

Study One

Earth

If you want to spice up the conversation at your next party simply bring up *the environment*. Soon, as the conversation becomes more animated, people will be quoting Rush Limbaugh or Al Gore alternating between accusations of *tree hugging* and *rape of the earth*. The language will most likely become downright acrimonious and the combatants will draw upon the most extreme examples that they can muster. Illustrations of *environmental wackos* (there are plenty of them) will be contrasted with the *rape and pillage extraction* crowd (there are plenty of them).

What is a Christian to think of all this? The issues are complex and the contemporary debate is often fueled by misinformation, misconceptions, prior commitments and political allegiances. The discussion for Christians becomes even more problematic when opinions about particular issues such as, logging, pollution standards for our air and water, ANWR, endangered species act, population growth, dams, off road vehicles, and alternative energy are formed independently of a biblical world view.

In this study we are going to tackle the issue of the stewardship of the earth. Try, especially at the beginning, to understand how the Bible teaches us to view our world. What does God think about what he has created? Make an attempt to develop a Christian and biblical understanding of the stewardship of the earth before you make application to particular issues.

Begin by reading the creation account in Genesis chapters 1-2. We will come back and look at a few verses in more detail. This foundational portion of Scripture is both simple and complex. While there is much to talk about in these opening two chapters of the Bible, read these chapters asking these questions.

- How does God feel about his creation?
- What is the relationship that man and woman are to have to the created order?
- In what ways are Adam and Eve distinct from the plants and animals?

Read the following Psalms. What do they tell us about the world that God has made? Does the natural world of sky, trees, birds, rivers, oceans and mountains have any intrinsic value in itself? What help do you get from these Psalms in thinking through this issue of the Christian's stewardship of the earth?

- Psalm 19:1-6
- Psalm 104:10-18
- Psalm 24:1-2
- Psalm 148:1-5

The current ecological crisis in our world is often blamed on Christians and a Christian world-view that has supposedly interpreted the opening chapters of Genesis in manner that has led to the destruction of our environment.¹ In Genesis 1-2 we find three crucial phrases; *dominion*, *subdue*, and *till and keep*. How we understand and apply these words will have a tremendous effect on our stewardship of the earth.

Dominion (rule) in Genesis 1:26, 28 we find two occurrences of this controversial word. The Hebrew word is *radah*, which means to govern, rule or have dominion. The New Living Translation renders the word *masters*. The NIV and NASB translates the word as *rule*. Most commentators understand *subdue* as a word that merely extends and amplifies the task of *dominion*.

British scholar, preacher and author John Stott draws three conclusions from these verses (*Involvement*, Vol. 1 p. 155)

1. God gave man dominion over the earth. We bear the image of God and we wield dominion over the earth and its creatures. Indeed, our unique dominion over the earth is due to our unique relationship to God.

¹ In 1967 Lynn White wrote an influential essay titled, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis* in which he argued the roots of our environmental problems should be traced to Christian thinking. In his essay White argues that the Christian understanding of *dominion* (Genesis 1:26) and *subdue* (Genesis 1:28) have led to the present state of affairs. White says, *Christianity . . . insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends . . . Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects*. It has not helped that more than a few high profile Christians have made statements that seem to bolster Lynn Whites suspicions. James Watt, Secretary of Interior under former President Ronald Reagan, was an outspoken Christian who on more than one occasion said that it was not important to have a strong environmental policy to protect our world because Jesus was coming back soon! During debate on the cutting of California Redwoods, then governor Ronald Reagan made his often repeated quip, *If you've seen one Redwood you've seen them all*.

2. Our dominion is cooperative. In exercising our God-given dominion, we are not creating the processes of nature, but cooperating with them.
3. Our dominion is delegated, and therefore a responsible dominion. The earth does not belong to us by right, but only by favour. The earth 'belongs' to us not because we made or own it, but because its Maker has entrusted its care to us.

Think about this word *dominion* or *rule*. How could the concept of dominion be misused by Christians in relationship to the environment? Can you give any examples?

How do John Stott's comments above help us to think about Biblical dominion and stewardship of the earth?

Genesis 2:15 says, *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden to till and keep it*. The garden can be seen as a metaphor for the earth. The word translated *till* is from the Hebrew word *abad* which can be translated, *to work, to serve, to be a slave to*. *Shamar* is the Hebrew word translated as *keep* in our text. It could also be rendered *watch*, or *preserve*. The NIV translates it, *The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it*.

What would it look like for God's people to *till and keep* the garden? How could this verse be twisted to suit various agendas and positions on the environment?

When you begin to talk about the beauty and sanctity of the natural world some Christians begin to get uneasy and wonder if you are about to begin worshipping nature. There is good reason for this concern. Many in our culture, particularly those who have been influenced by New Age types of thought forms, come close to worshipping nature or have actually crossed that line.¹ In Paul's words, *They exchanged the truth of God for*

¹ *Gaia* is the Greek earth goddess. In recent years there has been a great deal of talk about the *Gaia theory* by New Age devotees, neo-pagans, eco-feminists, *deep* environmentalists, and some animal rights activists. Essentially the theory postulates that the Earth is a living creature implying a kind of mystical divine power to Earth. Distinctions between the planet, people and animals are blurred. In this world view a tree, a baby and a raccoon may all have equal value.

a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Christians do not worship nature but rather the God who is distinct from nature and created our world. But it is this very beauty of the created order that reflects the glory and goodness of the Creator. Popular and controversial Christian author Tony Campolo has written a book whose title says it all; *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshipping Nature: A Christian's Call to Save Creation*. Respond to the following statements from this book.

Being concerned about the environment is a biblically mandated command, and acting to rescue creation . . . is a Christian obligation.

What must be made clear is that each of us has a responsibility to do something about our polluted and trashed creation right now. In anticipation of His coming, we must work today to contribute to the work which He will complete on the day of His coming.

Stewardship over creation means that we should treat creation with the same loving care as Jesus would if He were in our place.

We can tend to think of Christian stewardship of the earth primarily in terms of our immediate context: The Coastal Commission, SUV's, recycling, wetlands, etc. The most acute crisis environmentally, however, is in the developing world. Dr. Paul Brand, the famous medical missionary who has spent his life treating lepers in India comments that, *The world will die from lack of soil and pure water long before it will die from lack of antibiotics or surgical skill and knowledge*. How can we be involved in earth stewardship outside of our immediate context?

When thinking about our stewardship of the earth we must always remember that the biblical understanding of our world includes a profound sense of the sinfulness of humanity. Sin is selfish. Sin is greedy. Sin is shortsighted. Sin is destructive. John Stott writes. *At the root of the ecological crisis is human greed, what has been called 'economic gain by environmental loss.'* (Stott, *Involvement* Vol. 1, p, 165) The Christian understands this and sees that behind polluted drinking water, habitat destruction and the illegal dumping of toxic waste is greedy sinful people. How have you seen sin play out

in the destruction of our environment? Can you think of ways that your own selfishness and greed have affected your stewardship of our world?

Because of sin many people will do anything, regardless of who or what is destroyed, to earn another dollar. Christians should not be surprised when the local landowner or multinational corporation conducts business in a way that is harmful to the environment. As Christians we want to bring a Biblical world-view to bear on all of life. So Christians are people who agitate, write letters, vote and most importantly pray. Hopefully we are bringing our faith to bear on public issues like abortion, social justice, world hunger and poverty, pornography, racial relations and the environment. What are some of the ways that the Christian can be *salt and light* in this area of the stewardship of the earth?

Some Christians are hesitant to be referred to as an *environmentalist*. This is undoubtedly because of the excesses of many in the more extreme versions of the environmental movement. In light of our study, however, in the best sense of the term should every Christian steward be a biblical *environmentalist*?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Two Body

*Some glad morning, when this life is over
I'll fly away.
To a home on God's celestial shores,
I'll fly away.*

*I'll fly away O glory
I'll fly away.
When I die, Hallelujah by and by,
I'll fly away.*

*Just a few more weary days and then,
I'll fly away.
To a land where rejoicing never ends,
I'll fly away.*

How are believers to regard their bodies? Is the body something we forever leave behind when we die and go to heaven? Many Christians think that the immortality of their soul is what their salvation is all about. When we die, some believers suppose, our *soul* goes to heaven and that is the end of the matter.

The pages of the Bible present an entirely different picture. Therein we find a view of a *person* as a unity of body/soul/spirit. God created Adam from the dust of the ground and *breathed* into his nostrils *the breath of life, and the man became a living being* (Genesis 2:7). Adam is not living *in* his body, he is a living body.

Each of us is born embodied. It is not so much that we *have* a body, but that we *are* a body. For a person's body to die is therefore a tragedy of immense proportion. When a person's body dies, we say that the *person* has died.

When each of us dies our body will either decay in the ground or be immolated at the mortuary and reduced to ashes. The biblical teaching of salvation is not just that one's *soul* will be saved, but also that one's *body* will be resurrected.

The Book of Common Prayer contains a funeral service which testifies to the certain demise and resurrection of each of our bodies.

In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother <name>; and we commit his **body** to the ground; earth to earth; ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The Lord bless him and keep him, the Lord make his face to shine upon him and be gracious unto him and give him peace. Amen.

Such is pain of death. Death is not the end of life, but the end, at least temporarily, of embodied life. The resurrection of the *body*, therefore, is the great hope of the believer.

An overview of 1 Corinthians 15, the most lengthy passage in the Bible about the believer's resurrection, will help us understand how we should be stewards of our bodies during our present lives. The chapter is long and difficult to follow. Consider the following outline:

1. Paul argues for the historical resurrection of Jesus (vss. 1-11).
2. Paul argues for the resurrection of the dead. Because of the certainty of the resurrection of Christ, we can be certain of the resurrection of the dead (vss. 12-34).
3. Paul explains the *nature* of the resurrection body (vss. 35-58).

Let us examine, in some detail, verses 35-44. Paul follows his pattern in this letter of answering questions the Corinthians are in the habit of asking. Here the questions are, *How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?* Indeed, Christians of our era ask the same questions. *How can a decomposed body be put back together again?*

Paul answers by giving the reader several analogies. Let us think through these.

1. The analogy of the seed (vss. 36-38).

Paul is concerned to bring out not the necessity of death, but rather the fact of transformation. Death is not the end; death simply means change. In other words, the resurrection will involve continuity, but also discontinuity.¹

2. The analogy of different kinds of bodies (vss. 39-44).

Paul's analogy here is that just as God makes different kinds of bodies (animals, birds, heavenly bodies), so also he can give people a new, resurrection body after death.

The resurrection will involve transformation into a new kind of body suitable for its new form of existence.²

Consider the first two analogies together. What do they tell us about the resurrection of the *body*? How is this different from the belief in the immortality of the *soul*?

¹ Paul Beasley-Murray, *The Message of the Resurrection*, IVP, 2000, p. 139

² Beasley-Murray, p. 139.

Examine verses 42-44. What are the characteristics of the resurrection body?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

3. The analogy of Adam and Christ (vss. 44b-49).

This is the most difficult analogy of the three. Try to explain verses 45-46. What is Paul's teaching here?

Notice the main point of this analogy in verse 49. What is it?

Notice two truths we have learned about the *body* from our study thus far.

First we have learned that our bodies are God-given from the time of creation. They constitute, to some extent, who we are. Our bodies shape our identity.

Second our bodies will be transformed when they are resurrected, they will be made in the *likeness* of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:44).

Consider each of these truths. How do they inform your view of yourself? Of your future? What do you think it will mean to *bear the likeness of the man from heaven* (1 Corinthians 15:49)?

Compare Philippians 3:20-21 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-5. These two passages should help us understand 1 Corinthians 15.

What are the implications of the resurrection of our body for our lives here and now? It is here that our discussion of the stewardship of our bodies should begin. Since our bodies are significant to the extent that God will one day raise them to new life, how should we treat them now?

Examine carefully 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. With all of the above in mind, what do we learn from these verses about the stewardship of the body? Why are our bodies so important in these verses?

When we discuss a topic such as the stewardship of the body we might be tempted to superimpose our health and fitness consciousness onto the scriptures and then find in them the justification of an over-emphasis on the body. We live in a society which idolizes the body. Exercise, fatty-foods, carbohydrates and aerobic thresholds are a part of our vocabulary.

Actually, the Bible says very little about exercise and the necessity of cardio-vascular stimulation. If anything, Paul downplays this kind of activity saying, *bodily discipline is only of little profit* (1 Tim. 4:8, NASB). The Bible speaks much of gluttony (see Proverbs), but very little, if anything, of obesity. It says nothing about smoking, eating unsaturated fats, French fries or Krispy Kreme donuts. In other words, the sin appears to lie in the over-eating, in the unrestrained appetite, and not in the excessive weight one gains from the eating. Gluttony is a sin not because it makes us fat, but because the glutton has allowed his lust for food to become a substitute for God.

The writers of the Bible view the body in a moral context. Notice this in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Paul doesn't say, *Stay away from prostitutes 'cause you might get an STD*. Nor does he say, *Stay away 'cause visiting prostitutes will ruin your marriage*. Instead, he says,

Stay away from prostitutes because . . .

Compare 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 (note: the context is a chapter on the resurrection of the body).

Examine 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. What does it mean to *buffet* our bodies for the sake of our discipleship? Share with your group what sorts of bodily disciplines you practice. What is the spiritual impact of these disciplines?

Respond to the following quotation by C. S. Lewis:

Man has held three views of his body. First there is that of those ascetic Pagans who called it the prison or “tomb” of the soul. . . Then there are the Neo-Pagans, the nudists . . . to whom the body is glorious. But thirdly we have the view which St. Francis expressed by calling his body “Brother Ass.” All three may be—I am not sure—defensible; but give me St. Francis for my money.

Ass is exquisitely right because no one in his senses can either revere or hate a donkey. It is a useful, sturdy, lazy, obstinate, patient, loveable and infuriating beast; deserving now the stick and now a carrot; both pathetically and absurdly beautiful. So the body. There’s no living with it till we recognize that one of its functions in our lives is to play the part of the buffoon.¹

¹ *The Four Loves*, 1960, pp. 142-143 (chapter 5, paragraphs 19-20).

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Three

Money

It is well known that Thomas Jefferson had a copy of the Bible in which he cut out the sections that offended him. How convenient! If you were to make your own *cut and paste* Bible what would you leave out? A few of the Ten Commandments? Some of the more restricting sections that deal with food, sex or drink?

Many Christians would choose to extract the numerous portions of the Bible that deal with money, giving and possessions. The Bible talks about money and our relationship to money in great detail. In a single study we can hardly do an exhaustive analysis of the tremendous amount of Scripture dedicated to this topic. We can, however, get a feel for how God views money and our relationship to it.

Let us begin by looking at a few of the statements Jesus made concerning money. Some commentators would say that Jesus talked more about money than heaven and hell! His teachings and parables about money were extreme and shocking to listeners in both the first and the twenty-first centuries.

Read the story of the *Rich Young Man* in Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-30. Make some notes as to what you notice about the story. Do you see any differences between Matthew, Mark and Luke's account?

Matthew

Mark

Luke

Why did Jesus say it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God? What was the issue facing this young man?

Respond to this comment by Richard Halverson. Do you agree? Why? Why not?

Jesus Christ said more about money than any other single thing because, when it comes to man's real nature, money is of first importance. Money is an exact

index to a man's true character. All through the Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of a man's character and how he handles his money.

Think of your own journey of following Jesus. Explain to your Homegroup how your spiritual growth has informed how you handle money.

Read the parable of the *Rich Fool* in Luke 12:13-21. What is the point of the parable? Apply the parable to your life and be ready to give examples to your Homegroup.

Another hard-hitting teaching of Jesus is found in Matthew 6:19-24. What is Jesus teaching in this text? Is it permissible for a Christian to save, invest, and produce wealth in light of vs. 19?

We have only looked at a sampling of Jesus' teaching on money. Drawing from the Scriptures above and other statements of Jesus with which you are familiar, summarize the teachings of Jesus on money, wealth and possessions.

The Bible does not endorse a particular economic system nor does it give a detailed blueprint for handling our personal finances. At times the Bible's teaching on money even seems to be at odds. Sometimes money is seen as God's blessing.

The Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb and, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The Lord will delight in you and make you prosperous . . .
Deuteronomy 30:9

The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.
Proverbs 22:4

Elsewhere we confront a section of Scripture that appears to teach almost the opposite. Money, at the very least, is seen as dangerous. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-19. Paul marshals several arguments as to why money is dangerous. What are they?

Much of the wisdom literature in the Bible speaks of wealth and possessions. How do these Scriptures enhance the themes that Paul is teaching in 1 Timothy 6:6-19?

- Proverbs 18:11
- Ecclesiastes 5:10
- Ecclesiastes 2:17-26

If we are to be good stewards of the monies with which God has entrusted us we must consider our habits of giving. The longest section of the New Testament that deals with money and giving is found in 2 Corinthians 8-9. Here Paul writes of *giving, sharing, rich generosity, and gift*. The background to these two chapters is Paul's concern for the poverty stricken church of Jerusalem. Paul spent nearly ten years collecting funds for this body of believers caught in a devastating famine. To gain some background read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. What principles of giving and stewardship of money do you see in these Corinthian passages?

In 2 Corinthians 8-9 the word *grace* is found ten times. New Testament scholar Gordon Fee calls *grace* the most significant word Paul uses in relationship to his collection of money for Jerusalem. Make note of how *grace* is used in connection with the giving in chapter 8.

- 8:1
- 8:4 (NIV translates as *privilege*)
- 8:6
- 8:7
- 8:19

What is the relationship between the *grace of giving* (8:7) and God's grace in saving us (9:14-15).

Nowhere in the New Testament is the Christian instructed as to an exact amount or percentage of income that is to be given. What does 9:7 have to say about how much a person should give?

2 Corinthians 9:12 gives two reasons for giving. What are they? When you give do you think of these as motivations in your giving?

- 1.
- 2.

John Wesley and his brother Charles were the key leaders in the revivals that swept 18th century England. They emphasized personal conversion, a disciplined approach to Christian discipleship (hence the term *Methodist*), and a life of holiness. At the time John Wesley was one of the highest paid pastors in England. He also preached a great deal about money. At one point he suggested a three-point formula. *Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.* As one observer has quipped, *We appear to have concluded that two out of three isn't bad.* What do you think of Wesley's suggestion? If you applied this thinking to your life what would it look like practically? Give examples.

We have looked at a lot of Scripture in this study. Try to summarize what you have learned about the stewardship of your money. Where has your thinking been challenged? Where has your heart been changed concerning money and your Christian life?

Study Four

Time

I'm really busy, is a phrase as common to our era as *How do you do?* was to a previous generation. We are a “hurried” people. We work hard and play hard. As James Gleick writes, *We have reached the epoch of the nanosecond*.¹

The prize for busyness, we think, is the good life: health, wealth, a luxury car with DVD and heated seats, a good place to live, cable TV, travel, exotic foods and a membership to the local gymnasium. The price, however, is a frenzied life. A life so busy with things, activities, and *stuff*, that time for life itself seems to be in short supply.

What is a *Christian* view of time? Is time a commodity to be *spent*? Do we *invest* our time? Can we *buy* more time with a computer or a palm pilot?

Consider several biblical principles which inform our understanding of time.²

First, time should be viewed as a divine gift. It is God who created the rhythms of day and night, fall, winter, spring and summer.

Look over Genesis 1:3—2:3. Notice God’s establishment of life’s rhythms.

Compare Leviticus 23 which outlines the Jewish calendar. Notice the rhythm of Jewish life.

Psalm 74:16 says,

The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and moon.

What does this teach us about our view of time?

¹ James Gleick, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*, 1999, p. 9. A nanosecond is one billionth of a second.

² The first two of these principles come from Robert Banks, *Time*, in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity*, ed. by Robert Banks and Paul Stevens, 1997.

Respond to the following quotation.

Instead of treasuring time as a gift from our Creator—a daily present to be opened with delight and treated as special—we treat it as a resource from which we should extract the maximum amount as fast as possible. (Banks, p. 1038)

Second, we should understand our time as limited.

Respond to the following verses. What do they teach us about our view of time?

Psalm 90:10 The length of our days is seventy years — or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

Psalm 90:12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Compare James 4:13-15. What does this add to the above?

Third, our use of time should be informed by our understanding of our place in history.

The believer has a *long* view of life. It is not that we live and die and then the story of our existence is over. Instead, the Christian begins with a view of this life as one of preparation for eternity.

Compare the following verses. How should they affect our understanding of our time?

- John 9:4
- Ephesians 5:15-16 (compare translations)

- 1 Corinthians 15:58 (note context)
- Matthew 6:27-34
- Romans 13:12

What would you say to someone who used any of these verses to justify living life at a frantic pace?

Fourth, our time should be understood in the context of God's sovereignty.

Sleep is a God-given gift.

Psalm 3:5-6

Put another way, we may sleep because God is always awake.

Psalm 121:4

Doing without sleep in order to work harder is useless without the blessing of God.

Psalm 127:1-2

Sleeping too much or too often is seen in the scriptures as a self-defeating sin.

Proverbs 6:9-11

Since God is sovereign over all of history, and since he never sleeps, we are enjoined to punctuate our week of work with a day of rest. Compare the following verses. Is Sabbath-keeping only for un-busy people? What are your practices of Sabbath-keeping? How have these habits affected the rest of your life?

- Exodus 20:8-11
- Exodus 34:21

John Wesley, one of the greatest preachers of the eighteenth century, had a reputation as a very productive man. He traveled widely on his horse, preached the gospel to thousands in open-air gatherings, and organized a movement which became known as Methodism. At one point he asked his readers, *Are you determined to employ all your time in the work of God? Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly*

employed. Never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at one place than is strictly necessary.

But Wesley didn't want to push people to be *frantic for the Lord*. He went on to say, *Though I am always in haste, I am never in a hurry, because I never undertake more work than I can go through with calmness of spirit.*

Diligent. Never in a hurry. To which side of this spectrum do you err? What sort of commitment do you need to make to God with regard to your time?

Ponder and pray the prayer of Michael Quoist.

Lord, I have time.
I have plenty of time.
All the time that you give me,
The years of my life,
The days of my years,
They are all mine.
Mine to fill, quietly, calmly,
But to fill completely, up to the brim,
To offer them to you, that of their insipid water
You may make a rich wine as you
Made once in Cana of Galilee.

Study Five

Mind

Imagine this: You are a student in an English class at UCSB. In your latest paper, you demonstrate how Herman Melville used extensive biblical imagery in his classic novel *Moby Dick*. In discussing the papers with the entire class, the professor points you out, affirming that you were correct in detecting the biblical allusions in the novel. He then asks you,

How did you figure that out?

You pause and gulp. *Um . . . by reading the Bible.*

Really? the professor replies, with a slight smile. *Do you do this often?*

How would you respond? Would you have a response?

For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

Romans 10:2

Here the Apostle Paul is writing about unbelieving Jews. But could this statement be said today about Christians too? In the early 90's, two books loudly answered "Yes!" to that question. *No Place for Truth: Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* by David Wells and *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* by Mark Noll both lamented that the modern evangelical Christian church had lost its respect for and commitment to clear, strong theological thinking about the faith, and about life in general.

As Mark Noll states, *The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind . . . Notwithstanding all their other virtues, however, American evangelicals are not exemplary for their thinking, and they have not been so for several generations.* (p. 3)

Do you agree or disagree with Noll's assessment? Why or why not? Why would this be important?

Noll goes on to give the foundation of his argument:

By an evangelical “life of the mind” I mean more the effort to think like a Christian – to think within a specifically Christian framework – across the whole spectrum of modern learning, including economics and political science, literary criticism, and imaginative writing, historical inquiry and philosophical studies, linguistics and the history of science, social theory and the arts . . . the point is not simply whether evangelicals can learn how to succeed in the modern academy. The much more important matter is **what it means to think like a Christian** about the nature and workings of the physical world, the character of human social structures like government and the economy, the meaning of the past, the nature of artistic creation, and the circumstances attending our perception of the world outside ourselves.(p. 7)

In this study on stewardship, we want to explore the *stewardship of the mind*, or to quote Mark Noll, to explore *what it means to think like a Christian*.

To think “Christianly” does not mean one must become a brainy intellectual and be able to spout articulate, brilliant opinions at the corner Starbucks each week! As John Stott states, *I am not pleading for a dry, humorless, academic Christianity, but for a warm devotion set on fire by truth.* (*Your Mind Matters*, p. 11)

The noted theologian Karl Barth once remarked that one *should do theology with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other*. What do you think this means? What would this look like for you?

Read Acts 17:16-34. Note what stands out to you from the passage. For fun, take some time to imagine this scene at a coffee shop in downtown Santa Barbara.

What do you learn from Paul’s approach with non-believers?

In 1 Peter 3:15-16 we read,

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with

gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

What does it mean to *always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have?*

In his book *Your Mind Matters*, John Stott explains,

My argument now is that the great doctrines of creation, revelation, redemption and judgment all imply that man has an inescapable duty both to think and to act upon what he thinks and knows.

He then goes on to describe six spheres of Christian living where our mind plays an integral part in our experience. Take some time to examine each one of these and the implications for your own life. Write down some examples for each one, and include possible applications.

For example, in worship we praise God because he has touched our hearts experientially. We also worship him because he is truth, and worthy of our worship. It is good to acknowledge that worthiness in our worship.

Christian worship: to worship in spirit and in truth. Read Psalm 106 (recall God's faithfulness & character, and respond in worship).

Christian faith: to trust in the character and promises of God. Matthew 6:25-34. List reasons we can trust in the character & promises of God.

Christian holiness: to know God's moral laws, and seek to live them out. Romans 12:2, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:1-2. Why should we obey God's laws?

Christian guidance: to discern God's will for us. Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Psalm 32:8-9. Why do Christians seek God's will before making decisions?

Christian evangelism: to proclaim the truth and reality of Christ. Acts 17:16-34 (you read this already). What motivates us to share the gospel message?

Christian ministry (primarily leadership): to teach others in the ways of Christ and to serve them. Acts 20:28, 1Peter 5:2-3, Colossians 1:28. Who are to be Christian leaders? What kind of leadership are Christian leaders to provide?

It is important to conclude here by reminding ourselves that we worship our Lord in *spirit* as well as *truth*. In other words, we cannot worship God solely through our intellect. Rick Richardson, in his book *Evangelism Outside the Box*, says Christians *have often analyzed until we are paralyzed!* (p. 22)

On the spectrum of extremes between anti-intellectualism and hyper-intellectualism, where do you fall? Where does your faith need to grow more? How can you do that? How can your homegroup support you?

Many would say that in our postmodern culture, people today are more experience-oriented, hungry for community and concerned about *personal* but not *absolute* truth. Nevertheless, regardless of the trends, history has shown us that our faith needs to be founded on truth, and be lived out. We must know how to explain and defend our faith, and make it genuine. Then we will be God's witnesses to the ends of the earth! (see Acts 1:8)

As John Stott writes, *Knowledge is given us to be used, to lead us to higher worship, greater faith, deeper holiness, better service. What we need is not less knowledge but more knowledge, so as we act upon it.* (60)

Pray specifically for each other regarding the stewardship of our minds.

