the Son? Read Hebrews 2:1 and notice how it answers this question. What does “careful attention” mean? How have you paid “careful attention” to the Son?

2. Read [Hebrews 2:1-18](#). The author interprets [Psalm 8](#) as speaking about the Messiah (Christologically), not about humankind in general (anthropologically). As the author of Hebrews understands it here, Psalm 8 is about Jesus, not us.
 - Hebrews 1 deals directly with the divine nature and authority of the Son of God. Hebrews 2 is more about the Incarnation and his human nature. In what ways does this passage describe Jesus as “fully human”?
 - Again, to call Jesus “fully human” is both an idea and something to be personally embraced. What characteristics of humanity clearly and easily apply to Jesus? What

characteristics of humanity do not? What parts of this attribution (“fully human”) might need further inquiry, repentance, or reflective prayer on your part?

- There is a tension in 2:8 between “. . . *God left nothing that is not subject to them*” and “*Yet, at present we do not see everything subject to them.*” Describe the tension between these phrases. In what sense do we see all things “subject to them?” In what sense is this not a reality? Why is this not realized? In what ways do you sense this tension in your own life?
- What specific things do we see about Jesus in verse 9? How do these things address our life in the tension of v. 8? How does the coming of Jesus resolve the tension?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- If Christ identifies with us in suffering (Hebrews 2:9, 14, 17, 18) and has power over those who make us (the Church) suffer (Hebrews 2:8), why do we still suffer? How does the author of Hebrews respond to this? (See Hebrews 2:9, 3:1, and 12:1-2.)
- In the midst of our own suffering, persecution or drifting, how is Jesus an example for us to follow? What practical difference does it make to know that Jesus shared in our sufferings and our humanity, and that he has conquered death and the fear of death (vv. 14-18)?

GOING DEEPER

- Read [Luke 24](#) and [1 Corinthians 15:3-15](#). Besides dying for our sins, Jesus also rose from the dead. These are rich passages for learning, reflection, and worship. For today, though, simply reflect on the kindness that Jesus offers to his followers in insisting that we recognize the resurrection of his body.
- Why is Jesus’ resurrection the foundation of our hope?
- What do Hebrews 2:17-18 tell us about the role of Jesus as our High Priest? This is the main and distinctive theme of Hebrews. You can explore it more fully by reading Hebrews 7:23 – 10:39, a rich and challenging passage.
- Take some time to re-read these passages. Pray that familiarity with these verses will open to you more of the depth of God’s love for you. Pray that these parts of Scripture might help you to love the Lord your God more fully and faithfully, and to love your neighbor more directly. It may be helpful to keep your Bible open to these passages, but close with a time of thanksgiving for the verses you studied today.

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

Norm Geisler, [“The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ.”](#) This article summarizes Christianity’s unique claim that Jesus Christ was both God and man. Find more excellent resources at [Theology Network](#).

George Guthrie, [*The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*](#) (Zondervan, 2002). This is a great resource for beginning readers to understand Hebrews. [\[Kindle Edition\]](#)

David Wells, [*Above All Earthly Powers*](#), (Eerdmans, 2004). Examine and apply the meaning of Jesus' identity for life in the early 21st century with this profound analysis of theology and culture.

Michael Horton, [*Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology*](#) (Westminster John Knox). Discover and understand the person and work of Jesus within the developing story of God's covenant grace.



The Cross of Jesus

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

By Thomas L. Trevethan

We believe Jesus Christ assumed the judgment due sinners by dying in our place.

Isaiah was a prophet who lived many centuries before the time of Jesus. He wrote this passage as a foreshadowing of Jesus and the events of the cross. This study will unpack Isaiah's prophetic details about the life and death of Jesus -- and the significance for us today.

1. Read aloud [Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12](#), slowly and carefully. Consider how this passage offers us a portrait of Jesus as the Suffering Servant. What phrases and details seem to foretell the actual events surrounding the death of Jesus? What does it tell you about the cross and its meaning if this passage actually does interpret the event long before it happened?
2. The song contains five stanzas, each containing three verses. Give a title to each stanza that helps you recall what is said in those verses. How do these stanzas relate to one another? What does this tell you about the structure of the passage?
 - Isaiah 52:13-15
 - Isaiah 53:1-3
 - Isaiah 53:4-6
 - Isaiah 53:7-9
 - Isaiah 53:10-12
3. Look at the first stanza (vv. 52:13-15) and the last stanza (vv. 53:10-12) about the exaltation of the Servant. What do you learn about his exaltation from these verses? How does the final stanza answer an enigma raised in the first stanza?
4. The second stanza (vv. 53:1-3) and fourth stanza (vv. 53:7-9) both offer physical descriptions of the Servant. Focus especially on 53:7-9 and consider the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. What striking parallels can you identify?
5. How does the description of the Servant in vv. 53:1-3 compare to the common visual representations of Jesus you see today in movies or Bible story books? The New Testament doesn't offer any physical description of Jesus, yet Isaiah described the Servant (Jesus) who "had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." If this is so, what did attract men and women to the Lord Jesus?
6. The focus of the Song of the Suffering Servant is the central stanza (vv. 53:4-6).
 - What do you learn about the suffering and death of the Servant from these verses? Why does he suffer? For whom does he suffer?
 - How does this central stanza act as a hinge to hold together the whole Song of the Servant?

7. Compare this stanza to v. 53:10. What is the relationship of the LORD to the suffering of the Servant? Who ultimately brings this suffering upon the Servant?
 - What is a “sin offering?” (To understand this term, see [Leviticus 4](#) where the LORD ordained the “sin offering” for his people.)
8. Review the whole passage and note each place that mentions the Servant suffering and dying in the place of sinners. How many times is this foundational idea expressed? What does this tell you about the importance of “substitution” in understanding the cross of Jesus?
9. Take time together to offer prayers of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus, God’s Servant, who suffered for your sins. Conclude by reading [Isaiah 53:4-6](#) in unison.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- Think about these New Testament events in light of the Song of the Servant. How does this deepen your understanding and appreciation of Jesus’ death? How does this deepen your love and devotion to Jesus?
- Read Isaiah 53:4-6 again silently and substitute your name for “our.” (For example, “Surely he took up *Tom’s* pain and bore *Tom’s* suffering. . .” or “. . . and the LORD has laid on him *Tom’s* iniquity.”) Does such a reading express what you desire to be true for you?

GOING DEEPER

- The Song of the Servant gives an important perspective for understanding many of the events and sayings of Jesus. What experiences in the life of Jesus do you see foretold by Isaiah? Review these four events in particular:
 - Jesus predicts his death in [Matthew 20:17-28](#) and summarizes his mission in v. 28.
 - Jesus speaks his final words to his disciples at the Last Supper in [Matthew 26:26-30](#).
 - Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane about his suffering in [Matthew 26:36-45](#).
 - Jesus cries out from the cross in agony and abandonment in [Matthew 27:45-54](#).
- The Song of the Servant is also important background to the teaching of New Testament epistles about the meaning and significance of Jesus’ death. Consider how Isaiah’s writings illuminate and clarify these passages:
 - [Acts 8:26-40](#) (This passage clearly states that Isaiah 53 speaks of Jesus.)
 - [Romans 5:6-11](#)
 - [1 Peter 2:21-25](#)
 - [Revelation 5:1-14](#)

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

John R. W. Stott, [*The Cross of Christ*](#) (InterVarsity Press, 2006). Perhaps the finest of John Stott's wide-ranging corpus, this work considers not only the foundational teaching about the cross as a work of atonement, but also its claim on our lives as disciples, as faithful members of the church, and as worshippers. This is a classic, which means, *"Sell your shirt to buy this book!"*

James I. Packer, [*"The Logic of Penal Substitution,"*](#) The Biblical Theology Tyndale Lecture, 1973. This thought-provoking article addresses the basic question, "What did the cross achieve?"

Alan Spence, [*The Promise of Peace: A Unified Theory of the Atonement*](#) (T&T Clark, 2006). Some argue that the traditional view that Jesus was crucified for our sins is repugnant, arrogant and manipulative. What is God's rationality for the atonement? Is it a mystery, or is there redemptive logic for his eternal purpose of reconciliation through the cross of Jesus?



Justification: through Christ alone

Romans 3:9-31

By Thomas L. Trevethan

We believe in justification by God's grace to all who repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

How do people today answer the question, "What is most fundamentally wrong with our society and its human citizens?" This Bible study will challenge your perspective on core problems in our world. This Scripture passage captures and deepens the foundational gospel truth that God in grace forgives believing and repentant sinners.

1. Read [Romans 3:9-31](#) aloud, using three people to read vv. 9-20, vv. 21-26, and vv. 27-31. What words and ideas are repeated throughout the whole passage? What does this tell you about the central theme of the passage?
2. **Romans 3:10-18** is a collection of statements from the Old Testament. What is the common theme?
 - What do we learn about the human condition from these verses? (This is a summary of the case that Paul is making in Romans 1-3).
 - Notice the poetic imagery used here. What truths do you learn about people's speech, treatment of others, and relationship to God?
 - Do you think that this summary is too harsh or unfair? Why?
3. Look at **Romans 3:19-20**. How does "the law" (that is, God's commandments revealed to Israel in the Old Testament) come into this picture? What is the value and limitation of the law?
4. Review **Romans 3:9-20**. How would you summarize this discussion so far?
5. If you asked the apostle Paul "What's wrong with the world," what do you suppose he would say, given what you have seen in this paragraph? How does it compare to what most people in our society might say?
6. **Romans 3:21-26** is a tight, densely structured paragraph. This makes it challenging to understand. It will take some hard work to grasp the meaning, but also offers great rewards for our understanding of the gospel. One commentator described it as "simply the most important paragraph ever written." Read it aloud and notice repeated words or ideas.
 - What other words can you find which are important to the meaning of our salvation?
 - How would you define each of these words? Use a dictionary or, better, a Bible dictionary if definitions are unclear to you.

7. The thematic word in this paragraph is “righteousness/ justify/ justice.” All three of these words come from a common Greek root, so their repetition is even more pronounced in the original language of the passage.

- Look through vv. 21-26 and make a list of all the truths you can see about the righteousness of God of which Paul speaks.
- Verse 21 begins with “*But . . .*” How does this righteousness stand in contrast to the righteousness discussed in vv. 19-20?
- How is it that God demonstrates his justice by his free gift of righteousness through Jesus’ redemption and atoning sacrifice (vv. 25-26)?
- Why is it important that in “acquitting guilty sinners” God was acting justly by the standard of his own person and promises?
- Can you suggest a preliminary definition for “justified” from these verses?

8. Here is a historically important definition of *justification* of great simplicity and power:

Justification is defined as “*an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, and received by faith alone.*” ([Westminster Shorter Catechism](#), Q. 33)

- How does this definition arise from Romans 3:9-26?
- Paul never uses the word “alone.” What is there in these verses and their logic that leads you to think that “alone” is fully appropriate in this case?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, trusting only in the grace of God that comes through him for your acceptance with God?
 - If so, the most basic response would be to offer thanks to the God of justifying grace. Your prayer might be “*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*”
 - If not, what keeps you from doing so right now? Your prayer might be “*God be merciful to me, a sinner, only because of Jesus.*”
- In the final section of **Romans 3:27-31**, what are some practical implications of this doctrine of justification that Paul expresses?
- Why are these implications foundationally important to a mature spiritual life and vibrant mission to the campus?
- How might God’s perspective of the human problem guide your response to issues of injustice and corruption in the world? What is the underlying problem behind such issues as human trafficking, racism, and world hunger? How does this relate to possible solutions?
- What can you learn about the priorities of your mission to the campus from this study?

GOING DEEPER

- The *righteousness of God* refers to the character of God as the one who will always do what is fully right by the standard of his own person and promise, or to the acts of God which establish what is right, what is fully in accord with his person and promises, or to the state of those who have been put right by his right-making activity. The Righteous God is fully and gloriously himself in both his acts of mercy and his acts of justice and judgment.
- *To justify* is “to declare righteous” or “to acquit,” as in a verdict pronounced by a judge. *To justify*, then, means “to acquit a person and declare that person in right standing” or “to acquit a person and declare that person in right standing with the court,” according to this technical legal usage.
- *Justification* is the noun form of “justify,” the declaration that a person is not guilty and therefore is “in the right.”

MORE SCRIPTURE STUDY

- Take a look at [Luke 18:9-14](#) for an illustration by Jesus on the core gospel truth that *God in grace forgives believing and repentant sinners*.
- [James 2:14-24](#) is another powerful passage about justification. As you read it, note the points of tension with Romans 3:9-31. How do you feel about the tension? How might you begin to bring these points of tension into greater harmony? For help, check the resources below.
- Learn more about justification with these Scripture passages: [Romans 4](#), [Romans 5:8-11](#), [Galatians 2:16-21](#), [Galatians 3:6-14](#).

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

- Listen to a four-part [audio series on justification](#) by Mike Reeves at [Theology Network](#).
- [“Does Justification Still Matter?”](#), an article by Michael S. Horton at [Modern Reformation](#).
- [The Promise of Peace: A Unified Theory of the Atonement](#) by Alan Spence, T & T Clark, 2007.



The Holy Spirit

John 16:5-15

By Thomas L. Trevethan

We believe in the indwelling presence and transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all believers a new life and a new calling to obedient service.

In John 13-17, Jesus meets with his disciples for the final time before his death (the Last Supper) to give them important instructions and teaching. Read [John 16:5-15](#). What does Jesus tell them about the Holy Spirit that is particularly significant and timely for them?

Take a few moments to thank the Lord for this important teaching and ask him to give you a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit. Conclude your time of prayer by reading together this powerful traditional prayer:

Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Look carefully at the text again to understand **who the Spirit is**.

- What titles does Jesus use in speaking about the Spirit? What do these titles tell you about the identity of the Spirit?
- In [John 16:7](#), the title “Advocate” is a rich word that is difficult to translate into English because of its surplus of meanings. Look at [several other translations](#) of the passage and compare alternative words. What do they have in common?
- What pronoun is used to refer to the Spirit?
- How do Jesus and the Spirit relate to one another? Why is it “good” that Jesus is leaving the disciples? How does the Father relate to Jesus and to the Spirit?
- You can see that Jesus wants his followers to think about the Spirit in ways that inevitably lead us to the biblical view of God, the Trinity. (For more on the Holy Spirit, see the Bible study on [God the Glorious Trinity](#).) How does believing that God is the Trinity help deepen and direct your thinking about the question, “Who is the Holy Spirit?”

2. **What does the Spirit do**, according to Jesus’ teaching in these verses?

- Make a list of the verbs that are used to describe what the Holy Spirit does.
 - How are the deeds of the Spirit related to the deeds of Jesus?
 - What will the Spirit do “when he comes?” How are those things rooted in and caused by the finished work of Jesus on the cross?
 - In what ways can this information about what the Holy Spirit *does* tell us more about who the Spirit *is*?
3. People often speak about the Holy Spirit using the word “it” (neuter pronoun) rather than “he” (personal pronoun). Even Christians will pray as if the Spirit is some impersonal force or divine electricity. In light of this passage, why is it important to think about and speak to the Spirit as a fully divine person?
4. How does the Spirit relate to the disciples of Jesus in this passage?
- Earlier in the Upper Room with his disciples, Jesus spoke twice of the Spirit. Read [John 14:15-18](#). What is the difference between the Spirit “living with” the disciples, and “living in” the disciples? What does this difference have to do with the disciples not being “orphans?”
 - Is it possible to have an intimate relationship with Jesus or the Father apart from the Spirit? What does the Lord Jesus say the Spirit does to give us an intimate relationship with God the Father, and with Jesus himself?
 - What is required of the disciples to have this “in you” relationship with the Spirit? What actions on the part of the disciples are marks of the Spirit living in them?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- Based on this teaching about the Spirit, how have you seen the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life? In the lives of your family and friends?
- What do we learn from this passage about the way the Spirit will work in us as we seek to bear witness to Jesus?
- In your mission to the campus, how does the Holy Spirit provide motivation, contentment, hope for success, and empowerment for the work?
- Conclude your study and discussion with a time of prayer.
 - Thank the Lord Jesus for his gift of the Spirit.
 - Thank the Father, Son, and Spirit for the specific ways you see God at work in your life and in the lives of those around you and in your mission to the campus.
 - Confess your dependence on the Spirit and the ways you have not depended on him.

- Sing together this [praise song](#) (as the Spirit leads you):

*“Father, we adore you, lay our lives before you, how we love you;
Jesus, we adore you . . .
Spirit, we adore you . . .”*

GOING DEEPER

- The story of the Spirit’s coming on the day of Pentecost is found in the thrilling and theologically rich text of [Acts 2](#). We considered using it for the main Bible study on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, but finally decided to use the John 16 study above. If you have never studied it closely, we encourage you to do so.
- Read through Acts 2 and note every verse that is relevant to your understanding of the Holy Spirit. Then read these relevant verses again and note what they say about the Holy Spirit, being very sensitive to the context of this story. Next, organize your notes into an outline to guide you in understanding what Pentecost teaches about the Holy Spirit. Finally, discuss what you are learning with others.
- Perhaps no doctrinal issue related to the Holy Spirit has been more contentious than the meaning of baptism in (with, by) the Spirit. We can locate this phrase in six passages in the New Testament:

[Matthew 3:11](#); [Mark 1:8](#); [Luke 3:16](#); [John 1:33](#); [Acts 1:5](#), [Acts 11:16](#); [1 Corinthians 12:13](#).

Study these verses, being sensitive to their context, and organize them into an outline that helps you remember what the New Testament teaches about baptism in the Spirit.

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

Christopher J. Wright, [Knowing the Holy Spirit Through the Old Testament](#) (InterVarsity Press, 2006). It comes as a surprise to many that the Old Testament has quite a lot to say about the Spirit. Chris Wright’s treatment of this fact will deepen your understanding of the Spirit and of what the New Testament writers meant by “the Spirit.”

Michael Green, [I Believe in the Holy Spirit](#) (Eerdmans, 2004). This popular classic is a wonderful survey of what the whole biblical story tells us about the Holy Spirit. Green is an English academic theologian-pastor-evangelist, and a participant in charismatic renewal, especially in the Anglican Church.

Gordon D. Fee, [God’s Empowering Presence](#) (Baker, 2009). A fabulous, advanced, technical discussion of Paul’s teaching about the Spirit written by one of the most capable professors of Pentecostal New Testament Biblical Studies. This is a wonderfully rich theological resource, a gift to the whole contemporary church.



The Church: the Unity of All Believers

Ephesians 3:20 - 4:16

By Daniel J. Denk

We believe in the unity of all believers in Jesus Christ, manifest in worshipping and witnessing churches making disciples throughout the world.

Our commitment to the church and involvement in it is essential to Christian growth and maturity. Read [Ephesians 3:20 - 4:16](#). Note the important role of the church and how it works.

1. In Ephesians 3:20-21, Paul is moved to praise and worship God for his glorious work in the church. What can we learn about God’s intention for the church in this short doxology of praise?
2. Paul urges us to walk worthy of our calling (v. 4:1). What are some ways that we can demonstrate this worthy calling (v. 4:1-3)? What is this calling (v. 4:4)? Do you think of yourself as a “called” person?
3. Clearly, one way that we can “walk worthy” is to preserve the unity and peace of the church, the Body (v. 4:3). What is the basis of this unity?
 - Notice the seven “ones” (vv. 4:4-6). List them. Can you find the Trinity in this list?
 - What else do you notice about the “ones” that might help us understand the importance of Christian unity?
 - How have you seen the importance of seeking unity in your fellowship?
4. A common image used in the New Testament to describe the church is “the body” (vv. 4:4; 4:15-16) with Christ as the Head of the Body (see also 1:22-23). How does this image help us understand the living and organic working of the church?
5. Some gifts of the church are described in vv. 7-13.
 - Who is the giver of the gifts (v.7)? How does this affect the way you think about these gifts and the church?
 - Verses 8-10 can be confusing. Christ is pictured as victorious in battle, probably a reference to his resurrection, with the image of receiving gifts as the spoils of victory. Christ descended when he became human and suffered, died and was buried. But he rose again victorious and ascended to heaven. Because of this victory he has authority to dispense these gifts freely to his church.
 - Notice the five gifts mentioned in v. 11. What or who are these gifts? What is unique about them? What do they have in common?
 - What is the essential purpose of these leadership gifts (v. 12)? What does it mean to “equip” or “prepare?” Who is expected to do the works of service or ministry? Why is this important?

6. When the church is working properly, with gifted leaders equipping and each of the members involved in acts of service, what is the result (12b-16)? This is a description of a healthy, functioning church.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- What are the marks of maturity mentioned in vv. 13-16? Notice how the image of the Body continues to illustrate how the church is supposed to work. One of the keys is that “each part does its work.” How have you seen this in your fellowship group? In your church? How have you contributed to making this happen?
- In this passage, we see God’s intention for the church, the body of Christ, as a place where believers can mature together in a nurturing community. What steps have you taken to become an active member and participant in a local church? What might be some steps that you could take to make this more of a reality?

GOING DEEPER

Look at [Romans 12:4-8](#) and [1 Corinthians 12:12-31](#). Compare these verses with [Ephesians 3:20 - 4:16](#) to learn more about how the Body of Christ functions. What are the other gifts mentioned in these passages? How should we think about the gifts? See also [Acts 2:42-47](#), [1 Peter 2:9-12](#).

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

[*Giving Church Another Chance*](#), by Todd Hunter, InterVarsity Press 2010. For those disillusioned with the church, Todd Hunter invites us on a journey to discover how the church is important to our lives as disciples of Jesus.

[*Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional*](#), by Jim Belcher, InterVarsity Press 2009. Jim Belcher provides an honest and fascinating personal journey through the emergent camp and why he returned to the traditional church.

[*Know the Truth: A Handbook for Christian Belief*](#), 3rd edition, by Bruce Milne, InterVarsity Press 2012. This is a doctrinal survey with an excellent section on the church. [Order ebook](#).

[*I Believe in the Church*](#), by David Watson, Eerdmans 1978. This is a very practical story of the church told from the heart of a pastor, evangelist, and spiritual mentor to many in England. It’s part of the excellent “I Believe” series by Eerdmans.

[*The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor*](#), by John Stott, InterVarsity Press 2006. Stott shares his dream for a church that is biblical, worshipping, caring, serving and expectant.



Jesus, Judgment and Eternal Destiny

Matthew 25:31-46

By Thomas L. Trevethan

We believe in the victorious reign and future personal return of Jesus Christ, who will judge all people with justice and mercy, giving over the unrepentant to eternal condemnation but receiving the redeemed to eternal life.

Is there a final judgment? If so, how will we be judged? Take a closer look at the Judge himself and what he expects on that final day.

1. Read [Matthew 25:31-46](#) aloud. On first hearing, what strikes you most in this passage? Why is it significant that Jesus is the one who is speaking?
2. Sometimes this passage is described as a parable. Do you think that is a correct description? To begin to answer this question, compare this passage to the one immediately preceding it in [Matthew 25:14-30](#), "the parable of the talents." How are the two passages similar? How are they different?
3. An Old Testament vision of "the Son of Man" in [Daniel 7:9-14](#) is the background of this teaching of Jesus. Compare Daniel 7 with [Matthew 25:31-46](#), reading each passage carefully. How are they similar? Note particularly the ways in which Jesus' teaching goes beyond that of Daniel. For example, who is the judge, whose throne is seen in the vision, who is judged, on what basis are they judged?
4. Focus on vv. 31-33. Describe the scene. When will it take place, and who will be involved? From these verses, what do you learn about the Lord Jesus? What do you learn about "all the nations?"

Jesus uses a simile in verses 32-33 ("*he will separate . . . as a shepherd . . .*") that draws on a common event in his time. Sheep and goats that regularly mixed in the flocks were hard to distinguish. The sheep had more commercial value so shepherds had to identify and separate the sheep and goats in the herd. By using this image, what truth does Jesus convey about judgment?

5. The king speaks first to those on his right (vv. 34-40) and then to those on his left (vv. 41-45). Compare what he says in these two sections.
 - What similarities and differences do you see?
 - What repetitions do you observe?
 - How are these observations important in interpreting the meaning of Jesus' teaching?
6. How are the people on the Judge's right described in vv. 34-40? What do they receive? What have they done, in the judgment of the king? What does their response to the verdict tell you about them?

7. Focus on the king's verdict for those on his left (w. 41-45). How are the people in this group described? What do they receive? What evil have they done? Why, then, do they receive this negative judgment? What does their response to the verdict tell you about them?
8. Pay close attention to the stark contrast between these two groups. How do they stand in relationship to the Son of Man? How does Jesus describe their destiny (see especially v. 46)?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- Many find this passage surprising and troubling. What aspects of this passage did you find surprising or troubling? How do you feel about this passage?
- Marxists and secularists say, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." They claim that people come to their beliefs because it makes them happy or peaceful or because it gives them good feelings about themselves. How does this passage fit with this description? How does it challenge your own assumptions about how you should determine what to believe?
- Review the first question: Why is it significant that Jesus is the one speaking in this passage?
- How should this description of the final judgment and destiny of the human race ("all nations") affect you? What effect does it have on how you view the people in your life? Consider the classic statement by C.S. Lewis in his "Weight of Glory" sermon:

"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors." --[The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses](#), Eerdmans, 1975, pp. 14-15.

- What should you do in response to this passage? Notice the repetition: "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." How does this become a statement of the priorities of discipleship to Jesus? How could you begin fulfill this description of discipleship, knowing the King will take great delight in even your most halting efforts?

GOING DEEPER

- In v. 40 Jesus describes those who have been cared for by the “righteous” as “the least of these brothers [and sisters] of mine.” Who are these needy people?
 - See who Jesus refers to as his “brothers” in Matthew 12:48-50 and 28:10.
 - Who are “the least of these” (or, more literally “these little ones”) in the teaching of Jesus? Jesus refers to “these little ones” in Matthew 10:42 and Matthew 18:6, 10, 14. Who does Jesus view as “the least of these?”
 - What does this information about the text tell you about the criterion of judgment in this passage? Does it lead you to think differently about the meaning of this passage than you might otherwise? Why or why not?

- Some careful readers of the gospels have concluded that Jesus is “the New Testament theologian of hell.” They observe that only Jesus refers to “Hell” (the Hebrew word “Gehenna”). The word is derived from the name of a deep, narrow gorge southeast of Jerusalem (“the valley of Ben Hinnom”) where idolatrous Israelites offered up child sacrifices to the gods Moloch and Baal in Old Testament times. The valley was used as a garbage dump and viewed as a God-forsaken place of judgment. Consider the following passages from across the gospels: Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 23; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5. Be careful to read the context for these verses.

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

Bruce Milne, [*The Message of Heaven and Hell*](#), InterVarsity Press, 2006. A survey of the Bible’s teaching on human destiny, with very capable and faithful expositions of the key passages in Scripture about the last judgment and eternal destiny. The biblical overview of this material is the best available. This valuable resource is part of [The Bible Speaks Today Series](#).

J. I. Packer, [*Knowing God*](#), InterVarsity Press, 1993, “God the Judge,” chapter 14, pp. 138-147. A classic statement of Bible-based faith, this a one of the few works produced in our era which will still be read a century from now (should Christ not return sooner). This chapter makes the case for the Biblical view of judgment from Scripture and defends it cogently by argument.

C. S. Lewis, [*The Great Divorce*](#) (Harper One, 2001). This imaginative fictional account is faithful to the teaching of Jesus that all people are headed to one of two destinies.



To God be Glory

Psalm 115

By Thomas L. Trevethan

To God be glory forever.

InterVarsity's Doctrinal Basis begins each statement by asserting, "We believe . . .," and concludes with a ringing affirmation, "To God be glory forever." This framework is designed to help us see the value that doctrinal conviction brings to the life of Christian discipleship.

This study of [Psalm 115](#) will probe the relationship of faith, worship and living to the glory of God.

1. [Psalm 115](#) is "as alive as an act of worship as it is in its theology," says theologian Alec Motyer. He suggests that we look at Psalm 115 as antiphonal worship involving two choirs, a congregation, and a leader -- all interacting to praise the LORD. Experience this lively interaction by reading the psalm aloud. Divide your group into two parts (**A** and **B** below). Ask one person to volunteer to be the **leader**. Read it in the follow way:

All:	vv. 1-3		
Leader:	vv. 4-8		
A:	v. 9a	B:	v. 9b
A:	v. 10a	B:	v. 10b
A:	v. 11a	B:	v. 11b
All:	v. 12a		
A:	v. 12b	B:	v. 12c
All:	v. 13		
Leader:	vv. 14-15		
All:	vv. 16-18		

2. The most frequently repeated word in this psalm is "LORD." It is important to remember that this is not a generic name, like "God" in English. It is the personal name of the Old Testament God of the Covenant. Sometimes it is translated "Yahweh," (or "YHWH" with only Hebrew consonants).
 - What does this repetition tell you about what the author was trying to accomplish?
 - Look through the psalm and make a list of the attributes (characteristics) of the LORD. Turn your list into praise by expressing adoration to the LORD using your own words, but based on the concepts and words of the psalm.
3. The psalm begins by rejecting the false paths of self-glorification and idolatry (vv. 1-8). How is self-glorification inconsistent with the characteristics of the LORD on your list (#2)? Can you be both self-glorifying and a worshipper of the LORD? Why not?
 - What is the central error of idolatry?
 - Is idolatry only an ancient problem? Can you identify contemporary forms of idolatry? What fruit does idolatry produce in the lives of its devotees (v. 7)?

4. The key verb in vv. 9-11 is *trust*. Who is called to trust? In what are they called to trust? How is “trust” something more than intellectual assent to these statements about the LORD?
5. What is the key verb in vv. 12-15? Can you define this word?
 - What does the psalmist mean by stating, “*The LORD remembers us?*” Can the LORD have a memory lapse?
 - What is the relationship between the LORD “remembering” and the LORD “blessing?”
 - Who are the recipients of blessing from the LORD?
6. Review the entire psalm. Notice the connections in the psalm between the rejection of false belief, clarity of belief, trust, giving God glory, and worship.
 - What effect does false belief have on worship, on giving glory to God, on trusting in God and receiving his blessing?
 - How does self-glorification undercut trust in the LORD, worship to the LORD, or clarity of belief about the LORD?
 - What effect does clarity of belief have on trust in the LORD, worship to the LORD, or false beliefs about the LORD?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- Think of all of the spiritual realities mentioned in the psalm:
 - giving glory to God
 - rejecting self-glorification and idolatry (false belief)
 - clarity of belief
 - trust in the LORD
 - blessing from the LORD
 - worship of the LORD
- Which of the above realities are personal strengths, or strengths in your fellowship? Which are weaknesses?
 - What can you do to more fully practice your personal strengths and strengthen your weaknesses?
 - What can you do as leaders in your fellowship to enhance strengths and strengthen weakness?
- Pray together about these matters, giving glory to God and seeking his blessing.
- Sing a song of praise to the LORD that focuses on him (and not on you).
- Shout aloud together the final word of the psalm, “*Hallelujah!*”