



Theological Foundations I

Essentials of Christian Doctrine



INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

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Instructor's Introduction

It is our hope and prayer that God would be pleased to use this curriculum for his glory. Thus, the intention of this curriculum is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ by equipping men, women, and young adults to serve as family, business and community leaders, full-time Christian workers, missionaries, pastors, and teachers. This curriculum is guided by the vision and values of Bethlehem College & Seminary, which are more fully explained at www.bcsmn.org. On our website, you will find the God-centered philosophy that undergirds and motivates everything we do. May God be glorified in us as we are satisfied in him alone!

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The *Theological Foundations I* course is an attempt to systematically present what the Apostle Paul called “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Students will study biblical topics by examining particular biblical passages, reading through Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, and inspecting Bethlehem’s Affirmation of Faith. The student’s learning will be solidified through class discussion and various homework assignments. This course is the first of two semesters, progressing through roughly the first half of a systematic theology, including the doctrines of Scripture, the Trinity, God’s sovereignty, election, creation, sin, Christology and soteriology.

OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able

- ▷ To magnify the worth of God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ To understand the Scriptures more fully as a result of searching them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be Bereans (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ To comprehend and thoughtfully interact with Bethlehem's Affirmation of Faith and Grudem's *Systematic Theology*. To this end the student will answer comprehension questions and formulate their own questions.
- ▷ To discuss and apply the biblical truth that is presented in the curriculum.
- ▷ To synthesize and summarize what they have learned through the course. This last objective will be accomplished by the completion of the course's final project.

IMPLEMENTATION

As the instructor of this course, it is imperative that you are completely familiar with the curriculum. We therefore recommend that you read this entire section carefully and then skim through the rest of what is contained in this binder.

This course is designed to be taught in 12 lessons, ideally in 2 hours of in-class instruction and with approximately 2.5 hours of homework each week. To achieve the kind of undistracted focus and academic rigor that maximizes learning, we recommend that this course be taught as a weeknight class. We anticipate, however, that this curriculum might be adapted for a Sunday school, small group, or discipleship setting. If this is necessary or most appropriate, we urge you to establish an expectation among your students that this course will require more concentration and commitment than a typical Sunday school class would. A tone of serious and earnest study should be set by the instructor before the course even begins.

Before the first class session, you will need to decide when and where this course will be offered. Record this information on the syllabus in the box labeled: “Course Information.” You may also want to include your contact information in this box. The schedule incorporated in the syllabus does not have assigned dates. Please write the intended dates for each lesson. Once you have completed filling out the syllabus, photocopy it so that you may distribute one copy to each student enrolled in the course. The *Student Workbook* does not include a syllabus, so your students will not have a syllabus until you distribute one. Photocopying the syllabus is the only photocopying that is required of you by this curriculum.

During the first lesson, we recommend the following outline to structure your time:

- ▶ **Welcome / Prayer (5 min):** Greet the students as they arrive. Open the lesson by exalting God in prayer.

- ▶ **Personal Introductions (10 min):** Ask each student in the room to introduce themselves briefly by answering the following questions (and answer these questions yourself): What is your name? Can you tell the class a little about yourself? Why are you enrolled in this course and what are you hoping to gain from it?

- ▶ **Syllabus Review (10 min):** Distribute your customized course syllabus and then guide the class through it, reading each item and answering any questions that the students might have.

- ▶ **Break (5 min)**

- ▶ **Introduction to Systematic Theology (50 min):** Guide the class through Lesson 1. After allowing a few minutes for the students to answer each question, pause to discuss their answers. Lesson 1 is the only lesson you will take your students through without their prior preparation. For all subsequent lessons, students will work through the lesson on their own before coming to class. To prepare yourself for this lesson, you should attempt to answer the questions yourself before consulting the suggested answers in the Instructor’s Guide. Reading the first chapter of Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* and skimming Bethlehem’s *Affirmation of Faith* would also be beneficial preparation.

- ▶ **Overview the Next Lesson / Closing (5 min):** Encourage the students to purchase the required textbooks if they don't have them already. Ensure that they understand what is required of them in preparation for the next class session. Then thank them for coming to the class and dismiss in prayer.

The lesson outline for Lesson 1, included in the *Teaching Notes*, is our suggestion for how the class time should be structured. Although it is not necessary to follow this outline rigidly, nevertheless you should allow adequate time for each component of the lesson. Review the first lesson and its outline thoroughly before you attempt to teach it.

Subsequent Lessons

As the instructor, you will be expected to do all the preparation for each lesson that is required of the students and more. We strongly recommend that you obtain a *Student's Workbook* and attempt to complete the homework on your own before consulting this *Instructor's Guide*. The *Instructor's Guide* provides our suggested answers. Some questions in this curriculum are open-ended and could be answered in different ways. You may find that the answers contained in this manual may not be the clearest or most accurate answers possible. Therefore, we encourage you to improve upon our answers if you can. It is essential to understand that **this *Instructor's Guide* is meant to be a resource; the real authority is God's Word.**

Furthermore, we have deliberately omitted lesson outlines for Lessons 2-12. Our recommendation is to open the class in prayer and then immediately start to discuss the work the students have done. The discussion could then proceed through each day's study. We consider it unnecessary to lecture through the material the students will have read in Grudem's *Systematic Theology*—discussing student questions on the reading should adequately cover the material. You will notice that **the material in each lesson should provide you with much more material than you can cover in two hours of thoughtful interaction.** This is not a mistake in design and you should not feel obligated to provide the students with answers for every question. Rather, as the instructor, your responsibility should be to focus on areas where students have questions or interest.

You will also notice that the *Instructor's Guide* has material that is not included in the *Student's Workbook* in the form of Teaching Notes. Consult these notes in your preparations after thoroughly reviewing the lesson.

It is our conviction that the best teachers foster an environment in the classroom which engages students. Adults learn by solving problems or by working through things that provoke curiosity or concern. Therefore, we discourage you from lecturing for the entire lesson. Although an instructor will constantly shape conversation, clarifying and correcting as needed, they will probably not talk for the majority of the lesson. This curriculum is meant to facilitate an investigation into biblical truth—an investigation that is shared by the instructor and the students. Therefore, we encourage you to adopt the posture of a “fellow-learner” who invites participation from everyone in the class.

It might surprise you how eager adults can be to share what they have learned in preparing for each lesson. Therefore, you should invite participation by asking your students to share their discoveries. Here are some of our “tips” on facilitating discussion that is engaging and helpful:

- Don't be uncomfortable with silence initially. Once the first student shares their response, others will be likely to join in. If you cut the silence short by prompting the students, they are more likely to wait for you to prompt them every time.
- Affirm answers whenever possible and draw out the students by asking for clarification. Your aim is to make them feel comfortable sharing their ideas and learning, so be extremely hesitant to “shut down” a student's contribution or “trump” it with your own. This does not mean, however, that you shouldn't correct false ideas—just do it in a spirit of gentleness and love.
- Don't allow a single student or several students to dominate the discussion. Involve everyone and intentionally invite participation from those who are more reserved or hesitant.
- Labor to show the significance of their study. Emphasize the things that the students could not have learned without doing the homework.
- Avoid talking too much. The instructor should not monopolize the discussion, but rather guide and shape it. If the instructor does the majority of the talking, the students will be less likely to interact and engage, and will therefore not learn as much. Avoid constantly adding the “definitive last word.”
- The instructor should feel the freedom to linger on a topic or question if the group demonstrates interest. The instructor should also pursue digressions that are helpful and at least somewhat relevant. The instructor, however, *should* attempt to cover the material. So avoid the extreme of constantly wandering off topic, but also avoid the extreme of limiting the conversation in a way that squelches curiosity or learning.

- The instructor's passion, or lack of it, is infectious. Therefore, if you demonstrate little enthusiasm for the material, it is almost inevitable that your students will likewise be bored. But if you have a genuine excitement for what you are studying, and if you truly think systematic theology is worth-while, your class will be impacted positively. Therefore, it is our recommendation that before you come to class, you spend adequate time working through the homework and praying so that you can overflow with genuine enthusiasm for the Bible and for God in class. This point cannot be stressed enough. Delight yourself in God and in his Word!

It may be necessary to again stress that **this curriculum is a resource**. As the instructor, you should feel the freedom to structure the class time and to discuss through the material in a way that promotes the maximum learning and enjoyment of your students. Lingering on certain questions, pursuing helpful digressions, examining relevant portions of Scripture, adding other supplemental material, and customizing the curriculum to fit your situation are all heartily approved.

Questions or Comments?

If you still have questions after reading this introduction and surveying the curriculum, you may contact Bethlehem College & Seminary at info@bcm.edu. We are also eager for your comments and suggestions! Thanks!



Theological Foundations I

Essentials of Christian Doctrine

SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

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- ▷ To magnify the worth of God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ To understand the Scriptures more fully as a result of searching them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be Bereans (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ To comprehend and thoughtfully interact with Bethlehem’s Affirmation of Faith and Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. To this end the student will answer comprehension questions and formulate their own questions.
- ▷ To discuss and apply the biblical truth that is presented in the curriculum.
- ▷ To synthesize and summarize what they have learned through the course. This last objective will be accomplished by the completion of the course’s final project.

🔗 REQUIRED BOOKS (TEXTBOOKS)

- ▷ An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version* (ESV) or *New American Standard Bible* (NASB)
- ▷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000)

🔗 REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2-12 by completing the lesson pages in a sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson a student should read the Introduction, the Lesson Objectives, and the Preliminary Definitions. Then the student should read the remainder of the lesson, answer the 20 questions contained therein, and complete all the required reading and the integrative assignment. The student may then review the discussion questions and record their own discussion question. Each lesson's workload has been divided into five daily assignments for the convenience of the student. Students will compose a personal affirmation of faith at the end of the course.

Students will pass this course if they attend at least 10 class sessions, complete all the assignments, and complete an adequate final project. Please contact the instructor with any problems or concerns.

🔗 PERSONAL AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Students will be required to write a personal affirmation of faith (2-3 pages double-spaced), due one week after the last class session. This paper may be emailed as an attachment to the instructor, or mailed to their address.

The affirmation should consist of the student's own understanding of the various topics covered in the course.^{1*} Students may consult Bethlehem's Affirmation of Faith or other creeds and confessions (some of which are listed in Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, Appendix 1), but must express their biblical convictions *using their own words*. Students are not allowed to copy any portion of another creed, confession, or affirmation.

Students should include biblical support for the various assertions they make in the form of footnotes, although these footnotes don't need to be extensive. This project may be started after the last class period, but since it is a time-intensive project, students are encouraged to work on it throughout the semester. Students may choose to write smaller portions of their personal affirmation after each lesson. This approach is not required but is recommended.

¹ * In reality, this project will only be half of a comprehensive affirmation of faith. Students will complete the second half of their own personal affirmation of faith (an additional 2-3 pages) when they complete Theological Foundations II.

 SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		Introduction to Systematic Theology
2		Scripture, the Word of God Written (1)
3		Scripture, the Word of God Written (2)
4		The Trinity, One God as Three Persons
5		God's Eternal Purpose and Election (1)
6		God's Eternal Purpose and Election (2)
7		God's Creation of the Universe and Man (1)
8		God's Creation of the Universe and Man (2)
9		Man's Sin and Fall from Fellowship with God
10		Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God (1)
11		Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God (2)
12		The Saving Work of Christ

Note: After the 12th lesson you are required to complete a personal affirmation of faith.

Introduction to Systematic Theology

1

🔗 INTRODUCTION

Our goal during this course is to study the whole counsel of God in a systematic fashion in order to establish a strong foundation for our theology. We will be engaged in what is called *systematic theology*. Wayne Grudem defines systematic theology like this: “Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, ‘What does the whole Bible teach us today?’ about any given topic.”¹ Before we begin, there are two basic questions that need to be addressed.

First of all, are we really supposed to study the Bible in this way? Is it necessary to have a grasp of what the *whole* Bible teaches on any given topic? Secondly, is systematic theology even possible? Some would argue that because the Bible was written by several different authors over several centuries, it is therefore impossible to arrive at a unified theology of the entire Bible. And if there is no unity of the Bible, how can we possibly come to any conclusion about what the whole Bible teaches? Answering these two basic questions will lay a solid base for our semester of study.

🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- ▶ answer the two basic questions presented in the Introduction
- ▶ articulate why an affirmation of faith is important
- ▶ describe how right doctrine helps produce right living

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 21.

 PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **biblical theology:**

- **doctrine:**

- **dogmatic theology:**

- **systematic theology:**



IS SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY SOMETHING WE SHOULD ATTEMPT?

It is clear in Scripture that we are commanded to teach all that Jesus commanded.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

1. What is included under the heading, “all that I have commanded?”
 - **ANSWER.** *The primary referent is all the commands that Jesus gave his disciples during his earthly ministry. These are recorded for us in the Gospel accounts. But the book of Acts presents itself as the continuation of Jesus’ teaching and instruction to the early church through his Spirit. Likewise, the epistles are written by apostles appointed by Jesus himself to teach all that he commanded. Even the Old Testament might legitimately be considered under this heading because it is God’s word and Jesus is God. Therefore we are commanded to teach (and thus study) the whole Bible, the whole counsel of God.*

IS SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY EVEN POSSIBLE— IN OTHER WORDS, IS THERE A UNITY OF THE BIBLE?

Romans 1:1-3

¹ *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised before-hand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh.*

Romans 3:21-22

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

2. What was promised beforehand in the Holy Scriptures? To what do the law and prophets bear witness?

· **ANSWER.** *The gospel of God was promised beforehand in the holy Scriptures. And the law and the prophets are witnesses to the righteousness of God that is manifested in Jesus Christ and his death for sinners. These two passages, then, are indirect evidence for the unity of the Bible, which is centered upon the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Romans 16:25-27

²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Paul says there is revelation of a mystery that has been kept secret for long ages past. Something had been written, but wasn't fully understood; instead, it was kept secret. "But it has now" been manifested; now we know and understand what that mystery is. The mystery is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus was written about throughout the Old Testament, but never fully understood until he came. But now that he has come and the mystery is revealed, we are able to look at the Old Testament and see what was always there, but had remained unseen. Paul believes that there is unity in the Bible.

Luke 24:25-27

²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

3. Why does Jesus call them foolish and say they are slow to believe the prophets?

- **ANSWER.** *They are foolish and slow to believe because all these things have already been written for them in the Old Testament. They should have known that the Messiah was going to suffer and die. So he takes them through the Old Testament beginning with Moses and then with the other prophets so that they would see that the Old Testament was about the Christ coming and dying.*

There is a unity to the Bible and it is centered on the revelation of God's glory in Jesus, the Messiah. Both Paul and Jesus give testimony to the truth that the entire Bible is united in pointing us to Jesus. Therefore, we can be confident that our endeavor to study systematic theology is possible. See also Luke 24:44-47; Matthew 26:52-56; Hebrews 1:1-2; Acts 17:2-3; 18:24-28; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; and John 5:37-40.

Acts 20:17-21, 26-27

¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. ¹⁸ And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ...²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."

4. Underline the two things that Paul did not shrink from declaring. What is the implication of this parallel?

- **ANSWER.** *The whole purpose of God that Paul taught was profitable. Therefore we don't just seek to know the lowest common doctrinal denominator; rather, we seek to know and embrace the whole counsel of God.*

Notice the purpose of the teaching offices of the church, according to Paul:

Ephesians 4:11-14

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

2 Peter 3:14-18

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. ¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

5. What encouragement can be found from Peter's remarks about the writings of Paul? Why is Peter warning his readers that some distort Paul's letters to their own destruction?

· **ANSWER.** Often we read Paul's letters and don't understand what he is saying. But Peter tells us that this is somewhat expected—even he had a difficult time occasionally as he read Paul's letters. Therefore, we don't need to be discouraged when it takes hard work to find Paul's meaning. Peter recognizes how dangerous it can be to misinterpret the Scriptures—it can lead to destruction. He wants us to know this so that we can be on guard and not be carried away by error and fall from our own steadfastness, but rather grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.

1 Timothy 1:5

⁵ *The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

6. Paul's purpose in his teaching is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. How does teaching help produce that kind of love?

· **ANSWER.** *We need to learn about God's great love for us before we can be freed to love others. For example, when we know and understand the reality of our justification—that we have been set free from sin and clothed with the righteousness of Christ—we are able to love others for their sake rather than our own. If we know our needs are being met in Jesus we don't have to manipulate others to meet our needs; rather we can give our lives to meeting their needs. None of this can happen if we aren't taught about God and his salvation and purposes in our lives.*

Notice the cause of the Colossians' faith and love:

Colossians 1:3-5

³ *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel.*

As we move on, Bethlehem College & Seminary's Affirmation of Faith will provide the structure and topical ordering for this curricula. In addition, certain sections of the Affirmation appear at the end of each lesson as summary statements of the topics studied. It is our desire that you search the Scriptures to see if this affirmation is an accurate statement of the whole counsel of God. We hope that you find our summarizing attempts to be helpful and a starting point for your own Scriptural reflections.

We will now focus on the closing sections of our Affirmation of Faith. It is our hope that this concluding chapter of the Affirmation will help frame our study of systematic theology throughout the course.

An Affirmation of Faith

15.1 We do not believe that all things in this affirmation of faith are of equal weight, some being more essential, some less. We do not believe that every part of this affirmation must be believed in order for one to be saved.

Make a list of what are, in your mind, more essential and less essential doctrines:

Instructors should make their own lists prior to class. What one believes regarding baptism or spiritual gifts, for example, will not affect their salvation, but it will greatly impact the way that they live their Christian life and the witness of Christ that they give to others.

More Essential

Less Essential

7. If some are less essential, why study them at all?

- **ANSWER.** *We study them because God has written his word for our encouragement and instruction that we might have hope (Romans 15:4) and so that we might be equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

An Affirmation of Faith

15.2 Our aim is not to discover how little can be believed, but rather to embrace and teach “the whole counsel of God.” Our aim is to encourage a hearty adherence to the Bible, the fullness of its truth, and the glory of its Author. We believe Biblical doctrine stabilizes saints in the winds of confusion and strengthens the church in her mission to meet the great systems of false religion and secularism. We believe that the supreme virtue of love is nourished by the strong meat of God-centered doctrine. And we believe that a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ is sustained in an atmosphere of deep and joyful knowledge of God and His wonderful works.

8. Which Bible verses, of the ones we examined above, might be used to support this section of this affirmation of faith?

· **ANSWER.** *Acts 20:17-27 (and Ephesians 1:13-14), 2 Peter 3:14-18, 1 Timothy 1:5, and Colossians 1:3-5 could all be used to support this section of this affirmation of faith.*

An Affirmation of Faith

15.3 *We believe that the cause of unity in the church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine, around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, stating the doctrinal parameters of church or school or mission or ministry, seeking the unity that comes from the truth, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries. In this way, the importance of truth is served by the existence of doctrinal borders, and unity is served by the way we love others across those borders.*

9. Why is it important for churches to seek both unity and truth?

· **ANSWER.** *Unity is not attained only when we broaden the boundaries and avoid doctrinal controversy. Doctrinal statements are needed because truth is important because God's Word is truth. Therefore, we seek to elevate truth to its rightful place. Yet, we also recognize that we are all a part of the body of Christ and therefore we are commanded to love one another. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Some may work with Christians from other churches who disagree with them on certain issues. But if they don't love one another, the watching world will not know that either of them are disciples of Christ. We are seeking to elevate both truth and love.*

An Affirmation of Faith

15.4 *We do not claim infallibility for this affirmation and are open to refinement and correction from Scripture. Yet we do hold firmly to these truths as we see them and call on others to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. As conversation and debate take place, it may be that we will learn from each other, and the boundaries will be adjusted, even possibly folding formerly disagreeing groups into closer fellowship.*

10. Why do you think that this section was added to the affirmation of faith?

- **ANSWER.** *The Bethlehem Affirmation of Faith represents our understanding of the Scriptures, but it is not scripture, and is not infallible. If at any point it does not align with scripture, the Affirmation is subject to change. The Bible is our ultimate foundation, and this document is simply an attempt to encapsulate our understanding of the Bible. We do believe this document to hold true to the teachings in scripture, and thus teach these doctrines and hold them dear. And yet is important to recognize that its authors are fallible, and should be open to correction.*

OUR HEART AND ATTITUDE WHEN WE STUDY THE BIBLE

Finally, it is important for us to approach our studies in a godly way and therefore we need to have a certain attitude about the Bible. Some texts from Psalm 119 will help us as we launch into the study of the Scriptures in this course.

God's Word Is Greater than All Wealth and Sweeter than Honey

The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. (72)

Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. (127)

I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil. (162)

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (103)

God's Word Should Be Our Delight

I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. (16)

Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors. (24)

Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. (35)
If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. (92)
Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I
incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end. (111-112)

We Should Long for God's Word

My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times. (20)
My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word. My eyes long for your
promise; I ask, "When will you comfort me?" (81-82)
I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments. (131)

God's Word Helps Keep Us from Sin

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to
your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your
commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin
against you. (9-11)
Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get
dominion over me. (133)

God Revives Us through His Word

My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word. (25)
My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word. (28)
I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life. (93)
I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word! (107)

God's Word Makes Us Wise and Guides Us

Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.
I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my
meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. (98-100)
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (105)
The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the
simple. (130)

We Need God's Help

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (18)
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my
whole heart. (34)
Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain. (36)
Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared. (38)

.....
 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Chapter 1.

Scripture, The Word of God Written (1)

2

§ INTRODUCTION

The *Word of God* is a broad concept, encompassing more than just the Bible. Certainly the Bible *is* the Word of God, but God also speaks through creation (Psalm 19:1), by an audible voice (Matthew 3:17), and ultimately in his Son (John 1:1). As believers in the 21st-century, however, God primarily speaks to us today through the Word of God written.

This lesson and the next will lay the groundwork for systematic theology by examining the source of systematic theology: The Bible. It will address issues of canonicity, inerrancy, and authority. But do not let this become a dry, academic study. The words of the Bible, like the words of Jesus, are words of eternal life (Deuteronomy 32:47; John 6:68).

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- identify the 66 books of the canon and defend their inclusion
- define inerrancy and cite key biblical evidence for this doctrine
- articulate why the Bible is authoritative

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **Apocrypha:**
- **canon:**
- **inerrancy:**
- **infallibility:**
- **inspiration:**



Since this curriculum is designed as an *introduction* to systematic theology, it is freely conceded that some complex and problematic issues have been treated in a cursory, and almost reductionist, manner.

One such issue is the reliability of the New Testament, and especially the Gospels. In Question 6, John 14:26 is treated as the words of Jesus himself, though obviously these words are recorded in the Apostle John's Gospel. The objection could be made that treating this verse as the words of Jesus begs the question. In responding to such an objection, please consult the following sources:

- Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 78-80
- Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987).
- Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998).

Another issue that is not explored in detail is that of textual criticism. This issue has always been raised by skeptics, and the recent publication of Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus* is contemporary evidence that this kind of skepticism is alive and well today. For the evangelical response see:

- J. Ed Komoszewski et al., eds., *Reinventing Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006).
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

Further resources can be found in the Additional Resources section of this lesson.

If you decide to raise the issue of textual criticism, the following points could be stressed:

1. The Old Testament was more carefully copied and preserved than any other document of the ancient Near East. The recently discovered Dead Sea scrolls prove this.
2. The New Testament is better attested than any other ancient document.

3. The vast majority of words in the New Testament have no variants.
4. The majority of variants are easily resolved through basic principles of textual criticism.
5. The majority of variants have little or no bearing on interpretation.
6. No textual variants incline us to question any doctrine of the church.
7. Where there are difficult variants, we always know what the options are.

Some students may raise an objection to the doctrine of inerrancy on account of various alleged “contradictions” in the Bible. A number of points could be used in response:

1. Critical scholars have been seeking to undermine the authority and truthfulness of Scripture for hundreds of years and yet many intelligent and thoughtful Christians, including highly competent scholars, continue to affirm the doctrine of inerrancy.
2. Many supposed contradictions are adequately resolved upon closer examination. For help on a particular text, consult a book like Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).
3. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (which you will study in Lesson 3) is helpful in this regard because it clarifies what the doctrine of inerrancy is and isn't. In particular, Article XIII addresses issues related to “biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature,” among others. None of these biblical phenomena undermines the doctrine of inerrancy.

Finally, it may be helpful to point out to the students that the Bible was written over a period of 1,000 years on three different continents in three different languages by over 40 different authors from many different walks of life, including kings, prophets, shepherds, a doctor, and a fisherman. Yet the Bible has a remarkable unity in that the whole of Scripture testifies to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:47).



Day 1

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

Moses gave the following warning to the people of Israel while they were on the brink of entering the Promised Land:

Deuteronomy 4:2

² You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

How were the people to know what the commandments of the LORD were? A broader, but related question is, which books should be included in the Old Testament canon?

Though there are different variations in the Hebrew order of the Old Testament books, the order that is generally accepted is shown in the following table, which includes the three major divisions that were used to describe the Old Testament canon.

Table 1—The Hebrew Canonical Order

The Law (or Torah)	The Prophets	The Writings (or Psalms)
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Job
Leviticus	1 & 2 Samuel (<i>one book</i>)	Proverbs
Numbers	1 & 2 Kings (<i>one book</i>)	Ruth
Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Song of Songs
	Jeremiah	Ecclesiastes
	Ezekiel	Lamentations
	The Book of the Twelve (the 12 minor prophets)	Esther
		Daniel
		Ezra-Nehemiah (<i>one book</i>)
		1 & 2 Chronicles (<i>one book</i>)

1. What differences do you observe between the Hebrew canonical order and the order preserved in our English Bibles?

- **ANSWER.** *The Hebrew canonical order has three major divisions: The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Though the order is the same through 1 & 2 Kings, Chronicles is moved to the end of the Hebrew Bible. There are also other interesting changes—for example, Ruth follows Proverbs 31. In all, the Hebrew order has 24 books (instead of 39) since many books are lumped together.*

When Jesus explains how he fulfills the Old Testament Scripture, he says:

Luke 24:44

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

2. What is significant about how Jesus describes Scripture?

- **ANSWER.** *Jesus refers to the Old Testament using the same threefold division that was accepted as the Hebrew canonical order by Jews of his day. It appears as if Jesus, his disciples, and most first-century Jews were in agreement as to which books should be included in the Old Testament canon.*

According to chronology, the last martyr of the Old Testament was Uriah the Son of Shemaiah, whose death is described in Jeremiah 26:20-23. This took place during the reign of Jehoiakim, who reigned from 609-598 B.C.

When Jesus, however, describes the first and last martyr, he doesn't mention Uriah.

Luke 11:49-51

⁴⁹ “Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation,⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.”

3. If your Bible has cross references, use them to determine where in the Old Testament the martyrdom of Zechariah is described. Why might Jesus refer to him as the last martyr?

· **ANSWER.** *As was noted above, Jesus was familiar with the Hebrew canonical order, which ended with the book of 1 & 2 Chronicles. Zechariah is the last martyr described in this book (2 Chronicles 24:20-21). Therefore, Jesus is mentioning the first and last martyr as determined by the order of the books, and not by chronology. This is further indirect evidence that Jesus accepted the Hebrew canon, which includes all the books in our Old Testament and no more.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 54-59 (Chapter 3, Section A)

4. Why shouldn't we accept the Apocrypha as canonical material as the Roman Catholic church does?

· **ANSWER.** *As Grudem argues, the Apocrypha should not be regarded as part of Scripture because 1) the books of the Apocrypha don't claim prophetic authority; 2) Jesus and his disciples never quote the Apocrypha as Scripture; 3) Jews and the earliest Christians did not accept them as Scripture; 4) there are doctrinal and historical inconsistencies in these books; and 5) the Apocrypha was not declared canonical until 1546, at the Council of Trent.*

Day 2

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

After a cessation of almost 500 years, there was suddenly another spurt of writing that was quickly recognized as the word of God. Why this sudden profusion of writing?

Hebrews 1:1-2

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

5. Underline the two modes of revelation described in these verses. What authority is invested in each?

· **ANSWER.** *The prophets and the Son both speak with the authority of God himself.*

According to Grudem, the definitive revelation of God in Jesus marks the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the climactic and final revelation of God in history (until Jesus returns).² But how can we be sure that the New Testament accurately preserves what Jesus said and did?

Hebrews 2:1-4

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

2 Peter 1:16

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 60.

John 14:25-26

²⁵ *These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.* ²⁶ *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

6. In this series of verses, we trace a progression from second-hand testimony, to eyewitnesses, to the words of Jesus himself. Why is John 14:26 especially critical for establishing the reliability of the New Testament?

- **ANSWER.** *In John 14:26 Jesus makes a promise to his disciples that the Spirit will ensure that they understand and remember Jesus' teaching. Since Jesus' immediate disciples (the apostles) either wrote or supervised the writing of Scripture, Jesus' promise assures us that the New Testament accurately conveys his revelation of God.*

There is also intrinsic evidence that the New Testament authors were recognized as writers of Scripture. The passage that is most often quoted in this regard is Peter's affirmation of Paul's writing.

2 Peter 3:14-16

¹⁴ *Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.* ¹⁵ *And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,* ¹⁶ *as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*

In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter equates Paul's letters with Old Testament Scripture. There is, however, another instance of this phenomenon. Consider the following collection of passages:

Deuteronomy 25:4

⁴ *You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.*

Luke 10:7

⁷ *And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.*

1 Timothy 5:17-18

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

7. On the basis of these three passages, what can be said of Paul’s view of Luke’s Gospel?

- **ANSWER.** In 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul introduces two quotations with the words, “For the Scripture says....” The second of these quotations is from Luke 10:7. Therefore, Paul apparently considered Luke’s Gospel as Scripture, and on par with the book of Deuteronomy!

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 60-68 (Chapter 3, Section B)

8. According to Grudem, why is it significant that Revelation 22:18-19 virtually concludes the New Testament canon?

- **ANSWER.** Grudem believes that the canonical placement, historical setting, and theological impulse of these verses (especially when read with verses such as Hebrews 1:1-2) warrant a secondary application to the whole of Scripture: there will be no more Scripture written.

Revelation 22:18-19

¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

9. In addition to our confidence in the faithfulness of God, what other things could contribute to our belief in the correctness of our present canon?

- **ANSWER.** *Grudem lists four additional factors that can bolster our belief: 1) the internal witness of the Spirit and the collective, experiential evidence of Christians throughout the ages; 2) the historical circumstances surrounding the recognition of the canon; 3) the lack of viable candidates for canonical inclusion; and 4) the theological harmony within the recognized canon.*

“We know that it is God’s intention to rule the church by a written document, as in the Old Testament. So, as in the Old Testament, we should assume that God’s providence has made that book easy to find. Remember that the church did not ‘canonize’ the Bible; it did not make the Bible authoritative. Rather, it read these books and discovered that God had already made them authoritative. Basically, God illumined these writings so that the church could recognize God’s voice in them.”³

³ John Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2006), 65.

Day 3

See Teaching Notes for more information regarding challenges to inerrancy.

INERRANCY

Having established that the 66 books of the Old and New Testament are, in fact, the *canon* which pro-vides true revelation of God, what can we say about these books? Are they completely trustworthy—trustworthy in every detail?

Numbers 23:19

¹⁹ *God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?*

10. According to this passage, how is God different from men?

- **ANSWER.** *God is different from men in at least two ways. First of all, he doesn't lie; if he says something, it is true. Second, he is not like men because he does not repent or change his mind. There are never "new circumstances" that surprise God or force him to reconsider what he has said. Therefore when he says something we can know with certainty that he will do it.*

Hebrews 6:17-18

¹⁷ *So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.*

Titus 1:1-2

¹ *Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, ² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began...*

If it is impossible for God to lie, then the converse must also be true: whatever God says is true.

Psalms 12:6

⁶ *The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.*

Proverbs 30:5

⁵ Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

John 17:17

¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

11. According to these passages, why is it important for God's words to be true?

- **ANSWER.** *The importance of God's words being true can be seen in the relation between the first and second halves of these verses. God's words are true and they can therefore be our tested treasure, a reliable shield of refuge, and a means of sanctification.*

Although many other texts could be cited in support of the doctrine of inerrancy, we will examine one more—a text from the lips of Jesus. Compare the following versions:

Matthew 5:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Matthew 5:18 (King James Version)

¹⁸ For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Matthew 5:18 (New American Standard—Updated)

¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Notice the underlined pairings in each version. The first word in this pairing (“iota” or “jot”) is referring to a *yod*, which is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet (see below). The second word (“dot” or “tittle”) is referring to the slight difference between the Hebrew letters *daleth* and *resh* (see below).

yod

י

daleth

ד

resh

ר

12. What point is Jesus striving to communicate in Matthew 5:18 then?

- **ANSWER.** *The point is that God's word will stand forever and there is no part of it, however small, that will ever fall away. Jesus's illustration using these Hebrew characters implies that every detail and particularity of Scripture is significant and true.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 90-95 (Chapter 5, Sections A–B1)

13. Why might it be important to add the qualifications that Grudem does (91-92)?

- **ANSWER.** *It is important to mention these qualifications because without them a believer might be confused by what inerrancy actually means or a skeptic might make an irrelevant objection.*

14. What might be some consequences of denying the doctrine of inerrancy? Record some of your own ideas below and then compare that to Grudem's list, found on page 100.

- **ANSWER.** *Serious problems involved in denying inerrancy, according to Grudem:*
 - A1.** *If we deny inerrancy, a serious moral problem confronts us: may we imitate God and intentionally lie in small matters also?*
 - A2.** *If inerrancy is denied, we begin to wonder if we can really trust God in anything He says.*
 - A3.** *If we deny inerrancy, we essentially make our own human minds a higher standard of truth than God's Word itself.*
 - A4.** *If we deny inerrancy, then we must also say that the Bible is wrong not only in minor details but in some of its doctrines as well.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 95-100 (Chapter 5, Sections B2–C)

Day 4

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

The authority of the Bible flows from two prior realities: the authority of God himself and the nature of the Bible. In the coming lessons, we will examine the authority and absolute sovereignty of God. We have already seen the nature of the Bible—it is inerrant (and infallible). Its inerrancy derives from its inspiration.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

15. What is the relationship between Scripture’s inspired quality and its profitability? What might happen if Scripture’s inspiration is denied?

· **ANSWER.** *It seems as if 2 Timothy 3:16 is claiming the usefulness of Scripture (for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness) on the basis of its inspiration. Scripture is breathed out by God and is therefore profitable. Denying the inspiration of the Bible inevitably leads to a rejection of its authority over our lives. It will cease to reprove and correct our sin if we fail to treat it as God’s words.*

When Paul composed 2 Timothy 3:16 it is likely that “all Scripture” referred primarily to the Old Testament. Is there any indication, then, that Paul accorded the same authority to the New Testament or even his own writing? In addition to Paul’s citation of Luke, which we have already considered, consider also the following passage:

1 Corinthians 14:36-38

³⁶ *Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?* ³⁷ *If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.*

³⁸ *If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.*

The Corinthian church, to which Paul was writing, had an inflated view of their own spirituality. Apparently, in their case, this went hand-in-hand with licentiousness and the flagrant disregard for social norms.

16. In view of the situation into which Paul was writing, how do you interpret 1 Corinthians 14:36-38?

- **ANSWER.** *The rhetorical questions of v. 36 indicate that the word of God did not come from the Corinthians, but to them through Paul. In v. 37 Paul then equates his writing with the command of the Lord and makes that the standard by which the Corinthians' spirituality must be measured. The consequence of not recognizing Paul's authoritative writing is severe censure.*

The implicit authority of all the New Testament can be seen in the prescribed consequences for denying what is written, such as excommunication (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

17. True or False: To disobey Scripture is to disobey God.

2 Thessalonians 3:14

¹⁴ *If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 73-78 (Chapter 4, Section A1–A4)

Plenary inspiration is the idea that all the words of Scripture are God's words (plenary meaning "full").

18. Does Grudem affirm "plenary inspiration"?

- **ANSWER.** *In footnote 6 on page 75 Grudem explicitly affirms plenary inspiration. As he says, though he doesn't use the phrase in this chapter, he affirms the fact that all the words of Scripture are God's very words.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 78-85 (Chapter 4, Sections A5–D)

The true/false question (Question 17) in this lesson should be easily answered, but do not let its significance go unmentioned. Throughout this lesson you should be stressing that the 66 books of the Bible are the only authoritative source for systematic theology and life. This will prepare the students for subsequent lessons in which Scripture will be used without defense of its authority.

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

1.1 *We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error in the original manuscripts.*

1.2 *We believe that God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture.*

19. Rewrite these two sections in your own words:

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

20. Is this affirmation consistent with the Scripture you have studied?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*



•••••  INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Compose a brief note to a friend (real or imagined) who is tempted to deny the inerrancy or authority of Scripture. Persuade them that this would be wrong and dangerous.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. What would you say to a Mormon or Jehovah's witness who asserts that there are authoritative writings in addition to the Bible?
2. How should we approach "problem" texts?
3. What objections have you heard to the doctrine of inerrancy?
4. Your own question(s):

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992).
- ▷ F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988).
- ▷ John Piper, *Why We Believe the Bible* Seminar Booklet, at desiringGod.org.
- ▷ The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, in Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, pages 1203-1207.

Scripture, The Word of God Written (2)

3

🔗 INTRODUCTION

The Bible is a difficult book to understand. The Westminster Confession of Faith, however, encourages us in our life-long pursuit of biblical understanding:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (Chapter 1.7)⁴

This lesson will attempt to answer the question of how we might understand the meaning of the Bible. We will examine the appointed means to uncovering the Bible's meaning, potential obstacles in our pursuit, and the important role of the Holy Spirit.

🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- explain the relationship between divine and human authors
- defend the viability of discovering meaning through authorial intent
- identify factors which can obscure our understanding of the Bible

⁴ The Westminster Confession of Faith, found at http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/. Accessed April 26, 2016.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **Word of God:**
- **exegesis:**
- **general revelation:**
- **hermeneutics:**
- **special revelation:**



Much of the rest of this curriculum is inductive study of biblical texts. Therefore, this lesson and the previous one really do lay the groundwork for the rest of the lessons. If your students have a commitment to letting Scripture shape—and if necessary, correct—their theology, then they will have the openness that is a vital part of constructing a systematic theology.

This curriculum does not explicitly teach inductive Bible study skills, though hopefully the students taking this course will learn to become better interpreters as they answer questions on the verses this curriculum will present. Inductive Bible study skills are important, however, and so if your students don't have much experience or practice in studying the Bible, we encourage you to emphasize the value of Bible study skills throughout the course. If you are interested, Bethlehem Institute has a 12-lesson curricula that seeks to impart these skills. The course is entitled, *Mining God's Word*.

Finally, it is important to recognize that ultimately it is God who persuades people that the Bible is his word. Arguments and reasons have their proper place, but only God through the Holy Spirit can convince someone that the 66 books of the Bible are indeed the word of God. Scripture, by virtue of its divine origin, has a self-authenticating power. Here is how the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it:

“We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” (Chapter 1.5)

Note that ultimately we are persuaded of Scripture's divine authority by “the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” This does not mean that we should read the Bible, close it, and then ask God if it is true. Any assurance we get by that route will be based on our

subjective feelings. Rather, we should pray that God opens our eyes to see the wonder in his Word and then open the Bible and read. Then, if God wills, he will enlighten our minds and hearts while we are gazing upon his glory as it is revealed in Scripture such that we become convinced that the Bible is the authoritative and trustworthy word of God.



Day 1

GOD'S WORDS IN THE WORDS OF MEN

In the previous lesson, we sought to establish that the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are words from God—that Scripture was “God-breathed.” What wasn’t addressed was the way in which those words came to us. God has chosen to use human language, so that we could understand his revelation. And in inscribing this revelation, he chose to use a variety of human authors. Therefore, it is accurate to say that any particular portion of the Bible has “dual authorship”: both God and man.

2 Peter 1:19-21

¹⁹ And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 2:24

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Matthew 19:4-5

⁴ He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh?’”

1. How do these passages affirm the truth that Scripture has two authors?

- **ANSWER.** *2 Peter 1:19-21 describes the dynamic relationship that produced the prophecy of Scripture: though it was the will of God and the agency of the Holy Spirit that drove the process, men were clearly involved. And what is here said of the prophecy of Scripture can legitimately be applied more broadly to all of Scripture. Matthew 19:4-5 ascribes the words of Moses in Genesis 2:24 to God. Thus, while Moses wrote the book of Genesis, Jesus affirms that God was the one doing the speaking.*

Exodus 24:3-4

³ *Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.”* ⁴ *And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Revelation 1:10-11

¹⁰ *I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet* ¹¹ *saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”*

2. What do these two passages—one from the Old Testament and one from the New—indicate to us about the authorship of Scripture?

- **ANSWER.** *Again, these two passages show that although human authors actually wrote down the words of God, it was not on their own initiative. Rather, it was God who was communicating through them. This ensures that God’s revelation has not been distorted by the will of men.*

To this, a legitimate objection may be raised: “The process that Exodus 24 and Revelation 1 describe is not how all of Scripture came into being. We know that Luke, for example, wrote his Gospel on the basis of historical research and eyewitness accounts (Luke 1:1-4). In this case, it seems as if the human authors were more actively involved in the process of writing Scripture.”

Grudem describes this dynamic in a lengthy, but important, sentence:

“In cases where the ordinary human personality and writing style of the author were prominently involved, as seems the case with the major part of Scripture, all that we are able to say is that God’s providential oversight and direction of the life of each author was such that their personalities, their backgrounds and training, their abilities to evaluate events in the world around them, their access to historical data, their judgment with regard to the accuracy of information, and their individual circumstances when they wrote, were all exactly what God wanted them to be, so that when they actually came to the point of putting pen to paper, the words were fully their own words but also fully the words that God wanted them to write, words that God would also claim as his own.”⁵

This assertion must also apply to the use of an “amanuensis” (which will be defined presently).

Who wrote the book of Romans? This seems to be a straightforward question, but examine the following pair of texts:

Romans 1:1, 7

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God... ⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you...

Romans 16:22

²² I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

3. So then, who wrote the book of Romans: God, Paul, or Tertius?
 - **ANSWER.** *In some sense, all three wrote Romans: God sovereignly presided over the entire process and ensured that the final product flawlessly communicated his truth; it was Paul’s thought, study, and ministry that generated this letter; and it was Tertius’s diligent inscription of Paul’s words that physically produced it.*

“All of this led me to ponder the thought that in our doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, Paul’s relationship to Tertius is like God’s relationship to Paul—not exactly but in a key way. Just as even though Tertius is doing the writing, the

⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 81.

*words and the thoughts are still Paul's, so even though Paul is doing the dictating, the words and thoughts are still God's. I don't mean that precise word-for-word dictation is the only way God inspires the biblical writers, but I do mean that in whatever way he guides them, it is God's words that get written. And that makes the Bible the most precious book and the most precious possession in the world—it is God's inspired word.*³

In Romans 16:22, Tertius is identified as the amanuensis—the secretary that Paul employed to take down his dictation. This was a common practice in the ancient world and we see evidence of this practice throughout the New Testament (for example, in 2 Thessalonians 3:17 and 1 Peter 5:12). The use of an amanuensis does not invalidate the assertion that Scripture is God's words in the words of men. Rather, it points to the fluid, creative, and vibrant process by which God produced the Bible.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 47-51 (Chapter 2)

If your students have additional questions about the relationship between divine and human authors, refer them to Grudem's helpful discussion of this issue that was part of the "Further Reading" of the previous lesson (80-81, Section A6). You may also want to consult Piper's sermon on Romans 16:21-23, entitled "Thank God for an Inspired Bible." This sermon can be found at desiringGod.org.

4. How does this chapter enrich your understanding of the phrase "Word of God"? How does this chapter relate to the "dual authorship" of the Bible?⁶
 - **ANSWER.** *Grudem skillfully distinguishes five possible referents for this phrase: the person of Jesus Christ; God's decrees; God's words of personal address; God's speech through human lips; and God's words in written form. This should teach us not to be reductionistic in describing God's modes of communication. The human-divine dynamic present in God's written words is also seen in God's speech through human lips and in the person of Jesus Christ.*

⁶ John Piper, "Thank God for an Inspired Bible," an online sermon at desiringGod.org. Throughout this curriculum we will only provide the sermon titles (and not the full web addresses) for online sermons at the Desiring God website. Use the Title Index of the Resource Library to locate these sermons. Article last accessed April 26, 2016.

Day 2

AUTHORIAL INTENT AND MEANING

In our postmodern culture it has become fashionable to assert that texts have no fixed meaning, but only the meaning that readers, or communities, construct. “Who are you to say what this text might mean for me? The very fact that the Bible has been interpreted in so many ways seems to make a mockery of any suggestion that there is only one true meaning.”

If it is indeed true that readers construct the meaning of the biblical text, it would seem that systematic theology is doomed from the outset—or, at least, that individuals or communities might have their own “systematic theology,” but that the Bible itself does not present a coherent theology that thrusts itself upon us.

Ephesians 3:1-6

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—
² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

5. How does verse 4 relate to this issue of a text’s meaning?

- **ANSWER.** *This verse teaches us at least two things about a text’s meaning (according to Paul). First, Paul assumes that the readers are in fact able to understand his insight by reading the letter. Interpretation is possible. Second, Paul locates the meaning in his own insight. Thus it is the author’s intent that controls the text’s meaning.*

How would you respond to the following assertion?

“It is obvious that different readers understand different things when they read the same words in a text. This is because they bring different experiences and

prejudices to the text. Therefore, no one can say that one interpretation is better than another. All we can say is that our interpretations are different. In fact, saying one interpretation is 'correct' or 'true' is oppressive and intolerant. We should strive to understand and appreciate the different backgrounds readers bring to the text, resulting in different readings."

6. Is there any truth in this assertion? Is it compatible with what Paul says in Ephesians 3:4?

- **ANSWER.** *It is true that we bring much of our own "baggage" to texts that we read. We will examine some of what this baggage is on Day 3. But clearly Paul expects his readers to adopt his understanding of Christ. If the Bible's meaning is constructed by its readers, then it can have no authority over their lives. The readers would be, in effect, only reinforcing their own ideas.*

At this point it is important to make a qualification to what we've been articulating about authorial intent and meaning. As we've noted in Day 1, any portion of Scripture has two authors: God and man. And it's possible that God's intention in a text might surpass the meaning that the human author intended. Notice what Peter asserts about Old Testament prophets:

1 Peter 1:10-12

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Let's look at a concrete example of this phenomenon.

Isaiah 7:10-16

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." ¹³ And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the

Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.”

Isaiah 8:3-4

³ And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, “Call his name Maher-shalal-hashbaz; ⁴ for before the boy knows how to cry ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.”

Matthew 1:18-23

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

7. It appears as if the sign given to King Ahaz is fulfilled in Isaiah 8:3-4 (cf. especially 7:16 and 8:4). Matthew, however, applies Isaiah 7:14 to Christ. How can this be?

- **ANSWER.** They both can be fulfillments of the same promise because God, at times, intends both what the human author intends and something more. Isaiah may or may not have been aware that the fulfillment he saw in his life was only a partial fulfillment of the true prophecy that would be fulfilled in the Messiah. It is this aspect of the nature of prophecy that caused the prophets to inquire “what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Peter 1:11).

“We may legitimately presume that the divine intention corresponds to the human intention unless there is good reason—given the nature of God or the broader canonical context—to think otherwise. Recognizing Scripture’s divine authorship ultimately requires us to read the biblical texts as one book.”⁷

A second needed qualification is that although a biblical text usually has only one *meaning*, there are a wide variety of potential *applications* of that text.

1 Corinthians 8:4, 7-11

⁴ *Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one...”⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.*

⁸ *Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.* ⁹ *But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.* ¹⁰ *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?* ¹¹ *And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.*

8. What is the meaning of this passage—that is, what is Paul’s intention? What principle is articulated, and how might this be applied?

- **ANSWER.** *In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul is addressing the issue of whether it is permissible to eat meat sacrificed to idols. His conclusion is that the Corinthians are free to eat this meat provided that they don’t wound their own consciences or the consciences of others. The principle that can be inferred is, “Don’t do things that you are free to do if it causes someone else to stumble.” This principle still applies to us today and could be applied in a variety of circumstances.*

Thus, it should be clear that in the attempt to discern the text’s meaning, we attempt to discern the original author’s meaning, while understanding that God sometimes intended more than what the human author may have understood. We also understand that a single, fixed meaning might generate a number of legitimate, contemporary applications.

⁷ Kevin Vanhoozer, “Intention/Intentional Fallacy,” in the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, eds. Kevin Vanhoozer et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2005), 329. Used by permission.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 116-121 (Chapter 7, Sections A–C)

9. How does the doctrine of the necessity of Scripture motivate us to understand the author's intended meaning?
 - **ANSWER.** *As Grudem argues, the Bible is necessary for knowledge of the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for certain knowledge of God's will. Since these things are of ultimate concern in life, we ought to be concerned to understand the Bible accurately. And understanding the biblical text is accomplished through understanding the author's intended meaning.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 121-124 (Chapter 7, Sections D–E)

Day 3

OBSCURING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

This curriculum has argued thus far that the Bible is the only true and authoritative source for systematic theology and life. We understand the Bible as we understand the intention(s) of the divine and original human authors. If this is so straightforward, then why are there so many different interpretations of the Bible? Why the multiplicity of commentaries? What is it that obscures the Bible's meaning?

The most fundamental obstacle to understanding the Bible is unbelief. Only spirit-filled believers in Jesus are in the position to recognize the life-changing significance of the truth they read.

1 Corinthians 2:11-16

¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

10. Describe the difference between a natural man and one who is spiritual.

- **ANSWER.** *A natural man is unable to accept the things of the Spirit of God because he is unable to understand them—they are folly to him. The Spirit-led man understands and accepts the things of the Spirit of God because the Spirit in him teaches him.*

But there are also other factors that can obscure the Bible's meaning. Examine the following interaction between Jesus and Satan. What is the flaw in Satan's interpretation of Scripture?

Matthew 4:5-7

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” ⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

11. Using this passage, describe another factor that might obscure the meaning of the Bible.

- **ANSWER.** *Satan’s evil desires cause him to twist the Scripture for his own ends. Therefore, we could say that our own personal sin can pervert Scripture’s meaning. But if one investigates the Old Testament context of Satan’s quotation (Ps 91), it is clear that Satan is also quoting these verses out of context. So disregarding the original context can also create mistakes in interpretation.*

Consider also the following argument:

Our cultural assumptions also color the way we understand the text. When most Americans read the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand with a few loaves of bread they marvel at his power. But when most Middle Easterners read the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand with a few loaves they marvel at his hospitality.

We, Americans, are from a Western culture that values truth and law. Therefore we interpret the gospel as being the remedy for our guilt—that which makes us righteous. This is certainly true, but the gospel does more. And because of our focus on truth and law we often miss this.

In a helpful book by Roland Muller, Honor and Shame,⁸ Muller points out that three major things happened at the fall and the gospel answers them all: because of sin we are guilty, and the gospel makes us innocent; because of sin we bear shame and dishonor, and the gospel comes in and gives us glory; because of sin we live in fear, and the gospel gives us power. These three categories, guilt/innocence, shame/honor, fear/power are evident in all cultures, but each culture emphasizes one of them more than the other two.

In America we emphasize guilt and innocence, which is easily seen in all of our TV shows focused on the law. Many cultures however, especially animistic ones in Africa, focus on fear and power. They are afraid of the many spirits and need to

⁸ Roland Muller, *Honor and Shame* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Xlibris Corporation, 2000).

find ways to appease them, that is, to have power over them. In the Muslim world, and much of the 10/40 window, the focus is on honor and shame.

We have made much sense of the gospel in the guilt/innocence paradigm, which is why the church has been strong in the Western world. We have also made much progress in understanding the gospel in relation to fear and power, namely that in Christ we have power over sin and over evil spirits. This is why the church has grown much in Africa and other animistic places. But we haven't done as well in explaining the gospel in terms of shame and honor. Is it any wonder then why the church is so small in the Muslim world?⁹

12. Do you agree with this argument? Can our cultural background obscure our understanding?

- **ANSWER.** *It is certainly true that our own culture both helps and hinders our understanding of the Bible. We are likely to see things in the Bible that resonate with our own experience and cultural paradigm, but we are less likely to see things that reflect the cultural assumptions of the ancient world. Therefore, we can profit from listening to the perspectives and emphases of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 105-110 (Chapter 6, Sections A–E)

13. Why might it be important to affirm the clarity of Scripture even while recognizing the limitations, biases, and sin that we bring to the text?

- **ANSWER.** *If we do not continue to maintain the clarity of Scripture we not only deny what the Bible itself implies about our ability to understand, but we also undermine people's confidence in the Word. The uneducated believer might abdicate all responsibility in searching the Scripture for themselves (cf. Acts 17:11) or forsake the Bible's authority in despair.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 110-111 (Chapter 6, Section F)

⁹ This argument was composed by Dustin Shramek and was included in the unrevised version of this curriculum.

Day 4

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN INTERPRETATION

As seen in 1 Corinthians 2:11-16, the Holy Spirit is needed for properly understanding the Word. We will examine a few additional texts that make this plain.

Ephesians 1:16-19

¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe...

14. According to these verses, what role does the Holy Spirit have in our knowledge?

- **ANSWER.** *The Spirit provides wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God, enlightens the eyes of our heart, and gives us knowledge of the hope we have, the riches of God's inheritance, and the greatness of his power. In other words, we are dependent on the Holy Spirit for true, spiritual knowledge.*

Does the Spirit therefore render our efforts and hard work in interpretation meaningless? Should we not study his Word diligently, but rather simply pray for understanding?

2 Timothy 2:7

⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

15. Why does Paul instruct Timothy to think over what he says if the Lord will give him understanding?

- **ANSWER.** *Paul must believe that the Lord often gives understanding through our careful study. Therefore, rather than discouraging our study of God's word, the promise in 2 Tim 2:7b motivates us to think carefully. Notice the word "for" in this verse, which introduces the "ground clause."*

Benjamin Warfield, a great theologian at the beginning of the twentieth century, said, “Sometimes we hear it said that ten minutes on your knees will give you a truer, deeper, more operative knowledge of God than ten hours over your books. ‘What!’ is the appropriate response, ‘than ten hours over your books, on your knees?’”¹⁰

Finally, meditate on the following prayers from Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:18, 27, 33, 73

¹⁸ *Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

²⁷ *Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works.*

³³ *Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.*

⁷³ *Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.*

16. What do these verses imply about the understanding of God’s Word?

- **ANSWER.** *These verses imply that the LORD’s help is needed for our understanding and observance of his Word and commandments. These verses also imply that the LORD is able and willing to give us his help when we pray to him for it.*

Our study of systematic theology cannot remain an academic or merely intellectual exercise. Rather, we must approach this topic with dependence upon God for his help so that we understand his Word more fully and obey it with greater faithfulness and joy. As you study through this curriculum, ask that the Lord would grant you, by his grace, his Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 1203-1207 (Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy)

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy declares, “We are persuaded that to deny [the inerrancy of Scripture] is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God’s own word which marks true Christian faith.”¹¹

¹⁰ Benjamin Warfield, “The Religious Life of Theological Students,” in *The Princeton Theology*, ed. Mark Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 263.

¹¹ The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, found at http://www.etsjets.org/files/documents/Chicago_Statement.pdf. Accessed September 29, 2015.

17. Based on the study you have done in this lesson and the previous one, would you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

· ANSWER. *Answers will vary*

18. As you read through the articles of affirmation and denial, which article is the most confusing to you? What makes it hard to understand?

· ANSWER. *Answers will vary*

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

1.3 We believe God's intentions are revealed through the intentions of inspired human authors, even when the authors' intention was to express divine meaning of which they were not fully aware, as, for example, in the case of some Old Testament prophecies. Thus the meaning of Biblical texts is a fixed historical reality, rooted in the historical, unchangeable intentions of its divine and human authors. However, while meaning does not change, the application of that meaning may change in various situations. Nevertheless it is not legitimate to infer a meaning from a Biblical text that is not demonstrably carried by the words which God inspired.

1.4 Therefore, the process of discovering the intention of God in the Bible (which is its fullest meaning) is a humble and careful effort to find in the language of Scripture what the human authors intended to communicate. Limited abilities, traditional biases, personal sin, and cultural assumptions often obscure Biblical texts. Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit is essential for right understanding of the Bible, and prayer for His assistance belongs to a proper effort to understand and apply God's Word.

19. Summarize both sections of the Affirmation of Faith in one sentence each.

• **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

20. Using the Affirmation of Faith, respond to this statement: "The Bible means different things to different people. You can't say someone else's interpretation is wrong."

• **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

 INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT



Write a brief paragraph describing ways in which “limited abilities, traditional biases, personal sin, and cultural assumptions often obscure Biblical texts” (AOF 1.4) and how we might avoid them.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. What might we lose if we explain all of Scripture's composition using a strict "dictation theory" of inspiration (that is, that God dictated every word to each writer of Scripture)?
2. Why are there so many interpretations of the Bible? Is this a sound argument against texts having a fixed meaning?
3. Can unbelieving interpreters arrive at any correct interpretations of the Bible? Why or why not?
4. Your own question(s):

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996).
- ▷ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).
- ▷ John Piper, "O Lord, Open My Eyes," an online sermon at desiringGod.org.
- ▷ John Piper, "Wonderful Things from Your Word," an online sermon at desiringGod.org.

The Trinity, One God as Three Persons

4

🔗 INTRODUCTION

John Frame has said “Scripture gives us only a glimpse” and “not a treatise” of the subject we will study in this lesson. He says, “I think some theologians exaggerate what we know about the Trinity. Much that the Bible teaches about the Trinity is very mysterious, and we must bow in humility as we enter into this holy realm.”¹² This alerts us to the difficult balance we must strike in speaking about the Trinity: we must be careful not to go beyond Scripture, and yet we should not downplay what Scripture does in fact say.

This lesson will introduce the doctrine of the Trinity. Many objections and nuances, as well as much of the history behind this subject will be touched on in passing, if at all. And yet the basics are clear: God is a triune being, one God as three persons. We will examine the Scriptures that indicate this and examine the roles of each member.

🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- state what the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is
- identify some common heresies related to this doctrine
- describe the joyful relationship that exists between the persons of God

¹² Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 30.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **adoptionism:**
- **Arianism:**
- **economic subordination:**
- **eternal begetting of the Son:**
- **modalism:**
- **ontological equality:**
- **Trinity:**



This lesson has offered only a few arguments for the deity of Christ and has not even considered (except through the Grudem reading) the existence of God. These are certainly worthy topics to explore at length, and can probably be more thoroughly treated in other contexts. The purpose of this lesson is merely to introduce the doctrine of the Trinity and to ensure that the students grasp the essentials of this doctrine.

If during the class time you decide to focus more attention on the divinity of Jesus, you may want to consult the following texts (among others):

- Romans 8:9-11 and the equation of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ
- Romans 9:5 and its explicit affirmation of Jesus' deity
- Colossians 1:15-20, explaining that "firstborn" refers to Christ's preeminence (cf. Psalm 89:26-27)
- Titus 2:13 and its explicit affirmation of Jesus' deity
- Revelation 5:4-10 and the worship Jesus receives as God

You may also want to consult secondary resources that address the specific areas of confusion or concern that you anticipate your class having.

The three statements offered by Grudem (page 231) serve as a good summary of the Trinity. It may be helpful to press home these three statements as a memorable device. John Frame has a similar list of five propositions in *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (30):

1. God is one.
2. God is three.
3. The three persons are each fully God.
4. Each of the persons is distinct from the others.
5. The three persons are related eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Remember that although we can understand the doctrine of the Trinity *truly*, we cannot comprehend it *exhaustively*. You would do well to heed this caution, again by John Frame in *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (36):

But remember: Scriptures gives us a glimpse of the Trinity, not a treatise. We don't know very clearly what it means for God to be a substance or for him to

be three persons. We don't even know clearly what substance and person mean when applied to God. We have a rough idea of how these terms apply to things in creation, but we don't know what a divine person is and how precisely it differs from the divine substance.

Remember that these terms are just vehicles for biblical content. Sometimes we get the idea that when we learn technical theological terms like these we are learning information about God that is not in the Bible, stuff we could learn apart from the Bible alone. But there is certainly not right. These terms are only attempts to summarize biblical content. They don't stand on their own. The mystery remains.

For more information on God's infinite happiness within the Trinity, please consult Chapter 1 of *The Pleasures of God* by John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in His Son." This chapter is available for free online (see Additional Resources above). This chapter examines the deepest delight that God has in the universe, namely, his infinite delight in his Son. Though it is often overlooked, it is a crucial biblical theological truth that undergirds all of God's actions in creation and redemption.



Day 1

ONE GOD IN THREE PERSONS

One of the bedrock confessions of the Old Testament is found in Deuteronomy 6. This brief statement about God has been recited regularly by Jews from one generation to the next.

Deuteronomy 6:4

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Judaism, and Christianity after it, are considered monotheistic religions—that is, they are characterized by a belief in only one God who rules over all. When interacting with other pagan, polytheistic religions, this text from Isaiah represents the typical response.

Isaiah 46:1-11

¹ Bel [a foreign god] bows down; Nebo [another foreign god] stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. ² They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. ³ “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; ⁴ even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. ⁵ To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? ⁶ Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! ⁷ They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble. ⁸ Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹ remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end

from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it."

1. According to this text, what separates the true God of Israel from foreign "gods"?

· **ANSWER.** *The God of Israel is the only true God (46:9) since he is the only one who is able to save. The idols of the nations are weak, impotent, and created by man. The God of Israel declares the end from the beginning and does not need to be served by human hands, but rather serves those who trust in him.*

We see this fierce, monotheistic perspective one chapter earlier as well.

Isaiah 45:18-25

¹⁸ *For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other."¹⁹ I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in vain.' I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.²⁰ Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you survivors of the nations! They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save.²¹ Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.²² Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.²³ By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance."²⁴ Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him.²⁵ In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory."*

2. According to this text, why is it significant that there is only one God?

- **ANSWER.** *Since there is only one God and creator, salvation can be found in no one else. The God of Israel is the only one who is worthy of worship and trust. As Isa 42:8 says, “My glory I give to no other.” Therefore, God has ordained that he alone will receive all the praise and honor from men (45:23).*

It could not be clearer from the Old Testament that there is only one God.

When we come to the New Testament, however, we notice something curious: threefold formulas that speak of Father, Son, *and* Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13:14

¹⁴ *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

3. Do the Father, Son, and Spirit have one name or three names? Why is this significant?

- **ANSWER.** *They have one name (note that “name” is singular). Jesus did not say, “Baptize them in the names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Nor did he say, “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the name of the Son, and the name of the Holy Spirit.” It is significant because it points to the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are three, yet they have the same name. Notice also that Jesus is given all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18)! Why would God share his power and authority (and glory!) with a person who was not God?!*

The same three persons are clearly seen in Jesus’ baptism.

Matthew 3:16-17

¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

4. How might these verses address modalism, the belief that God only appears to be three persons?
 - **ANSWER.** *It would be extremely difficult to construe this passage as the simultaneous appearance of a single person in three forms. Rather, the natural way to read this passage is to see the one God existing in three persons: Jesus, being baptized as a man; the Spirit, descending to rest on Jesus; and the Father, speaking from heaven about his Son.*

We’ve only begun to glimpse the mystery of what theologians and Christians throughout the ages have called the Trinity: one God in three persons.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 231-239 (Chapter 14, Section B1–B3)

5. Rewrite the three statements that, according to Grudem, summarize the Bible’s teaching on the Trinity:
 - A1. *God is three persons.*
 - A2. *Each person is fully God.*
 - A3. *There is one God.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 226-231 (Chapter 14, Section A)

Day 2

GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON

Throughout this course we will be describing God's person and his work as revealed in the Bible. For the purpose of this lesson, we will limit our focus on the deity of each member of the Trinity and the unique role each one plays. God the Father is the fountain of all being.

1 Corinthians 8:6

...⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist...

Romans 11:34-36

³⁴ For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?

³⁵ Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

6. Is it possible that some things exist independently from God the Father (i.e. Satan, moral laws, natural laws, etc.)? Why or why not? Why is this important?

- **ANSWER.** *No, it is not possible, for the Bible is very clear that all things are from God. Therefore, even Satan has his existence from God the Father and there is no moral code or natural law to which God must conform. He is the source of both moral and natural law. This is so important because otherwise there would be something outside of the control of God and he would no longer be supreme. If someone or something had its existence from some other source than God, God would no longer be ultimate in the universe.*

In Scripture we observe that even the Son and the Spirit are from the Father—not in the sense that they once did not exist, but in the sense that it is the Son who is begotten by the Father and not the other way around (John 1:14, 18). It is the Son who is sent from the Father; the Father is not sent from the Son (John 3:16; Romans 8:32; Galatians 4:4; 1 John 4:9). The Father sends the Spirit, but the Spirit does not send the Father (John 14:26). Jesus himself did not speak on his own authority, but only spoke what was given him from the Father (John 12:49-50).

And while Christ is the head of man and man is the head of woman, it is God the Father who is the head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). All of this shows us that God the Father is distinct from the Son and the Spirit.

Now God is certainly known as Father. Is God known in the person of the Son too? This issue could easily be a lesson—if not a course—of its own. We will necessarily simplify the complexity (and richness) of this debated issue by presenting two of the more compelling arguments for the deity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Gospel of John is filled with verses that testify to the deity of Christ. We will examine a few of them in the following list.

John 1:1-3

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John 8:57-59

⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

John 10:27-33

²⁷ “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.” ³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” ³³ The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.”

John 20:26-28

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

Much could be said about each one of these passages. For now, we will focus on only one: John 8:57-59.

7. Where else in the Bible do we hear someone say, “I am” (see Exodus 3:14)? What then is Jesus saying? How is this confirmed by the reaction of the Jews?

- **ANSWER.** *God says, “I am who I am,” in Exodus 3:14. By saying, “Before Abraham was, I am,” Jesus is claiming that he is Yahweh, he is God. This is exactly how the Jews understand him because they pick up stones to throw at him. They want to kill him for what they think is blasphemy.*

Aside from these narrative portions in the Gospel of John, another strong strand of evidence for Jesus’ deity can be seen in the way Old Testament citations are applied to him. Review Isaiah 45 and Question 2, which we completed earlier. Then compare these texts:

Isaiah 45:22-23

²² Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. ²³ By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.”

Philippians 2:9-11

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

8. What is so shocking about Paul’s allusion in Philippians 2:10?

- **ANSWER.** *Paul clearly alludes to Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians 2:10. In its OT context, every knee shall bow to the LORD, the one and only God, the God of Israel. Paul, however, claims that every knee will bow to Jesus! Why would Paul give glory to Jesus that properly belongs only to God if Jesus was not God? If Jesus is not God, then Paul commits blasphemy in Philippians 2:10!*

Notice also this pair of texts:

Psalm 102:18-27

¹⁸ *Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD; ¹⁹ that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, ²⁰ to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die, ²¹ that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD, and in Jerusalem his praise, ²² when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD. ²³ He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days. ²⁴ “O my God,” I say, “take me not away in the midst of my days—you whose years endure throughout all generations! ²⁵ Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ²⁶ They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, ²⁷ but you are the same, and your years have no end.”*

Hebrews 1:8, 10-12

⁸ *But of the Son he says... ¹⁰ And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; ¹¹ they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, ¹² like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”*

So there should be no doubt that Jesus is God and “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

But what can be said about the role of the Son within the Trinity?

John 1:14-18

¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”)* ¹⁶ *And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.*

Hebrews 1:1-3

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power...

Colossians 1:11-15

¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Matthew 11:25-27

²⁵ At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

9. What (fundamental?) work of Jesus is common to all these texts?

- **ANSWER.** Jesus, God the Son, reveals the Father. He makes him known to sinful humans who would otherwise not know him. Jesus can do this because he is "the exact imprint of his nature," and the "image of the invisible God."

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 239-246 (Chapter 14, Sections B4–C2c)

10. What heresies regarding the Trinity are you familiar with? Please describe them using as much detail as possible.

- **ANSWER.** Answers will vary, though Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormonism should be mentioned

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 141-144 (Chapter 9)

Day 3

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

In what has preceded we have seen that Scripture teaches that the Father and the Son are both divine persons in the Godhead. We have yet to consider the third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:10-11

¹⁰ *These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.* ¹¹ *For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

Psalm 139:7-8

⁷ *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?*

⁸ *If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!*

Hebrews 9:14

¹⁴ *How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*

2 Timothy 1:14

¹⁴ *By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.*

11. According to these four verses, what four divine attributes does the Holy Spirit possess? Find one attribute in each text.

- **ANSWER.** 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 = Omniscience, the Spirit knows everything in the mind of God. Psalm 139:7-8 = Omnipresence, there is no place where God's Spirit is not. Hebrews 9:14 = Eternality, he is the "eternal Spirit."
2 Timothy 2:14 = Holiness, he is the "Holy Spirit."

Aside from the divine attributes that the Spirit possesses there are other indications that the Holy Spirit is God. Notice that lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God.

Acts 5:3-4

³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

Now examine the following pair of texts:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 10:15-17

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” ¹⁷ then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

12. The author of Hebrews is quoting from Jeremiah 31:33-34. From the quote it is clear that the LORD (Yahweh) is speaking (Hebrews 10:16, see also Jeremiah 31:33), but who does the author of Hebrews say is speaking? What is the significance of this?

- **ANSWER.** The author of Hebrews says that it is the Holy Spirit who is testifying to us. This is significant because he sees the word of the LORD as the same thing as the word of the Holy Spirit. He knows that the Holy Spirit himself is God.

Luke says the same thing in Acts 28:25-26 when he quotes God speaking from Isaiah 6:9.

The work of the Holy Spirit is explored in much greater detail in Lesson 1 of *Theological Foundations II*. For now, it is sufficient to note that the Holy Spirit is distinct from God the Father and Jesus, but is fully divine.

John 16:13-14

¹³ *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

13. Underline every pronoun referring to the Holy Spirit. How is the personhood of the Spirit made evident in these verses?

· **ANSWER.** *The personhood of the Holy Spirit is made evident by the fact that he is referred to as a he rather than an it. We also see that he does things that persons do: he comes, guides, speaks, hears, discloses, and glorifies. Some object by saying that the Greek word for spirit is pneuma, which is a neuter noun. This is true and Greek grammar would then demand that the pronoun be neuter in order to match the noun to which it is refer-ring. John, however, uses a masculine pronoun (ekeinos) when referring to the Spirit. He broke the rules of traditional grammar. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is a person and John was making that abundantly clear by using a masculine pronoun.*

The Holy Spirit possesses a mind (Romans 8:27) and a will (1 Corinthians 12:11) and he can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). Impersonal forces cannot be grieved, only persons can. He can also be lied to (Acts 5:3), resisted (Acts 7:51), and insulted (Hebrews 10:29).

The Holy Spirit is sent from both the Father and the Son as seen in the following verses:

John 14:26

²⁶ *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

John 15:26

²⁶ *But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*

As the Son's role is to reveal the Father, the Spirit's role is to bear witness to the Son.

“To generalize, the Father foreordains, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies the work of Christ to the heart.”¹³

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 246-252 (Chapter 14, Sections C2d–D2)

14. List those things that Grudem thinks are at stake in the doctrine of the Trinity:

· **ANSWER.** *The heart of the Christian faith is at stake in the doctrine of the Trinity, for if the doctrine of the Trinity is not true, then:*

- A1. *we must doubt the atonement*
- A2. *justification by faith alone is threatened*
- A3. *it would be idolatry to worship Jesus*
- A4. *we must attribute salvation to a creature (Jesus)*
- A5. *the independence and personal nature of God are in question*
- A6. *the unity of the universe is undermined*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 149-152 (Chapter 10)

¹³ Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 34.

Day 4

THE HAPPY GOD

God is one and exists in three, distinct and fully divine persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. Each person is equal and yet each person has a unique role in salvation and in the intra-Trinitarian relationship. We have now but to consider what characterizes the Trinitarian fellowship: pure joy.

1 Timothy 1:11

¹¹ *...in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.*

1 Timothy 6:15

¹⁵ *...which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords...*

The word translated “blessed” can also be translated “happy” or “fortunate.” Our God is a *happy* God!

Matthew 25:23

²³ *His master said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”*

John 15:11

¹¹ *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

15. What is the necessary assumption behind these two verses?

- **ANSWER.** *The assumption is that God must be happy! Entering the “joy of your master” is offered as a reward and as an incentive for being faithful. How would this be a glorious promise if the joy of the master was not great? And why would we pray if the fullness of Jesus’ joy in us was not that great? It is more powerful that the joy of God is assumed in these verses rather than argued for.*

Matthew 12:18-21

¹⁸ Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; ²⁰ a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; ²¹ and in his name the Gentiles will hope.

16. In what qualities of the servant (Jesus) does God delight?

- **ANSWER.** *God delights in the servant-like meekness of his Son. The Father also delights in the supremacy of the Son (cf. John 3:35).*

Consider the following theological argument for the happiness of God:

“God is happy because he is sovereign. Psalm 115:3 says, ‘Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.’ What this verse implies is that God’s sovereignty is his right and power to do whatever makes him happy. Our God is in heaven—he is over all things and subject to none. Therefore, he does whatever he pleases—he always acts to preserve his maximum happiness. God is happy because his righteous acts, which are always done out of love to his own glory, can never be frustrated beyond his will.”

...Therefore, I conclude that nothing in all the world can frustrate the ultimate happiness of God.¹⁴

17. Do you agree with this argument? Would this make God the “happiest of all beings”?

- **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

“If God were unhappy, if he were in some way deficient, then he might indeed be constrained from outside in some way to do what he does not want to do in order to make up his deficiency and finally to be happy.”

“On the contrary, because he is complete and exuberantly happy and overflowing with satisfaction in the fellowship of the Trinity, all he does is free and uncoerced.

¹⁴ John Piper, “The Happiness of God: Foundation for Christian Hedonism.” An online sermon at desiringGod.org.

His deeds are the overflow of his joy. This is what it means when the Scripture says that God does something according to the “good pleasure” of his will. It means that nothing outside God’s own pleasure — the pleasure he has in what he is, nothing but that pleasure — has constrained his choices and his deeds.”¹⁵

And finally, observe the delight that the Father has in his Son.

Matthew 3:16-17

¹⁶ *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*

Matthew 17:5

⁵ *He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”*

John 17:26

²⁶ *I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*

“One of the best ways to think about God’s immense happiness in his own glory is to think of it as the delight he has in his Son who is the image of that glory. When Jesus entered the world, God the Father said, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). When God the Father beholds the glory of his own essence in the person of his Son, he is infinitely happy. “Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights” (Isaiah 42:1). So the first observation is that God is happy because he delights in himself, especially as his nature is reflected in his beloved Son.”¹⁶

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 252-257 (Chapter 14, Sections D3–E)

¹⁵ John Piper, “The Pleasure of God in All That He Does.” An online sermon at desiringGod.org.

¹⁶ John Piper, “The Happiness of God: Foundation for Christian Hedonism.” An online sermon at desiringGod.org.

18. Why is it important to preserve the mystery of the doctrine of the Trinity?

- **ANSWER.** *Grudem asserts that we must not simplify the doctrine of the Trinity because that has resulted, historically, in error. We must affirm that the doctrine of the Trinity is mysterious if we are to be honest with ourselves and with Scripture. The mystery may even contribute to the glory of God. In saying this, however, we must not make the mistake of concluding that we cannot know anything about this essential doctrine.*

See Teaching Notes for more information and a helpful quote on this topic.

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 177-180 (Chapter 11, Section B5)

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

2.1 *We believe in one living, sovereign, and all-glorious God, eternally existing in three infinitely excellent and admirable Persons: God the Father, fountain of all being; God the Son, eternally begotten, not made, without beginning, being of one essence with the Father; and God the Holy Spirit, proceeding in the full, divine essence, as a Person, eternally from the Father and the Son. Thus each Person in the Godhead is fully and completely God.*

2.2 *We believe that God is supremely joyful in the fellowship of the Trinity, each Person beholding and expressing His eternal and unsurpassed delight in the all-satisfying perfections of the triune God.*

19. Think of two analogies that would *not* be an accurate way of illustrating the Trinity. Explain why they are inaccurate.

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

20. Why do you think that this affirmation of faith includes Section 2.2?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

 INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT



Ask a non-Christian friend if they have ever heard of the Trinity. If they have, ask what their understanding of this doctrine is. If they haven't, try to explain it to them. Record a brief summary of your conversation.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. What are some analogies for the Trinity that you have heard? What is helpful about them and what is inaccurate?
2. Do you think many Christians today could defend the doctrine of the Trinity? Why or why not? Is this important to be able to do?
3. Have you ever been in a conversation with a Muslim, a Jew, a Mormon, a Jehovah's Witness, or a member of another religion or cult? Did you discuss the Trinity? What was said in the conversation?
4. Your own question(s):

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in His Son," Chapter 1 in *The Pleasures of God* (online version available at <http://www.desiringgod.org/books/the-pleasures-of-god>)
- ▶ Robert Letham, *Holy Trinity* (Phillisburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2005).
- ▶ Jonathan Edwards, *An Unpublished Essay on the Trinity* (available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/trinity/files/trinity.html>)
- ▶ Donald MacLeod, *Shared Life* (Waynesboro, Georgia: Christian Focus, 2005).

God's Eternal Purpose and Election (1)

5

📖 INTRODUCTION

The sovereignty of God can become so embroiled in debate that it becomes a doctrine to be debated and not rejoiced in. Our confusion and concerns with this doctrine can strip it of the effect it ought to have in our lives.

In this lesson, we will present the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty as something to be cherished. It is our hope that even if you are initially hostile to this doctrine, your testimony will eventually be similar to that of Jonathan Edwards:

"From childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me... there has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, in respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, from that day to this; so that I scarce ever have found so much as the rising of an objection against it, in the most absolute sense, in God's shewing mercy to whom he will show mercy, and hardening whom he will. God's absolute sovereignty and justice, with respect to salvation and damnation, is what my mind seems to rest assured of, as much as of any thing that I see with my eyes, at least it is so at times... The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God."¹⁷

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- describe the extent of God's sovereignty in the universe
- defend the traditional and orthodox understanding of God's foreknowledge
- affirm divine sovereignty and human responsibility

17 Jonathan Edwards, *Selections* (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), 58-59.

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **Arminianism:**
- **Calvinism:**
- **compatibilism:**
- **concurrence:**
- **free will:**
- **immutability:**
- **providence:**
- **Reformed:**
- **sovereignty:**
- **unchangeableness:**



This lesson covers the topic of God's sovereignty over all things, including salvation. Obviously, the sovereignty of God is a massive issue and the students who use this curriculum will probably come from a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, you will need to make a determination of what will be most helpful to discuss in class.

If your students are being introduced to the topic of God's sovereignty for the first time, you might want to stick closely to the three statements offered in Day 4.

1. God foreknows and ordains all things, whatsoever comes to pass.
2. God by no means commits evil, is evil himself, or judges evildoers unjustly.
3. Human beings are responsible for the choices they make, and they make those choices willingly.

Show how the Bible supports each one of these statements and begin to address the questions that arise about the relationships between them. Stress the importance of holding all three without compromise.

*If your students are confused about this topic but have some familiarity with it, you might want to focus on answering their objections. Prepare by reviewing 342-351 of Grudem's *Systematic Theology* carefully. If they have been confronted with Arminianism or Open Theism, invite them to share what they've encountered and remember to direct them to the text. "Common sense" must not be allowed to trump the clear statements of the Bible. Many will give emotional arguments against this teaching, but it must be stressed that we should only reject doctrines if they are contrary to Scripture, not just because they are hard to understand or difficult for our heart to accept. This is a crucial point to stress over and over so that no one rejects God's sovereignty on the basis of emotions (or "gut feelings") alone.*

If your students are committed Calvinists, then you might want to focus on preparing them to share the sovereignty of God with others in a winsome way. Raise standard objections yourself and force the students to defend their positions biblically. Here is a helpful (but limited) illustration that might equip your students:

God is not like a fireman. Firemen respond to problems outside their control and which arise without their foreknowledge. All that firemen can do is to make the best of the situations they find themselves in. Instead, God is like a surgeon. Surgeons knowingly cut into their patients, and cause temporary pain, but they do it in order to bring about a greater good—like removing a cancerous tumor. We might be thankful for a fireman, but we trust a surgeon.

If you are looking for a quote to represent the Open Theism view in a general way, here is a statement by Greg Boyd in *Letters from a Skeptic* (Wheaton: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1994), 30:

In the Christian view God knows all of reality—everything there is to know. But to assume He knows ahead of time how every person is going to freely act assumes that each person's free activity is already there to know—even before he freely does it! But it's not. If we have been given freedom, we create the reality of our decisions by making them. And until we make them, they don't exist. Thus, in my view at least, there simply isn't anything to know until we make it there to know. So God can't foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He creates these people and they, in turn create their decisions.



Day 1

GOD ORDAINS AND GOVERNS ALL THINGS

In this day and the next we will examine Scripture to see whether the following assertion of the Westminster Confession of Faith is an accurate summary of God's sovereignty:

“God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.” (Chapter 5.1)¹⁸

Does God indeed ordain whatsoever comes to pass? Does God indeed govern *all* things? We will look at only a few key texts, leaving many, many others unexamined.

Ephesians 1:11-12

¹¹ *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,*
¹² *so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

1. Paraphrase the last phrase of v. 11, “who works all things after the counsel of His will.”
- **ANSWER.** *“... Who accomplishes or brings about everything that happens just the way he wants.”*

“All things” includes the major events in history as well as seemingly trivial things in life. Notice the comprehensiveness of God's control in the following verse.

¹⁸ The Westminster Confession of Faith as reproduced in Grudem *Systematic Theology*, 1182.

Proverbs 16:33

³³ *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*

Or, as John Piper has said:

“And if someone should raise the question of sheer chance and the kinds of things that just seem to happen with no more meaning than the role of the dice, Proverbs 16:33 answers: ‘The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.’ In other words, there is no such thing as ‘chance’ from God’s perspective. He has his purposes for every roll of the dice in Las Vegas and every seemingly absurd turn of events in the universe.”¹⁹

Proverbs 19:21

²¹ *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*

Psalm 33:8-11

⁸ *Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!* ⁹ *For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.*

¹⁰ *The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.* ¹¹ *The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.*

2. What is the difference between the plans of man and the plans of the Lord?

- **ANSWER.** *The difference between man’s plans and the LORD’s plans is that the LORD’s plans (counsel) will stand—that is, they will come to pass just as the LORD intends. Our plans, however, sometimes come to fruition and sometimes do not. We are not able to bring about exactly what we want because we don’t control all of the factors involved. Our plans are also different from God’s plans in that our plans change and fluctuate, but his counsel stands forever, his plans remain the same from generation to generation.*

¹⁹ John Piper, “Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordained that Evil Be?”, online sermon at desiringGod.org.

Daniel 4:29-35

²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” ³¹ While the words were still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”

³³ Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws. ³⁴ At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; ³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”

3. What purpose did God have in humbling Nebuchadnezzar? Did he learn his lesson?

- **ANSWER.** God’s purpose in humbling Nebuchadnezzar is stated in v. 32: Nebuchadnezzar must learn that he rules over Babylon only because God, who has all dominion, gives it to him. Nebuchadnezzar does learn his lesson and confesses God’s uncontested kingship in vv. 34-35.

Here are two additional verses that clearly assert the sovereignty of God over all things:

Lamentations 3:37-38

³⁷ Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? ³⁸ Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?

Job 42:2

² I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

The following list of texts is but a small sample of texts that affirm God's control over the various aspects of life.

Psalm 135:6-7 (cf. Mark 4:39-41!)

⁶ Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. ⁷ He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.

Romans 13:1

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Proverbs 21:1

¹ The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

Genesis 20:2-6

² And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." ⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her."

Amos 3:3-6

³ Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet? ⁴ Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from his den, if he has taken nothing? ⁵ Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? ⁶ Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?

Isaiah 45:7

⁷ I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-23)

¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

4. Using these passages, list the various things over which God has power. List at least one thing per passage.
 - **ANSWER.** *God has power over the forces of nature, human governments, the hearts and actions of men, disaster, well-being, calamity, and delusions (evil spirits). By this we should know that God has power over all things.*

Here is a list compiled by John Piper as he reflected on the “all things” of Ephesians 1:11:

“This ‘all things’ includes the fall of sparrows (Matthew 10:29), the rolling of dice (Proverbs 16:33), the slaughter of his people (Psalm 44:11), the decisions of kings (Proverbs 21:1), the failing of sight (Exodus 4:11), the sickness of children (2 Samuel 12:15), the loss and gain of money (1 Samuel 2:7), the suffering of saints (1 Peter 4:19), the completion of travel plans (James 4:15), the persecution of Christians (Hebrews 12:4-7), the repentance of souls (2 Timothy 2:25), the gift of faith (Philippians 1:29), the pursuit of holiness (Philippians 3:12-13), the growth of believers (Hebrews 6:3), the giving of life and the taking in death (1 Samuel 2:6), and the crucifixion of his Son (Acts 4:27-28).”²⁰

Not only does God ordain and govern all things, but creation is dependent upon him for its preservation and continued existence:

Hebrews 1:1-3

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

²⁰ John Piper, “Why I Do Not Say ‘God Did Not Cause This Calamity, But He Can Use It For Good,’” an online sermon at the desiringGod.org.

Colossians 1:15-17

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Acts 17:28

²⁸ For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.”

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 315-322 (Chapter 16, Sections A–B6)

The required reading for today partially anticipates what we will be studying the following days.

5. Record one thing that you have learned from Grudem that you weren't aware of already.

• **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 331-333 (Chapter 16, Sections C–D)

Day 2

GOD FOREKNOWS ALL THINGS

If it has been demonstrated that God ordains all that comes to pass, the question still remains, “When did God devise his plan for creation and all history?” Does God know in advance everything that will happen? This is of particular concern because of the recent popularity of a doctrine of God called Open Theism.

“Proponents of open theism are, in one sense, committed Arminians. That is, they affirm such cardinal Arminian doctrines as 1) the universal and impartial love of God for all humanity and his true desire that all be saved; 2) God’s creation of humans with what they often call ‘genuine’ or ‘significant’ freedom of will (i.e., libertarian freedom); and 3) the necessity of such genuine freedom for true worship of God, love for God, and human moral accountability. While embracing wholly these Arminian commitments, open theists are also disturbed with other aspects of the Arminian theological tradition. Particularly they object to the notion that the divine omniscience includes comprehensive knowledge of the future. Omniscience (i.e., in its most general sense, the doctrine that God knows all that can be known or is knowable) must be defined, they say, as God’s comprehensive knowledge of the past and present only. All of the future that is undetermined by God (which includes all future free choices and actions), since it has not happened and hence is not real, cannot be an object of knowledge.”²¹

See Teaching Notes for another helpful quote regarding Open Theism.

This section wouldn’t even have been necessary to include twenty years ago. At that time, all Christians believed that God foreknew all things. Yet in the church today there are an increasing number of teachers and pastors who have rejected this historical doctrine and teach that God does not know the future.

Isaiah 46:8-11

⁸ Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors,
⁹ remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,” ¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

²¹ Bruce Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2000), 32.

6. God is totally unlike the vain idols who are powerless (Isaiah 46:5-8). How is he contrasted with other “gods” in this passage? What, then, might be the consequence of affirming Open Theism?

· **ANSWER.** *God is unlike any other god because he declares the end from the beginning. He tells what will happen from ancient times before it has actually happened. By denying the foreknowledge of God and by limiting his sovereignty, proponents of Open Theism are (unwittingly?) making God into a vain idol.*

Notice the connection between the following two verses:

Psalm 135:5-6

⁵ *For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.*

⁶ *Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.*

The LORD is great and above all gods *because* he does whatever he pleases in all creation (unlike the so-called gods). There are many passages that assert God’s uniqueness, greatness, and glory *on the basis* of his foreknowledge and sovereignty.

This point is extremely important, and is, perhaps, the most compelling rebuttal to Open Theism. Notice the same idea expressed in other texts from Isaiah 40-48.

Isaiah 41:21-23

²¹ *Set forth your case, says the Lord; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.*

²² *Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come.* ²³ *Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified.*

Isaiah 42:8-9

⁸ *I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.* ⁹ *Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.*

Isaiah 44:6-8

⁶ Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:
“I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.” ⁷ Who is like me?
Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an
ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. ⁸ Fear
not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are
my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”

Now examine two more texts which assert that God knows the whole of our
lives before we live a single day.

Job 14:1, 5

¹ Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble . . . ⁵ Since his
days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have
appointed his limits that he cannot pass.

Psalm 139:16

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every
one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of
them.

7. Who determines the number of our days? How should this impact the
way we live our lives?
- **ANSWER.** *God determines the number of our days. This should impact our
lives by causing us to trust God for his perfect timing in our lives as well
as the lives of those we love. I need not fear, for what can man do to me
(Hebrews 13:6)? When we know that God has our lives in his hands we are
freed to live more radical lives of discipleship, to take risks for the sake of
the gospel.*

John 13:19

¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place
you may believe that I am he [literally, “I am”].

When Jesus says “I am,” he is saying that he is God, for “I am” is the name that
God told to Moses when Moses asked him what name for God he should tell the
Israelites (Exodus 3:14).

8. So according to Jesus, why should we believe that he is divine (that he is the “I am”)?

- **ANSWER.** *We should believe that Jesus is God because he knows the future—he tells his disciples what will happen before it comes pass. As is seen in John 14:29 (below), Jesus declares the future so that his disciples will believe.*

John 14:29

²⁹ *And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 163-173 (Chapter 11, Section B2–B3)

1 Samuel 15:10-11, 35

¹⁰ *The word of the LORD came to Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.”...³⁵ And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.*

9. Based on your reading, respond to the following quotation.

“We must wonder how the Lord could truly experience regret for making Saul king if he was absolutely certain that Saul would act the way he did. Could God genuinely confess, ‘I regret that I made Saul king’ if he could in the same breath proclaim, ‘I was certain of what Saul would do when I made him king’? I do not see how....Common sense tells us that we can only regret a decision we made if the decision resulted in an outcome other than what we expected or hoped for when the decision was made.”²²

- **ANSWER.** *First, as Grudem says, there is reason to believe that verses such as 1 Samuel 15:11 and 35 express God’s “present attitude or intention with respect to the situation as it exists at that moment.” Second, any interpretation of these verses must account for 1 Samuel 15:27-29 (below). Third, it is interesting that Boyd’s appeal effectively elevates “common sense” above the teaching of Scripture.*

²² Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 56.

1 Samuel 15:27-29

²⁷ As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore.

²⁸ And Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. ²⁹ And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”

Numbers 23:19

¹⁹ God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 156-163 (Chapter 11, Sections A–B1)

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 173-177 (Chapter 11, Section B4)

Day 3

GOD NEVER SINS

As we have seen, God governs *all* things. He foreknows all of the choices that we will make, and ordains those choices and everything else. This strong affirmation of God's sovereignty is bound to raise at least these two objections:

1. If God ordains evil, isn't he then guilty of committing that evil?
2. If God ordains evil, isn't he unjust in punishing evildoers?

We will handle each objection in turn.

Deuteronomy 32:4

⁴ The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

1 John 1:5

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

James 1:13-15

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

10. Summarize these passages in your own words:

- **ANSWER.** *God is perfectly just and pure. There is absolutely no evil in him. Furthermore, he is not tempted by evil, nor does he tempt any person with evil. Therefore, we must say that God, though ordaining evil, is not the author or source of evil. He causes evil in a different way than he causes good.*

Genesis 18:25

²⁵ *Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*

Ezekiel 33:17-20

¹⁷ *Yet your people say, "The way of the Lord is not just," when it is their own way that is not just.* ¹⁸ *When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it.* ¹⁹ *And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by them.* ²⁰ *Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is not just." O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.*

Romans 3:19-20

¹⁹ *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* ²⁰ *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

Revelation 16:5-7

⁵ *And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.* ⁶ *For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"* ⁷ *And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!"*

11. Summarize these passages in your own words:

- **ANSWER.** *God is in no way unjust in his judgments; rather it is man who is unjust. No one will be able to object to the justice of God when he judges the world. He only gives evildoers what their sins deserve.*

Therefore, we must say that the Bible plainly teaches the following two propositions:

1. God foreknows and ordains everything that comes to pass (including the willing, evil choices of the beings he has created).

2. God is not the source or author of evil, and he is not unjust to judge the wicked.

12. How can we reconcile these two propositions (stated above)?

- **ANSWER.** *Divine agency must be on a different level than human agency. If a human causes another human to do evil, then we must attribute responsibility to the one who caused the evil. But God has a way of working in which he does not coerce someone's will—not causing them to act contrary to their desires (which are evil). This is the issue which we will study in the next day's lesson.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 322-329 (Chapter 16, Section B7–B8b)

Consider the following illustration:

“Imagine a sun that was a living thing—a sun that had the ability to shoot out rays of light from itself, but also had the ability to draw those rays of light back. In this way, the sun could choose where its rays of light would and would not be. Now we ask, Does this sun create darkness? We must answer Yes and No. The sun is a sun and consists only of light. There is no darkness in it; rather darkness is the absence of what the sun is. But when this sun chooses to pull back its beams of light, in its wake darkness falls. The absence of light is filled with darkness. So in this way the sun has complete control over the darkness, but is itself not darkness nor the cause of darkness.”²³

13. Does this illustration help you think about God's relationship to evil? Why or why not?

- **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 337-341 (Chapter 16, Section G)

The further reading on this day outlines the Arminian position on God's sovereignty. It is helpful to study what Arminians think to contrast it with the perspective offered in this curriculum.

²³ This illustration is modified from <http://www.seekthelord.info/is-god-the-author-of-evil/>. Last Accessed August 5, 2011.

Day 4

HUMAN MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The first two statements that follow summarize what we've learned in the previous days of study. The third statement represents the contention to be examined today.

1. God foreknows and ordains all things, whatsoever comes to pass.
2. God by no means commits evil, is evil himself, or judges evildoers unjustly.
3. Human beings are responsible for the choices they make, and they make those choices willingly.

Again, this third statement could be supported by many texts. We will only look at a representative sample of texts. The first set is about the census that David takes of Israel. All three passages are referring to the same event.

2 Samuel 24:1

¹ *Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah."*

2 Samuel 24:10

¹⁰ *But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly."*

1 Chronicles 21:1, 7-8

¹ *Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. . . .⁷ But God was displeased with this thing, and he struck Israel.⁸ And David said to God, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing. But now, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have acted very foolishly."*

14. According to these three passages, who incited David to take this census? Who takes the responsibility for this great sin?

- **ANSWER.** *According to 2 Samuel the Lord incites David and according to 1 Chronicles it is Satan. We can harmonize these passages theologically by saying that God worked through Satan to accomplish his purposes. It is interesting, however, to note that in both books David recognizes his own moral responsibility in committing this sin. The blame cannot be shifted to Satan or to God.*

Another important text in this regard is Joseph's statement of God's sovereignty at the end of the book of Genesis. After being stripped by his brothers, thrown into a pit (Genesis 37:24), and sold into slavery (37:28)—then falsely accused of rape (39:17-18), thrown into prison (39:20), and forgotten by someone he saved (40:33)—Joseph addresses his brothers:

Genesis 50:19-20

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?" ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

15. What is the "it" that God meant for good? Read the broader context if necessary. Are Joseph's brothers still accountable for what they did?

- **ANSWER.** *God meant it the evil Joseph's brothers did to him for good. God meant evil for good—that is, he had good designs to work through the evil actions of Joseph's brothers. God's intentions and sovereign control, however, don't mean that the brothers are thereby absolved of their guilt. Rather, Joseph is simply saying that it is not his place to exact vengeance.*

Divine sovereignty and human responsibility can be most clearly seen, however, in the interplay at the most decisive event in history: the crucifixion of Jesus. Trace the causes of his crucifixion through the Gospel of Matthew and into the preaching of Acts.

Matthew 26:24-25

²⁴ "The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." ²⁵ Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

Matthew 27:1-4

¹ When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. ² And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor. ³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."

Matthew 27:20-25

²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹ The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³ And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" ²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵ And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

Matthew 27:27, 31-36

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ...³¹ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him. ³² As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

Acts 2:23, 36-38

²³ This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ...³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. ³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent..."

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life... ¹⁷ And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out...

Acts 4:8, 10-11

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders...¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.”

Acts 4:27-28

²⁷ For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

16. Who is responsible for the death of Jesus?

- **ANSWER.** *There are many people who are responsible in different ways: Judas betrayed Jesus; the chief priests and elders delivered him over to Pilate and stirred up the crowds; the crowds cried out for his blood; Pilate capitulated and gave the order; the Roman soldiers actually drove the nails. Over all this it could be said that the sin of the human race necessitated his death. And yet, as Acts makes clear, all of these responsible moral agents were acting under the sovereignty of God who had planned, foreknown, and predestined the death of his Son.*

And so we see that God ordains evil in such a way that humans are still morally responsible. Humans make real and willing choices to do the evil they do.

Can we go any further in our explanation? Is there any way to reconcile this “paradox,” “antinomy,” or “mystery,” as some have called it? The following excerpt is John Piper’s summary of Edwards’s attempt to do just that. This is difficult to understand and may require rereading.

“I will try to develop in the briefest possible way how Edwards attempts to show ‘that God’s moral government over mankind, his treating them as moral agents, making them the objects of his commands, counsels, calls, warnings, expostulations, promises, threatenings, rewards and punishments, is not inconsistent with a determining disposal of all events, of every kind, throughout the universe, in his providence: either by positive efficiency, or permission’ (258).

First, Edwards argues that the thing which determines what the will chooses is not the will itself but rather motives which come from outside the will. More precisely, 'it is that motive, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest, that determines the will' (9).

He defines motive like this: 'By motive, I mean the whole of that which moves, excites or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly' (9). By 'strongest motive' he means 'that which appears most inviting' (10). Or as he puts it later, 'the will always is as the greatest apparent good is' (10), in which case 'good' means 'agreeable' or 'pleasing' (11).

Hence the determination of our will does not lie in itself. It is determined by the strongest motive as we perceive it, and motives are given. Therefore all men are in a sense enslaved—as Paul says—either to righteousness or to sin (Rom 6:16-23), or as Jesus put it, 'Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin' (John 8:34). We are all enslaved to do what we esteem most desirable in any given moment of decision. We are enslaved to do what we want to do most. We are unable to do otherwise provided we are not physically hindered.

Edwards describes this situation with the terms moral necessity and moral inability on the one hand and natural necessity and natural inability on the other. Moral necessity is the necessity that exists between the strongest motive and the act of volition which it elicits (24). Thus all choices are morally necessary since they are all determined by the strongest motive. They are necessary in that, given the existence of the motive, the existence of the choice is certain and unavoidable. Moral inability, accordingly, is the inability we all have to choose contrary to what we perceive to be the strongest motive (28). We are morally unable to act contrary to what in any given moment we want most to do. If we lack the inclination to study we are morally unable to study.

Natural necessity is 'such necessity as men are under through the force of natural causes' (24). Events are naturally necessary when they are constrained not by moral causes but physical ones. My sitting in this chair would be necessary with a 'natural necessity' if I were chained here. Natural inability is my inability to do a thing even though I will it. If I am chained to this chair my strongest motive might be to stand up (say, if the room is on fire) but I would be unable.

This distinction between moral inability and natural inability is crucial in Edwards' solution to the so-called antinomy between God's sovereign disposal of all things and man's accountability. The solution is this: Moral ability is not a prerequisite to accountability. Natural ability is. 'All inability that excuses may be resolved into one thing; namely, want of natural capacity or strength; either capacity of understanding, or external strength' (150).

But moral inability to do a good thing does not excuse our failure to do it (148). Though we love darkness rather than light and therefore can't (because of moral inability) come to the light, nevertheless we are responsible for not coming, that is, we can be justly punished for not coming. This conforms with an almost universal human judgment, for the stronger a man's desire is to do evil the more unable he is to do good and yet the more wicked he is judged to be by men. If men really believed that moral inability excused a man from guilt, then a man's wickedness would decrease in proportion to the intensity of his love of evil. But this is contrary to the moral sensibilities of almost all men.

Therefore moral inability and moral necessity on the one hand and human accountability on the other are not an antinomy. Their unity is not contrary to reason or to the common moral experience of mankind. Therefore, in order to see how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility perfectly cohere, one need only realize that the way God works in the world is not by imposing natural necessity on men and then holding them accountable for what they can't do even though they will to do it. But rather God so disposes all things (Eph 1:11) so that in accordance with moral necessity all men make only those choices ordained by God from all eternity.”²⁴

17. Attempt to summarize the argument of these paragraphs in your own words.

- **ANSWER.** *We do whatever we most want to do unless we are physically prevented from doing so. In every evil choice, therefore, we are choosing what we want to do. In ordaining the evil choices that we make, God is not coercing us to do what we don't want to do (that is, he is not physically compelling us), but rather is working in such a way that our preferences and desires for evil are realized.*

“I can choose to eat whatever food I prefer. I cannot, however, choose my preferences. In the spiritual birth, we are given new ‘taste buds’ so that for the very first time we can choose to do good things because we have been given new desires, or preferences, for the good.”²⁵

24 This excerpt is from an article entitled, “A Response to J.I. Packer on the So-Called Antinomy Between the Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility,” which can be found at desiringGod.org. The page numbers throughout the article correspond to *The Freedom of the Will* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1969).

25 This argument is adapted from an argument verbalized by one of the elders at Bethlehem Baptist Church (Minneapolis), Rod Takata.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 329-331 (Chapter 16, Section B8c–B9)

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 333-337 (Chapter 16, Sections E–F)

18. How does Grudem answer the question of whether we have “free will”?

- **ANSWER.** *Grudem asserts that we do make willing choices that have real effects. But since most people mean “undetermined choices” or “the ability to ultimately decide between good and evil” by “free will,” this is a phrase best avoided.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 342-351 (Chapter 16, Section H)

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

3.1 *We believe that God, from all eternity, in order to display the full extent of His glory for the eternal and ever-increasing enjoyment of all who love Him, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His will, freely and unchangeably ordain and foreknow whatever comes to pass.*

3.2 *We believe that God upholds and governs all things – from galaxies to subatomic particles, from the forces of nature to the movements of nations, and from the public plans of politicians to the secret acts of solitary persons – all in accord with His eternal, all-wise purposes to glorify Himself, yet in such a way that He never sins, nor ever condemns a person unjustly; but that His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with the moral accountability of all persons created in His image.*

19. Explain the importance of the words “freely” and “unchangeably” in section 3.1 of the affirmation.

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

20. How are “all things” further explained (between the dashes) in section 3.2 of this affirmation? Why might these particular things be chosen as illustrations?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

 INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT



Write a brief paragraph explaining your position on God's sovereignty over all things—including evil—indicating whether you agree or disagree with the position presented in Bethlehem's Affirmation of Faith. Please define in what way God is sovereign over evil and argue for your viewpoint.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. What comfort do we receive from knowing that God plans everything that happens?
2. If God controls all things, why should we bother praying? Why should we bother evangelizing?
3. If you are persuaded from the Bible to be a “Calvinist,” how might you talk to an “Arminian” or an “Open Theist”?
4. Your own question(s):

This question is covered extensively in Lesson 6.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will* (Orlando, Florida: Ligonier Publishing House, 2004).
- ▶ Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001).
- ▶ John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003).
- ▶ John Piper, “The Pleasure of God in All that He Does,” *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2000).
- ▶ John Piper, “Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordains that Evil Be?,” an online article at the DG website.

God's Eternal Purpose and Election (2)

6

🔗 INTRODUCTION

This curriculum teaches the doctrines of grace, or, as they are also called, the five points of Calvinism. Each point emphasizes the total sovereignty of God in salvation. The point that we will consider in this lesson is most commonly called “unconditional election.”

It is possible to view unconditional election as the bedrock for the other doctrines of grace. For if God chooses who will be saved without any regard for human distinctions (including foreseen faith), then it must be that man apart from God's election is morally unable to choose God. If the elect and only the elect are saved through Jesus' death, then his atoning work must be effective only for the elect. And if the elect always obtain salvation, then God must irresistibly draw them and preserve them in faith.

But perhaps this is getting ahead of ourselves. For now, just consider that unconditional election is first in the *temporal* sequence of our salvation, even if it is not the first in the logical sequence. We will turn our attention to this doctrine.

🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- trace the argument of Romans 9:1-23
- argue biblically for the doctrine of unconditional election
- explain what God's purpose is in election and all things

 PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **common grace:**
- **determinism:**
- **election:**
- **fatalism:**
- **foreknowledge:**
- **predestination:**
- **reprobation:**
- **revealed will:**
- **secret will:**
- **special grace:**



As the instructor, you will need to decide how deeply you want to take your class into the logic of Romans 9 and how carefully to trace Piper's argument. If you do decide to do this, it might be helpful to present the following syllogism as a summary of Piper's reading of Paul's argument in Romans 9:14-18.

1. God's righteousness is his unswerving commitment to uphold his glory
2. Unconditional election upholds his glory
3. Therefore, unconditional election is righteous and not unrighteous

Here is the syllogism represented in Piper's own words: "It follows then that, since God's righteousness is his unswerving allegiance to his own name, and since that name consists in his sovereign freedom to show mercy on whomever he wills, therefore, God is not unrighteous when his decision to have mercy on one person and not another is based solely on his own will rather than any human willing or running" (*The Justification of God*, 179).

As Grudem notes in chapter 32, on page 682, one of the most common objections to the doctrine of unconditional election is that it makes God out to be unfair or unjust. Furthermore, if salvation is ultimately determined by God, then it doesn't seem right that God would find fault with those who reject him. In addition to the responses that Grudem gives, it is important to note that these same objections were raised to the apostle Paul (see Rom 9:14 and 9:19). In other words, the fact that Paul heard and responded to the same objections that are made to proponents of unconditional election is another piece of evidence that Paul himself believed and preached unconditional election.

An important issue that is not covered in this lesson is the issue of the "two wills" of God. The following discussion might help you navigate the topic.

CONTRADICTIONS?

1. God commands Pharaoh to let His people go.
Exodus 5:1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'"

But God hardens Pharaoh's heart so that he will not let them go.

Exodus 4:21 And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go."

2. God commands us to love all people.

Leviticus 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

But God causes hatred in people's hearts.

Psalms 105:25 He turned their hearts to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants.

Isaiah 19:2 And I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, each against another and each against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.

3. God commands that the Sabbath be remembered.

Exodus 20:8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

But God causes his people to forget the Sabbath.

Lamentations 2:6 He has laid waste his booth like a garden, laid in ruins his meeting place; the Lord has made Zion forget festival and Sabbath, and in his fierce indignation has spurned king and priest.

4. God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

But God says that He will delight in destroying Israel when they do evil.

Deuteronomy 28:63 And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

5. God desires all people to be saved.

1 Timothy 2:4 ...who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

But He does not choose to save all people.

Mark 4:11 And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹² so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."

6. God commands us not to murder.

Exodus 20:13 You shall not murder.

But God predestined the crucifixion of Christ, which could not have happened apart from murder.

Acts 4:27 For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

In fact, it was God who ultimately killed Christ.

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

We know that the word of God does not contradict itself, so there must be another explanation for these verses. We want to take both sets seriously and not ignore one set because of the presuppositions we bring to the Bible. It seems that the best way to understand how it is that God can command that we not do evil and yet bring evil about through our actions is to understand that God has two wills: his moral will and his sovereign will.

God's moral will (or will of command) is his will as it is revealed to us in Scripture. He has given us clear instructions on what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. We do not need to guess what his moral will is, nor do we need to ask him to reveal it to us. To find God's moral will all we must do is open the Bible. In each example listed above, the first set of verses was God's moral will. They were clear commands that he wants us to obey.

God's sovereign will (or will of decree) is the will of God that he actually brings to pass. This is his will that has been determined from all of eternity. If something happens, you can be assured that it was God's sovereign will for it to

happen, for we know that God sovereignly brings about all things, including evil. The second set of verses illustrates God's sovereign will. We can see that it can be different than God's moral will. After all, the cross of Christ was predestined to happen, yet it could not have happened without violation of God's moral will. Even though God's moral will had to be violated, God still wanted Christ to be crucified.

We must understand however, that God does not delight in bringing about affliction. This is made clear in Lamentations 3:33, "For he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men." God does afflict to bring about judgment or to bring about holiness in his people (see Hebrews 12:4-11), but he does not do it willingly (literally, "from the heart"). This means that he does not do it with the same great delight with which he takes pleasure in blessing his people (see Numbers 24:1).

Another helpful way of thinking through God's sovereignty over evil is to think about God looking at the world through a narrow lens and a wide lens. God can look at sin in one way and hate it, yet when he looks at it differently, he can desire that it be brought about. When God looks through the narrow lens he considers sin in and of itself, he hates it and commands us not to do it. He has no desire for people to sin. In the same way, when God looks at all of mankind, he genuinely wants all to be saved. He desires that none perish.

However, when God looks through the wide lens and considers sin in the context of all of redemptive history, he can will for it to come about. He does not bring it about for its own sake; rather he does it for the sake of a greater good. While he hates sin in and of itself, when all things are considered, he may will for it to happen. It is the same in reference to salvation. While through the narrow lens, God wants all to be saved, when he looks through the wide lens and sees what will bring him the most glory, he wills that not all people be saved.

This is similar to a painting by a great artist. If you look at some of the black strokes by themselves they may be quite ugly. But if you step back, you can see how they work together with the rest of the colors to contribute to a beautiful picture.

You may want to weave this into the class session as a way to explain how God can ordain things which he is morally opposed to.



Day 1

THE JUSTIFICATION OF GOD

Romans 9 is an extremely important chapter in any discussion of God's sovereignty, human account-ability, and the doctrine of election. It is a difficult passage, but this should not cause us throw our hands into the air and profess ignorance, but rather to vigorously exercise our minds in the attempt to understand what Paul meant.

Those who argue against the "Calvinistic" reading of this chapter generally argue that Paul is concerned with the historical destiny of nations rather than the eternal destiny of individuals. Here are some representative quotes from an "Arminian" perspective:

"The absolute election of Jacob...has reference simply to the election of one to higher privileges, as head of the chosen race, than the other. It has nothing to do with their eternal salvation. In the original to which St. Paul is referring, Esau is simply a synonym for Edom."

"The reference here is not to salvation, but to position and historical task, of the quotation from Genesis 25:23 in v12: 'The elder shall serve the younger.'"

"Romans 9:6-13 is therefore speaking neither of individuals and their selection for salvation, nor of the spiritual Israel, the Christian church. It speaks rather of the patriarchs, who without exception became founders of peoples."²⁶

In an attempt to understand this important chapter, we will walk through Romans 9:1-23 section by section, tracing Paul's logic.

²⁶ The quotations are from Sanday and Headlam, G. Schrenk, and J. Munck, respectively, as they are quoted in John Piper, *The Justification of God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1993), 57. Used with permission.

Romans 9:1-5

¹ I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

1. What is the implied problem that is causing Paul so much grief?

- **ANSWER.** *The implied problem is that despite Israel's lofty privileges, they are accursed and cut off from Christ. The surrounding context makes it clear that not all Israelites have been lost, but a majority has been. In other words, the problem is that individual Israelites are perishing in their unbelief.*

This implied problem raises an objection— “the word of God has failed”—which Paul quickly dismisses. Then he supports the assertion of Romans 9:6a with Romans 9:6b and the following verses.

Romans 9:6-13

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

2. One might argue that Isaac was chosen over Ishmael because Isaac was the son of Sarah, while Ishmael was the son of Hagar, their servant. But Jacob and Esau were twins. Why did God choose Jacob over Esau? Why is the timing of God's choice significant?

· **ANSWER.** *God chose Jacob over Esau before either of them had been born and before they had done anything good or bad. Therefore, he did not choose Jacob because he was good and Esau was bad. Rather, he chose Jacob (the second-born and thus the less likely—even the wrong—choice) so that “God’s purpose of election might continue.” He chose Jacob before the twins were born so that all would know that God’s election is not dependent on the works of the individual, but is dependent on the one who calls, the one who chooses. God is demonstrating his sovereign freedom to choose whomever he wishes.*

Romans 9:14-18

¹⁴ *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means!*

¹⁵ *For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.*

3. What in Romans 9:6-13 would prompt the accusation that God is unjust (or unrighteous)? How are verses 15-18 a defense of God's righteousness? (Notice the word “for” at the beginning of verse 15.)

· **ANSWER.** *These are difficult questions to answer and prompted John Piper to write the book *The Justification of God*, which we will examine at the end of this day. In short, the unconditional election of Jacob, expressed in verse 11, prompts the objection. In other words, the fact that God elected Jacob and not Esau without reference to any human distinctives, whether good or bad, prompts the accusation that God is unrighteous or unjust. Paul’s defense is to quote two Old Testament texts which demonstrate that God’s righteousness consists in his “unswerving commitment always to preserve the honor of his name and display his glory” (as Piper argues). Since unconditional election does glorify God, it is therefore not unrighteous for God to elect unconditionally.*

The plain inference stated in verse 18 is hard to reinterpret. There are some, however, who still continue to assert that God's mercy and hardening is based upon what he foresees people with "free will" will choose. Leaving aside whether it is actually (philosophically) possible for totally "free choices" to be foreseen, notice what Paul *doesn't* say in verse 20 and following. If Paul really believed that God's will was determined by human free-will choices, he would have had the perfect rebuttal to the objection of verse 19.

Romans 9:19-23

¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...

4. What is the ultimate purpose of God in choosing some to be vessels of wrath and some to be vessels of mercy?

· **ANSWER.** God created vessels of wrath in order to make known his power and wrath. But the "in order to" clause in verse 23 makes it clear that even God's creation of vessels of wrath serves a greater purpose. God's ultimate purpose is to make known his glory in vessels of mercy. God's wrath provides the necessary "backdrop" to highlight his mercy.

John Piper has written an entire book that carefully examines Paul's argument in Romans 9:1-23. The book is entitled *The Justification of God*. Though the book is very technical in parts, his summaries of the four different sections we have examined are reproduced below.²⁷ Read Piper's analysis and compare it to the answers you provided above.

Romans 9:1-5

"In the preceding chapter we clarified the question Paul is trying to answer in Romans 9-11: Since Israel is the real heir of God's promises which include personal, eternal salvation (9:4,5), how is it that most of the Israelites of Paul's day are accursed and cut off from Christ (9:3)? Why are only 'some' being saved (11:14)? Has God's

²⁷ The following excerpts and page numbers are all from John Piper, *The Justification of God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1993). Used with permission.

word fallen? We must stress very heavily that the problem Paul is grappling with is the condemnation of many within Israel. Most of his kinsmen are incurring 'the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord' (2 Thessalonians 1:9), while only 'some,' the remnant of 11:5, have the hope of sharing the eternal blessings of Christ. The reason this must be stressed is that correctly understanding Paul's question in Romans 9:1-5 will guard us from impertinent and imaginary reconstructions of the first part of his answer in 9:6-13." (47)

Romans 9:6-13

"In answer to the question how it can be that many individuals within Israel are accursed, cut off from Christ (Rom 9:1-5), Paul says it is not because the word of God has fallen (9:6a); on the contrary, God's expressed purpose remains firm (9:11c). The reason this situation does not mean the failure of God's word is that his purpose expressed in that word never has been to guarantee the salvation of every Israelite. It is an 'electing purpose' by which God aims to preserve his complete freedom in determining who will be the beneficiaries of his saving promises, who will be the 'Israel' within Israel (9:6b). It is therefore a purpose maintained by means of the predestination of individuals to their respective eternal destinies.

The interpretation which tries to restrict this predestination or unconditional election to nations rather than individuals or to historical tasks rather than eternal destinies must ignore or distort the problem posed in Rom 9:1-5, the individualism of 9:6b, the vocabulary and logical structure of 9:6b-8, the closely analogous texts elsewhere in Paul, and the implications of 9:14-23. The position is exegetically untenable." (73)

"Between Romans 9:13 and 14 we may imagine an objection being raised. It apparently sounded like this: if God, in determining who will be the beneficiaries of his mercy, does not base his decisions on any human distinctives that a person may claim by birth or effort, then he is unrighteous. The assumption seems to be that divine righteousness would require that God elect persons on the basis of their real and valuable distinctives, whether racial (Jewishness) or moral (keepers of the law)." (218)

Romans 9:14-18

"Paul responds that God is not unrighteous (9:14) and defends this assertion, as I have tried to show, by quoting two Old Testament texts (9:15,17) which show that God's freedom from human 'willing and running' is at the very heart of what it means to be the all-glorious God. This Old Testament revelation is a justification of God because the divine righteousness consists in God's unswerving commitment to preserve and display his glory." (180)

“It can scarcely be overemphasized, for the sake of Paul’s justification of God, that in Rom 9:15 and 17 Paul employs Old Testament texts in which the exercise of God’s sovereign freedom, in mercy (Ex 33:19) and in hardening (Ex 9:16), is the means by which he declares the glory of his name! This is the heart of Paul’s defense: in choosing unconditionally those on whom he will have mercy and those whom he will harden God is not unrighteous, for in this ‘electing purpose’ he is acting out of a full allegiance to his name and esteem for his glory.” (219)

Romans 9:19-23

“Paul’s justification of God does not end at Romans 9:18, because someone registers another objection in 9:19: ‘Why does God still find fault since no one can successfully resist his sovereign will?’ That is, if God is in absolute control of whether men are hardened or not, then he has no right to condemn them for their hardness. ...God is our creator and as such has as much right to make of us what he wills as a potter has over his clay to make from the same lump a vessel for honor and a vessel for dishonor (9:21). We have no right to dispute with God our maker. Yet Paul does not stop with a reprimand, for man is not asked to submit to God’s sovereignty without seeing some justification for why he does what he does.

The final statement of this justification of God’s ways is given in Romans 9:22,23. God’s desire is ‘to show wrath and make known his power.’ But even more he desires ‘to make known the wealth of his glory on his people, the vessels of mercy.’ The ultimate aim of God is to show mercy. But to do this he must place it against a backdrop of wrath.” (219-220)

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 669-679 (Chapter 32, Sections A–C)

5. According to your reading, what might be lost if we deny the doctrine of election?

· **ANSWER.** *First it should be said that if we deny the doctrine of election, we are contradicting the teaching of the Bible. But second, Grudem lists a number of ways in which the New Testament presents election. Without election, we could lose comfort in God’s good sovereignty, we could lose a reason to praise God, and an encouragement for evangelism. Finally, if election is based on our faith, Grudem contends that salvation would be by our merit and God would lose glory!*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 185-190 (Chapter 12, Section A)

Day 2

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

As we've seen from Romans 9, God's election of his people is not dependent on anything within themselves. Does the rest of the Bible also teach unconditional election? That is the question which we will seek to answer in this day's study.

We will first approach this question from a side angle. What might happen if God's election was based on human distinctives? Consider the following text:

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

6. How does election ensure that no one may boast before God?

- **ANSWER.** Election ensures that no one may boast before the Lord because we are not chosen based on anything that is within ourselves or anything we have done. It is (unconditional) election that shows us there is nothing in ourselves that commends us to God. Therefore we should recognize that our salvation is all of grace, from beginning to end, and there is no room for boasting (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9).

God's election is based solely on his grace. He *must* choose based on grace alone, for if he chooses by some other criteria, election would be on the basis of works and not grace. Notice the connection between grace and election in the following text:

Romans 11:5-8

⁵ So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. ⁷ What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, ⁸ as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.”

Though God elects those who will believe, the elect must still believe. What is the connection between election and human believing? Again we ask, “Does belief precede election or does election precede belief? Is election based upon belief or is belief based upon election?”

Acts 13:44-48

⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” ⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

7. According to this passage, who believed and why?

- **ANSWER.** *The Gentiles who were appointed to eternal life believed. The wording of verse 48— “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed”—indicates that the cause of belief is being appointed to eternal life. Therefore, election precedes belief and belief is based upon (caused by) election.*

The following passage in the Gospel of John also expresses the truth of the doctrine of election, though using different words. Jesus repeatedly stresses that the Father’s prior action (“giving” or “drawing”) is what causes someone to come to Jesus.

John 6:37-39, 44-45, 63-65

³⁷ “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ...⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—... ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

Someone might point to verse 64 as evidence that Jesus foresees future faith. This is certainly true, but this observation doesn't imply that future faith is the basis upon which God gives people to Jesus. Note the logic of the next verse (verse 65).

“This’ in This is why refers to the phenomenon of unbelief – i.e. Jesus knew in advance that he would be rejected by many, and, knowing this, he earlier explained (vv. 37, 44) the need for the divine initiative which draws those whom the Father has given to the Son and enables them to believe. This advance explanation prepares the true believers themselves to face the attacks of unbelievers, without finding their own faith threatened (cf. 13:18-19). However much men and women are commanded to believe, and are held accountable for their unbelief, genuine coming to faith is never finally a matter of autonomous human decision.”²⁸

¹ Thessalonians 5:9

⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In studying Romans 9:6-13 we saw that God chose Jacob before he was born. But how far back does God's election go?

²⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 302-303.

2 Timothy 1:8-9

⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began...

8. What might 2 Timothy 1:8-9 contribute to our understanding of election?

- **ANSWER.** *This passage makes it clear that our salvation and calling are not based on our works, but rather God's own purpose and grace. This much we have already seen in other texts. But 2 Timothy 1:8-9 adds that this salvific grace was given to us before the ages began! Therefore, it would be appropriate to say that our election as the saved people of God happened before creation (cf. Ephesians 1:4).*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 680-687 (Chapter 32, Sections D-F)

9. Of the objections to the doctrine of election that Grudem outlines, which have you heard most frequently?

- **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 190-197 (Chapter 12, Section B)

Day 3

COMMON GRACE

We have been studying the grace of God and its relationship to election, and so one might be tempted to think that God's grace is only shown to the elect. This is certainly not so. God shows grace to all that he has made. But to distinguish between the kind of grace shown to everyone and the kind of grace shown only to the elect, theologians have used the terms "common grace" and "special (or saving) grace." Whereas we've been focused on special grace in the previous days, we now turn our attention to common grace. This distinction relates to the terms "natural revelation" and "special revelation," which were briefly examined in Lesson 3.

In the previous lesson (Lesson 5) we learned that God upholds all things by his power. The grass grows because God wills it to grow, and every human breath and life is sustained by the power of God. Life and existence itself is the most fundamental of common graces. Observe the following texts in this regard.

Matthew 5:43-45

⁴³ *You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."* ⁴⁴ *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* ⁴⁵ *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

10. According to the passage, does God "love" his enemies? How?

- **ANSWER.** *God's love for his enemies is implied in this passage because God's example is the basis for the command for us to love our enemies. God loves his enemies by providing them with the same sunshine and rain that he provides for the just. Therefore, we can say that the provisions of nature are God's common grace to all.*

Acts 14:15-17

¹⁵ Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

Psalm 145:9-10, 14-17

⁹ The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. ¹⁰ All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you! ...¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. ¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. ¹⁶ You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. ¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.

God has shown mercy to mankind in not blotting them out altogether after the sin of Adam and the wickedness in the days of Noah. He has also left witness to his character in what has been made. He has given a conscience to every person. This is all common grace.

Romans 1:18-21, 32

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ... ³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

11. What evidences of common grace can you find in this passage?

- **ANSWER.** *God has ensured that all mankind knows about his power and divine nature through what has been made. In some sense, everyone knows God. They also know of God's judgment against sin. Therefore, they are without excuse on the day of judgment (cf. Rom 3:19). These are all examples of common grace because God was under no obligation to show anything of himself to sinful man.*

Even every “good” action of unbelievers (Luke 6:33) is evidence of God’s grace at work. God restrains the evil that mankind would be capable of if he removed his grace. Often, he restrains evil through human governments (Romans 13:1-5).

But Scripture is clear that even the “good” actions of unbelievers are ultimately sin, because it is not motivated from faith.

Romans 14:23

²³ *...For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

Hebrews 11:6

⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Why does God show common grace to all mankind?

Romans 2:4

⁴ *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

1 Timothy 2:1-4

¹ *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

Ezekiel 33:10-11

¹⁰ *And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?"* ¹¹ *Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?*

12. What is God's stance toward unbelievers (and the non-elect)? How does this fit with the doctrine of election?

- **ANSWER.** *God desires that all people be saved; he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. In not choosing some, this does not mean that these desires are insincere. For even as humans we have some genuine desires that we choose not to act upon. To give a crude example, a parent may not want to punish a child, but they might be motivated to do so by other factors. See the Teaching Notes for more material on the "two wills" of God.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 657-665 (Chapter 31)

13. Record one comment or question that you have after reading this section.

- **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 197-207 (Chapter 12, Section C)

Day 4

ALL FOR HIS GLORY

This day's study concludes our focus on God's eternal purpose and election. Although the underlying, chief end for which God does all things has been hinted at throughout these two lessons, we now desire to make it explicit. God sovereignly ordains all things for his glory and for the joy of his elect people.

Ephesians 1:3-14

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

14. According to this passage, why does God choose us (before the foundation of the world!), predestine us for adoption, redeem us, forgive us, make known to us his will, and seal us with the Holy Spirit? Underline phrases which support your answer.

- **ANSWER.** God chose us so that we would be “holy and blameless before him” (v. 4), but even this is done for a greater purpose. God's chief end is indicated in three clauses in this passage: “to the praise of his glorious grace” (v. 6), “to the praise of his glory” (v. 12), and “to the praise of his glory” (v. 14).

Ephesians 2:4-7

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

This is a precious verse! It will take the *infinite* coming ages to show us *immeasurable* grace. God will display his grace for his everlasting glory and our everlasting (and increasing!) joy.

15. According to this passage, why does God make us alive, raise us up, and seat us in the heavenly places?

- **ANSWER.** God does these things so that he might show “the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (v. 7).

This ultimate aim of God is clearly present in the Old Testament as well as the New. Examine the following medley of texts from Isaiah.

Isaiah 42:8-12

⁸ I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. ⁹ Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them. ¹⁰ Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that fills it, the coast-lands and their inhabitants. ¹¹ Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the habitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the top of the mountains. ¹² Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare his praise in the coastlands.

Isaiah 43:6-7

⁶ I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

Isaiah 48:9-11

⁹ For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. ¹⁰ Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

Isaiah 60:21

²¹ *Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.*

16. According to these verses, why does God ordain all things and create a people for himself?

- **ANSWER.** *God ordains all things for his glory, desires his praises to be sung in all the earth, is jealous for his glory, and creates and guides his people for his glory.*

The death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus is for the glory of God.

Philippians 2:8-11

⁸ *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* ⁹ *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,* ¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

After describing and defending God's sovereign plan of redemption throughout history in Romans 9-11, Paul concludes this section with the following expression of praise:

Romans 11:33-36

³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* ³⁴ *“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”* ³⁵ *“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”* ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

17. Why is it appropriate to end this doxology with “to him be glory forever”?

- **ANSWER.** *God is worthy of all glory forever for all the realities in vv. 33-36 that are true of him. His deep riches, deep wisdom, deep knowledge, unsearchable judgments, inscrutable ways, unknowable mind, unalterable counsel, total self-sufficiency and overflowing provision of all things—for all these things he is worthy of glory forever.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 218-221 (Chapter 13, Section E)

18. What was your emotional response to reading about the perfection, blessedness, beauty, and glory of God?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 211-218 (Chapter 13, Section D)

The further reading for this day includes some very helpful and important material on the “two wills” of God. Since the required reading is shorter, please consider reading 211-221 (chapter 13) in its entirety.

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

3.1 We believe that God, from all eternity, in order to display the full extent of His glory for the eternal and ever-increasing enjoyment of all who love Him, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His will, freely and unchangeably ordain and foreknow whatever comes to pass.

3.2 We believe that God upholds and governs all things – from galaxies to subatomic particles, from the forces of nature to the movements of nations, and from the public plans of politicians to the secret acts of solitary persons – all in accord with His eternal, all-wise purposes to glorify Himself, yet in such a way that He never sins, nor ever condemns a person unjustly; but that His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with the moral accountability of all persons created in His image.

3.3 We believe that God's election is an unconditional act of free grace which was given through His Son Christ Jesus before the world began. By this act God chose, before the foundation of the world, those who would be delivered from bondage to sin and brought to repentance and saving faith in His Son Christ Jesus.

19. Underline all the clauses in these sections that express God's underlying motive for all that he does.
20. Why might the doctrine of election be stated in the same chapter of this affirmation as the sovereignty of God?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*



§ INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Write a prayer to God expressing your gratitude for his election of you. Weave some of the biblical verses we've studied into your prayer.

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ C. Samuel Storms, *Chosen For Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).
- ▷ Tom Schreiner and Bruce Ware, ed. *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).
- ▷ “The Pleasure of God in Election” in John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Multnomah, Multnomah Press, 2000).
- ▷ John Piper, “The Elect Obtained It, the Rest Were Hardened,” an online sermon at desiringGod.org.
- ▷ John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?,” an online article at desiringGod.org.

God's Creation of the Universe and Man (1)

7

§ INTRODUCTION

Consider the following illustration from John Piper that refers to movie theatres near his church:

“We were all impressed with cinerama when the curved screen gave such a lifelike impression. And now you can walk into the Omnitheatre at the St. Paul Science Museum, and hear all of the oooohs and ahhhhs as people recline and see themselves enveloped in a domed screen, and then an hour later walk outside into a dome and a three dimensional drama ten million times bigger, more unpredictable and suspenseful, and hear not a single exclamation. Why?

Clyde Kilby, a literature teacher at Wheaton [College], gave this answer:

The fall of man can hardly be more forcefully felt than simply in noting what we all do with a fresh snowfall or the first buds of spring. On Monday they fill us with delight and meaning and on Tuesday we ignore them. No amount of shouting to us that this is all wrong changes the fact for very long . . . Only some aesthetic power which is akin to God's own creativity has the capability for renewal, for giving us the power to see.

He thinks the reason we pay so little attention to God's omnitheatre is that we are fallen, sinful creatures. And I agree, because I cannot imagine that the angels in heaven get tired of God's beauty or that God himself grows weary of the beauty of his Son. There is in heaven an ever-renewed energy of perception and enjoyment. But fallen man is plagued with the proverb: 'Familiarity breeds contempt.'”²⁹

29 John Piper, “Sky Talk,” an online sermon desiringGod.org.

This lesson is designed to rekindle your appreciation for God's good creation and to increase your understanding of it—even those created things that are invisible to our eyes.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- ▷ explain what caused God to create the world
- ▷ describe angels and demons from what the Bible teaches us
- ▷ clarify Christian boundary lines in the current conversation about the Bible and science

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **angel:**

- **deism:**

- **demons:**

- **dualism:**

- *ex nihilo:*

- **macro-evolution:**
- **materialism:**
- **micro-evolution:**
- **pantheism:**
- **theistic evolution:**



TEACHING NOTES

The content of this lesson covers a lot of material that is not explicitly mentioned in Bethlehem's Affirmation of Faith. Therefore, as the instructor you will need to rely more heavily on Grudem's *Systematic Theology*.

Given the provocative and controversial nature of much of the material in this lesson, be on guard not to allow discussion to wander off into unhelpful speculation or debate. Rather, when dealing with angels, demons, and the days of creation, identify and emphasize the major contours of the Bible's teaching. Wrestle with what is known before venturing into matters of controversy or experience.

One common question that is often raised in regard to demons is this: "Can a Christian be demon-possessed?" This is a matter of both theological and pastoral significance. We encourage you to carefully read Grudem, especially pages 423-425. In particular, you may note the following points:

1. The term "demon-possessed" is ambiguous and in need of careful definition, if it is used at all. It seems better to use different language in order to be as precise as possible.
2. Christians are no longer under the dominion of sin (Romans 6:11, 14). We have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's Son (Colossians 1:13). Thus, a Christian can never be so "demonized" that they have no power left to choose to do right and obey God.
3. Nevertheless, Satan and demons are active in the world and therefore, can and do afflict Christians in various ways, including some that are quite evident and strong. Thus, it is best to conclude that there can be varying degrees of demonic attack or influence on people, and even on Christians
4. The proper response to any demonic attack or influence is to rebuke the demon in the name of Jesus and call upon the Lord for help (see Grudem's discussion on pages 427-433). Christ is triumphant and is able to save us from every demonic attack.

Two major views of Genesis 1 and 2 are not mentioned in Grudem's book. If profitable (and if there is interest in the class), you might do outside study of John Sailhammer's view and John Walton's view. Sailhammer's view is presented in *Genesis Unbound*, which is included in the Additional Resources list. John Walton wrote the Genesis commentary in the NIV Application Series.



Day 1

CREATION OUT OF NOTHING

After discussing the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of God, and the doctrine of election, we finally come to the doctrine of creation. The most fundamental verse in this regard is, of course, the very first verse of the Bible.

Genesis 1:1

¹ *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

Packed into this brief verse is a lot of theology. *God* created the heavens and earth; they are not the product of chance or many gods, and the creation is not eternal. *God created* them; creation is distinct from God and God is over creation. Observe other verses which reinforce the contention of Genesis 1:1.

Acts 4:24

²⁴ *And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them."*

Hebrews 11:3

³ *By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

John 1:1-3

¹ *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ² *He was in the beginning with God.* ³ *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

1. According to these verses, would it be accurate to say that God created all things out of nothing? Why?

• **ANSWER.** *Yes, these verses clearly teach that God created all things out of nothing. Acts 4:24 affirms that God created the universe—heaven, earth, and sea—and everything in them. Hebrews 11:3 asserts that what*

we see was made by nothing other than the “invisible” word of God. John 1:1-3 asserts that all things were made through the Word. Therefore, if we suppose that God formed the creation from pre-existing and “uncreated” material, we would contradict these three verses.

The fact that God created the world means that he can lay claim to it; he owns the world and everything in it.

Psalm 24:1-2

¹ The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, ² for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

God is not dependent on the world for anything. Creation meets none of his needs; in fact, God has no needs or deficiencies in himself.

Acts 17:24-25

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

2. How do you reconcile Acts 17:25 with the many commands in Scripture to “serve” God, such as Luke 4:8: “And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.””
- **ANSWER.** *There is a right way and a wrong way to “serve” God. The wrong way to serve God is to do so in such a way as to imply that he has needs that you are able to meet. Since it is always true that “the giver gets the glory,” you would glorify yourself by serving God in this way. The right way, therefore, is to serve him by depending on him and him alone to provide everything you need. Then he gets the glory. (See John Piper, Desiring God, 168-174.)*

Psalm 50:9-15

⁹ I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. ¹⁰ For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. ¹² “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. ¹³ Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? ¹⁴ Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, ¹⁵ and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

3. According to this passage, what does God want from us and what does he not want? Why?

· **ANSWER.** *God does not want sacrifices offered in a way that implies that he has needs that he cannot meet himself. In fact, God does not grow hungry or have “needs.” Rather, he desires our thanksgiving, especially when he provides deliverance to us when we cry out for help. This ensures that God gets the glory.*

We have already seen in the previous lesson (and will see throughout this curriculum) that everything God does, he does for his glory. This includes the act of creation.

Revelation 4:9-11

⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

4. According to this passage, *why* is God worthy to receive glory? What word signifies this logic?

· **ANSWER.** *The word “for” in v. 11 signifies that what follows provides the ground or reason why God is worthy to receive glory. The reason is that he created all things. He created by an act of his free will.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 262-273 (Chapter 15, Sections A–D)

5. Think about the categories of materialism, pantheism, dualism, and deism, as outlined by Grudem. Which philosophies and world religions might fit into which of these categories?

· **ANSWER.** *Materialism: secular humanism, atheism. Pantheism: Hinduism, Buddhism, other Eastern religions. Dualism: New Age religion. Deism: nominal Christianity, Islam (to some extent?).*

This question is difficult to answer but will hopefully provoke discussion. It is hard to classify a religion, especially when the religion is not clearly defined or exists in many forms.

Day 2

OF ANGELS

The “natural world” and mankind are usually what people are referring to when they say “God’s creation.” Scripture is clear, however, that God created other spiritual beings which are largely invisible to us. This day and the next we will examine the two categories of spiritual beings: angels and demons (broadly speaking and recognizing that there are other heavenly beings which may not be so easily classified).

In our examination of angels, we will confine our investigation to Hebrews 1, which is probably the most extended discussions of angels.

Hebrews 1:3-6

³ He [Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? ⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.”

6. What distinguishes Jesus from the angels?

- **ANSWER.** Based on his atoning death and exaltation, Jesus has inherited a name that is more excellent than that of the angels. He is uniquely the “Son of God.” The angels are commanded to worship Jesus.

Hebrews 1:7-12

⁷ Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.” ⁸ But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” ¹⁰ And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; ¹¹ they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, ¹² like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”

7. What distinguishes Jesus from the angels (cf. the use of this text in Lesson 4)?

- **ANSWER.** *The angels are mere servants of God, whereas Jesus is God himself! Recall that Psalm 102 in its original context is clearly spoken with reference to the LORD. Therefore, Jesus is divine and angels are mere creatures.*

Hebrews 1:13-14

¹³ *And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?* ¹⁴ *Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*

8. What distinguishes Jesus from the angels?

- **ANSWER.** *Jesus is given dominion over all things; the angels are not. Rather, the angels are spirits who are sent out for the purpose of ministering and serving the elect. There is a difference in role between Jesus and the angels.*

Here are excerpts from a sermon that John Piper preached on this passage. The sermon is entitled, “Jesus Christ: Infinitely Superior to Angels.”

There was some wrong thinking about angels in these churches [to whom the letter of Hebrews was addressed], especially as they related to Jesus. It may have been a lot like the Jehovah’s Witnesses error of making a great angel out of Jesus Christ. The answer of this writer is

- *Jesus is the Son of God in a way that no angel ever was or is (v. 5).*
- *Jesus is not an angel; he is worshipped by angels (v. 6).*
- *Jesus is not an angel; he is God (v. 8).*
- *Jesus is not an angel; he is the eternal Creator of all things (vv. 10-12).*
- *He is seated on the throne as king and angels are dispatched to do the king’s bidding.*

...Once you see angels in their proper place their role is a magnificent one. They have a role toward Christ and they have a role toward the people of Christ. Toward Christ, verse 6 says their role is to worship. Toward the people of Christ, verse 14 says their role is to serve and help us reach salvation. Which means—if you're willing to let me use the familiar language—that God created angels that his Son might be glorified and his people might be satisfied.

I want you to leave this morning with this truth ringing in your heart: Jesus Christ is infinitely superior to angels. They were created not to compete with Christ, but to worship Christ and honor him. And the chief way that they do that on the earth is by serving us so that we hold fast to Christ and trust him and love him and treasure him and finally reach him in the fullness of our salvation. So angels were created for Christ's everlasting glory and for our everlasting joy—which, as you well know, are not contradictory aims. Because Christ is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.³⁰

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 397-405 (Chapter 19, Sections A–C)

9. What popular misconceptions of angels have you heard? What Scripture might you use to address these misconceptions?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 405-408 (Chapter 19, Section D)

³⁰ John Piper, “Jesus Christ: Infinitely Superior to Angels,” an online sermon at desiringGod.org.

Day 3

OF DEMONS

The counterparts to angels are demons—evil spirits that attempt to thwart God’s plans, slander his name, and harm the saints. And the chief demon is Satan, who is always called the devil, Beelzebul, or simply, “the evil one.” Satan has been opposing God since the beginning of human history.

Genesis 3:1-6

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Revelation 12:9

⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Revelation 20:2-3

² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

John 8:44

⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth,

because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

1 John 3:8

⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

10. How do these passages help us identify the serpent in Genesis 3?

- **ANSWER.** *The two texts in Revelation explicitly identify the serpent as Satan. John 8 and 1 John 3 characterize the devil as a murderer and sinner “from the beginning,” and as the father of lies. This would also indicate that it was Satan who deceived Eve in the garden. Therefore, we should understand that Satan has opposed God’s purposes from the beginning of human history (and probably before that also).*

Satan has also been active throughout history and is still active today, prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Luke 8:12

¹² The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.

⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Ephesians 2:1-3

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

11. According to these verses, what is the chief work of Satan?

- **ANSWER.** *Satan's chief work is to keep as many as possible in a state of unbelief. He does this by taking away the word from peoples' hearts and blinding them to the gospel. If successful, the deceived will remain in their trespasses and sins and do the devil's bidding, which is disobedience to God.*

It is clear that the demons assist Satan, the prince of demons, in his work of deception, oppression, affliction, and temptation.

1 Timothy 4:1-3

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

1 John 4:1

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Matthew 8:16

¹⁶ That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.

It is important to study Satan and demonic forces in systematic theology, not only because this is a part of the whole counsel of God taught in Scripture, but because we don't want to be ignorant of Satan's designs and thereby outwitted by him (2 Corinthians 2:11). We want to effectively resist the devil (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9) and stand against his schemes (Ephesians 6:11).

Though Scripture asserts that now "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19), we know that "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8) and that Jesus "himself likewise partook of the same things [flesh and blood], that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus will one day return to finally conquer sin, death, and the devil.

Revelation 20:7-10

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

12. Why might the demise of Satan be recorded for the suffering saints in Asia Minor (to whom Revelation was addressed)?

- **ANSWER.** *As the letters in Revelation, chapters 2-3, indicate, at least some of the saints were suffering from direct Satanic persecution and false teaching. Knowing that God was sovereign over their suffering and would eventually destroy Satan and vindicate his followers would have encouraged them to persevere. Likewise, Revelation 20:7-10 should encourage us to persevere in our stand against the evil one, knowing that his time is short (cf. Rev 12:12).*

“...the only weapon the devil can use to destroy us in death is our sin. Nobody goes to hell because they are oppressed by the devil or even possessed by the devil. Nobody goes to hell because they are harassed by the devil or get shot at by the devil or given hallucinations by the devil. These are all smoke screens to hide the one deadly power in Satan’s artillery, namely, unforgiven sin. The only reason any-body goes to hell is because of their own sin. And all Satan can do is fight like hell to keep you sinning and to keep you away from the one who forgives sin.

Because if your sin is forgiven, and the wrath of God Almighty is turned away from you, then the devil is disarmed. The one deadly, lethal tactic he has is to accuse you of sin and keep you sinning and to keep you away from Christ who forgives sin and removes the wrath of God. If your sins are forgiven and the wrath of God is removed from you, and you stand righteous before God in Jesus Christ by faith, and God is for you and not against you, then the devil is rendered powerless: he cannot destroy you.”³¹

³¹ John Piper, “Jesus Is Able to Help Those Who Are Tempted,” an online sermon at desiringGod.org.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 412-419 (Chapter 20, Sections A–C)

13. According to Grudem, how are demons limited in their power?

- **ANSWER.** *First, it must be stressed that God has absolute dominion over Satan and his demons. Satan cannot do anything contrary to God's eternal plan; Satan is "on a leash." Grudem extensively argues that demons are also limited in their knowledge: they can know neither our thoughts nor the future.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 419-433 (Chapter 20, Section D)

Day 4

SCRIPTURE AND SCIENCE

Today's lesson will survey a topic on which Bethlehem's Affirmation of Faith is largely silent: the topic of Scripture and science. Though this curriculum will not advocate for a specific view of Genesis 1 and 2, it will set some parameters within which Christians can disagree.

Genesis 1:11-12

¹¹ And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:24-25

²⁴ And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:31–2:2

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. ^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

14. According to these passages, what might all Bible-believing Christians be able to agree upon?

• **ANSWER.** *Though there may be some disagreement about the "days" of creation, all Christians should be able to agree that creation was the product of God's intentional design. Furthermore, creation was completed by God and pronounced "very good." Therefore, any sinfulness or deficiency in creation is the result of sin and not God's faulty design.*

Scripture also clearly teaches the way in which God created the world.

Psalm 33:6-9

⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. ⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

15. How did God create?

- **ANSWER.** *God created the world through his spoken word. As John 1:3 states, all things were made through the Word, and Hebrews 11:3 tells us that the universe was created by the word of God. Apparently, this is significant and should be a point of agreement for all Bible-believing Christians.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 273-279 (Chapter 15, Section E1–E2b)

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 308-309 (Chapter 15, Sections E6–F)

16. Based upon your reading of Grudem, what else should be common ground on this topic for Christians?

- **ANSWER.** *As Grudem argues, Christians should understand that there is no final conflict between the Bible and science (the two are both “books” of God’s revelation), and that secular theories of the origin of the universe and even theistic evolution are not compatible with biblical teaching. We should maintain a posture of humility and openness, though, when discussing specific views of creation with other Christians.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 279-308 (Chapter 15, Section E2c–E5)

The study for today has been abbreviated so that the student has more time to devote to the further reading. If you are able to read this entire section, please do. Otherwise, skim through this section and only carefully read those sections which are most interesting (or will be most helpful) to you. Then answer the questions below.

17. Which theory of creation is the most persuasive to you? Why?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

18. Record one comment or question prompted by this section that you would like to share in discussion with the class.

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

4.1 We believe that God created the universe, and everything in it, out of nothing, by the Word of His power. Having no deficiency in Himself, nor moved by any incompleteness in His joyful self-sufficiency, God was pleased in creation to display His glory for the everlasting joy of the redeemed, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

19. If you didn't affirm that God had no deficiency in himself and wasn't "moved by any incompleteness" in creating the universe what alternative would you be forced to accept? Explain the implications of this alternative.

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

20. Why does this affirmation repeatedly return to the themes of God's glory and our joy?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

 INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT



If angels and demons are real, why are they largely ignored in America? Why is this harmful for the church? Write a brief reflection on these two questions and be prepared to share this reflection in discussion with the class.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Interact with this statement: “God created the world because he needed to share his joy.”
2. Have you had any personal experience with angels or demons, or have you spoken with others who have? How might biblical teaching help you evaluate this experience?
3. How should Christians defend the truth of Genesis 1 and 2 in the public square?
4. Your own question(s):

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998).
- ▷ John Sailhammer, *Genesis Unbound* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1996).
- ▷ Phillip Johnson, *Darwin’s Black Box* (Parsippany, New Jersey: Free Press, 2006).
- ▷ Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).
- ▷ David Powlinson, *Power Encounters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).
- ▷ John Piper, “The Pleasure of God in His Creation,” an online sermon at desiringGod.org

God's Creation of the Universe and Man (2)

8

🔗 INTRODUCTION

Human beings are the pinnacle of God's creation, as has often been stated. Being created in the image of God makes us categorically different from every other creature on the planet. When God created human beings, he created them male and female. This distinction is an important one.

Sexuality permeates one's individual being to its very depth; it conditions every facet of one's life as a person. As the self is always aware of itself as an 'I,' so this 'I' is always aware of itself as himself or herself. Our self-knowledge is indissolubly bound up not simply with our human being but with our sexual being.³²

This lesson will teach the complementarian position on human sexuality. We will also examine what it means to be created in the image of God and how humans are comprised.

🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- define what it means to be created in the image of God
- describe the differing roles God assigned to men and women
- evaluate biblically the dichotomist view and the trichotomist view

³² Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 172.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **complementarian:**
- **dichotomy:**
- **difference in role:**
- **egalitarian:**
- **equality in personhood:**
- **image of God:**
- **monism:**
- **trichotomy:**



As Grudem notes on page 443, it is difficult to specify exactly what it means to be made in the image of God. Grudem defines being made in the image of God as being like God and representing God. Another helpful way to summarize this truth is by highlighting the fact that God created mankind to be both priests and kings. In other words, man was created to worship God (the priestly dimension) and to reign over creation (the kingly dimension). Thus, man exists under God and over creation. Some biblical texts which highlight this biblical theme are Genesis 1:26-30, Exodus 19:5-6, Psalm 8, 1 Peter 2:9, and Revelation 5:9-10.

Related to the topic of manhood and womanhood is the issue of women leaders in the church. This is an important issue and the Bible does address whether women should be elders, but this issue will be covered in *Theological Foundations II* (Lesson 11) under section 12.5 of the Bethlehem Affirmation of Faith.

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood by John Piper and Wayne Grudem is an incredible resource on this topic because it is so comprehensive and is thus likely to answer most questions. Having a copy to show and use in class might be helpful. It is available for free at the CBMW website. Make sure your students are aware of this website! There are many free resources here, including multiple online books!

Because the issue of biblical manhood and womanhood is so contested today, it is easy for a discussion of these issues to become combative and intense. Therefore, we encourage you to seek to present this material as winsomely and joyfully as possible. Remember: the fact that God created men and women equal yet different is good news! Pray that God would give you the ability to celebrate his wisdom in designing gender roles in the way he has.

Sometimes when Ephesians 5:22-33 is used to argue for the complementarian position, egalitarians will respond by citing Ephesians 5:21 where Christians are told to “submit yourselves to each other.” They argue that any command for wives to submit to husbands should be seen in the context of “mutual submission.” Here are four points to consider by way of response:

1. When people talk of “mutual submission,” they often mean that Christians should treat each other with kindness and consideration. While this is certainly a biblical teaching, the Greek word *hypotasso* does not carry this meaning (see Grudem, page 465 for specific examples). Rather it implies a relationship of submission to an authority. Thus any interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33 must acknowledge the reality of authority in the language of submission.
2. The context in Ephesians 5 indicates that we should understand Ephesians 5:21 in light of what follows. In fact, Ephesians 5:21-22 literally reads “submitting to each other out of reverence for Christ, wives to husbands as to the Lord.” Notice that the word “submit” is only used once. V. 22 is

explaining what kind of submission Paul has in mind, namely wives submitting to husbands.

3. This interpretation is confirmed by the other two sets of relationships described in Ephesians 6:1-9: parent/child and master/slave. In both relationships, one person submits to the other as an authority. Parents do not submit to their children in any meaningful sense. Thus, the most likely interpretation of this section of Scripture is that Paul gives a command to the church (“Submit to each other out of reverence for Christ”) and then gives practical instructions for how that command would express itself in three important relationships: wives submit to their own husbands; children obey (submit to) their parents; and slaves obey their masters. Likewise, husbands love their wives sacrificially, parents tenderly discipline their children, and masters look out for the good of their slaves.
4. Another possible interpretation of these verses is that even if husbands are called to submit to their wives, this does not necessitate that their form of submission must be identical to the way in which wives submit to their husbands. This perspective is articulated by John Piper in a sermon entitled “Lionhearted and Lamblike: The Christian Husband as Head, Part 1,” found at desiringGod.org.

In your presentation of biblical manhood and womanhood, consider John Piper’s words of exhortation in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (26):

“Experience has taught me that there are two ways to commend a vision of manhood and womanhood. One way has to do with rational argumentation concerning factual evidences. For example, an evangelical Christian wants to know, Does the Bible really teach this vision of manhood and womanhood? So one way of commending the vision is by patient, detailed, careful exegetical argumentation.

But there is another way to commend the vision. A person also wants to know, Is the vision beautiful and satisfying and fulfilling? Can I live with it? This is not a bad question. Commending Biblical truth involves more than saying, ‘Do it because the Bible says so.’ That sort of commendation may result in a kind of obedience that is so begrudging and so empty of delight and hearty affirmation that the Lord is not pleased with it at all.

So there is a second task needed in winning people over to a vision of manhood and womanhood. Not only must there be thorough exegesis, there must also be a portrayal of the vision that satisfies the heart as well as the head. Or to put it another way: we must commend the beauty as well as the truth of the vision. We must show that something is not only right but also good. It is not only valid but also valuable, not only accurate but also admirable.”

It would be completely appropriate for you, or students within the class, to testify to the beauty of complementarity in your own personal experience.



Day 1

CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

In the previous lesson we examined the creation of the world in general, the creation of angels and demons, and the way in which the Bible and science relate. In this lesson we will turn our focus to the creation of man and woman. What does it mean for man and woman to be created in the image of God? How were man and woman created?

Genesis 2:7

⁷ Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

1 Corinthians 15:22, 47

²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ...⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.

Genesis 3:20

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

Romans 5:12-14

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

1. Why is it important to affirm that Adam and Eve are historical, literal people that God created?
 - **ANSWER.** *It is important to affirm that Adam and Eve are historical, literal people because the Bible speaks of them in this way. Not only do we have several explicit statements to this effect, but the logic of Romans 5 also seems to necessitate this view. Therefore, if we deny their historicity, we are denying the truth of God's word.*

Now notice these extremely important words about God's purpose in creating mankind.

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

2. Underline the references to creation in God's image and the dominion of mankind. How might these ideas be related?

- **ANSWER.** *If being created in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God (as Grudem will assert in the required reading for this day), then our dominion over creation reflects God's dominion over creation. We are created as his "vice-regents," reflecting his benevolent rule in the world.*

Genesis 1:28

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Habakkuk 2:14

¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

3. How might these two verses be related? (Hint: Remember that man is created in God's image.)

- **ANSWER.** *If our previous answer is correct, then man glorifies God by representing his likeness in the world that God has created. As mankind multiplies, according to God's command, then the glory of God begins to spread also. Therefore, God's intention, from the beginning, was to spread his glory throughout the earth through the multiplication and spreading of his image-bearers.*

Knowing that mankind is created in the image of God has implications for how we should treat fellow human beings. Notice the following verses in this regard:

Genesis 9:5-6

⁵ *And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.* ⁶ *Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*

James 3:9-10

⁹ *With it [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.* ¹⁰ *From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 439-445 (Chapter 21, Sections A–C4)

4. According to Grudem, why was man created? What is our purpose in life?
 - **ANSWER.** *Grudem argues that we were created to glorify God. Our purpose in life is to align ourselves with God's design. As Grudem says, "When we realize that God created us to glorify him, and when we start to act in ways that fulfill that purpose, then we begin to experience an intensity of joy in the Lord that we have never before known" (441).*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 445-450 (Chapter 21, Section C5–C6)

Day 2

CREATED EQUAL...

Genesis 1:27 lays the foundation for a biblical understanding of human sexuality: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Although it should be obvious, nevertheless we must state at the outset that male and female are created equally in the image of God. Neither sex is inherently “better” than the other. This becomes vital to remember when we broach the subject of differing gender roles (Day 3).

Genesis 2:18-23

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” ¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

5. What does this passage imply about the woman’s status vis-à-vis the man?

· **ANSWER.** *The fact that no suitable helper could be found among the animals and that the woman is made from the man implies that the woman is like the man in being categorically different from the animals. Men and women are covenant partners in the commission God gave to humans. (We will see in tomorrow’s study, though, that the woman, as helper, has a different role than the man. This does not mean that she is in any way inferior to the man.)*

There are some who will cite Galatians 3:28 as evidence that under the new covenant, all distinctions in men's and women's roles have been rendered void. Let's examine this verse in context to see if it can support this contention.

Galatians 3:24-29

²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

6. Does Galatians 3:28 teach that men and women are identical in every respect? If not, what does this passage teach?

- **ANSWER.** *Galatians 3:28 is part of Paul's broader argument against the need for circumcision or the observance of the Mosaic Law for Gentiles after the death of Christ. His contention in these verses is that there is no difference in justified status between those who have put their faith in Christ. Racial, economic, social, and even gender difference don't affect believers' status as equal heirs of God. Therefore, this passage argues for the salvific equality of men and women, but does not address the functional differences that may remain.*

The concept of headship and submission, to be investigated in Day 3's study, causes some people discomfort. If man is the head of woman, doesn't that mean that men are superior to women?

1 Corinthians 11:2-3

² Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. ³ But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

7. How might this text (and the doctrine of the Trinity) illustrate that headship does not imply inequality?

- **ANSWER.** *It is true that the head of a wife is her husband, but Paul also says that the head of Christ is God the Father. Clearly both Jesus and God are ontologically equal, for all the fulness of God dwells in Christ (Colossians 2:9). Yet the Son is subordinate to the Father—he submits to his Father. Therefore, the functional subordination of the Son to the Father provides a good model for how a woman might submit to a man while retaining her equal status and her dignity.*

“I think Paul added the headship of God over Christ right after asserting the headship of man over woman in order to teach that the authority of man over woman does not imply the inferiority of women or the superiority of men. Some Corinthians may have concluded that the headship of man over woman diminished woman’s worth. Paul anticipates this objection and adds that God is the head over Christ. And even though God (i.e., the Father) is the head over Christ, He is not essentially greater than Christ. So too, even though women are under men’s authority, they are not essentially inferior.”³³

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 454-459 (Chapter 22, Sections A–B)

8. List other Scripture verses that Grudem cites to prove the equality in personhood and importance of men and women.

- **ANSWER.** *In addition to the verses treated above, Grudem also directs our attention to Genesis 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:11-12; Proverbs 31:10, 28-30; 1 Peter 3:7; Acts 2:17-18, 41; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11; 1 Peter 4:10; and Acts 2:41.*

We might also note that there are no verses in Scripture, when properly interpreted, that can be used to defend the inherent superiority of men or inferiority of women.

33 Thomas Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 130.

Day 3

...YET DIFFERENT

The perspective that this curriculum asserts as biblical is the complementarian perspective: men and women possess equal value and dignity, but are assigned *complementary* roles in marriage, the family, and the church.

The study for this day is not a full-blown defense or explanation of God's beautiful design for men and women. There are other resources that address the issue in more depth. Our aim, therefore, will be to introduce some of the key texts and to set forth some of the key conclusions of the complementarian perspective.

One of the most important texts for the complementarian position is Ephesians 5, which depicts the marriage relationship as mirroring Christ's relationship to the church.

Ephesians 5:22-33

²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ²³ *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* ²⁴ *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* ²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,* ²⁶ *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* ²⁷ *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* ²⁸ *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* ²⁹ *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,* ³⁰ *because we are members of his body.* ³¹ *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* ³² *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.* ³³ *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

9. Paul says that “wives should submit in everything to their husbands” just as the church submits to Christ (verse 24). What if her husband wants her to do things that are sinful? Should she still submit to him?

· **ANSWER.** *A wife should not submit to a husband who is asking her to do sinful things. This is very much like the example of Peter and John before the Council when they were told not to teach in the name of Jesus, but responded that they must obey God rather than man (Acts 4:18-20). This example is especially relevant since Peter himself commanded that Christians ought to submit to the human authorities in their lives (1 Peter 2:13). Wives must submit to Christ first, then to their husbands.*

10. Describe the ways in which Christ’s love for the church is shown in this text. Then explain how these things might be emulated by husbands.

· **ANSWER.** *Jesus loved the church by dying for her (v. 25), working to make her holy and pure (vv. 26-27), nourishing her, and cherishing her (v. 29). Jesus said that he came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45) and this is the way a husband must seek to love his wife. A husband must be willing to give himself up for his wife, placing her desires above his own just as Christ sought the joy of his beloved above his own comfort. A husband must also love his wife by working to make her holy and pure. He can do this through prayer and fasting on her behalf, leading her to the Word of God, and by being an example of a faithful disciple himself. He must ensure that she is getting the fellowship and accountability she needs. A husband must nourish his wife physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He must cherish his wife, showing her through word and deed that she is precious to him.*

11. Interact with this statement: “Telling the wife to submit to her husband as her head is the same thing as male domination and makes the wife a slave.”

· **ANSWER.** *This would only be true if vv. 25-30 were not true. This is not male domination because the husband’s responsibility is to love his wife like Christ loved the church. There-fore he is seeking her joy and her good. The leadership that Christ models is not domineering leadership, but servant leadership. Therefore, the wife who submits to such a husband never feels like a slave because her husband is loving her in the way that she longs to be loved. Many godly women have testified that true submission is a beautiful, joyful, and freeing command to obey.*

Colossians 3:18-19

¹⁸ *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.* ¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.*

Man, therefore, is given the charge of leadership (headship) in his home.

Genesis 3:9-11

⁹ *But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"*
¹⁰ *And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."* ¹¹ *He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"*

Romans 5:17-19

¹⁷ *For, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.* ¹⁸ *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.* ¹⁹ *For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

12. Is it significant that God address the man first (Genesis 3:9)? Is it significant that Adam (and not Eve) is spoken of as the representative head of the human race?
 - **ANSWER.** *Yes, both of these observations are significant because they demonstrate that the primary burden of leadership, responsibility, and accountability, lies with the man. This does not mean that Eve is not responsible for her sin! It simply means that Adam, as the leader, was responsible in a unique way for abdicating his responsibility and being led into sin.*

Women are given the charge of submission, support, and nurturing.

1 Peter 3:1-7

¹ Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives— ² when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³ Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— ⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵ For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. ⁷ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

13. Underline all the evidence in this passage that points to a wife's submission. What do you think it means that a woman is the "weaker vessel"?

• **ANSWER.** *The answer to this question will probably vary among your students. Although it is true that men, on average, have more brute strength than women, this is probably not what is being alluded to here. Likewise, it would be a mistake to say, without qualification, that men are emotionally stronger than women. Men are stronger emotionally in some ways than women and vice versa (and the ways vary from person to person). In context, a woman being the weaker vessel is the reason put forth for a husband to live with her in an understanding way and for showing her honor. Therefore, we might say that women are especially vulnerable to the emotional insensitivity of men. This means that loving husbands should be all the more tender and considerate of their wives.*

The God-given differences between men and women are not something to be ashamed of; rather, they are something to celebrate! It is a beautiful thing to see a husband who leads like Christ and a wife who willingly submits like the pure bride which is the church. Understanding the difference between men and women is liberating, not oppressive.

John Piper summarizes the difference in this way:

“At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships.

At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships.”³⁴

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 459-468 (Chapter 22, Sections C–D)

14. After reading this section, are there any lingering objections or questions in your mind with regard to the differing roles of men and women?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

34 John Piper, *What’s the Difference?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 22.

Day 4

CREATED BODY AND SOUL

We have seen thus far that men and women are created in the image of God and assigned different, though complementary, roles. In today's study we will conclude our overview of the creation of man by examining of what parts a person is comprised.

Human beings obviously have bodies. There is a material or physical aspect to who we are. But what exists beyond the physical?

Philippians 1:21-24

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

2 Corinthians 5:1-8

¹ For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

15. What do these passages imply about our composition? Do we cease to exist when our bodies die?

• **ANSWER.** *The answer, of course, is “no,” we don’t cease to exist when our bodies die. It was clearly the expectation of Paul that after he died, he would leave his body and be with Christ in spirit. His final hope was to be reunited with his body in the resurrection. This means that in this life we are composed of at least two parts: body and soul.*

Matthew 10:28

²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Although secular humanists (who are materialists) would argue that we are nothing more than our physical body, this clearly cannot be a Christian perspective. Christians believe that a person's soul remains after their death; however, this should not be taken as a denigration of the body. The Bible clearly presents the resurrection of the body as the final hope for the believer. In addition to 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 (reproduced above) notice the following verses:

1 Corinthians 15:35-44

³⁵ But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶ You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ³⁹ For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. ⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Romans 8:18-23

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

16. What is at stake in affirming the importance of the body—that is, what do we lose if we disdain our physical bodies or neglect the resurrection of our bodies?

- **ANSWER.** *The glory of God is at stake in our physical bodies. God created us with bodies which were very good. He meant us to enjoy and reflect the glory of God in our bodies. The hope of the resurrection is that God will one day reverse the futility that creation has been subjected to. Therefore, denying the value of our physical bodies denies God's good design and his glory in their redemption.*

The material and immaterial aspect of our selves are thus both important. Some theologians have wanted to make a distinction between our souls and our spirits. These theologians would argue that we are comprised of three distinct parts: body, soul, and spirit.

John 12:27

²⁷ Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour”? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

John 13:21

²¹ After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”

Luke 1:46-48

⁴⁶ And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.”

17. Underline every occurrence of “soul” and “spirit.” How might these verses address the question of whether there is a distinction between a person’s soul and their spirit?

- **ANSWER.** *In the first two passages, which are only one chapter apart, John appears to be using soul and spirit synonymously. In Luke, soul and spirit are in a (Hebrew) parallel structure. These observations suggest that there is no significant difference between soul and spirit. Both terms probably refer to the immaterial aspect of our being.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 472-477 (Chapter 23, Sections A–B)

18. True or False: According to Grudem, the focus of Scripture is primarily on man as a unity.

· **ANSWER.** *True. See the bottom of page 476.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 477-486 (Chapter 23, Sections C–F)

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

4.2 *We believe that God directly created Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve from his side. We believe that Adam and Eve were the historical parents of the entire human race; that they were created male and female equally in the image of God, without sin; that they were created to glorify their Maker, Ruler, Provider, and Friend by trusting His all-sufficient goodness, admiring His infinite beauty, enjoying His personal fellowship, and obeying His all-wise counsel; and that, in God's love and wisdom, they were appointed differing and complementary roles in marriage as a type of Christ and the church.*

19. According to this section of the affirmation, how do humans created in God's image glorify God?

- **ANSWER.** *Humans glorify God by "trusting His all-sufficient goodness, admiring His infinite beauty, enjoying His personal fellowship, and obeying His all-wise counsel."*

20. Does this section of the affirmation accurately summarize what you have seen in the relevant biblical texts?

- **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

It might be worthwhile to discuss how these ideas are related.



Complete the reading assignment corresponding to your gender and answer the questions:

For Men: Read Ephesians 5:25-33. What does being a Christ-like husband look like on a day-to-day basis? If married, what steps do you need to take in order to become more like the husband God created you to be? If single, how can you live out these characteristics, even now, in your current relationships?

For Women: Read 1 Peter 3:1-6. How does a properly adorned wife behave on a day-to-day basis? If married, what steps do you need to take in order to become more like the wife God created you to be? If single, how can you live out these characteristics, even now, in your current relationships?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Are the cognitively disabled created in the image of God?
2. How does the culture and media portray masculinity and femininity? Is this contrary to the Bible's testimony?
3. How connected are our spiritual and physical dimensions? Do spiritual realities manifest themselves physically? Can our physical state affect our spiritual state? Provide support for your opinions.
4. Your own question(s):

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).
- ▶ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).
- ▶ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2004).
- ▶ The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood website (cbmw.org)
- ▶ John Piper, "Affirming the Goodness of Manhood and Womanhood in All of Life," an online sermon at desiringGod.org.

Man's Sin and Fall from Fellowship with God

9

🔗 INTRODUCTION

As we learned in the last two lessons, when God completed his work of creation, he called it “very good” (Gen 1:31). However, no one looks at the world today and says that it is very good. Almost everyone who looks at the world concludes that this is not the way it’s supposed to be. Something has gone terribly wrong in God’s good creation. The Bible calls this problem “sin.” But what exactly is sin? Where did it come from? Does it affect every human being? How comprehensive is its influence? This lesson will explore all of these questions and more.

From the outset, we should note that sin is incredibly foolish. As John Frame says, “Sin is irrational. Consider Satan himself, who knows more about God than most any of us but, nevertheless, seeks to replace God on the throne; an intelligent being, yet from one perspective incredibly stupid.”³⁵

Calling sin stupid is not intended to trivialize it. Sin is also incredibly evil, reprehensible, abhorrent, disgusting, revolting, and wicked. Scripture makes it clear that the fool is wicked. The one who stupidly chooses sin and not God commits great evil. As we examine the doctrine of sin, our prayer is for you to gain a better understanding of sin and revulsion for it, so that you may be freed to serve God more faithfully and more joyfully.

🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- describe the origin of sin and death
- describe the effects that Adam’s sin has upon the human race
- explain the believer’s struggle with indwelling sin

35 John Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 101.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **inherited corruption:**
- **inherited guilt:**
- **inherited sin:**
- **sin:**
- **total inability:**
- **unpardonable sin:**



There are two issues that are tangentially related to this topic that are likely to be the subject of conversation and interest: the unpardonable sin and the question of whether infants will go to heaven. Therefore, you will want to be prepared to address these issues. For additional help, you could turn to two online resources:

1. “What Happens to Infants Who Die?”(media found at desiringGod.org).
2. “Beyond Forgiveness: Blasphemy Against the Spirit”(message found at desiringGod.org).

Here is an extended defense of the Reformed interpretation of “because all sinned” (Romans 5:12):

Key Question: What does “because all sinned” mean? Does it mean “all sinned in Adam”? Or does it mean “all have committed personal acts of sin”?

Four pointers that help us define “all sinned” as “all sinned in Adam.”

1. *It isn't true that all people who die also committed sin. Babies die, both in and outside of the womb. Yet it can't be said that they actually disobeyed some command of God. So if one dies because of their own sin, why do infants, both born and unborn, die?*
2. *The view that all die because all have committed personal acts of sin is contradicted by vv. 13-14. Paul stresses that death even reigned over those between the time of Adam and Moses, those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam. How did they not sin the same way Adam did? They had no revealed command of God that they were to obey, thus they could not rebel against a command and be lawbreakers. That is what he means by the fact that that sin is not imputed when there is no law. Yet they all died. Every last one of them died because all sinned, but not like Adam sinned for they did not break the law that was revealed to them from God. Rather, they all sinned in Adam.*
3. *This other view also makes no sense of the rest of the passage where it is clear that death comes from the one sin of the one man. Notice that throughout the passage the stress is on the one sin and that it is through this one sin that death came to all (“many died through one man's trespass,” v. 15, “the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation,” v. 16, “because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man,” v. 17, “one trespass led to condemnation for all men,” v. 18, “by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners,” v. 19).*

4. *Finally, it does not make sense of the analogy that is made with Jesus. We read that Adam was a type of him who was to come (5:14). He is like Jesus. Just as death came to all through Adam's sin, so also life comes to all through Jesus' righteousness. If you understand v. 12 to be saying that death comes because all commit individual acts of sin, then you must also believe that life comes because all commit individual acts of righteousness. If Adam is not our head in sin, then Jesus is not our head in righteousness.*

Adam's sin and guilt is imputed to us. Adam was our representative and however he went, so went the entire human race. Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

Perhaps it is better to say that Adam's sin brought death to all those he represents, that is, all of those over whom he acts as their head. This is also true for Jesus. His righteousness gives life to all those he represents, that is, all of those over whom he acts as their head. So if you are in Adam, you die. But if you are in Christ, you live. While every single human ever to live is in Adam, it is not true that every single human is in Christ.

See also "Adam, Christ, and Justification, Part 2," a sermon found at desiringGod.org (listed in the Additional Resources section).

You may want to stress the point that sin is portrayed with a number of metaphors in Scripture. It is portrayed as transgression of a law, as slavery, brokenness, marital unfaithfulness, rebellion, folly, pollution, indecent exposure, wandering, and in many other ways as well. Understanding the many ways sin is portrayed will help us to better appreciate our salvation as forgiveness, redemption, healing, betrothal, reconciliation, wisdom, cleansing, clothing, a bringing back, etc. It is important to stress a multi-dimensional view of sin so that we don't minimize or distort the biblical perspective on sin. For example, if we only view sin in judicial terms as a breaking of a divine law, then we will tend to view sinners only as guilty and worthy of condemnation. This may then affect how we treat them. Similarly, if we only view sin in terms of brokenness or slavery, then we will tend to view sinners only as victims. It is important that we stress both of these perspectives (as well as the others mentioned above). Sinners (including ourselves) are both guilty law-breakers and enslaved victims. Holding these truths together will enable us to be personally and pastorally effective in waging war against our sin and the sin of others.



Day 1

SIN CAME INTO THE WORLD

In the previous lessons we've learned that when God created the world and man, they were good. The world and man were designed to glorify God. And yet, as we look around, we see that not all in the world is good. Life is marred by pain, suffering, injustice, and death. What happened? In this day's study we will investigate how sin came into the world.

Genesis 3:1-7

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Genesis 2:16-17

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

1. Compare God's command to Adam to what Eve relates to Satan. Underline all the differences you can find. Is there anything that Eve *left out, changed, or added* in her retelling of God's command? Explain.
 - **ANSWER.** *Eve minimizes God's generosity, fails to identify the tree precisely, softens the consequence and its immediacy, and adds a prohibition "neither shall you touch it." Each of these distortions call into question the goodness of God's provision or the finality and significance of his word. Since, in the literary context, Eve wasn't created yet when God commanded the man (Genesis 2:16-17), we should probably understand that Adam (inaccurately?) communicated the command to Eve.*

2. Using this occurrence of the first human sin, compose your own definition of sin.
 - **ANSWER.** *Sin is the distrust of God's provision and his word that results in disobedience to his commands. Adam and Eve believed that disobeying God would bring greater pleasure and reward than obeying God. Therefore, sin is looking for satisfaction anywhere other than in the person and provision of God.*

Jeremiah 2:12-13

¹² *Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, ¹³ for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

It is apparent that Adam and Eve's sin is not the first one in the universe. Before Eve ever takes the first bite of the fruit, the serpent tells Eve a lie. But how did the serpent (Satan) fall from the good state in which God created all things? The answer to this question is shrouded in mystery. Though contested, it is possible that Isaiah 14 or Ezekiel 28 allusively describe the very first intrusion of sin into the created order.

Isaiah 14:12-15

¹² How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! ¹³ You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” ¹⁵ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

Ezekiel 28:12-19

¹² Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: “You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. ¹³ You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. ¹⁴ You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. ¹⁵ You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. ¹⁶ In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. ¹⁷ Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you. ¹⁸ By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; so I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you. ¹⁹ All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.”

Regardless of whether Isaiah 14 or Ezekiel 28 indirectly refer to the fall of Satan, it is important to maintain that God is not the origin of evil in the universe, nor does evil spring from any fault or deficiency in God’s creation. We must also say that God sovereignly ordained the fall of Satan and Adam and Eve, because God is sovereign over all things. The cross of Christ, the Lamb who was slain, was in God’s eternal plan before the foundation of the world.

Romans 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

3. Underline every phrase that describes sin in this passage. Circle every phrase that describes God's righteous response to sin. From this passage, derive a short definition of sin.
 - **ANSWER.** *Sin is the exchanging of the infinitely valuable God for anything that is not God such that we treasure and value other things more than God, ultimately suppressing the truth about God.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 490-493 (Chapter 24, Sections A–B)

4. According to Grudem, is the essence of sin selfishness? Record his arguments below.
 - **ANSWER.** *No. Defining sin as selfishness is unsatisfactory because 1) Scripture does not define sin in this way; 2) much self-interest is good and approved by Scripture; 3) much sin is not selfishness in the ordinary sense of the term; and 4) such a definition could suggest wrongdoing on God's part.*

Day 2

INHERITED GUILT AND CORRUPTION

It is evident that Adam and Eve's sin had immediate and eternal consequences. We will now examine those consequences through the lens of Romans 5, a central text in the biblical account of sin.

Romans 5:12-19

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

5. Describe the parallel between Adam and Christ and between Adam's one transgression and Christ's one act of obedience.

• **ANSWER.** Adam was the type of Christ and therefore as Adam was our head, so also is Christ. Just as the result of Adam's sin was death and condemnation, so also the result of Christ's obedience is life and justification. We didn't commit Adam's sin and yet we were made sinners, but neither did we perform Christ's obedience and yet we are made righteous.

There is a theological difficulty in this passage. John Piper explains:

“He has just said that through one man, Adam, sin entered the world of mankind, and through sin death – the penalty, the judgment on sin. Then he broadens out this statement and says that this death, this judgment, was not confined to one man but spread to all humans. Why? Now here comes the ambiguity. He says, “because all sinned.” Does this mean “because all sinned in Adam”? Does it mean that Adam’s sin was the sin of the human race, so that when he sinned, in a real and profound and mysterious way, I sinned, and you sinned? Was Adam’s sin imputed to us, so that we are viewed as sinning in him? Or does it mean that the penalty and judgment of death is owing to our individual acts of sin and not to Adam’s sin being imputed to us?”³⁶

6. What does “because all sinned” mean?

- **ANSWER.** *This curriculum will adopt the typical Reformed interpretation of this verse, that Paul meant we all sinned in Adam, that his sin is imputed to us, and that universal human death and condemnation is God’s judgment and penalty on all of us because in some mysterious way we were united to Adam in his sinning. See the Teaching Notes for an extended defense of this interpretation.*

Our union with Adam, therefore, has profound ramifications. Notice the following text and its description of our “natural” state.

Ephesians 2:1-3

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

³⁶ John Piper, “Adam, Christ, and Justification, Part 2,” an online sermon at desiringGod.org.

7. What does it mean to be “dead” in trespasses and sins?

- **ANSWER.** *It means that we are reckoned as dead, that is, we are condemned. We are not waiting to be condemned; we already are condemned. Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin are death.” This is exactly what God told Adam would happen if he ate of the forbidden tree — he would die. Certainly this happens in our physical death, but Paul says that we were dead, even while living. Our spirits are dead. We are unable to respond to God and therefore need to be made alive.*

Psalm 51:1-5

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. ¹ *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.* ² *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!* ³ *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.* ⁴ *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.* ⁵ *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

8. Does the phrase “in sin did my mother conceive me” (verse 5) refer to David’s mother’s sin, or does it refer to David’s sinful nature apparent even from the time of his conception?

- **ANSWER.** *It almost certainly refers to David’s sinful nature. First, the context for this verse is David’s personal confession of sin. Second, Scripture nowhere mentions a sinful encounter between Jesse (David’s father) and his wife, resulting in the conception of David. Third, being brought forth in iniquity (v. 5) does not refer to a sinful conception or birthing process. Rather, David is making the point that he had a sinful disposition from the time of his birth, and even, before that, from the time of his conception.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 494-498 (Chapter 24, Section C)

9. Based on your reading, how would you respond to someone who says that it isn’t fair for us to be punished for Adam’s sin?

- **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Day 3

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TOTAL INABILITY

This day's study builds on the previous day: If we are united to Adam in his sin and have inherited a spiritual deadness from conception, then it will follow that apart from God's grace we are totally unable to do anything of spiritual good. This has traditionally been called "total depravity," the first letter in the acronym TULIP. This curriculum will follow Grudem's use of the term "total inability," as a term that is potentially less confusing.

Romans 3:9-19

⁹ *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes." ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*

10. Underline all the evidence for man's universal enslavement to sin. If there were some who were righteous (apart from God's grace), what implications would follow?

• **ANSWER.** *If there were some who weren't under sin, then God would be unjust to condemn them. Their mouths would not be stopped at the judgment and they would not be accountable to God. They would not need the righteousness that Jesus Christ provides, and God would not be glorified as their Savior from sin.*

An objection might be stated in response to our use of Romans 3: "This passage does not prove that man is totally unable to do good. Rather, it simply means that man never does good. There's a difference: one is a statement of ability, the

other is an observation from experience.” Whether this is a legitimate objection or not—if *no one* has ever done good, does that not imply something about ability? Notice the following verses:

Romans 6:16-20

¹⁶ *Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?* ¹⁷ *But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,* ¹⁸ *and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.* ¹⁹ *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.* ²⁰ *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.*

Romans 8:5-10

⁵ *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.* ⁶ *To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* ⁷ *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.* ⁸ *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* ⁹ *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* ¹⁰ *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

11. How does one cease to be a slave of sin? How does one cease to living according to the flesh? What does this imply about our ability to do good?

· **ANSWER.** *One only becomes a slave to righteousness if they are set free from sin — by God! This is why God is thanked for the believers’ obedience (v. 17). Because the flesh is hostile to God and cannot submit to God’s law, the Spirit must first dwell in the believer in order for them to walk according to the Spirit. So both passages assume that man is totally unable to obey God on their own; man is enslaved to sin.*

Here is a statement of this doctrine of grace:

Total Depravity

When we speak of man's depravity we mean man's natural condition apart from any grace exerted by God to restrain or transform man.

There is no doubt that man could perform more evil acts toward his fellow man than he does. But if he is restrained from performing more evil acts by motives that are not owing to his glad submission to God, then even his "virtue" is evil in the sight of God.

Romans 14:23 says, "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." This is a radical indictment of all natural "virtue" that does not flow from a heart humbly relying on God's grace.

The terrible condition of man's heart will never be recognized by people who assess it only in relation to other men. Romans 14:23 makes plain that depravity is our condition in relation to God primarily, and only secondarily in relation to man. Unless we start here we will never grasp the totality of our natural depravity.

Man's depravity is total in at least four senses.

(1) Our rebellion against God is total.

Apart from the grace of God there is no delight in the holiness of God, and there is no glad submission to the sovereign authority of God.

Of course totally depraved men can be very religious and very philanthropic. They can pray and give alms and fast, as Jesus said (Matthew 6:1-18). But their very religion is rebellion against the rights of their Creator, if it does not come from a childlike heart of trust in the free grace of God. Religion is one of the chief ways that man conceals his unwillingness to forsake self-reliance and bank all his hopes on the unmerited mercy of God (Luke 18:9-14; Colossians 2:20-23).

The totality of our rebellion is seen in Romans 3:9-10 and 18. "I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: None is righteous, no not one; no one seeks for God....There is no fear of God before their eyes."

It is a myth that man in his natural state is genuinely seeking God. Men do seek God. But they do not seek him for who he is. They seek him in a pinch as one who might preserve them from death or enhance their worldly enjoyments. Apart from conversion, no one comes to the light of God.

Some do come to the light. But listen to what John 3:20-21 says about them. "Every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God."

Yes there are those who come to the light—namely those whose deeds are the work of God. “Wrought in God” means worked by God. Apart from this gracious work of God all men hate the light of God and will not come to him lest their evil be exposed—this is total rebellion. “No one seeks for God...There is no fear of God before their eyes!”

(2) In his total rebellion everything man does is sin.

In Romans 14:23 Paul says, “Whatever is not from faith is sin.” Therefore, if all men are in total rebellion, everything they do is the product of rebellion and cannot be an honor to God, but only part of their sinful rebellion. If a king teaches his subjects how to fight well and then those subjects rebel against their king and use the very skill he taught them to resist him, then even those skills become evil.

Thus man does many things which he can only do because he is created in the image of God and which in the service of God could be praised. But in the service of man’s self-justifying rebellion, these very things are sinful.

In Romans 7:18 Paul says, “I know that no good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” This is a radical confession of the truth that in our rebellion nothing we think or feel is good. It is all part of our rebellion. The fact that Paul qualifies his depravity with the words, “that is, in my flesh,” shows that he is willing to affirm the good of anything that the Spirit of God produces in him (Romans 15:18). “Flesh” refers to man in his natural state apart from the work of God’s Spirit. So what Paul is saying in Romans 7:18 is that apart from the work of God’s Spirit all we think and feel and do is not good.

NOTE: We recognize that the word “good” has a broad range of meanings. We will have to use it in a restricted sense to refer to many actions of fallen people which in relation are in fact not good.

For example we will have to say that it is good that most unbelievers do not kill and that some unbelievers perform acts of benevolence. What we mean when we call such actions good is that they more or less conform to the external pattern of life that God has commanded in Scripture.

However, such outward conformity to the revealed will of God is not righteousness in relation to God. It is not done out of reliance on him or for his glory. He is not trusted for the resources, though he gives them all. Nor is his honor exalted, even though that’s his will in all things (1 Corinthians 10:31). Therefore even these “good” acts are part of our rebellion and are not “good” in the sense that really counts in the end—in relation to God.

(3) Man's inability to submit to God and do good is total.

Picking up on the term "flesh" above (man apart from the grace of God) we find Paul declaring it to be totally enslaved to rebellion. Romans 8:7-8 says, "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

The "mind of the flesh" is the mind of man apart from the indwelling Spirit of God ("You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you," Romans 8:9). So natural man has a mindset that does not and cannot submit to God. Man cannot reform himself.

Ephesians 2:1 says that we Christians were all once "dead in trespasses and sins." The point of dead-ness is that we were incapable of any life with God. Our hearts were like a stone toward God (Ephesians 4:18; Ezekiel 36:26). Our hearts were blind and incapable of seeing the glory of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). We were totally unable to reform ourselves.

(4) Our rebellion is totally deserving of eternal punishment.

Ephesians 2:3 goes on to say that in our deadness we were "children of wrath." That is, we were under God's wrath because of the corruption of our hearts that made us as good as dead before God.

The reality of hell is God's clear indictment of the infiniteness of our guilt. If our corruption were not deserving of an eternal punishment God would be unjust to threaten us with a punishment so severe as eternal torment. But the Scriptures teach that God is just in condemning unbelievers to eternal hell (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; Matthew 5:29f; 10:28; 13:49f; 18:8f; 25:46; Revelation 14:9-11; 20:10). Therefore, to the extent that hell is a total sentence of condemnation, to that extent must we think of ourselves as totally blameworthy apart from the saving grace of God.

In summary, total depravity means that our rebellion against God is total, everything we do in this rebellion is sin, our inability to submit to God or reform ourselves is total, and we are therefore totally deserving of eternal punishment.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of admitting our condition to be this bad. If we think of ourselves as basically good or even less than totally at odds with God, our grasp of the work of God in redemption will be defective. But if we humble ourselves under this terrible truth of our total depravity, we will be in a position to see and appreciate the glory and wonder of the work of God discussed in the next four points³⁷

37 Bethlehem Baptist Church Staff, "What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism," an online article at desiringGod.org

12. How important is it to affirm man's total inability (or "total depravity")?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

When God saves and justifies a sinner, they cease to be a child of wrath and a son of disobedience. Whereas they once were a slave to sin, now they have become a slave to righteousness; whereas they once walked according to the flesh, now they walk according to the Spirit. We should make it explicit, however, that even believers continue to sin throughout their lives. They no longer have an inability to do good, but they still have the ability to sin and do sin.

1 John 1:6-10

⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

13. Why is it significant that these verses were originally addressed to believers?

· **ANSWER.** *It is significant because it demonstrates that the Apostle John assumes that believers will continue to sin and need to confess their sins. Although he writes this epistle so that his children "may not sin," he recognizes that they will and assures them that they have "an advocate with the Father" (2:1).*

The believer's continual struggle with sin is confirmed throughout the New Testament. It is also confirmed by the experiential testimony of every mature saint.

James 5:15-16

¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Ephesians 4:31-32

³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Matthew 18:15

¹⁵ If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 498-504 (Chapter 24, Section D1–D4)

This topic will likely generate some discussion and further questions.

See media at desiringGod.org entitled "What Happens To Infants Who Die?" to help prepare you to discuss this topic.

14. How would you respond to the question of whether infants can be saved?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Day 4

THE EFFECTS OF OUR SIN

It is evident that as believers we continue to sin. What, then, are the effects of our sin? Does our forgiveness at the cross mean that we will suffer no consequences for our sin?

It is first vital that we look at what will *not* happen as we continue to wrestle against sinful desires.

Romans 8:1

¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

John 19:30

³⁰ *When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

1 John 2:12

¹² *I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.*

15. How might these verses bring encouragement to those who are trusting in Jesus but still wrestle with sin?

- **ANSWER.** *These verses assure us that God's work of atonement was completed by the death of Jesus, our sins are forgiven for his name's sake, and that there is no longer the verdict of condemnation for those who are in Christ. Our continuing, indwelling sin cannot separate us from God or change our justified status!*

Now we will examine what *does* happen.

Hebrews 12:5-11

⁵ *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you*

as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

16. According to this passage, will we still suffer some consequences for our sin as believers? How is the believer's situation different from an unbeliever? What should our response to discipline be?

- **ANSWER.** *This passage implies that believers will receive the loving correction of God when we stray into sin. As sons, however, this discipline is restorative and remedial. It is intended for our good. Whereas unbelievers are subject to punishment for their sin (in this life and the life to come), the punishment of believers' has been taken away. Therefore we should humbly embrace God's discipline and be trained by it.*

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

17. According to this passage, what extreme measure does God sometimes use to discipline believers?

- **ANSWER.** *Verse 30 indicates that some believers have died because they have eaten in an unworthy manner and have brought the judgment of the Lord upon themselves. Verse 32 makes it clear that this judgment is not condemnation. Therefore, sometimes God even takes someone to be with him, putting them to death as an extreme measure of discipline for their sin.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 504-510 (Chapter 24, Sections D5–E)

18. Summarize Grudem’s discussion of the unpardonable sin.

- **ANSWER.** *Grudem summarizes the major interpretive options of what the “unpardonable sin” is, but finds each one lacking. The only option that makes sense of the con-text of these passages is that there is such a thing as an “unusually malicious, willful rejection and slander against the Holy Spirit’s work attesting to Christ” that hardens a person to the point where repentance is impossible. He helpfully adds that being afraid of having committed this sin indicates that you haven’t committed it.*

This topic often generates questions and additional discussion. See “Beyond Forgiveness: Blasphemy Against the Spirit” at desiringGod.org for additional preparation.

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

5.1 *We believe that, although God created man morally upright, he was led astray from God's Word and wisdom by the subtlety of Satan's deceit, and chose to take what was forbidden, and thus declare his independence from, distrust for, and disobedience toward his all-good and gracious Creator. Thus, our first parents, by this sin, fell from their original innocence and communion with God.*

5.2 *We believe that, as the head of the human race, Adam's fall became the fall of all his posterity, in such a way that corruption, guilt, death, and condemnation belong properly to every person. All persons are thus corrupt by nature, enslaved to sin, and morally unable to delight in God and overcome their own proud preference for the fleeting pleasures of self-rule.*

5.3 *We believe God has subjected the creation to futility, and the entire human family is made justly liable to untold miseries of sickness, decay, calamity, and loss. Thus all the adversity and suffering in the world is an echo and a witness of the exceedingly great evil of moral depravity in the heart of mankind; and every new day of life is a God-given, merciful reprieve from imminent judgment, pointing to repentance.*

19. Explain how the act of sinning is a declaration of “independence from, distrust for, and disobedience toward [an] all-good and gracious Creator.”

• **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

20. If someone becomes physically sick, does it mean that that person sinned in some way and the sickness is a result of their sin?

- *ANSWER.* No, we would be wrong to infer that every case of sickness can be attributed to some specific sin. Consider a question Jesus is asked once by his disciples: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:2-3). Therefore, we should understand that though adversity and suffering is a witness to the moral depravity of mankind, it does not necessarily indicate any great evil of the one who is suffering.



INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Meditate on some of the texts from this lesson and journal about your own, personal sin. Confess your sin to God. Some questions to help you journal:

- What areas of my life do I have victory in?
- What are the sins I most struggle with?
- What is at the root of my sin?
- How does sin tempt me?
- Do I need to confess any of my sins to someone?
- What is repentance? Do I have it in my life?
- What steps can I take to avoid sin?

You will not be required to share this journaling with the class if it is too personal or if it would be unhelpful.

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959).
- ▷ Kelly Kopic and Justin Taylor, eds., *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).
- ▷ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1990).
- ▷ John Piper, "Adam, Christ, and Justification, Part 2," an online sermon at desiringGod.org

Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God (1)

10

📖 INTRODUCTION

This lesson begins our focus on Jesus Christ, the God-Man. As Jonathan Edwards has said, “There is an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies in Jesus Christ.” He continues:

Christ, as he is God, is infinitely great and high above all. He is higher than the kings of the earth; for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is higher than the heavens, and higher than the highest angels of heaven. So great is he, that all men, all kings and princes, are as worms of the dust before him; all nations are as the drop of the bucket, and the light dust of the balance; yea, and angels themselves are as nothing before him. ...He is sovereign Lord of all. He rules over the whole universe, and doth whatsoever pleaseth him. His knowledge is without bound. His wisdom is perfect, and what none can circumvent. His power is infinite, and none can resist Him. His riches are immense and inexhaustible. His majesty is infinitely awful.

And yet he is one of infinite condescension. None are so low or inferior, but Christ’s condescension is sufficient to take a gracious notice of them. He condescends not only to the angels, humbling himself to behold the things that are done in heaven, but he also condescends to such poor creatures as men; and that not only so as to take notice of princes and great men, but of those that are of meanest rank and degree, “the poor of the world,” James 2:5. Such as are commonly despised by their fellow creatures, Christ does not despise. ...Such a conjunction of infinite highness and low condescension, in the same person, is admirable.

- **Eutychianism:**
- **hypostatic union:**
- **impeccability:**
- **incarnation:**
- **miracle:**
- **monophysitism:**
- **monothelite view:**
- **Nestorianism:**
- **virgin birth:**



TEACHING NOTES

This lesson does not incorporate Grudem's defense of the deity of Christ as a part of the required reading. Therefore, this is probably something that you will want to address in your class discussion, particularly if your students have been confronted with arguments against the deity of Christ.

Please refer to the verses listed in the Teaching Notes of Lesson 4. If you did not cover those verses in that lesson, you might want to consider covering those verses here.

Though people outside the church often struggle to believe in the deity of Christ, people within the church often struggle to understand the humanity of Christ. However, it is important that we affirm and embrace the truth that Jesus was like us in every way, with the exception that he never sinned. There is great comfort in knowing that our great High Priest can sympathize with our weaknesses. He knows what it means to be tempted. He has been made like his brothers in every way (Hebrews 2:17). It may be helpful to remind your students that Jesus grew hungry (Matthew 4:2) and thirsty (John 19:28), became weary (John 4:6), sorrowful (John 11:35), joyful (John 10:21), and troubled (John 13:21), grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52) and experienced tremendous pain (Luke 23:46). The point of stressing the humanity of Christ is that Jesus knows what it's like to be human. He has experienced the full range of human life, except that which is sinful, and therefore he can identify with us.

Throughout this course we have handled difficult issues. The two natures of Christ existing in one person is another such issue. Here is another stab at articulating the hypostatic union of Jesus, as argued by John Frame in *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (page 144):

The Reformed try a different way of showing how the two natures fit together. They say that the divine nature doesn't change the human nature or vice versa but that the person of Jesus has all the attributes of both. It is not that his body is omnipresent, but he is omni-present, in his own divine way. Jesus' actions reflect sometimes mainly his humanity and sometimes mainly his deity, but his person is both omniscient and ignorant, both omnipotent and weak, and so on."

Another topic that you will want to introduce is the kingdom of God, treated in this lesson in only a cursory way. This is part of the broader topic of

“inaugurated eschatology,” the concept that God’s end-time promised blessings have been inaugurated (started) in the person of Jesus, but that the fullness of these blessings is still awaiting consummation. This concept is particularly important in biblical theology, but should still be introduced in a course like this.

For more resources on the kingdom of God, see John Piper’s sermon series entitled, “Compassion, Power, and the Kingdom of God” (found at desiringGod.org) or the book by George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1959). See also Russell Moore’s *The Kingdom of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

Here is Pastor Tom Steller’s definition of the kingdom:

The Kingdom of God is the dynamic reign of God in Christ, which is breaking into this present evil age with salvation and with foretastes of the age to come. Through the preaching of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit the kingdom of God is now in the process of delivering men and women from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation from their own sin and from Satan’s oppression. It is here now in part, and one day will come in all its fullness and banish evil once and for all.



Day 1

TRULY MAN, TRULY GOD

In the previous lesson we saw that man is enslaved to sin, in rebellion against God, and is subject to the just wrath and condemnation of God. But we have also seen that God created the world and mankind for his glory, and that it is his aim to be glorified among all nations. What then would God do in response to sin?

Some of the most basic verses describing God's response to sin are found in Galatians 4:4-5.

Galatians 4:4-5

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

This lesson will focus on the Son of God—specifically his person and earthly ministry.

When God sent forth his Son to be “born of woman,” this is the description of his conception as described in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his

kingdom there will be no end.”³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.”³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

1. Based upon what you studied in the previous lesson, of what doctrinal importance is the virgin birth?

· **ANSWER.** We saw in the previous lesson that all of mankind is dead in Adam, conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath. And as John 3:6 asserts, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” By interrupting the normal birthing process and attributing Jesus’ conception to a work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus escapes the inherited guilt and corruption to which all other humans are subject. This is indicated in the logic of Luke 1:35: because Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit, therefore he shall be called holy.

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

It is crucial to affirm that Jesus was truly human, like us in every way, yet without sin.

Hebrews 2:14-17

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

2. Reflecting upon this passage, what might happen if we deny Jesus' full humanity?

· **ANSWER.** *The author to the Hebrews makes Jesus' full humanity a necessity for our salvation. His sharing in flesh and blood and being made like us in every respect enabled him to die a devil-destroying and delivering death, and to become a faithful high priest. Therefore, denying Jesus' humanity would call into question the effectiveness of his salvation.*

John 1:14

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Philippians 2:5-8

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

3. How does this passage in Philippians assert both the deity and humanity of Jesus?

· **ANSWER.** *V. 6 teaches us that Jesus was divine: he was in the form of God and was equal with God. Vv. 7-8 teach us that Jesus was human: he was born in the likeness of men, was found in human form, and died on a cross. He was in the form of God; he took on the form of a servant. (The word "form" in vv. 6 and 7 translates the same Greek word.)*

This curriculum has already asserted the full divinity of Jesus Christ. Please review Lesson 4, Day 2 for a few of the initial texts. To those, and whatever other texts may have been covered in class discussion, we will add one more pairing of texts.

Revelation 1:8

⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Revelation 22:12-13

¹² “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

4. Using your Bible to search the wider context, identify the speaker in Revelation 1:8 and the speaker of Revelation 22:12-13 (cf. Revelation 1:17-18). How might this pairing of texts argue for Jesus’ deity?
 - **ANSWER.** *The speaker in the first text is the Lord God, the Almighty, God the Father. The speaker in the second text is Jesus (cf. Revelation 22:16, 20). Both are said to be the Alpha and Omega. Since this is a reference to eternity, we should understand that Father and Son are equally eternal and equally God.*

“The Apocalypse has already called God ‘the Alpha and the Omega’ (1:8; 21:6) and ‘the Beginning and the End’ (21:6), and Christ has been called ‘the First and the Last’ (1:17; 2:8). Now all these titles, which are used in the OT of God, are combined and applied to Christ to highlight his deity. ... The emphasis of the bipolar names here at the end of the book is to underscore Christ’s divine ability to conclude history at his coming.”³⁹

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 529-535 (Chapter 26, Section A1–A2)

5. What additional evidence in this section did you find compelling in its support of the doctrine of the humanity of Jesus?
 - **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

³⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 1138.

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 543-554 (Chapter 26, Section B)

This section is devoted to proving the deity of Christ. Since this was addressed (though briefly) in Lesson 4, it will not be required reading. We strongly suggest, however, that you review this section to solidify your convictions, learn more arguments that can be used in apologetics, and kindle your affections with the truth about the one in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily.

Day 2

ONE PERSON, TWO NATURES

In the previous day of study, we affirmed that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Does this mean Jesus was, in actuality, two persons? How does his human nature relate to his divine nature?

We are treading on difficult ground here. It's easy to articulate a heretical view about the person of Jesus if we aren't careful and precise in our language.

John 18:37

³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

Romans 8:3

³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.

6. Explain how the two natures of Christ are seen in his one person in each passage above.

- **ANSWER.** *In John 18, Jesus shows that he is one person because he refers to himself in the first person singular ("I"). Jesus was born (and thus is human), yet he also "came into the world," implying that he came from somewhere else—namely heaven. In Romans 8, God sent his own Son (singular) who existed as his Son before he was sent, and when he was sent he came in the likeness of sinful flesh (as a human). Each passage thus implies that the Son was a single person before and after his coming into the world.*

The church has historically looked to certain creeds to give orthodox expression to the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ. Though these creeds use extra-biblical language—that is, language not explicitly found in the Bible—the

language that they use does reflect biblical truth. Examine the Chalcedonian Creed (A.D. 451) which addresses the very issue we are discussing:

“We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.”⁴⁰

7. Record at least one comment or question you have after reading this creed.

• **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

One of the more confusing texts to reconcile with the fact that Jesus is one person of two natures is Jesus’ statement of ignorance in Mark 13.

Mark 13:31-33

³¹ *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* ³² *But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* ³³ *Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.*

40 The Chalcedonian Creed, found at <https://bible.org/illustration/creed-chalcedon-ad-451>. Accessed May 2, 2016.

8. How could the Father know something that the Son did not know (13:32)? Doesn't this imply that Jesus isn't God?

· **ANSWER.** *Most Christian theologians have answered this problem by positing that Jesus has two centers of consciousness. In his human consciousness, his knowledge is limited and he learns things. In his divine consciousness, he knows all things. This assertion, however, must not be taken to mean that Jesus is not one person.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 554-563 (Chapter 26, Section C)

9. According to the reading that you have done thus far (and referring to Chapter 26 and the glossary if needed), match the following heresies to the corresponding descriptions. (Note: a heresy may match more than one description. Write the letter next to the corresponding number(s).)

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|--|
| A. Apollinarianism | <u>A, C, D</u> | 1. Denies the humanity of Jesus |
| B. Arianism | <u>B, D</u> | 2. Denies the deity of Jesus |
| C. docetism | <u>F</u> | 3. Denies that Jesus is one person |
| D. monophysitism | <u>A, B, C, D, E</u> | 4. Denies that Jesus is of two natures, human and divine |
| E. monothelite view | | |
| F. Nestorianism | | |

10. Which heretical understanding of Jesus are you most prone to, even if unconsciously?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Day 3

A LIFE WITHOUT SIN

The God-Man, Jesus, lived among us. What, now, can we say about his life? One of the most basic affirmations of Scripture is that Jesus lived without sin, though he was tempted.

Hebrews 2:17-18

¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Hebrews 4:14-15

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

11. Of what significance is it that Jesus was genuinely tempted, according to the author of Hebrews?

· **ANSWER.** *According to the author of Hebrews, Jesus is able to help us and sympathize with us because he was made like us and has been tempted as we are. This makes him our qualified high priest.*

Matthew 4:1

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Mark 1:13

¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.

Luke 4:1-2

¹ And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.

It must be said definitively, though, that Jesus never sinned. As Hebrews 4:15 says, Jesus “in every respect has been tempted as we are, *yet without sin*.” Here are a number of other texts which affirm this truth:

Luke 23:40-41, 47

⁴⁰ *But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ...*

⁴⁷ *Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!”*

John 8:28-29

²⁸ *So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. ²⁹ And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”*

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

1 Peter 2:21-23

²¹ *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*

1 John 3:4-5

⁴ *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.*

12. Who are the authors of these texts? Why might the diversity of authors be significant?

- **ANSWER.** *The authors are, respectively, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, and John. This is significant because it demonstrates that the sinlessness of Jesus is a doctrine taught by many NT authors, in Gospels as well as epistles. Thus, we may infer that this is a central and undisputed tenet of apostolic teaching.*

1 Peter 1:17-19

¹⁷ *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,*
¹⁸ *knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,* ¹⁹ *but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

Hebrews 7:25-27

²⁵ *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.* ²⁶ *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.* ²⁷ *He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.*

Hebrews 9:13-14

¹³ *For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh,* ¹⁴ *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*

13. Why is the doctrine of Jesus' sinlessness theologically important?

- **ANSWER.** *It is theologically significant because it is tied to his atoning work. His sinless-ness qualified him to be the spotless sacrifice. He could not have atoned for the sins of others if he had sinned himself. But since he didn't sin, he is able to purify us completely and finally in one, decisive act.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 535-539 (Chapter 26, Section A3–A4)

14. Summarize Grudem's answer to the question, "Could Jesus have sinned?"

- **ANSWER.** *Grudem claims that Scripture clearly teaches us five things: 1) Christ never actually sinned; 2) Jesus was tempted with real temptations; 3) Jesus is fully man; 4) Jesus is fully God; and 5) God cannot be tempted with evil. Although difficult to harmonize these statements, Grudem believes that the union of the human and divine nature prevented sin from being an actual possibility for Jesus.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 540-543 (Chapter 26, Section A5–A6)

Day 4

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHRIST

When the Gospels describe the ministry of Jesus in summary statements, they invariably sound like this:

Matthew 4:23-25

²³ *And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.* ²⁴ *So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.*

²⁵ *And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.*

15. From the above passage and your knowledge of the Gospels, what activities characterized Jesus' ministry? Why might this be significant?

- **ANSWER.** *Jesus' ministry was characterized by teaching, proclaiming the gospel, healing, and casting out demons. The latter two activities (healing and casting out demons) demonstrate the presence of the kingdom and confirm the authority of the former two activities (teaching and proclaiming). Throughout his ministry Jesus was showing that the prophetic hope of Israel was being realized in him.*

Jesus' ministry was full of mighty works, or "miracles." Though we can't examine every miracle that is recorded in Scripture, we will examine two of the miracles that are mentioned in at least three of the four Gospels.

Matthew 14:15-21 (cf. Mark 6:35-44, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-13)

¹⁵ *Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves."* ¹⁶ *But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."* ¹⁷ *They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish."* ¹⁸ *And he said, "Bring them here to me."* ¹⁹ *Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave*

them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

16. Why is the miracle important enough to be recorded in all four Gospels?

- **ANSWER.** *This question is difficult to answer. But we can be sure that attempts to explain away the miraculous nature of this feeding inevitably fail. It is possible that Jesus is assuming the direct role God has had in the past for providing for the needs of his people. Jesus, as the one bringing the kingdom of God, is providing more than enough for Israel, as symbolized in the twelve remaining baskets of food. The kingdom of God is present in his person.*

Another well-known miracle is Jesus' walking on water:

Mark 6:45-52 (cf. Matthew 14:22-32, John 6:15-21)

⁴⁵ Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

17. Why did Jesus mean to pass by his disciples (6:48)? The same Greek word (*parerchomai*, “to pass by”) occurs also in Exodus 33:19. Does that observation furnish a clue?

- **ANSWER.** *When Mark writes that Jesus “meant to pass by them,” he doesn’t mean that Jesus was just quietly and discreetly walking to the other side. This is the same verb (parerchomai) that is used in Exodus 33:19, “And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name “The LORD.” And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.’” Jesus came out on the water and intended to pass them by in the way that God passed by Moses, so that they would see his glory. The disciples were in the boat full of fear, so Jesus, out of love for them, walks out on the water so that they can see him and be reminded that Jesus is ruler of the sea and that he has committed himself to meet their needs and be their shield of protection. (verse 50 literally says, “Take courage, I am, do not be afraid.”)*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 355-361 (Chapter 17, Sections A–C)

18. List the purpose for miracles according to Grudem.

- **ANSWER.** *According to Grudem, miracles are intended to: 1) authenticate the message of the gospel; 2) bear witness to the inauguration of the kingdom of God; 3) help those in need; and 4) remove hindrances to people’s ministries.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 361-372 (Chapter 17, Sections D–F)

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

6.1 *We believe that in the fullness of time God sent forth His eternal Son as Jesus the Messiah, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. We believe that, when the eternal Son became flesh, He took on a fully human nature, so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one Person, without confusion or mixture. Thus the Person, Jesus Christ, was and is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ and the only Mediator between God and man.*

6.2 *We believe that Jesus Christ lived without sin, though He endured the common infirmities and temptations of human life. He preached and taught with truth and authority unparalleled in human history. He worked miracles, demonstrating His divine right and power over all creation: dispatching demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, stilling the storm, walking on water, multiplying loaves, and foreknowing what would befall Him and His disciples, including the betrayal of Judas and the denial, restoration, and eventual martyrdom of Peter.*

19. Compare the Affirmation and the Chalcedonian creed. What similarities do you see?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

20. Interact with this statement: “I believe in Jesus. I just don’t believe that he performed all those miracles. We in the 21st century know that miracles don’t really happen.”

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

 INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT



Choose another miracle story from one of the Gospels. Study it, noticing what is implied about Jesus' humanity or deity, if anything. Reflect on what this particular story tells us about Jesus' ministry. Record your reflections below and be prepared to share them with the class.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Why did Jesus have to be both human and divine in order to save us?
2. Does Jesus still have a body right now, in heaven?
3. Should all ministries look at all like the ministry of Jesus? Why?
4. Your own question(s):

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).
- ▷ John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).
- ▷ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1994).
- ▷ Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998).
- ▷ Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: B&H, 1997).
- ▷ Benjamin Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1950).

Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God (2)

11

§ INTRODUCTION

The resurrection of the crucified Savior has inspired worship, praise, adoration, witness, boldness, and faith for generations. It is fitting to open this lesson with a short devotional by John Piper:

“The meaning of the resurrection is that God is for us. He aims to close ranks with us. He aims to overcome all our sense of abandonment and alienation.

The resurrection of Jesus is God’s declaration to Israel and to the world that we cannot work our way to glory but that he intends to do the impossible to get us there.

The resurrection is the promise of God that all who trust Jesus will be the beneficiaries of God’s power to lead us in paths of righteousness and through the valley of death.

Therefore, believing in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead is much more than accepting a fact. It means being confident that God is for you, that he has closed ranks with you, that he is transforming your life, and that he will save you for eternal joy.

Believing in the resurrection means trusting in all the promises of life and hope and righteousness for which it stands.

It means being so confident of God’s power and love that no fear of worldly loss or greed for worldly gain will lure us to disobey his will.

That’s the difference between Satan and the saints. O, might God circumcise our hearts to love him and to rest in the resurrection of his Son.”⁴¹

41 John Piper, “What the Resurrection Means,” Blogpost, August 19, 2016 (resource on Desiring God website: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-the-resurrection-means>).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- ▷ demonstrate how Christ fulfills several key prophecies from the Old Testament
- ▷ explain the doctrinal significance of the resurrection
- ▷ describe Christ's post-resurrection activity and ministry

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **ascension:**

- **covenant of grace:**

- **covenant of works:**

- **resurrection:**



The material in this lesson is fairly straightforward. Most of your students are probably familiar with the basics ideas of Jesus fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, being raised from the dead, and ascending to heaven.

Therefore, this lesson might be an opportunity to deepen your students' understanding in one of three areas:

1. Apologetics

If you discern that your students might be most interested in learning how to defend the doctrine of the resurrection to their unbelieving family, friends, and co-workers, then focus on Piper's article and bring in other material that you have found helpful on this topic. The book *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?* listed in the "Additional Resources" is an actual debate between the two authors. You could even use part of your class session to stage a mock debate and thereby expose your students to the typical objections to the historicity of the resurrection.

2. Inaugurated Eschatology

Especially if you didn't have the opportunity to talk about this subject during the last lesson, you may want to during this lesson. Stress that Jesus fulfilled the prophetic hope of the OT ("all the promises of God are yes in him"), but not completely. You may want to stress the relationship between Jesus' resurrection and ours. If you are knowledgeable in the differences between dispensationalism, covenant theology, and new covenant theology, you might want to introduce that to your students at this point.

3. The New Testament use of the Old Testament

The New Testament's use of the Old Testament is a flowering subject of study. Since many of the New Testament quotations of the Old Testament reward a broader study of the Old Testament context, you may want to teach your students some of the basic guidelines for interpretation in this area. A book that lays out different interpretive stances on this issue is *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text?* edited by G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994). As far as this subject's intersection with the doctrine of Christ's resurrection, notice the repeated use of Psalm 16 in the early apostolic preaching.

When discussing the objective basis for our salvation, the resurrection is often short-changed. Perhaps in our zeal to safeguard the importance of the

work of Christ on the cross, we inadvertently neglect the biblical teaching on the redemptive significance of Christ's resurrection. This lesson provides an opportunity to give due weight to the resurrection of Christ. In particular, you might stress the following:

1. The resurrection of Jesus is both the demonstration of his deity (John 10:18) and the transformation of his humanity (1 Corinthians 15:42-49). Jesus' body was sown perishable, but raised imperishable. It was sown in dishonor, but raised in glory. In other words, in the resurrection, Jesus, as a human being, is transformed, changed, and glorified.
2. The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of our future resurrection (1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:20-23). He is the firstfruits of the resurrection harvest.
3. Believers are united to Christ in his death, resurrection, and ascension. For example, Ephesians 1:20 tells us that God "raised him (Jesus) from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places." A few verses later in Ephesians 2:6, Paul tells us that God "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." These verses teach that we are united to Christ such that what is true of him is now also true of us.
4. The practical importance of the doctrine of Christ's resurrection and ascension can be seen in this quotation from John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, about his conversion:

"One day as I was passing into the field...this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And methought, withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he [lacks] righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, 'The same yesterday, today, and forever.' Hebrews 13:8. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that time those dreadful scriptures of God [about the unforgivable sin] left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God." John Bunyan (as quoted in "Living Upon God that is Invisible," a sermon at desiringGod.org)

Notice the connection that Bunyan draws between the resurrection and ascension of Christ ("Jesus Christ at God's right hand") and the doctrine of justification ("my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself"). The fact that the one sinless, perfect human being has paid the penalty for sin and been glorified and exalted to God's right hand guarantees that all those who are connected to him can have confidence and joy in God's holy presence.



Day 1

THE ONE WHO WAS TO COME

At the end of the previous lesson we learned that Jesus' ministry proclaimed and demonstrated that the kingdom of God had come, that the God of Israel was finally fulfilling the promises he had made to Abraham and Israel.

One of the important strands of New Testament Christology is that Jesus fulfills the prophetic and Messianic hope of the Old Testament. In this day's study we will examine four titles of the Christ drawn from the Old Testament.

Jesus is a *prophet like Moses*.

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

¹⁵ *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—* ¹⁶ *just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, “Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.”* ¹⁷ *And the LORD said to me, “They are right in what they have spoken.* ¹⁸ *I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.* ¹⁹ *And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.”*

Acts 3:19-24

¹⁹ *Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,* ²⁰ *that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,* ²¹ *whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.* ²² *Moses said, “The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.* ²³ *And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.”* ²⁴ *And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.*

1. In what way is Jesus a prophet like Moses?

- **ANSWER.** *Jesus is the prophet like Moses for just as Moses led God's people out of slavery in Egypt, so also Jesus has led God's people out of slavery to sin. Jesus brings about the redemption that God's people need and now they must follow him and obey him. While Moses was the mediator of God's revelation and covenant, now Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant and the one who fully reveals the God of Israel to the world.*

Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Psalm 110:1, 4

¹ *The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." ...⁴ The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."*

Hebrews 5:5-6

⁵ *So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";⁶ as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."*

Hebrews 7:1-11

¹ *For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,² and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.³ He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.⁴ See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham.⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.⁸ In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives.*

⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. ¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?

2. Why is the Messiah a priest according to the order of Melchizedek rather than according to the order of Aaron?

· **ANSWER.** Abraham gave a tenth of his wealth to Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High. Then Melchizedek blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:18-20). He is mentioned one other time in the Old Testament in Psalm 110, which is a Messianic psalm. The Messiah will be a priest of God in the likeness of Melchizedek. This theme is then picked up in Hebrews and applied to Jesus the Messiah. The point of Hebrews 7 is that the priest of Melchizedek is greater than the Levitical priesthood and this is why the Messiah must be a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:11). Jesus is the true high priest who has no need to offer sacrifices for his own sin and whose sacrifice offered for the sins of the people is so sufficient that it is offered only once (unlike the Aaronic priesthood).

The Son of David is the promised king, for the kingship belongs to the line of David. Jesus is the *Son of David*. Here are the two primary texts of the Old Testament:

2 Samuel 7:12-16

¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.

Psalm 2:6-9

⁶ “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

Now notice the following New Testament texts:

Matthew 12:22-23

²² Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. ²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”

Matthew 21:1-9

¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

Matthew 21:14-16

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?’”

Luke 1:30-33

³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

3. What were the crowds in Jesus' day expecting the Son of David to be like?

- **ANSWER.** *They were expecting the Son of David to be a king like David, who would sit on a throne, destroy Israel's enemies, and reign forever. Apparently, they thought the king's victory would take the shape of a military defeat of the Romans. Apparently, they also had an expectation that the Son of David would come with power to heal (cf. Matthew 12:22-23; 21:14-15).*

Jesus, however, was not the kind of king that Israel was expecting. His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). Jesus was not only the Son of David, but also the *Suffering Servant*. This was an unexpected combination of roles.

Isaiah 52:13

¹³ Behold, My servant shall act wisely, He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.

Isaiah 53:3-6

³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows He carried; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; upon his was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Mark 10:45

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

4. What significance does it have for our lives that Jesus, the promised King, was also the suffering servant?
 - **ANSWER.** *We should be in awe of the fact that the King of Kings would become a servant. The one worthy of all glory and honor has chosen to humble himself and serve those that are worthy of nothing. Therefore, our lives ought to be lives of service. We are not worthy of service, yet Jesus serves us. How much more ought we to serve others? To be con-formed to the image of Jesus, means, in part, being conformed to his example of service and modeling that service to others.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 624-629 (Chapter 29, Sections A–C)

5. Grudem argues that “prophet” is not a primary designation of Jesus. Why?
 - **ANSWER.** *Grudem think that the New Testament avoided calling Jesus a prophet because he is greater than any of the OT prophets because he is the one about whom the prophecies were made, and was himself the source of revelation. Therefore, the term prophet could have been misunderstood if applied too often to Jesus. He was a prophet like none other.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 629-630 (Chapter 29, Section D)

Day 2

DIED, BURIED, RAISED

This lesson will not interpret the significance of Jesus' death. That task will be left for the following lesson. Rather, we will, for now, simply assert that Jesus did actually die. And then, Jesus was raised!

Why should we focus on Jesus' resurrection before attempting to interpret the significance of his death? We will work in reverse order because that is probably how the disciples also thought through Jesus' death and resurrection. After Jesus was crucified, his disciples were confused. Although they had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel (Luke 24:21), the crucifixion seems to have dashed their hopes.

But then came the glorious news: Jesus is risen! After seeing the risen Jesus, the disciples must have started to think about what his death must have meant. They probably recalled his teaching, the Last Supper they enjoyed with him, and predictions that he had made. Therefore, since his resurrection was the vindication of his saving work, the disciples probably did not understand his death until they believed in his resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:1-5

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

6. Underline the components of Paul's gospel. Why might Paul have mentioned that Jesus was buried?

- **ANSWER.** *It was important for Paul and the early disciples to assert that Jesus was buried, because it proved that Jesus was, in fact, dead. And they needed to establish that Jesus was, in fact, dead so that they could proclaim that he was risen from the dead. If Jesus had not really died, then there would be no resurrection from the dead to prove his words and work were of God.*

The Lord is risen!

Acts 2:22-32

²² Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵ For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.” ²⁹ Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

7. What does Peter emphasize in this proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection?

- **ANSWER.** In speaking to his fellow Jews, it is significant that Peter does not feel compelled to prove that Jesus actually died. He assumes that his countrymen will know this. Rather, Peter focuses on proving that both Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection were the plan of God. Since Jews of Peter’s day could not easily fathom how a crucified “criminal” could be Israel’s victorious Messiah, he quotes an OT psalm, shows that it could not refer to David, and then applies it to Jesus. Peter then stresses that he and the other disciples were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection.

He is risen indeed!

Romans 1:1-5

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to

*the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,
5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the
obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...*

8. According to this passage, how does the resurrection factor into Paul's expression of the gospel?

- **ANSWER.** *The resurrection declares that Jesus is the Son of God. The crucifixion appeared to proclaim over Jesus, not "the Son of God" but rather "false Messiah." This is how the religious leaders were interpreting his death as they mocked him at the cross. The resurrection overturns this verdict. Jesus is the Son of God, and is therefore able to bring salvation and is worthy to receive obedience.*

This course will not go into a detailed defense of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection (although you can find more information by using the Additional Resources section of this lesson). Rather, we will simply include one of John Piper's brief articles that articulates eight reasons why we can believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

1. Jesus himself testified to his coming resurrection from the dead.

Jesus spoke openly about what would happen to him: crucifixion and then resurrection from the dead. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31; see also Matthew 17:22; Luke 9:22). Those who consider the resurrection of Christ unbelievable will probably say that Jesus was deluded or (more likely) that the early church put these statements in his mouth to make him teach the falsehood that they themselves conceived. But those who read the Gospels and come to the considered conviction that the one who speaks so compellingly through these witnesses is not the figment of foolish imagination will be unsatisfied with this effort to explain away Jesus' own testimony to his resurrection from the dead.

This is especially true in view of the fact that the words which predict the resurrection are not only the simple straightforward words quoted above, but also the very oblique and indirect words which are far less likely to be the simple invention of deluded disciples. For example, two separate witnesses testify in two very different ways to Jesus' statement during his lifetime that if his enemies destroyed the temple (of his body), he would build it again in three days (John 2:19; Mark 14:58; cf. Matthew 26:61). He also spoke illusively

of the “sign of Jonah”—three days in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39; 16:4). And he hinted at it again in Matthew 21:42— “The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.” On top of his own witness to the coming resurrection, his accusers said that this was part of Jesus’ claim: “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise’” (Matthew 27:63).

Our first evidence of the resurrection, therefore, is that Jesus himself spoke of it. The breadth and nature of the sayings make it unlikely that a deluded church made these up. And the character of Jesus himself, revealed in these witnesses, has not been judged by most people to be a lunatic or a deceiver.

2. The tomb was empty on Easter.

The earliest documents claim this: “When they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus” (Luke 24:3). And the enemies of Jesus confirmed it by claiming that the disciples had stolen the body (Matthew 28:13). The dead body of Jesus could not be found. There are four possible ways to account for this.

2.1 His foes stole the body. If they did (and they never claimed to have done so), they surely would have produced the body to stop the successful spread of the Christian faith in the very city where the crucifixion occurred. But they could not produce it.

2.2 His friends stole the body. This was an early rumor (Matthew 28:11-15). Is it probable? Could they have overcome the guards at the tomb? More important, would they have begun to preach with such authority that Jesus was raised, knowing that he was not? Would they have risked their lives and accepted beatings for something they knew was a fraud?

2.3 Jesus was not dead, but only unconscious when they laid him in the tomb. He awoke, removed the stone, overcame the soldiers, and vanished from history after a few meetings with his disciples in which he convinced them he was risen from the dead. Even the foes of Jesus did not try this line. He was obviously dead. The Romans saw to that. The stone could not be moved by one man from within who had just been stabbed in the side by a spear and spent six hours nailed to a cross.

2.4 God raised Jesus from the dead. This is what he said would happen. It is what the disciples said did happen. But as long as there is a remote possibility of explaining the resurrection naturalistically, modern people say we should not jump to a supernatural explanation. Is this reasonable? I don’t think so. Of course, we don’t want to be gullible.

But neither do we want to reject the truth just because it's strange. We need to be aware that our commitments at this point are much affected by our preferences—either for the state of affairs that would arise from the truth of the resurrection, or for the state of affairs that would arise from the falsehood of the resurrection. If the message of Jesus has opened you to the reality of God and the need of forgiveness, for example, then anti-supernatural dogma might lose its power over your mind. Could it be that this openness is not prejudice for the resurrection, but freedom from prejudice against it?

3. The disciples were almost immediately transformed from men who were hopeless and fearful after the crucifixion (Luke 24:21, John 20:19) into men who were confident and bold witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 2:24, 3:15, 4:2).

Their explanation of this change was that they had seen the risen Christ and had been authorized to be his witnesses (Acts 2:32). The most popular competing explanation is that their confidence was owing to hallucinations. There are numerous problems with such a notion. The disciples were not gullible, but level-headed skeptics both before and after the resurrection. (Mark 9:32, Luke 24:11, John 20:8-9, 25). Moreover, is the deep and noble teaching of those who witnessed the risen Christ the stuff of which hallucinations are made? What about Paul's great letter to the Romans? I personally find it hard to think of this giant intellect and deeply transparent soul as deluded or deceptive, and he claimed to have seen the risen Christ.

4. Paul claimed that, not only had he seen the risen Christ, but that 500 others had seen him also, and many were still alive when he made this public claim.

“Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:6). What makes this so relevant is that this was written to Greeks who were skeptical of such claims when many of these witnesses were still alive. So it was a risky claim if it could be disproved by a little firsthand research.

5. The sheer existence of a thriving, empire-conquering early Christian church supports the truth of the resurrection claim.

The church spread on the power of the testimony that Jesus was raised from the dead and that God had thus made him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The Lordship of Christ over all nations is based on his victory over death. This is the message that spread all over the world. Its power to cross cultures and create one new people of God was a strong testimony of its truth.

6. The Apostle Paul's conversion supports the truth of the resurrection.

He argues to a partially unsympathetic audience in Galatians 1:11-17 that his gospel comes from the risen Jesus Christ, not from men. His argument is that before his Damascus Road experience when he saw the risen Jesus, he was violently opposed to the Christian faith (Acts 9:1). But now, to everyone's astonishment, he is risking his life for the gospel (Acts 9:24-25). His explanation: The risen Jesus appeared to him and authorized him to spearhead the Gentile mission (Acts 26:15-18). Can we credit such a testimony? This leads to the next argument.

7. The New Testament witnesses do not bear the stamp of dupes or deceivers.

How do you credit a witness? How do you decide whether to believe a person's testimony? The decision to give credence to a person's testimony is not the same as completing a mathematical equation. The certainty is of a different kind, yet can be just as firm (I trust my wife's testimony that she is faithful). When a witness is dead, we can base our judgment of him only on the content of his writings and the testimonies of others about him. How do Peter and John and Matthew and Paul stack up? In my judgment (and at this point we can live authentically only by our own judgment—Luke 12:57), these men's writings do not read like the works of gullible, easily deceived or deceiving men. Their insights into human nature are profound. Their personal commitment is sober and carefully stated. Their teachings are coherent and do not look like the invention of unstable men. The moral and spiritual standard is high. And the lives of these men are totally devoted to the truth and to the honor of God.

8. There is a self-authenticating glory in the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection as narrated by the biblical witnesses.

The New Testament teaches that God sent the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.... He will glorify me" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit does not do this by telling us that Jesus rose from the dead. He does it by opening our eyes to see the self-authenticating glory of Christ in the narrative of his life and death and resurrection. He enables us to see Jesus as he really was, so that he is irresistibly true and beautiful. The apostle stated the problem of our blindness and the solution like this: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.... For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6).

*A saving knowledge of Christ crucified and risen is not the mere result of right reasoning about historical facts. It is the result of spiritual illumination to see those facts for what they really are: a revelation of the truth and glory of God in the face of Christ—who is the same yesterday today and forever.*⁴²

9. Of these eight reasons, which do you find the most compelling?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 608-614 (Chapter 28, Section A1–A3)

Luke 24:37-43

³⁷ *But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.* ³⁸ *And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?*

³⁹ *See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”* ⁴⁰ *And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.* ⁴¹ *And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”*

⁴² *They gave him a piece of broiled fish,* ⁴³ *and he took it and ate before them.*

10. According to Grudem, what theological assertion does a passage like this support?

· **ANSWER.** *This passage gives direct support to the claim that Jesus’ physical body could be touched and handled (609). But later Grudem cites this passage again as evidence that Jesus’ resurrection body was a physical body, and that it is misleading to think of the resurrected body as a body that only occasionally materialized in appearances to the disciples (612).*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 515-519 (Chapter 25, Sections A–B)

⁴² John Piper, “Eight Reasons Why I Believe That Jesus Rose from the Dead” an article from desiringGod.org.

Day 3

IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED...

We have already seen some of the theological significance of Jesus' resurrection. A helpful way to see what is at stake in the resurrection is to contemplate what is lost in denying it. Paul reflects on this very scenario in his important chapter on the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

11. Reconstruct the chain of Paul's argument here by writing out his series of inferences that starts with the premise that there is no resurrection of the dead.
 - A1. *There is no resurrection of the dead (or the dead are not raised).*
 - A2. *Christ has not been raised.*
 - A3. *Paul's preaching is vain; he has misrepresented God.*
 - A4. *The Corinthians' faith (based on Paul's preaching) is vain or futile.*
 - A5. *The Corinthians are still in their sins; there is no forgiveness of sins.*
 - A6. *The dead who had trusted in Christ are lost or have perished.*
 - A7. *Those who trust in Christ are to be pitied above all people.*

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

12. After examining the above passage, again think about what would be lost if Christ had not been raised from the dead. Is it possible for someone to deny the resurrection and still be saved?

· ANSWER. Answers will vary

When Paul describes our union to Christ in his resurrection, notice the realities that are thereby true of us.

Romans 6:1-13

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he

lives to God.¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

13. Underline the purpose statements of our unification with Christ. Can someone who is united to Christ continue to live in sin? What commands does Paul infer from our union with Christ?

- **ANSWER.** *No, one who is united to Christ cannot live in sin. (We should understand that although believers still do sin, they do not “live” in sin; there is a difference.) Paul infers the following commands from our union with Christ: 1) consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus; 2) let not sin reign in your mortal bodies; 3) do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness; and 4) present yourselves to God and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 614–616 (Chapter 28, Section A4–A5)

14. According to Grudem, what does it mean that Christ has been “raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25)?

- **ANSWER.** *Grudem asserts that in raising Jesus from the dead, God is “putting his stamp of approval” on Jesus’ atoning work, finding Jesus as righteous in his sight. When we are united to Jesus by faith, we share in this same declaration of righteousness. Therefore, when united to the Righteous One (or Justified One), we become righteous ones, or justified ones.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 519–522 (Chapter 25, Section C)

Day 4

ASCENDED, EXALTED, AND INTERCEDING

The doctrine of the ascension receives little attention. Here are two biblical descriptions of this event:

Luke 24:50-53

⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Acts 1:9-11

⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

15. Why would the disciples rejoice at the departure of Jesus (Luke 24:52)?

- **ANSWER.** *The disciples would only rejoice at the ascension of Jesus if two things were true: 1) they were confident that he would return and take them with him; and 2) Jesus was leaving them to do things which he couldn't do if he stayed. For an extended defense of this position, see John Piper's sermon entitled, "The Ascent of Joy," which is online at desiringGod.org.*

John 14:2-3

² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 16:7

⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

What happens after Jesus ascends into heaven?

Acts 2:32-33

³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

Hebrews 10:12-13

¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

1 Peter 3:21-22

²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

16. Were Jesus' enemies subjected to him when he sat down at the right hand of God?

- **ANSWER.** Yes and no. Clearly Jesus has won the decisive victory over his enemies by accomplishing the forgiveness of sins and the pouring out of the Spirit. However, it is also true that he is waiting until his enemies will be completely subjected to him, which will happen at his second coming. This phenomenon of “already” and “not yet” is called “inaugurated eschatology” by theologians.

Romans 8:33-34

³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Hebrews 7:22-25

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. ²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

17. What do these passages teach us about the continual work of Christ on our behalf? What should our response be to this work of Christ?

- **ANSWER.** *These passages indicate that Christ is continually interceding for us. On this basis, Paul asserts that there is no one who can condemn us. The author of Hebrews infers that his intercession ensures the efficacy of our salvation. Our response to this should be gratitude, praise, adoration, comfort, and boldness!*

We should continually remind ourselves that the Eternal Son of God did not clothe himself with flesh, live for thirty-three years, die on the cross, rise from the grave, and then shed his humanity and go back to simply being God again. Jesus Christ ascended to heaven as a glorified human being and he remains a human being today. As 1 Timothy 2:5 reminds us, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and man, *the man* Christ Jesus.” As a glorified human being, he is our forerunner (Hebrews 6:20) who enters into the heavenly places as our representative and stands before God in our place.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 616-620 (Chapter 28, Sections B–C)

18. According to Grudem, what two popular misconceptions do some evangelicals hold about the nature of Jesus’ resurrected body and Jesus’ ascension?

- **ANSWER.** *Grudem thinks that speculating about the ability for Jesus to “immaterialize” in his resurrected body (or walk through walls) and his ascension as a disappearance or a passing into an ethereal “state of being” are both unhelpful because they could undermine the physicality of Jesus’ body and heaven, and undermine the affirmation of physical creation as good.*

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

6.3 *We believe that His life was governed by His Father's providence with a view to fulfilling all Old Testament prophecies concerning the One who was to come, such as the Seed of the woman, the Prophet like Moses, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, the Son of David, and the Suffering Servant.*

6.4 *We believe that Jesus Christ suffered voluntarily in fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, that He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, that He died, was buried and on the third day rose from the dead to vindicate the saving work of His life and death and to take His place as the invincible, everlasting Lord of glory. During forty days after His resurrection, He gave many compelling evidences of His bodily resurrection and then ascended bodily into heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for His people on the basis of His all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, and reigning until He puts all His enemies under His feet.*

19. Can you think of any other prophecies that Jesus fulfilled in his life?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

20. According to this affirmation, what were at least two purposes of Jesus' resurrection?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

 INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT



Write a brief rebuttal directed toward a skeptic who questions the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Or, write an appeal to someone who may claim Christ but denies his resurrection.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Is the picture of who the Messiah would be clear in the Old Testament?
2. Would it be possible to affirm that Jesus was raised from the dead while still refusing to believe in his message?
3. What hinders Christians from recognizing that Jesus is alive and active today?
4. Your own question(s):

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ Richard Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1987).
- ▷ John Piper, “The Marvelous Rising of a Rejected Stone,” an online sermon at desiringGod.org
- ▷ Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus Ascended* (Philadelphia: P&R, 2004).
- ▷ William Lane Craig and Gerd Ludemann, *Jesus’ Resurrection: Fact or Figment?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000).
- ▷ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

The Saving Work of Christ

12

📖 INTRODUCTION

“At the center of what Paul preaches is the bloody, criminal, shame-covered, torturing, scandalous cross of Jesus Christ. That is the heart of his message. Christ was insulted, Christ was mocked, ridiculed, scorned, derided, satirized, parodied, caricatured, and then hung up like a piece of meat and speared to see if it was done. And [1 Corinthians 1:18] says this is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Indeed it is the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).”⁴³

This lesson will lift up the bloody, scandalous cross of Christ. We will investigate the doctrine of the atonement and define its extent and nature. Consider the centrality of the cross in Paul’s ministry and life: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2); “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- ▶ trace a theology of the atonement from Old Testament to New
- ▶ argue persuasively for the penal substitutionary view of the atonement
- ▶ argue persuasively for the limited or definite nature of the atonement

⁴³ John Piper, “Let the One Who Boasts Boast in the Lord,” an online sermon at desiringGod.org.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **active obedience:**
- **atonement:**
- **limited atonement:**
- **passive obedience:**
- **penal substitution:**
- **propitiation:**
- **unlimited atonement:**



This final lesson is one of the most important lessons of the course. Since penal substitution has come under increasing attack, you may want to spend the majority of the class period defending this view. The following sixteen points distill the central, biblical assertions of this view:

1. God is holy and can tolerate no sin in his presence. (Leviticus 10:1-3)
2. When our holy God encounters sin, he is wrathful. (Deuteronomy 29:22, 24-28; John 3:36; Revelation 14:9-10)
3. God's wrath against sin and his holiness demand that sin be justly punished. (2 Thessalonians 1:5-8; Romans 6:23)
4. The crucial question, then, becomes "*How* can a just and holy God forgive sin?"
5. The consistent pattern of the Old Testament is of God forgiving sins through sacrifice, with particular reference to the blood of the sacrifice. (Leviticus 17:11)
6. Although the inner logic of how sacrifice removed or covered sin is not as explicit as we would like at times, substitution is clearly in view. (Leviticus 16)
7. It is clear that animal sacrifices in themselves are not effective in removing sin. (Isaiah 1:10-17; Psalm 51:16-17)
8. It is also clear that repentance and contrition alone are not effective in removing sin. (Psalm 51:7, 18-19; Hebrew 9:22)
9. God promised to achieve a definitive forgiveness of sins in the new covenant. (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-26, 29, 33; Isaiah 53:4-7, 12)
10. Jesus presented his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins in the new covenant, fulfilling God's promises. (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 5:7)
11. Jesus' death is portrayed in sacrificial terms, emphasizing the role of his blood in removing our sins. (Hebrews 9:11-14, 10:1-14)
12. Explicit New Testament reflection on Jesus' death portrays Jesus' death as satisfying the wrath and justice of God. (Romans 3:23-26; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, 2:14-16, 5:9-10)
13. The penal substitution view of the atonement provides the best explanation of the inner logic of *how* a just God who is wrathful toward sin can forgive sinners.
14. Therefore, although penal substitution is at the heart of the atonement, it doesn't necessarily exhaust the significance of Jesus' death. (Colossians 2:13-15, 1:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:16-17, 54-57)

15. When properly understood, the penal substitution view does not portray God's execution of Jesus as divine child abuse; neither does it implicitly endorse violence. (Acts 2:23, 4:27)
16. Understanding and affirming the penal substitution view of the atonement is crucial in the preservation of God's righteousness and in our worship of the Lamb who was slain. (Revelation 5:9-10)

The doctrine of particular redemption is often hard for people to embrace, especially if this is their first exposure to it. Recognize the difficulty that this doctrine poses for people and encourage them to search the Scriptures diligently in order to resolve any questions they have. In addition, it may be helpful to emphasize the following points:

1. Those who hold to particular redemption (Calvinists) can affirm everything that an Arminian affirms in regard to the atonement. When an Arminian says, "Christ died for every single person," he means (assuming he is not a universalist) that "Christ died such that anyone who believes will be saved." The Calvinist can and should wholeheartedly affirm this point in order to establish common ground with the Arminian.
2. However, Calvinists believe more than the Arminian. Calvinists believe that, not only did Christ die such that anyone who believes will be saved, but also he died such that the elect will in fact believe and be saved. In other words, the question about the extent of the atonement does not have to be either-or. It can be both-and. Yes, Christ died for every single human being, in one sense. And he also died for the elect in a different and more profound sense. This is sometimes expressed by saying the Jesus' death was sufficient for all, but only effective for some.
3. An analogy that you can use to illustrate this point is the fact that a Christian man may love all of his sisters in Christ in a general sense, but the Christian man also loves his wife in a different and special sense. In the same way, God loves every individual in one sense (see Lesson 6, Day 3 on common grace for the ways that God loves all people), but he loves his bride in a different and deeper sense (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Since this is the last lesson of *Theological Foundations I*, it might be appropriate to spend about 30 minutes at the end of class either discussing any remaining questions or discussing ways in which the students' view of God has changed over the semester. Either of these options might help draw things together in their minds and give them a sense of closure. Encourage your students to continue their study of systematic theology by beginning *Theological Foundations II*. Remind them of the final assignment for the course.



Day 1

FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE OLD COVENANT

In order to build a well-informed view of the atonement, perhaps it is wisest to first lay the Old Testament foundations. By constructing our view from biblical texts, we will guard ourselves from letting contemporary culture and modern “sensibilities” dictate what we “can and cannot believe.”

One of the most fundamental assertions we can make is that God is holy and can tolerate no sin in his presence. This is vividly seen in the execution of Nadab and Abihu.

Leviticus 10:1-3

¹ Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said, ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’”

Now notice God’s attitude toward sin:

Deuteronomy 29:22, 24-28

²² And the next generation, your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, will say, when they see the afflictions of that land and the sicknesses with which the LORD has made it sick— ... ²⁴ all the nations will say, “Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What caused the heat of this great anger?” ²⁵ Then people will say, “It is because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, ²⁶ and went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them. ²⁷ Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, ²⁸ and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as they are this day.”

Here are New Testament texts that witness to this same, shocking reality.

John 3:36

³⁶ *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

Revelation 14:9-10

⁹ *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”*

1. Underline all the descriptions of God’s emotional response toward sin (and sinners!) in Deuteronomy 29, John 3, and Revelation 14. Is it just for God to be angry at sin and punish it?

· **ANSWER.** *It is just for God to be angry at sin and punish it because sin is a slander on his glory and great worth. God would not be holy and righteous and just if he did not detest sin and punish it. We would question someone’s moral integrity if they did not respond with the appropriate emotions when confronted with an atrocity like the Holocaust. Would it not, then, be all the more appropriate and necessary for God to become angry at the outrage of human sin?*

2 Thessalonians 1:5-8

⁵ *This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— ⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

Romans 6:23

²³ *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Unless we are prepared to explain away the very existence of hell, we must say that God is wrathful toward sin and justly punishes it.

When confronted with this truth, the critical question then becomes, “*How* can a just and holy God forgive sin?” This is the inverse of the question many people ask: “How can a loving God send anyone to hell?” The question that more accurately reflects the tension the Bible expresses is, “How can a just and holy God send anyone to heaven?”

The consistent pattern of the Old Testament is of God forgiving sins through sacrifice, with particular reference to the blood of the sacrifice.

Leviticus 17:11

¹¹ For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

Although the inner logic of how sacrifice removed or covered sin is not as explicit as we would like at times, substitution is clearly in view. The day of atonement is described to Israel in these terms: “on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins” (Lev 16:30). On this day, two goats were set before the Lord. One goat was killed as the sin offering. Its blood was sprinkled inside the Holy of Holies on the “mercy seat” to make atonement for the people. The sins of the people are confessed over the second goat and it is sent into the wilderness to bear the sins of the people. Taken together these two goats illustrate the forgiveness of sins well. There is a substitute that dies in our place and bears our sins, and our sins are taken away from us.

But did this sacrifice guarantee that forgiveness would be accomplished?

Isaiah 1:10-17

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary

of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."

Psalm 51:16-17

¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

2. Do these passages teach that sacrifices were totally unnecessary for the forgiveness of sins?

- **ANSWER.** No, they do not teach this. These passages are a radical denouncement of trusting in hypocritical sacrifices. God is not pleased with sacrificial offerings if they are not presented with genuine repentance. And sacrifices will not cover spiritual hardness, injustice, and a blatant disregard for God. But as the following verses make clear, sacrifice was still the mechanism by which God forgave his people. If forgiveness could come through repentance alone, then Jesus died for nothing.

Psalm 51:7, 18-19

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ...¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; ¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Hebrews 9:22

²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

One of the most important verses in all of Scripture in constructing a doctrine of the atonement has to be Hebrews 10:4, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Even the Old Testament prophets realized this and predicted a day in which the LORD would provide a definitive forgiveness of sins, securing something that could never be had through the sacrifice of animals in the temple.

Aside from the very important text of Isaiah 53, which we have already looked at (but should be inspected again), notice the two following new covenant texts:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Ezekiel 36:24-29

²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses...

3. In each of these texts, for what reality does the forgiveness of sins serve as a basis?

- **ANSWER.** *Forgiveness is the basis for obedience that comes from the heart. In Jeremiah 31 God promises to write his law on the heart of his people. In Ezekiel 36 God promises to put his Holy Spirit within them and cause them to obey. Therefore, the definitive forgiveness of the new covenant won't result in the hard-heartedness that characterized the old covenant people.*

This hope of forgiveness, the appeasement of God's wrath, was waiting for a new and better sacrifice.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 568-573 (Chapter 27, Sections A–C2b1)

4. According to Grudem, how are the love and the justice of God the causes of the atonement?

· **ANSWER.** *The love of God provided the impulse for God's pursuit of us in our sins. With-out the love of God, God would never have sent his Son to die for us. The justice of God, however, demanded that atonement must be made. So without the justice (and holiness) of God, there would have been no need for atonement in the first place. The cross is the supreme manifestation of both the love and justice of God.*

Day 2

FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE NEW COVENANT

The most explicit interpretation of his own death that Jesus gives are the words he speaks to his disciples on the night he is betrayed. It is crucial to recognize what the Passover meal symbolized, because the Passover provided the context in which Jesus' words and subsequent death must be understood.

Exodus 12:21-27

²¹ Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. ²² Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. ²³ For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. ²⁴ You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. ²⁵ And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. ²⁶ And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' ²⁷ you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Pass-over, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

Matthew 26:26-29

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

5. How does the Old Testament background inform our understanding of Jesus' death?

- **ANSWER.** *The Passover Lamb was God's means of delivering his people. The blood of this lamb would cover the people so that God's wrath would be averted from them. In a similar way, Jesus presents his own body and blood to his disciples and says that the pouring out of his blood is for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' sacrificial death provides the great deliverance from sin that the Old Testament had promised.*

1 Corinthians 5:7

7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Hebrews, more than any other New Testament book, reflects on the death of Christ and how it relates to the old covenant.

Hebrews 9:11-14

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Hebrews 10:1-14

1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" 8 When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), 9 then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. 10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

6. The Passover certainly provides crucial background for interpreting the death of Jesus. Is the same true of the Old Testament sacrificial system?

- **ANSWER.** *Yes. These texts in Hebrews led us to understand that comparing Jesus' death to the old covenant sacrificial system illuminates Jesus' saving work. Jesus is compared in these passages both to the priest offering the sacrifice and to the sacrifice itself. Jesus atoning death was a bloody sacrifice—there is simply no way around that fact.*

If we've confirmed God's wrathful disposition toward sin, and the appeasement of that wrath as the forgiveness of sin (seen in the Passover and sacrificial system), then it should not come as a surprise to read New Testament descriptions of Jesus' death as saving us from the wrath of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last!

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

7. How do all three of these texts make a contribution to our understanding of Jesus' death and its atoning value?

- **ANSWER.** *1 Thessalonians 1:10 informs us that Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come. This wrath described in this verse is assuredly the wrath of God, mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 2:16 (cf. also Romans 5:9). 1 Thessalonians 5:9 makes it clear that God is the one who destines us not for his wrath, but for salvation. Therefore, God sends and raises Jesus to deliver us from his own wrath.*

Jesus' death not only atones for our sins, but also accomplishes something in relation to God:

Romans 3:23

...²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

8. How does Jesus' death show God's righteousness?

- **ANSWER.** *God's righteousness is called into question in passing over former sins. For centuries he "passed over" the sins of his people even though it was known that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). If God had not made sufficient payment and atonement for these generations of sin, then it could not be said that he was just. Therefore, Jesus' death propitiated (or satisfied) God's wrath and justice, proving him just in forgiving sins.*

This examination of the atonement, from the perspective of Old and New Testaments, has supported what is called the "penal substitutionary" view of the atonement. This view of the atonement provides the best explanation of the inner logic of *how* a just God who is wrathful toward sin can forgive sinners. Here is a succinct description of this view:

In his death, Jesus bore our sins and suffered the penalty that we deserved. In so doing, God's wrath toward sin and the demands of his justice were satisfied, and at the same time the Father's sending of the Son and the Son's willingness to offer up his life are the greatest expressions of God's love and mercy. Therefore, understanding Jesus' death in our place as the accomplishment of the forgiveness of our sins is both fundamental and central to a biblical view of the atonement.

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 573-579 (Chapter 27, Section C2b2–C2c4)

9. How does Grudem interpret Jesus' "cry of dereliction" (Matthew 27:46)?
 - **ANSWER.** *Grudem believes that Jesus was aware of the OT context from which these words come. Rather than being a cry of ultimate despair or unbelief, the context of Psalm 22 indicates that Jesus was expressing real anguish while still believing that God would ultimately deliver him.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 586-594 (Chapter 27, Section C2f)

Day 3

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE ATONEMENT

We have argued that Jesus' death as our substitute, bearing the wrath of God toward sin, is at the heart of the biblical portrayal of the atonement. Having said this, though, does not mean that Jesus' death cannot also be appreciated from other angles, or that his death did not do things other than propitiation. We will now consider two other prominent ways in which Jesus' death is described.

Jesus' death is often portrayed as a victory over sin, death, and the forces of darkness.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:13-14

¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 2:13-15

¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

10. What relationship is presented in these verses between forgiveness of sins and triumph over evil? How might you respond to someone who said that triumph over evil was the sole, or primary, way we should view Jesus' death?

ANSWER. The forgiveness of our sins—our legal acquittal—is consistently portrayed as basis of our triumph over evil. We conquer death and sin because forgiveness has taken away its “sting,” the law. We are delivered from the domain of darkness through redemption, which is the forgiveness of sins. And finally, the transition from Colossians 2:13-14 to Colossians 2:15 indicates that Christ's triumph over Satan consisted in his removal of the legal demands that stood against us.

Jesus' death is also portrayed as a model for us to imitate.

1 Peter 2:19-24

¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

11. Again, how might you respond to someone who said that Jesus' example of love was the sole, or primary, way we should view his death?

· **ANSWER.** *Jesus' death cannot be reduced to a moral example. This is because we cannot love people, do good, or endure suffering, if we are provided only with a good model or motivational example. Rather, our sins needed to be borne by another in order for us to live to righteousness (2:24)!*

It is clear that Jesus' death has accomplished a whole host of other effects, and we shouldn't succumb to reductionism in proclaiming his death. However, since the preservation of God's justice, righteousness, and glory is the central concern of Scripture, the model of atonement which shows how this can be done is the foundational and central model. Therefore, we must say again that penal substitution is at the heart of Christ's saving work.

This doctrine has been opposed and ridiculed, however—even by some who profess to be evangelical believers. Here is one sample of the kind of opposition that penal substitution has provoked:

“The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse—a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement: God is love. If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind

but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil.”⁴⁴

12. How might you respond to this attack on the doctrine of the atonement?

- **ANSWER.** *The author is right: the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse. But the author has seriously distorted the penal substitutionary view! First, it cannot be labeled child abuse because the Son willingly absorbs God's wrath. Second, though Jesus is sinless in himself, he does bear the offense that we have committed. Third, we should not judge what is and is not true by what the world finds palatable. Fourth, the author's view of God's love leaves no room for wrath at all. Fifth, the author makes no attempt to argue on biblical grounds.*

John 10:11-18

¹¹ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

¹² *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 579-586 (Chapter 27, Section C2d-C2e)

13. Which alternative views of the atonement have you encountered, if any?

- **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 1179-1185 (Chapters 1-9 of the WCF)

44 This citation is from Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 182-183, as quoted by “Defending My Father’s Wrath,” an article found at desiringGod.org (last accessed May 2, 2016).

Day 4

PARTICULAR REDEMPTION

This fourth day of study will attempt to answer the single question, “For whom did Jesus die?” As we have seen with previous issues, it will be imperative to acknowledge the full canonical range of teaching on this issue before seeking to harmonize.

Hebrews 8:6, 12

⁶ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ...¹² “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

Hebrews 9:15

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

John 10:14-15, 24-26

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ... ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.”

Ephesians 5:25-27

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Revelation 5:9-10

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

John 17:6, 9-10, 17-19

⁶ I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ...⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ...¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

14. What must we deduce from these passages? For whom did Christ die?

- **ANSWER.** It is clear that Christ died for the elect. His definitive forgiveness in his atoning death is what makes the new covenant “new.” Jesus dies for his flock, which does not include all people. He dies for the church, to sanctify her. He purchases a particular people by his blood. He consecrates himself (unto death) for his disciples, and not for the whole world.

Now look at another set of texts:

1 John 2:1-2

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

Hebrews 2:9

⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

15. How should we reconcile this set of texts with the former set?

- **ANSWER.** *The second set of texts describe the universal scope of Jesus' redeeming death: there are no boundaries of race, geography, gender, political status, economic status, or prior background that puts someone beyond the reach of God's redeeming love. This cannot be taken to mean, however, that Christ died in a saving way for all people (universalism) or merely made an offer of salvation to all people.*

One of the most popular Bible verses is John 3:16. Someone might quote the first part of this verse, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..." in order to defend the idea that Jesus died for everyone in the same way. Look at the surrounding context, though, to see if such a contention can be maintained. What is the limiting condition on God's offer of life?

John 3:14-18

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Asserting that Jesus died in a special, salvific way for his elect people should not, however, limit our free offer of the gospel. Our understanding of "particular redemption," must never hinder us from speaking as Jesus did.

Matthew 11:28-29

²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

John 6:37

³⁷ *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*

Revelation 22:17

¹⁷ *The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.*

16. If we believe that Jesus only died for the elect, does that mean that we shouldn't preach the gospel to unbelievers?

- **ANSWER.** *We do not know who the elect and non-elect are. God may be pleased to save some through our preaching of the gospel. Therefore, we should preach to everyone indiscriminately, praying that God would draw people to himself and give them to his Son Jesus (John 6:37a). Furthermore, when people hear the gospel and reject it, God is still glorified in their just judgment. So we should preach to everyone, with perseverance.*

And now, we will examine another statement of John Piper's—this time on atonement. Please note that what this excerpt calls "limited atonement," we have labeled "particular redemption" (following Grudem). Both labels refer to the same doctrine (which has also been called "definite atonement").

Limited Atonement

...The term "limited atonement" addresses the question, "For whom did Christ die?" But behind the question of the extent of the atonement lies the equally important question about the nature of the atonement. What did Christ actually achieve on the cross for those for whom he died?

If you say that he died for every human being in the same way, then you have to define the nature of the atonement very differently than you would if you believed that Christ only died for those who actually believe. In the first case you

would believe that the death of Christ did not actually save anybody; it only made all men savable. It did not actually remove God's punitive wrath from anyone, but instead created a place where people could come and find mercy—IF they could accomplish their own new birth and bring themselves to faith without the irresistible grace of God.

For if Christ died for all men in the same way then he did not purchase regenerating grace for those who are saved. They must regenerate themselves and bring themselves to faith. Then and only then do they become partakers of the benefits of the cross.

In other words if you believe that Christ died for all men in the same way, then the benefits of the cross cannot include the mercy by which we are brought to faith, because then all men would be brought to faith, but they aren't. But if the mercy by which we are brought to faith (irresistible grace) is not part of what Christ purchased on the cross, then we are left to save ourselves from the bondage of sin, the hardness of heart, the blindness of corruption, and the wrath of God.

Therefore it becomes evident that it is not the Calvinist who limits the atonement. It is the Arminian, because he denies that the atoning death of Christ accomplishes what we most desperately need—namely, salvation from the condition of deadness and hardness and blindness under the wrath of God. The Arminian limits the nature and value and effectiveness of the atonement so that he can say that it was accomplished even for those who die in unbelief and are condemned. In order to say that Christ died for all men in the same way, the Arminian must limit the atonement to a powerless opportunity for men to save themselves from their terrible plight of depravity.

On the other hand we do not limit the power and effectiveness of the atonement. We simply say that in the cross God had in view the actual redemption of his children. And we affirm that when Christ died for these, he did not just create the opportunity for them to save themselves, but really purchased for them all that was necessary to get them saved, including the grace of regeneration and the gift of faith.

We do not deny that all men are the intended beneficiaries of the cross in some sense. 1 Timothy 4:10 says that Christ is "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." What we deny is that all men are intended as the beneficiaries of the death of Christ in the same way. All of God's mercy toward unbelievers—from the rising sun (Matthew 5:45) to the worldwide preaching of the gospel (John 3:16)—is made possible because of the cross.

This is the implication of Romans 3:25 where the cross is presented as the basis of God's righteousness in passing over sins. Every breath that an unbeliever takes is

an act of God's mercy withholding judgment (Romans 2:4). Every time the gospel is preached to unbelievers it is the mercy of God that gives this opportunity for salvation.

Whence does this mercy flow to sinners? How is God just to withhold judgment from sinners who deserve to be immediately cast into hell? The answer is that Christ's death so clearly demonstrates God's just abhorrence of sin that he is free to treat the world with mercy without compromising his righteousness. In this sense Christ is the savior of all men.

But he is especially the Savior of those who believe. He did not die for all men in the same sense. The intention of the death of Christ for the children of God was that it purchase far more than the rising sun and the opportunity to be saved. The death of Christ actually saves from ALL evil those for whom Christ died "especially."

...In accordance with John 10:16 John does not say that the death of Christ ransomed all men but that it ransomed men from all the tribes of the world.

This is the way we understand texts like 1 John 2:2 which says, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." This does not mean that Christ died with the intention to appease the wrath of God for every person in the world, but that the "sheep," "the children of God" scattered throughout the whole world, "from every tongue and tribe and people and nation" are intended by the propitiation of Christ. In fact the grammatical parallel between John 11:51-52 and 1 John 2:2 is so close it is difficult to escape the conviction that the same thing is intended by John in both verses.

John 11:51-52, "He prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."

1 John 2:2, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

The "whole world" refers to the children of God scattered throughout the whole world.

If "the whole world" referred to every individual in the world, we would be forced to say that John is teaching that all people will be saved, which he does not believe (Revelation 14:9-11). The reason we would be forced to say this is that the term propitiation refers to a real removal of wrath from sinners. When God's wrath against a sinner is propitiated, it is removed from that sinner. And the result is that all God's power now flows in the service of his mercy, with the result that nothing can stop him from saving that sinner.

Propitiated sins cannot be punished. Otherwise propitiation loses its meaning. Therefore if Christ is the propitiation for all the sins of every individual in the world, they cannot be punished, and must be saved. But John does not believe in such universalism (John 5:29). Therefore it is very unlikely that 1 John 2:2 teaches that Jesus is the propitiation of every person in the world. Mark 10:45, in accord with Revelation 5:9, does not say that Jesus came to ransom all men. It says, "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Similarly in Matthew 26:28 Jesus says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Hebrews 9:28, "So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." (See also 13:20; Isaiah 53:11-12.)

One of the clearest passages on the intention of the death of Christ is Ephesians 5:25-27. Here Paul not only says that the intended beneficiary of the death of Christ is the Church, but also that the intended effect of the death of Christ is the sanctification and glorification of the church. This is the truth we want very much to preserve: that the cross was not intended to give all men the opportunity to save themselves, but was intended to actually save the church.

Paul says, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor."

Similarly in Titus 2:14 Paul describes the purpose of Christ's death like this: "He gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." If Paul were an Arminian would he not have said, "He gave himself to redeem all men from iniquity and purify all men for himself"? But Paul says that the design of the atonement is to purify for Christ a people out from the world. This is just what John said in John 10:15; 11:51f; and Revelation 5:9.

One of the most crucial texts on this issue is Romans 8:32. It is one of the most precious promises for God's people in all the Bible. Paul says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?"

The crucial thing to see here is how Paul bases the certainty of our inheritance on the death of Christ. He says, "God will most certainly give you all things because he did not spare his own Son but gave him up for you." What becomes of this precious argument if Christ is given for those who do not in fact receive all things but instead are lost? The argument vanishes.

If God gave his own Son for unbelievers who in the end are lost, then he cannot say that the giving of the Son guarantees “all things” for the those for whom he died. But this is what he does say! If God gave his Son for you, then he most certainly will give you all things. The structure of Paul’s thought here is simply destroyed by introducing the idea that Christ died for all men in the same way.

We can conclude this section with the following summary argument. Which of these statements is true?

- 1. Christ died for some of the sins of all men.*
- 2. Christ died for all the sins of some men.*
- 3. Christ died for all the sins of all men.*

No one says that the first is true, for then all would be lost because of the sins that Christ did not die for. The only way to be saved from sin is for Christ to cover it with his blood.

The third statement is what the Arminians would say. Christ died for all the sins of all men. But then why are not all saved? They answer, Because some do not believe. But is this unbelief not one of the sins for which Christ died? If they say yes, then why is it not covered by the blood of Jesus and all unbelievers saved? If they say no (unbelief is not a sin that Christ has died for) then they must say that men can be saved without having all their sins atoned for by Jesus, or they must join us in affirming statement number two: Christ died for all the sins of some men. That is, he died for the unbelief of the elect so that God’s punitive wrath is appeased toward them and his grace is free to draw them irresistibly out of darkness into his marvelous light.⁴⁵

- 17.** Of the five doctrines of grace, this one is usually the most difficult for people to accept. Why might that be?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

Required Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 594-600 (Chapter 27, Section D1–D3)

⁴⁵ This excerpt is from “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism,” an article found at desiringGod.org. Last accessed May 2, 2016.

18. How does Grudem explain those texts that are used to support general redemption?

- **ANSWER.** *Grudem contends that these texts refer to sinners in a general way without implying that every individual sinner will be saved. He also says that it is possible that verses such as 1 John 2:2 may mean that Christ's atoning sacrifice is now available for the sins of everyone in the world. Though available to all, sinners would need addition-al grace to actually believe. This grace, too, is purchased by Christ's death.*

Further Reading: *Systematic Theology*, 601-603 (Chapter 27, Section D4)

Day 5

An Affirmation of Faith

7.1 We believe that by His perfect obedience to God and by His suffering and death as the immaculate Lamb of God, Jesus Christ obtained forgiveness of sins and the gift of perfect righteousness for all who trusted in God prior to the cross and all who would trust in Christ thereafter. Through living a perfect life and dying in our place, the just for the unjust, Christ absorbed our punishment, appeased the wrath of God against us, vindicated the righteousness of God in our justification, and removed the condemnation of the law against us.

7.2 We believe that the atonement of Christ for sin warrants and impels a universal offering of the gospel to all persons, so that to every person it may be truly said, “God gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.” Whosoever will may come for cleansing at this fountain, and whoever does come, Jesus will not cast out.

7.3 We believe, moreover, that the death of Christ did obtain more than the *bona fide* offer of the gospel for all; it also obtained the omnipotent New Covenant mercy of repentance and faith for God’s elect. Christ died for all, but not for all in the same way. In His death, Christ expressed a special covenant love to His friends, His sheep, His bride. For them He obtained the infallible and effectual working of the Spirit to triumph over their resistance and bring them to saving faith.

19. Summarize each section of this affirmation in your own words.

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

20. Do these sections accurately summarize the biblical truth you've been studying?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*



•••••  INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Write your own brief, evangelistic explanation of how Jesus' death accomplishes the forgiveness of sins. Consider whether you should share this explanation with unbelievers that you know.

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

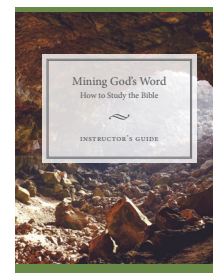
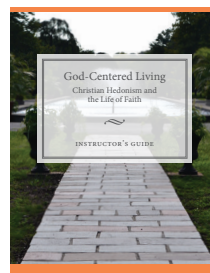
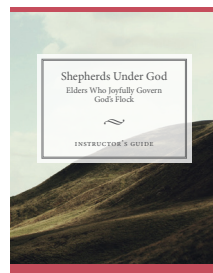
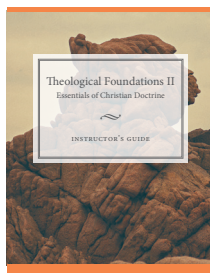
- ▷ John Piper, “For Whom Did Jesus Taste Death?” an online sermon at desiringGod.org
- ▷ Steve Jeffery et al., *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007).
- ▷ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984).
- ▷ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1991).
- ▷ Charles Hill et al., eds., *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).
- ▷ John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).
- ▷ C. J. Mahaney, *Living the Cross Centered Life* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2006).

Theological Foundations I

Essentials of Christian Doctrine

Theological Foundations I: Essentials of Christian Doctrine is a 12-week course designed to introduce students to a systematic treatment of theology, leading to both Christ-centered worship and the living-out of doctrinal truths. This course is an attempt to systematically present what the Apostle Paul called “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Students will study biblical topics by closely examining key biblical passages, answering provocative questions, reading select passages from Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper, and inspecting Bethlehem Baptist Church’s Elder Affirmation of Faith. The student’s learning will be solidified through class discussion and various homework assignments. This course is the first of two semesters, progressing through roughly the first half of a systematic theology, including the doctrines of Scripture, the Trinity, God’s sovereignty, election, creation, sin, Christology and soteriology.

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