

foundations of our faith

transformation through truth

foundations of our faith

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Foundations of our faith

Introduction

Foundations are absolutely vital to any building. You can't see foundations, but if they are laid well, they make the building secure and strong. God wants us to build ourselves up in the faith (Jude 20) and so, as a follower of Jesus, God gives you a responsibility to grow in Him. This is only possible if your foundation is secure and your foundation needs to be built on the person and work of Jesus himself. The Bible speaks of young Christians needing the basic teachings of Christ (Heb. 6:1) and of all parts of our lives needing to be built on Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). This course will be one of the tools God uses to help you lay good foundations in your life as we learn together what it means to build our lives centered on Jesus.

Understanding salvation

Salvation is not some type of spiritual fire insurance in which you make a deal with God to be a good person so you can be saved from hell. Salvation is a radical act involving God acting and you responding. The story of the Israelites, pretty much a nation of slaves, is a wonderful picture of salvation. The story is one of God bringing a people out of bondage and into the Promised Land. When we get saved, God saves us from the old life in which we were enslaved by addictions and selfishness, and He brings us into a place of freedom, joy and life. The point is this: without God's initiative you can't be saved or delivered from your old life.

As we look at what salvation is, it's important to ask the question, "What has God done for me?" It is vital that you understand this before you try and understand what you can do for God.

We can only understand salvation when, firstly, we understand the gospel.

The gospel reveals to us how we can be saved

Jesus said we are to "repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The gospel is the good news of what Jesus has done, and if we truly believe this good news, we will be saved (Rom. 10:10).

This news is not just information, but it is the incredible truth about the Son of God. It is the best news that anyone can ever hear in their lives!

"The gospel ... is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

Wrapped up in this news, this gospel, is the very power to transform your life, to set you free and to keep you free. As Christians we are called to treasure, cherish, guard, hold fast to, and even be prepared to suffer for the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8-14)!

So what is the good news of salvation? It can be described in the following 4 points:

God desires all to be saved

God created you and genuinely desires a relationship with you, and with every person on planet Earth. The Bible describes God as loving the whole world and desiring all to be saved (John 3:16, 1 Tim. 2:4). "The Lord is ... patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). As we will see, not all are saved but His nature is that "he may have mercy on all" (Rom. 11:32).

This means that no matter how far from God people are, how deep in sin and wickedness, God is able and willing to draw them out and save them. No one is without hope!

For example, the great apostle Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, had formerly been a blasphemer and a murderer of God's people and yet we see God saving him. There is no one who is out of the reach of God's mercy and grace.

God saves us from sin and His wrath (His punishment on sin)

We have mentioned the word 'sin' a number of times now, but what exactly is sin?

Basically, sin is disobeying God. It started with our first parents Adam and Eve and we have been doing it ever since. Sin is not about 'not fulfilling your potential' or 'being in poverty' but it is about the breakdown of relationship with God. The Bible uses another word for sin which is 'transgressions'. This means crossing a line, going over a boundary, or to break a law. When God, from the beginning, called people to put Him first, to love Him passionately and to love and respect others, we chose not to. We crossed the line. We've loved ourselves more than God and have put our interests before His. We've been rebels from God living as we feel is right. God is not only our creator, but also our lover, and we have spurned His love.

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

"Because we break his laws again and again, Scripture says those who aren't saved are "dead ... in sins" (Eph. 2:1).

"For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Sin is a deadly serious thing because it leads to spiritual death and eternal separation from a loving God.

So, for us to have crossed the bounds God sets for our lives, is a serious thing in His eyes. He is holy and just and punishes sin. We cross the line against a holy, righteous, loving God who cannot just ignore our sin. The Bible explains that God hates sin and uses the word 'wrath' to show His attitude against evil and sin.

"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness" (Rom. 1:18).

"For those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey righteousness, there will be wrath and fury" (Rom. 2:8).

Do you understand that your sin and your self-seeking lifestyle was an offense to God who created you and loves you? It is sin which separates us from God who is holy, perfect and pure and cannot look on anything sinful. He desires relationship with us but needs to first deal with the barrier of sin so deeply entrenched into our hearts.

God saves us through the death of Jesus on the cross

How has God rescued us out of sin? We were trapped in a lifestyle of sin because by nature we were full of sin, but God took the initiative to rescue us.

God rescued us through Jesus' death on the cross.

"We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10).

It happened in this way: Instead of us receiving the punishment due for our sins, God sent his Son to be punished on our behalf. Jesus willingly took the sins of the world upon Himself at the cross (John 1:29, 3:16, 1 Tim. 2:6, 2 Pet. 2:1, 1 John 2:2). Every single selfish or wicked attitude or thing we have ever done, or which has been done to us, was dealt with on the cross.

"For our sake he made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The cross, then, was a place of divine exchange where the Father punished our sin in Jesus and declared us to be in right standing with Him, and no longer under his wrath. The offense of sin was removed at the cross.

Through the cross we see the nature of God in two ways. Firstly, we see that He is just. He did not just forget about sin but He dealt with it, punished it. Secondly, we see that He is loving. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). He died for rebels who spurned His love. He died that we might live.

God calls us to respond in repentance and faith to be saved

God calls us to respond to Him to be saved. Being a follower of Jesus does not start with what we do, it starts with what Christ has done. We now need to respond to this good news to be saved. How do we do this?

Repentance and faith

Repentance and faith go together like two sides of a coin.

"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21).

"Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15).

Repentance

Repentance is not just about 'being sorry' and confessing what you have done wrong.

In the Bible, Esau wept over the consequences of his action but in the end did not truly repent (Heb. 12:17). To repent means to personally 'turn away' from your old life.

Repentance involves a radical attitude change that causes you to do a '180 degree' about-turn away from your old life of sin. It means to personally forsake your sin, and a commitment to turn away from specific sins.

Repentance also means to 'change your mind'. Repentance is to start thinking and believing in the way God wants you to, and therefore to start living in a way that pleases God.

RC Ryle said the following:

"There is a common worldly kind of Christianity is this day... a cheap Christianity which offends nobody and requires no sacrifice - which costs nothing, and is worth nothing."

Our salvation cost God everything. Our response is therefore one of a sacrificial turning away and renouncing your sin. Repentance should cost us!

Faith

To have faith essentially means to believe and trust.

It's not just a mental belief, though. Scripture says that even the demons believe in God and they know much about Him! The kind of belief God wants us to have is a trust, a living in, a giving of yourself to Jesus. It means to personally trust in God fully to save you and to submit to His guidance for your life.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Faith, according to this Scripture, is not relying on how good you are, but it is believing that only through Jesus' work, the free gift of life, can you be saved.

We are saved then not by the results of our goodness or good works, but by faith in His good work on the cross. It is by truly believing in what God has done for you, and by putting all your trust in this God, that you can experience a new life!

Repentance and faith must continue throughout your life as a Christian

"But my righteous one shall live by faith" (Heb. 10:38).

The Christian life does not only start with faith but we are called to live daily by faith. In other words, God desires us to trust in Him daily, to keep relying on His grace and strength for the life ahead. Salvation is not just a once-off prayer but it involves a life fully lived to the glory of God!

"Although we are now in God's family and have been given new life in Christ, we are to guard our hearts against sin. For example, Jesus commands the church in Laodicea to repent from their sin and lukewarmness." (Rev. 3:19).

"So that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12).

Summary

The good news is that salvation is not something we do. We are saved when we respond to what God has done in Christ. God saves us when we repent of our sins and put our faith in the perfect Son of God who lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died. Salvation is by grace: God's undeserving blessings given to rebel sinners with whom He has initiated peace.

That's good news!

Water baptism

When the significance and power of baptism is not fully understood, we tend to place little emphasis on it and often only tell new believers about it years down the line! This is a real shame and often, even when new believers do get baptized, there is little expectation of real grace and favour being imparted. It can become an empty work that people do only because they know they should!

Baptism is far more than this.

What is baptism?

The word "baptism" comes from the Greek word "baptizo" which means to "immerse" or "dip". To baptize something, then, means to completely submerge it in a liquid. In a biblical sense, to baptize a person in water means to put that person completely under the water, then immediately raise him or her up again.

Baptism was used in the textile industry. Linen went into liquid one colour and came out a completely different colour.

Key Scripture:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin (Rom. 6:3-7).

Water baptism

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

A SIGN OF THE DEATH OF OUR OLD NATURE

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

A SIGN OF OUR NEW BIRTH

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

A SIGN OF IDENTIFICATION WITH THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

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

A SIGN OF IDENTIFICATION WITH THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

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

A SIGN OF BELONGING TO JESUS CHRIST

- In the Old Testament, circumcision of the flesh was the sign of separation unto God.
- In the New Testament, baptism has taken over from Old Testament circumcision and is a sign that we belong to God (Col. 2:11-1).

What can we expect to happen during baptism?

When Jesus tells us to do something like He did in Matthew 28 when He commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, He did not do this merely to give us a rule to follow or even merely to give us a picture of what happens when we become Christians. There is real power in this wonderful act.

- It is an act of obedience to the Father and when we obey the Father He always pours out special favour and blessing, just like a natural father! Baptism can be a very daunting thing for a new believer, doing something so openly in front of so many people. The Father sees this, as well as your heart that wants to please Him, and He always blesses.
- Because it is not just an action, but rather an action done in faith and an expression of our faith in the reality of Jesus' powerful work on the cross, it can bring great victory and freedom. Faith must always be expressed in action; as we step out in faith in the cross, the blessings of the cross will be more powerfully imparted to us.
 - ◆ We can trust for freedom from sin, addictions, wrong mindsets, etc.
 - ◆ We can trust for greater faith to be given.
- It often removes doubt as to assurance of salvation and assurance that Jesus really does love you. Sometimes people will be born again and experience powerful fruit for awhile, but then, as soon as the fruit wanes a little or undergoes testing, doubt can come as to the reality of their salvation because they are so used to being on cloud nine. Baptism is a powerful symbol of the reality of what happened in the heart and a definite point that can always be referred to in the future.
- It is powerful not only for the person being baptized but also for the onlookers! As we witness people being baptized in our local churches and communities we are encouraged as to the real, powerful work that God is doing amongst us! Faith is imparted as we see the reality of the God we serve in real faith right in front of our eyes.

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

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

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

Therefore, water baptism is not necessary in the sense that we must perform this as a work that earns salvation. We know salvation comes by faith alone.

But then we can ask,

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

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

The criminal on the cross next to Jesus could not be baptized but at the moment of faith Jesus said:

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Who should be baptized?

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

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

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

Yes, even a child who is old enough to understand the significance of repentance and faith in Jesus can be baptized. Water baptism demonstrates obedience to the command of Jesus (see Matt. 28:19). Like a child we need to obey even when we don't fully understand!

So should an infant be christened?

No - the Bible is clear that it is for those who are saved through faith and repentance.

Who should do the baptizing?

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matt. 28:19).

This command was for all of us who are believers. In Acts we see Philip (not an Elder or Pastor) baptizing people.

It is one of the most wonderful things to baptize other people, especially when they are friends or family in whom you have seen God doing a great work.

When should one be baptized?

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

In our culture we are either very sceptical and suspicious of any outward action of faith, or we are overly eager to do anything that will earn us points with God (New Age; Hinduism). Sometimes people get baptized just because it is a good thing to do or else they take years to get baptized, saying they haven't heard God yet for baptism (we don't have to hear Him because he has already spoken).

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

Can a person be baptized more than once?

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

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

Pictures of baptism

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

Noah's baptism

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

Moses' baptism

Moses led a generation of Israelites out of Egypt and they were "baptized" by the cloud and the sea. Paul said that "All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:1-4). Once again, this is a picture of spiritual baptism. Those Israelites were not "water baptized", but they were spiritually baptized by passing through the Red Sea and following the cloud (the presence of Jehovah) by faith. "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned" (Heb.11:29). We see that those Israelites whose faith endured through the wilderness tests (Joshua, Caleb, and the younger generation), inherited the Promised Land.

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

John's baptism

John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance to prepare the way for the Messiah. Whoever believed John's teaching showed their change of heart (repentance) and faith through water baptism. "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preached the **baptism of repentance** for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:4-5). John later baptized Jesus to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). In baptism, Jesus not only set a precedent for His followers, but also publicly declared that He was leaving His past life as a carpenter to enter into the mission for which He came. He was the promised Messiah who would baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire (see Matt. 3:11), and at His baptism the fullness of the Holy Spirit came upon Him (see Acts 10:38).

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The person of the Holy Spirit

From almost the time of the New Testament, baptism in the Holy Spirit, ironically, has been a very controversial subject. The one that is referred to as the Spirit of unity has caused sharp debate, church splits, denomination splits, family splits, etc.

Often the reason for this is because we try to take the subject and turn it into a formula. We try to create distinctions between Christians who are baptised in the Holy Spirit and those who are not. It can cause a spiritual hierarchy so easily!

Another common misconception is viewing the Holy Spirit as some sort of spiritual force that can be manipulated and controlled. No! The Holy Spirit is GOD, the third Person of the Trinity. He is His own person:

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A PERSON

Intelligence: thought (Acts 15:28, Rom. 8:27, 1 Cor. 2:10-11); speech: language (Acts 1:16, 8:29, 10:9, 13:2, 1 Cor. 2:13, 1 Tim. 4:1); will (1 Cor. 12:11); emotion: feelings (Rom. 15:30, Gal. 4:6, Eph. 4:30, 1 Thess. 5:19, James 4:5).

THE ACTIONS OF A PERSON

Leads and guides (Acts 8:39, 13:2&4, 16:7, Rom. 8:14); works: and gives (Acts 8:39, 1 Cor. 12:11); fellowships (2 Cor. 13:14); convicts (John 16:8); teaches (John 14:26); comforts: and counsels (John 14:16, 16:8); prays (Rom. 8:26).

HE IS SUSCEPTIBLE TO PERSONAL TREATMENT

He can be: lied to (Acts 5:3); tested (5:9); resisted (7:51); insulted (Heb. 10:29); blasphemed: and sinned against (Matt. 12:31).

HE IS REFERRED TO BY PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Not it, its or itself, but He; Him and Himself (12x in John 16; Rom. 8:16&26); not which, but Who (Eph. 1:14).

HE IS ASSOCIATED WITH OTHER PERSONAL BEINGS

With the Father and Son (Matt. 12:32, 28:19, John 14:16, 2 Cor. 3:17, 13:14) and with man (Acts 10:19, 15:28).

- The important thing about realizing He is a person is that we will not categorize Christians into having more or less of the Holy Spirit. He is a person and He either indwells a person or He doesn't!
- Also, we will not ask the question: "How much of the Holy Spirit do I have?" but rather: "How much of me does the Holy Spirit have?"!
- So, as we discuss the baptism of the Spirit we must remember that He is a Person and not a force or energy!

The Holy Spirit's function described through pictures

Having said this, the Bible does use certain metaphoric language concerning the Holy Spirit. This language is used not to describe what the Holy Spirit looks like, but rather what He is like and what He does!

- Wind: powerful and sovereign (John 3:8, Acts 2:2)
- Fire: refining and destroying (Matt. 3:11, Acts 2:3)
- Water: cleaning and sustaining (Isa. 44:3, John 7:37-39)
- Oil: anointing and healing (1 Sam. 16:13, Heb. 1:9, Jas 5:14-15)
- Dove: peace and gentleness (Matt. 3:16)

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

What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit and why is it needed?

What language is used for baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Scripture uses the language: "baptized with" or "filled with the Spirit" or to have the "Holy Spirit come upon you" (Acts 1:5, 8; Matt. 3:11; Eph. 5:18).

"Baptism" means to be dipped in, fully submerged in, to be overwhelmed by.

In what context is the baptism of the Holy Spirit found?

Reference to being filled with the Holy Spirit always comes in the context of empowering for the work God has for us, boldness to witness with conviction and a demonstration of His power. It does not exclusively refer to receiving spiritual gifts or needing to be filled in order to overcome sin, etc.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) Note that these disciples were already born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). This was spoken by Jesus just before He was taken to heaven. He commissioned His disciples, but also told them that they were to wait until they were clothed with power from on High.

- It would seem, then, that being filled with the Holy Spirit is for a purpose, which is the purpose of us being His witnesses. It is not the same as just being born again and having the Holy Spirit come and live inside of you. Being baptized with the Holy Spirit is that work of the Holy Spirit to empower us for witness, and to fill us in the sense of manifesting Himself in us and doing a supernatural work inside of us i.e. empowering, assuring, cleansing, giving authority, commissioning, etc.
- It is dangerous to try to put a formula to baptism in the Spirit. We must take the Biblical accounts and realize that nothing has changed since that time – that we can have all that they did in terms of the powerful infilling of the Spirit!

Extreme views and misconceptions regarding baptism in the Holy Spirit

You must be baptized in the Holy Spirit in a very tangible (shaking and falling over) way:

- In order to be saved. This error causes people who do not have the same experience or theology to be considered inferior and even unsaved!
- To be considered "filled with the Holy Spirit". Again Scripture never states this. Often those who have never had the tangible experience are far more Christ-like and effective than those that have the tangible experience. (Even in the power gifts like healing; signs; wonders, etc.)

You have to speak in tongues in order to be filled with the Spirit. This implies that the only or chief sign and result of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is the gift of tongues. (The Bible clearly states that different gifts are given to different people as in 1 Cor. 12:1-11). This does not mean that every believer can't be gifted in the private use of tongues, but we cannot create a requirement where Scripture does not! When Scripture is descriptive, we cannot presume it to be prescriptive!

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

Who does the baptizing?

Jesus (Joel 2:28-32, Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16).

How do we receive the baptism in the Spirit?

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

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

We can say by looking at these examples that we can have faith and expectancy for the Holy Spirit to come in a very real and tangible way. He will respond to us!

We can expect to be filled as we:

- Pray, especially when praying for empowering for spreading the gospel.
- Lay hands on one another.
- Believe and hear the message of the gospel, or even other messages that are worked deeply into our hearts by the Spirit.
- Wait upon the Lord with a hungry heart, eager and expectant.

How often should we be baptized in the Spirit?

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The language here is actually saying that we need to be continually filled with the Spirit. It is clear from the context that, as some people rely on wine and find their temporary joy in wine, so we should rely on and find our joy and security in the Holy Spirit.

Even by ourselves we must make time to fellowship with the Spirit. As we do He will fill us with joy, power, boldness and gifts. So ... let's do it all the time!

Summary

We have a massive job to do and we need the Holy Spirit to do it through us and in us. Jesus promised that if we as evil fathers, can give good gifts to our children, God, our loving heavenly Father, will most certainly give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks for Him (Luke 11:13). Let us continually rely on Him, enjoy Him and fellowship with Him. Let us be filled with Him!

The Word of God

Jesus emphasized our absolute need for the Word of God when he said,

"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"
(Matt. 4:4).

Our spiritual health depends on the feeding of our spirits. We start out as spiritual babies and need nourishment to grow.

"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2).

Reading God's word is like spiritual milk, that sustains and nourishes us. It is not optional, but essential, to our growth! It's important, therefore, to understand that when we speak about 'The Word of God', we are referring to a book ... you guessed it, the Bible!

The Bible is God's Word

The Bible is God's Word spoken in history through human words

The Bible is written by men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God did not forcefully dictate the words to the authors but he worked through their unique (some might say crazy) personalities and circumstances in which they lived in. God chose to use human language, specifically in its ancient form of Hebrew and Greek, and real human beings with their varied writing styles and genres to communicate to us. The words we have in the Bible are therefore fully human and fully divine. They are God's words written in human words.

"In order to communicate His word to all human conditions, God chose to use almost every available kind of communication: narrative, history, genealogies, chronicles, laws of all kinds, poetry of all kinds, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons and apocalypses." Gordon Fee

So we notice in our Bibles that there are 66 books speaking to all kinds of human conditions, in genres mentioned above! These were originally written to the Jews (in the Old Testament) and to various groups of people in the New Testament including Jews, Christians and Gentiles (non-Jews). Although it was not written to us, they have been written for us and are incredibly relevant for us today because, ultimately, the Holy Spirit is the Author.

The Bible is inspired by God and is the standard of all truth

"No prophecy of Scripture was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

See also 2 Pet. 3:16, 1 Tim 5:18.

Because the Bible has a divine origin, its words are therefore true and have eternal relevance. Every generation needs the Bible and it has authority over all areas of our lives.

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

God's Word does not just contain truth, but it is truth itself and is the final standard of all that is right and true. This is because it is impossible for God to lie (Tit. 1:2) and so His words and promises to us are sure.

This means that the Bible shows us unchanging standards of truth. In other words, what was true two thousand years ago, is still true today. For example, sleeping together outside of marriage is still sin. The love of money, which was a sin in Jesus' day, is still sin today. We are still called to love, worship, show hospitality and devotion in the same attitude they did in the early church. Human nature does not change!

What does this mean if we believe that the Bible is written by God?

Ultimately, it means we are to obey the Bible and use it as our standard in life.

The Bible is our final authority in all things because its very origins come from God who cannot lie. That does not mean the Bible is easy to understand, but God promises to make the Word clear to those who seek Him with a pure heart.

Our obedience to God's Word is a sign that we love Him.

"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word" (John 14:23).

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

God promises to bless those who obey his Word.

"Blessed is the man... whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1).

"You shall meditate on [the book of the law] day and night, so that you may be careful to do all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Josh. 1:8).

The Bible has stood the test of time and millions of believers around the world over the last two thousand years have attested to the truth: "Your word is a lamp to my path and a light to my feet" (Ps. 119:105). It is a faithful reliable guide on which we can stake our lives! The Bible not only helps us to know what is truth, but it also reveals the God of truth, the God we love and with whom we are in relationship. He is the One who is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

How to read the Word of God

Why read the Bible?

Our aim in reading the Bible is ultimately to get to know the Author and to obey the Author.

The goal is transformation not information. We don't read the Bible to store up impressive amounts of knowledge to quote to our friends, but we read it to let God speak to us and for Him to train and equip us to live better lives for Jesus.

There are many different ways to study and read the Bible, but our concern in the foundations course is to help you read it devotionally. The focus here is not so much learning to study various books of the Bible, or how to study it topically. That will be covered in a separate course from this.

What about the Cults?

Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and many other cults also read the Bible and use it as their standard for life. Yet we say they are deceived. How can so many different groups read the same Bible and get to different and contradictory beliefs? It comes down to how you interpret and read the Bible. It is therefore very important that we learn to be students who know how to be read the Word.

Very simply this means learning to read the Bible in its context. For example if a friend writes you a 5 page letter, you don't take just a sentence of it on page three to think about and ignore the rest. Because you understand your friend is communicating to you ideas or feelings, these are best understood in the context of the whole letter. The same principle applies to reading the Bible. Don't just take a verse out, but rather read it in context of its chapter (and then book), and then try to understand what the author was trying to say.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved ... rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

How to read the Bible to get to know God

Your attitude is the key

"But this is the one to whom I will look: He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Is. 66:2). Read the Word humbly and with an open prayerful heart. This is probably the most important attitude in reading the Bible. The Scripture above in Isaiah 66 describes this kind of attitude as catching God's attention. He looks at the one who is humble and who is willing to listen to His voice with a heart of adoration, submission and eagerness. The key is not a technique but an attitude that honours God.

SOME PRACTICAL TIPS

Kevin Smith, in his book 'A practical guide for studying God's Word', offers the following really helpful advice in practically reading the Bible.

- Passage: read an entire passage
- Part: focus on one part

- Point: ask what God is saying to you
- Practice: respond to God

Step 1: Passage. The idea here is to read a whole chapter not just a verse or two. A simple method is to work your way through a book of the Bible, reading a chapter a day.

Step 2: Part. When you read the chapter, look for one part which stands out to you. Don't get sidetracked trying to understand the parts which are confusing. Remember your goal is to meet with God, not to master the deep intricacies of Scripture. That can come at another time! Read until you find something which you can understand and apply to your heart. You may have to read the chapter a number of times before something jumps out to you.

Step 3: Point. Once you identify the part which stands out to you, pause to ponder. Ask the Lord, "What is your point?" Be careful to read it in context, as discussed earlier, so that you don't twist the real meaning of the text. Be open to ask the Holy Spirit why He is highlighting this portion to you.

Step 4: Practice. The two main goals of devotional Bible study are to (a) hear God and (b) obey God. When God speaks, we need to respond. We must act on what He says. The act might take the form of confession, praise, thanksgiving, giving something away, a word of encouragement, apologizing to someone etc. Kevin brings this challenge by saying, "If you read one chapter of the Bible and put one principle in practice each day, can you imagine how your knowledge of the Scriptures will grow? Can you imagine how much your life will change in a year?"

Which is the best Bible translation?

Simply put: The best Bible is the one you read!

Don't be scared of making marks, notes or highlights in your Bible. It's important for you to make it your own and personalize it.

"Dirty Bible = clean Christian. Clean Bible = dirty Christian" Anonymous

Prayer is key

What is prayer?

We all know that prayer is important! The old children's song we may have sung in Sunday school reflects the biblical truth very well: "Read your Bible, pray everyday, pray everyday, pray everyday..."

Even if we have just started reading our Bibles for the first time, we realise that prayer is mentioned and instructed over and over:

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:6).

Prayer is not merely:

- A good introduction to a family gathering or a nice thing to do before we eat.
- A kind of slot machine that if we put in enough prayer we'll get whatever we want out.
- A duty we perform to win points with God.
- A good habit before sleeping.
- A mumbling of the same words over and over without there being any expectancy for change or power.

Prayer is the greatest act of intimacy between us and the God of the universe. It has the potential to be the most powerful thing you ever do on this earth. It is our weapon and shield as we walk through this life!

In this teaching we will be giving an overview of prayer that will hopefully inspire and equip you to pray rather than make you feel guilty for not praying enough.

To whom do we pray?

"This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name..." (Matt. 6:9).

When Jesus came into the world He did something radical, unexpected and unprecedented. He constantly referred to God as "Abba" or Father ... daddy. One of the most spectacular revelations that Jesus brought to us is that God is a father and wants to be our very own Father! Jesus constantly spoke of God as Father. The Jews at the time considered this blasphemous and completely disrespectful!

The only thing more amazing than Jesus referring to God as Father was that when the disciples asked Him how to pray, He started by saying, "When you pray say, 'Our Father...' " WOW! This is revolutionary! And it must be the foundation of our prayer lives – that when we are praying we are speaking to our Father.

This is done in the context of relationship. If we understand this, prayer becomes more than duty and more than a spiritual activity – our prayer will be:

- **Intimate** – we will feel His emotions and be moved by Him even as He has compassion on us and empathy towards our requests and desires.
- **Dynamic** – as with any conversation between people who love each other, even so our prayer will be organic and dynamic. It won't stick to a structure and form and be the same all the time.
- **Two way conversation** – it won't be about just rattling off our list and getting through our requests. Rather, it will be about speaking and listening and responding (this is why praying with a note pad can be very helpful as it makes it more tangible to pray and write down what we are feeling and what we think God is saying) to a living person.
- **Expectant/Faith-filled** – faith is more about knowing who we are speaking to, rather than how much faith we feel we have. It is more about direction in terms of who are we trusting rather than quantity, or how much faith we have. Knowing that we are praying to a Father Who designed us, loves us, sacrificed His Son to have relationship with us and always wants what is best for us; means that we can be totally convinced that He is listening to us and will respond to us, though not always in the way that we expect!

Our Father loves it when we come to Him in humble submission and ask Him for help! Over and over the Bible says God exalts the humble but brings low the proud (Jas 4:5, 1 Pet. 5:6). He desires that we be utterly dependent on Him.

As a church and individually, if we seldom come together and pray, we can easily fall into the trap of thinking we don't need God's presence, power or activity in our meetings and lives! We can start to think that as long as we organize and administrate everything correctly then we will get the results and be successful. This kind of thinking is actually idolatrous! If we are not constantly praying and admitting our need for Him, then it shows that we are probably relying on ourselves or other people, or even on other things rather than on God. This is idolatry.

So let's pray like Jesus taught us: in relationship with the Father. A Father that demonstrated His love for us by giving Jesus to die for us; a Father Who knows us and our needs better than we know ourselves!

Why do we pray?

So then, why do we pray? What should be our motivation?

So often I have heard sermons on prayer that emphasize how unspiritual and unholy we are if we are not waking up every morning and praying for hours before our day, quoting the saints of old and their devotion to prayer. Usually this inspires us to pray, but it usually only lasts a couple of days because guilt is just such a rotten motivation for prayer!

Prayer works!

The thing that really motivates us to pray is when we realize that it really works! It actually changes things!

Sometimes people forget that even though God is sovereign, He has, in His sovereignty, chosen to work in partnership with man. Even in the very beginning in Genesis 1:27 we see God delegating responsibility and authority to man on earth. In a sense, He could do anything He wants, whenever He wants, but He has chosen to give people the amazing privilege of co-laboring with Him. People can actually have authority in prayer that can affect the future! Let's look at some biblical examples of this:

- James tells us, "You do not have because you do not ask" (Jas 4:2).

- God had actually decided to destroy His people but Moses turned God away from destroying them by interceding for the people and God relented!

"Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people (Exod. 32:13-14).

- Elijah pretty much started and stopped a drought because of his prayer.
- The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit (Jas 5:16-18).
- Again and again Jesus promises in the gospels that if we would just ask in His name and believe then He will give us what we ask for!

"Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it." (John 14:13-14)

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:7)

Not only does our motivation come from the knowledge and experience that prayer works but...

Prayer wins the battle in private

There are many biblical examples of the battle being won in private in prayer.

- Imagine the Israelites' desperate prayer and dependence on God as they marched around and around the walls of Jericho before finally shouting out in faith and walking in victory as God brought down the walls around the city!
- Think of the prophet Samuel crying out to God on behalf of Israel that He would save them from a much more powerful enemy:

"When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. They said to Samuel, 'Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.'" Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him.

While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar" (1 Sam. 7:7-11).

- Think of Jesus in Luke 9 – His disciples are unable to drive the demon out of the boy and the father cries out to Jesus to help his unbelief. Jesus, of course, drives the spirit out but the disciples are concerned as to why they could not. Jesus says this is because this kind of demon only comes out with prayer! Not meaning that they should all have gathered around the boy to pray but meaning that they needed to be constantly found in prayer; fighting the battle there first, so they would have the wisdom, faith and authority when it came to ministry!
- And of course the ultimate example: think of Jesus that night before facing the cross! He wrestles in prayer through the night, sweating blood in anguish, exhorting His disciples to stick with Him in prayer because of all they would face as well ... think of the place of surrender He came to and the journey to get there! Think of the soldiers coming to arrest Him and the power in which He must have been walking after His prayer – such power and authority that when He merely speaks the soldiers fall to the ground!

Now think of your life: the relationship conflicts and difficulties. The children's struggles and pressures. The workplace challenges. The battle for purity and holiness. The battle in sickness.

The battle is won in the secret place first and then walked out in the situation.

Philippians 4 spells it out so beautifully:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)

Note – it doesn't say that as we pray God will necessarily grant the requests, but that His peace will come and that we will be secure in our hearts where it counts, knowing we are in Christ Jesus.

We must remember the “why?” is because it works and it is essential for any kind of victory when it comes to walking out the battles of life!

What should we pray for?

What should one pray about? Anything and everything! Married couples know how much they need to communicate in order to keep their marriage healthy.

A good guideline for prayer is found in the model prayer that Jesus gave us:

“This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:9).

- **Firstly**, as we have already said, it is relational. There is a need to pray as you would talk to your Father, and to acknowledge Him as Father. As you pray and acknowledge the relationship and who He is to you, there is a much closer intimacy that comes when compared with just rattling off a list of needs.
- **Secondly**, see how Jesus first focuses on God before focusing on the self. He focuses on God's holy name, on God's character and His attributes, and then flows into focusing on God's desires and will. Prayer that moves God is prayer that concentrates on God's will and allows our hearts to be motivated to pray in line

with who God is and what God desires. So, for example, if you are praying for your unsaved friend don't just come with the perfect plan to God of how your friend ought to be saved; rather pray for God's heart for your friend and His will for your friend. You'll probably come away from that prayer feeling so much more peace and expectation for what God is going to do in your friend; and so much more aware of how you must act towards him / her.

- **Thirdly**, pray for all those things you need. Here Jesus prays for provision, forgiveness, guidance regarding temptation and protection from Satan. I love the humility of this prayer. The absolute dependence on the Father, the desire to see and please Him first and then the reliance on Him for the deep, constant needs that we have as people.

How should we pray?

Here are some helpful keys to keep in mind when you pray. Our prayer must be:

REGULAR

Yes, the truth is that Jesus ascended so that He would no longer be one man on earth with human limitations, but rather would be the Ever Present Indwelling Christ with Whom we can (though to our detriment often don't) have unbroken fellowship. This is why Paul exhorts us to pray unceasingly (1 Thess. 5:16). What an amazing truth that can change our lives! Our aim should be constant awareness of, trust in, and communion with Jesus. You can be with your wife all day and not really know how she's feeling or where she's at. There is a difference between that and "facetime". By this I don't mean the Apple app., but the real-life, face-to-face connection. The kind of attention and focus that we give in real, true fellowship. Every day we need those times of undistracted fellowship with Jesus, the kind that is more than reading, writing or talking. The kind that involves all our senses and affections.

SIMPLE AND SINCERE

"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (Matt 6:7-8).

Pharisees were known for their long-winded prayers. Jesus rebuked them because it did not reflect their true spiritual state. They weren't honest! We must not try to impress God or people with our prayer; we don't have to use spiritual sounding language or raise our voices or drag out the name "Jeeesus." God wants honesty! He wants truth from the heart.

PERSEVERING

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10).

Most of us read this not realising that the verbs here are continuous, so it should read, "... ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, etc..."

Jesus tells various parables to exhort us not just to pray once and then forget about it, but rather that God honours and rewards persevering faith and prayer!

PRIVATE AND CORPORATE

We mentioned above that we must make regular quiet time for prayer when we can be alone and without distractions, but there is also a wonderful biblical mandate for corporate prayer. In Acts 4 we see a prayer meeting that is so powerful that the building starts to literally shake as they continue to pray! The disciples gather to pray after being persecuted, and as they pray they are so filled with faith and boldness that they leave that place totally changed and empowered to preach the gospel!

"And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said 'And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they continued to speak the word of God with boldness.'" (Acts 4:24-31).

"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matt. 18:19-20).

As we pray together we inspire one another and our faith spreads like fire as we begin to agree together. We catch each other's compassion and wisdom and His voice is confirmed as we listen and pray together. Christianity is very definitely a team sport!

Conclusion

May prayer be to us the very channel of life and relationship with a living Father that has lavished His love upon us by calling us His sons! May it call forth the power of the Almighty to change and act on behalf of His creation. May it never be a duty but always an expression of devotion and dependence. May it rise in unison with brothers and sisters and cause us to reflect, act and believe like Jesus did.

Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake (Rev 8:3-5).

Who is God?

Nowhere in the Bible does it try to prove that God exists. The matter is never even open to question, it is simply assumed (Is. 40:12-26, Jer. 10:1-6). The Bible argues only that He is the one true God and reveals His nature, character and His relationship with His creation.

We need to be clear: man does not discover God, but God reveals Himself to man (Rom 10:20; Gal 1:11-12)

God has a will (Eph 1:11), intelligence (1 Cor. 2:11) and emotions (1 Pet. 5:7), and He is without imperfections. He is a person, not simply some cosmic force.

God is Spirit

The Bible clearly teaches that God is spirit (John 4:24; Rom. 1:20; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17). This means that He is not composed of matter; He does not have a physical nature. This does not mean that He is any way less "real". We tend to view the spiritual as "not quite real". This concept is a modern and western mindset and is actually invalid.

God is independent

We exist for God; God does not exist for us (1Cor 8:6; Rev 4:11). There is nothing that we have, or that we can do, that God needs (Rom. 11:35-36; Job 22:2).

God is the source of life

Apart from God, nothing was made (John 1:1-4). Everything that exists is created by Him and for Him.

The Attributes of God

The greatness of God

These are aspects of God's character that are inherent only within the Godhead. Nothing else in creation possesses these attributes.

God is infinite

This word is not used specifically in the Bible but the concept is clearly there (Ps. 113:4-6; Ps. 147:5, Job 36:26, Eph. 1:23, Is. 66:1).

"God is infinite. This means not only that God is unlimited but also that He is unlimitable. In this respect God is unlike anything we experience." Erickson

God is eternal

"God is without beginning or end; He is free from all succession of time and He is the cause of time." Thiessen

"He is without beginning ... He will never cease to be ... He never grows any older ... Time doesn't apply to God ... Eternity is to God what present time is to us." C. Finney

God is eternal, created beings are not. Though we are promised "eternal" life, this means a life without end. We had a definite beginning, unlike God. It may be more accurate therefore to refer to man having "everlasting" life.

God is immutable

God is constant, devoid of all change. He cannot and will not alter His person, perfections, promises or purposes.

"God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent. Has He said, and shall He not do it? Or has He spoken, and shall He not make it good" (Num. 23:19)?

"For I am Jehovah, I change not" (Mal 3:6).

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

Also 1 Kings 8:56, Ps. 102:27, Ps. 33:11, Is. 46:10, Heb. 1:12, Jas 1:17.

An understanding of God's immutability gives us an assurance and confidence in Him and our relationship with Him. Because He does not change, He deals with us consistently (Lam 3:22-23) so we can approach the throne with confidence (Heb 4:16).

God is omnipresent

"God is everywhere present with His whole being at all times" C.C. Ryrie

Again, this truth is made very clear in Scripture. For example: Ps. 139:7-12, Is. 6:3, Jer. 23:23-24, Amos 9:2-4, Eph. 1:23.

If God is present everywhere, is He present to all in the same way?

The answer is no! The immediacy of God's presence can vary.

How do we reach such a conclusion?

James 4:8 suggests that we can feel remote from God and need to draw near to Him, even though He is omnipresent. Likewise Revelation 4:2 and 2 Chronicles 7:2 suggest that God's presence is localised. The only way to reconcile these passages with the previous ones highlighted, is to suggest that whilst God is everywhere, there are times when He chooses to reveal Himself more particularly in a given context.

God is omniscient

"God knows all things actual and possible, past, present and future in one eternal act."

There are many Scriptures pointing to God's omniscience:

Prov. 15:3, Ps. 147:5, Is. 29:15-16, 2 Chron. 16:9, Job 28:24, Job 34:21,22, Acts 1:24, 1 Cor. 3:20, Heb. 4:12-13, 1 John 3:20, 1 Cor. 2:11.

C.C. Ryrie points out the benefits of God's omniscience to us:

- **It gives us security** - nothing can surprise God!
- **It gives us sensitivity** - allow God to guide; He knows what will happen.
- **It gives us solace** - when faced with the mysteries of life.
- **It gives us sobriety** - one day we will stand before an all-knowing God.

God is omnipotent

God's power is able to perform His purposes with perfect wisdom

"Ah Lord GOD! Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17).

Also Gen. 17:1, Gen. 18:14, Job 42:2, Matt. 19:26 etc.

In fact the word "Almighty" (i.e. all powerful) occurs 56 times in the Bible and only ever in reference to God.

God's divine omnipotence means that He can do all things for us. His resources are always more than able to meet our requirements. This is encouraging and faith building indeed. Leonard Ravenhill stated, "When we link our impotence to His omnipotence the word impossible is dropped from our vocabularies."

The goodness of God

Whilst God desires that we possess these attributes we do not possess them perfectly. We must also remember that God is the foundation of these attributes, not man. If we remove God from our thinking, as the world has done, then there can be no moral absolutes. Our absolute is that God is the definer of, embodiment of, and judge of all morality." A God without moral character is no god at all." Schuurman.

Holiness of God

"The one aim of Christianity is personal holiness, but personal holiness will only be the one absorbing and attainable aim of man as he recognises it to be the one pre-eminent attribute of God." E.G. Robinson

God's name is Holy: Exod. 20:7, Lev. 22:32, Ezek. 20:39, Ezek. 39:25, Ezek. 43:8, Amos 2:7.

God's nature is Holy: not what He has, but who He is.

As health is more the absence of illness, so holiness is more than the absence of sin.

"Holiness is at the deepest a doctrine of absolute and perfect moral excellence. Holiness is not made up of omissions but by realities that fill character and life." Clarke.

"As a wooden mannequin, though it has never sinned, is not holy; so a man cannot be made holy simply by what he does not do." Mike Davies

God was Holy before creation, before Lucifer's rebellion, before sin existed. Holiness is not defined by sin in any way.

There are two aspects to God's holiness:

His Majestic Holiness

"transcendent" aspect, e.g. Is 6:1-4

Causes man to revere God

His Moral Holiness

purity, goodness, lack of evil, etc.

Causes man to imitate God

Of course we cannot become Holy in the majestic sense, but we can become passionate about seeking holiness.

Holiness is mentioned 45 times in Leviticus alone. God is Holy, Holy, Holy!! It is because of His holiness that God is separated from sinful man. Holiness is the primary attribute mentioned in the book of Revelation (Is. 59:2, Hab. 1:13, Heb. 12:14, 1 Pet. 1:14, 1 John 1:5, Ps. 99:9, Rev. 4:8, Rev. 15:4, Is. 6:5).

An understanding of God's holiness should have a bearing on our relationship with God in every aspect; in our worship, our prayers, our service, etc.

Justice of God (righteousness)

God is absolutely just in His character.

The parables of Matt 13 teach that in the future there will be a time of judgement.

A common saying today is, "Surely God is too good to damn anyone!"

However, the same book that deals with the goodness of God deals with justice: Deut 32:4. In fact, if God eliminated punishment, He would no longer be just (Zeph. 3:5). God cannot and will not pervert justice. It is man who would long to do so (Job 8:3).

God's justice is a positive attribute that flows out of love. He is faithful and just (1 John 1:9). In fact the only real injustice is the punishment taken by Jesus, for our salvation.

Love of God

He is a God of love and peace (2 Cor. 13:11, 1 John 4:7-11) and we know that God's love is reliable (Rom. 8:35).

Love is an act of the will, not just an emotion. God's love is a reasoned love rather than an emotionally based love. He loves even when love is not reciprocated. Love with God is more than what He does; it is an attribute, it is what He is. Care must be taken, for whilst it is true that "God is Love" this is not a formula; one cannot reverse it and make love, God. Neither can one say that love is all that God is!

Love, of course, does not equate with approval: He loved us whilst we were still sinners, but He does not wish us to remain sinners. I have heard the argument, "God loves me as I am, why change?" The reply is that God loves us as we are but He loves us too much to allow us to remain as we are. Besides, a true love for God will result in us becoming more like Him and obeying His commands (John 13:34, 1 John 2:3-4). In fact, love has been called the 11th commandment.

The great passage of 1 Corinthians 13 defines love, and therefore goes a long way to defining this attribute of God. One may even substitute the word God for the word love to more fully understand this.

We live in a generation of broken families, alienation, isolation, abuse, etc. For many it is difficult to accept the love of God (e.g. as a father) because they have not experienced what love really is. It is essential, then, that our frame of reference for what is love, how to love one another, must come from God and not from our own experience or understanding. "Because God is love, we do not discover God from our experience of love, but we discover love from our experience of God." Michael Harper

Mercy of God

God's mercy = undeserved forgiveness

God's grace = undeserved favour

An innocent being cannot be the recipient of mercy. Therefore, one must realize one's sinfulness and guilt in order to receive it. David Pawson says there is only one requirement for us to receive mercy and that is to recognize that we need it.

God is not compelled to show mercy to individuals, otherwise it wouldn't be mercy, it would be an obligation. He chooses to show mercy.

*"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Jehovah, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."
Is 55:7*

Also Mic. 7:18-19, Luke 1:50, Luke 6:36, Eph. 2:4, Jas 5:11.

Benevolence of God

That is: wishing to do good; actively friendly and helpful; charitable.

We do not serve a malevolent God (as are some Hindu gods) nor is He ambivalent, as Deists would argue. It is impossible for God to be indifferent (Matt. 5:45, Matt. 6:26, Acts 14:17, Ps. 104:21).

God does not merely seek His own good but the good of others. He is good to us even though we deserve nothing (Tit. 2:11).

God shows His goodness through His grace; that is, His unmerited favour.

Summary

We are to link these moral attributes to ourselves. We have been called to participate in the divine nature.

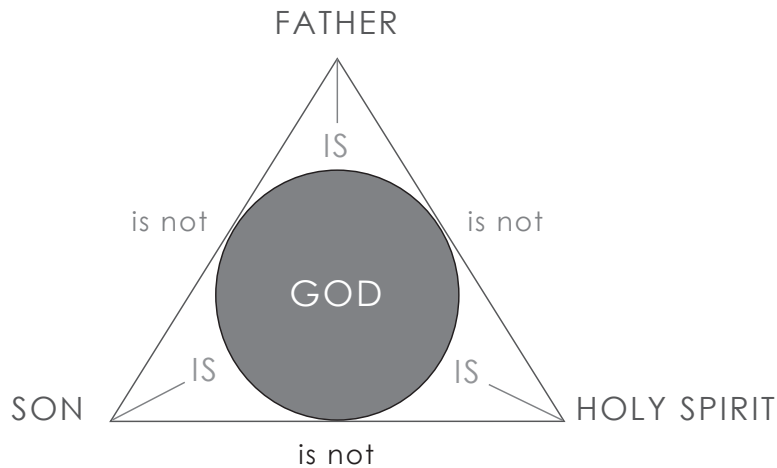
"For this very reason do your best to add goodness to your faith; to your goodness add knowledge; to your knowledge add self-control; to your self-control add endurance; to your endurance add godliness; to your godliness add Christian affection; and to your Christian affection add love. These are the qualities you need, and if you have them in abundance, they will make you active and effective in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

The Trinity

"A term designating one God in three persons. Although not a biblical term, "the Trinity" has been found a convenient designation for the one God self-revealed in Scripture as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It signifies that within the one essence of the Godhead we have to distinguish three persons who are neither three gods on the one side, nor three parts or modes of God on the other, but coequally and coeternally God." Elwell

Trinity is a uniquely Christian concept that is monotheistic. It is not discovered by reason, but by revelation. That is not to say, however, that it defies reason or is unreasonable. We may have difficulty understanding this concept clearly but that should neither surprise nor dismay us. I have actually learned to enjoy the fact that I cannot fully explain the Trinity! I love that God has revealed Himself in such a way as to allow us to relate to Him yet at the same time be beyond our comprehension.

A common symbol for God is a circle within a triangle, to indicate His triune nature. The following diagram may prove helpful.



We see here that whilst the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are all God (in one essence), the Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit; neither is the Son the Holy Spirit. The triangle has unity yet threefoldness, without confusion.

The Athanasian Creed, developed to state the orthodox belief of the church in the face of heresy, states, "So the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are not three Gods but one God, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance."

Evidence for the Trinity

Evidence of oneness

Deut. 4:35, Deut. 6:4, Deut. 32:39, 2 Sam. 7:22, Ps. 86:10, Is. 43:10-11, Is. 44:6, 1 Cor. 8:4, Gal. 3:20, Eph. 4:6, 1 Tim. 2:5, Jas 2:19. Jesus spoke of the greatest command in Mark 12:29. This command begins "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord."

Evidence of threeness

There are a number of references where the word "one" is not singular in the simple arithmetical sense: Gen. 2:24 "they will become one", Gen. 41:25, 1 Kings 22:13, John 17:22, Acts 4:32, 1 Cor. 3:8, Eph. 2:14.

Unity can also include more than one person. There are two Hebrew words for "one" – Yachid (only one, in an absolute sense) and Achid (united one). The Old Testament consistently uses the word Achid. Yachid is used 12 times in the Old Testament "but not once is it used to denote the unity of God" Ruth Specter.

The Trinity is foreshadowed in the Old Testament

El is singular for God, Elohim is plural. Elohim is used 10 times more than El when referring to God. Though many have argued that this is a “plural of majesty” (denoting His greatness – like the ‘royal we’ of Queen Victoria) it should be noted that, for example in Gen 1 Elohim (plural) created (singular verb form). Also it is interesting to **note** - that this “plural of majesty” that has been proposed is never used in reference to any royalty.

- Plural pronouns (let us ...) (Gen. 1:26, Gen. 3:22, Gen. 11:7, Is 6:8). Surely fierce monotheists would have been careful to use language that would avoid a belief in polytheism unless directed by the Holy Spirit.
- Dual distinction in conversations: Ps. 2:7, Ps. 16:10, Ps. 45:6-7, Ps. 110:1, (cf. John 12:28, Heb. 10: 5 & 9).
- Repetition of divine names. That is, there are times when names are used as if they distinguish God from God. Gen. 19:24, Ps. 110:1 (Jehovah said to Adonai), Dan. 9:17 (Elohim ... Adonai), Hos. 1:7.
- Threefold descriptions and benedictions such as Deut. 6:4, Num. 6:24-26, Is. 6:2, (cf. Rev. 4:8). Hodge says that these are an anticipation of the threefold nature of God.
- Divinity of the Messiah was foretold. He is represented as one with Jehovah and yet distinct from Him (Is. 9:6, Mic. 5:2, Mal. 3:1, Prov. 30:4).

The Trinity is clear in the New Testament

Though no specific Scripture says the Trinity exists, (note: 1 John 5:7 is not included in the oldest most reliable manuscripts) the message is clear.

First; in collective references to all three persons of the Trinity

- Matt. 28:19 states oneness and three (The Name is singular)
- In the NT over 70 passages bring the three into close association (esp. the baptism of Jesus).
- Luke 1:35, Rom. 1:1, 3 & 4, Rom. 15:30, Eph. 3:14-17, Eph. 4:4-6.
- Jesus is at God's right hand. Mark 16:19, Acts 2:33, Rom. 8:34, Eph. 1:20, Col. 3:1, Heb. 1:3, Heb. 1:13, Heb. 10:12, Heb. 12:2, 1 Pet. 3:22, Rev. 3:21. How is it possible to sit at your own right hand?
- He took the scroll (Rev 5:7).
- Jesus spoke to the Father (John 17:1). The prayer life of Jesus would be a total deception if there were no distinction between Him and the Father.
- Whilst on earth Jesus made reference to the plurality of God (John 15:24, 2 John 9, John 8:17-18). He also uses ‘we’ and ‘our’ (John 14:23) and says He wasn't alone because the Father was with Him (John 8:16&29, John 16:32).
- In John 14:16 He uses the Greek word allos (another of the same substance) when He could have used heteros (another of a different kind).
- The Son is God: John 6:27, 1 Pet. 1 & 2 John 1:1, Heb. 1:8.
- The Holy Spirit is God: Acts 5:3&4, 1 Cor. 6:19, (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16).

Second; in Scriptures that demonstrate that all three persons are God. If we can show that the Son and The Holy Spirit possess the divine attributes, then they must be God, or we are left with three gods. There are many Scriptures that make this clear.

"Ultimately, this supra-rational truth about the infinite God is beyond the reasoning powers of finite man. It is the inability to accept this last point, and the difficulty of the concept itself, that has led to this doctrine being surrounded by more error and misunderstanding than any other." N. Day Lewis

It has also been said of this Doctrine:

"Try to explain it and you'll lose your mind But try to deny it and you'll lose your soul."

God the Father

The Father is the First Person of the Trinity, known and delineated in Scripture particularly with respect to:

His relationships

- By creation, the Father of all men (Acts 17:29).
- By covenant, the Father of Israel (Exod. 4:22). Both a spiritual relationship (with believing Israelites) and a governmental relationship (with all Israelites).
- By incarnation, the Father of Jesus (Matt. 3:17).
- By redemption, the Father of all who believe in Christ (John 20:17, Rom. 8:14-17, Gal. 3:26-4:7, 1 John 3:1).

His works

Almost everything God does involves, in some way or another, all the Members of the Trinity (necessarily, because God is one). So when we speak of the particular works of the Father we are not excluding the other Persons but simply delineating those things that seem to be the prerogative of the Father in a special way.

- The author of the plan of salvation or decree of God (Ps. 2:7-9).
- The author of salvation (Eph. 1:3-6).
- The sender of the Son to this world and the orchestrator of His mission (John 5:37).
- The disciplinarian of His children (Heb. 12:9).

As our Father, He loves us, disciplines us, knows how to give us good things, leads us, speaks with us and brings us to maturity. He is a perfect Father who knows us perfectly and loves us perfectly, who works within us perfectly.

The names of God (What is God called?)

Names in Israel were never a matter of chance, sentiment or mere identification: they contained a record or a hopeful prediction of an individual's character and deeds. Similarly, the names God gives Himself reveal His nature and deeds, His relationship to the objects of revelation (those who use the names) and the content (message) of that revelation. Some names God instituted Himself; whereas other names men ascribed to Him consequent on a particular experience of Him, but even these were inspired by the Spirit and included by Him in infallible Scripture.

Old Testament

PRIMARY NAMES

- **EL (si): ELOHIM (pl)** (translated: god: God) (used >2000x & 250x)

The common, generic noun for "god" in the Hebrew language. Its root means "strong one", the name thus denoting strength: might, a powerful governor of the universe and man. Because it refers to gods in the widest sense, it is often, when used of the true God, connected to one of his attributes (e.g. mercy, in Deut. 4:31) to distinguish Him from other (false) gods. Being the most general name of God, it has the least specific significance (meaning). The use of the plural (e.g. in Gen. 1:1&26) indicates not a plurality of gods but a plural of majesty, the fullness of reign (similar to the English idiom of the royal "we"). It allows for a distinction in the Godhead and the later revelation of the Trinity.

- **YAHWEH: JAH (abb.)** (translated: LORD) (used 7000x & 49x)

God's most personal, unique name, having therefore the greatest significance (meaning). It is first revealed in Exodus 3:14 (to Moses at the burning bush) but is used retrospectively in Scripture. Its revelation at this point in Israel's history gave it special significance and in turn revealed much about Israel's God. It is further especially associated with God's holiness (Lev. 11:44-45), His hatred of sin (Gen. 6:3-7) and His gracious provision of redemption (Is. 53:1&5-6&10). The Jews regarded this name as so holy, they had such a superstitious dread of it, that they would neither write it out in full or take it up on their lips: they wrote YHWH and said ADONAI (see below). The vowels of the latter were later placed in the former to make it more pronounceable: YaHoWaH; this was anglicised to JEHOVAH.

- **ADON (si): ADONAI (pl)** (translated: Lord) (used 30x & 280x)

This word was also used of Human Master-slave relationships (Exod. 21:1-6) and so denoted Lord, Sovereign Lord, Master or Owner. Applied to God, it conveys God's absolute authority (Josh. 5:14, Is. 6:8-11), but also His protection.

COMPOUND NAMES

There is virtually an endless list of these, each embroidering on the primary names of EL, YAHWEH or both. They are not distinct names in the strict sense but designations: "titles" bestowed on God by someone who had just experienced Him in the particular way expressed in the title.

- On EL: **EL ELYON**, the most high God (Gen. 14:22, Is. 14:14); **EL OLAM**, the everlasting God (Gen. 21:33, Is. 40:28); **EL SHADDAI**, the almighty God (Gen. 17:1 - the root of "Shaddai" means mountain, and so this name denotes "the God as mighty as a mountain"); et al.

- On YAHWEH: **YAHWEH JIREH**, the LORD provides (Gen. 22:14); YAHWEH NISSI, the LORD is my banner (Exod. 17:15); YAHWEH SHALOM, the Lord is my peace (Judg. 6:24); YAHWEH SABBAOTH, the Lord of hosts (1 Sam. 1:3); YAHWEH MACCADDESHCEM, the LORD my sanctifier (Exod. 31:13); YAHWEH ROI, the LORD my shepherd (Ps. 23:1); YAHWEH TSIDKENU, the LORD our righteousness (Jer. 23:6); YAHWEH SHAMMAH: the LORD is there (Ezek. 48:35); et al.
- On both: **YAHWEH ELOHIM ISRAEL**, the LORD God of Israel (Judg. 5:3); et al.

OTHER NAMES

On rare occasions names not connected to one of the three primary names are used, but these (like [ii] above) are normally statements of God's character rather than names. For example: QADOSH ISRAEL, the Holy One of Israel.

New Testament

- **THEOS**. Greek equivalent for EL:ELOHIM, and thus meaning simply God:god.
- **KURIOS**. YAHWEH ("I am who I am") is explicated a few times by variations of a descriptive kind ("the Alpha and the Omega", "the first and the last", "the beginning and the end", "who was, who is and who is to come"). But for the most part the New Testament writers followed Judaism in substituting (for YAHWEH) KURIOS, the Greek equivalent of ADONAI (its root means power). This name thus designates God and Christ as the Mighty One, the Lord, the Possessor, the Ruler, the One who has legal power and authority over His subjects.
- **PATER**. Greek for "Father". The New Testament introduced this name as descriptive of a distinct person within the Godhead, although "Father" had been used in the Old Testament to designate the special theocratic relationship God had with Israel (Deut. 32:6). In the New Testament it is used in the general sense of Originator:Creator, or to express the special relationship between the First Person of the Trinity and Jesus, or to express the relationship between God and all believers as His spiritual children.

Resurrection and judgement

Eternal implications

In Hebrews 6:2, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement is included as a basic of the faith that we should all know about. To live with a realization of eternity is one of the greatest keys to living a life of purpose and fruitfulness.

The truth of eternity, as incredible as it is for believers, is very daunting for unbelievers! The world has, therefore, tried to reduce the concept of hell and judgement to a cartoon character devil with a trident fork; to an endless debauched party that can be eagerly anticipated or simply to ceasing to exist rather than have to give any sort of account for your life!

How long is eternity? This is something that our minds can hardly grasp. A good illustration would be the following:

If a swallow had to take one grain of sand from Table Mountain once a year and drop it into the sea ... the day that the mountain has completely disappeared would only be the earliest beginning of eternity!

Because of these massive implications for us as believers and for those who are unbelievers, this subject must be a priority for study and contemplation.

Resurrection

Although we could talk about the many people that were raised from the dead in the Bible as well as the spiritual resurrection that takes place at the moment of conversion, we will rather be concentrating on the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of our bodies on the last day.

Often we only talk about the death of Jesus without realising that the gospel is nullified if it weren't for the resurrection on the third day. The Bible gives much attention to the resurrection of Jesus as well as our future resurrection. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:18, if there is no resurrection and future hope then we who live and often suffer for the sake of Christ, are to be "pitied more than all men."

What was the significance of Jesus' resurrection?

- He was raised to life and to the position as supreme Ruler over all creation. His resurrection confirmed Jesus to be the One that has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:17.) The One that is seated "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but in the one to come" (Eph. 1:21).
- He defeated death. The Bible tells us that death no longer has mastery over Him (Rom. 6:9) and that in rising again He now holds the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1:18). He holds the keys to all death and to every trap of hell that holds us captive!
- He has risen to become our Great High Priest Who serves in heaven before the throne of God. The One Who is ever living and seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us and to help us in our weakness and struggles here on earth (Heb. 10:13-14)!

- Through His resurrection we too will be raised on the last day. In Him we will be raised up to new life (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

An encouragement

- When we feel far from God because of sin or busyness or tiredness we would do well to not only remember the grace in which we stand, but also the fact that we come not to a great concept or idea, but to a living Saviour that is one hundred percent committed to blessing and perfecting us! It's not about positive thinking; it's about a real living God dwelling in us!
- We, together with our King, are not fighting a losing battle against sin and the death that sin brings! We are fighting a battle that has already been won. We are speeding up the inevitable rule and reign of Jesus over all creation.

The final resurrection of the dead

When will it happen?

It will happen on the last day (John 6:39-54) when the final trumpet sounds (1 Cor. 15:51-52) and Jesus comes again (1 Cor. 15:20-23) with the voice of the archangel (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

The Bible tells us that the day of the Lord's coming will be unmistakable and warns us not to run after false prophets that claim to be Jesus. It also warns us that no one knows the exact time of His return and rather than trying to work out the time, we must rather live in a state of constant readiness (Matt. 24-25).

What will the resurrection of the dead look like?

Don't be surprised at this: A time is coming when all who are dead and in their graves will hear his voice. Then they will come out of their graves. Those who did good will rise and have life forever, but those who did evil will rise to be judged guilty. I can do nothing alone. I judge only the way I am told, so my judgment is fair. I don't try to please myself, but I try to please the One who sent me (John 5:28-30).

- All those who have died before His coming whether they were believers or not will hear his voice and rise again. According to whether they had saving faith or not they will either be raised to life forever in the new heavens and the new earth, or they will be condemned to eternal punishment in Hell.
- Those who are in Christ will receive glorious bodies, imperishable and powerful that will long only to do His will (1 Cor. 15:38-44)! This means they will never wear out, grow old or be subject to any kind of disease, sickness, pain or injury! The only scars present will be the scars on the body of Jesus, which serve as trophies of His victory; memorials of the incredible price that was paid on the cross for us!
- Those who are not in Christ will also be resurrected to 'live' forever, but they will have no real life at all but rather eternal torment, as seen below under the heading, "Hell".
- We will all rise on that day to stand before the judgment seat of Christ (see below under the final judgment).

What happens in the time between death and the resurrection?

Firstly, we must take note that death for believers is not a punishment for sin because the wrath of God was completely satisfied by Jesus. There is no condemnation for believers (Rom. 8:1)! Death for believers is rather a natural consequence of living in a fallen world and in the shell of a corrupted body.

- For believers, therefore, we do not grieve like those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13) because death has lost its sting! Paul describes it as merely falling asleep.
- This does not mean that we slip into a state of unconsciousness between death and the resurrection.
- The Bible clearly teaches that we will be in His presence in heaven when we die.

"So I say that we have courage. We really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:8).

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus said to him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43).

- This rules out the idea of purgatory. (The teaching of a place where the souls of believers go to be further purified from sin until they are ready to be admitted into heaven.)
- It also rules out the idea of soul sleep. (The teaching that believers die and go into a state of unconscious sleep until the day of Christ's return.)
- Hebrews 12 even speaks about a great cloud of witnesses watching us as we run our race here on earth. In the light of Hebrews 11 we see that these are real people who have died and are already in the presence of the Lord. Although this teaches that people in heaven are aware of what is happening on earth, God detests the practice of trying to communicate with the dead (Saul's great sin, 1 Sam. 28:7-25).
- Scripture also teaches that unbelievers go immediately to eternal punishment. The parable of Lazarus, that Jesus told, clearly states that there will be no second chances after death! When the rich man, who had died and gone to hell, asked for just a tiny sip of water from the beggar, Lazarus, who was still alive, Abraham's reply to him was that a great chasm had been fixed between those who were dead and those who were alive. There are no second chances to come back to earth and try again!

Practical application

- Although we must always trust God for physical healing of our mortal bodies, this teaching encourages us that our physical bodies are temporary, that life is very short in the light of eternity and that our new bodies will be perfect and incorruptible!
- Although it may be a long time before the resurrection and the final judgment, we cannot live irresponsibly! There are no second chances once we die.

The final judgment

Born again believers who are walking out their salvation in love never have to fear eternal punishment! This love that we have for one another is the big test of true salvation and gives great confidence to those who find themselves full of love!

This is how love is made perfect in us: that we can be without fear on the day God judges us, because in this world we are like Him. Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love drives out fear. It is punishment that makes a person fear, so love is not made perfect in the person who fears (1 John 4:17-18).

But even though we can be very assured of our standing in Christ and our sure hope of eternal life, we will still stand at the judgment seat of Christ either to receive or lose reward on that day!

Who will judge?

Jesus is the Judge (2 Tim. 4:8, Acts 10:42, John 5:26-27). He is without partiality; His memory is perfect and His vision penetrates all pretence or hypocrisy! He is, however, also our great Defender Who is faithful to forgive all the sins we confess - removing them from us and choosing to forget them forever!

This should cause us to live soberly, praying with David in Psalm 139:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps. 139:23-24)

Remember that this fear of the Day of Judgment is not the primary reason we chose to confess our sins and obey God, rather, as children who love their Father and are loved and known by their Father, we obey because we genuinely want to and we confess our sin because we do not want anything to stand between us!

Although we don't know too much about this the Bible also says that Christians will be involved in judging as well.

"Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!" (1 Cor. 6:32-3)!

How will we be judged and what will that day look like?

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire." (Rev. 20:11-15).

This vision of John of the final judgment is probably the clearest description that we see in Scripture and in it and other Scriptures we see the following:

- We will be judged as individuals - we each have our own books that have written in them all that we have done while in the body. We will be judged according to these books. There will be no finger pointing or blame shifting! We must therefore take responsibility now for our whole lives and all our choices, forgiving all who have wronged us and acknowledging our responsibility for our lives!

- Believers will be “judged” in the sense that they will be rewarded according to various degrees –
 - ◆ We must understand that as believers we do not face any punishment for sin, this has been satisfied fully on the cross by Jesus! (Rom. 8:1, John 5:24)
 - ◆ Rather we are rewarded according to the good works that were prepared for us before time and the degree that we walked in them!
 - ◆ We are rewarded according to our works and the heart motivation of those works.
 - ◆ The wonderful part is that not one good thing done will fail to receive its reward!

“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” (Matt. 10:42).

- The sobering part is that our heart motives will be revealed and we will be rewarded or not rewarded according to them. Are we producing dead works according to the law, trying to earn merit by self-righteousness – these will be burned up. Rather, we must produce fruit as we remain in the vine, doing good works in grace and love and on the foundation of Jesus (1 Cor. 3:12-15, Matt. 6:4,6,18, 1 Cor. 13:1-3).

An encouragement

- Often when speaking about rewards one feels guilty and either gives up even trying or one tries harder in the flesh. The subject of reward is huge in the New Testament and Jesus speaks about deliberately storing up treasures in heaven. However, if we feel we lack motivation for good works, remember that Jesus taught this subject almost always in the context of a son pleasing his Father out of love and a genuine desire to please Him, not in a context of striving in your own strength!
- On that day there will be no shame or guilt for those in Christ but there will be regret when we see all Jesus planned for us. We may not care now about rewards and say as long as we get to heaven that's fine, but we won't say that on that day when we look into His eyes. The good news is that every tear, including tears of regret will be wiped away and once in heaven our joy will be complete and regret will be over. But let us encourage one another towards love and good deeds especially as we see the Day approaching.
- The best thing to do is to seek His face, come into His presence and then start responding to His voice even in the small things that seem insignificant. As we are faithful with the small things, He will entrust greater and greater works to us and therefore give greater and greater rewards.
- Unbelievers will be judged in the sense that they will receive various degrees of punishment –
 - ◆ For unbelievers their every evil deed will be exposed on that day and judged according to the Law.

“But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.” (Matt. 12:36).

- There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. (Luke 12:2-3)
 - ◆ There will be no reward for them because even the good things they did are counted as filthy rags outside of Jesus (Phil. 3:7-9).

- ◆ They will be judged according to their revelation of God and the degree to which they rejected Him (Luke 12:47-48 – the servant that knew his master's will and still disobeyed gets the more severe beating than the servant that disobeyed ignorantly).
- ◆ God is a just Judge and outside of Jesus covering over our sin, He must judge every person according everything they did that did not match up to the perfect standard of His righteousness!

Heaven and hell

Hell

Definition – “a place of eternal, conscious punishment for the wicked”

Jesus does not tip toe around the subject of hell like so many of us do when chatting about or sharing our faith. It would appear that the greater our revelation of that terrible place the more we would not be able to keep silent. Like looking at multitudes walking on the edge of a cliff we should be stirred to warn in love and truth about the reality of hell!

We've already discussed the fact that unbelievers will go to a place of punishment the day that they die and then again at the last judgment they will be thrown into the lake of fire for all eternity. But what does hell really look like?

- Jesus described hell as a place where
 - ◆ “men will weep and gnash their teeth” (Matt. 25:30).
 - ◆ a place where men will suffer in “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41).
 - ◆ He referred to it as “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46).
 - ◆ and “the unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:34).
- One of the most vivid descriptions is in the book of Revelation

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name (Rev. 14:9-11).

When one thinks about the imagery in these texts and realizes that this is not just a symbolic description but rather the literal pain and torture that real people with fully functioning nervous systems will be subjected to, it should cause a holy awe and desperation to rise up inside. Awe and fear of the holiness and righteousness of God's judgment; and desperation for a lost and dying world.

Heaven

Christians often talk about living in heaven forever and the picture that comes to mind is usually a very spiritual, ethereal, surreal type of place with little substance and reality. But the Biblical teaching about heaven is very rich and real, that at the time of the resurrection the heavens and the earth will be renewed and there we will live with God forever. It goes on to say, too, that it won't be like it is now where there is a definite separation between heaven and earth but that the New Jerusalem will come down and God's dwelling will be with men.

"Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth" for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea" (Rev. 21:1).

"See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind." (Is. 65:17)

What happens before the new heavens and earth are created?

As spoken about earlier, believers do go to be with God as soon as they die. But where do they go? The Bible indicates that heaven is, even now, a very real place;

- We read of the heavens being opened and people seeing into heaven (Acts 7:55-56, Matt. 3:16).
- Jesus also prays for the kingdom to come now to earth as it is now in heaven (Matt. 6:10).
- So we will go to a very real place called heaven, though we will not yet have our renewed physical bodies.

A short summary of what to expect

- The old will pass away.

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare." (2 Pet. 3:10).

- Definition: Heaven is a place where God most fully makes known His presence to bless.
- God will dwell with us – Probably the greatest aspect to look forward to: seeing God's face! When we look into His eyes we will see in them everything that is good and perfect and desirable and satisfying and holy and beautiful! We will find complete fulfillment in looking into His face (Rev. 21:3-4, Rev. 22:4, Ps. 16:11)!
- There will be no sun, for the "glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23).
- It will be free of all evil and sin and sickness and pain (Rev. 21:27; 21:4)!
- We will rule with God over all (Rev. 22:5).

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

The greater our revelation of heaven and eternity the clearer and purer our perspective on earth will become! We won't lose heart; we will look forward to that eternal weight of glory that will rest over all creation in heaven!

- If Jesus, Steven, John and so many others in the Bible had such clear revelations and visions of heaven, then so can we because God is no respecter of persons! Let's ask for so much more! Amen and Amen!

Additional Notes:

