

T3 BIBLE PROGRAMME

COURSE 6:
Growing in God



Growing in God

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Title

Growing in God

Objective

In this course, we will be covering the many important foundational topics in the life of a disciple of Jesus. The author of Hebrews explains that there are foundational truths that are important for us to know. Of course, the greater aim is for us to, “*go on to maturity*” (Hebrews 6:1,) but in order to do so, we must first ensure that we have laid good foundations so that we can grow from milk loving infants to meat eating adults.

Synopsis

This course covers foundational truths so that we can grow in God. We will focus on what it means to be grounded in God and will take a closer look at growing in the Spirit, growing in spiritual disciplines and being a Christian in the world today.

Duration

The course content, if running this along with the filmed teachings, will be covered over 7-sessions, with each session split into approximately two 45-minute blocks of teaching time. If this course is being covered by a live presenter, the time frames may differ. Please confirm it with them.

Requirements

Try not to miss a single one! No prior study of Scripture is necessarily needed, however, bear in mind that this is not a foundational course. We will be digging deeper into Theological truths. Should you not have some basic foundational truths in place, we encourage you to first attend a foundations/introductory type of course to give you a better foundation to build on. *Please note this is not an accredited programme/course.

Tools

You will need your Bible, a pen and should you wish, a notebook for additional note taking.

Assessment

The best way to learn is through application and interaction with the course content. For this reason, we have included a final optional assessment/activity. Depending on how your course is being run, this may be for self-study, a required part of your course or something you can complete at your leisure. Just check with your course coordinator. Don't fear, this is not an exam. It will merely be an opportunity for you to reflect on and apply what you have learnt during the course.

[If you do this as part of self-study, you may want to ask a pastor/elder if you can submit it to them for their input. No marking memo has been provided.]

T3 Bible Programme

The T3 Bible Programme consists of 8 Courses with each course made up of Modules. The course work can either be covered with live presentations from pastors/teachers, or filmed recordings of teachings are available. The pace at which the course work is covered is based on the organiser's preference. The course work is taught generally in the filmed teachings and does not necessarily unpack the course notes in a systematic manner. It is recommended students read the notes on their own, before or after sessions, and spend time reflecting and interacting with the notes.

Each course is a stand-alone course and it is not necessary to have attended prior courses or to complete the entire T3 Programme in order.

*A reminder that the T3 Bible Programme is NOT an accredited or registered programme. It is for informal study only. Should you wish to work towards a formal certificate/ diploma/ degree you will need to sign up to a registered and accredited programme with a recognised institution.

Programme Outline

- Course 1: Doctrine of Revelation: God Speaks
- Course 2: In the Beginning
- Course 3: The Fall
- Course 4: Understanding the Old Testament
- Course 5: Coming to Know God: The Doctrine of Salvation
- Course 6: Growing in God ... **YOU ARE HERE**
- Course 7: Church and the Kingdom
- Course 8: Eschatology: The Doctrine of Last Things

Interacting with the Notes

Keep an eye out for **REFLECTION** opportunities in the course notes, where you can pause, reflect and have some space to engage with some questions or additional thoughts. There are also **FOCUS POINTS** which provide additional information, summaries or expound on previous information etc. These are always interesting reads and worth going over outside of "class time".

We trust that as you study and pursue God, seeking His face, that you will encounter Him even more and dig foundations that will take you deeper, make you stronger and will impact on the church and the Kingdom of God, for many years to come.

Blessings,

T3 Teaching Team

ASSESSMENT TASK (OPTIONAL)

Growing in God

Answer these question by using your T3 notes and your Bible as your guide.

Question 1:

Having an assurance of salvation is promised to every believer. In 1 John, John gives us a number of ways that we can know we are children of God.

1. Name the 4 ways John describes, that help to give us assurance that we belong to God, along with a Scripture for each. (100 words or less)
2. Describe which one of the four "tests" have been the most meaningful for you in experiencing the assurance of salvation. (100 words or less)

Question 2:

The Bible describes how the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to believers.

1. Define what a spiritual gift is (30 words or less).
2. Go through the list in your notes on the spiritual gifts and describe at least two spiritual gifts you believe you have (100 words or less).

Question 3:

Growing in the fruit of the Spirit involves growing in character. Describe how you have changed as a person, from the inside out, since your conversion to the Christian faith? (150 words or less)

Question 4:

Explain what the Bible means when it speaks about, "the will of God", and explain the different spheres of God's will. Use at least 2 Scriptures to explain each "sphere". (200 words or less).

NB Assessment Guidelines

- Use Scripture to back up your point of view, where applicable.
 - Don't just repeat course content but use the course content as a "springboard" for your own ideas and to show that you have a working understanding of the concepts covered.
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INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY

The Story of God

This teaching programme is about helping you immerse yourself into the story of God and the main characters that make up the story. The moment we came to Christ, we became part of the story of God, and our personal life stories find meaning within His grand meta-narrative. All the content in this programme is the telling of this story.

God's story has four parts to it as revealed in the Bible. Here is a brief overview of each:

1. **Creation.** The creation account in Genesis describes how God created all things as good. He created humans in His image, with the intent that we would live in fellowship with Him and serve as co-regents with God over the earth, being wise stewards over all He has made.
2. **Fall.** The Scriptures explain that man defies God and is cut off from the fellowship and intimacy he once had. The Holy Creator God simply cannot fellowship with sinful man. While Man is still in God's image, that image has been corrupted and twisted through sin and the desire for self-rule. Because of man's sinful choices, even the earth itself comes under a curse.
3. **Redemption.** God in His mercy promises to rescue and redeem man's sinful condition and restore creation back into right relationship with Him. This great rescue plan is promised and foreshadowed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament through the ministry of Jesus. God's great plan of renewing all things begins in Jesus.
4. **Consummation.** The climax of the story when God finishes His project of redeeming the world through Jesus. He finally puts every enemy under His feet including death, sickness and Satan.

This is the greatest story ever told. God wins and gets the glory and He graciously allows us to share in His glory. This great overriding story or meta-narrative is what gives our life meaning and purpose. We are a part then of God's great story to renew all things and bring us into true life. We have one truth and one Lord and our individual stories find meaning within the 'big picture.'

What is Theology?

Theology (from the Greek: *Theos* meaning "God", and *logos* meaning "study or discourse") is essentially the study of God – who is the 'main character' in the story we have looked at.

In our passion to study God and to get to know Him, we will take a closer look at doctrine. Doctrine (from Greek: *Didache* meaning "teaching or instruction") is simply the teaching on a specific subject or topic in the whole Bible. So to use the analogy of a builder - in order to build a house, you need to construct it section by section and brick by brick. Doctrine is like the bricks we use to build. Theology is like the house.

Limitations of Theology

We realise that trying to study God and His ways is somewhat like an ant trying to understand the elephant. God is infinite and we are finite. But God does encourage us in His Word to apply our hearts to understanding and to find the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:2-5). His desire is for us to love Him with our minds as well as with our emotions. But in dealing with theology, we need to always keep in mind that our understanding is limited and finite and we can only see at best, in part. Therefore, in our attitude God requires us to come to Him and His Word with humility (Isaiah 66:1-2; Job 42:2-6).

“There are indeed some areas where human minds cannot go ... a God we can wholly explain is no bigger than our little minds.” - Winkey Pratney

That is, a God that we can fully understand, ceases to be God!

“Theology having reached its highest peak will always remain nothing more than man’s puny attempt to understand and explain God” - Jan Robbertze

REFLECTION

Why do you personally wish to study God’s Word in greater depth? What do you hope to glean during this personal study time?

NOTES:

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INTRODUCTION

This course is entitled, “Growing in God” and will cover many important foundational topics in the life of a disciple of Jesus.

The author of Hebrews explains that there are foundational truths which are important for us to know in order for us to, “go on to maturity” (Hebrews 6:1). We must first ensure that we have laid good foundations in order for us to grow from, “milk loving infants” to “meat eating adults”.

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” - Hebrews 6:1–2

In this course, we will deal with many of these foundational truths with the aim that we can grow in God. Peter exhorts his readers by saying, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Our spiritual lives should be characterised by a faith towards God and a love towards God and people that is, “growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing” (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

Growing in God and desiring to walk in “the more” is built into the DNA of the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom on the earth is expanding, and what was a mustard seed will become a mighty tree. Christians don’t remain as spiritual babes but we grow to be fathers and mothers in the faith (1 John 2:12-14). A stunted Christian is an anomaly in the Kingdom of God.

As believers, we need a theology that always believes God for greater things. Like the writer of Proverbs says, “... the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day” (Proverbs 4:18). This doesn’t mean life will be easy, but we must believe that it will become more glorious. He is the God who, “is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

AW Tozer, while talking about spiritual riches in his article, “Our Unclaimed Riches”, states:

“You will get nothing unless you go for it, You will have as much as you insist on, You will have as little as you are satisfied with, You now have as much as you really want”

You determine how much you want to grow in God, as He has graciously given us all the same resources to grow in Godliness. Peter states that God’s, “... divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Our prayer is that this course will be a great launching pad which will catapult you into a greater life of fruitfulness for Jesus.

MODULE 1: BEING GROUNDED

As we teach on the assurance of salvation in greater depth, followed by water baptism, the aim is that it will create a grounded, settled assurance that the old has truly passed away and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17), that you have passed from death into life and there is no turning back!

The Assurance of Salvation

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” - 1 John 5:13

God does not want us wondering if we are His children. His desire is that we may know that we have eternal life in His Son. Christians are called to walk in assurance – a confidence that we are those who belong to Him and have been adopted into His household.

How Can We Be Sure We Are Truly Children of God?

Just as it was in the early church, so it is today, that many people falsely claim that they know God and have a handle on the truth (1 John 2:3). Some who claimed to know God were Gnostics, who had a false assurance based on, “secret knowledge”. Even in Jesus’ day, some were confident of salvation, yet their confidence was based on a self-righteous pride rather than a humble trust in the Lord (Luke 18:9-14).

Part of the reason 1 John was written was to help give Christians true assurance that they would know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). John then gives us four tests to help give true believers real assurance.

Test 1 – The Test of the Spirit

“Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.” - 1 John 3:24

One of the primary ways we have assurance and confidence in Christ is through an inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Paul says, *“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God”* (Romans 8:15–16). There is then a perceptible inner witness or confirmation that takes place when we are born again, which gives us an assurance of our salvation. Another translation says, *“For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children”* (Romans 8:16, NLT). This is essentially what John is referring to in 1 John 3:24.

It is this wonderful assurance that we experience as God comes to dwell within those who have believed in Him. Jesus explained, *“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”* (John 14:23).

Test 2 – The Test of Obedience

“And by this we know that we have come to know him: if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” - 1 John 2:3–6

John is saying that the test or measurement that you are in Him is this; “*whoever keeps his word*” and walks, “*in the same way in which he walked*”. In other words, this is speaking about obedience. Are you being obedient? If not John emphatically states that the truth is not in you.

REFLECTION

The important point here is that it is very easy to say you know God. John explains that obedience or action, rather than speech, is a truer measure or evidence of the validity of your faith. What does it mean then to “keep His commandments”?

Is John Saying That If You Are Saved – You Will Never Sin?

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” - 1 John 1:8

No! He is speaking about a lifestyle of obedience or disobedience, a general pattern in your life one way or another. Obedience then is the default desire for a child of God. Disobedience is the default desire of an unsaved person.

“A slave obeys because he has to. If he doesn’t obey he will be punished. But a Christian is to obey his Heavenly Father because he wants to—for the relationship between him and God is one of love. ‘If you love Me, keep My commandments’ (John 14:15)”
- Warren Wiersbe

John sums it up for us, “*And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us*” (1 John 3:23). So walking in obedience is one way you can have an assurance that you know Him and belong to Him.

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What Love Looks Like

“We ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” - 1 John 3:17-17

This sounds like such a noble act, and taken literally could mean we should die on behalf of another Christian – while this should be the radical heart behind our love, only Jesus could perfectly do this. We can do this by living sacrificially and being prepared to be inconvenienced on behalf of others. Loving the church should affect your diary (time), budget (money), home and possessions, energy and talents.

Walking in love then gives assurance that you belong to God and is powerful evidence to the world that we belong to God.

Test 4 – The Test of Truth

*“If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life”
- 1 John 5:9–13*

This test is centred around how you view Jesus. A Christian is not just someone who loves others but is someone who believes the right things, specifically when it comes to Jesus. Being a nice person or a loving person cannot save you.

FOCUS POINT

What makes us fundamentally different from other religions is that we have an incredibly high view of Jesus. We believe He really is God the Son, who became fully human yet was still fully God. He was not merely a good teacher or a prophet like many other religions hold to.

The False Teachers

The reason John wrote this is because false teachers were espousing their heretical views about Jesus. They taught that God the Son came as a Spirit Being on the Person Jesus, after His baptism, and then left just before His crucifixion. They held a low view of Jesus then, that He was just an ordinary man on whom the Christ came for a season (see 1 John 2:21-23, 4:1-3).

What We Believe

Christians believe that Jesus was God in the flesh (1 John 2:22, 5:1; 2 John 7). The only way Man could be reconciled back to God is if Jesus fully identified with Man’s humanity. He had to become 100% human. Theologians call this the Doctrine of the Incarnation (see John 1:14; Colossians 1:19).

The Importance of Right Belief

John had to make clear that our view and belief in Jesus has eternal consequences, *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life”* (1 John 5:13). As discussed previously, saving faith or belief is not merely a mental assent of Christ as Lord, but is a deep heartfelt decision to trust in Christ with your whole life. It is this kind of faith that saves.

This then is the test of truth. If you have this kind of belief in Jesus, it gives you assurance and enables you to overcome. Having this kind of right belief leads to right living.

Baptism in Water

Symbolically, water baptism shows what happens in the heart at the point of salvation:

A sign of the death of our old nature.

“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ... knowing this that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Romans 6:3, 6).

A sign of our new birth.

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

A sign of identification with the death and resurrection of Christ.

“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Romans 6:3).

“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:5).

A sign of belonging to Christ:

- In the Old Testament, circumcision of the flesh was the sign of separation unto God.
- In the New Testament, baptism has taken over from Old Testament circumcision and is a sign that we belong to God (Colossians 2:11-12).

NOTES:

Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?

The Bible teaches that there is a type of baptism that is necessary for salvation; however, this baptism it is not water baptism, but spiritual baptism! A person must be baptised into Christ in order to be saved:

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” - Galatians. 3:27

Therefore, water baptism is not necessary in the sense that we must perform this as a “work” in order to earn salvation. We know salvation comes by faith alone. But then we can ask,

“Why are people in the New Testament so often told to repent and be baptized as though it is one action that we must perform in order to be saved?” - Acts 2:38

- Circumcision was an act that followed the faith of Abraham and was a sign of the relationship (covenant) into which he had entered. This was a picture of baptism. Once we are saved we are given baptism as a sign.
- Faith without works is dead, and love without obedience is not real love, so the bottom line is that if we say we have saving faith and that we love Jesus, then we will obey what He has told us to do. So baptism is not necessary for salvation but is an essential fruit of real faith that should happen if it is in any way physically possible.

The criminal on the cross next to Jesus could not be baptised, but at the moment of faith, Jesus said, *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43).

Who Should be Baptised?

Let's look at some other examples of water baptism in the New Testament:

- John the Baptist baptised whoever would repent (Mark 1:5).
- On the day of Pentecost, 3 000 new believers were baptised (Acts 2:41).
- The Samaritans that believed were baptised (Acts 8:12).
- Paul was baptised three days after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:18).
- Cornelius and some other Gentiles were baptised (Acts 10:47).
- Lydia and her household were baptised (Acts 16:15).
- The Philippian jailer and his household were baptised (Acts 16:33).
- Many Corinthians were baptised (Acts 18:8).
- The Ephesian disciples were baptised (Acts 19:5).

According to these accounts and our key Scripture (Romans 6), we can again say with confidence that baptism is for believers that have repented and been born again!

FOCUS POINT

A child who is old enough to understand the significance of repentance and faith in Jesus can be baptised. Water baptism demonstrates obedience to the command of Jesus (see Matthew. 28:19). Like a child, we need to obey even if we don't fully understand all the intricacies of this truth. To be clear, the Bible does not advocate the christening of babies.

Who Should Do the Baptising?

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” - Matthew. 28:19

This command was for all of us who are believers. In Acts we see Philip (not an Elder or Pastor) baptising people. It is one of the most wonderful things to baptise others, especially when they are friends or family in whom you have seen God doing a great work.

When Should One be Baptised?

There is no rule or formula laid forth in Scripture, but after seeing how wonderful baptism is, the question would be, “Why wouldn’t we want to be baptised immediately?” (Paul likens baptism to circumcision that was done at 8 days old. When we are born again we are like babies. The idea seems to be that it should be done soon after salvation.)

In our culture, we are either very sceptical or suspicious of any outward action of faith, or we are overly eager to do anything that will earn us points with God (i.e. New Age; Hinduism). Sometimes people get baptised just because it is a good thing to do, otherwise, they take years to get baptised, saying they haven’t heard from God yet about baptism. (We don’t have to hear Him because He has already spoken!)

We need to rediscover the early church culture of baptising as soon as possible after salvation. However, sometimes it is a good thing to wait until witnesses – who are special to the people being baptised – are able to get to the baptism.

Can a Person be Baptised More Than Once?

A new believer should be baptised once in obedience to the command of Jesus.

- Some people, however, may have been baptised earlier in their life (such as in the case of infant baptism) without understanding the significance of baptism.
- Perhaps they did not truly repent and receive Jesus as their Saviour. In such cases it is very important to be re-baptised as a public profession of faith.
- I don’t believe that someone who is saved and has been baptised and then backslides, should be baptised when he comes back to Christ. Rather, they should recognise the faithfulness of their Father who never let them go even when they let Him go. It is a time to praise Him because their salvation (and baptism) has proven to be powerful and secure!
- If, however, a person feels that God is prompting them to be baptised after returning to Christ, then it can be a powerful thing to do and certainly won’t do any harm.

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Pictures of Baptism

In the Old Testament and the Gospels there are a few very clear pictures of baptism that can help us to understand more fully the power and significance of baptism:

Noah's Baptism

Although Noah was not “water baptised,” ... he was saved by his faith in God and by the Ark (which is symbolic of our being in Christ). Noah preached to the unbelievers of his time, “... *God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved by water*” (1Peter 3:20; and 1 Peter 2:5). Because of Noah's faith, he became an “heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Hebrews. 11:7) and was saved, just as we will be if we enter into, and stay in, the spiritual Ark (baptism into Christ). The wickedness of Noah's generation will be seen again on the earth before Christ returns (see Luke 17:26-27), and those who are not in Christ, will perish.

Moses' Baptism

Moses led a generation of Israelites out of Egypt and they were, “baptised” by the cloud and the sea. Paul said that, “All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1Corinthians 10:1-4).

Once again, this is a picture of spiritual baptism. Those Israelites were not, “water baptised”, but they were spiritually baptised by passing through the Red Sea and following the cloud (the presence of Jehovah) by faith. “*By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned*” (Hebrews 11:29). We see that those Israelites whose faith endured through the wilderness tests (Joshua, Caleb, and the younger generation), inherited the Promised Land.

This illustration shows us that in salvation and baptism we are free from slavery to sin (bondage) and have freedom in Christ. Deliverance can and does happen as people are baptised.

John's Baptism

John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance to prepare the way for the Messiah. Whoever believed John's teaching showed their change of heart (repentance) and faith through water baptism, “*John did baptize in the wilderness, and preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins*” (Mark 1:4-5).

John later baptised Jesus to “*fulfill all righteousness*” (Matthew 3:15). In baptism, Jesus not only sets a precedent for His followers but also publicly declared that He was leaving His past life as a carpenter to enter into the mission for which He came. He was the promised Messiah who would baptise with the Holy Ghost and fire (see Matthew 3:11), and at His baptism, the fullness of the Holy Spirit came upon Him (Acts 10:38).

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MODULE TWO: GROWING IN THE SPIRIT

This module covers topics that all focus on living in the Spirit, and ministering to others as a Spirit-filled believer.

Baptism in the Spirit

The subject of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit has caused many blessings and also much division in the church over the last 100 years. As we look at this vital doctrine, let us remember that Jesus said that it was, *“to your advantage that I go away”* (John 16:7) in order that the Spirit would come in fullness.

The Holy Spirit’s Function Described Through Pictures

The Bible uses certain metaphoric language concerning the Holy Spirit. This language is used not to describe what the Holy Spirit looks like, but rather what He is like and what He does.

- **Wind:** powerful and sovereign (John 3:8; Acts 2:2)
- **Fire:** refining and destroying (Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:3)
- **Water:** cleaning and sustaining (Isaiah 44:3; John 7:37-39)
- **Oil:** anointing and healing (1 Samuel 16:13; Hebrews 1:9; James 5:14-15)
- **Dove:** peace and gentleness (Matthew 3:16)

When we pray for more of His Spirit or even to be filled with His Spirit we are actually praying for a greater manifestation of the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Defining the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The term “baptised in the Holy Spirit” (greek. *en pneumati hagio*) is issued 7 times in the New Testament. Four times it is used when John predicts the ministry of Jesus and contrasts His ministry of baptism in water with Christ’s baptism in the Spirit, *“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”* (Matthew 3:11). See also Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16 and John 1:33. Twice the term is used in Acts to describe Pentecost with the Spirit coming in power (Acts 1:5, 11:16). Finally, it is also used in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Some Bible versions translate the phrase as, *“baptism with”* or, *“baptism by”* the Spirit, but the Greek preposition *en* can most literally be translated as *“in”* the Holy Spirit.

What is clear is that the Holy Spirit is not the agent or the one doing the baptising. The New Testament makes clear that it is Jesus alone who baptises us in the Spirit (Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16).

The word *“baptism”* (verb. *baptizo*) means, *“to be dipped in, fully submerged in, to be overwhelmed by”*. It was used in various contexts meaning, *“to dip or put under water to bring about permanent change”*. This would then be likened to a shirt dipped in a coloured dye that would come out different or changed, or a ship that was put under water (sunk) that involved permanent change.

The Purpose of the Baptism in the Spirit

References to being filled with the Holy Spirit often come in the context of empowering for the work God has for us, boldness to witness with conviction and a demonstration of His power (Acts 1:8; Luke 4:14; 24:49). We see that in the outpouring of the Spirit, God often releases spiritual gifts to His people such as prophecy (Acts 2:18), preaching with boldness and miracles (4:29-30, 5:12) and tongues (10:46). These spiritual gifts will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Scripture also indicates that the experience of the Spirit also leads to assurance that we are His children (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:15-16). Along with this is also the experience of God's love (Romans 5:5), which the Spirit makes real to us.

It would seem then that being filled with the Holy Spirit is for a purpose, which is the purpose of us primarily being His witnesses. It is not the same as just being born again and having the Holy Spirit come and live inside of you. Being baptised with the Holy Spirit is that work of the Holy Spirit to empower us for witness, and to fill us in the sense of manifesting Himself in us and doing a supernatural work inside of us, i.e. empowering, assuring, cleansing, giving authority and commissioning.

Extreme Views and Misconceptions Regarding Baptism in the Holy Spirit

- **You must have a very tangible (shaking and falling over) experience in order to be filled with the Spirit.** While Scripture does describe very experiential ways we receive the Spirit, those experiences vary from person to person. Often, those who have never had the tangible experience are far more Christ-like and effective than those who have had the tangible experience. (Even in the power gifts like healing, signs, wonders, etc.)
- **Speaking in tongues is the evidence of being filled with the Spirit.** This implies that the only or chief sign and result of being baptised in the Holy Spirit is the gift of tongues. (The Bible clearly states that different gifts are given to different people, as in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11). This does not mean that every believer can't be gifted in the private use of tongues, but we cannot create a requirement where Scripture does not. When Scripture is descriptive, we cannot presume it to be prescriptive.

FOCUS POINT

It is true that the Holy Spirit can be experienced tangibly; it may even be that God wants us all to experience Him that way, but it is not explicitly required. What is important is that we are filled, and go on being filled, so that the transforming work of the Holy Spirit will produce fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, etc. (Galatians 5:22-23), and power in our communication of the gospel.

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How Do We Receive the Baptism in the Spirit?

In the book of Acts there seem to be different ways and contexts in which the Holy Spirit comes upon people, as well as at different times:

- **Acts 2:1-4:** The Holy Spirit comes sovereignly and in His sovereign timing (people were in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost, therefore a good time for witnessing) as the believers wait for Him. He comes like tongues of fire upon them. They supernaturally speak in foreign languages.
- **Acts 4:31:** The believers are gathered together praying for boldness to witness and they are filled with the Spirit. They received boldness and the whole place where they were meeting was shaken. (Many of these disciples had already received the baptism of the Spirit and therefore this shows us that it is not a once off event like baptism in water.)
- **Acts 8:14-18:** Philip preaches and baptises people in water. Later the apostles come and as they lay hands on the people, they received the Holy Spirit.
- **Acts 10:44-46:** Peter is witnessing to the family of Cornelius and suddenly, as they hear the gospel and believe, they are filled with the Holy Spirit and speak in other tongues.
- **Acts 19:6:** The believers who have been baptised receive the baptism of the Spirit as Paul places his hands on them and they speak in other tongues.

The Bible teacher, Derek Prince, points out four very useful keys with regard to receiving the infilling of the Spirit¹:

- **Thirsting.** John 7:37-38; Luke 1:53. God does not pour out His Spirit and presence on those who are satisfied and self-sufficient. Many good Christians never experience the life of the Spirit because they feel no need for Him. They are satisfied without the blessing of the Spirit. Thirsting speaks of an inner longing and a deep desire for Him.
- **Asking.** Luke 11:13 (keep asking). If your attitude is, *“If God wants me to have the infilling of the Holy Spirit, He will give it to me - I don’t have to ask”*, you will never receive. This attitude is not Scriptural and is a sign of pride and arrogance. The Scriptural principle is, if we don’t ask, we won’t receive. Ask in faith, believing God is a good Father and desires to pour out His Spirit upon you.
- **Drinking.** John 7:37. “Drinking” is the active process of receiving. It involves actively opening yourself up to God, in ways such as raising your hands and opening your mouth. An analogy would be Peter walking on water (Matthew 14:29). He desired to walk on water as he saw Jesus appear on the waves. Peter had to physically get out of the boat in order to experience the supernatural. In other words, there was an active role he played in positioning himself for the supernatural.
- **Yielding.** This involves surrendering. It is an attitude of allowing God to do as He wishes upon, and in, you. This attitude of yielding involves a heartfelt trust in the Lord rather than trusting in your own ability to figure it out and understand (Proverbs 3:5; 1 Corinthians 14:14).

If you fulfil these steps, there is no guarantee that you will receive the infilling of the Spirit. God is sovereign and we can’t manipulate Him. It is not a formula, but these are helpful principles that can enable people to position themselves to receive from the Lord.

¹ Prince, Derek. *Foundations for Christian Living*.

New Testament Examples

In light of the Old Testament practices, we now look to the New Testament. Here we find a number of purposes for the laying on of hands described:

Healing

In Old Testament, the laying on of hands was never used for healing; only in the New Testament (see Matthew 8:3; Mark 1:41; 6:5; Luke 4:40, 13:13; Acts 28:8). In Mark 6:2 it describes miracles being done through Jesus' hands, *“And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?”*

The power of the Holy Spirit was conveyed through physical touch (Luke 5:17, 6:19; Mark 5:23, 41). In fact, people would come to Jesus asking Him to lay hands on them (Matthew 9:18; Mark 5:23). This was then recognised by the people as the primary way that Jesus healed.

The laying on of hands is not some type of formula for healing to occur, that said it needs to be combined with faith (James 5:14-16). We are called to lay hands on people in His Name or with faith in His Name (Mark 16:17-18).

Can ordinary believers lay hands on the sick? Yes. Mark 16:18, is applicable for all who “go”. Every Christian is called to be part of the great commission. We also find that God gives gifts of healing to individuals in the body (1 Corinthians 12:28).

Commissioning for Ministry

This is similar to the Old Testament in which we see hands were laid on individuals to ordain and transmit authority. For example, Acts 6:3-6 describes the ordaining of the first deacons. The seven were already full of the Spirit, so the laying on of hands seemed more symbolic in that context (see also Acts 13:2-3, 1 Timothy 5:22).

FOCUS POINT

1 Timothy 5:22, speaks about the need not to be hasty in ordaining and releasing leaders. If you ordain leaders into positions of authority before they are ready it can lead to division in the church, through immature leading and unbalanced character. It is much harder to un-ordain them, so wisdom teaches the need to release leaders wisely.

So we see a pattern: God calls people but leaders commission them (Acts 13:2-3). We only find leaders or elders laying hands to commission other leaders but it is wise for the whole church to be in general agreement (See Acts 6:3).

Impartation of the Spirit, Gifts and Power

“And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul” - Acts 19:11

This again does not refer to the magical power inherent in the hands of the apostles but rather that God was doing miracles through their touch.

We see the laying on of hands when various people received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-18; 9:17, 19:6). Spiritual Gifts were also given through prophecy and the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6).

Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts have often been misunderstood or abused, and as a result, some Christians avoid them. But God has given them to us, and Scripture instructs us to, “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts” (1 Corinthians 14:1). They are given for His glory and our good.

Defining Spiritual Gifts

“A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church”⁴ - Wayne Grudem

God gives us various gifts at different times. We are all born with natural God-given gifts, which many use for God’s glory (i.e. mercy, hospitality, teaching). Then there are gifts given supernaturally which the Holy Spirit releases in you, sometimes for a specific moment (such as prophecy or gift of healing). It is also true that the Spirit releases gifts that are yours, so to speak for your whole lifetime as a believer.

Which of these are the more “spiritual” gifts? In 1 Peter 4:10, Peter says that whatever you have received, “use it to serve one another”. Paul does not seem to distinguish between the “more” or “lesser” spiritual gifts. For example, in Romans 12:6-8 he lists serving next to prophecy, which is next to encouragement. We also see this in 1 Corinthians 12:28; the gift of administration is lumped with the gifts of healing and miracles. For Paul, all the gifts were important if the motive was to build up the body of Christ whether through the spectacular, or through the so-called, “ordinary” gifts (1 Corinthians 14:3,12; Ephesians 4:12).

The List of Gifts

In the New Testament, Spiritual gifts are specifically mentioned in five different passages. Some are repeated while others appear only once:

1 Corinthians 12:28

- Apostle
- Prophet
- Teacher
- Miracles
- Kinds of Healings
- Helps
- Administration
- Tongues

⁴ Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.

1 Corinthians 12: 8 -10

- Word of Wisdom
- Word of Knowledge
- Faith
- Gifts of Healing
- Miracles
- Prophecy
- Discerning Between Different Spirits
- Tongues
- Interpretation of Tongues

Ephesians 4:11

- Apostle
- Prophet
- Evangelist
- Pastor
- Teacher

Romans 12:6-8

- Prophecy
- Serving
- Teaching
- Encouraging
- Contributing
- Leadership
- Mercy

1 Corinthians 7:7

- Marriage
- Celibacy

1 Peter 4:11

- Whoever Speaks (covering several gifts)
- Whoever Serves (covering several gifts)

This list is not meant to be exhaustive but can best be used as examples for your reference. Most Biblical scholars agree that it was Paul listing the gifts that came to mind, rather than stating that these are the only gifts. Within these lists, we can add gifts of music, intercessory prayer, counselling, writing, artistic skill and so on.

1 Peter 4:10 -11, explains that God's gifts are part of His, "*varied grace*" which means that the gifts are rich in diversity and have many facets to it, many of which we are still discovering! All with the aim to serve one another and ultimately, to glorify God.

They Vary in Strength

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...in proportion to our faith” - Romans 12:6

This Scripture indicates gifts differ according to a measure of grace given to individuals. This holds true from experience as well. For example, with regard to leadership, some are clearly gifted to lead large groups while others have the capacity for small groups.

Two variables indicate the strength of your gift:

- **Divine Influence.** The sovereignty of God in giving certain gifts and abilities (1 Corinthians 12:11).
- **Human Influence.** In light of the first truth, the desire you have to grow in and stir up the gifts determine its strength (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Corinthians 14:1).

They are All Important and Each Has its Place

The danger we need to be constantly aware of is the tendency to elevate the supernatural gifts as more important. Part of this tendency is because Christians often separate the sacred and the secular. Rather, we need to have the mindset that all we do is sacred and holy unto God, even something basic such as eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 10:31). But many view the more miraculous or spectacular gifts as more sacred and important. Paul warns us not to do this. He states that “the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Corinthians 12:22).

The reason we should be careful is because many believe that the supernatural gifts are from the Lord, but not the more “natural » and therefore we fail to see God working in all the varied gifts. Those who do not move in the visible and demonstrative gifts then feel condemned and worthless, rather than valued.

There are Certain Gifts that Carry More Weight

1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11 are clear in terms of the “weight” certain gifts carry in the church, *“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles...”* (1 Corinthians 12:28).

This does not necessarily mean that they are more important, but simply that they are more pivotal to the direction and influence over the church. These two Scriptures refer to gifted people who carry a spiritual office (such as a Prophet); this differs from all believers who can exercise the Gift of Prophecy. This does not mean they are more, “spiritual” or “mature” than others, but simply that they have been given greater responsibility.

REFLECTION

Is it possible for one person to have all the gifts?

God never designed one person to have the full gamut of gifting. This is why we are part of a body and why we need one another to complement where we are lacking (1 Corinthians 12: 27-31). A healthy church will have a great variety of gifts and we must not all look the same or have to do the same thing.

Prophecy Under the New Covenant

Prophecy is one of the gifts that Paul exhorts all Christians to desire (1 Corinthians 14:1). In fact, one of the evidences that you are filled with the Spirit is that it will affect your tongue. For example, we find from Luke's writings that all those who were filled with the Spirit had some kind of verbal utterance; whether it was praise, prophecy, boldness to witness or tongues. (For example – Elizabeth in Luke 1:41; Zechariah in Luke 1:67; and others in Acts 1:8; 4:31 and Acts 10:45-46). It is true that *“out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks”* (Luke 6:45).

This is also reflected in the Scripture quoted below with specific reference to prophecy.

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy” - Acts 2:17–18

In Acts 2:17-18, we see this incredible promise of God spoken by Peter (who quotes an ancient promise from the book of Joel, that was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost). For a Jewish person listening to this, it must have been a staggering idea. No longer was there a select few (such as Kings, Prophets and Priests) who would be speaking God's words. The Spirit would now be given to all; even the most unlikely and marginalised of society: the children, the women, the male and female servants of all ages. In other words, God doesn't leave anyone out.

The gift of prophecy is to be a normal, common Christian experience because of the Holy Spirit given to us. This is why in 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul tells whole church to eagerly desire to prophesy, *“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy”*.

For us living in the New Covenant, prophecy is not primarily foretelling (telling the future) but forth-telling - speaking God's heart into the present with the intent to encourage and build others up (1 Corinthians 14:3).

REFLECTION

What about the gift of tongues?

Paul did desire that all Christians speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:5) but he never commanded us to eagerly seek it, as he does with prophecy. He is simply placing a high value on tongues, rather than saying that every Christian must speak in tongues (see similar language used in 1 Corinthians 7:7 with celibacy). However, the gift of tongues is one of the only gifts of the Spirit given for personal edification (1 Corinthians 14:4) and it is good to seek it.

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The Context of Galatians

Galatians 5:22-23, is the primary but not exclusive passage outlining a significant but not exhaustive list of the, “fruit of the Spirit”.

Galatians includes:

- Paul’s defence of his apostleship
- A focus on the tension between the Law and the Spirit

Galatians 5:13-26, exhorts the Galatians believers to live by the Spirit and not follow the fleshly desires characteristic of those outside of the believing community, or to submit themselves once more to the yoke of the law under which they have previously lived, and which some religious Jews of the say were claiming they should return too.

As D.S. Dockery says, “It was therefore necessary for Paul to show that freedom from the Law does not by any means do away with the obligations of ethical living...however, the responsibilities of moral conduct must not be shaped by the dictates of Law but by the operation, enablement and sufficiency of the Spirit”

To the enablement of the Spirit, we turn.

The Root of Regeneration

Before examining the fruit, it is important to remember that every fruit stems from a seed. For the follower of Christ, the seed is the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” - Titus 3:3-7

That washing of regeneration and renewal transforms us from the inside out and means that the Christian faith is not one of behaviour modification from the outside, but rather of holistic transformation from the inside out.

The Old Testament hints powerfully at this truth in Jeremiah 17 when it says,

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is in the Lord. He is like a tree planted by the water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit” - Jeremiah 17:7-8

REFLECTION

If someone were to dig up the roots of your relationship with Jesus, what state would they be in? Before getting caught up in whether your walk with Jesus is producing good fruit, remind yourself often that fruit is exactly that, fruit, and that it is the Father’s intent to transform our roots before inspecting fruit.

The Nine Fruit of the Spirit

Here we have a cluster of nine Christian graces which seem to portray a Christian's attitude to God, to other people and to himself – all of which are the outworking sign of the inward work of the Holy Spirit; hence they are the fruit of the Spirit, and not of the law/ or of the flesh.

This cluster of fruit can be roughly broken up into three sections:

- Spiritual Graces – Love, Joy, Peace
- Social Conduct – Patience, Kindness, Goodness
- Personal Discipline – Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control

Another way of looking at it is that the direction of “love, joy and peace” is Godward, of “patience, kindness and goodness” is man-ward, and of “faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” is self-ward.

Of significance is that that Paul does not refer to the “fruits” of the Spirit, but the “fruit”, which suggests that all of the nine characteristics listed must be present in our lives as a homogeneous whole. Coming back to the metaphor of fruit, it is fair to say that the fruit must be growing in our lives and that it does so by constant nourishment from Christ, by the Word and the Spirit.

REFLECTION

Are you experiencing the growth of the fruit in your life? How would you say you have changed as a person from the inside out since your conversion to the Christian faith? When people look at your life, do you think that the fruit will lead them to the root?

The Importance of Roots Becoming Fruit

In a significant passage on discipleship in Matthew 7, Jesus tells his disciples that those who do not bear fruit will be taken away to be burned, but those that do bear fruit will be pruned to produce even greater fruit. Disciples cannot bear fruit apart from abiding in Christ. Good trees produce good fruit (Matthew 7:17).

This is especially significant because God the Father is glorified by His disciples bearing spiritual fruit and so proving to be His disciples (John 15:2, 4, 8).

The Way of Love

The journey of following Christ, the journey of discipleship, is one of learning to love. We continue our focus on Growing in God, by looking at the great fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer - the God graced ability to love.

Defining Love

The definition of love, given the contemporary cultural confusion around this word, is exceedingly important. Turning to the Biblical narrative, no text is more explicit in its theological definition of love than 1 John 4.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” - 1 John 4:7-12

God is love (1 John 4:8), is a statement that the Bible makes about no other being. The truth of the statement is one of the glories of the Bible’s portrait of God. Understanding the love of God is therefore foundational to our understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, and of how the Holy Spirit works in us and through us.

The Biblical narrative, from beginning to end, is characterised by God’s love. As Grenz says:

“the entire drama of creation and redemption, climaxing in the eschatological new community is the outflow of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. God is self-giving love ... Because he is the Spirit of the divine relationship, God sends his Spirit to bring us into fellowship with himself, into the fellowship of the Son and of the Father”⁵

The God of the Bible is a Person, and love is so bound up with who He is as a person that John can make this stupendous claim that God is Love. Critically, the statement cannot be reversed to say “Love is God”. To do that would be to scandalise and tragically misconstrue both who God is, and therefore what true love is. The reality is that “*God is love is far more stunning in definition and reality than the reductionist and humanistic definition of ‘love as God’.*”

Theologically this is because the foundation for the trinity of the Christian God lies with the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. They share a fellowship of love, which is concretised in the third person of trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Because the Biblical definition of love begins with the triune God, it ends up being a definition which is vastly different from that of contemporary culture.

⁵ - Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God.*

Again, as Grenz states:

“The understanding of God as the social Trinity, the community of love, carries far-reaching ecclesiological implications. From Pentecost to the end of the age the focal point of the reconciled society in history is the church of Jesus Christ, the covenant people.”

REFLECTION

Think about the manner in which contemporary culture defines love. We live in a day in which love (however defined from a humanistic point of view) is God. Due to our immersion within the daily life of contemporary culture, it is very easy for an unguarded heart and mind to be conformed to this understanding. Let us be mindful to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Love as the Greatest of the Fruit

If God is love, and His intent is to create a community/body/family/church whose sole purpose is to be a revealer of the Nature and Character of God to the world – then it makes sense that the primary fruit of the Christian life is love.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love...” - Galatians 5:22

The particular Ancient Greek word here translated love is *Agape*. It has a very specific meaning focused on the exercising of the will away from oneself, towards the loving of another:

- **Describes the attitude of God toward His Son** (John 17:26); the human race generally (John 3:16; Romans 5:8), and in particular towards those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:21)
- **Conveys His will to His children concerning their attitude** toward one another (John 13:34) and toward all men (1 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Corinthians 16:14; 2 Peter 1:7)
- Expresses the essential nature of God (1 John 4:8)

To clarify, love so defined is not an impulse from the feelings, nor does it always run with the natural inclinations of our emotions. It is love that is born of God that leads to a governing of the will, the feelings, and the emotions that result in looking beyond oneself to the “*other*”. This is the love at the heart of the Biblical narrative!

To Summarise: Christian love can be understood, and best practised, only when it is seen to be a reflection of God’s love in its varied dimensions. Failure to love God, and to love like God and with God, lies at the heart of sin and idolatry.

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Love as the Anchor of Community

1 Corinthians 13 provides a wonderful example of the centrality of love within the dynamics functioning of the community of the Church.

1 Corinthians 12 -14 has an interesting pattern to it: in chapter 12 we find gifts; in chapter 13 - love; in chapter 14 - gifts. Some call it the "Gift Sandwich". The interpretation is that you can only operate in your gifts effectively if you are motivated by love of God, and love for others.

Any self-interest or self-promotion at the expense of another, or in order to bring attention to oneself, is the opposite of Biblical love, which considers others first.

"If there is no love, there is nothing of any real value in my ministry. I may be successful; I may get results; I may be admired, appreciated and applauded - But as far as God and eternity are concerned, I am nothing"⁶ - David Prior

If you want your service and works to have eternal value, God wants us it to flow out from a heart of love for others, with a concern to see them built up, and for God's glory.

REFLECTION

Think about contemporary Christian culture, and the tendency to esteem those who appear highly gifted. Let us constantly remind ourselves, and each other, that love is the glue that binds and unifies in Christ, that love is the anchor that grounds the gifted.

It's All About Love

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments rest all the Law and the Prophets.'⁶
- Matthew 22:36-40

As the Beatles song so famously goes, "love, love, love...", it's all about love! And love is seen most clearly in the nature of the triune God of the Christian faith. This is a key building stone in the Biblical narrative, culminating in the life of Christ; and is absolutely at the heart of the continued ministry of the Father in the earth, through His bride.

"As His holy people, we are to proclaim in word and action the principles of the kingdom, showing others what it means to live under the divine reign. But more importantly, as Christ's people we are to show forth the divine reality – to be the image of God... The church reflects God's character in that it lives as a genuine community – lives in love – for as the community of love the church shows the nature of the triune God⁷" – Stanley Grenz

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – please help us to love, like You first loved us.

⁶ Prior, David. *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church*.

⁷ Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God*.

Why We Pray

"We don't pray to tell God something he doesn't know. Jesus said that the Father knows all we need before we ask him" - Matthew 6:8

First, we pray because prayer is an expression of our dependence and trust in Him. When teaching prayer to the disciples, Jesus started the Lord's Prayer with the words, *"Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name"* (Matthew 6:9). Jesus was clear that He wanted prayer to start with us trusting in and delighting in our Heavenly Father.

Second, we pray because God chooses to work through prayer. John Wesley said, *"God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it."* The apostle Paul understood the power of prayer and often asked believers to stand with him in prayer for breakthrough and change (Ephesians 6:18-19; Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1). Yet, some Christians have a fatalistic understanding of God's will, thinking that all things are set and the things cannot be changed. Paul declared that we are, *"For we are God's fellow workers"* (1 Corinthians 3:9) which means that we work together with God in genuine relationship, dependence and cooperation to extend His Kingdom into our world.

The patriarchs such as Abraham and Moses prayed boldly because they understood that their prayers made a difference (Genesis 18, Exodus 32:14 cf. Jonah 3:10). Scripture shows us that God has even reversed His plans in response to people's prayers (Exodus 32:14; 2 Chronicles 32:26; John 3:10; Jeremiah 18:8, 26:3, 36:3). God desires us to change the world, starting with prayer.

REFLECTION

Although prayer is very intuitive in one sense and something most people do, believers and unbelievers alike, much of it can be ineffective and does not move the hand of God. We have to be taught how to pray (Luke 11:1). This is why it is so important to pray with others and learn from the prayer lives of other believers.

How is your personal prayer life? How often do you pray with others and learn from them?

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Principles of Prayer

Pray According to God's Will

The apostle John explains that *"if we ask anything according to his will he hears us"* (1 John 5:14). Jesus also taught us to pray, *"... your will be done"* (Matthew 6:10) and modelled it for us in the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). How though do we know what God's will is when we pray?

First, God has already revealed His universal and moral will to us in Scripture. We understand what He desires for us and so we can pray along those lines. This is why it is so important to know and read the Scriptures! Understanding or discerning God's will is to be discussed in greater depth later in this module.

Pray from A Life of Obedience

God does not "hear" every prayer (Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 28:9; Isaiah 1:15, 29:13; Matthew 15:8-9) but only those whose hearts are set on Him, who are living lives pleasing to God. This is because prayer is a relationship with God and if we do things that displease Him, it hinders our relationship with Him. It is with this truth in mind that John states, *"and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him"* (1 John 3:22).

Obviously, we are not speaking of a "sinless" life because none of us is without sin (1 John 1:8). The emphasis is on a heart set towards Him and a desire to live obediently.

We also need to keep in mind that obedience involves living in right relationship with each other. For example, if husbands treat their wives badly, their prayers are hindered (1 Peter 3:7 cf. 1 Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 12:14; James 4:3, 5:16).

"God has not placed himself under obligation to honor the requests of worldly, carnal or disobedient Christians. He hears and answers the prayers only of those who walk in His way"
- AW Tozer

Pray in Faith

Hebrews 11 makes it clear that *"without faith it is impossible to please him"* (v6) and this holds true in the realm of prayer. Jesus is clear when He says, *"And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith"* (Matthew 21:22). Our prayer lives are to be characterised by a trust in God. James tells us to, *"ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind"* (James 1:6).

We see the connection again between prayer and faith in James 5 when James instructs elders to pray, *"the prayer of faith" which, "will save the one who is sick"* (James 5:15).

God's desire is for us to approach Him with confidence knowing that what we ask for, He desires to give us (Mark 11:24; Luke 11:13) because He is a good Father.

The key to our confidence and faith is in knowing that God is a good Father who is for us (Romans 8:31-32).

Pray Regularly

If prayer is communication and therefore relationship with God, we must find regular times to be in His presence. We see the pattern the gospel writers give us regarding Jesus' prayer life. Luke tells us, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (5:16) while both Mark and Matthew state similar things (Mark 1:35; Matthew 14:23).

Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to "Be constant in prayer" (Romans 12:12). Faithfulness in prayer involves finding regular times to seek God.

Pray Sincerely

In Matthew 6:7, Jesus teaches on prayer and condemns the gentiles' prayer lives. Jesus says they, "heap up empty phrases... for they think that they will be heard for their many words". They were hypocrites in prayer. They tried to fool God by impressing Him with their words and techniques yet their lives were corrupt and wicked.

Our aim must be to pray sincerely and honestly before God. David understood this very well. He often poured his heart out to God (Psalm 42:4) and he encouraged all people to, "pour out your heart before Him" (Psalm 62:8).

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their prayers because they were full of insincerity and religious facade (Luke 18:11). However, God loves a broken, contrite heart poured out before Him! An honest confession of sin and sincere trust in God is vital (Luke 18:13-14) to effective prayer.

Pray Persistently

"Biblical prayer is impertinent, persistent, shameless, indecorous. It is more like haggling in an outdoor bazaar than the polite monologues of the church" - Walter Wink

In Luke 18:1-5, Jesus teaches on persistent prayer and essentially emphasised that God rewards determined persistence (Luke 11:8). We also see that in order to, "inherit the promises", faith and patience (Hebrews 6:12) are needed. God often delays answers not because of His unwillingness, but rather because He wants to teach us endurance (Hebrews 10:36).

Pray Privately

"And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace" - Matthew 6:5-6 (The Message)

Prayer is not an opportunity to show off your spirituality. Private prayer must be our primary mode of prayer. We still, however, must make time for corporate prayer (Acts 2:42, 4:24, 12:5). Jesus here is not teaching that it is wrong to pray together, but He is striking at the heart of our desire to impress others. Our first aim is to "impress" God privately.

Stewardship

We have included stewardship here, as this teaching forms an important part of being trained as a disciple of Jesus. Stewardship deals with generous giving but is also so much more than that. It is one of the key principles of living out our faith.

Defining Stewardship

Stewardship is essentially the teaching that we own nothing, God owns everything and we are simply His servants or managers of His resources.

This is summed up by Moses, who said:

“Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day” - Deuteronomy 8:17–18

In Bible times we see that every wealthy home had many servants. Over the servants was the chief servant, the steward who managed everything. We see for example that Eliezer was Abraham’s steward (Genesis 15:2). He was in charge of all Abraham’s possessions, property and even children whom he would have taught. He was also entrusted with the job of getting a wife for Abraham’s son, Isaac (Genesis 24). This man was a servant yet had authority and was trustworthy.

In the New Testament, Paul refers to himself as a steward (1 Corinthians 4:1,2) and calls church leaders to be stewards (Titus 1:7) Peter says that all Christians are to be, “good stewards” (1 Peter 4:10 cf. Luke 12:42, 16:1; Galatians 4:2).

What is a Steward Called To Do?

A Stewards Serves

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” - 1 Peter 4:10

Peter emphasises that stewards, “serve one another”. We must remember that having the heart of a servant is a prized value in Scripture. Paul often referred to himself as a servant. So did James, Peter, Timothy, Jude and John etc. (Refer to Romans 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1, Jude 1, James 1:1; Revelation 1:1).

“The Old Testament’s use of “slave” language as a designation of a special and honored relationship to God is continued in the New Testament, especially by Paul who described himself (Romans 1:1), along with Timothy (Philippians 1:1), as “slaves of Christ Jesus,” thereby stressing not only full dependence on Christ but also their place of honor in the Old Testament tradition of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, et al. In Titus 1:2 Paul is further designated as a “slave of God.” - N Freeman

So we see that it is not derogatory but rather an honour to be called by God to serve others, just as servants would. He redeemed and brought us into His service, to worship Him, and work with Him in His love.

A Steward Serves Through His Gifts

Peter explains that we serve others as stewards through the gifts God gives us.

Here are the gifts God has freely given us to use for the benefit of others:

- **Our Bodies** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Philippians 1:20).
- **Our Time.** In the Old Testament, 1 in 7 days belonged to God. The principle holds that all our time is holy (Romans 14:5-8) and we need to honour God with it (Ephesians 5:16).
- **Our Families** (1 Timothy 3:5).
- **Our Money.** The Old Testament shows how the Israelites gave their first fruits to the Lord and honoured Him with what was actually His (Deuteronomy 26:2; Proverbs 3:9). Malachi 3:8 explains that the Jews robbed God with their finances by withholding them. As those under grace, we are called to a higher standard. We are called to be God's money managers, those who understand the principle that all we have is God's and that we must share it generously. This will be discussed in more detail later.
- **Our Talents and Spiritual Gifts** (1 Peter 4:10; Romans 12:6).

A Steward Serves Faithfully

“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” - 1 Corinthians 4:2

God's promise is that if we are faithful, He will reward us (Luke 12:42-44). This is because God is a good Master who blesses us and gives us good gifts but He calls us to be faithful with them. However, Jesus also warns that those who are found unfaithful will be severely punished (Luke 12:45-48; cf Matthew 25:26). Dishonesty (Luke 16:12), idleness (2 Thessalonians 3:11; Proverbs 18:9), disloyalty (Luke 16:13, John 10:13) and discontentment (Luke 3:14; Matthew 20:9-15) are characteristics of unfaithful servants.

The steward, therefore, is answerable to his Master. In light of Paul's teaching on being a steward, he explains that each of us has to give an account to God the Great Judge for the way we have been unfaithful or faithful with our resources and gifts.

“Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God” - 1 Corinthians 4:5

REFLECTION

Can God trust you with His gifts, His possessions, His people? When Jesus returns will you be found waiting around or working faithfully? Like the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30, we don't know when the Master will return. The point is we are to be industrious and hardworking and full of risk-taking faith while He is away.

The result of serving faithfully is that God is glorified!

“whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” - 1 Peter 4:11

Stewardship and Money

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” - Matthew 6:19-21

“When spent on earthly treasure, money is only of temporary value- unless it’s spent with a view towards a heavenly treasure”⁹ - Randy Alcorn

Jesus explains here that earthly treasures such as money and possessions are of temporary value. Beyond that, no earthly treasures are guaranteed to be safe. They can easily all be lost, stolen, destroyed and devalued! Jesus, however, is not against the storing up of treasures, but He focuses on treasures in heaven. Alcorn explains, *“When money and possessions are spent on heavenly treasure... the investment takes on eternal value.”*

This means that we are called to invest our money into what is important to God. This would include the church, the poor and what God is busy doing on the earth.

FOCUS POINT

When Jesus tells us not to, *“lay up treasures on earth”*, is He saying saving and investing is wrong? Not at all. It is wise to save (Proverbs 6:6-8) and you need to provide wisely for your family (1 Timothy 5:8). However, there is a difference between saving and hoarding. Hoarding is taking saving to the extreme and is a means of replacing God. It is often done out of fear. Hoarding is accumulating funds for no other purpose than keeping it, *“just in case”* of a disaster. You won't actually live off it or need it in the future.

How Do We Practically Store Up Treasures in Heaven?

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.” - 1 Timothy 6:17–19

By Being Rich in Good Works

Even if God has blessed you with wealth, your ministry is not just the giving of finances, but also to do good works; to DO good. Sometimes it is easier to give financially than to love people. God expects all Christians to love others through acts of service, not merely tithe to the church. We are all called to be rich in good works (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8) and Paul tells us if we do, we are, *“storing up treasure... for the future”* (v19).

⁹ Alcorn, Randy C. *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*.

By Being Generous and Sharing

If money is your master and has a spiritual hold on your life, giving is a sure way to break the hold. Giving is the antidote or cure to break the allure that materialism has over a soul! This means that we are called to start by tithing in the local church.

Use your money to serve the church and to be generous to others. Someone once said, "Money makes a wonderful slave but a terrible master". Don't let money enslave you, use it as your slave to bless others.

Giving benefits two-folded; both the giver and the receiver (Acts 20:35). It changes you! You receive when you give. Jesus was not against money and possessions but was against it enslaving us and us living for it. Paul explains that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). It is the love of money rather than the mere use of it that draws us away from God.

"I have made many millions but they have brought me no happiness." - John D Rockefeller

REFLECTION

Why does Jesus command us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven? Our true home is as part of the Kingdom of God, where Christ is. Our earthly life is just temporary, a place of training for eternity. We are pilgrims, strangers and aliens in a worldly system (2 Corinthians 5:20; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:13,16).

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" - Matthew 6:24

Jesus summarises how we must handle money and possessions by stating that we can only have one master. Who will you serve? There is no middle ground. A disciple of Jesus cannot serve God and money. You can't serve money in the week and then serve God on Sundays. God, the Owner, expects you to be a faithful steward, to willingly and joyfully give and administrate His resources for the good of others. It is His money after all.

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The Different Spheres of God's Will

The Universal Will of God

There are certain plans that God has purposed to bring about, which is universal in scope and certain to take place. Ephesians 1 speaks of, *"his purpose ... a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth"* (1:9,10).

Certain of His plans stand forever (Psalm 33:11) and cannot be undone by evil men (Proverbs 19:21; John 9:12; Isaiah 8:10) or evil powers (Revelation 17:17). These purposes are determined from eternity past (2 Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 1:4; Titus 1:2) because God is Eternal, Sovereign and All-Knowing.

The universal or general will of God would then include His plans to:

- Redeem the world through Christ (Isaiah 53:10; 1 Peter 1:19-20).
- Establish Jesus as Lord over all (Ephesians 1:9-10; Acts 2:36; Colossians 1:18).
- Establish His church through whom He would work (Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 3:10-11).
- Save and renew individuals through faith in Jesus (2 Timothy 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).
- Return to judge the living and the dead (Matthew 16:27; Hebrews 9:27).
- Rule over the nations with the saints (Revelation 1:6, 5:10).

FOCUS POINT

As God's people, we can stand securely knowing that history is ultimately, His Story. Psalm 2 tells that people have plotted in vain against God but that God has the last laugh (v1-4). He uses all opposition for His purpose. For example, when Jesus was unjustly crucified it was part of God's predestined plan (Acts 4:28). Be secure in the knowledge that God is setting up His Kingdom, and His plan is to unite all things under Christ (Ephesians 1:10). Nothing can stop that!

The Moral Will of God

The moral will of God essentially refers to the boundaries of right and wrong behaviour. God has determined certain moral boundaries which have been revealed clearly for us in the Scriptures. For example, in Exodus 20 God reveals His moral law to Moses in the form of the Ten Commandments.

These laws have not been rescinded under the new covenant but rather reaffirmed, except for the Sabbath Law (Romans 14:5; Galatians 4:10). God's standard of right and wrong is not just a list of, "Do's and Don'ts", but rather it reflects the very character of God in His purity and holiness. For example, God is a being full of truth. He never lies or deceives, and He expects us, who are made in His image, to remain truthful (Ephesians 4:24-25). Therefore, our Creator God wants us to behave in a way that reflects His nature. It is in living this way, that we begin to flourish as human beings.

Although sin corrupted humanity and causes people to live selfishly (Romans 3:9-18), God comes to redeem our fallen nature and His Spirit enables us to live rightly. The blessing of being under the New Covenant means that God has written His moral law on our hearts (Ezekiel 36:27; Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10) enabling us to do what is right and to resist sin (Titus 2:12).

His moral will is not just for Christians, but for all people and for all times. When individuals face God on judgement day, each one will have to give an account of how they have lived according to His moral standards (Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 2:7-10; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 6:8) and most importantly, whether they have believed and trusted in Christ.

We may ask moral questions such as:

- Is it God’s will to divorce my wife because I have fallen in love with another woman?
- Does God mind if I avoid paying tax in a nation governed by corrupt authorities?
- Is it God’s will for me to live with my boyfriend?
- Is it God’s will to marry a person of the same sex?
- Can I choose to change my gender?

Some of the modern issues we face are straight forward but some are more complex and require great wisdom. The Bible, as an ancient book, doesn’t mention some modern moral issues such as euthanasia, modern concepts of human rights, dating, birth control, cloning and genetic biotechnology. But, as great wisdom is exercised, Scripture does provide us with principles that can be applied in these difficult areas.

Although the Bible is an ancient text, we must believe that because it is God’s Word, it will provide us with modern solutions to right and wrong. Scripture itself testifies that “*every one of your righteous rules endures forever*” (Psalm 119:160 cf. Psalm 119:89; Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:25) because God Himself is unchanging. Truth and morality remain fixed forever.

FOCUS POINT

Some might be thinking that God’s moral will is so limiting, like living with strict rules and in a straightjacket. However, God gives us boundaries for our good and to protect us. God’s moral will mustn’t be seen as a tightrope but rather as a garden. It is there to release us and help us into full life and joy.

Once we understand the universal and moral will of God, that He revealed to us in Scripture, it becomes much easier to make right choices that will cause us to flourish and will be pleasing to God. His universal and moral will are the large boundaries set for us, in which we can live and move effectively. As the psalmist says, “*The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance*” (Psalm 16:6).

The Personal Will of God

The Bible indicates that God has a plan for each individual on the earth (Ephesians 2:10; Psalm 56:8; 139:13-16) that fits within the scope of His general and moral will. He has created us each uniquely with a special set of abilities and gifts. Each one has a unique temperament which bears the mark of a creative Father who delights in us.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” - Ephesians 2:10

The personal will of God for our lives is not something restrictive or one-sided. The Bible shows that God often works through people’s initiatives in establishing His plans (2 Samuel 7; Romans 15:20; Acts 16:6). However, even our initiatives and dreams come from Him (Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 2:10)! The principle then, is that God loves to share His work and Kingdom with us. We co-labour with Him (1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 6:1) and His plan was always for us to live creatively, as a Spirit-led people, to steward His rule on the earth.

MODULE 4: BEING A CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD

Having a Christian World View

“Does a fish know it is wet?”

“Objective reality, the world view produced by the spirit of scientific inquiry, is the myth of our time” - Albert Hofmann

No one can look at the world without seeing it through their personal experience and beliefs. The way we respond to others, the way we react to world events, how we understand the past and how we look at the future is a product of who we are. We call this a world view.

Our world view is simply the lens of unquestioned “truth” through which we view everything. That lens is formed from what we know and what we believe. Of course not everything we “know” may be right, and not all we believe may be true. But these are the measures we use, often subconsciously, to create our own world view lens.

World Views

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” - Proverbs 16:25

Essentially there are three starting points, three lenses to choose from:

There is no God. Only the material realm exists.

For example, an atheist will see the world through a humanist, materialist lens. This means the concept of God is automatically rejected. There is no supernatural. Concepts of relativism and self-determination will influence their life choices.

There is only God, encompassing the spiritual and material realm.

For example, a Hindu, Buddhist or New Age practitioner will see the world through a pantheistic lens, for some God is everything, for others everything is God. Their gods (if they have any) came after and are a product of creation. True success is to exit the natural into the supernatural realm. Ideas of karma and reincarnation will influence their life choices.

There is God and there are the material and spiritual realms He has made.

For example, the three Abrahamic faiths share this view. They believe in a personal Creator God, who is before creation. Christian doctrine is set apart from Islam and Judaism in that they acknowledge a Trinitarian God, one God in three persons.

These different starting points do not blend. You cannot mix Atheism and Theism. You cannot mix Pagan Pantheism and Christian Trinitarian Theism.

Because, from one of these starting points, the individual may put a unique spin on things, depending on what they “know” or believe.

FOCUS POINT

For the Christian believer, all that we know and believe about God, about salvation, about the history of God's dealing with His people, should enlighten the way we see the world. The greatest tool we have is the Scriptures. Through reading the Scriptures we can learn to see the world as Christ sees it (Psalm 199:105; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

The Christian World View

The Christian world view is not just a religious belief. It is a comprehensive view of the world from a Biblical standpoint; a complete framework through which we understand the Universe and everything in it. Here we are going to look at various aspects of life and see how a Christian world view will teach us to think about them.

Theology – God the Three in One

As Christians we believe in a personal, intelligent, powerful, loving, just, and awesome God who exists in the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And not just any personal, awesome triune God; but God as revealed by Himself in Scripture. Our God is not a mystic god, created to be discovered. He is the Creator God who revealed Himself to His creation.

The Scripture further reveals that this personal God who created all things has standards and punishes sin (Romans 3:23, 6:23). It also teaches that He took upon Himself human form in the person of Jesus Christ and died for our sins so we could enjoy relationship with Him as adopted children forever.

FOCUS POINT

Our Christian world view rules out many other conflicting ways of seeing the world: e.g. Atheism (there is no God), Agnosticism (I'm not sure about God), Animism (there are tree gods, river gods...), Polytheism (there are many gods), Dualism (there is a good god and a bad god), Monotheism (only one person is god), Deism (a creator-who-is-not-in-control is god), Pantheism or Panentheism (everything is or contains god).

(Refer to: Genesis 1; Deuteronomy 6:4; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Matthew 28:19; John 1; Romans 3;29,30; 1 Corinthians 8:5,6)

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Philosophy – God the Reason

John 1:1 says that Jesus is the Logos (the Word or reason). This sums up the Scriptural belief that Jesus is the explanation for the Universe and everything in it. He is the uncaused cause and the purpose for everything. Therefore, whatever He says or commands, trumps all other knowledge.

FOCUS POINT

Our Christian world view is in contrast to many philosophies that still search for meaning and purpose outside of God: e.g. Humanism (man explains), Existentialism (man's experience explains), Rationalism (man's reason explains), Materialism (man explores the material realm to explain), Mysticism (man explores the spirit realm to explain), Monism (man explores the material and spirit realm, as one, to explain), Nihilism (man will never manage to explain).

See John 1; Colossians 1:15-20

Science – God the Creator

The Bible reveals God as the Designer and Creator of an orderly Universe that speaks to us about Him. The earth we live in can be explained through an understanding of creation (God makes a perfect world), the fall (sin and death enter the world), the flood of Noah (particularly impacting geology and animal speciation), and the confusion of languages at Babel (particularly impacting human migration).

Science and Christian faith are not only compatible; they make more sense as bedfellows than Science and Atheism. Throughout history belief in God has been a major catalyst for scientific endeavour. Even the father of empiricism, Sir Francis Bacon, was a believer in both God and the Bible. He regarded God to have spoken to us through two books, the book of His Word (the Bible) and the book of His works (nature).

Both the Bible and the pursuit of science give us information about God and His Universe. Science need never contradict the Bible, if the science is done right.

FOCUS POINT

Our Christian world view contradicts secular philosophies of science: Scientism (science alone provides all knowledge), Empiricism (only what we can test and observe provides knowledge), Philosophical Naturalism (nothing supernatural exists or contributes to knowledge).

Refer to: Genesis 1 (Creation), 3 (Fall), 6 (Flood), 11 (Babel); John 1; Romans 1; Colossians 1:15-17

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Sociology and Anthropology – God the Father

God began creation, not with society, but with a single man in relationship with God. To this He added a single woman, to be in relationship with this single man and with God. To these two He added children, by the process of human sexual reproduction. Later, we see extended families and tribes, cities and states, nations and empires, synagogues and churches.

God has created an order for society that recognises the individual, gives honour and importance to marriage, respects the sanctity of family, and places us within cities and states for our well-being, social interaction and times of worship.

Christian anthropology acknowledges that God made, from one man, every nation. No matter how civilised or “unreached”, each tribe and nation is descended from Adam, through Noah. All have, as their distant father, a man who knew God and spoke to Him, obeyed Him and enjoyed covenant with Him. The so-called “races” (which are really just diversity of the same kind) and our many languages are a result of what God did at Babel and the subsequent migration.

FOCUS POINT

Our Christian world view is the antithesis of the other main theories in sociology and anthropology today: For example, Functionalism and Communism (put society before the individual), Totalitarianism (let the state rule the individual); Evolution (man evolved, was not created), Linguistic Polygenesis (language evolved at different times in different places).

See Genesis 1, 2; Genesis 4:17; Matthew 19:4-6; Acts 17:26; Romans 1; Ephesians 5:22-6:4.

Psychology – God the Redeemer

The Bible teaches us to recognise our own sinfulness and our need for a Saviour. Our greatest need is not self-esteem; but rather to die to our self, take up our cross and live a life for God in Christ.

Primarily, we are born to serve and enjoy God, not ourselves. When we get this right everything else makes sense; pain and hardship, pleasure and affluence. As Job says, *“the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the Name of the Lord!”* (Job 1:21).

“Most people want to be happy in this life and holy in the next. God wants us to be holy in this life and happy in the next.” - David Pawson

FOCUS POINT

Our Christian world view runs contrary to much of secular psychology theory: Self-Realisation (I will be happy when I know myself); Self-Actualisation (I will be happy when I’m the best version of myself); Libertarianism (I will be happy when I fully own myself).

See Proverbs 3:5-8; Romans 6:11-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:5.

Ethics – God the Lawgiver

Scripture teaches us that God is a lawgiver, who rewards obedience and punishes disobedience. God hates evil and loves good, so should we. God's absolute moral standards for ethical behaviour do not shift with society's fads and fashions. He is a rock, immovable.

We are fallen and incapable of meeting His standards. This is the reason for the sacrifice of Jesus; He paid our debt of death. In Christ we are righteous. This does not mean that we now hate those who are not in Christ or continue to do wrong. God, when we were still doing wrong, considered us and sent His Son to bear the punishment for our evil. We too should love those who do evil, but we should not love evil.

Man is made in the image of God; his life is sacred. Animals are not, they are not equal to Man. It is acceptable to eat animals, but we also have a responsibility to all of God's creation as stewards.

FOCUS POINT

Our Christian world view uses a different basis for determining what is good than most of society today: e.g. Consensus Theory (whatever we agree is good); Constructivist Theory (we build our own good); Pragmatic Theory (if it works it is good), Epicureanism (what makes you happy is good); Situation Ethics (the means is justified if the end is good), Environmentalism (nature, not man, is good). (See Genesis 1, 2; Psalm 34:14-16; Micah 6:8; Matthew 7:12; Matthew 12:12; Mark 10:18; Luke 6:31; Romans 3:23, 5:13, 6:23; Ephesians 2:4)

Law and Politics – God the King

God's law is everlasting. Justice and mercy, truth and righteousness are hallmarks of how He reigns. God expects all people to obey His law, whether "Christian" or not. State law should reflect God's eternal law. Where God's laws are obeyed, men and societies thrive. Where man goes against what God wants, it doesn't end well.

Jesus said, "*My Kingdom is not of this world*" (John 8:36), and so God has established human governments to rule on earth. In the Bible, God worked through many forms of Government; from authoritarian Nebuchadnezzar (who bowed to God and who God called the king of kings) to democratic Rome (who crucified Jesus and persecuted His church). Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but we are called to serve Him as foreigners and aliens in earthly Kingdoms and nations. The Bible teaches us to seek the welfare of these cities and to pray to God on their behalf (Jeremiah 29).

The Bible teaches us to pray and honour our leaders (1 Peter 2:17), whatever system of Government we find ourselves under. We should be model citizens; modelling God-honouring behaviour to those around us. The only exception to this would be where state law requires us to break God's law. The Bible gives examples of situations like this, where His servants committed peaceful civil disobedience, either in private or public (1 Kings 18; Acts 5:29) and willingly accepting the consequence for their disobedience from the state.

FOCUS POINT

Our Christian world view differs significantly from most secular political philosophies: e.g. Marxism (overthrow the elite to be happy), Nietzsche's existentialism (become the elite to be happy), Utilitarianism and Consequentialism (do whatever makes everyone happy).

(Refer to: Psalm 1; Psalm 19:7-11; Psalm 119:1, 89; Proverbs 10:29,30; Jeremiah 29:7; Daniel 3, 6; John 17:14-19; Romans 13; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 3:10,11; Ephesians 6:12; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Titus 3:1,2; Hebrews 11:32-38)

Economics – God the Master

The Bible teaches us that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24:1). We do not own it, we are merely stewards of all God has given us. God also teaches us it is He who gives us the power to create wealth and we shouldn't forget it. The Bible teaches us the poor will always be with us (Matthew 26:11), but that we should do good to those in need, especially those who fellowship with us in church, and we should not take advantage of those who need to borrow.

We are taught in Scripture not to worry about income, food, shelter or clothing. We are taught to seek first God's Kingdom and righteousness and He will give us all we need (Matthew 6:33). It is not what we have that shows we belong to God, but what we do with what we have.

Jesus taught us to pay tax to the state when required (He even provided Peter with miraculous provision to meet His tax bill in Matthew 7). Furthermore, He taught those responsible for collecting tax not to abuse the position of trust, but to act righteously in all matters.

"When we truly discover how to love our neighbour as ourself, Capitalism will not be possible and Marxism will not be necessary." - Shane Claiborne, leader in modern monasticism movement

FOCUS POINT

Our Christian world view of Godly economics is very different to the world system: for example, Capitalism (every man for himself), Marxism or Communism (force everyone to share).

(See Exodus 22:25,26; Leviticus 25:35-43; Deuteronomy 23:19,20; Psalm 24:1; Proverbs 3:9,10; Proverbs 28:8; Matthew 5:42; Matthew 6:25-24; Matthew 22; Luke 12:22-31; Luke 19; Romans 13; Ephesians 6:5-9)

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History – God the Author

One thing is clear from Scripture: God has a plan. History is not a random series of unfortunate events. From Creation, God has been working His plan. His plan foresaw our rebellion. His plan included the curse and the law. His plan affected freedom from the curse and the law, through Jesus.

Throughout Scripture God foretells His next move before He acts. In this way He demonstrates the control He has over the progression of history.

“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.” - Proverbs 21:1

Rulers and Governments are not immune to God’s power. He will use whomever He wills.

“... in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them” - Psalm 139:16

Within this understanding of God being involved in history is the equally Biblical idea that man has the freedom to make choices. This is demonstrated most often in our ability to sin! The challenge for a believer is to hear God sufficiently and to obey Him faithfully. In this way we use our free will to follow His plan.

FOCUS POINT

Typically, this world view is in conflict with the prevailing secular world views: for example, Atheism and Evolution (history is a result not of God, but of random events), Deism (History began with God, but He’s not involved anymore).

See Proverbs 21:1; Psalm 129:16; Psalm 139:16; Acts 3:15.

The Christian world view presented here only scratches the surface. No matter the topic, the Bible is able to provide a comprehensive way to view and understand the world.

The Bible is not exhaustive, but it is sufficient.

The Bible says that in everything we do, we should do it as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:23). When we see the world as God sees it, we can begin to do that.

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Evangelism

Although the word “evangelism” is not found in the Bible, the word “evangelist” is (Ephesians 4:11; Acts 21:8; 2 Timothy 4:5). An evangelist is simply a person who preaches the gospel message. However, preaching the gospel is not merely for evangelists, but for every believer. In Mark, Jesus gives the great commission to the twelve, with the implication that all believers are called to continue with the work.

*“And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation”
- Mark 16:15*

God has given each of us a great privilege to share His message of salvation with the world. The aim of this section is to help you to learn the message we are called to preach, along with the method. Ultimately, it is believing in the message that saves, rather than our methods (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18). However, our method is also important and we need wisdom, anointing and skill to be able to communicate the message well. This teaching will focus on the message and on the methods of evangelism.

*“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”
- Romans 10:14–15*

The Message of the Gospel

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

Here Paul states powerfully that it is the Gospel that is the power of God for salvation. The word “gospel” means “good news” and essentially it is the good news that Jesus is the Lord of all. God’s intent has been that this specific news about Jesus, if believed, produces great change and power within people if believed.

It’s important then that we share the right news. We see that advertisements give you news but often they only tell you part of the facts to get you to buy the product.

- “Join the navy and see the world”
- “Drink Coca-Cola and enjoy life”

So many adverts only tell half the truth! Something that is half-true is actually misleading and therefore dishonest and potentially deceptive. To relate this to evangelism, we must be careful to not only share the convenient parts of the gospel and dilute its power for fear of offending people. As we will see, sharing only the attractive parts of the message can be misleading to the hearer.

Many false gospels out there are preaching half-truths, and in many churches the good news has been compromised.

Here are some examples of half-truths (in speaking to an unsaved person):

- God accepts you the way you are. (Why is this wrong? God rejects sinners because He is holy.)
- You are a good person inside. (Why is this wrong? You are a sinner and your natural default is set to preserve and keep yourself at the centre of your life, rather than God.)

FOCUS POINT

Sharing the gospel with someone is telling them the good news, but ALL the news – not leaving out the difficult portions!

The Gospel Has Two Sides

One side is the news that we are sinners condemned. We try to “do” things to get to God, but this does not please God.

The other side is the news that Jesus is the Saviour who loves us. He has already “done” the work for us to get to God.

Let’s look at these two points in further detail:

The News that We are Sinners (the “Bad” News)

Often, we try to give people the cure and the solution, but they don't know that they are sick and in danger. They don't know they are lost. Show them that they are sick and in need of a Saviour first.

We are Born as Sinners

Are people born good, with the ability to choose good and God? (Romans 3:10, 5:12)

- We are born with our natures corrupted by sin (Romans 5:6).
- We are born dead in our sins, without the ability to love God properly (Ephesians 2:1).

Failed God's Laws

In our unsaved, sinful state we try to “do” things to get to God, yet we want to remain in charge, or in control of our own lives.

- We always fall short of God's standard and glory (Romans 3:23)
- Deserving of punishment. We are children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3).
- God is entirely “Just” to send us all to hell. We all deserve punishment.

In coming to Jesus, people need to confess or admit this shocking reality that they are helpless guilty sinners in need of great mercy. We cannot DO anything to earn salvation. We are simply too corrupt and incapable of living a life pleasing to God. We need to be born again.

Methods of Sharing the Gospel

Although the message itself should never change, the methods and timing of how to share will change from situation to situation, and from individual to individual.

The SHARE Method

- **S**ay
- **H**i
- **A**sk Questions
- **R**eally Listen
- **E**nter Jesus

Say Hi: Find Something You Have in Common

- Sport
- Hobbies
- Movies
- Shoes etc.

Ask Questions

- Are you married?
- What do you do for work?
- What did you think of the latest movie?
- Do you think much about spiritual things?
- What is your concept of God? Positive or negative?
- Do you go to church? Why or why not?
- If you were to die tonight what would happen?
- How would you describe your view of God/ Jesus?
- A lot of people say that they believe in God. What does believing in God mean to you?
- What do you think about when you go to sleep at night?
- Can I share the thing I've found most important to me as a (dad), (mom), (boss)?
- How do you think someone becomes a Christian?

Really Listen

If you bring a friend to church or a Christian event, ask them afterwards:

- What did you think of it?
- Did it make sense to you?
- Have you made the wonderful discovery of knowing God personally?
- Would you like to know God personally?

Being a Christian in the Workplace

Being a Christian and serving the Lord in the workplace does not necessarily mean holding prayer meetings or using every opportunity to witness to your unsaved colleagues. We need a good theology of work, which means seeing work itself as a holy activity. The term “workplace” is used broadly here and includes stay-at-home mothers, housewives, students at university or school, etc.

One danger we face is to lift up “full-time ministry” as the ultimate goal for those who really love the Lord, and other types of work are places as, “second best”. As we will see here, that type of thinking is not Biblical. Everything (all) that we do is meant to be sacred and pleasing to Him.

God has Created Us to Work

In Genesis 2 God placed our first parents in a garden. God had given them responsibility to work in it and keep it (v8; 15). Work was always part of God's original design for Man. Man's original “job description”, given by God, was to be His co-regents ruling through having children, raising families and administrating and stewarding God's rule in all creation (see Genesis 1:28).

All this happened before, “The Fall”. Work then was to be an integral part of what it means to be human. Work is a privilege and a reward, not a punishment. It is something good, noble and holy. As the old maxim goes, “*we don't work in order to live, we live in order to work*”.

God's Original Intention Was for Us to Find Fulfillment in Our Work

*“So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot”
- Ecclesiastes 3:22*

God's original intent was for us to enjoy our work. God Himself modelled this for us. He created and worked, and at the end of each day of creation looked at His work, evaluated it and, “*saw that it was good*” (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 25, 31). God enjoyed perfect job satisfaction and fulfilment.

However, the curse of “The Fall” means that we often find more frustration than fulfilment in work. We have to deal with our own laziness, sinful bosses, sinful clients and corrupt or inept systems. Some work in soul destroying work cultures that do not value creativity or you as an individual.

But even with all these realities, when we are in Christ, God comes to restore His original intention that our work can be meaningful and that we can use it to glorify God and make a difference in this world.

God Modelled Work for Us

God modelled work for us in that He worked for six days at the beginning of Creation. Jesus proclaimed that “*my father is always at work to this very day, and I, too, am working*” (John 5:17). Manual work was highly valued in Jewish culture. In Jesus' short life on earth, He spent the large majority of it (30 years) in manual labour. He demonstrated to us the dignity of work.

Work and Rest

God worked six days and rested one (Genesis 2:3) as a pattern for man to follow. For the Jew, the seventh day, the Sabbath, was to be a day set aside for rest and worship (Exodus 20:8-11).

Although the New Testament makes clear that Christians are not bound by law to keep the Sabbath (Romans 14:5; Colossians 2:16-17) it does not mean we are to neglect this vital principle.

Work is vital to us being human, but so is rest, play and worship.

"We human beings are at our most human not so much when we work, as when we lay aside our work in order to worship"¹⁰ - John Stott

How Then Are We to Work?

Paul in Colossians 3:22-25, writes to slaves and their master and gives some vital principles regarding work. In our western culture, slavery has been outlawed but there is employment. These principles apply to any kind of employment or work environment and addresses two kinds of people:

- **Slave** - employee/student. A person under the authority of someone. We are all slaves in one sense. As Bob Dylan sang, "you gotta serve somebody"!
- **Master** - employer/boss/teacher/parents. A person exercising authority over someone.

For the "Slaves"

"Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" - Colossians 3:22–24

Work Obediently.

Obey your boss. As a Christian this is vital. We are called to have a willingness to do what he/she asks you in everything, without sinning or dishonouring your conscience. We must be those who should ask, "How can I make his job easier?"

REFLECTION

If you are in a difficult work situation don't just assume you need to leave. God might want you to stay. The fiery pressure of your work environment might be His instrument to shape your character in vital ways.

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¹⁰ Stott, John R. W., and John R. W. Stott. *New Issues Facing Christians Today*.

For the “Masters”

“By working faithfully eight hours a day, you may eventually get to be a boss and work twelve hours a day” - Robert Frost

*“Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”
- Colossians 4:1*

The instructions to employers are not as detailed as those given to employees. But from this Scripture we find some vital truths.

Masters Must Care for their Staff.

The command given is to care deliberately for those under you. This is because our Master in Heaven, God, cares for us and treats us with fairness and justice.

Many Masters considered slaves as mere property, but here Paul explains that each person deserves to be treated with dignity.

This heart for the weak or oppressed in society is found throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament God identifies with the fatherless, the widow and the immigrant (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 10:14) and even calls Himself the *“Father of the fatherless and protector of widows”* (Psalm 68:5).

Part of this care is making sure workers are getting a fair wage and have decent working conditions. Again, Old Testament Law protected employees from being exploited (Exodus 21:3, 9; Leviticus 25:41, 47-49, 54; Exodus 21:8, 11).

Even animals were protected from overwork (Deuteronomy 5:10, 14). Throughout the centuries Christians such as William Wilberforce, Elizabeth Fry, the Quakers and others have taken these truths and have sought to bring justice and fairness to the work place. As a Christian employer or person in authority, what is clear is that God wants you to prioritise people as important.

Masters Must Give an Account.

Paul reminds masters that, *“you have a master in heaven”*. Here we see that earthly masters will need to give an account to the Great Master for the authority that was given to them. In fact, all those who exercised authority will have to give an account for the way they led or taught or influenced others (Ezekiel 34:10; Hebrews 13:17; James 3:1). Did they exercise that authority in a Godly way, or in a way that was worldly and self-centered?

The profit is not the bottom line. Just as is true for the employer as for the employee, work is the place to glorify God and to honour one another.

REFLECTION

If you have had a low view of work and have forgotten that it is part of your ministry, take time to repent of your attitude. Ask God to empower you to find grace and joy in your workplace. Just as God anoints us to be effective for church-based ministry, so He is faithful to anoint you with wisdom and grace in your workplace.

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