

# Basic Christian Studies

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## Introduction

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*“The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock”*

**Matthew 7:25**

Most people understand that constructing a building without ensuring that a solid foundation is in place would compromise the overall integrity of its structure. The strength of a building's foundation ultimately determines its stability and capacity to withstand 'attacks' from the elements such as the wind and rain.

Similarly, the life of a Christian needs to be built on key foundational truths so that they too might withstand attacks from false teaching, trials and persecution.

We live in a world today filled with all kinds of deception and in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to find truth. 'Truth' is promoted as relative and the pursuit of personal happiness is paramount, no matter its cost. What once was deemed good is now regarded as evil and what is evil is now called good.<sup>1</sup>

The unrelenting assault of these ideals through the liberal media, and the tidal wave of public opinion in general, desensitizes and bullies society to be more accepting and tolerant to immoral behavior. Such an environment can easily result in the core principles of the Christian faith being distorted or compromised by confessing believers, who through lack of knowledge and understanding are *tossed like waves and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, or by clever strategies that would lead them astray.*<sup>2</sup>

As such it is critical in these challenging and confusing times that believers are firmly grounded in the Word of God so that when the 'waters rise and the winds blow' they are able to remain steadfast in truth, as their foundation is built upon the rock of Jesus Christ.

**Question**

*Can you think of two examples today where professing believers are compromising biblical truth as a result of worldly pressures?*

As with the natural birth, the spiritual birth also requires nurturing so that the 'new life' can develop, grow and flourish.

In fact Paul compares the elementary or foundational teachings to feeding infants with milk before they are able to receive solid food.

Only once these foundational truths are in place can the deeper things of God be fully appreciated and understood.

God does not want us to remain as spiritual infants but rather He expects us to grow in His ways and to develop in our faith in order to prepare us for our eternal purposes. It is the primary intention of this study to help lay a solid foundation in the lives of believers from which they can grow, whether they are new to or maturing in their faith.

The writer of Hebrews admonishes its readers for not developing in the things of God and strongly encourages them to "*become mature in understanding*"<sup>3</sup>.

Chapter 6 in Hebrews provides a great framework for these foundational teachings, specifically "*the importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God...about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.*"

As such this program will focus on developing your knowledge and understanding in these areas.

There are no prerequisites for participating in this program and it is built on two key assumptions, namely that:

- Participants have a basic faith in God; and
- The Bible, being the written word of God, is without error and absolute in truth.

Each week reading and questions will be provided in order to prepare you for the following week. In order for you to get the most out of these studies and in order to make the time together as fruitful as possible please ensure you take the time to prepare through prayer and reading.

I pray the Holy Spirit will illuminate these truths to you through so that you may grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; that your identity may be found in Him, so that He may produce much fruit in and through you to the glory of God the Father.

**MY THOUGHTS:**

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**Preparation for Section 2**

**Readings:** *Genesis 1 to 3; Exodus 20 and Matthew 5 and 6*

**Questions:**

- What is meant by “the Fall”?
- What is sin?
- What is meant by ‘the law’?

**PREPARATION NOTES:**

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## The Fall & Sin

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### The Fall

God recognised His creation as 'good' and as 'very good' after He had created man, it was His masterpiece and we were His prize possession, made in His very image. (Genesis 1)

However, Satan was able to deceive Eve by getting her to doubt God's word and question His very nature – unbelief through the entertaining of Satan's lies was the first sin and it is the very thing that still holds many believers in spiritual bondage today. Sin had entered creation, God's design had been corrupted and man had been stripped of his innocence. (Genesis 3)

This account of the fall of man recorded in Genesis 3 explains the mess we see both within us and in the world around us. Adam's sin explains the sin nature inherent within each of us. We sin because we are like Adam, our father. The sufferings of man and in all of creation are the consequences of sin and the fall of man.

*"When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned"*

**Romans 5:12**

### Sin

Sin can quite simply be defined as disobedience to the known will of God.

The bible clearly states that ALL of us inherit a sinful nature as descendants of Adam. (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15)

What does this then mean? Quite simply it says we are born as sinners! Every single one of us, no exception! Sin is inherent in our make-up, rebellion is our natural disposition. Have you ever noticed that a young child will lie and steal for self-gain without been taught? Where did they learn that?!

This is not a comfortable thought for most of us, to think of ourselves as “sinners”, in fact most people are offended by the mere implication. Surely, this label is reserved for the murderers, the thieves, the drug addicts, the adulterers and the rapists – you know, the “Bad” people. The problem is we don’t set our standards very high with our ‘goodness barometer’ programmed to measure ourselves against other people or to what the world regards as good, and not according to Holy Scripture. When comparing ourselves to scripture the Holy Spirit can begin to open our eyes and reveal to us our naturally fallen state.

*“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God “*

**Romans 3:23**

*“If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth”*

**1 John 1:8**

*“If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.”*

**1 John 1:8**

*“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*

**Romans 3:10-12**

Oh how much greater is the heavenly standard of our Holy God than the worldly standard of depraved man?! The bar was set and the standard revealed in God’s holy law that He provided to

His beloved Israel through His servant Moses. Most of us are familiar with the Ten Commandments and for the most part its principles are built into the legislation for most ‘Christian countries’.

What becomes clear in the New Testament is that God ultimately provided the law to act as a mirror to reveal our sin – to shine a light on the depraved state of man.

*“I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law.”*

**Romans 7:7**

No son of Adam, being sinful in nature, could follow the law perfectly; in fact it was purposely designed to condemn us, to declare us guilty!

The well known evangelist Charles Spurgeon once wrote:

*“There is a war between you and God’s Law. The Ten Commandments are against you. The first comes forward and says, ‘Let him be cursed. For he denies Me. He has another god beside Me. His god is his belly and he yields his homage to his lust.’ All the Ten Commandments, like ten great cannons, are pointed at you today. For you have broken all of God’s statutes and lived in daily neglect of all His commands.*

*“Soul, thou wilt find it a hard thing to go at war with the Law. When the Law came in peace, Sinai was altogether on a smoke and even Moses said, ‘I exceeding fear and quake!’ What will you do when the Law of God comes in terror; when the trumpet of the archangel shall tear you from your grave; when the eyes of God shall burn their way into your guilty soul; when the great books shall be opened and all your sin and shame shall be punished...Can you stand against an angry Law in that Day?”*

We have all broken some, if not all, of the Ten Commandments in some form or another. Have we not all lied? Have we not all stolen? (Did you ever copy or download music or video’s without paying? Be honest). In fact Jesus during His sermon on the mount made it clear that to entertain thoughts of lust equates to adultery and to hate is to murder (*Matthew 5*). Even our thoughts condemn us! If we are truly honest with ourselves and search our hearts we know this is true, we are guilty and covered in shame!

Consider this, what would be revealed if your inner most thoughts were projected on a big screen for all to see?



*“The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil”*

**Genesis 6:5**

God is both omniscient (knows everything) and omnipresent (is everywhere) – He knows everything we have done or thought and He was there when we did it or thought it!

*“...you, the righteous God who probes minds and hearts.”*

**Psalm 7:9**

*“O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me... You know my thoughts even when I’m far away... You know everything I do. I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.”*

**Psalm 139**

I am aware these truths may be confronting to some but choosing to ignore truth does not make it false. We mean well, we have good intentions, we try to do the right thing and we consider ourselves as good people. However, we are stained by sin, it is part of us and no amount of ‘good deeds’ can offset that.

*“We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags.”*

**Isaiah 64:6**

**A concluding thought...**

*“It is better to hurt someone with the truth than to comfort with a lie”*

**Unknown**

A person walks into a doctor's office, the doctor sits them down and gently says "I have bad news, you are dying. You have an aggressive disease and without the only available treatment you are certain to die".

This person now has a choice: they can go into denial or they can actively seek an antidote!

It is the same with us, although the news may initially both be shocking and unpleasant, the fact remains, we are dying in our sin and if we choose to acknowledge that truth then we can clearly see our need for a cure!

**MY THOUGHTS:**

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**Preparation for Section 3**

**Readings:** *Genesis 3 and 22; Exodus 12; Leviticus 16; John 19*

**Questions:**

- What is the consequence of sin?
- How would you explain eternity?
- What is your understanding of atonement?
- Can you provide three examples in the Old Testament of Atonement?
- From what has God saved us from?

**PREPARATION NOTES:**

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## Judgment & Atonement

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### Judgment

We have established that we are sinful creatures, that we have all broken God's law in some shape or form and are all therefore guilty of sinning against Almighty God, the Creator of all things.

#### Question

What then is the consequence of sin?

The bible declares God as perfectly good, as holy and as righteous. It is these very attributes of His which demand justice. We are guilty as we have broken God's holy law, and because God is perfectly just He must act, sin must be judged – God cannot compromise who He is.

*“God is a righteous judge”*

**Psalm 7:11**

To stand as a sinner before a Holy God will be a fearful thing! We even see a righteous man like the prophet Isaiah, a chosen Oracle of God cry out *“It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man”*, when he stood before the throne of God.

We are in sin and therefore under God's wrath. Sin has branded us as guilty and sentenced us to death.

*“For the wages of sin is death”*

**Romans 6:23**

Spiritually speaking those who are in sin and under wrath are already dead. However, should someone physically die (referred to as the first death) in a state of sin their soul will

be separated and ultimately subject to eternal torment (referred to as the second death). Note that God's judgments are both final and eternal (*Hebrews 6*).

Jesus himself said:

*"Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*

**Matthew 10:28**

*"And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It's better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 'where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out'"*

**Mark 9:47-48**

You may say that isn't fair, that your sins 'aren't that bad' – but to a Holy God sin is sin, there is no difference and it carries a standard sentence, eternal death (i.e. separation from God).

*"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it"*

**James 2:10**

Eternity is something that we can't quite grasp in our heads, yet it is a concept that carries a greater understanding in our hearts. I believe God has purposely created us this way.

Time is a dimension, a physical law or constraint placed on creation much the same as mass and space. Simply put eternity is the existence outside of time, this is where God exists and why He can foresee the future. There is no beginning or no end, it just is. Mathematically speaking, a million years divided by eternity is zero!

A great analogy for eternity has been described as follows; imagine a granite boulder the size of the sun, and every one thousand years a dove flies up to, lands on and scrapes its

beak against the boulder. When that boulder is whittled down to the size of a pea that's when eternity starts.

What chance then does sinful man have to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? Simply put man has no chance in his own capacity, NONE! But there is hope...

*“Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible“*

**Matthew 19:26**

## **Atonement**

We have concluded from scripture that God is righteous and holy and will judge sin. However, the bible also reveals that God is a loving and merciful father to those who seek Him and earnestly ask for His forgiveness.

*“The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.”*

**Lamentations 3:22-23**

So then how does a righteous God demonstrate mercy without compromising who He is?

By having atonement for our sin! A substitute for punishment; an avenue for mercy and forgiveness.

Atonement is defined as an *“Amends or reparation made for an injury or wrong”*.

But what would be an appropriate and acceptable atonement for our sin to a Holy God?

As sin entered the world through a man Adam, only a man could pay the price for sin. But who could be worthy if all man was inherently born in sin?

The gospel's make it clear that 'The Word', who was with God from the beginning and who was also God, entered this world in the person of Jesus Christ, born of a virgin and therefore bypassing the curse of inherent sin.

*“For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ.”*

**Romans 5:15**

*“Yes, Adam’s one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ’s one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.”*

**Romans 5:18-19**

God Himself, incarnated as the man Jesus would live a sinless life yet die a sinners death. In doing so He would pay for the sins of all and reconcile us back to the Father.

*“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ”*

**2 Corinthians 5:21**

Looking back through the cross we can clearly see that the Old Testament is full of shadows and prophecies pointing to the ultimate sin offering provided by God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the seed of the woman (Genesis 4), He is the ram in the bushes (Genesis 22), He is our Passover lamb, our scapegoat (Leviticus 16) and He is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 to name a few.

**Reflection**

It is worth reflecting on each of the Old Testament shadows and types mentioned above and discuss how they give us insight into the cross and Jesus. Can you think of any more?

What we see at the cross is the holiness and righteousness of God where sin was judged once for all as well as his great love and mercy where His only Son was given as the sacrifice to sin for all.

When Christ died on the cross, Mercy and truth met...Truth said *“the sinner shall die.”* Mercy said... *“the Saviour died for the sinner.”* Righteousness said, *“Then I am satisfied.”* Peace said, *“there is no more condemnation and kissed Righteousness.”* Judgment said, *“My work is done”* and Mercy *“rejoiced.”*

*“Mercy rejoiceth against judgment”*

**James 2:13**

*“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”*

**Psalms 85:10**

What is clear is that this atonement was a sovereign act of God, a gift of mercy and grace available to all those who choose to receive it.

*“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.”*

**2 Corinthians 5:18-19**

*God has saved us from Himself, by Himself and for Himself! Paul Washer*



**MY THOUGHTS**

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