

Summer Calendar

Teaching Date	Study	Memory Verse	Topic
6/5	1	James 1:17	God
6/12	2	John 14:6	Jesus Christ
6/19	3	John 14:26	The Holy Spirit
6/26	4	2 Timothy 3:16-17	The Bible
7/3	5	Romans 6:23	Sin
7/10	6	John 3:16	Salvation
7/17	7	Psalm 95:6-7	Worship
7/24	8	Romans 8:38-39	The Security of the Believer
7/31	9	1 Peter 1:15-16	Holiness of Life
8/7	10	Ephesians 3:10	The Church
8/14	11	1 John 2:28	The Second Coming
8/21	12	Philippians 3:20	Heaven

The “We Believe . . .” study was a collaborative effort. Mike Willbanks wrote study # 4 on the Bible and Bonnie Fearer wrote studies # 7 on Worship and # 10 on the Church. Steve Jolley wrote the remainder of the studies. A hearty thanks to proof readers Bonnie Fearer, Joan Fredrickson and Krista Frohling. Linne Avila has added visual spice to our text with her intricate and excellent art work. May God Bless us all as we study His word!

All Bible quotations are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

The Christian faith as historically understood for the last two millennia is confessional. We proclaim (confess) to believe certain truths about God and his interaction with men and women. There is a body of truth found in the Bible that is to be believed intellectually and lived out daily. “Faith” has an object. It is not faith in faith. The apostle Paul in a mini-creed says plainly, *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . . he was buried . . . he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

The New Testament writers taught that what we believe is not a matter of personal preference but of God’s authority. The apostle Paul warned the churches in Galatia: *If anybody is preaching a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!* (Galatians 1:9) Christians are instructed to *guard* this faith, *defend* it, *stand firm* in it, not to *drift* from it, to become *established* in it, and to teach it to the next generation. (1 Timothy 4:6, 2 Timothy 1:13-14, 4:3, Titus 1:9, Galatians 1:9, Jude 3, 1 John 2:27-28)

The writers of the New Testament described our faith in doctrinal terms. The word “doctrine” simply means teaching. In giving the qualifications for church leaders (elders) Paul says, *He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by **sound doctrine** and refute those who oppose it.* (Titus 1:9) Paul was concerned, and rightfully so, that *the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.* (2 Timothy 4:3 ESV)

It is important for Christians to know what we believe and why we believe it. We must know the difference between our faith and other religions. We must understand and be able to articulate why Jesus was more than just an inspiring teacher. We must be able to tell our neighbor how the God of the Bible is different from the gods of Hinduism. The world in which believers at Santa Barbara Community Church live is often hostile to the truth claims of Scripture. The early church faced similar antagonism.

Admittedly, the apostolic world was small and ours is not. Theirs, however, was a cauldron of conflicting religious claims within which the Christian movement would have remained tiny but for one fact: the first Christians knew that their faith was absolutely true, that it could brook no rivals, and so they sought no compromises. (David Wells, No Place For Truth, p. 104)

Sermon Notes. . .

Study One

We Believe. . . in God

The Bible and the Christian faith are first and foremost about God. The first four words of the Bible read, *In the beginning God . . .* (Genesis 1:1). The Bible proclaims his existence, describes his nature and ponders his interaction with the world and people he created. The Bible could be called the “Book of God.” Rick Warren, popular author of The Purpose Driven Life, correctly begins his book with a chapter, “It All Starts with God.” The first sentence says it all, “It is not about you.”



Both the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed begin with God.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth . . .
(Apostle's Creed)¹

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. (Nicene Creed 325 AD)

We will begin our “We believe” series with God. But who is this God we are talking about? It seems at the beginning of the 21st century that there are fewer and fewer atheists.² Everywhere you look people believe in “god.” The local High School teacher proclaims that God is nothing more than “Mother Nature.” Your next-door neighbor describes God as, “the man upstairs.” Cultural icon Madonna can say, “I go to synagogue, I study Hinduism . . . all paths lead to God.” Mormons describe God as perfect exalted man with literal flesh and body. Christian Scientists think of God as an impersonal Principle, Law or Spirit. Hinduism essentially asserts that we are all God. Borrowing from Buddhism, Hinduism and other Eastern religions, New Age devotees also say we that we only need become aware that we all partake of divinity. The term “god” can mean very different things to people. When Christians say that they believe in God,

Memorize James 1:17
Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

¹ The basic creed of Reformed churches, as most familiarly known, is called the Apostle's Creed. It has received this title because of its great antiquity; it dates from very early times in the Church, a half-century or so from the last writings of the New Testament.

² This is not to say that there are no atheists left. But like communists of the 20th century they are becoming harder to find.

we need to ask, what kind of God are they talking about? For the Christian the final source of our knowledge about God is found in the Bible. In this study we will examine portions of Scripture that describe the character of God.

Theologians will talk of the attributes of God. Attributes simply mean the characteristics of a person. George Bush is courageous. Arnold is strong. Einstein was intelligent. Shaq is huge. Dave Barry is witty. Mother Teresa was compassionate. What about God? What is he like?

Begin by listing some of the attributes or characteristics about God that come to mind. How would you describe God to someone? What does it mean to say "God"?

Before looking at the Bible think about your background. You may have to dig a little into your memory to answer this question. Where do you get your ideas about God? What sorts of influences in your life have shaped your thinking about God?

Read the verses below. How do they describe God? Is God static and passive or living and active? Is the God of the Bible personal or simply an impersonal principle?

- Psalm 42:1-2
- Psalm 84:1-2
- Psalm 117:2
- Psalm 145:1-21
- 2 Corinthians 6:16

Does the Bible speak of God as an emotionless deity or as a God who feels and responds?

- Genesis 6:5-6
- 2 Samuel 11:27
- Psalm 7:11

- Psalm 147:11
- 1 Corinthians 1:3-4

What other portions of Scripture can you think of that show God responding with love, anger, joy, grief, mercy . . . ?

Think about your own spiritual life. Do you treat God as a personal being or an object and some sort of impersonal force? The implications for our relationship with God hinge on how we think about God. How have you seen your understanding of God's character shape your Christian life? Be ready to share examples with your homegroup.

One of the strongest themes in the Bible is the persistent picture of God as sovereign.¹ Daniel may put this most succinctly when he says, *The Most High God rules the kingdoms of men, and sets over it whom he will.* (Daniel 5:21) Ponder these verses that speak of God's sovereign power and control. Do these verses make you uncomfortable or do you find security in them?

- 1 Chronicles 29:11
- Job 42:1-2
- Psalm 22:28
- Psalm 47
- Psalm 139:7-10
- Isaiah 40:22
- Ephesians 1:3-10

¹ The vast amount of Scripture that speaks of God's sovereign rule also asserts what is known as God's providence. While the term "providence" does not occur in the Bible it is a thoroughly Biblical concept. Providence points to God's preserving, governing and bringing to pass everything under his sovereign control. Providence tells us that the world and our lives are not ruled by chance or fate but by God who directs everything. Theologian Bruce Ware points out, "As goes the doctrine of providence, so goes vast portions of our entire doctrine of God and with it our conception of God's glory." (Ware, God's Lesser Glory, p.12)

In the Old Testament book of Job, God is largely silent for thirty-seven chapters. Job suffers, and his friends offer advice that is of little help. Then in chapter thirty-eight God speaks. Read Job 38-41 and enjoy this poetic picture of God. What do these four chapters reveal about the sovereignty of God? Where in your life do you need to apply the lessons of Job 38-41?

Read the Bible passages below as they are arranged under headings that describe God in the Scriptures. This is obviously a brief and selective list of attributes and Scriptural passages. Take notes and record your thoughts about God. Add your own verses and characteristics of God and be ready to share these with your homegroup.

God's Holiness

- Exodus 15:11
- Isaiah 6:1-5
- Psalm 77:13; Psalm 99; Psalm 111:9
- 1 Peter 1:15-16 What Scripture is Peter quoting here?
- Revelation 4:8

God's Love and Grace

- Numbers 14:18
- Psalm 25:6-10; 36:5-7; 86:13
- John 3:16
- Romans 5:8
- Ephesians 1:4-5
- 1 John 4:8, 16

Studying the character of God is far from an abstract exercise. To know God should have a profound influence on our faith. Respond to this statement by J.I. Packer.

God's love is an exercise of his goodness towards sinners. As such, it has the nature of grace and mercy. It is an outgoing of God in kindness which is not merely undeserved, but is actually contrary to desert [deserve]; for the objects of God's love are rational creatures who have broken God's law, whose nature is corrupt in God's sight, and who merit only condemnation and final banishment from his presence. It is staggering that God should love sinners; yet it is true. God loves creatures who have become unlovely and (one would have thought) unlovable. (Knowing God, p. 112)

What do these verses tell us about the character of God?¹

- 2 Chronicles 16:9
- Psalm 147:5
- Malachi 3:6
- 1 Timothy 1:17
- 1 Timothy 6:15-16
- Hebrews 4:13
- James 1:17

Having understood something about the character of God we may be tempted to think we have God figured out. This is dangerous.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9

J.I. Packer says, "We should avoid like the plague any talk that suggests that we have enlisted God on our side, and now have him in our pockets." How can we

¹ Theologians will talk of the "communicable" and the "incommunicable" attributes of God. This means that some of the characteristics of God (communicable) correspond to human experience. God is love. Humans can know something of giving and receiving love. God also has characteristics that humans can never experience (incommunicable). An example would be the God's omniscience or all knowing. This means that there is nothing hidden or concealed from God's knowledge. We have no ability to know as God does.

appropriately say that we know something of God's character and yet avoid a theological triumphalism that puts God in a box?

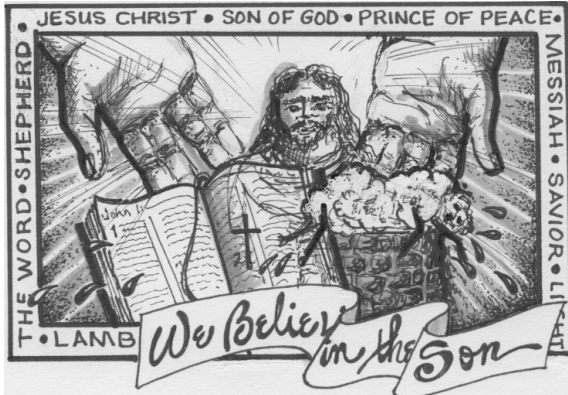
Think through the verses we have studied. Has your understanding of God's character changed? How has it come into sharper focus?

Respond to this statement by A.W. Tozer. What is your conception of God?

The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of hundreds of lesser evils among us"; and, "A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God. (Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, p.10)

Study Two

We Believe. . . in Jesus Christ



I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. (Apostles Creed)

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our

salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. (Nicene Creed 325 AD)

Muslims follow the prophet Mohammed. Buddhists trace their beginnings to Buddha. Christians owe everything to Jesus Christ. But who is Jesus Christ? After over 2,000 years the question continues to be asked. Every year, usually around Christmas or Easter, Time Magazine and Newsweek Magazine run cover stories on the person of Jesus. Beautifully produced television specials ponder the historical Jesus. The bestselling fictional book, The Da Vinci Code, has kept the question alive in an entertaining and conspiratorial fashion.¹ The famous Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, asks the question of Jesus' identity in a pointed way.

The most pressing question on the problem of faith is whether a man, as a civilized being . . . can believe in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for therein rest the whole of our faith.

Memorize John 14:6 *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

¹ The popularity of The Da Vinci Code has been staggering. This seemingly benign fictionalized thriller has had an insidious effect on many in their thinking about Jesus. Two books that are helpful in thinking through the historical dishonesty of The Da Vinci Code are, Breaking the Da Vinci Code, by Darrell Bock and The Gospel Code, by Ben Witherington III.

Let's begin by listening to the words of Jesus. As Jesus began his public ministry of teaching and healing he began to make shocking and startling statements about himself and his ministry. Eventually these declarations cost him his life. In reading the Scriptures below take notes and begin to formulate a picture as to the identity of Jesus.¹ Who is this Jesus?

- Matthew 10:40
- Matthew 25:31-33
- Mark 2:5-7
- Mark 14:61-65
- John 8:54-59
- John 10:33-38
- John 14:6
- John 20:28-29

John Stott summarizes for us.

So close was his connection with God that he equated a man's attitude to himself with the man's attitude to God. Thus, to know him was to know God (John 8:19; 14:7). To see him was to see God (John 12:45; 14:9). To believe in him was to believe in God (John 12:44; 14:1). To receive him was to receive God (Mark 9:37). To hate him was to hate God (John 15:23). And to honor him was to honor God (John 5:23). (Stott, Basic Christianity, p. 26)

Jesus always claimed a unique relationship with God the Father. Combining what you have learned about this relationship from the verses above, now examine John 5:18-47. How would you describe the connection that Jesus has with God the Father? What does this tell us about the nature of Jesus?

¹ In study #4 we will examine the Bible in more detail. For the moment, suffice it to say that the New Testament has excellent manuscript material that gives us a very accurate historical record of the life and sayings of Christ. F.J.A. Hort, one of the giants of textual criticism, says, "In the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests, the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings." (Hort, The New Testament in the Original Greek, p. 561)

In one of his more famous statements C.S. Lewis makes the issue very clear.

Jesus . . . told people their sins were forgiven. This would make sense only if He really was the God whose laws were broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. . . .I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, p. 55-56)

What would you say to someone who wanted to follow Jesus but did not believe he was God? Can you be a Christian believer and not trust that Jesus was in fact God?

Having already considered what Jesus said about himself, examine these verses where his followers pondered his identity. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The apostles began to reflect more on the nature and mission of Jesus. What do these New Testament Scriptures say about the person of Christ?

- Matthew 16:13-17
- John 1:1-2
- Philippians 2:6-11
- Colossians 1:15-20
- Colossians 2:9

- Titus 2:13
- 2 Peter 2:1
- Hebrews 1:3¹

Would it be worth being a Christian if you did not believe that Jesus was God come in the flesh?

Think of your non-Christian friends. Why is it so hard for many of them to believe that Jesus is God? Was it hard for you when you began to have faith in Jesus? What are some practical ways we can help those who stumble over Jesus?

The Gospel record is also very clear as to the full humanity of Jesus. Luke 2:52, tells us, *Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.* We know that Jesus had normal human physical limitations:

- Became tired (John 4:6)
- Needed sleep (Matthew 8:24)
- Got hungry (Matthew 21:18)
- Wanted water (John 19:28)
- Felt pain (Luke 22:44)
- Was restricted at times in knowledge (Mark 13:32)

Read the following Scriptures. Did Jesus have a sinful nature or did he ever disobey God the Father with sinful actions?

- John 8:46
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- 1 Peter 1:19, 2:22
- Hebrews 7:26, 9:14
- 1 John 3:5

¹ These are only some of the main New Testament Scriptures that speak of the deity of Jesus. It is because of this overwhelming evidence that William Bierderwolf said; "A man who can read the New Testament and not see that Christ claims to be more than a man, can look all over the sky at high noon on a cloudless day and not see the sun."

So is Jesus fully God or is he a very special human? This question was particularly perplexing for some in the early centuries of the church. Different groups and individuals answered in different ways that were often at odds with the clear teaching of the Bible. These early heresies helped the church to define what it believed about Jesus.¹ The early creeds and doctrinal statements were an effort to clarify what the Bible taught.² The orthodox view is that **Jesus is fully human and fully divine, having two natures in one person.** This is a marvelous and life-changing mystery! Why is it so important that we guard the full divinity and humanity of Jesus? What difference does this great truth make in your life?

What do Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses think about the person of Jesus? Where does their understanding of Christ lead them in their theology? How does the entire Christian faith hinge on a correct understanding of Christ?

¹ Some erred on the side of Jesus' divinity to the exclusion of his humanity. 1) Docetists taught that Jesus only appeared to be human flesh and die on the cross. God does not mix with the material world. 2) Apollinarius said that Jesus' human flesh resided in a divine mind and will. 3) Modalists thought that Jesus changed roles or "modes" (like a chameleon). When he was Jesus he wasn't the Father or the Spirit. When he was the Father he wasn't the Son or the Spirit. Others erred on the side of Jesus' humanity to the exclusion of his divinity. 1) Ebionites were a conservative "Jewish-Christian" group who believed Jesus was a very special prophet. 2) Adoptionists said that Jesus was born a mere man but that at some point, usually his baptism, God "adopted" this human Jesus as a special son and gave him an extra measure of divine power. 3) A man named Arius, and his followers Arians, fostered a movement that taught that Jesus, the Word or Logos, was created by God. Hence he was not eternal or perfect but rather created as an agent of God.

² Along with the Nicene Creed the statement from the Council of Chalcedon (modern day Turkey) in 451 makes clear the orthodox and biblical position on the person of Christ. Notice how the language of the statement is very careful to protect the Scriptural picture of Christ. *Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.*

When we ponder the divinity of Jesus (and the Holy Spirit in study #3) we must consider the nature of God as triune. Fritz Ridenour puts it succinctly; “Even though the Bible never uses the word ‘trinity,’ Christians teach the doctrine of the Trinity, namely, the one eternal and living God, always existing as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” (Ridenour, So What’s the Difference?, p. 18)¹ How do the Scriptures below describe this God who coexists as Father, Son and Spirit?

- Matthew 3:16-17
- Matthew 28:19
- John 14:16-17
- 1 Corinthians 12:5-7
- 2 Corinthians 13:14
- 1 Peter 1:2
- Jude 20-21

Are you perplexed by the doctrine of the Trinity? Again, Fritz Ridenour is helpful.

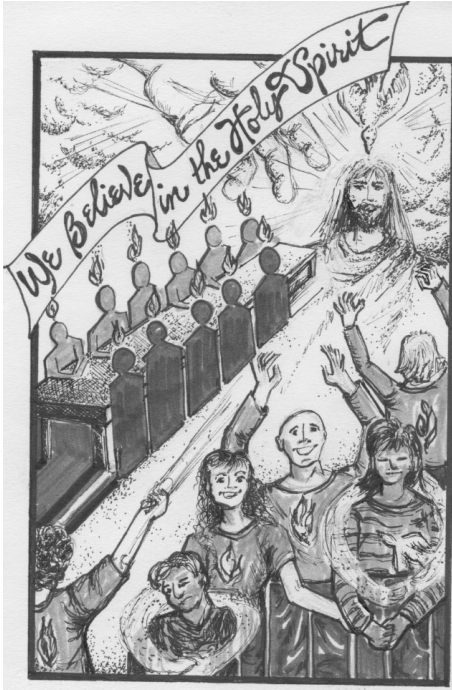
Despite the many Scripture passages that clearly describe how the oneness of God includes three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity remains one of the most difficult concepts for Christians to understand or explain to other people. How three persons can be one God called Trinity is a puzzle to natural reasoning. However, one question we might ask is, *If God is supernatural—beyond nature—why must he be understood only in natural terms?* The biblical believer accepts the mystery of God’s greatness, realizing that the real point is that God is not the “Big Fella” upstairs. As Wayne Gruden points out, “The Trinity is a kind of existence far different from anything we have experienced.” We should not be surprised, then, that in the Trinity there is an element of mystery that defies human analysis or understanding, because we are only human and God is God. (Ridenour, p. 20)

Think through this fairly lengthy (sorry) but tremendously important (you’re welcome) study. What new things have you learned? What difference can these foundational truths about Jesus make in your daily Christian experience?

¹ If I could recommend one simple and clear book to help Christians understand the difference between their faith and other religions and cults it would be Fritz Ridenour’s, So What’s the Difference? (A look at 20 worldviews, faiths and religions and how they compare to Christianity).

Study Three

We Believe. . . in the Holy Spirit



But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

Who is the Holy Spirit? Many Christians have no trouble believing in God the Father and in his Son, Jesus Christ. But when it comes to the Holy Spirit many are not so sure. "Spirit" is amorphous and vague. As New Testament scholar Gordon Fee puts it, "Listen to our images: dove, wind, fire, water, oil. No wonder many regard the Spirit as a gray, oblong blur and find him so difficult to understand and to relate to." (Fee, Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God, p.25) Orthodox Christians affirm that the Holy Spirit is the third person in the Trinity. The Spirit is the life-giving presence of God who affirms the truth about God, and creates and empowers the twice-

born community of people called the church.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

(Nicene Creed 325 AD)

Begin by making note of how you normally think of the Holy Spirit. Where did you get your ideas about the Spirit of God? What role do you see the Spirit playing in your Christian life? What are your experiences with the Holy Spirit?

Memorize John 14:26 *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

How do the Scriptures below instruct us to think about the Holy Spirit? Is the Holy Spirit a person or an impersonal force? Do you see any personal pronouns in these texts?¹

- John 14:25-26
- John 15:26
- John 16:5-16
- Romans 8:26-27
- 1 Corinthians 2:10-16

Reflecting on the New Testament letters of Paul, Gordon Fee makes the following observation. “The evidence indicates clearly that for Paul the Spirit is not thought of as “it,” but as “person.”² (Fee, p. 28) What are some practical ways that you can help yourself to think of the Holy Spirit as a person and not an “it”? What difference would this make in your daily Christian experience?

Consider the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit. Jesus talks most about the role of the Holy Spirit and his relationship to the Spirit near the end of his ministry as he instructs the disciples in John 14-16. We have already looked at some of these verses in the question above. From these chapters in John’s gospel, how does Jesus see the Spirit functioning in the life of Christians? How does Jesus understand his relationship to the Spirit?

In John 14-16 there are five references that refer to the Spirit as *Paraclete* (14:15-18, 14:25-27, 15:26, 16:7-11, 16:13-15). This difficult to translate Greek word gets translated as Counselor, Comforter, Intercessor, Interpreter, Helper, and Friend (Eugene Peterson). The basic meaning of the word is of one who is

¹ The word “spirit” is neuter in the Greek language. Context, however, often demands the use of the personal pronoun.

² There are 140 occurrences of “S/spirit” (*pneuma*) in Paul’s letters. Paul uses the full name, “Holy Spirit,” seventeen times. He designates the Spirit as “the Spirit of God” / “his Spirit” sixteen times, and as “the Spirit of Christ,” or its equivalent, three times.

called alongside to help. Michael Green points out that the *Paraclete* takes over the role of Jesus. (Green, I Believe in the Holy Spirit, p. 45) In what ways does Jesus point out that his followers will benefit from the presence of this *Paraclete* in their lives? Are the followers of Jesus better off with the presence of the Holy Spirit than the physical presence of Jesus? How?

In the verses below notice the fluid nature of language that talks about Jesus and the Spirit. What sort of picture do these verses present of this Jesus /Holy Spirit relationship? Do you find this comforting? How?

- Romans 8:9-11
- 1 Corinthians 2:16 (in light of verses 10-15)
- Galatians 4:6
- Philippians 1:19

Some Christians wonder if they really have the Spirit in their lives. What is the picture the New Testament gives of the believer and the Spirit? Is it possible to even be a Christian without the presence of the Spirit in your life?

- Romans 8:9
- 1 Corinthians 3:16
- 1 Corinthians 12:13

In Bruce Shelly's book, Theology for Ordinary People, he refers to the Holy Spirit as "the blue collar deity." (Shelly, p. 112) He does this because of all the work the Spirit does on behalf of the Christian. In the verses below list what the Spirit does on your behalf. Be ready to give examples in your homegroup of how you personally have experienced the benefits of the Holy Spirit in your life. **What would you add to this list?**

He _____ me. Romans 8:12-14

He _____ me. Romans 8:26

He _____ me. 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, John 16:13

He _____ me. I Corinthians 12:7-11¹

He _____ me. Ephesians 1:13-14

He _____ me. Ephesians 5:18, Acts 1:8

While the Holy Spirit is active on behalf of the believer, we also have a responsibility to respond to the work of the Spirit in our lives. How do these verses instruct us to enjoy the full benefits of the Spirit's empowering presence in our life?

You must _____ Galatians 5: 16-18, 25

You must not _____ Ephesians 4:30

You must not _____ 1 Thessalonians 5:19

Is it possible to live the Christian life without relying on the power of the Spirit in your life? Give an example from your life of attempting to follow Jesus **without** reliance on the Holy Spirit. Give another example of a time when you trusted and depended on the Spirit for Christian living. Why do we sometimes tend to live the Christian life on our own power?

There tends to be two extremes in the Christian life in our thinking about, and dependence upon, the Spirit. Some Christians, while they would say they

¹ Gordon Fee makes this observation about spiritual gifts: "One of the fads among evangelicals in the final decades of the twentieth century has been that of finding your spiritual gift. There was hardly a church or youth group that did not have such a conference or seminar. While I appreciate the motivation behind this movement, that each of us recognize and appreciate our role in the church, nonetheless the New Testament scholar in me winced on more than one occasion. I can not imagine Paul understanding what was going on at all! (Fee, p. 163)

believe in the Holy Spirit, go about living the Christian life as if he did not exist. On the other extreme are believers who assume that complete victory, seemingly independent of personal effort, will always be theirs because of the Spirit in their lives. To which error do you tend to fall? How can these errors be avoided?

Worship (which we will examine in study #7) is to be an integral part of the Christian life and the Spirit plays the prominent role leading the church in this praise. While worship of our God happens in many settings and situations, it comes into sharpest focus when the church gathers for corporate praise and adoration.

For Paul the gathered church was first of all a worshipping community; and the key to their worship was the presence of the Holy Spirit. . . . Perhaps most noteworthy from the available evidence is the free, spontaneous nature of worship in Paul's churches, apparently orchestrated by the Spirit himself. (Fee, p. 154)

What do these verses tell us about Spirit led worship? When we worship corporately at SBCC are you aware of the Holy Spirit's presence? Do you ask him to come and lead our body into worship?

- 1 Corinthians 14:26
- Ephesians 5:18-19 (Colossians 3:16)

Fee observes:

We need to note, first of all, that where the Spirit of God is, there is also singing. The early church was characterized by its singing; so also in every generation where there is renewal by the Spirit a new hymnody breaks forth. (Fee, p. 159)

Can you be filled with the Holy Spirit and not be a singing believer? How have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in worship and singing?

At a basic level the indwelling Holy Spirit confirms in the experience of the Christian God's presence and that the believer is in fact a child of God. Paul puts it this way in Romans 8:16: *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children*. Eugene Peterson's paraphrase renders Romans 8:16, *God's*

Spirit touches our spirit and confirms who we really are. Try and describe this experience to your homegroup. How has the Holy Spirit experientially confirmed that you belong to God?

Think through this study. What has surprised you? What new things have you learned about the Holy Spirit? How can you better incorporate the ministry and person of the Holy Spirit into your life?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Four

We Believe. . . in the Bible

The Bible is the #1 bestseller of all time and has been translated into over 1200 languages. What we commonly think of as one book, the Bible, is actually a compilation of letters, stories, histories, poems, prophecies, songs, genealogies, and laws written over the course of about 1,600 years by roughly 40 people. These human authors were kings, prophets, fishermen, priests, peasants, scholars, and doctors. The original documents were written in the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek languages. It is this conglomeration of writings¹ that we believe to be God's Word.



Do a quick inventory of your home (and car, office, etc). How many Bibles do you own? How many different versions?

In contrast, the Bible is a rare and precious commodity to many of the world's persecuted Christians. "Owning a Bible in North Korea is very dangerous," says a Bible League courier. "Without a trial, a person with a Bible can receive a 15-

Memorize 2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

year prison sentence. The life expectancy of prisoners is less than three years." Yet, hunger for the knowledge of God is intense and the Bible is eagerly sought after. "A woman came to the door and boldly asked if I had a 'book' for her," says a Bible League ministry partner. "I don't know how she knew I was there. When I handed her one of the few Bibles I had carried, she told me she had prayed for seven years for that moment. She stayed eleven hours — yes, eleven hours — just weeping in response."²

What is this book that is largely taken for

¹ The Latin word "scriptura" renders the Greek word "graphe," both meaning "a writing." Similarly, the word Bible comes from the Greek "biblia" which means "books."

² <http://www.bibleleague.com.au/nthkorea.shtml>

granted and stockpiled in the West, and is fervently sought after and revered in other parts of the world? If an unbeliever were to ask what you believe the Bible to be, what would you say? Don't settle for a simple answer like "God's word." What does the Bible mean to you?

One of the rallying cries of the Reformation was "Sola Scriptura," or Scripture alone as the only infallible authority and guide for the church. Many people are familiar with the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

But perhaps less well known is the second Q &A which reflects the Reformer's high estimation of the Bible and the connection it has to our knowledge of God and his will for us:

Q: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

A: The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

Why is it that we need such a guide? Consider Howard Rice's comments:

We cannot trust either our minds or our feelings to give us reliable instruction about the Christian faith and life. Without some trustworthy standard¹ by which to measure ourselves and our faith, we may very well begin to worship an idolatrous god of our own making. (Rice, Reformed Spirituality, p. 96)

What kind of "idolatrous gods" is he talking about? Or put differently, how might our minds or our feelings lead us in a different direction from God's self-revelation in Scripture?

¹ The word "canon", by which we refer to the totality of Scripture, comes from the Greek word *kanon* which originally referred to a rod or reed used for measuring. So the word came to mean "standard" or "rule" by which other things are measured. So the canon of Scripture is our standard by which we measure truth.

Although it was written over a long period of time by many different people, the Bible is much more than a random amalgamation of writings about God. It will not be fully understood until it is seen in its unity— that is, all of it points to Jesus!

Read Luke 24:44.

This is what Martin Luther meant when he wrote,

Holy Scripture is the garment which our Lord Christ has put on and in which He lets Himself be seen and found. This garment is woven throughout and so wrought together into one that it cannot be cut or parted.” (quoted in Eugene Peterson, Working the Angles, p. 131)

We believe that the Bible is trustworthy and authoritative because it is not merely human words and ideas, but rather, is a message to us from God himself. Review the following verses and consider what they imply:

- John 10:35
- 1 Corinthians 2:13
- 1 Thessalonians 2:13
- 2 Timothy 3:16
- 2 Peter 1:20-21

In this last verse, we are told that all Scripture is “God-breathed.”¹ (Some versions translate this word as “inspired.”) What does this suggest to you? Read Genesis 2:7 and John 20:21-22. How do these verses add to your understanding of 2 Timothy 3:16?

¹ Some scholars point out that a legitimate translation of the Greek could be “All God-breathed Scripture is profitable...” While this is true, Guthrie’s conclusion is solid: “It is rather more in harmony with both grammar and syntax to translate as the NIV and RSV have done [“All Scripture is God-breathed/inspired and is profitable...”]. Timothy is not therefore being informed of the inspiration of Scripture, for this was a doctrine commonly admitted by Jews, but he is being reminded that the basis of its profitableness lies in its inspired character.” (Donald Guthrie, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 176)

Does the Bible merely contain thoughts that are from God? Or do the specific words matter? Consider the following verses:

- Exodus 4:30
- Jeremiah 1:9
- Galatians 3:16
- Hebrews 12:26-27

Notice how the last two passages use reasoning based on specific words from the Old Testament verses that are quoted. The doctrine of verbal or plenary (complete) inspiration is well summed up by J.I. Packer.

The biblical words themselves (in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek) are to be seen as God-given...The Lord who gave the Word also gave the words. It was not just the writers' thinking but 'all Scripture,' the written product, that is inspired by God....Words, after all, are the vehicles and guardians of meaning; if we lose the words, we shall have lost the sense too. (quoted in LeLand Ryken, The Word of God in English, p.132)

What is at stake for the church in our understanding of Scripture's nature and authority? Does our understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture have a bearing on other areas of church life and doctrine?

Just as the Incarnate Word (Jesus) was both human and divine, so too is the written Word (the Bible). How do you understand the relationship between the human and the divine in Scripture? Do you have more difficulty accepting one or the other?

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17. What does this text tell us about the purpose and usefulness of Scripture?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

At the end of the day, “what counts is that the Bible speaks and is heard.” (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics IV, 1, p. 73) Certainly this cannot happen when the Bible is treated as a sacred but closed book. But does opening the Bible and reading it necessarily mean that it speaks and is heard? Think about what Eugene Peterson says. If he is right, how might this affect the way you read Scripture?

Reading Scripture is not the same as listening to God...By associating reading so thoroughly with schooling, we are habituated to looking for information when we read rather than being in relationship with a person who once spoke and then wrote so that we could listen to what was said...The primary practice of language is not in giving out information but being in relationship. (Peterson, Working the Angles, p.93, 95)

There is not one *right way* to read the Bible. Memorization, study, meditation, praying the text—these are some of the ways that Christians seek to listen to God through the Scriptures. How have you interacted with Scripture most profitably?

Do you have any devotional aids that have helped you to interact with the Bible? Do you have a specific time or place for Bible reading? What steps can you take to be a better listener to God’s voice in Scripture?

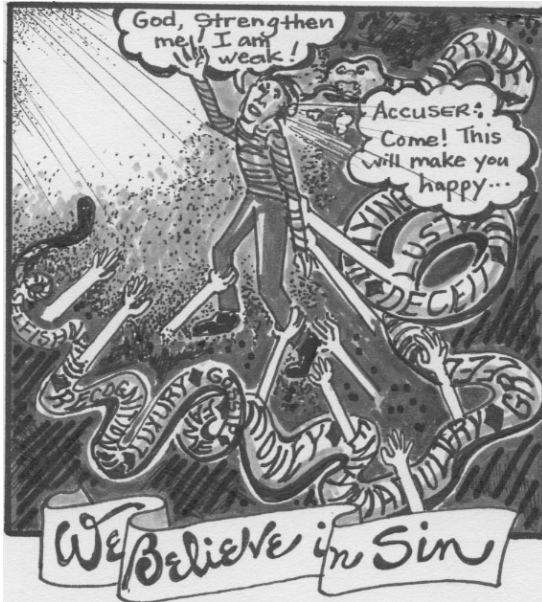
Read Psalm 119, the longest psalm and an acrostic poem¹ devoted to the greatness of God’s law. Read a few of your favorite verses from this psalm to your homegroup. Then as a group, write an acrostic poem about the Bible. Try to include some of what we’ve learned about it’s nature, authority, purpose, and usefulness, as well as what it means to you personally. (If your homegroup comes up with a good one, submit it to the Community News!)

¹ The first 8 verses all start with the first Hebrew letter, Aleph; the next 8 lines all start with the next Hebrew letter, Beth; etc.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Five

We Believe. . . in Sin



The Bible, from the opening pages of Genesis to the end of the book of Revelation, speaks of sin. Without an understanding of sin you cannot understand the human predicament, the Old Testament sacrifices, Israel's failures, the Prophet's sermons, God's wrath, love and grace, the birth and death of Jesus, the promise of new life and resurrection from the dead. You can not understand the Bible without understanding sin. We cannot understand God unless we know about sin; the subject is vital.

Unfortunately, learning about sin poses problems. We are not impartial and uninvolved participants in the discussion. What the Bible says about us is not particularly complimentary and we have the uncanny knack of excusing ourselves. Even if we accept the Bible's description of sin we tend to think it doesn't apply to us!

Begin by reading how sin entered our world and our lives in Genesis 3:1-24. This is the story of the "fall" of Adam and Eve. Read slowly and carefully to understand the full implications of the story.

Why did God say they would "die" (vs. 3) if they ate of the tree? (see also 2:15-17)

What happened when they ate from the tree? (vs. 7-8)

Explain how did this disobedience changed their relationship with:

- God
- each other (and by implication male/female relationships)
- their world

Memorize Romans 6:23
For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

How does the New Testament trace the sin of mankind to Adam?

- Romans 5:12-19
- I Corinthians 15:22

Many modern people living in Western nations have accepted the conclusions of 18th century Enlightenment thinking that human nature is basically good. Humanities problems are seen as primarily external. These issues can be solved with more education, political freedoms, and societal improvement. Optimism about our ability to improve and better ourselves independent of God is how many modern people think. The writers of the Bible will have none of it! What do the Scriptures say about the condition of our hearts? Is sin simply a result of an evil environment or is it fundamentally a result of who we are in the core of our very being?¹

- Genesis 6:5
- Psalm 14:1-4, 36:1, 51:5, 58:3
- Isaiah 53:6
- Jeremiah 17:9
- Ephesians 2:3, 4:17-18
- Titus 3:3

The 19th century British literary figure G. K. Chesterton observed that sin was the one Christian doctrine that can really be proved. Do you agree with his observation? When you look at our world does “sin” accurately describe the human condition? How could you explain the world situation (and the condition of your own heart) without the biblical idea of sin?

Paul’s letter to the Romans is one of the most systematic explanations of the gospel in the New Testament. In this letter the apostle Paul builds his argument

¹ Some may want to blame personal sin on Satan. “A central New Testament conviction is that the evil one gains no ground that we do not give him. Satan seduces only those who are in the market for seduction. Satan deceives only the self-deceived.” (Plantinga, Not The Way It’s Supposed to Be, p. 75)

for man's great need of salvation from God (the topic of our next study #6). Read Romans 1:18-3:26. What is the thrust of the argument in these verses?

- Who is guilty of sin?
- What are the consequences of our sin?
- What is the extent of our sin?¹

The Bible makes it clear that the conception of sin cannot be separated from a holy God. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23) Bruce Shelly clarifies.

. . . sin is not only contrary to the rules of God, it is an offense against God himself. Sin not only attacks the standards of God; it destroys one's relationship with God. The Bible speaks of God as the source of all good. He is the very definition of truth and beauty and goodness. All that he has made is good, and the rules he gave were made to keep it good. So sin is more than an illegal act; it is also a personal affront. (Shelly, Theology for Ordinary People, p. 50)

Humans have a tendency to compare themselves with others who are in a worse condition. "Well, at least I don't murder people," your neighbor says. Or we might ponder our life in contrast to a disreputable character; "I am not nearly as bad as _____." How would you respond to the person who does this? How would you respond to the person who says that they don't sin? What Scripture would you use to make your point?

At this point in our study we have looked at a fair amount of Scripture that talks about sin. But what is it? Think through the passages we have looked at. Include these verses below to help you to define sin. Write a definition of sin that someone who knew little or nothing of the Bible could understand. Be ready to read this definition to your homegroup.

- 1 John 3:4
- James 2:8-12, 4:17

¹ Wayne Grudem points out, "Every part of our being is affected by sin—our intellects, our emotions . . . our hearts (the center of our desires in decision-making process), our goals and motives, and even our physical bodies." (Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, p. 494)

How does the following description of sin help your understanding?

But what is sin? Its universal extent is clear; what is its nature? Several words are used in the Bible to describe it. They group themselves into two categories, according to whether wrongdoing is regarded as negatively or positively. Negatively, it is a shortcoming. One word represents it as a lapse, a slip, a blunder. Another pictures it as the failure to hit a mark, as when shooting at a target. Yet another shows it to be an inward badness, a disposition which falls short of what is good. Positively, sin is transgression. One word makes sin the trespass of a boundary. Another reveals it as lawlessness, and another as an act which violates justice. Both of these groups of words imply the existence of a moral standard. It is either an ideal which we fail to reach, or a law which we break. (Stott, Basic Christianity, p. 64)

The Scriptures we have looked at have lead Christian thinkers to use words like “total depravity” and “original sin.” This does not mean that there is no natural goodness or freedom remaining in the individual, but that all our good works are ultimately infected by sinful motivation and purposes. According to the Bible, sin has corrupted us.¹ Consider and respond to the description of this state by theologian Alvin Plantinga.

Corruption is thus a dynamic motif in the Christian understanding of sin: it is not so much a particular sin as the multiplying power of all sin to spoil a good creation and to breach its defenses against invaders. Corruption is spiritual AIDS— the mysterious, systemic, infectious, and progressive attack of our spiritual immune system that eventually breaks it down and opens the way for hordes of opportunistic sins. These make life progressively more miserable: conceit, for instance, typically generates envy of rivals, a nasty form of resentment that eats away at the envier. “Sin,” as Augustine says, “becomes the punishment of sin.” (Plantinga, Not The Way It’s Supposed to Be, p. 33)

¹ In his clever spiritual biography, Donald Miller is musing on the sad state of our world. There is a lot to be upset about. But finally he looks at himself. “I am the problem. I think every conscious person, every person who is awake to the functioning principles within his reality, has a moment where he stops blaming the problems in the world on group think, on humanity and authority, and starts to face himself. I hate this more than anything. This is the hardest principle within Christian spirituality for me to deal with. The problem is not out there; the problem is the needy beast of a thing that lives in my chest.” (Miller, Blue Like Jazz, p. 20)

A great deal of Scripture equates sin with death. Some of these passages we have already looked at. How serious is sin? What sort of “death” do these verses describe?

- Romans 5:12, 6:16, 23
- Ephesians 2:1
- James 1:13-15

How would you communicate the biblical truths we have learned about in this study to someone who believed in the inherent goodness of people?

Without an understanding of sin the gospel message of new life in Christ is meaningless.

In short, for the Christian church to ignore, euphemize, or otherwise mute the lethal reality of sin is to cut the nerve of the gospel. For the sober truth is that without full disclosure on sin, the gospel of grace becomes impertinent, unnecessary, and finally uninteresting. (Plantinga, p.199)

Spend a few minutes reviewing the big picture of what we have learned in this study. How has it affected your thinking about your Christian life? What about your relationship to our world and people who do not have faith in Christ? How can we speak intelligibly to the un-churched about “sin”?

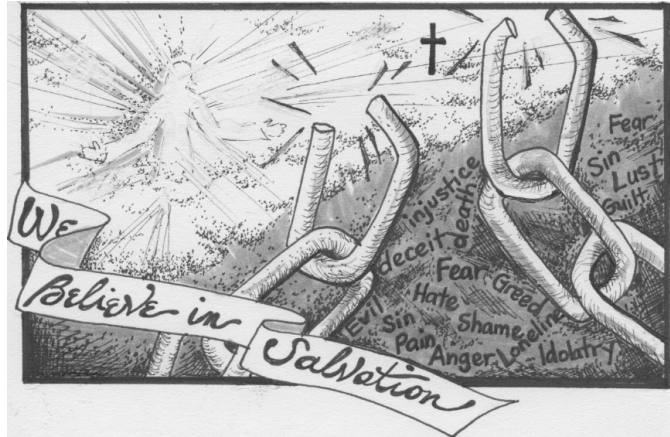
Sermon Notes. . .

Study Six

We Believe. . . in Salvation!

“Please—Aslan,” said Lucy, “can anything be done to save Edmund?”

“All shall be done,” said Aslan.
(C. S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, p. 124)



When you have a deadly disease, as we examined in study #5, you want a cure. We have seen that our deepest problem is sin and the consequent alienation and separation from God. The remedy for this problem, according to the Bible, is salvation from God.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:16-17

John Stott says,

Christianity is a rescue religion. It declares that God has taken the initiative in Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins. This is the main theme of the Bible. (Stott, Basic Christianity, p. 81)

Read these verses that speak of God's salvation. Notice the language and images of Scripture. Begin to take some preliminary notes. What are we saved from? Who does the saving? What else do you notice about this salvation?

- Matthew 1:21
- Luke 19:10
- John 3:16-17

Memorize John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

- Acts 4:12
- Romans 1:16, 5:9
- Timothy 1:15
- 1 Peter 1:9
- Revelation 7:10

When someone gets married his or her social status moves from being “single” to “married.” If you change your country of citizenship your national identity changes. In the United States when you turn eighteen years old your legal status changes from being a “minor” to being an “adult.” In the Bible when an individual comes into a renewed relationship with God his spiritual status changes. The Scriptures use a variety of words and pictures to describe this new spiritual standing. How are Christians described in the New Testament? What do these verses tell us about our salvation? This is only a partial list. What other descriptions can you think of? With which of these words and pictures do you most closely identify? Why?

- John 3:3, 1 Peter 1:23
- Acts 11:29
- Acts 19:9
- Ephesians 1:1, 13
- Philippians 3:20
- Colossians 1:13
- 1 Peter 1:1
- 1 Peter 2:9-10

Read Ephesians 2:4-9 and ponder the fact that we are saved by “grace.” How many times does the word grace show up in these verses? How would you define grace?

John Newton, a British slave trader who found God's grace, wrote in 1779 what some consider the most famous song in the English language—"Amazing Grace." Ponder the words. What is so amazing about God's grace? How can you identify with these words?

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

Respond to this statement by Fritz Ridenour. Do you know people who think like this? Have you ever thought like this?

Many people, however, have difficulty accepting the concept that they cannot earn God's favor. Deep down, they believe they can earn salvation by being "good enough." Also at work is the popular and widespread idea that "Somebody else shouldn't be punished for my mistakes." That kind of thinking sounds noble, humble and honest. Actually this reasoning stems from pride, from not wanting to admit that no one can attain the standard of a holy God. For us to say that we can earn our own salvation is to say that God is something less than perfectly holy, and this is to say that God is less than God. (Ridenour, p. 26)

The apostle Paul begins his letter to the Romans with bad news. For the first three and a half chapters he builds his case that all men and women are in trouble because of their sin and rebellion. Just when we are at the edge of despair, he switches gears and begins to explain the good news of God's provision of salvation for sinners. Read and study Romans 3:21-31. Define the meaning and concepts for each of these very important words that describe this

transaction of salvation. Write down any questions you have about this passage. As a group, help each other answer these questions and clarify the passage.

- Righteousness
- Faith
- Justified
- Redemption
- Sacrifice of atonement

The central image of the Christian faith is the cross of Christ. But what was accomplished by this gruesome death? Was Jesus simply an example of altruistic suffering? Was it all a tragic mistake? Or, did Jesus' death provide a ransom that appeased the wrath of a holy God?

- 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
- Ephesians 5:2
- Hebrews 9:28
- 1 Peter 3:18

Pondering the cross of Christ, John Stott observes that the cross points to three truths—about ourselves, about God and about Jesus Christ.

First, our sin must be extremely horrible. Nothing reveals the gravity of sin like the cross . . . Secondly, God's love must be wonderful beyond comprehension. God could quite justly have abandoned us to our fate. He could have left us alone to reap the fruit of wrongdoing and to perish in our sins . . . Thirdly, Christ's salvation must be a free gift. He "purchased" it for us at the high price of his own life-blood. So what is there left for us to pay? Nothing! (Stott, The Cross of Christ, p. 83)

How would you explain this salvation that is available through Christ to someone who knew little or nothing about the Bible? What language and concepts are essential to the gospel message?

Can you think of any illustrations or analogies that would help you to explain what happened on the cross?

Study Seven

We Believe. . . in Worship



Ralph Waldo Emerson was a 19th century writer who began the Transcendentalism movement. Though not a follower of Jesus Christ, Emerson had something to say about worship. It rings true:

A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will come out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.

Emerson was right. As human beings, we have that capacity to praise or submit to someone or something greater than us. We ascribe worth and value to people or things. This is, in its most generic sense, worship.

As Christians, we believe that the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is alone worthy of our worship.

So then, what, exactly, is worship? Is it the various *forms* of expression of faith? Is it a *feeling*, an *action*? Psalm 100 may give us some clues.

*Shout for joy to the Lord,
All the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness;
Come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
We are his people, the sheep of his
pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving
And his courts with praise;
Give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
His faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Memorize Psalm 95:6-7

*Come, let us bow down
and worship, let us kneel
before the Lord our
Maker; for he is our God
and we are the people of
his pasture, the flock
under his care.*

Before going further in this study, take a moment to come up with a preliminary definition of worship with the above Psalm in mind. Share your definitions as a group.

Now, think of some of those people in the Bible that you would consider to be “all-star worshippers.” Who did you name, and what is it about their worship that stands out to you? Share the portions of scripture that illustrate these qualities.

As we consider worship together, let’s look at some key characteristics of worship and what it means to be worshipping people.

We were created for worship.

Imagine the time when Adam walked in the cool of the evenings with God, in a perfect garden with flawless delights all around him. His fellowship with God was pure -- unstained by any betrayal, guile or sin. Our best conversations, our most intimate friendships, our deepest loves, would pale by comparison. What would it have been like? That unbroken fellowship with the one who created us, the one who knows and loves us more intimately than any other, are blessings God intended for us. Beyond that, it is the *purpose* for which he intended us. He intended us for worship.

Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22. List all of the things you see in these verses that reveal God’s heart toward his people.

Now (within the same text) list the ways we are to respond in worship.

Do you find anything that you would like to add to your initial definition of worship?

Sin misdirects worship.

When sin entered the world, worship was affected—from Adam to us. Our fall into sin didn't take away our urge to worship, but it did misdirect our worship. We still bow down and surrender ourselves, but now we surrender ourselves to things and beings less than God.

In one of the more tragic ironies in Scripture, Moses is up on Mt. Sinai, meeting face to face with the Lord. God gives Moses 10 commandments for the Israelites to live by, so it will go well for them. His first rule for the people is found in Exodus 20:2-4:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God....”

At the very time God is issuing this commandment, the Israelites are engaged in breaking it. Read Exodus 32:1-6.

In what ways did sin misdirect the worship of the Israelites?

In what ways does sin misdirect your worship? Be specific.

Think about various trends in the corporate worship of the evangelical church at large, do you see areas where sin has misdirected corporate worship? If so, how can we guard against it at SBCC?

Worship is a lifestyle.

Worship is a choice. Sometimes it is a choice that flows out of joy; sometimes it is a disciplined response to what we know to be true about God, even in the midst of difficulties.

Consider Habakkuk 3:17-18

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are
no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Choosing to worship God, regardless of our circumstances, is pleasing to Him.
Those choices, made consistently, add up to a lifestyle.

Think of a time in your life when worship didn't originate in joy, but came as an
act of discipline. Did that change your perspective on worship? If so, how?

What habits can you develop to help your everyday activities become an act of
worship?

Read John 4:4-24. In the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman,
what stands out to you in their discussion of worship?

What do you think it means to be "true worshippers", ones who "worship in Spirit
and in truth"?

Respond to the following statement:

Worship is revelation and response. In our day of strong expository
preaching, we have become better at hearing than doing the Word. Hear
the Word – receive! Do the Word – respond! Worship means to respond
to God. If we fail to respond, worship has probably not occurred. (Ronald
Allen & Gordon Borrer, Worship, p. 39)

Worship is private *and* public

Thomas Jefferson once said that “worship requires only a man and God.” While he was a brilliant founding father, Jefferson missed a key part of the Christian life.

As Christians we believe that worship is our relational response to God and all that he reveals of himself to us. This begins in private. But God calls us to a rhythm of spiritual life where we move from private devotion to public adoration, and back again. Importantly, *our private worship affects our gathered worship.*

In light of that thought, what (if any) changes would you make to your private devotional life?

Consider the following:

What then shall we say brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be used for the strengthening of the church. 1 Corinthians 14:26

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:25

Two directives are given in these verses: Keep meeting together, and come prepared to worship!

Respond to the following statement:

Worship is not pulled out of people, but it flows out because people have already put something in. (Ogden, Greg, Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God, p. 150)

Does this quote change how you think about the role of worship leaders? If so, how?¹

¹ Matt Redman, author of many of the worship songs we sing, suggests that instead of being called “worship leaders,” perhaps they should be called “lead worshippers.”

Worship is more than a dress-rehearsal.

Have you heard that phrase used before, that our worship here on earth is a dress-rehearsal for eternity? It is an accurate statement in that we get a taste of heaven as we worship well here on earth. But it is just a taste. Eugene Peterson wrote, "Worship does not satisfy our hunger for God – it whets our appetite." (Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction, p.139)

There is so much more to look forward to.

Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. Hebrews 13:12

There is, however, a big "in the meantime" to attach here, because worship is more than longing; it is more than rehearsing for the final act. It is living all-out for Jesus right now.

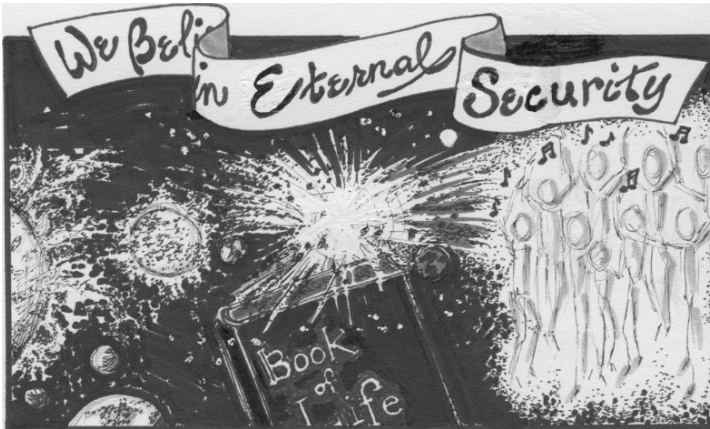
What is the connection between obedience and worship? How does this play itself out in your life?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith....
Hebrews 12:1-2

What a great opportunity to worship together as a homegroup!

Study Eight

We Believe. . . in Eternal Security



There are times in the lives of most Christians when we ask, “How can we know for sure that we are saved?” We wonder if our sins (which seem stubbornly consistent) are truly forgiven. Our spiritual confidence that we will really inherit eternal life may ebb. It doesn’t help that much of our experience in the world is filled with broken

promises, friends who betray and security that is fleeting. We wonder if we can really count on God to save us. In this study we will examine a biblical teaching that is referred to as, eternal security, assurance of faith or perseverance of the saints.¹ The assurance of the believer is the biblical teaching that the Christian, in spite of personal sin, is irrevocably a child of God and destined for eternal life in heaven. Consider how the Westminster Confession of Faith describes the Christian’s security.

They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit can neither totally or finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved.

(Westminster Confession of Faith – 1647)

Begin our study of Scripture with the words of Jesus. Read John 10:25-30. This is at the end of Jesus’ very famous description of himself as the “good shepherd” (John 10:14). What are the four ways that Jesus declares the security of the believer?

Memorize: Romans 8:38-39 *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

¹ The doctrine of the assurance of the believer was given a great deal of attention by Saint Augustine (4th century) and then again during the 16th century Reformation. John Calvin and Martin Luther were particularly strong in their teaching and preaching on this topic. The Roman Catholic Church, with doctrines of merit and purgatory, rejected this teaching that a Christian may be certain he is saved. Some Protestants (Arminians) believe that a believer may apostatize and forfeit his salvation.

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

This theme of assurance is found in many of the teachings of Jesus. Read John 6:35-40.

According to Jesus, on what does our security for salvation depend?

In both John 10:28 and John 6:40 Jesus ties assurance of salvation to eternal life.¹ Can we have any real security with God without a trust in eternal life with him? How does the promise of eternal life with God affect how you think and live your life on a daily basis? What practical difference does this teaching make in your life?

Romans 8:28-39 is a central passage in the Bible that talks of the believer's security and confidence in our relationship with God. Romans 8 is the climax of Paul's long explanation of our sin, need for salvation and consequent victory and assurance to be found in Christ. Read and ponder Romans 8:28-39.

In these verses Paul asks four questions. What are the questions and how are each of these questions answered?

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

¹ John 3:16, John 3:36 and John 5:24 all proclaim this same assurance of eternal life.

Many believers suffer from a deflated spiritual self-esteem. They are nervous about God's love. They wonder if he will be consistent in carrying out his promises. How would Romans 8:28-39 be of comfort to the believer who is struggling with these types of thoughts? How are these verses a comfort to you?

The 16th Century Swiss Reformer, John Calvin pointed out that true foundation of spiritual confidence is "a firm and certain persuasion of God's benevolence towards us." Calvin seems to be echoing the sentiment of Romans 8:31, *If God is for us, who can be against us?* To understand and rest in our eternal security the believer must personally internalize God's gracious acceptance of us in Christ. Read Romans 8:16. How have you experienced an internal confidence of salvation from the Holy Spirit? What would you say to a believer that has no such confidence?

William Perkins was a Puritan pastor who lived at the very end of the 16th century (he died in 1602).¹ Perkins, like many Puritan pastors, was concerned that believers be convinced of their salvation. They believed that a true conversion persuaded the conscience of the Christian and that the result was assurance. Read and respond to this statement by William Perkins. You may have to read it several times slowly. Puritan writing can be a bit ponderous. What is Perkins saying? Do you agree?

Infallible certainty of pardon of sin and life everlasting is the property of every renewed conscience . . . The principle agent and beginner thereof is the holy Ghost, enlightening the mind and conscience with spiritual and divine light: and the instrument in this action, is the ministry of the Gospel, whereby the word of life is applied in the name of God to the person of every hearer. And this certainty is by little and little conceived in a form of reasoning or practical syllogism framed in the mind of the holy Ghost on this manner: Everyone that believes is the child of God: But I do believe: Therefore I am a child of God. (quoted in, Ten Great Ideas From Church History, Mark Shaw, p. 86)

¹ The Puritans, while a diverse movement, sought to complete the work of the Reformation, purify the Church of England of elements that they thought were contrary to Biblical teaching. William Perkins was part of a wing of the Puritan movement that advocated staying in the Church of England and worked to purify it with passive resistance. Perkins wrote a number of best selling books to promote this reform, along with ground breaking work on the expository preaching of the Bible. In 1596 Perkins, a long time bachelor, married a widow with seven children! He died six years later at the age of forty-four.

Thus far we have examined two main passages (John 10:25-30 and Romans 8:28-39) that affirm the eternal security of the believer. Read the Scriptures below. How do they add to what we have already learned? What is the key word in each one of these passages?

- Galatians 4:6
- Ephesians 1:13
- Philippians 1:6
- 2 Timothy 1:12
- 1 John 5:13

In spite of all these wonderful Scriptural affirmations about the security of the Christian, most of us know people who at one time claimed to be believers, participated in the life of the church, read their Bible, participated in homegroup and now say that they no longer believe. The New Testament talks about individuals who appeared to follow Christ for a season. Judas was a disciple of Jesus for three years. Paul mentions three people, Hymeneus, Alexander and Philetus (1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 2:17) *who wandered away from the truth*. In addition, there are passages that speak of people falling away from the truth (Hebrews 6:4-6) and of an unpardonable sin (Matthew 12:31). How does the reality of people we know who have left the faith and these biblical warnings affect the teaching on the security of the believer?

How would you answer the person who says, “If the perseverance of the saints is true, then why not go out and sin all you want, since you will be saved in the end anyway?”

How does the security we have in Christ affect your Christian life? Does it give you a confidence and motivation for further discipleship or does it make you lazy or lethargic in your pursuit of spiritual growth?

Study Nine

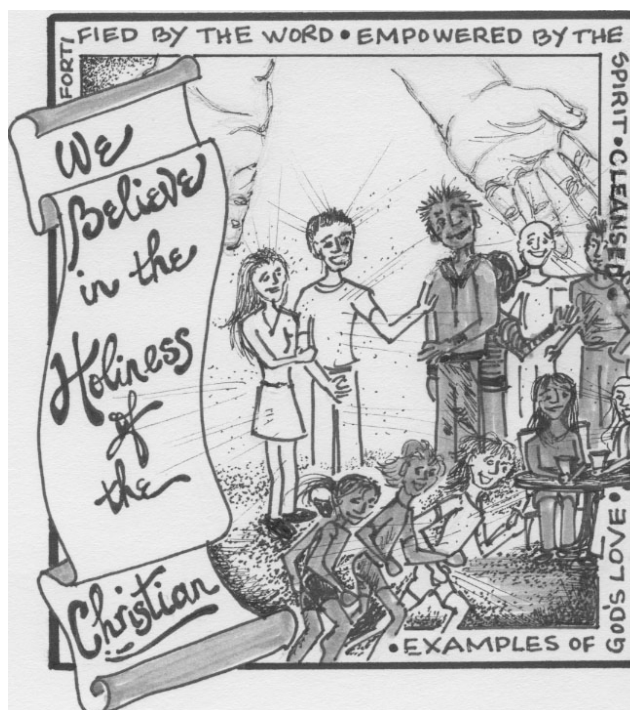
We Believe. . . in Holiness of Lifestyle

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self; created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22-24

. . . to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy. 1 Corinthians 1:2

Repentance is the porch of religion, Faith is the door of religion, Holiness is religion itself.

John Wesley



We are created to become like Christ. When we trust in Jesus for salvation, a process of transformation begins in our life. This process is referred to as sanctification. The word *sanctification* is related to the term *holiness*. To sanctify means to make holy. Unfortunately, words like holiness and sanctification repel us because they sound so religious! After all, who wants to be a “holy-sanctified-saint?” When we hear “holy” we may think of someone who has an obnoxious attitude of spiritual superiority. We often confuse sanctified with sanctimonious. As a result, we tend to associate holiness and sanctification with unattractive religious people. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Scriptures below speak of the importance of growing in relationship with God and developing spiritual maturity. What insights do these verses give about growing up in our Christian lives? Is spiritual maturity and a holy lifestyle to be the norm for all Christians?

- Ephesians 4:12-15
- Colossians 1:28
- Hebrews 5:11-6:1

Memorize: 1 Peter 1:15-16 *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy because I am holy.”*

Think about your Christian life and relationship with Christ. When you think of a spiritually mature person what characteristics come to mind? Does the idea of pursuing holiness sound attractive or like a horrible burden to you? Explain why.

Ponder and respond to this statement by Rick Warren.

God's ultimate goal for your life on earth is not comfort, but character development. He wants you to grow up spiritually and become like Christ. Becoming like Christ does not mean losing your personality or becoming a mindless clone. God created your uniqueness, so he certainly doesn't want to destroy it. Christlikeness is all about transforming your character, not your personality. God wants you to develop the kind of character described in the beatitudes of Jesus [Matthew 5:1-12], the fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5:22-23], Paul's great chapter on love [1 Corinthians 13], and Peter's list of the characteristics of an effective and productive life [2 Peter 1:5-8]. (Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, p. 173)

Paul tells the Christians at Corinth that we . . . *are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit* (2 Corinthians 3:18). Peter is crystal clear when he instructs his readers. *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy because I am holy."* (1 Peter 1:15-16) When Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica he bluntly says, *It is God's will that you should be sanctified.* (1 Thessalonians 4:3) How do these verses help you to understand God's plan for you to live a holy life?

There is no shortage of Scripture passages that point the believer to a new holy way of life. We will only consider a few of the numerous sections of the Bible that deal with sanctification. In your study and homegroup discussion please add pertinent Scriptures that will enhance your understanding.

Refer to Ephesians 4:22-24 at the beginning of this study to answer the following questions:

- What does it mean to *be made new in the attitude of your minds*? (see Romans 12:1-2)

- Give some practical examples of how you have *put off the old self* and *put on the new self*.
- How were you created to *be like God*?

Read Galatians 5:16-26:

- According to vs. 16-18, what is the nature of our spiritual conflict? (see Romans 6:1-4)
- The text gives us two contrasting pictures of lifestyle. In vs. 19-21 we see *the acts of sinful nature* and in vs. 22-25 *the fruit of the Spirit*. Is the difference between a Christian life and life outside of God really this dramatic?
- How is the Holy Spirit essential in living a holy life? What does it mean to *keep in step with the Spirit*?

John Wesley (1703-1791), along with George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards, was a leading agent whom God used in the revivals that swept England and America in the 18th century. Wesley was deeply concerned about spiritual growth and holiness. In his desire to see converts become full-fledged disciples he developed methods (hence “Methodism”) for spiritual growth. A huge part of his plan for holy living was the importance of small groups of believers interacting with each other and stimulating spiritual growth. These small groups, called “classes” or “bands,” were for the mutual confession of sin, accountability and growth in holiness.¹ The bands had six rules.

1. Meet weekly
2. Be punctual
3. Begin with singing and prayer
4. “To speak to each other in order, freely and plainly the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word or deed, and the

¹ The class was a small group of twelve to twenty that meet weekly in the evenings. Bands were stricter and more serious consisting of five to ten members (either all men or all women). It is estimated that about twenty percent of the members of a Methodist society belonged to a band.

- temptations we have felt since our last meeting . . .”
5. End meetings with prayer for each person
 6. “To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins and temptations.”

The questions that members were expected to ask one another were probing: Any known sins since last week? Any temptations? How were you delivered? Any doubtful thoughts, words or deeds?

Think about your homegroup experience. Do you ask each other questions like these? What sort of spiritual accountability is in place in your homegroup?

How have homegroups helped you in your pursuit of a holy life? If they have not been particularly helpful, what could be done in your homegroup that would help you to grow in your Christlikeness? Be prepared to make concrete, constructive suggestions.

Some Christians may feel that to live a holy sanctified life you need to go live in a desert cave and flee the world. The Bible, however, always describes a godly life in our present circumstances. Read the words of Jesus in John 17:15-19. Where does sanctification take place? According to verse 17, how are we sanctified?

A sanctified holy life takes time. Spiritual maturity does not happen instantaneously. Read these comments from Rick Warren. Do you find them encouraging or discouraging?

Becoming like Christ is a long, slow process of growth. Spiritual maturity is neither instant nor automatic; it is a gradual, progressive development that will take the rest of your life. You are a work in progress. Your spiritual transformation in developing the character of Jesus will take the rest of your life, and even then it won't be completed here on earth. It will only be finished when you get to heaven or when Jesus returns. (Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, p. 176)

How have you seen growth in your Christian life? Be prepared to give concrete

examples of your progress in holy living. If you know people in your homegroup well tell them how you have observed their progress in holy living.

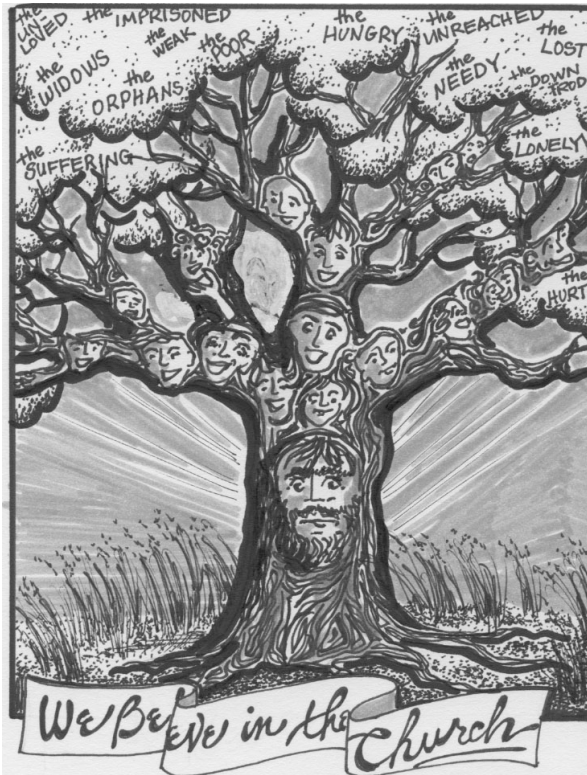
Think through what we have learned in this study. What have you learned that is new? What changes do you plan to make in your discipleship as a result of reflection on these Scriptures?

Would you describe yourself as optimistic or pessimistic about your growth in holy living? Why?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Ten

We Believe. . . in the Church



And God placed all things under his (Jesus) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:22, 23

The Lord their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. Zechariah 9:16

What is the Church? First and foremost, the Church is God's idea, not ours. (Refer again to the above Ephesians passage.) In the New Testament, the word "church" comes from the Greek *ekklesia*, which

means "assembly," and it referred to the early gatherings of believers, usually in people's homes. This word, *ekklesia*, is never used to reference a building; no one ever "went to" *ekklesia*. The word defined who believers were in community. The same definition should apply to us today. God, in his grace, never intended for us to live out our faith on our own.¹ We were saved into community with other believers!

Why is the Church so important to the heart of God? The answer is both simple and mysterious. Through the Holy Spirit, God continues to reveal himself within the context of the Church. The Church's response, and purpose, is to bring glory to Him. We are to *sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown*. We will stumble in this endeavor, but what a worthy aspiration to hold before us as we attempt to be communities of faith that glorify Him.

Memorize Ephesians 3:10
His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.

¹ It has been said that there are two things a person cannot be on their own: be married or be a Christian.

The Beginning of the Church

Read Matthew 16:13-19. What is our first indication of God's plan for the Church?

- What was the important precursor to Jesus' pronouncement of the coming of the Church?
- What is the significance of Jesus renaming Simon to Peter?¹
- In vs. 19, what is it that Jesus is imparting to the Church?

In the above verses, we listen in as Jesus gives clear prophetic instruction about the church that is yet to be. Now turn to Acts 1:4-11 and read about the beginning of this new community.

- In v. 6, what are the disciples still waiting for?
- What does Jesus promise them instead?
- Concurrent with that promise being fulfilled, what does Jesus ask them to be and do as a result?

Read Acts 2:1-12.

Jot down the sequence of events. What stands out to you? In what way should this inform how we are to view (and live out) church life?

¹ The name Simon literally means "water reed," something that is tossed about by wind and waves.

Metaphors for the Church

Nowhere in Scripture is there a blueprint for what a church is to look like or how it is to conduct its services. We are, however, given rich images and metaphors of how God designed church life to function. Consider the following:

The Church as a **building**: Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5

The Church as a **body**: 1 Cor. 12:12-31¹

- What do these verses illustrate for us about unity and diversity in church life?
- Reflect on what the above verses call the Church to be. What would that look like? What are some practical ways this New Testament model of the church can be modeled and implemented?

How well are we doing in these things (again referencing the above verses) in Santa Barbara Community Church, and in what areas can we grow? Be specific.

How do you see your “place” in the Body of Christ, in Santa Barbara Community Church in particular? Perhaps you are confident in the gifts God has given you; maybe you are unsure what they might be. Take some time to think about this and jot down the spiritual gifts you think God has given you, as well as some practical ways you can use them.²

Referring again to the Ephesians passage at the beginning of this study, we know that Christ is the head of the church. This means so much more than he is the boss-leader-CEO. Christ is the head of the church in the fullest sense of

¹ For fun, read this section in Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase, *The Message*

² A good assignment for this week: Choose someone from your group in whom you identify a spiritual gift. Write them a note to explain how you see that at work. A simple encouragement can help people to see the importance of their place in the larger body of Christ!

knowing the purpose of the Church and the purpose behind where we are each to be placed within his Body. (1 Corinthians 12:18) It is only in focusing on the head, Christ, that we will know our place (and our gifts) within the context of the church Body.

The Priesthood of Believers

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 1 Peter 2:9

Does it surprise you to know that God calls you to be a priest? What does that look like in day-to-day life? Consider the following quote:

The priesthood of all believers, therefore, does not only mean that each person is his or her own priest ... In very personal terms, it means that the minister is your priest and that you are the minister's priest; that you are my priest and I am your priest; that we are God's representatives to each other, and that we are each other's representatives before God. It means that we are to speak to each other about God, calling each other to repentance and faith. It means that we are to speak to God about each other, interceding before God for each other, and seeking God's guidance and blessing. It means that we should try to become increasingly responsive to one another, tending to each other in God's name and offering each other practical and constructive help for Christ's sake. (Alston, Wallace, Guides to the Reformed Tradition: The Church, p. 47)

The call to step up and be a priest is a call to care, encourage, exercise accountability, sometimes lead (and more often submit), and to pray – all within the context of Church family.

Take a minute to do a little self-evaluation. Are you acting as a priest as described here? What are some specific areas where you could use some encouragement or nudging? Share with your group.

Organization vs. organism. Clearly, the images we are given in scripture, and the model of the early church, all point to a community that is organic in nature. As we mentioned in the beginning, there is never mention made of “going to” *ekklesia*, or church. The demise of healthy church life begins when a church becomes populated with church “go-ers”, instead of church “be-ers.”

What subtle attitude shifts occur when we view the Church only as something to “go to”?

What is the Church to be doing?

Well, since you are one of the priests, what do *you* think the Church should be doing? Make two lists: what the Church should be doing “in-house,” and what the Church should be doing in the world. Share your list with your group and brainstorm together.

In-house

In the world

The Church is God’s idea. His purposes go far beyond providing a comfortable and nurturing community for believers. He calls his Church into the world. As you read through these verses below, break down what you see God asking the church to do and write those things out.

- Matthew 28:18-19
- Colossians 1:28-29

The Church is to be about two very important things: evangelism and discipleship. Stated most simply, evangelism is “telling the story.” Evangelism is introducing people to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is then “coming alongside” someone on their spiritual journey in order to encourage them to maturity in the faith. The Church’s purpose is to reach out to a lost and hurting world, to tell the Good News of Jesus, and to walk alongside those who are seeking Him.

Lastly, and most importantly, the Church is to be doing what it was created for: worship!

As we discussed in an earlier study, worship is our response to all God has done.

What are the specific ways our worship is expressed on a Sunday afternoon?

How is our worship expressed the remaining 6 days of the week?

In conclusion, the Church is not only God's idea, but his great *gift* to us as believers. We were not called to work out our salvation in isolation, but in the company of fellow believers. God created his Church to act as a family, with each member interdependent on the others. It is the place where we learn, grow, and exercise our gifts for the building up of the other members of God's family.

Take time as a group to praise God for his gift of the Church, and to ask for his guidance and blessing on us at Santa Barbara Community Church as we seek to serve Him.

Study Eleven

We Believe. . . in the Second Coming of Jesus



He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Revelation 22:20

The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Apostles Creed

From the Scriptures you will learn also of His second manifestation to us, glorious and divine indeed, when he shall come not in lowliness but in His proper glory, no longer in humiliation but in majesty. Athanasius (296-373 Bishop of Alexandria)

Christians believe that their savior, Jesus Christ, will return again to earth. When will this happen? How will this event transpire? What signs can we look for that will tell us to get ready? There has been no shortage of speculation about the scenario for these end time events. Consider the astounding popularity of the Left Behind series of fictional books written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Stacks of these volumes, that ponder the "earth's last days," are available at any Costco. They have sold over 62 million copies! The largest selling book of the 1970's was Hal Lindsay's The Late Great Planet Earth, which pondered the return of Christ and the end times. Christians have always been fascinated with the particulars of end time events. Many have attempted to draw up a calendar of how these events would unfold.

Memorize 1 John 2:28 *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*

The Apostles Creed, which has been confessed by Christians over the centuries and throughout the world, is content to speak of four aspects of the end of the age.

1. Jesus Christ will come to earth again
2. he will judge the living and the dead
3. human beings will be raised to life
4. Christian believers will receive “life everlasting”

We might wonder where Christians got the idea that Jesus would come back to earth. The answer is clear. Jesus himself told his disciples to be on the lookout for his return.¹ Matthew 24 and Mark 13 are parallel passages where Jesus taught his followers about his return. Read Matthew 24 (the longer of these two teachings). The text is loaded with Jewish images that are difficult to interpret.² As you read, look for the big picture and focus on the points that do come through clearly.

What are the main themes in this chapter? Even if some of the details are foggy, what is the general thrust of this teaching?

In this teaching Jesus gives some very specific commands to his disciples. List these particular instructions.

Take each of these specific instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples and apply them to your life. What would it mean for you live out these commands?

¹ Jesus spoke often about his return. Here is just a sampling of some of his statements concerning his second coming. Matthew 16:27, Mark 14:62, Luke 12:37-43, John 14:3.

² In Matthew 24: 15-22 Jesus is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. He uses the phrase, *abomination that causes desolation*, which Daniel’s prophecy mentions four times (Daniel 8:13, 9:27, 11:31, 12:11). This phrase refers to the desecration of the Jerusalem temple built by Ezra. Jews would have understood this prophecy of Daniel to have been fulfilled in 168 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificed a pig to the Greek god Zeus on the altar. Here Jesus is teaching that a final desecration will take place in the near future. The temple will again be desecrated. His prophecy came to pass when the Romans came and completely destroyed the temple and all of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Luke 21:20 makes this more explicit. There the *abomination that causes desolation* is replaced with *Jerusalem being surrounded by armies*.

According to Matthew 24:36-42 when will Jesus return? What does this tell us about Christian authors and preachers who come perilously close to setting a date for Christ's return?

What are the followers of Jesus to make of *wars, famine, earthquakes, etc.*? According to Matthew 24:6 how are we to respond to calamities and frightening events in our world? Are you currently responding like this?

Our salvation is secure because of the finished work of Christ on the cross where our sins were paid for and the resurrection of Jesus where sin and death was conquered. There is a sense, however, in which our salvation awaits completion with the return of Christ. Marvel at this truth as described in Hebrews 9:27-28.

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The New Testament authors have an eager expectation about the return of Christ.¹ Ponder the verses below. How do they talk about Christ's return? Why is there excitement and expectancy?

- 1 Corinthians 4:5
- Titus 2:13
- James 5:8
- 1 Peter 5:4
- 1 John 2:28

¹ Any discussion of the return of Christ naturally leads to questions about the nature of the millennial kingdom; the rapture of the church; and the time, nature and duration of the period known as the tribulation. Are you Pre-millennial, Post-millennial, or A-millennial? Do you believe in a literal seven-year tribulation period or does this describe the entire church age? What about the rapture of the church? Great theological minds have struggled with these questions for centuries. Bible believing Christians have come to different conclusions. While these questions are important, they are beyond the scope of this study. Santa Barbara Community Church is committed to the Biblical teaching that Christ is coming again. We are a church of the second-advent.

Many who are working through this study guide have wonderful lives. For the most part we enjoy material abundance, a beautiful city in which to live, warm church life, healthy bodies, loving families and friends, the safety of America and hobbies and pleasures to keep life interesting and fun. Unfortunately, all of these blessings can tend to dampen our zeal and expectation for the return of Jesus. Respond to this observation by Anthony Hoekema.

The expectation of Christ's Second Advent is a most important aspect of New Testament eschatology [study of the end times] —so much so, in fact, that the faith of the New Testament church is **dominated** [emphasis added] by its expectation. Every book of the New Testament points us to the return of Christ and urges us to live in such a way as to be always ready for that return This same lively expectation of Christ's return should mark the church of Jesus Christ today. If this expectation is no longer present, there is something radically wrong. (Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, p. 109)

Do you find yourself anticipating the return of Christ? Is it an event that you eagerly long for? What could you do in your Christian discipleship to live in eager expectation of Jesus' return?

So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Matthew 24:44

If you took the second coming of Christ more seriously and lived your life in readiness what would your life look like? How would it be different from how you are presently living?

Acts 1:6-11 records a profound and rather humorous post resurrection story of Jesus. Read these verses. What does it tell us about the behavior of Christians as we wait for Jesus' coming? What is the point of the angel's statement in verse 11?

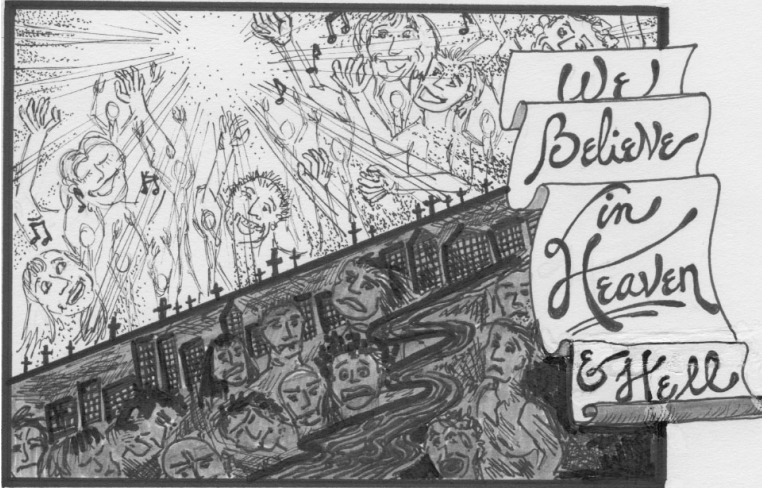
Respond to this statement by C.S. Lewis. How should our death and the expectation of the second coming modify how we live life now?

What is important is not that we should always fear (or hope) about the End but that we should always remember, always take it into account. An analogy may help here. A man of seventy need not be always feeling (much less talking) about his approaching death: but a wise man of seventy should always take it into account. He would be foolish to embark on schemes which presuppose twenty more years of life: he would be criminally foolish not to make—indeed, not to have made long since—his will. Now, what death is to each man, the Second Coming is to the whole human race. (Lewis, The World's Last Night and Other Essays, p. 110)

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twelve

We Believe. . . in Heaven and Hell



But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Philippians 3:20

He has set eternity in our hearts. Ecclesiastes 3:11

Heaven and Hell. We know that we want to go to one rather than the other. Unfortunately most Christians are not really sure what to expect from heaven and most non-Christians don't really believe they will end up in hell. The Bible speaks of both heaven and hell—often. Bible readers frequently read right by sections of Scripture that address heaven and hell giving the words little thought. We tend to be so preoccupied with our lives here and now that we rarely think about our eternal destiny.

Before working through this study guide stop and ponder your eternal destiny for a moment. Assuming you are trusting in Christ for your salvation and expect to spend eternity with him, what do you think heaven will be like?

Most of the portions of Scriptures that talk about heaven leave much to the imagination of the reader. Often we find heaven being talked about in poetic or

Memorize Philippians 3:20 *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

metaphorical language. Read these verses. Look for clues about heaven and eternity. Who is in heaven? What will it be like?

- John 14:1-4
- Acts 7:54
- Philippians 1:23, 3:20
- Hebrews 8:5

The book of Revelation, with its graphic images, is loaded with descriptions of heaven. Unfortunately when we read of pearly gates and streets paved with gold (Revelation 21:21) we are sometimes unimpressed. The décor seems so gaudy in heaven! Read Revelation 21 and 22. These two chapters paint a picture of heaven (the Holy City Jerusalem) and our eternal life with God. How many images of heaven and eternity can you find? To what reality do these images point?

Image

Reality

According to these two chapters from Revelation, how will life in heaven with God be better than life here on earth?

American Christians tend to be so preoccupied with health, fitness, temporal beauty and retirement security that we rarely ponder heaven. The Psalmist says, *Show me O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life.* (Psalm 39:4) America's famous 18th century pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards, said, "This life ought to be spent by us only as a journey toward heaven." Best selling author Rick Warren, echoes Jonathan Edwards words. "You weren't put on earth to be remembered. You were put here to prepare for eternity." (Warren, Purpose Driven Life, p. 33) How do these statements challenge you? What can you do in your life to become more heavenly minded?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5. In these verses the apostle Paul ponders our *heavenly dwelling*. What is Paul driving at in these verses?

What is the eternal glory that we look forward to? How does this change how we respond to pain and problems in our life?

Do you ever *groan* and *long* for something more?

Respond to what C.S. Lewis says.

Most of us find it very difficult to want “Heaven” at all—except in so far as “Heaven” means meeting again friends who have died. One reason for this difficulty is that we have not been trained: our whole education tends to fix our mind on this world. Another reason is that when the real want for Heaven is present in us, we do not recognize it. Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. . . If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. (Lewis, Mere Christianity, p. 119)

How has thinking about heaven and studying these Scripture passages helped renew your enthusiasm for heaven?

Consider the following from pastor and author Randy Alcorn. Have you experienced any of the “new spiritual passion” he speaks of?

If you lack a passion for heaven, I can almost guarantee it’s because you have a weak, deficient, and distorted theology of heaven. (Or you’re making choices that conflict with heaven’s agenda). A robust, accurate, and biblically energized view of heaven will bring you a new spiritual passion. (Alcorn, In the Light of Eternity, p. 5)

The Bible also speaks a great deal about judgment and hell. Consider the words of Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, the author of Hebrews, Jude and John.¹ What do these Scriptures say about the final destiny of those who reject Christ?

- Matthew 13:49, 25:46
- 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9
- Hebrews 10:26
- James 5:1
- 2 Peter 3:3
- Jude 7
- Revelation 21:8

Just as we saw in the Scriptures that speak of heaven, the images, symbols and figures of speech describing hell are graphic. Make a list of some of these symbols and images. Any figure of speech has a literal point. What is the reality to which they point?

You will often hear people say that they could never believe in a God who would send people to hell. Yet the Scriptures point out that it is God's kindness that leads you to repentance. (Romans 2:4) Consider these statements by C.S. Lewis. Does God send anyone to hell or do we send ourselves?

A man can't be taken to hell, or sent to hell: you can only get there on your own steam. (Lewis, The Dark Tower, p. 49)

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in hell choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no hell. (Lewis, The Great Divorce, p. 72)

¹ There is some irony in the fact that Jesus speaks of hell and punishment more than any other Biblical personality. Many unfamiliar with the Bible would suppose Jesus would just talk about love and it would be the apostle Paul or one of the fiery Old Testament prophets who would discuss hell. If you are interested in some of Jesus' many statements on hell consider the following Scriptures. Matthew 5:22, 7:23, 8:12, 10:28, 18:6, 22:13, 25:41, 46.

I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the **inside**. (Lewis, The Problem of Pain, p.127)

John 3:36 says, *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.* Read John 3:16-18. How do these words of Jesus help you to understand God's loving gift of salvation in Christ and God's wrath and condemnation for those who reject the Son?

What about people who never hear the gospel? What about people who think they are basically "good"?¹ Read these Scriptures that speak of God's judgment being proportional. How do we have to trust in the mercy and justice of God in particular cases that are outside of our ability to comprehend?

- Matthew 11:20-24
- Mark 12:40
- Luke 12:47-48

Some, mistakenly, think of God torturing people in hell. Medieval depictions of hell do not help our imagination. Is the essence of hell separation from God? Theologian J.P. Moreland makes this observation.

God is the most generous, loving, wonderful, attractive being in the cosmos. He has made us with a free will and he has made us for a purpose: to relate lovingly to him and to others. And if we fail over and over again to live for the purpose for which we were made—a purpose, by the way, which would allow us to flourish more than living any other way—then God will have absolutely no choice but to give us what we've asked for all along in our lives, which is separation from him. And that is hell . . . (quoted in Lee Strobel, The Case for Faith, p. 241)

¹ You may want to review Paul's argument in Romans 1-3 concerning our rebellious nature and God's wrath.

Many modern people can be very cavalier about hell. Mark Twain once quipped; “Heaven for the climate; hell for the companionship.” How will you talk to your neighbor who makes light of any chance of going to hell?

How has pondering heaven and hell in this study affected you? Do you need to think more about heaven and hell?

Sermon Notes. . .