

About This Book . . .

New life needs to grow—whether it be a baby or a new Christian. This book is concerned with the growth of new Christians in a knowledge of Jesus Christ and an understanding of their faith.

It is firstly a study book in which the person works their way through the study, looking up the relevant Scriptures and answering the various questions. Then it is designed to be a discussion book where the new Christian talks over the lesson with a mature Christian. This can be done on a one-to-one basis or in a small group setting.

John Annells has been in the Christian ministry in South Australia for many years. He has pastored the Baptist Church at Christies Beach over most of this period. This church has seen rapid growth and a continuous stream of people going into full-time ministry. John also lectures at the Baptist Theological College and Tabor College, and has completed a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. John, and his wife Robyn, have three daughters and two sons (and one grandchild).

New Creation Publications Inc.

Help me to
GROW

John Annells

Help Me To Grow

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Preface

Early in my ministry at Christies Beach Baptist Church, I saw the need of nurturing the steady stream of new Christians the Lord was adding to the Church. As I looked around for suitable materials, I could not find the one that really satisfied me. All had a particular position to push. So the decision was made to write my own study which would embrace the theological position I accepted and taught at Christies Beach.

Over the past ten years, three printings of this study book have been produced. The first was duplicated on our own Gestetner and left much to be desired! The latter two printings have been done on offset press. These books have been used by many denominations and have been sent to nearly every Australian State.

I wish to express my thanks to the Reverend Geoffrey Bingham for the teaching and personal guidance he has given me over the past fourteen years. Others indirectly have helped me in the initial writing of this book. Many have been forgotten, but their comments and ideas have gone on in print. Two members of this church have been particularly helpful in this present volume. Hank Schoemaker (a missionary with Africa Inland Mission in Zaire) has used the book in one-to-one nurturing, and gave many helpful comments. Jan White (Pastoral Assistant at this church) has used this volume more than any other person. Her comments and suggestions were most valuable.

This new printing comes with certain alterations and omissions to make the book appeal to wider than Baptist users. To this end the assistance of the Reverend Deane Meatheringham is greatly appreciated.

I pray that this study may be used by many, and through it the Father may help new Christians (and not-so-new ones also) to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'.

John Annells

Christies Beach, South Australia

February, 1986

Introduction

This course is intended primarily for new Christians, although those who have been Christians for some time could still be helped by it.

It is intended for study, firstly on your own, enabling you to look up the verses mentioned and to take your time in thinking and praying about them. It is best to take about a week on each study so that the facts discussed are fully grasped. Some may wish to go either faster or slower than this.

Having studied each lesson by yourself, it is good to have someone who has been a Christian for some time go through it with you. This will enable you to clarify anything that was not clear, allow any answers that may need some more understanding to be given, as well as helping to build up a relationship of sharing and prayer between you and the one who helps you.

Familiarise yourself with the Bible. It is not just our textbook; it is God's Word to us. As such it is the authority for everything we believe and do. It has an index in the front and you should not be ashamed to use it. The Bible is divided into two parts—the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old deals with the Creation; with man and his rebellion against God; with God's choice of a nation of people (the Jews) and the history of these people and God's dealing with them up until about the fourth century before the coming of Jesus Christ. Through all this history God is revealing Himself and preparing the way for the coming into the world of His Son.

The New Testament deals with the coming, birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is contained in the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There is a history of the early church over about the first thirty years of its life and this is contained in the Acts of the Apostles. The remainder of the New Testament (we will write it as 'N.T.' and the Old as 'O.T.') is made up of Letters to churches and individuals,

written by some of the disciples of Jesus, and others, teaching us what to believe and how to live as Christians. It is quite a good idea to memorise the books in the Bible in order, as this enables you to locate them quickly without looking up the index. Another good thing is to memorise verses in the Bible. Select those out of each study that personally help you, and commit them to memory. Before you commence each lesson, ask the Lord to guide you, giving you understanding of those things studied.

NOTE: There are many translations of the Bible. The one used throughout this book is the *New International Version* (NIV). If you find some of the words of the Bible quoted in the study are slightly different from your Bible, the reason is that your translation is a different one.

What is a Christian?

Becoming a Christian is the most exciting thing that can happen to you. You're a new person! Oh, I know your body is the same shape, your eyes the same colour, and your ears in the same place. But something has really happened to you. Paul, who wrote many of the Letters in the New Testament, says that you are a 'new creation'! He puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 5: 17: 'When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun' (*Living Bible*). A change has occurred in you, and it is going to continue.

Just what has taken place? As you talk to other Christians you will discover that when they became Christians they all had different experiences. Some people felt a wonderful peace come over them, others wanted to cry, others were really excited, while others had no change in feelings at all. This does not matter, because even though our feelings may vary, the fact of what has happened is the same for us all. The important thing is that our relationship with God has changed.

Turn now to the New Testament, and to the Book of Acts. In Acts 2:14-36 we have recorded a message that Peter preached on the day that.

4 Help Me to Grow

(a).....

(b)

We will study later how God can forgive, but it is sufficient now to simply note that God promises to 'totally forgive'. This means that all the sin that I have committed is forgiven and so is taken away forever. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and write down what you think God means in the last part of verse 34.

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What effect should that now have upon your life?

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One of the biggest burdens that we carry is guilt from sin, from failure, from feelings of inferiority. When God forgives us He removes all these things and sees us as though we had never sinned or failed in any way. in Christ, God sees us as 'new creations'. When our guilt is removed we are truly free to be what God has planned us to be, and to see and accept ourselves in that way.

When God does this, He also does two other things:

1. He makes us His children

Read John 1:12 and Romans 8:14-17. Write down what these two verses are saying to you.

5 What is a Christian?

(a) John 1:12

.....

(b) Romans 8:14-17

.....

To be God's son or daughter is to be loved and accepted fully by God. It is to be a part of His family. This means that you can accept yourself, and in doing that you are enabled to accept others, just as they are, for this is how the Father accepted you.

2. God gives us His Holy Spirit

We will study more about the Holy Spirit in Study 8, but for now we need to realise that when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, we have God living with us. To help you understand this, read John 14:15-17 and 23. It is important to remember that by ourselves we cannot live as God wants us to, but it is only as we rely upon the help and power of the Holy Spirit that we can experience the real life which God the Father has planned for us.

When the Holy Spirit is living within us (or, as some verses in the Bible put it, 'when we have the Son', i.e. Jesus), we have eternal life. This means that whether we live or die we are always with God. and that what we call 'death' is only the transition from this life to the life that is 'eternal' with God.

Read the following verses and describe in your own words what each verse is saying to you:

(a) John 3:16

.....

(b) John 5:24.....

(c) John 11:25-26.....

.....

(d) 1 John 5:11-12.....

.....

2

Who is God?

Before you became a Christian, God was probably one of those ‘religious words’. or maybe a figment of your imagination. But now you’ve become a Christian, and God has suddenly become not only ‘someone’, but someone very important to you.

In the Old Testament (O.T.), in Jeremiah 9:23-24, God says:

Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches. but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth...

In the New Testament (N.T.), in John 17:3, Jesus says, ‘This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent’. What these two verses are saying is that the most important thing for a man or woman to know in life is ‘to know God’. This does not mean *knowing about God*, because anyone can do that by reading the Bible. True knowledge of God is actually knowing Him by *being in relationship with Him*.

Think of human relationships (for example, of husband and wife, or of parent and child), and then write down what you think it means to have a relationship with God.

.....

The most wonderful description of God in the Bible is that of Him as *Father*. As Father, God has many children. These are those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ (read John 1:12 again). We can understand a lot about God as Father by looking at the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus said that He only did what the Father told Him to do (read John 5: 17-20, 30). In John I: 18 Jesus is said to have made God known, and from that verse we see that He revealed God as Father. So we can say that whatever we see God's Son, Jesus Christ, doing in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), we are really seeing God the Father doing. Keep this in mind as you read the Gospels.

How would you describe God to someone else? That is not easy to do. What we can describe, though, are the *characteristics* of God, that is, the things that He says or does. Some of these characteristics are human characteristics, that is, they are things we too can develop in our lives. Others are divine and supernatural, and these things make God distinctively God.

Let us look first at what we could call the *human characteristics of God*.

Study the following passages and write down what you learn about the 'human characteristics' of God:

BIBLE PASSAGE	CHARACTERISTIC: HOW IS GOD DESCRIBED?	HAVE YOU SEEN GOD EXPRESS THIS CHARACTERISTIC TO YOU RECENTLY?
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(a) Psalm 103:8-9.....

BIBLE PASSAGE	CHARACTERISTIC: HOW IS GOD DESCRIBED?	HAVE YOU SEEN GOD EXPRESS THIS CHARACTERISTIC TO YOU RECENTLY?
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(b) Psalm 25:8-9.....

 (c) Isaiah 11:1-2.....

 (d) Jeremiah 31:3.....

 (e) Psalm 116:1-2.....

We need to look also at the things which make God unique. God is quite unlike human beings. Philosophically we can talk about man as *being finite*, which means that man is limited in what he can do. On the other hand, we can say that God is *infinite*, meaning that God is unlimited in time or space; He has no end, limits or boundaries.

Read the following passages carefully: Psalm 139; Exodus 14:15-28; Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 40: 12-31; Malachi 3:6. When you have read each of these passages, see if you can record the verses which speak about the nature of God as being quite different from man. Use the space below to do this:

GOD IS...

WHAT DO THE VERSES YOU READ SAY ABOUT THIS, AND WHAT ARE THOSE VERSES?

(a) All-knowing.....

 (b) Everywhere at once.....

GOD IS...

WHAT DO THE VERSES YOU READ SAY ABOUT THIS,
AND WHAT ARE THOSE VERSES?

(c) All-powerful.....

.....

(d) Without beginning or end

.....

(e) Never-changing.....

.....

To conclude this study, we return to what we commenced with: we need to know God personally.

Read John 14:6 and describe in your own words the way that you have come to know God as Father.

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3

Who is Jesus?

If someone asked you, 'Who is Jesus?', I wonder what you would answer? Some people think there was something different about Him. Others say that He was a man who did a lot of good things. To really understand who Jesus is, we have to go again to the Bible. As we read the Old Testament, we can see that God was preparing for the coming of His Son into this world. In many places God spoke specifically about Him, while in other parts it is veiled, and not as clear. Read the following references and say what each one says to you about the coming of Jesus Christ. ('Christ' is the Greek word for the Hebrew term 'Messiah', which means 'anointed one'.)

(a) Isaiah 9:1-7

.....

(b) Isaiah 7:14 (see Matthew 1:23)

.....

(c) Micah 3:2 (see Matthew 2:6)

.....

The birth of Jesus is recorded for us in Matthew, chapters 1 and 2, and in Luke, chapters 1 to 3. These should be read.

When Jesus was about thirty years of age, He began going about the land of Judah preaching, teaching, healing and gathering a group of twelve men, who were called 'disciples'. In this time of about three years that He was with these twelve men, Jesus taught them many things, including many things about Himself. What does Jesus say about Himself in the following passages?

(a) John 14:1-6.....

.....

(b) John 14:8-11

.....

(c) John 8:19

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(d) John 12:45

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(e) John 16:23.....

.....

(f) John 20:30-31

.....

How would you summarise these six passages in one sentence?

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These verses give us a good understanding of *who Jesus is*. They show us, among other things, that Jesus is one with the Father. So we speak of God, the Father, and of God, the Son. We will have more to say about this later.

We need to look now at *what He did*. After Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist, He was led by the Holy Spirit into a desert area where He underwent a time of temptation (Luke 4: 1-14). After this His ministry began. One incident occurred in the town of Nazareth, where He had grown up, which gives a good summary of Jesus' ministry. Read Luke 4: 16-21, and list the main characteristics of Jesus' ministry:

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What do you think Jesus meant by saying that He was sent 'to proclaim freedom to the prisoners'?

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Now read Mark 1:29 to 2:17, for an example of His life and ministry. Write down at least six characteristics of Christ that seem significant to you. Look for attitudes, actions, responses to people, things He said, what motivated Him, etc.:

- 1.
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- 2.
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- 3.
-
- 4.
-
- 5.
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- 6.
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Now that you have become a Christian, God wants to change you. He wants to produce in you many of the characteristics of Jesus' life. What areas of your life do you feel God wants to change or develop? (Share this with a Christian friend who can pray for you and share with you as God works in you.)

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4

Why did Jesus need to die?

Jesus died by crucifixion, which was the normal means of executing non-Roman citizens who were found guilty of acts worthy of death. When Jesus was crucified, two others were also crucified.

Before we look at the actual crucifixion, we will look at what Jesus said about His own death. That may sound strange to you, but Jesus knew that He was going to die a special death. Read the following passages, and write down what Jesus said about His death:

- (a) Luke 9:18-22
-
- (b) John 10:1-18.....
-
- (c) Mark 10:32-34.....
-

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Each of the Gospels records the crucifixion of Jesus. They each give a slightly different perspective. They are recorded in Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23 and John 19.

Read also Luke 22:66-71 and discover the 'crime' for which Jesus was crucified:

.....

There are many verses in the New Testament which tell us why Jesus needed to die. Read the following passages and state why you believe Jesus' death was necessary:

(a) 1 Peter 3:18

.....

(b) 1 Peter 2:24

.....

(c) 1 John 4:10

.....

(d) 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 21

.....

We discover from these passages that Jesus was not just a good man dying for a cause, but He was dying a death which He did not deserve (He was sinless). Many books have been written on this subject, but we will try to express it in a few sentences! The Bible teaches us that God is love (1 John 4:7 and 16). It also says that He is 'just' or 'righteous ', and that He is rightly angry with our rebellion, sin, disobedience, etc. (see Nahum 1:3; Psalm 7:11; Romans 1:18).

God's wrath has been defined as 'His implacable opposition to evil and His unchangeable intention to destroy it'. We might well ask, 'How can God love and also have wrath?' This is the miracle of Christ's death. Read

17 Why Did Jesus Need to Die?

1 John 4:10 again. Put simply, this means that God shows us His love by sending His Son to die, and in dying Jesus took God's wrath or anger against our sins, for us. In bearing our sin as sin, Jesus bore God's wrath against *our* sins. The Bible uses the word 'justified' to explain what effect this has upon us (see Romans 3:21-26; 4:24-25; 5:1). The word means 'to be totally acquitted ', and is a legal term. It means that all the charges that were against us are taken away (see Colossians 2:13-14). The word can be understood by opening it out: 'just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned '.

This is what made it possible for God to accept you as His child and forgive you. God did not lift the carpet and sweep your sin under it, thus conveniently hiding it, but not destroying it. No! He sent His Son to die for your sin, and in His death He destroyed everything that was against you, so that the Father could freely love and forgive you and make you His child.

Read the following passages and state what God promises to do in each:

(a) Jeremiah 31:31-34

.....

(b) Hebrews 10:11-14

.....

(c) 2 Corinthians 5:21

.....

(d) 1 John 1:9

.....

What is the result of being forgiven by God? (To assist in your answer, read Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13:

.....

It is important, when we talk about Jesus' death, to speak also about His resurrection, which means His rising from the dead. Jesus' death and resurrection belong together. If Christ had died and not risen, we would have nothing. The resurrection proved that He was who He said He was and that His death accomplished all He said it would: it demonstrates that He has defeated sin and death. You can read about this event in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24 and John 20.

The New Testament speaks of the significance of Christ's resurrection for us as Christians. What do the following passages tell you about the meaning of the resurrection for you?:

- (a) 1 Corinthians 15:12-13.....
.....
- (b) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
.....
- (c) Romans 6:4-11
.....

Am I really free?

Can you imagine the feelings of a man who has been a prisoner for many years and then is granted a pardon and released? He would be free! Free never to be condemned again for what he had done; free to live a new life. We may not have been in a human prison, but we were in a bondage no less real. It was enslavement to many things.

Read John 8:31-36. What kind of bondage was Jesus referring to?

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How real is this? (For example, how strong are our habits, addictions, etc.?)

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Help Me to Grow

There are many kinds of 'bondages' in the world, but one of the worst is recorded in Hebrews 2:14-15. How would you describe this 'bondage', and what effect does it have upon people?

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What is the 'fear of death'? (compare Hebrews 9:27).

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.....

How is this 'bondage' destroyed? (See Romans 3:21-26, and be sure to read it in a modern translation as well. Remember that 'justified' means 'to be totally acquitted' and is a legal term. Read also Hebrews 2: 14; 1 John 3:8; Colossians 2:13-15.)

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.....

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He totally destroyed all the sin, guilt, shame, uncleanness, failure, rebellion and disobedience that was once a part of our life. God accepted Jesus' death as full and sufficient payment for all of your sins for all of time. So when you became a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, you were totally forgiven. Read what Paul says in Romans 8:1 and 31-34, and describe your present standing before God.

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However, being freed from the guilt of sin does not mean that you are

Am I Really Free?

free to do as you please. That is not freedom; that is licence. True freedom does have boundaries. Read what it says in Psalm 119:44-45. Then read Romans 6: 1. Paul is here refuting what some have been saying, that is, that to be forgiven by God gives a person a licence to do as he pleases and to sin to his heart's content. The thought behind this is that as you are totally forgiven it does not matter what you do.

What is Paul's answer to this question in Romans 6:2-4?

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Freedom is a very positive experience. Above all else it means that I am free to love—to love God, myself and others. When you are forgiven and all the barriers are down between God and yourself, you can really love. God loves you and accepts you as you are. (This brings death to an inferiority complex—why?)

If God loves you and accepts you because of what He has done for you, then you can love and accept yourself, and accept that God is changing you to be like His Son Jesus. Thus, accepting and loving yourself (with all your failures and weaknesses), you can do the same to others. To put it in John's words: 'We love because He first loved us' (1 John 4:19).

Then also, you are free to obey God out of love for Him. Read John 13:34-35, 14:21 and 15:9-13. Discuss these verses with other Christians to be sure you understand them.

When we talk about freedom, the two important words the Bible uses are the words 'justification' and 'no condemnation'.

Read Romans 3:21-26 again, and describe in your own words what is meant by 'justification'.

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Read also Romans 8:1-4, and describe in your own words what it means to have 'no condemnation'.

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The Father and the family

In Study 2, we made brief reference to God as Father. This matter is so important that it is necessary for us to spend more time considering it. and the outcome of it in our lives.

To begin, read Ephesians 1:3-10. In verses 3 and 4, Paul makes four statements about what God the Father has done. List these in your own words:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

God's plan has always been to have His family and for them to be a forgiven and holy people. To make this possible, His own Son had to die so that God could have 'many sons'. The Bible shows us that God has

always been Father. See Isaiah 63:16 and Ephesians 3:14 and 4:6. As Father, He desires a family. But His family is unique! You do not deserve to be a son or daughter, but out of His great love, and through the cross, God the Father has forgiven, cleansed and renewed you, and filled you with the Spirit of His Son, so that you are adopted into His family (Galatians 4:4-6). God even says that He is changing you so that you bear the image of His Son. This does not mean that you will look like Jesus physically, but that you will have your 'nature' or 'character' changed; Christ takes shape within you. Read the following verses, and try to describe what it says to you:

(a) Romans 8:29.....

.....

(b) Romans 12:2

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(c) 2 Corinthians 3:18.....

.....

(d) Ephesians 5:1-2.....

.....

(e) 1 John 5:2

.....

The last reference is a very important one because it emphasises the fact that because God is Father, as we love Him we must also love His other children, that is, other Christians. The First Epistle of John majors on this fact. To John, to say that we love God is meaningless unless we love all other Christians. He goes even further, and says that our love for God is

revealed and proven by our love for our brother and sister Christians. Read the following references: I John 2:7-11; 3:10-24; 4:7 to 5:3.

In the relationships of any family there are difficulties at times. We are not perfect! Sometimes we hurt each other by things we say or do, or fail to say or do. How are we to deal with these problems? Read Ephesians 4:30-32 and Colossians 3:12-15.

(a) What is to be our attitude to one another?.....

.....

(b) What are we to do if we are hurt?

.....

(c) Why must we forgive?

.....

The test of whether we have really understood that God has forgiven us is that we are 'forgivers' ourselves. Read the story Jesus told in Matthew 18:21-35, and say why the one owing the most did not forgive his fellow servant.

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Sometimes when we are in situations of being hurt or offended by what others do or say, we turn that hurt inward and 'brood' on it. When this happens we are (to put it bluntly) sinning! We have turned our reaction into a sin of anger, or hurt pride, or self-pity, or resentment, or something else. We must recognise that we cannot be held responsible for other people's *actions*, but we are responsible for our *reactions*. We need to

acknowledge these as sin, confess them, and receive God's forgiveness.

To help you experience this personally, list any areas of relationship that you are still experiencing 'hurt' from, or where you see you are sinning in holding the attitudes that you do. Having listed them, confess them as sin (to hurt is to sin), see them as having been forgiven on the cross, and receive God's forgiveness for them as He promised. If you do this 'from your heart' (Matthew 18:35), you will find yourself set wonderfully free, just as David was, in Psalm 32:1-5.

7

I'm a child of God

In this study we will develop more fully some of the comments made in Studies 1 and 6. In Study 1 we said that when a person became a Christian, that person was made a child of God. Read again John 1:12 and Romans 8:14-17.

In Study 6 we said that God has always been Father, and as such, His plan was always to have a family who would relate to Him as loving children. This family was created through the cross (that is, through the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ), and through the coming of the Holy Spirit, who is also called 'the Spirit of His Son' (Galatians 4:6).

What we are going to consider in this study is what it means, in experience, to be a child of God. So we first ask the question: 'What happened when I became a child of God?' The following are some of the answers to that question.

1. A new life began

Read John 3:3-8. Describe in your own words what you think Jesus is saying about becoming a Christian.

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Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, and describe what you believe Paul means.

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2. I was adopted into God's family, i.e. I received the rights of a 'full son'

Read Galatians 4:4-6; Romans 8: 15-16. What new understanding does being a son bring to you concerning your place in God's plan and purpose?

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How secure does this make you?

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3. The Father totally accepts me as His child

Read Ephesians 1:36. In an older translation (*Authorised Version*) the words of verse 6 are translated, '... he hath made us accepted in the beloved '. The NIV translates it, '... he has freely given us in the One He loves'. Why do you believe from this verse that God accepts you?

.....

.....

What effect does that have upon you:

(a) in your relationship with God?.....

(b) in your acceptance of yourself?

(c)/n your relationships with, and acceptance of, others?.....

4. He leads and guides us throughout our life

Read Romans 8: 14-16. What does the fact that God leads and guides us mean about how God works? (Does this imply that He has a 'plan' for our lives?)

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.....

If God does have a plan for our lives, how should this affect my relationship with the Father?

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5. Because we are the sons (daughters) of God, we share with the Son

Read Hebrews 2:10-12 and Romans 8: 16-17. What facts emerge from these two passages?

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What place does suffering (or trials) have in this relationship? Consider such passages as Romans 8:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 4:12-14 (more will be said about this in Study 12).

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6. Became we are God's children, we are being changed to be like the Son, and one day we will be totally like Him

Read Romans 8:28-30; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 1:4; 4:22-24. How do these verses describe *what* is happening to us as God's children, *and when* it is happening?

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Now read 1 Corinthians 15:42-57, Philippians 3:21 and 1 John 3:1-2. What further truths do these verses say about our future state as God's children?

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What *time* is being spoken of?

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As you conclude this study, spend some time thanking the Father for His Son, and for making you His child. Be specific in praising Him for the things He has revealed to you.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

In Study 2 we spoke of God as being 'Father'. Then in the next study we discovered that Jesus is the 'Son of God' and that He is 'one' with God, the Father (see John 5: 15-18; 10:30-33). So we speak of God the Father and God the Son.

In the same way we speak of God the Holy Spirit, meaning that the Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, in being Divine. This teaching is called 'the Trinity', or as it could be expressed 'tri-unity'—Three in One. This is not an easy doctrine to understand, but it can best be explained by looking at certain incidents which show the Trinity in action. Two will be taken:

1. Creation

Read Genesis 1: 1-2. Who is spoken of in the action of creation?

- (a).....
- (b)

Read John 1: 1-3 and Hebrews 1: 1-3. To whom is creation attributed in these verses?

- (a).....
- (b)

Thus we can see the action of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in creation.

2. The baptism of Jesus

Read Matthew 3:13-17. Can you discover the action of the Trinity in this activity?. If so, state where:

- (a) Father:
- (b) Son:
- (c) Holy Spirit:.....

The Holy Spirit was present and active in the O.T. time, but He was not spoken of nearly as much as we find in the N.T. In fact, since the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have lived in the ‘era of the Spirit’. The O.T. prophets looked forward to this time, when God would give His Holy Spirit to all men. Read a few of the prophecies in Ezekiel 36:26-27 and Joel 2:28-29. The latter prophecy was fulfilled initially on the day of Pentecost, which was a Jewish feast day and the day on which the church began. See Acts 2: 14-21, although the whole chapter should be read to put the happening in its full context.

Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit, particularly near the time of His death. John chapters 14 to 18 should be read to get an overall teaching of what Jesus said about the coming and work of the Spirit.

In John 14:15-17 Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as ‘another counselor.’

The word ‘another’ in the Greek means ‘one of exactly the same kind’. That is, the Holy Spirit will be similar to Jesus, i.e. as though Jesus Himself will be present.

Some people (and some religious sects) think of the Holy Spirit as a ‘force’ or ‘influence’. What do the verses quoted in the last paragraph teach you about the Holy Spirit? (Read John 16:7-8 also.)

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We need now to see something of what the Holy Spirit does in the life of men and women. Read the following verses, and write down what you understand the work of the Holy Spirit to be:

- (a) John 16:7-11.....
-
- (b) John 3:5-8.....
-
- (c) John 16:12-15.....
-
- (d) John 14:15-17.....
-

The Greek word ‘counselor’ is *paraclete*, or ‘one called alongside to help’. It was the word the Greeks used for a lawyer. In what ways does the Holy Spirit do this helping work in the following verses?

(a) Romans 8:14.....

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(b) Romans 8:26-27.....

.....

(c) Acts 1:8.....

.....

List at least three situations in your life where you need the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to come alongside you and help you today:

(a)

(b)

(c).....

As you conclude this study, spend some time in thanking God that He has not left you alone (see John 14: 15-18), and that He will help you not only today in the areas you have specified, but every day in every way you need Him.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit lives within you as a Christian (Romans 8:9). He does many things for you. One of the most exciting things he does is that he 'changes you'. As men and women living without God, we live lives that are not pleasing to God. When we come to know God, we are still living the kind of lives that are not pleasing to Him. The Holy Spirit begins a work that will continue all the time we live. This work is described in the following verses. Read Romans 8:28-29 and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. Describe in your own words what is being said about the Holy Spirit changing us.

The work done within us begins as soon as the Holy Spirit takes up His residence within us. Since you received the Holy Spirit (at your conversion), in what ways has the Spirit changed you? List these changes.

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Help Me to Grow

This work takes place as we walk with the Lord, and live in obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Acts 5:32; Romans 16:26).

The Bible speaks of our lives producing 'fruit'. Read the words that John said to the religious leaders of his day in Matthew 3:7-10, and the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:15-20. What sort of fruit does God not want from our lives?

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Read Galatians 5: 13-25. This passage contains a comparison of the fruit that we produce 'of ourselves' and the fruit that is produced in us by the Holy Spirit. List these two kinds of fruit below:

FRUIT OF THE 'FLESH'	FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit

How would you describe the difference between these two kinds of fruit?

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Read John 15:1-5. What does the idea of fruit suggest to you?

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Does the passage in John 15 add anything to your understanding of this matter?.

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In the light of these verses (and Galatians 5:22-23), whose task is it to produce these nine fruit (or characteristics) in your life?

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We need always to remember that this fruit is not produced *by us*. We cannot 'turn over a new leaf' or 'try harder'. The Holy Spirit produces this fruit. Think of an ordinary fruit tree. Can an apricot tree, by trying hard, produce peaches? Of course not! The fruit of the Holy Spirit is the result of the Holy Spirit living in us and producing the fruit of the Gospel itself in our actions. Read what Paul says in Romans 6:11-14. Does this give you any further ideas on living with the Holy Spirit as He produces His fruit in' you?

We live in an age that is very 'doing' oriented. If someone were to ask you who you are, you would probably tell them your name, as well as telling them *what you do*. Many official forms that require our name and address, also require our occupation. Sometimes we find it very hard to separate *who we are* from *what we do*. This is added to by the fact that so many of us are 'success-oriented'. There is pressure on me, as a minister, to have a church which is always growing in numbers, as though numbers is the thing that shows 'who we are'. God is not like this. He is far more interested in *who we are*, than He is in *what we do*. You will find, as you go on as a Christian, that the temptation comes to prove to God how much you love Him by doing things. Read the story of two sisters (Martha and Mary) in Luke 10:38-42. What attitude in Mary did Jesus encourage?

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What should your attitude be, as the Holy Spirit produces His fruit in you?

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Each day the Holy Spirit produces His fruit in you, because you have entrusted yourself to Him.

10

The gifts of the Holy Spirit

Distinct from the fruit of the Spirit are the gifts of the Spirit. They are just what the word says: 'gifts'. We have just seen that the Holy Spirit is in the business of transforming our character by making us like Jesus Christ, and producing in us a life like that of Jesus Christ. He was the only person who perfectly produced all the fruit of the Spirit in his daily life.

The Father, who is the great 'gift-giver', has work for us to do. This work is that of revealing to the world who God is, as well as the work of building one another up as Christians. How do we do this work? Is it something *we do*, using our natural talents, or is it again something that God does through us?

Christ give us gifts so that we can do the work that the Father has for us. At this point read the passages that speak of these gifts. They are: 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14; Romans 12: 1-8; Ephesians 4:7-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

There are a number of things we need to understand about the gifts. Among these are:

- (a) Every Christian has been given a gift (or gifts) by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7). It is true to say that all the gifts reside in the Giver—Christ. We received the Holy Spirit at conversion. There is no reason why the Spirit of God should not release His gifts within us, as they are needed, as we walk in obedience to the Father’s will.
- (b) These gifts are not for our personal use, but are operated for the benefit of the whole church (body). This understanding is basic to all that Paul says to the Corinthians. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-3 1. In fact, the gifts are given to the *Church*, and are distributed to *persons*.
- (c) No one can boast about a gift, because it is a gift. No one person has all the gifts. Together we have the gifts God wants us to have. These gifts reveal the actions of the Holy Spirit as they come through us.
- (d) The gifts used without love are pointless and worth nothing to God. Read I Corinthians 13:1-3.

A question that you have probably been asking yourself is, ‘How do I know if I have a gift?’ Or perhaps, ‘How do I get a gift?’ To answer these questions, let me give some guidelines.

- (a) Ask God to reveal to you the gifts He has given you. Make this a matter of prayer (see 1 Corinthians 14:1). It may be that every Christian has the ability to use every gift because the gifts reside in the Giver. In 1 Corinthians 14:1 Paul urges the church to strive for the operation of the gifts in the church, especially the gift of God’s speaking to His people (prophecy).
- (b) As you participate in the worship and fellowship of other Christians, you will have a ministry, and the action of the gifts will become apparent to you and the group.
- (c) It is important to see that no gift has any value unless it is an operation of love. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

It will be most helpful to spend time with the person who is helping you with this study (or a church leader, if you are doing it alone), to talk about issues like:

—how do I participate in the gifts which Christ gives His people?
 —the problems of false modesty and exhibitionism.

We have spent a lot of this study on the origin and operation of the gifts. Now we must look at the gifts themselves.

Some have divided the gifts into categories, which is quite helpful in understanding their function. These are not ‘objects’, as it were, which we get and then possess as a member of the body of Christ. They are for the meeting of human need, for the means of expressing love, and for the rich worship of God.

1. Knowledge gifts

- (a) *Wisdom*. This is a special gift of wisdom which allows the person to understand. This is particularly beneficial when a person is being counselled, and special help is needed to understand and help that person.
- (b) *Knowledge*. This is more than human knowledge, and is a special endowment of knowledge given at particular times, as it is needed for the working of the church.
- (c) *Discernment* (or, the ability to distinguish between spirits). This is a gift given to understand or discern whether God is trying to say something to the church or if it is simply from man. It is given for a wide variety of situations, wherever special discernment is necessary.

2. Power gifts

- (d) *Healing*. This is the ability to pray for a person to be healed. See also James 5:14-18 where this ministry is committed to the Elders.
- (e) *Miracles*. These are dynamic powers given to overcome obstacles which are beyond our natural abilities. They are not toys for self-advancement.
- (f) *Faith*. We all have faith, but this is a special faith which enables the people of God to go forward in the face of seeming contradictions.

3. Speaking gifts

- (g) *Prophecy*. This is the ability to speak a message to the church from God. It is always a message that edifies or encourages the church. It is not on the same 'level' as the Bible or the words of the prophets of old, but is upbuilding to the church, and must always be in agreement with what God has said in the Bible.
- (h) *Tongues*. This is a language that God gives to members of the church, for its upbuilding. Some have called it 'prayer language', as those who have this gift often use it to praise God in prayer. It can be a means of praying privately, but in the church is accompanied by the gift of interpretation.
- (i) *Interpretation of tongues*. This is a gift God gives when tongues are spoken in church. The person has the ability to understand what has been said. When he 'interprets' the tongue, it becomes like a word of prophecy, and all that we have said about prophecy becomes meaningful for this gift as well.

Two other passages in the Bible which speak about 'gifts' are Ephesians 4:7-14 and Romans 12:3-8 (mentioned above). Ephesians refers to leadership gifts, but are again for the building up of the whole church (see Study 17).

Helpers and administrators (I Corinthians 12:28). These indicate the very practical nature of the gifts. They coincide with Romans 12:3-8, which shows the down-to-earth nature of the action of the gifts. Paul admonishes us not to be puffed up with our own importance, but to remember that just as all the members or organs of the human body are necessary for its proper function, so the so-called lesser or greater gifts are all necessary for the proper functioning of the church.

Is there really a devil?

To many people outside of the church, the devil is not a real person. Cartoons depict 'the devil' as a sinister, evil character with a pitch-fork in his hand and having a forked tail! The Bible is very clear that the devil is a real person, and that he is very powerful. His appearance is not spoken of, but we are told that he can appear in all manner of 'acceptable' ways (see 2 Corinthians 11: 14).

One thing that we discover almost immediately as Christians is that we are in a spiritual battle. We have temptations to go any way but God 's. Doubts seem to come into our mind from nowhere. This is the work of the devil, who opposes everything that God does. Before we look into this warfare, let us look at who the devil is, and why he behaves as he does.

1. Who is the devil?

The devil was originally one of the angels who was created to serve God. He was one of the leading angels and may have been one of the archangels—a ruling angel. There appears to be hierarchies among the

angels, and Satan (as the devil is called) appears to have been one of the three highest angels.

2. Why did he become evil?

Read Isaiah 14:12-15. This describes Satan’s fall from a place of perfection and obedience to God. What are the five things he sought to be?

- (a).....
- (b)
- (c).....
- (d)
- (e).....

Basically, his sin was that he wanted to become as God.

3. What happened when he fell?

When Satan sinned, he appears to have taken into sin and rebellion with him all the angels under his authority. Read Revelation 12:7-9, where this appears to be stated. Some see the reference to a ‘third’ to mean that a third of the angels turned against God and followed Satan. The Bible speaks about *one* devil but *many* demons. These beings are spoken of particularly in the four Gospels. They are wicked angels, that is, the ones who rebelled with Satan. There are good angels who are still obedient to God and do His work (see Psalm 103:20).

It is very easy for even Christians to become so obsessed with Satan that they live in fear of his attacks and of being led astray by him. Before we look at the dimension of spiritual battle, let us look at how Jesus

Christ faced and defeated Satan.

1. Jesus, as a man dependent upon His Father, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, opposed and defeated Satan in his lifetime

This was seen particularly in Jesus’ ‘temptations’. Read Matthew 4: 1-11. What did Jesus use to battle Satan with?

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Jesus’ defeat of Satan is seen in many incidents in the Gospels. Read Mark 1:21-27, 5:1-17, and Acts 10:37-38.

2. Jesus defeated Satan at the cross

When Jesus was taken to be crucified, Satan no doubt thought that he had defeated Jesus, but the miracle of the cross is that what looks to man like defeat, is to God the ultimate victory of all time.

Read the following Scriptures and make brief comments on what it is saying about Jesus’ victory:

- (a) Hebrews 2:14-15
-
- (b) John 12:27-31.....
-
- (c) 1 John 3:8
-

(d) Colossians 2:14-15.....
.....

3. The outcome of this is that we can defeat Satan in the power of Jesus Christ

Read the following Scriptures and make brief comments about what they say concerning our victory over Satan:

(a) 1 John 4:4.....
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(b) 1 John 2:14.....
.....

(c) 1 Peter 5:8-9.....
.....

(d) James 4:7.....
.....

(e) Revelation 12:10-11.....
.....

We are in a spiritual battle, whether we like it or not. To be a Christian is to encounter opposition from the enemy. For this battle we need protection. Read Ephesians 6:10-17 and see how God equips us for our battle against Satan. List the different pieces of armour that God has

given us. (Read this in a modern translation also, such as the *Living Bible*.)

(a).....

(b).....

(c).....

(d).....

(e).....

(f).....

Each piece of armour is indispensable. The *belt of truth* reminds us that the Gospel and the Bible are dependable and true. The *breastplate of righteousness* reminds us that we have God’s acceptance always. The *shoes of peace* lead us to act in ways which reflect the Prince of Peace. The *shield of faith* (believing God’s promises to us) throws off the arrows that Satan shoots at us, and protects us from him (compare what Jesus did, in Matthew 4:1-11). The *helmet of salvation* protects our minds when they might tend to wander, or to doubt the things God has done for us, and to believe the lies Satan would tell us. The *sword of the Spirit—the Word of God*—allows us to be on the offensive against Satan, as we use it to bring the light of God’s promises and love into a dark, lost world. As Christians, we need to have respect for the devil, in that he is a formidable enemy. However, we need not be fearful of him. Remember that he is a created being like us—he is not almighty, he was defeated by Jesus on the cross, and while we trust in the Lord, we too are victorious.

12

Will I still have problems?

Sometimes people have the idea that Christians never have any problems and that they should never do anything wrong. You may have even been surprised as a new Christian to realise that you still did and thought some things that were wrong. Unfortunately Christians still face problems, still have temptations, and are not perfect! While we remain in these bodies of ours we will still be plagued with all the things that we have always experienced, but the difference is that now we are forgiven, and while we rely on the Lord we have the power to overcome our temptations.

Read 1 John 1:5 to 2:2. What function does Jesus fulfil in and for us?

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How does this compare with the function of a defence lawyer in our courts?

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Compare this with the statements in Romans 8:1 and 31- 34. These facts are based on the sufficiency of the death of Jesus Christ for *all* of our sins. The more we realise how much God loves us and what it cost Him to forgive us our sins, the more careful we will be not to fall into sin.

Leaving aside these things, what about the problems and trials and tribulations we experience in life? Read Romans 8:28. What do you think Paul means by this statement?

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What is meant by 'all things'?

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Do you think this means that God uses our problems, etc., to our benefit?

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Read Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-16; Job 23:10. What are some of the things these verses teach about problems and suffering?

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Help Me to Grow

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Does this help you understand Romans 8:28 any more clearly? If so, how?

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Read I Corinthians 10:13. What does this tell you about the problems you will face?

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What confidence does this give you?

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Very often we see all problems, sickness, disasters, etc., as coming from Satan. This is not so. Even a very casual reading of the Old Testament shows how the Israelites, because they were disobedient, had the Lord bring punishment to them in the form of famines, sickness, foreign armies, and so on. (See such passages as Isaiah 47:5-6, where God says He will punish Babylon, even though that nation was God's instrument to punish His people, Israel.)

Will I Still Have Problems?

Read Hebrews 12:1-11. What does this passage tell you about the 'discipline of the Lord'?

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God always has our correction in mind, so that we grow out of the experience. In every experience of life, we have the opportunity to grow. One interesting thing to note is that our greatest growth as God's children does not come when everything is going well, but as we go through difficult times. It is in these times especially that we need to really trust the Lord and draw on His strength.

This is seen in Paul's life. Read 2 Corinthians 12: 1-10. What outcome in Paul's life did this 'thorn in my flesh' have?

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A good rule to keep in the back of your mind when things go wrong is this: Don't ask 'Why has it happened?', but rather, 'What have you got to teach me, Lord, through this experience?'

Often it is helpful to discuss problems or problem areas with others. The Elders (or your Home Fellowship leaders) are particularly willing to assist you in this way. However, God has placed us in His Body, the Church, and in this Body we are to help one another.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:22-26 and Galatians 6:1-2. What are these verses teaching you concerning suffering and the part we play in helping one another?

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Conclude this study by reading 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Philippians 4:6-7, asking God to help you to understand these passages and put into practice what they are saying.

How important is the Bible?

In the introduction to these studies, we said that the Bible was our text book. This is true because every study has been based on what the Bible says. But we also said that the Bible is God's Word to us. This means that the Bible was not just speaking to people in Israel many years ago, but is speaking to us today, or, to put it another way, God speaks through it to us today. Many of the situations, problems, wrong teaching and so on, that were written about then, are still with us today. They may come in different forms, but basically they are the same.

How did the Bible come to be written? Men certainly wrote it, and their personalities and style come through, but it is more than this. Read Acts 1:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21, and 2 Timothy 3:14-17. From the first two references, who was 'acting upon' men when they wrote the Bible?

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What do you understand by the statement in 2 Timothy, 'God-breathed'? (Compare this word with what Peter says in 2 Peter 1:21.)

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Help Me to Grow

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 In verse 16, what are the four 'actions' of the Word of God, and what does it show as the purpose of the Word of God (i.e. explain what the four actions mean to you)?

ACTION	MEANING
(a).....
(b)
(c).....
(d)

Similar actions are seen in some O.T. passages. Read each one of the following passages, and give a brief explanation of the action and what it implies to you:

VERSE	ACTION	MEANING
Psalm 119:
Psalm 119:104

How Important is the Bible?

VERSE	ACTION	MEANING
<i>Psalm 119:105</i>
Jeremiah 23:29.....
Ephesians 6:17.....
Hebrews 4:12.....
I Peter 2:2.....

The Bible is not just a book that you hear read at church, or read occasionally yourself. It is your 'spiritual food', and through it the Holy Spirit will help you grow as a child of God. It is meant to relate to every part of your life. This is brought out in an O.T. passage in which God is instructing fathers in their role as spiritual leaders in the home. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. As you read, carefully list what the Israelites were to do with the Bible and when they were to do it.

What they were to do:

(a).....
(b)
(c).....

(d)

When they were to do it:

(a).....

(b).....

(c).....

(d)

It is a good practical habit to read some of God’s Word each day. There are many ways of doing this. One way is to methodically read book by book, taking a section from both Old and New Testament each day. It is wise to procure a Bible commentary that will give you an introduction to each book of the Bible, so that you understand something of its purpose before reading it. Some Bible commentaries are rather large and so are expensive, but the expense is worth it, as you will find them most helpful. Two good books are *The Bible Expositor*, edited by Carl Henry, and the *New Bible Commentary*.

If you want more help in this area, then speak to one of your church Elders or to your Pastor, who will be able to advise you in more detail.

Why do I need to pray?

To many new Christians, prayer is something strange and difficult. Stated simply, prayer is conversing or talking with God.

We should not think this strange. When you meet someone, the way to get to know them is by talking with them. It is so also with God. But you may ask, ‘How does God speak to me? Is His voice audible?’ There are times when God has done this for people, but it is certainly not the rule. God speaks through His written Word, the Bible. As you read it, ask God to speak to your heart (will, mind, emotions) what He wants to say to you or wants you to learn about Him and His ways.

On the other side, we speak to God simply by talking to Him. In the same way we speak to a person we can see, so we speak to God, who—although we do not see Him—is there and hears us. The Book of Psalms is a good illustration of prayers of men which have been written down for us. Read Psalm 51, for example. This is David’s prayer of confession of sin.

God is with us all the time, so at any moment we can speak to Him. As our Father, He wants us to share everything with Him. So at any moment, as we experience anything (good or bad), we can share it with Him, in

whatever way it needs to be shared.

Jesus Christ, even though He was God’s Son, needed to pray. Read Mark 1:35, Luke 5:15-16, and Matthew 14: 22-23. What do these verses tell you about the importance of prayer in Jesus’ life?

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Can you imagine having a loving and understanding father and never talking to him? God is our loving Father. So ask God right now to teach you how to pray. Then read Matthew 6:5-13. This is Jesus’ ‘model prayer’ which He told His disciples to use as an example.

There are many different kinds of prayer, that is, different reasons why and how we talk to God. One very well-known way is to use the word A-C-T-S to remember these reasons. The first letter of the following four ways of praying spells the word ‘ACTS’. The four types of prayer are:

Adoration: which is praising God for being God. To help you understand this, read Psalm 145:1-7 aloud. It will help you express to God some of His qualities. Pause for a few moments and seek to express adoration to God in your own words.

Confession: which is acknowledging sin and thanking God for His forgiveness. Read Psalm 51 again. Notice the change in David’s attitude once he had acknowledged his sin and realised God had forgiven him.

Thanksgiving: which is thanking God for the thing He has done. List four things God has done for you, particularly in the last two weeks.

(a).....

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(b)

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(c).....

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(d)

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Supplication: which is making requests to God. Read Ephesians 6: 18.

It is a very good idea to have some time each day (the time will depend on your situation) when you can spend time reading your Bible and praying. You will need some time for God to speak to you, so don’t be in a hurry. Just as you need regular meals and not just a snack grabbed here or there, to grow physically and remain healthy, so you need the same in reading the Word and praying, to grow spiritually and remain ‘healthy’.

There are many good books that can assist you to develop your relationship with God in prayer. See your Christian bookshop manager for suggestions.

Two books I have found to be particularly helpful are *Hush/Hush! It’s Time to Pray— But How?* by Jill Briscoe (Zondervan), and *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster (Hodder & Stoughton).

One of the most important exercises you will do as a child of God is to develop your prayer relationship with the Father. Concentrate on this area, and ask the Father to help you.

15

Do I really have to tell others about Jesus?

Peter Gillquist, in his splendid little book *Love is Now* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1974), tells of a conversation he had with a university student about becoming a Christian. The student wanted to, but was worried about having to tell others what he had done, so he asked if he could become a Christian without having to tell others. Gillquist assured the man that that was not a necessary condition of becoming a Christian. The student gave himself to the Lord and was so overjoyed with the realisation and experience of forgiveness and God's love that he told every person he met as the two men walked across the campus to the refectory! The very thing he feared, he did without realising, because he could not hold within himself the experience of becoming a Christian.

Such a situation is seen in many of the lives of people who were touched by Jesus' ministry. Read about a few of these in Mark 5:1-20 (noting especially verse 20); 1:40-45; 7:31-36. In each case what is it that these people tell others about?

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One reason that Christians often give for not sharing Jesus with others is that they do not understand the Bible well enough. It does help to know the Bible, but none of these people in the above Bible references spoke from a knowledge of the Bible! People who talk to you don't want a sermon, they want to know what God has done for you, and what difference He makes in your life now. Read the whole of John 9. This is the story of a blind man who was healed completely by Jesus. The Pharisees (a narrow religious group in the time of Jesus) sought to make Jesus appear as a wicked or sinful man because they were more interested in keeping their traditions than in helping people. You see, Jesus had healed on the sabbath, and to the Pharisees that constituted work, and work was not allowed on the sabbath. Read verses 24 and 25 again. What was the basis of this man's argument?

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The 'argument' we as Christians have is just the same. No person can refute the changes the Lord has made in our lives.

Read Psalm 103:1-14 (looking particularly at verses 1-5). What makes David speak out in such a wonderful way?.

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In answer to the question in the title of this study, we can say that once a person's life has been gripped by the wonder of God's love and forgiveness, once they have experienced the freedom of having guilt removed,

once they have realised what it means to know God as Father, it will be hard to keep that person quiet about the Lord!

To tell others is not a condition of becoming a Christian—only the cross can do that—but it is the inevitable outcome of a life that has been touched and changed by the Father.

Just one word of advice in this matter of sharing your faith. Don't 'buttonhole' people, or squeeze them into a corner so they have to listen. These are the best ways of turning people off. Instead, ask the Lord to put you in situations day by day where you are able to tell others. Your opening may be simply in helping someone without mentioning the Lord's name. If you wait for the right God-given moment, you will be able to tell them why you want to help others. God will send situations and people to you if you want Him to. One final thing: be ready at any time to speak out for the Lord. He has promised to give you the right words to say.

What about Baptism and the Lord's Supper?

BAPTISM

When Jesus left this earth to return to His Father, He gave a command to His disciples to go into all the world and bring men to know God. (Strictly speaking it is not a command. Matthew 28:19 is better translated, 'as you go, make disciples... ') Read Matthew 28:18-20 and discover these two things:

- (a)
- (b)

It is with *baptism* that we will firstly be concerned in this study.

As we read the N.T., we first encounter baptism in relation to John 'the baptiser' (see Mark 1:4-8). John's demand for baptism was linked with the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 3:2), repentance with a view to

forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:5), and the baptism with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8).

On the Day of Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit was given), Peter called on the hearers to repent and be baptised. Here it was related to the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), but it also signified incorporation into the (new) people of God. It was 'in the name of Jesus Christ'. Baptism is a pledge given by God that He has made us His own, as it also identifies us with Christ. This comes out more clearly in Romans 6: 1-6. In your own words, state what these verses are saying to you:

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Baptism is from God's grace, as also are the fruits of baptism, which are forgiveness (Acts 2:38), cleansing (Acts 22: 16), justification (1 Peter 3:21), incorporation into Christ's body (the Church, Romans 6:1-6; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26), and the initial act of regeneration followed by the process of sanctification which leads to ultimate glory (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Romans 8:28-30).

The requirements for baptism are repentance (Acts 2:38) and faith (Mark 16:16).

The *demands made by baptism* are renunciation of sin, the world, the flesh, and evil powers (the devil). These demands are inherent in repentance (which means 'a change of mind').

Baptism, as a ritual, does not, of itself, bring all these benefits. Baptism must be accompanied by repentance and faith. A great Christian writer once said: *'Baptism and faith* are but the *outside* and *inside* of the same thing'.

Different branches of the Church have viewed the meaning of baptism in different ways. Some view baptism as dynamic merely for the time of the act itself. Others, such as Martin Luther, see the whole of life as being a

dying to sin and a rising to life until the resurrection. He spoke of 'creeping back under our baptism'. It tells us what God has done and who we are.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

This Supper has been called by many names, eg. 'Holy Communion', 'Eucharist' (The Thanksgiving), 'Breaking of Bread', and others. Each name signifies something important about the sacrament.

The Lord's Supper was first instituted by Jesus at the time of the Passover meal (see Exodus 12:1-30 for the details of the Passover). Luke points out that the disciples were eating the Passover when Jesus introduced this new concept (Luke 22:7-20).

The Supper speaks of the death of Jesus Christ. The two symbols used are bread and wine.

Of what does the bread speak?

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The wine?

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Being linked with the Passover, the Supper points back to the old exodus (Israel being released from slavery in Egypt), and forward to the 'new' exodus (Luke 9:28)—Jesus' death which would secure our release from sin and the devil.

It also has in view the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In Luke 22:18 we see this fact. It also comes out in I Corinthians 11:26, where Paul says that we are to share in this meal 'until he comes'. This simple meal points to the ultimate purpose of God when all the redeemed people of God shall be gathered together in glory to celebrate the full salvation and liberty of the sons of God.

There are many interpretations of the use of the bread and wine, and the references to 'my body' and 'my blood'. It is best to see them in terms of *covenant* (see 1 Corinthians 11:25 and Matthew 26:28). Jesus was

establishing a new covenant ‘in my blood ‘. What we mean is that just as Israel was delivered from Egypt (bondage) and released to Canaan (liberty), so the giving of Christ’s body and the shedding of His blood will bring the promised freedom spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

In celebrating the Lord’s Supper, we take a *backward look* to Jesus’ death and all it signifies for the people of God, especially in the total forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28). We also take a *forward look* to the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God, the new age. But we also take a *present look*, because we are participating dynamically in forgiveness and also in the full unity of the body, since the body is one with its Head (Jesus Christ).

We must remember, as we did with baptism, that this sacrament does not of itself effect forgiveness, liberty, fellowship and hope. Faith and repentance are essential. But even repentance and faith are simply the manward conditions essential to right participation. The Lord’s Supper is ‘all of grace’. The Lord’s Supper, rightly comprehended, is the body of the church in fellowship with its redeeming Lord.

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What is the Church, and why should I belong to it?

We will commence this study by asking the question, ‘What is the Church?’ Before you read on, write down a short definition of what you believe is ‘the Church’.

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Many of the books of the N .T. were written to churches. For example, read 1 Corinthians 1: 1-2, Galatians 1: 1-2, and 1 Thessalonians 1: 1. Often we think of the ‘church’ as being the church building. We all use the expression that way on many occasions. But this is not strictly correct. The church is the group of believers who meet together. Put simply, the church is people—people who belong to God. Read Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 16: 19, and Ephesians 5:23-27. What evidence do you find in these verses that ‘the church’ refers to ‘the people of God ‘?

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Now read I Peter 2:4-5. How is the Christian described in verse 5?

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A similar description is given in Ephesians 4:15-16. What is the church likened to in these verses?

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When a person becomes a Christian, he or she simultaneously becomes a member of the church. Baptism testifies of this. Read I Corinthians 12:12-13. The word 'church' is used in two ways. One is the 'local church', the other is of the 'church universal', that is, all true believers all over the world. This is sometimes called the 'one true church' and is what is referred to in the above reference from I Corinthians.

The fact that we need to consider now is what we call the 'local church'. By this we mean the different church 'groups' or 'denominations' which are all over the world. It is impossible to discuss in the scope of this study how the church came to be made up of so many denominations. The fact that we need to remember is this: no matter what denomination a person may belong to, all true believers are one, they are all brothers and sisters in Christ, all one family under God who is Father. Read Galatians 3:26-28. The initial question in the study asked why we should belong to one of these denominations. With all their faults, God works through His church.

In the N.T. we find God revealing through the Apostles His plan for the

church. Read Ephesians 4:4-14. What are the four 'gifts' which God gives to the church, mentioned in verse 11 (the last two are one of office)?

- (a).....
- (b)
- (c).....
- (d)

What is their purpose as shown in verse 12 onwards?

- (a).....
- (b)
- (c).....

The purposes are not that they do all the work, but that they equip the Christians so that they can do the work God wants them to do. The wonderful part about God's work is that He gives us special gifts which enable us to do His work. The church is not like a 'club' that we belong to, in which we can be active if we want to. The church is the 'body of Christ', and as such is Christ in action in this world. This means that each of us is vitally important to its functioning. It carries with it a responsibility which flows out of the love of God, to be involved in God's work. No part of Christ 's body is to be 'deformed' and thus useless ! The Father sees us all as being gifted to minister in the body (the church). The gifts/positions of Ephesians 4 are thus to 'prepare God's people for the work of the ministry', not to do the ministry while the members sit back and enjoy the ride. This puts real value on to every member of Christ's body.

Do you see any particular area of ministry to which you are called, and for which you are being equipped to serve?

Read I Peter 4:10-11. The gifts God gives us are broadly speaking divided up into 'speaking' and 'serving' divisions.

It is through the local church that the Lord wants to work. Jesus Christ is 'Lord of the Church'. The local fellowship of God's people is to be a loving and caring community (see Ephesians 4:15-16). It is to reveal God's love (see John 13:34-35). It is to be a place where people are cared for, built up as believers, and prepared to move out to show the love of God to others by word and action (see Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 3: 14-21; Colossians 3:12-17; I John 3:16-18).

Within each fellowship or church, God gives different functions, though no Christian is superior or inferior to another. To some He gives the position of leadership (see Ephesians 4: 10-12). These men are to be mature Christians and an example to the church in living (see 1 Peter 5: 1-5). Also in the church God gives gifts to all (as we saw in Romans 12: 3-8), and every person has a part to play in the work, witness and life of the church. The N.T. writers often speak of the church as a 'body', and just as the body is healthy and strong when every part of the body is functioning as it should, so the body of Christ—the church—is healthy and vital when each believer is functioning as the Father wants him to.

There is no place in the N.T. for a Christian being on his or her own, and doing their own thing. Just as a finger on the body cannot decide to leave the body and do its own thing, so the Christian is part of the body of God's people. So, just as we simultaneously become a part of the one universal 'body of Christ' when we are converted, we are to become a part of the local church and use those gifts that God has given to us, under the leadership and guidance of those to whom God has given the positions of leadership.

In concluding, can I again encourage you to seek the counsel and help of your Pastor and Elders if you ever need it. Read Ephesians 3: 14-21, and praise God that you belong to Him.

Going on in grace

The end of these studies is not the end of all there is to know! It is only a way of helping you get going at the beginning of your life as God's son or daughter. The purpose of this last study is to keep you from making a big mistake that too many Christians make as they go on in their Christian life.

In Galatians 3:3 Paul says, 'After *beginning* with the Spirit, are you now *trying to attain your goal* by human effort?' Too many Christians think that God's grace was only necessary for making them Christians. Paul said in Ephesians 2:5 that 'It is by grace you have been saved'. Put simply, grace means that no person ever *deserves* God's love, but God has accepted every one of us through what Jesus did on the cross. Having experienced that wonderful gift, it is easy to think we now remain acceptable to God by *what we do*. *This* is not so!

These two ways of seeing our relationship with God can be seen in Galatians 2:15-16. They could be called the '*way of grace*' (faith in Jesus Christ), and the '*way of law*' (keeping God's laws). This matter is so important that the entire Letter to the Galatians and most of the Letter to the Romans—as well as many other passages—are devoted to it.

To help us get God’s way firmly fixed in our minds, let us look at some real situations:

1. How do we daily remain acceptable to God?

- Law says: ‘Perform well so you will be accepted ‘.
- *Grace* says: ‘You are accepted; now you can perform’.

Let me put it another way. It is impossible to *earn* the acceptance of God if God has already *given it* to us. Our problem is that most of us have been taught from childhood that if we perform well we will be acceptable. A mother may say to a small child whom she wants to put on a good display of behaviour: ‘Be a good little boy and HI buy you an icecream’. We think God works in the same way. But God says to us, ‘There’s nothing good enough that any of you can do to make Me accept you. But don’t worry, I’ve already accepted you (and always will) because of what My Son has done for you’.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. What does it say that we have been made?

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How long does this last?

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So then, if we try to gain God’s acceptance through our own actions, we are despising Christ’s action on our behalf. Paul puts it rather bluntly in Galatians 5:4.

Let’s look at another aspect of our Christian life.

2. How do we receive daily blessings from God?

Some think that these come from such exercises as Bible reading, prayer, witnessing, or going to church regularly. ‘If I do this, God will

surely bless me!’ These thing are very important and should be done— but not as a means of getting God’s blessing. We do them because we love Him and want to do what He says. Grace tells us that them is never a time when God is not moving out to bless us. In Acts 4:33 we read of these new Christians that ‘much grace was upon them all’. This was not because they were doing great things for the Lord, but because they knew God had loved and forgiven them, and they were joyfully responding to this fact. This leads us to ask another crucial question:

3. How does God motivate us?

The way of law is to motivate us *by fear*, while the way of grace is by *love*.

Read 1 John 4:16-18. Fear is the opposite to love, and the way of fear has no place in the life of God’s children.

Read carefully 2 Corinthians 5: 14-15, and express in your own words what it means.

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A word that is freely used in Christian circles is the word ‘commitment’. A *commitment* is something we do or give to God. It might be a commitment to serve Him in some particular place or way. Because it comes from us, it needs to be continually renewed. It takes a lot of effort. If it is demanding enough it may cause us to even have a break-down. The N.T. writers speak of ‘constraint’, not ‘commitment’. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul says, ‘The love of God constrains me’. The word ‘constrains’ means ‘to be controlled by’, or, ‘to be compelled ‘. Paul is saying that God’s love has so taken hold of him that *it* is the power that works within him. In Romans 5:5 Paul speaks of God pouring out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. When God’s love, by His Spirit, really takes hold of us,

Help Me to Grow

we do not need a man-made commitment. We become gripped by grace. Grace tells us that God loves us and won't stop loving us. It tells us that He accepted us in Christ and always will. It also tells us that God has poured out His love and forgiveness on us, and all we have to do is to return that love. We do that because we *want* to, not because we *have* to. John says, 'We love because *He first* loved us' (1 John 4:19).

The grace way is the way of true freedom, which is why Paul wrote Galatians 5:1 (read it). What is the 'yoke of slavery' referring to?

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We need to take care that we do not wrongly use that grace. Read Galatians 5:13-14. What does Paul mean in verse 14?

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When we are living in grace, we are living in the good of all that the Lord has done for us. We are not using grace as an 'excuse' to live for ourselves, knowing God will forgive us. Instead, we are living for God because He loves and accepts us freely. The commandments of God are not a burden, but a delight (the Psalmist of the O.T. knew this: see Psalm 11:16, 35, 47, etc.). Jesus expressed it in John 14:15, when he said, 'If you love me you will obey what I command '.

The way of the Lord is the way of grace: grace from beginning to end.