

The Word of God

Study #1

2 Timothy 3:16-17

God-breathed Scripture

Question: *What does the Word of God say about itself?*

Question: What does it mean that all Scripture is God-breathed or inspired by God?

Observation: Regardless of how inspiration works, the concept of being God-breathed informs us that this is the Word of God, not men, and is to be lived out.

Question: Do you believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God rather than men?

John 8:31-32

Hold to the truth

Questions: What must be held to, according to Jesus? Do you believe that these Jews were sincere? Does Jesus seem to value truth or sincerity?

Observation: Jesus valued truth over sincerity. If we are to be true followers of Jesus, we must hold to his teachings and live them out. Sincerity does not lead to truth. Religious people can hold to something other than the truth.

1 Timothy 4:16

Life and doctrine

Questions: Which is more important, life or doctrine? What is meant by life? What is meant by doctrine?

Observation: Many people lean naturally towards valuing life, while many others lean towards valuing doctrine. The biblical call is to value both and see to it that they are kept equal. When we pay careful attention to both our life and doctrine, we will save ourselves and those around us.

Question: What would happen if someone watched only their life and not doctrine? What would happen if someone watched only their doctrine and not their life?

Acts 17:10-12

Examine the Scriptures

Questions: What did the Bereans do that made them so noble? What does this mean for us today?

Observation: We are to check out what people say regarding the Bible. We are to examine carefully what others say and see for ourselves if it is true. The only way to do this is to study the Bible with devotion so that we recognize false teachings.

Question: How can we know that the Word of God is reliable?

Manuscripts

Evidence for the Bible

The first question we must ask about the reliability of the Scripture is: can we know that the Bible we have today is an accurate rendition of the original manuscripts. To answer this we have to consider the bibliographic, eyewitness, and external evidence.

The bibliographic test considers the quantity of manuscripts and the time span between the original and the earliest copies in existence. The more copies and the closer the time span between the original and the copies, the more likely it is to demonstrate the lack of textual errors. There are over 14,000 manuscript copies in existence of the Old Testament, some of which date back as far as 250 BC. There are over 5,600 copies of the New Testament, some of which can be dated within a hundred years of the original documents. There is no other ancient book or document that is even close to the New Testament in either of these categories. The *Iliad* (which blows away all other ancient works) has 643 manuscripts that date to as close as 500 years to the original date of authorship.

Nearly all of the Bible was written by eyewitnesses or people who interviewed eyewitnesses. This is important because eyewitness testimony is always considered more reliable than second-hand information. For example, Moses was an eyewitness to much of what is described in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Luke, in the New Testament, tells us that he carefully gathered testimony and investigated everything he wrote (Luke 1:1-3).

The Word of God, Continued

External evidence considers information from outside of the texts to determine the reliability of the historical events, geographical locations, and cultural consistency of the biblical texts. The Bible is unique among sacred texts from other religions in that it gives many historical references that verify its accuracy. The Bible makes historical claims that have been proven over and over again.

Bible Scholar Hank Hanegraaff says, “Many of the events, people, places, and customs in the New Testament are confirmed by secular historians who were almost contemporaries with New Testament writers. Secular historians like the Jewish Josephus (before A.D. 100), the Roman Tacitus (around A.D. 120), the Roman Suetonius (A.D. 110), and the Roman governor Pliny Secundus (A.D. 100-110) make direct reference to Jesus or affirm one or more historical New Testament references. Early church leaders such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Julius Africanus, and Clement of Rome — all writing before A.D. 250 — shed light on New Testament historical accuracy. Even skeptical historians agree that the New Testament is a remarkable historical document. Hence, it is clear that there is strong external evidence to support the Bible’s manuscript reliability.”

Archaeology

Evidence for the Bible

Unlike other religious books that either make no historical claims that can be verified by history, or do make claims that have been shown false, the Bible has been affirmed in its reliability again and again. Solid archaeological evidence has shown, without fail, that the Bible is a reliable source.

For years, critics criticized the book of Daniel because there was no evidence of a king named Belshazzar. Later archaeological research, however, confirmed that the reigning monarch Nabonidus, appointed Belshazzar as his co-regent while he was away from Babylon. In the 19th century, the Bible was criticized because there was no evidence of the Hittites, who are described extensively in the Old Testament. In 1906, archaeology confirmed the existence of the Hittites and affirmed the reliability and accuracy of the Bible. Sir William Ramsay, an archaeologist and skeptic of the Bible set out to disprove the reliability of the book of Luke. Through many archaeological trips to the Mediterranean, he became converted as he realized the incredible historical accuracy of the book of Luke.

Prophecy

Evidence for the Bible

The third principle of Bible reliability is Prophecy, or predictive ability. The Bible records predictions of events that could not be known or predicted by chance or common sense. Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, critics of the Bible claimed that the prophetic parts of the Old Testament that concerned Jesus’ birth were written after He was born. The discovery of these scrolls, however, showed that the many predictions of Christ’s birth, life and death were indisputably rendered more than a century before they occurred as proven by the Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah and other prophetic books as well as by the Septuagint translation, all dating from earlier than 100 B.C.

For instance, Old Testament prophecies concerning the Phoenician city of Tyre were fulfilled in ancient times, including prophecies that the city would be opposed by many nations (Ezek. 26:3); its walls would be destroyed and towers broken down (26:4); and its stones, timbers, and debris would be thrown into the water (26:12). Similar prophecies were fulfilled concerning Sidon (Ezek. 28:23; Isa. 23; Jer. 27:3-6; 47:4) and Babylon (Jer. 50:13, 39; 51:26, 42-43, 58; Isa. 13:20-21).

The many prophecies concerning the birth, life, and death were too numerous to be coincidence, and included many things that could not have been intentionally fulfilled by someone. Consider, His descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 12:3; 17:19; Num. 24:21-24); His birth in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2); His crucifixion with criminals (Isa. 53:12); the piercing of His hands and feet at the crucifixion (Ps. 22:16); the soldiers’ gambling for His clothes (Ps. 22:18); the piercing of His side and the fact that His bones were not broken at His death (Zech. 12:10; Ps. 34:20); and His burial among the rich (Isa. 53:9). Jesus also predicted His own death and resurrection (John 2:19-22). Predictive Prophecy is a principle of Bible reliability that often reaches even the hard-boiled skeptic!

For Further Study

What the Bible does for us

Observation: There are many things that the Bible does for us: It Reveals Our True Self (James 1:21-25); it directs us to rebirth (1 Peter 1:22-25); it will judge us (John 12:47-48); it shows us truth from tradition (Matthew 15:1-9); it allows us to have faith (Romans 10:17); it provides warning for us (1 Corinthians 10:1-13).

Considerations

Things to think about

Do you believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God?
Are you willing to commit your life to the Word of God?
Are you willing to commit yourself to the daily study of the Word of God?

The Purpose and Corruption of Man

Study #2

Genesis 1:1, 31

Creation was good

Question: What did God think of His creation after completing it?

Observation: God completed His creation, including man, and saw that it was all very good. It was in perfect communion with Him and there was no sin.

Question: *Man was the focal point of God's creation, but for what did God make man?*

Genesis 1:26-27

God's representatives

Question: With what special characteristics did God give create man?

Observation: Image (*Tselem*) literally means idol or representative (It is the same word used in the Ten Commandments for idols). Likeness (*Demwuth*) means not so much an exact copy but possessing many of the characteristics. We were created to be God's representative on earth.

Matthew 22:36-37

Relationship with God

Questions: For what did God make us? For what purpose did He make us?

Observation: God made us all to love Him; It is the fuel on which we run. He wants to have a relationship with us. God did all of this for His pleasure and according to His will. He wanted to share the love that He already enjoyed within the relationship of the Trinity. There is every indication that this relationship with man would last forever; there was not sin so there was not death.

Genesis 1:26-30

Created for work

Question: According to this verse, for what did God make man?

Observation: God made man to do work. He created us to have dominion over the rest of His creation. We were to be in a symbiotic relationship with God's creation as His representatives.

Genesis 2:18-25

Created for relationships

Question: For what purpose does this passage tell us that man was made?

Observation: Adam was in a perfect relationship with God. There was no sin, yet, God said that it was not good for him to be alone. God made us to need more than just Him. He made us to be in community and relationship with one another. Verse 25 demonstrates that without sin, there is no shame or separation in relationship between people or between people and God.

Genesis 3:6

The Fall of man

Questions: What happened in this verse? What is sin really?

Observation: Through this action of mankind, sin entered the world. Sin is really disobedience to God

Question: *What were the effects of sin?*

Genesis 5:1-3

No longer God's reps

Question: What seems to be different about the image and likeness of man after the Fall?

Observation: Man, separated from God ceases to be His representative. Now we only represent and reflect our parents. The relationship between man and God has been corrupted. When we are marred by sin, we cannot represent God.

The Purpose and Corruption of Man, Continued

Isaiah 59:2

Separated from God

Question: What impact does our sin and iniquity have on our relationship with God?
Observation: Our sin separates us from God. God cannot be in the presence of or even look upon sin. Left to our own devices, sin permanently separates us from God.

Romans 5:12

Death enters the world

Question: What entered the world as a result of Adam's sin?
Observation: God allows man to suffer the result of his sin. The price of sin is death. Because of sin, and the fact that all men have sinned (Romans 3:23) all men will suffer a physical and spiritual death.

Genesis 3:17-19

*Dominion surrendered -
We can no longer work
for God*

Question: What is result of sin upon man according to this passage?
Observation: Due to the sin of Adam and Eve, the relationship between man and the rest of God's creation changed drastically. No longer did man have total dominion over all creation. Rather than working in concert with man to glorify God, all of creation now groans, waiting to be put back to rights by God (Romans 8:20-22). The role of work also changed radically. Before the Fall, man worked in order to represent God and keep care over His creation. Now, man will struggle and labor just to survive in an environment that is also fallen and no longer subject to man's dominion. The man separated from God by sin works for himself rather than God.

Genesis 4:3-8

*Relationships between
humans are corrupted*

Question: What impact did sin have on man's relationships with one another after the Fall?

Observation: With sin corrupting everything in the world, relationships between humans are no different. Instead of peace and cooperation the way God intended it, man now spirals into hate, violence, and mistrust.

Question: *In a world dominated by sin, what is man to do?*

Ecc. 12:13-14

The standard of living

Questions: What is the duty of man? What do all men face at death?
Observation: The Ten Commandments are the embodiment of God's glory and perfect creation. He will one day restore the world back to that condition. In the meantime, they are our standard to pass God's judgment. He demands no less than perfection to be in His presence and we all will face judgment at death (Hebrews 9:27).

Exodus 20:1-17

The Commandments

Questions: If our duty is to keep these Commandments, how do you measure up? How many of these have you broken?

Observation: If we're honest and keep Jesus words in mind (Matthew 5:21-30) we have all probably broken all of the Commandments. Even if we think we haven't, James reminds us that if we've broken one part of the law, we've broken it all (James 2:10).

Galatians 5:19-21

The acts of the flesh

Question: Which of these areas do you most tend to struggle with?
Observation: Just as we fail to keep God's Commandments, we also fail to remain pure from these acts of the flesh.

Questions: *When God judges you according to His Ten Commandments, will He find you guilty or innocent?*

Based on that verdict, would He send you to heaven or hell?

Are you concerned by your fate before God?

Romans 2:5-9

Storing up wrath

Question: What are we storing up every time we sin? What is in store for those who do evil? Is there where you want to be before the Almighty God?

Observation: Sin angers God and causes us to be children of wrath in His sight.

Christ and the Kingdom of God

Study #3

Genesis 3:15

The seed of the woman

Question: What are the promises given in this verse?

Observation: From the moment of the Fall, God already knew what He would do to set things right in His creation. This would eventually come in the person of Jesus Christ. This savior would come through the seed of a woman. Until that time, however, God would provide another hope for the world.

Genesis 18:18

Promise for all nations

Question: What promise is given to Abraham here?

Observation: The ultimate fulfillment of this promise was, of course, Christ. Abraham's descendants, though, would be the people through whom the Messiah would come. They were to remain set apart for that purpose as well as to be a light to all nations so that they may come to know God (*1 Samuel 17:46, 1 Chronicles 16:24, Psalm 108:5, Isaiah 12:4, Daniel 7:13-14*). It was always God's desire to bring His entire creation, including all people, into a right relationship with Him.

Genesis 17:1-12

God's Covenant

Question: What are some of the promises given to Abraham by God?

Observation: God enacted a Covenant with Abraham and his descendants. This was a promise from God to put things right between Him and the world through the descendants of Abraham. *The Covenant was an agreement between two parties that contains five parts. These components can be seen fully in the book of Deuteronomy (Preamble 1:1-5; History between the two parties 1:6-4:49; Ethical Stipulations 5:1-26:19; Blesses and Curses 27:1-30:20; Length of Covenant 31:1-34:12).*

Jeremiah 3:8

A broken Covenant

Question: What does God say that He has done with Israel and might soon do to Judah?

Observation: Israel was to be the life boat of the world. The light to that world that showed what living was like in a place that was put to rights with God. They failed, however, and became like the pagan nations around them rather than being the holy people of God. Because they had broken the Covenant, God was free not to cancel the Covenant but to replace the people through whom the Covenant would be fulfilled.

John 1:29-30

The Lamb of God

Question: For what purpose does John say that Jesus has come?

Observation: Jesus came to set to rights God's creation. He came to do what Israel had failed to do. Israel had failed the Covenant, Jesus would fulfill it and create a way for God's creation to be restored.

Question: *How would Jesus do what he came to do?*

Luke 19:9-10

Children of Abraham

Questions: What does Jesus call Zacchaeus? For what purpose does Jesus say He came?

Observation: Jesus calls Zacchaeus a son of Abraham because of His faith, not because he was a Jew, although he was a Jew. Jesus came to redefine who the children of Abraham were (Romans 9:8). These would be the people that were put to rights with God, restored in their relationship with Him, restored in their work and dominion, and restored in relationship with one another. They would be the new light of the world in a very new kind of Kingdom

Christ and the Kingdom of God, Continued

1 John 2:2-3

The Atoning Sacrifice

Questions: What effect did Jesus have on sin? What must we do to take part in that atonement?

Observation: Since sin was the problem in God's creation, Jesus came to deal with sin. Because He was fully human, He could pay for the sins of man, but because He was fully God, His sacrifice would cover all sin.

Mark 1:15

Death enters the world

Question: What was Jesus announcing here?

Observation: Jesus came not just to take away sins but also to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. Sin had ruined God's creation and Jesus came to pay the price for that but He also came to bring back the Paradise that sin had ruined. This would be available to those who have faith (believing obedience) in Jesus Christ.

John 4:14

The Age to Come

Question: What does Jesus say that he will give those who want it?

Observation: If we want to understand what the early church meant by 'eternal life' we would do better to interpret the word as 'age to come.' Although it certainly includes the idea of life without end, it also carried the concept of God's Paradise restored and put to rights (see Isaiah 11 for a poetic description of that age). It is this 'age to come' which is God's Kingdom. It is His creation put to rights. Although it is to come to full fruition in the future, it is available now. The Kingdom or 'the age to come' is within us (Luke 17:21); It is God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). Christ was offering to His followers the revealed secret (Mark 4:11) of the Kingdom of God. They, and we, can be part of and live out the 'age to come' where everything is put to rights while still here on earth. We can be seated in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6) and have eternal life ('the age to come') now.

Matthew 27:50-51

Put to Right

Question: What do you think was the purpose of the temple curtain tearing?

Observation: The tearing of the Temple curtain from top to bottom demonstrated that the death of Jesus not only served as an atonement for sin but it put things to right in the universe between God and His creation. The separation between God and His creation could now be bridged through Jesus Christ. This is why those who follow and have been clothed with Christ can be put to right with God. This all points to the 'age to come' when all the universe will be fully put to rights.

Question: *How did Jesus accomplish all of this?*

Luke 22:54-23:49

The Crucifixion

Question: What is it that Jesus had to do for your sins?

Observation: Jesus was betrayed by one of His own disciples, arrested, disowned, mocked, beaten, humiliated, tortured, nailed to a cross, and killed. You may want to read Isaiah 53:4-6 and substitute your own name to understand the full brunt of this.

Galatians 2:15-16

The standard of living

Question: What can be done by faith in Christ that could not be done under the Old Covenant?

Observation: Because of what Christ did for us on the Cross, we can be set to rights with God. Note: Justified means the demonstration of or badge that we are the people of God, not how we become His people. We will continue to study out what that means in the following studies.

Recommended

The Passion of the Christ

For further reflection: Watch The Passion of the Christ together. Watch it from the perspective of Christ suffering through the crucifixion for you personally. Following the film, discuss the personal and emotional impact that it had on you.

Discipleship and the Work of God

Study #4

Genesis 1:26-30

The purpose of work

Question: For what did God make man to do?

Observation: One of the purposes that God made man for was to rule and have dominion over the earth. When man's relationship with God is unimpeded by sin we are His representatives and we take care of the earth for Him. In other words, when we are at rights with God, we do His work rather than our own.

Genesis 3:17-19

The corruption of work

Question: What was the impact of sin on the way that man would work and interact with his environment?

Observation: When sin separates us from God, we are forced to work for ourselves as our own representatives rather than God's. As with everything else, Jesus came to put that portion of our relationship with God to rights.

Matthew 28:18-20

The call

Question: What does Jesus want all people to become?

Observation: Jesus wants us all to be restored in our relationship with God. When we have done this, we will be His disciples. This is the state of the person who is put to rights in their relationship with God and restored in their dominion and the role of work. Notice that Jesus says all authority has been given Him. This means that Christ took back the dominion that man had surrendered and that Satan had illegitimately been exercising as the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). By telling His disciples to "go" He was transferring some of that dominion and doing the work of God to His disciples, present and future (which includes His disciples today).

Mark 1:14-18

Calling Disciples

Questions: What did Jesus call these two men to be? What did He call them to do?

Observation: It was customary for rabbis of Jesus' time to surround themselves with students. The students would ask to be the rabbi's follower; the difference here is that Jesus called them. Their immediate response was to leave everything and follow him. The saying of the day was to "walk in the dust of the rabbi." This means that one would follow their rabbi so closely that the dust from his shoes would come off on theirs. Jesus would take these men and show them what following God, being His representative, and doing work for Him, and having restored human relationships would look like.

Luke 9:23-26

Take up your cross

Questions: What must any person that wants to follow Christ give up? What does that mean for you?

Observation: Being put to rights with God means following Christ and being His disciple. It means giving up our own sense of what life is about and following Him. Why? Our sense of work and what is important in life is colored by sin. It is only when we truly give all of that up, in other words, surrender our lives, that we can restore our relationship with God. This is how we go about being His representative again, and we realize that the work He calls us to is far more important than our own agenda. This is a daily, not a one time decision. Note, that we are called to work for God, not because this will save us but because this is simply what it looks like when we are in a right relationship with Him. It is the purpose for which we were made: to exercise His dominion.

Discipleship and the Work of God, Continued

Luke 14:25-33

Estimate the cost

Questions: What do the tower builder and the king both do in this passage? What was Jesus' point that we can learn and follow in our own lives?

Observation: These two examples would have brought up images of two things that most Jews believed would be their path to God. The first was the rebuilding of the Temple, and the Old Covenant, embodied in the Temple. The second was that of going to war with and ridding themselves from Roman rule. Jesus is letting them know that any other conception of following God other than His will lead to failure and destruction. This is as true for us and our alternate ways to God or peace in life as it was for these Jews.

Luke 11:1-4

Learning to pray

Question: What did Jesus disciples want to learn here?

Observation: Most rabbis taught their followers a special way to pray. This is what Jesus' disciples were looking for. It was not that this is the only way they would pray or the only thing they would pray. It was a short prayer that would identify them as His followers. He teaches them many things in this short prayer. One is the importance of a daily relationship with God. This is essential. Another thing is that the will of God, which is done in heaven, should be done on earth. This is the concept of living in the Kingdom of God (the age to come) in the present age.

Ephesians 2:10

Saved for good works

Question: For what are we saved?

Observation: One of the purposes of our salvation is to once again be God's representative so that we are suitable to exercise His dominion and do His work. If we claim we have faith in God but do not want to do His work, then we don't have real faith (James 2:14-18, 26). Faith does come first, though. Without true faith, works are still for us no matter how good they seem.

1 Corinthians 15:10

Working via grace

Question: What allows us to do God's work.

Observation: We must be aware that the true work of God is always done through His grace and Spirit, never our own power.

Matthew 28:18-20

Make disciples

Questions: What does Jesus want all men to become? What is our role in that? What is the command that Jesus gives to all of His disciples?

Observation: The fact is that if we are Jesus' disciples then we will be restored to our position of dominion. We will do the work of God rather than working for ourselves and our own desires. We need other people in the community of God to show us how to do this. God's original plan for His perfect paradise was that man would rule over it and work for Him. This also meant that man was given charge to be fruitful and fill the earth with more people that would have a relationship with God and be His representatives. Now, through Christ, we are able to be restored with God. This means that once again, we are called to be fruitful and fill the earth with those who will be God's representatives. What was once to be done physically, is now done spiritually by the making of disciples.

This is the plan that will transform and restore God's world. If every disciple represents God in this manner the world can be transformed rather quickly:

Discipleship and the Work of God, Continued

Transforming the World

The multiplication process

Year	Preacher	Disciple
1	365	2
2	730	4
3	1095	8
13	4745	8192
33	12,045	8 billion

Questions: Am I truly a disciple?
Have I been working for God's dominion rather than my own agenda?
What do I need to do to become a disciple?

The New Family of God

Study #5

Genesis 2:18-24

The purpose of work

Questions: What did God decide that Adam needed? What did He create for Adam?

Observation: Even though Adam and God had a relationship that was un-interrupted by sin, God made Him a helper. Humans were made for more than just a relationship with God, although we absolutely need that. Humans were also made to have relationships with one another and be creatures of community.

Genesis 6:5-6

Relationships between men are corrupted

Question: What impact did sin have on man's relationships with one another after the Fall?

Observation: With sin corrupting everything in the world, relationships between humans are no different. Mankind, beginning with Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) spiraled into violence and hate. This can also be seen in Genesis 11 with the separation of mankind due to their sin.

Genesis 12:1-3

The People of God

Question: What does God promise to make from the descendants of Abraham.

Observation: Since the Fall, God's plan has always been to make a group of people set apart for His purposes; to live differently than the world around them. This people would be a light to the nations and point to the way of life in eternal life ('the age to come'). This was to be done through Israel, but they failed in this commission. Christ came to build a new Israel, a new people for God and of God.

Galatians 3:7-8

Children of Abraham

Question: Who are the children of Abraham according to this verse?

Observation: With Israel having failed to uphold the Covenant as the people of God, a new Covenant would be established with a new people.

Matthew 16:15-18

The building of the Church

Question: What does Christ tell Peter that He came to build?

Observation: The people of the New Covenant would be the Church, built on the foundational truth that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The Church is God's plan to spread the message of the Gospel and the life of His Kingdom. There is no other biblical plan. There is no mention of individual or lone ranger Christians and no provisions are made for any such thing.

Mark 3:31-35

The new family of Christ

Question: Who is a part of Jesus' true family?

Observation: This is a deeply shocking and disturbing statement in Jewish society that perceived honor to family as one of the primary means through which they honored God. It was the source of their economic future, their comfort, security, and identity.

Luke 11:27-28

The new family of Christ

Question: Why did Jesus redirect this woman's blessing?

Observation: This was a standard Jewish greeting that both honored the individual as well affirmed the status of his family heritage. It was an affirmation of following the Law and being the people of God. Jesus turns this on its head; He is saying that following the Law and being born Jewish have nothing to do with being the people of God. The people of God are defined solely as those who obey the word of God.

Luke 9:57-60

The new family of Christ

Question: What could Jesus possibly mean by this statement?

Observation: This challenging statement would only make sense if Jesus was completely redefining the concept of family for those who would follow him. Jesus is not banning his disciples from burying their relatives, but is, in the context of his immediate mission to Jerusalem, telling this man that if he wanted to follow him, he needed to prioritize the needs of the Kingdom of God over those of his normal familial obligations.

Luke 14:25-27

The new family of Christ

Question: Did Jesus really intend for us to hate our families?

Observation: Without meeting this standard, says Jesus, no one can be his disciple. This teaching from Jesus is puzzling until we understand that 'hate' (*miseo* in Greek) was a common

The Family of God, Cont.

Hebrew figure of speech for 'reject' (particularly when it came to matters of inheritance; For Example: Malachi 1:2-5 where Esau and Jacob are mentioned as representatives of the people who would be accepted or rejected as the people of God). Jesus was telling his would-be followers that they must be willing to redefine what would be the source of their identity, comfort, and security. It would no longer be their biological family, or anything else in their lives. It would be in the new family that Jesus was forming around himself.

Mark 10:28-30

The new family of Christ

Question: Was Jesus telling his followers that after an initial period of giving things up for him, they would then get rich?

Observation: No, he was redefining family once again. When his followers mentally (and often physically) left their families as their source of identity and means of honoring God, they would receive a new family that would be a hundred times (metaphorically speaking) larger than their biological families.

John 19:25-27

The new family of Christ

Question: Why did Jesus ask John to take care of Mary?

Observation: Mary had other sons that could have done this, but Jesus wanted to send a clear message to his followers that the Kingdom of God involved new boundaries and new definitions of what it meant to be in God's family. This act would continue, throughout Mary's life, to send a strong message to Christians, as early church tradition tells us that Mary did go with John, and eventually died in Ephesus many years later.

If Jesus were speaking to us directly today, he would surely speak the message that when we become disciples we need to redefine who our family is. For some of us, we might struggle with similar issues when it comes to our families. For many of us, however, it is not family but things like friends, jobs, status, relationships, etc., that compete with Jesus for our full devotion and source of identity and security. He would expand that message to the areas of our culture that demand our loyalties, prick our sense of obligation, and appeal to our concept of identity. The test for each one of us is to thoroughly examine our lives and see if we have allowed Jesus to challenge us as much as his teachings challenged the very hearts of the Jews of his day.

Colossians 1:15-18

The Head of the Church

Questions: Who is the head of the Church? Who is the body?

Observation: The Church is the body of Christ. Christ is the head of the church. The authority that Christ has was given to the Church (Matthew 28:18-20) and God relies on the Church to do His work in the world. The Church is the family of God of which Christ is the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-21).

1 Cor. 12:12-27

One Body, Many Parts

Questions: Why is it important that we recognize that within the one body there will be many parts? What are things that you can contribute to the body of Christ?

Observation: Everyone has a role and gifts to contribute to the body of Christ. Every part of the body is indispensable and needs all of the other parts. The incredible part of the body is that it puts to rights man's relationships with one another. Only through the obedient body of Christ can humans truly restore their relationships with one another.

John 13:34-35

Love One Another

Question: How will the world know the true members of the body of Christ?

Observation: Notice that Jesus doesn't say that people will know His disciples by how holy they are, how much they pray, how much they go to church, or even how much they love God. The world can't see us love God and the other things won't matter much to non-believers. It is how we love one another that will mark us out as the people of God. Men were created before sin to love one another; the body of Christ restores that intended purpose.

Entering Into the life of Christ

Study #6

Romans 3:19-23

All have fallen short

Question: What can we do to earn our way back to God?

Observation: There is nothing that we can do to earn our way to God. Even following the Law of the Old Testament won't do it because all it can do is show how short we have fallen from God's intended glory for us. Everyone one of us in that fallen state, separated from God.

Romans 5:12-21

Adam and the Messiah

Question: What did the Messiah do for us?

Observation: There are many things that we can learn from this passage:

1. Sin entered the world through Adam; all of his heirs were his representatives (image) because he had separated from God
2. Because we are all born like Adam, we sin like Adam, thus cementing our separation from God
3. We are all born into Adam's image and the realm of sin and death
4. Those who enter into the life of Christ will reign with him
5. Christ offers us a chance to escape our Adamic image and enter into his image
6. Christ did for us what we could never do and became what we never could - a genuine human being not marred by sin

Psalms 8:4-9

The son of man

Question: Does this sound like your average human being?

Observation: This is what God made man to be but sin kept us from being. Jesus came to be the true son of man so that we might be restored to our original purpose.

John 15:1-7

Remain in Christ

Question: What does Jesus say over and over again in this passage we must do in order to bear the fruit of a godly life?

Observation: Israel was called by God to be an example to the world what genuine human beings were to look like. He called them His vine that he had planted (Isaiah 5) to be a light to the world. They had failed to do this. Jesus came to replace Israel as the true vine, the true genuine human being. He would create the people of God that Israel was supposed to be by calling people to enter into his life.

Romans 6:1-4

Entering into Christ

Question: How do we enter into the life of Christ? What would that look like for you?

Observation: We must lay down our life in Adam and enter into the life of Christ. We do this by repenting and leaving behind our old life. Jesus told his followers that they would have to pick up their cross (which meant death in the ancient world) in order to follow him (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). We enter into Christ's death rather than waiting for our own, and enter into his life. From that point on we seek to be conformed to his image. Baptism means entering into the Messiah so that what is true of Him becomes true of those who are baptized. In baptism the Christian not only dies with the Messiah but rises as well to the new life of Christ.

Acts 2:37-38

Repent & be baptized

Question: What must we do to be saved? What does this verse promise to those who are baptized.

Observation: The only biblical response to the realization of our status as sinners in Adam is to repent of that life, die to it, and enter into Christ's life at baptism. This is the demonstration of our faith; we show that we believe that the life of Christ will save us, we cannot save ourselves.

1 Peter 3:18-22

Saved at baptism

Question: What does baptism do according to this verse.

Observation: Just as Noah and his family had to enter into the Ark to be saved, so we enter into Christ. It is not the water that saves us because it is the entry into death. It is the fact that in the water, we enter into the death and raise to the new life of Christ. It is not that the water washes us clean. What saves us in the act of baptism is the fact that we have entered into the Ark of Christ. In baptism we enter into Christ's life and what is true of him becomes true of us. He was

Entering into the life of Christ, Cont.

resurrected and so will those who remain in him. It is a pledge to God that we have died to ourselves and will allow God to transform us into the image of Jesus the Messiah.

2 Corinthians 4:10-11

His life revealed in us

Question: What does it mean for you to die to yourself? What would that look like?

Observation: Dying to ourselves and participating in Christ's death is not a onetime event; it is a permanent change of status. The realizing and revealing of Christ's life is a process.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

A new creation

Question: What will happen to those in Christ according to this passage?

Observation: We see the world and everything in it because we are a new person, a new creature, that has entered a new reality. God will reconcile those in Christ to himself and not count their sins against them. Our response to this should be to realize that we are now ambassadors, announcing to the world what it looks like to be reconciled to God by living in Christ, this is called the righteousness of God

John 14:6

The life

Question: How can we come to the Father?

Observation: Notice that Jesus says he is *the way*, *the truth* and *the life*. His life is the only one that will ever have access to the Father. If we do not enter into his life, we will never see the Father. No one comes to the Father except through the life of Jesus.

Common mistakes concerning entering into Christ

1 John 3:16: *This verse is part of John's explanation of Jesus' words earlier in the chapter that being born again would involve the Spirit and water. What did John mean by believing in Jesus? He meant that we have to believe that his life would lead to salvation. We have to believe in Jesus in order to enter in to his life. Notice verse 18, which says, "whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." In biblical times, the term "name" was used as a shorthand for the character and life of someone. Thus, it means that those who do not believe in the life of Jesus are already condemned because they have chosen to stay in their sin-marred life in Adam. It is clear that we do not enter into the life of Christ by simply mentally agreeing that Jesus will save us.*

Romans 10:9: *This verse is still a part of the larger argument which extends back to Romans 6:1-4, discussing how to enter in to the life of Christ. In addition, there are two clear allusions to the concept of entering into Christ through baptism in this verse alone. First, Paul mentions those who confess that "Jesus is Lord." This is the confession offered up by the early Christians right before their baptism. Second, he says that converts must believe in their heart that "God raised him from the dead will be saved." Again, this does not refer to mental assent. It is related to the belief that Jesus lived the perfect life of a genuine human being and was raised to the life of the age to come. Paul is saying that those who are about to be baptized cannot view it as though the water is a magic elixir that will save them by itself. It is the faith and act of entering into Christ's resurrected life that will save us. Also note verse 13 which mentions "calling on the name of the Lord." Acts 22:16 makes it clear that this is what is done at baptism. Remember "name" refers to life, so by calling on his name, we are appealing to and entering into his life.*

Revelation 3:20: *This verse is written to a church of existing Christians and has nothing to do with salvation or entering into Christ. Mentally agreeing to something won't enter us into the life of Christ, nor will simple prayer. There are absolutely no verse that indicate that we can enter into the life of Christ by simply praying. See Saul's conversion where he spends several days praying and fasting after seeing the risen Christ but still needs to be baptized to have his sins forgiven and enter into the life of Christ.*

Covenant Acceptance and Love for God, Continued

The Early Church

Accepting God's Covenant

Observation: *The early church of the first three centuries were very clear about the importance of baptism:*

Justin Martyr, c. 160 A.D.: “but [we] may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed”

“Accordingly, we have believed and testify that the very baptism which he announced is alone able to purify those who have repented. And this is the water of life. . .”

“Christ has redeemed us by being crucified on the tree and purifying us with water.”

Theophilus, c. 180 A.D.: “The things proceeding from the waters were blessed by God, that this also could be a sign of men being destined to receive repentance and remission for sins, through the water and bath of regeneration - as many as come to the truth and are born again.”

Irenaeus, c. 180 A.D.: “For the baptism instituted by the visible Jesus was for the remission of sins.”

“This class of men [the Gnostics] have been instigated by Satan to a denial of that baptism which is regeneration to God.”

Clement of Alexandria, c. 195 A.D.: “Being baptized, we are illuminated. Illuminated, we become sons. . . This work is variously called grace, illumination, perfection, and washing. Washing, by which we cleanse away our sins.”

“In the same way, therefore, we also repent of our sins, renounce our iniquities, and are purified by baptism. Thereby, we speed back to the eternal light as children of the Father.”

Tertullian, c. 198 A.D.: “I do not deny that the divine benefit (that is, the putting away of sins) is in every way certain to those who are about to enter the water. . . However, some think that God is under a necessity of bestowing what He has promised even on the unworthy. So they turn His liberality into His slavery! . . . For do not many afterwards fall out of [grace]? Is not this gift taken away from many?”