

Evangelistic Bible Study in five sessions

*A discipleship training to equip
Christians for works of service,
so that the Body of Christ may
be built up (Ephesians 4:11-16).*

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SESSION 1. THE POINTERS TO THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

- Introduce

People search for answers to their fundamental questions: “Who am I?” “Where do I come from?” “Why am I here?” “Where am I going?” The answers to many of these fundamental questions are found in the Bible. A famous scientist said, “There is an empty space in man, which only **God** can fill.” It is therefore very important to seek God.

- Sharing in the group

“Does someone whom we call ‘God’ really exist?”

Tell why you think that God does or does not exist?

- Teaching from the Bible

The ideas of people why they believe that God does or does not exist are based on mere human opinions and not on divine revelation. When people discuss natural science, they make use of a natural science book. Likewise, when we discuss the Christian Faith, we use the Bible. The Bible is God’s revelation and tells us to look at 5 things which point to the existence of God.

A. THE CREATION REVEALS THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1. The possibility of creation.

Someone may say, “I think that the universe came into existence by its own power” (by evolution or an explosion).

Consider. “How could I believe that *Someone* has created the universe?”

- The illustration of Newton.

Newton was a great scientist who discovered that the planets and stars in the universe are held together by gravity. In order to illustrate this fact, he built a model of the solar system in his office. He showed this model to visitors and said, “If you believe that the universe came into existence by its own power, then you should also believe that a model of the solar system like this can come into existence by itself, because all the materials needed for this to happen are available in this office. All that is needed for that to happen again, is an observable evolution or explosion! However, if you believe that I (Newton) made (created) this model of the solar system, you should also be able to believe that the existing solar system and whole universe was made (created) by Someone we call GOD. The only difference is that the universe which God made is much greater and more wonderful than any model I can make.”

2. The great things that have been created.

Consider. Some facts about the stars.

Read Isaiah 40:25-26; (Job 11:7-8a; Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:20).

God challenges man to try to imagine his greatness and power. There is nothing on earth that can be compared to God’s greatness and power. Even the Himalaya Mountains are too small! There is nothing in the solar system that can be compared to God’s greatness and power. Even the sun is too small! What can help people to picture the greatness and power of God? People know of nothing that can be compared to God’s greatness and power. That is why everyone remains silent.

Then God points to the stars and invites man to consider who created the stars. The stars are a constant reminder of the greatness and power of God. Try to imagine the following:

- The number of the stars¹

On a clear and dark night a man can see about six thousand (6000) stars with his naked eye. Most of them belong to our galaxy, called ‘the Milky Way’, which contains about one hundred milliard (100 000 000 000) (11 zero’s) stars.

By means of the greatest telescopes man can see more than ten thousand trillion (10 000 000 000 000 000 000) (22 zero’s) stars and about one hundred milliard (100 000 000 000) (11 zero’s) galaxies like the Milky Way. Some stars have never been discovered, because since the creation their light has never reached the earth! The number of stars in the universe is so great that no one can count them in his whole lifetime.

- The distances of the stars

The only star in the solar system is the sun and it is the closest star to earth. The distance to the sun is 150 million kilometres. Just how far is that? Flying by plane to the sun at 1000 kilometres per hour would take you 17 years.

The distances to the stars are so immense that scientists use ‘a light year’ to indicate the distance. Light is the fastest phenomenon known to man. The speed of light is about three hundred thousand kilometres (300 000) per second. That equals 7½ times around the earth in one second! ‘A light year’ is the distance light travels during one year. One light year equals a distance of nine-and-a-half billion (9 454 000 000 000) (9½ times 12 zero’s) kilometres!

The moon is one and a third light second away. The planet Mars is 5 light minutes away. The sun is 8 light minutes away. The planet Pluto is five light hours away. The star closest to the solar system is 4.3 light years away. Flying by plane to this star would take four and a half million (4 644 000) years!

Our galaxy, the Milky Way, has a diameter of about hundred-and-twenty thousand (120 000) light years! The galaxy closest to our galaxy is called Spiral Nebula N-1. It consists of billions of stars and the distance to it is more than one million light years! The furthest stars are milliards of light years separated from us! Astronomers estimate that the furthest measured distance in the universe is plus minus seventeen milliard (17 000 000 000) light years!

Man will never be able to comprehend the universe, let alone conquer the universe!

- The sizes of the stars

Our planet earth has a diameter of 12 756 kilometres. The diameter of the sun is 109 times that of the earth. There are stars that have a diameter 100 and even 1000 times that of the sun! The largest stars, the super blue giant stars, are so great that the planets Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars could rotate with ease inside such a star!

If the diameter of the earth could be represented by 1 millimetre, then in comparison the diameter of the sun would be 11 centimetres and that of a super blue giant star 110 metres!

- The greatness and power of God

People can observe and study the stars with telescopes. But who created the greatest things in the universe known to man? The Bible reveals that God created the stars, controls their movements and even gives to each star a name (Isaiah 40:25-26)! God says “It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshalled their starry hosts” (Isaiah 45:12).

If man cannot fathom the number, the distances and sizes of the stars, how could man then fathom the existence, being (nature) and greatness of God? The existence of the stars point every night to the existence of a great and powerful God!

3. The small things that have been created.

Consider. Some facts about the human body.

Read Psalm 139:14. God has created the human body fantastic! God is the Creator of growth. The phenomenon ‘growth’ is a wonder! The human body grows and renews itself continuously. God is not only the Creator of the greatest things in the universe (the stars), but also of the smallest forms of life thinkable.

- Cells in the human body.

The human body consists of uncountable cells. One kilogram of body weight can contain up to 2 000 000 000 000 (12 zero’s) cells! Each single cell contains tens of small power stations that produce all the energy in the human body. But in size, each power station is less than 1 micrometer (one thousandth of a millimetre)! These power stations are so small, yet capable of producing so much energy! The energy produced by this uncountable number of cells is used to manage all the functions of the human body and to enable man to work hard or to participate in energetic sports.

¹ million (British + American) = 1 000 000 (6 zero’s)
 milliard (American: billion) = 1 000 000 000 (9 zero’s) (a thousand million)
 billion (American: trillion) = 1 000 000 000 000 (12 zero’s) (a million million)
 billiard (American: quadrillion) = 1 000 000 000 000 000 (15 zero’s) (a million milliard)
 trillion (American: quintillion) = 1 000 000 000 000 000 000 (18 zero’s) (million million million)

- Lungs of a human.

The human lungs consist of many tubes that end in air sacks. Scientists estimate that there are more than 600 000 000 such air sacks in your lungs. The wall of each air sack contains many tiny blood vessels that absorb the oxygen before it is transported to the rest of the body. The walls of the air sacks of one human being's lungs are so artfully folded together that if you could unfold them, they would form a surface as large as a football field! Imagine how God is able to fold skin containing blood vessels the size of a football field into such a small space as a human breast!

We can study the human body by means of the greatest microscopes. But WHO created the human body, which contain some of the smallest things in the universe? The Bible says that GOD created every human being in his mother's womb and that each human being is wonderfully made! If man still has not fathomed all the secrets of the human body, how can he fathom the Creator of the human body? The existence of wonderful human bodies point to the existence of an even greater Creator!

4. Knowing that the Creator exists.

Discuss. If you cannot see God, the Creator, how can you know that he exists?

- The wristwatch illustration.

You can see my wristwatch, but you cannot see the person who made it. Yet you know that he must exist somewhere in the world, because you can see what he made. In the same way, even though you cannot see God, the Creator, you know that he exists, because you can see his creation!

Summary. By studying the created universe, you can get to know the CREATOR of the universe. The universe reveals the power, beauty and order of the WORK OF GOD within creation.

B. THE BIBLE REVEALS THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Jesus Christ says, "Heaven and earth *will pass away*, but *my words (the Bible) will never pass away*" (Matthew 24:35). Therefore, God's words in the Bible are even more important than God's works in the whole creation!

Consider. Some facts about God's words, which are recorded in the Bible.

1. Facts concerning the contents of the Bible.

When you read the Bible, you will discover that every part is related to one great theme, namely, "God, who speaks and acts decisively in human history." God begins the material universe, gives purpose to the material universe, saves the lost and broken people of this material universe and ends this present material universe. The Bible from beginning to end is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

- The Bible describes *the beginning* of all things: It describes the beginning of the material universe and the beginning of the human race. It relates the beginning of the revelation of God and his will to man. It records the beginning of man's sin and redemption. It describes the beginning of family life, man-made civilisation and the nations of the world.
- The Bible describes the meaning and purpose of existence: It describes how people should live, how families should function, how teachers should teach, how judges should judge, how politicians should rule, how businessmen should conduct their business, etc. etc.
- The Bible teaches why all people need salvation and how they can be saved. The Bible describes God's salvation plan and salvation history.
- The Bible also vividly describes *the end* of all things: It describes the death of man and animals, the end of human history and the destruction of all human kingdoms, the final judgement of everyone and the renewal of the whole present creation.

Thus, the Bible has one theme, namely, "God, who speaks and acts decisively in human history." God speaks and acts in order to reveal and execute his eternal plan with his whole creation. God's plan includes the salvation of lost and broken people in the world.

The *one single theme* from beginning to end of the Bible points to just ONE AUTHOR directing the writing of the Bible!

2. Facts concerning the origin of the Bible.

- The Bible consists of 66 books.
- These books were written over a period of at least 1600 years, from about 1500 B.C. to about A.D. 100.
- These books were written by at least 40 different authors.
- These authors lived as far as 2500 kilometres apart from one another, from Babylonia in the East to Rome in the West.
- The authors wrote these books in the context of completely different languages (Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek) and completely different cultures (Eastern culture, Middle Eastern culture and Western culture).

When these 66 books were completed, they were compiled into one single book called *the Bible*, because of the unity and progression of its message. The Bible is one complete book with one single theme.

The *one single book*, written by so many different people living in so many different times and circumstances, points to just *one Author* directing the writing of the Bible!

3. Facts concerning the copying of the Bible.

Before the discovery of printing, books were copied by hand. What was done to ensure the faithful copying and transmission of the original Bible books, so that we can have confidence in God's Word today?

- Three groups of people contributed to the faithful transmission of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament through many centuries.

They were "the Sopherim", "the Talmudists" and "the Masoretes".

"The Sopherim" were an order of "scribes" and "teachers of the law" which had its beginning under Ezra, the scribe, from about 457 B.C. to about 200 A.D. (Ezra 7:6,10; Nehemiah 8:13). For more than 600 years they were the official "Bible Publication Society" of that time. Their great achievement was to standardise a pure text of the Hebrew Bible by making sure that *every hand-written copy of an Old Testament book would conform to the standard text*. From about 100 B.C. they counted all the verses, all the words and all the letters (consonants) of each book of the Old Testament and wrote these figures at the end of each book concerned! In this way, anyone could check if he had a perfect copy of the Old Testament text before him or one with a mistake.

"The Talmudists" were "the transmitters of the interpretations" of the Old Testament books. They existed between 100 B.C. and 500 A.D. For 600 years they memorised the oral tradition and transmitted the written tradition concerning the interpretation of the Old Testament books. The mass of these "traditions" has been preserved in three collections, called "the Midrash", "the Talmud" and "the Tosefta". They are important, because they *contain many quotations from the Old Testament books*. These quotations help us to see that the Hebrew text we possess today is very accurate. The many years of transmission by hand did not change the standard Hebrew text!

"The Masoretes" were "the scholars who gave the final form to the Hebrew text" of the Old Testament books. They functioned between 500 and 950 A.D. The Hebrew script originally had only 22 letters and all of them were consonants. The vowels were added mentally when the Hebrew text was read. Only after 500 A.D. "points" were added to the text to represent the vowels. The Masoretes received the Hebrew text written only in these 22 consonants from the Sopherim and they inserted the vowels in the form of "points". Thus they *ensured that every Hebrew word preserved its exact pronunciation and grammatical form*. They committed themselves to the accurate preservation of the Hebrew Old Testament books. They were more diligent and devoted to the accurate preservation of the Hebrew Old Testament books than any other endeavour to preserve ancient secular or religious literature in the history of human civilisation! They were so conscientious in their task that they did not even venture to make the most obvious corrections in the consonant text, but handed the ancient Hebrew consonant text down to us exactly as it came to them!

Conclusion. The faithful copying and transmission of the original Old Testament books was ensured by maintaining the standard text, by counting verses, words and letters and by never making any changes in the text.

- The faithful copying of the New Testament manuscripts.

The trustworthiness of the Greek New Testament is based on three facts:

The number of manuscripts. The most ancient historical books in the West we possess are from Herodotus and Thucydides and are from the 5th century B.C. While we only possess 8 manuscripts of each of these, we have 5000 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, 1000 manuscripts of the earlier translations of the New Testament and 8000 manuscripts of the Latin translation of the New Testament! Thus the text of the New Testament has been preserved better than any other document of the ancient world!

The time interval between copies and their originals. The oldest historical books in the West, Herodotus and Thucydides, are from the 5th century B.C., but the oldest copies we have of them are from A.D. 900. While the time interval between the writing of these books and the date of their earliest extant ("still existing") copies is 1300 years, the time interval between the New Testament originals and their oldest extant copies is only 250 years! Classical scholars of history do not doubt the authenticity of the text of Herodotus and Thucydides. The reliability of the New Testament text is many times greater!

The accuracy of the copies of the text. The greatest Epic in the West is "the Iliad of Homer"² and we possess 643 copies of it. Next to the New Testament, there are more extant copies of the Iliad than of any other book of ancient times. Both the Iliad and the Bible are considered "sacred" and both underwent *some changes in their text through copying*. But, while 764 lines of the 15 600 lines of the Iliad are questioned, only 40 lines of the 20 000 lines of the New Testament are questioned, that is 25 times less! Moreover, not one of these 40 lines or 400 words which are questioned in the New Testament Greek text affects either the doctrine or life of Christianity, because the doctrine and life contained in them are supported by other parts of the New Testament which stand above any doubt!

² 'Iliad' means "a long story of martial arts, for example the epic poem of Homer"

Conclusion: From the standpoint of literary evidence, the reliability of the New Testament Greek text is stronger than that of any other ancient written document in the whole world! Scholars are satisfied that we possess substantially the true text of the Greek New Testament³.

4. Facts concerning the completeness of the Bible.

The Bible is so complete that *throughout the centuries there has never been a need to change, to add to or to destroy its contents*. No other religious book can equal this!

- The holy books of other religions.

The holy books of Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism had many authors who lived in different times and who wrote very many holy books. However, these books are very *different in contents*. Their authors had so great a diversity of teachings and their doctrines have been amended so many times that it is impossible to unite all their doctrines into one unified system. Therefore, the Hindus, Buddhists and Confucianists do not have “a Bible”.

The holy book of Islam, called the Qur’an, came into being about 600 years *after* the Bible (between A.D. 609-632). One third of its contents consist of materials, which has been borrowed from the Bible⁴, but in a way that misunderstood the Bible. One third consists of repetitions. And one third consists of materials partly borrowed from Arab heathenism⁵, partly describing Mohammed’s relationships⁶ and partly giving political and ritual rules for his followers, which have been borrowed from different religions and sects. During the life of Mohammed, his words were mainly memorised and rehearsed.

The first collection of the Qur’an was probably made under Abu Bakr, the first “Caliph” or “successor” of Mohammed (A.D. 632-634).

The second collection. Due to the fact that many of those who could recite verses from Mohammed from memory died in battles, Umar, the second Caliph (A.D. 634-644) commissioned Zayd-ibn-Thabit, one of Mohammed’s secretaries, to collect “the recitations” (i.e. the Qur’an).⁷ One tradition says that Zayd collected it “not only from the hearts of men, but also from pieces of parchment, flat stones, palm leaves, shoulder blades, ribs of animals, pieces of leather and wooden boards”.

The final collection. The collection of Zayd was almost certainly the basis of a completion of the text in A.D. 652 ordered by Uthman, the third Caliph (644-656). When *disputes arose as to the different readings* of the text, the dialect and reading of Mohammed’s tribe (the Quraysh) was chosen. Four *standard copies* were placed at Medina, Kufa, Basra and Damascus. All variant readings of the Qur’an were deliberately destroyed!

The Qur’an:

- has but one man who “recited” the revelation (Mohammed)
- one man who “gathered and recorded” these recitations (Zayd) over a period of 23 years
- and one man (Uthman) who deliberately destroyed all variant readings of the Qur’an!

In comparison to this the Bible:

- has more than 40 writers inspired by the Holy Spirit
- who recorded the revelation of God over a period of more than 1600 years
- without changing a single letter!

- The Bible has never been amended.

Although there are variant readings among the hand-written copies of the Bible, they have never been deliberately destroyed. Moreover, these variant readings do not change any of the teachings of the Bible! Throughout the centuries, the teachings of the Bible have never been amended. For example:

The creation of vegetation. The Bible relates that matter was made, formed or ordered as follows: On the first day of creation, God made the light (energy). That points to the light of the sun and other heavenly bodies. On the second day of creation, God made the sky, which made a separation between the vapour moving above in the sky (the clouds) and the vapour condensed on the earth (the sea). Thus, a thick layer of clouds covered the earth. On the third day of creation, God separated the dry land from the sea, so that the continents and oceans of the earth were formed. Of course, God may have made use of the gradual cooling of the earth, that brought about the condensation of vapour into water and he could have made use of earthquakes that pushed mountains upwards into the air. *The Bible does not describe any details of how God created or how long it took to create.* By God’s creative command, the earth produced all kinds of green plants and trees. The light of the sun, which shone through the clouds, and the water made the production of chlorophyll (leaf-green) possible. Scientists have discovered that light, oxygen and water are needed in photosynthesis to produce chlorophyll. Thus, scientists agree that *the process of creation* as described in the Bible is in accord with science. Scientists confirmed the truth of the Bible.

³ Novum Testamentum Graece van Eberhard Nestle en Kurt Aland

⁴ The Qur’an borrowed the Old Testament prophets, Pharaoh, Jews, the apostles of the New Testament, Gabriel, Mary, Jesus, the Last Day, etc.

⁵ The Arab goddesses: al-Lat, al-Uzza and al-Manat (Surah 53:19-30) and the Jinn (Surah 6:100; 34:41)

⁶ The wives of the prophet (Surah 33:28-52)

⁷ “Read!” (Surah 96:1-5). “Why is the Qur’an not revealed unto him all at once?” (Surah 25:32. “And (it is) a Qur’an that We have divided, that thou mayest recite it unto mankind at intervals, and We have revealed it by (successive) revelation” (Surah 17:106.

The creation in six days. The first page of the Bible relates how God “*created*” the universe inclusive the earth “in the beginning” (Genesis 1:1-2) and “*completed*” it in six creation days (Genesis 2:1). During the 18th century, some learned people said that Christians should tear this page out of their Bibles, because it was in conflict with science. But in our time an increasing number of scientists and cosmologists agree that the Bible is not in conflict with science.⁸

God *created energy, matter, space and time out of nothing* (Hebrews 11:3) and *created the final product through a process*. For example: First God *created matter out of nothing*. Then he *formed (fashioned) matter (clay) into the form of a man and breathed life into him* (Genesis 2:7). Finally he *built* a woman out of the side of man (Genesis 2:22).

God created “time” (years, seasons, *days* of 24 hours) as humans calculate time only on the fourth *day* of creation (Genesis 1:14). And Genesis 2:4 says, “... in *the day* the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” as if the whole creation of the universe was made in one day! Thus, every “*day* of creation” may have been a very long period. However, the famous scientist, Lawrence, proved that “time is dependent on speed.” For example, if it were possible for a man to make a return trip to the planet Pluto with the speed of light, then he would take less than 11 *hours* to complete the journey. However, when he returns to earth, more than 12 *years* would have gone by on earth, because earth does not travel at the speed of light. Likewise, the time needed to create the universe is proportionately dependent on the speed with which God created! God, who created light by just speaking a word, could also have created the universe at the speed of light. Therefore, no man can calculate the duration of “*a day* of creation”!

Thus, it is not the Bible that needs to amend its record, but it is scientists who need to adjust their theories again and again to the true testimony of the Bible and change their theories about the Bible! The *once for all time completeness* of the Bible, points to just *one Author* directing the writing of the Bible!

Summary. Forty different prophets could only have produced one complete book with one main theme, without amending its teachings and without deliberately destroying any variant reading over a period of 1600 years if there was one Author and Editor behind all these prophets! The Bible is so complete that nothing needed to be changed after its completion! The Bible is the book most sold and most read in the world. The existence of the Bible points to the existence of the Author and Editor of the Bible, namely God.

By studying the Bible, you can get to know the AUTHOR and EDITOR of the Bible.

The thoughts, feelings, will, WORDS and DEEDS of God in human history are revealed in the Bible.

C. JESUS CHRIST REVEALS THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1. The incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Question. How do we know that Jesus Christ really existed?

- The calendar-illustration.

This part speaks about the incarnation of Jesus Christ. How do we know that he really came to this earth? How do people date ancient and modern history? What is the meaning of B.C. and A.D.? They mean “before Christ” (B.C. and “after Christ” (A.D.: “Anno Domini” means “in the year of the LORD”). Thus, Jesus Christ divides all human history into two parts and all modern dating is done with reference to Jesus Christ! The historians in the world would never have used a person who never existed in history to date the history of the world! The historians in the world acknowledge that Jesus Christ really existed!

In the ancient past many emperors and great kings have aspired to occupy this position in history. They destroyed all previous calendars and used all means to create a new calendar in which all dating referred to themselves. But their efforts were in vain. Their calendars were rejected and forgotten.

Why is human history recorded with reference to the birth of Jesus Christ? Why does Jesus Christ occupy the centre of human history? Why is Jesus Christ different to all the rulers and prophets in history? The Bible says, because Jesus Christ is the most unique Person who ever lived! Jesus Christ is “God who took on the human nature and lived amongst us”. *He entered his own creation and our human history in order to reveal to us who God really is and what God has done for us!*

2. Fulfilled prophecies about Jesus Christ.

Draw a time line on a board or paper. Moses (Deuteronomy) lived during 1450 B.C.; David (Psalms) during 1000 B.C.; Isaiah and Micah during 700 B.C.

Discover and discuss. Which predictions of the prophets concerning Jesus Christ were literally fulfilled?

- His birth.

More than 700 years B.C., Micah prophesied that Jesus Christ would be born in Bethlehem, a city in Israel (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1). More than 700 years B.C., Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ would be the son of a virgin and that his name would mean “God with us” (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:20-23).

⁸ Read “The Fingerprint of God” by Hugh Ross

- His life.

More than 1450 years B.C., Moses prophesied that Jesus Christ would be a prophet who must be obeyed (Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-23).

- His death

More than 1000 years B.C., David prophesied how Jesus Christ would die: his hands and feet would be pierced (with nails) (Psalm 22:16; Luke 23:33); people would divide his clothes among themselves (Psalms 22:18; John 19:23-24); people would surround him, scorn, mock, despise and insult him (Psalm 22:6-7; Matthew 27:39-44); and he would experience being forsaken by God the Father (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46).

- His salvation

More than 700 years B.C., Isaiah prophesied why Jesus Christ would die on the cross: He said, “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him” (Isaiah 53:5-6; 1 Peter 2:24-25; Romans 4:25).

- More than fifty predictions regarding Jesus Christ.

The prophets made more than fifty predictions or prophecies about Jesus Christ hundreds of years before he was born. Maybe one or two of these predictions could have been fulfilled also in another person in history, but certainly not all fifty predictions! Jesus fulfilled all fifty predictions! Sixteen of these predictions were all fulfilled on one day, the day he was crucified! About no other person in history have so many predictions been made! No other person in history has literally fulfilled so many predictions! In order to fulfil only eight of such predictions, any person would have one chance out of a hundred billion (100 000 000 000 000 000)(17 zero’s)! The significance of the fact that Jesus Christ fulfilled all fifty predictions is that it proves that Jesus Christ is *absolutely unique in the history* of the world and that he is *divine*. It is also evidence that there exists a divine mind behind the Bible and its predictions, that is, that the Bible is inspired by God. It is therefore evidence that God exists.

3. Jesus Christ revealed God.

Discover and discuss. Who is Jesus Christ?

What is said about Jesus Christ in the Bible passage below? Which aspects of God’s character does Jesus Christ reveal?

Read the following Bible passages. What is said about Jesus Christ?

- John 1:1 and 14? (Jesus Christ is God and Man)
- John 1:3 and 9b? (Jesus Christ is Creator of the world and came into the world)
- John 1:18 and 4? (Jesus Christ is revealed God and God’s character)
- John 1:4,9a and 5,10? (Jesus Christ is enlightened every man, but was not understood/recognized/acknowledged)
- John 1:11 and 12? (Jesus Christ was rejected by some and accepted by others)
- Mark 2:1-12? (God/Jesus has authority to forgive sins)
- John 5:21-24? (God/Jesus raises the dead and gives life)
- John 14:21,23? (God/Jesus makes God’s love and presence a reality)

- Who Jesus Christ is.

God is the almighty Spirit, lives in an unapproachable light and is invisible (1 Timothy 6:16). However, Jesus Christ is *the visible revelation* of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15)⁹. He reveals God’s being and glory (Hebrews 1:3). Words reveal and express thoughts. Jesus Christ is called “the Word” (John 1:1), because he reveals and expresses (reflects) the soul (being) and mind (thoughts) of God. Jesus Christ is God. “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). And Jesus Christ took on the human nature in Mary (Luke 1:30-37). Jesus Christ therefore has a divine nature and a human nature (John 1:1 and 14). He makes God known to man (John 1:18) and enables man to know God and approach God.

- What Jesus Christ does.

Jesus Christ is the Creator of the universe as well as the One who came into the created world (John 1:3 and 9b). Jesus Christ reveals (expresses) God and God’s character to people. “In him was life and that life was the light of men” (John 1:4) (“life” is the summary of God’s divine attributes and “light” is that truth expressed) “Jesus Christ made God known (John 1:18). Jesus Christ is the only One that saves people (John 14:6; Luke 19:10). Jesus Christ now raises spiritual and physical dead people, and will later at his second coming raise dead people (John 5:21,24, 28-29) exactly as God the father does. And Jesus Christ will judge all people (John 5:22-23).

- How a person can come into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ has the authority to forgive sins just as God the Father has (Mark 2:1-12). He blesses people with God’s grace (John 1:16). He enlightens every person and yet he is not understood or acknowledged by many (John 1:4,9a and 5,10). He is being rejected by some people and received by others (John 1:11 and 12). He makes the love and presence of God a reality in human life (John 14:21 and 23).

Summary. By studying Jesus Christ, you can get to know GOD WHO BECAME MAN. Jesus Christ reveals the NATURE, PERSONALITY and CHARACTER of God.

⁹ Read Exodus 3:2. The Angel of the LORD (= the LORD)(verse 4) appeared in fire in the bush. Also Islam believes that Allah appeared to Moses in a burning bush and spoke to him Surah 20:10-12). If God can reveal himself in material fire, he can also reveal himself in the Man, Jesus Christ!

D. THE HEART OF MAN REVEALS THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1. How do all people know what is “right” and what is “wrong”?

Read Exodus 20:12-17; Romans 2:14-15. Illiterate and literate nations as well as all cultures in every part of the world know “you shall not murder”, “you shall not commit adultery” and “you shall not steal”. How can all people in the world know the difference between right and wrong? This is possible only if the same Lawgiver wrote some of his moral laws on every human heart.

The moral laws in the hearts and consciences of people are the same, because the same Lawgiver wrote them when he created people. When you listen to these moral laws written in your heart, your heart will begin to tell you that there is a God who loves what is right and hates what is evil (Psalm 5:4-5; Psalm 11:5).

However, this will not always happen, because something terrible has happened to the human heart.

2. What happened to the human heart?

Read Jeremiah 17:5-10. “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” Only when a very special miracle takes place in your heart, will your heart become new! In the Bible this miracle is called “regeneration” or “to be born again/anew/from above” (John 3:3). Jesus says, “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3)! And, “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You *must* be born again’.” (John 3:7).

3. Why is the heart so important.

Read Psalm 14:1; Psalm 10:2-4; Psalm 27:8. With your heart you can exclude God or you can seek God and find him! “Your heart is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23). That is why God says, “My son, give me your heart” (Proverbs 23:26).

Summary. By listening to your heart and conscience, you can get to know the GOD FOR WHOM RIGHT AND WRONG IS VERY IMPORTANT. The heart of man reveals some of the MORAL LAWS of God.

E. THE LIVES OF REAL CHRISTIANS REVEAL THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1. Which changes took place in the life of the apostle Paul.

Read Acts 26:9-19 and Philippians 3:7-14. Who was Paul? Paul hated and persecuted Christians. But one day Jesus Christ appeared to him, transformed his heart and turned his life around. Christ forgave his sin and saved him. Paul’s life changed and he began to live a new life. The former persecutor and destroyer of Christians became a Christian himself, a person whom God chose to use!

2. Who changed Paul’s life so much?

Read 1 Timothy 1:15-16. Paul himself testifies that no religion, philosophy or science has changed him. Only God through the work of Jesus Christ changed his life!

3. Look at the lives of genuine Christians.

Seek contact and fellowship with genuine Christians¹⁰ and observe their lives and testimonies. Ask them who changed their lives and how it happened. Modern psychology, sociology, criminology and philosophy all recognise the importance of helping people to change for the better. But these sciences have little power to accomplish the necessary changes. However, millions of Christians give testimonies of how their lives have changed. Therefore, when genuine Christians tell you how their lives have been changed, you must listen and observe. Behind these Christians stands the living God who changed their lives and is continuing to transform their lives.

Unfortunately there are also people who call themselves “Christians”, but in reality are not changed at all. Some so-called “Christians” behave as non-Christians and even as bad people. Nevertheless, Christians do not throw these people out of their churches, but persevere to speak the truth to them in the hope that they too will begin to grasp the truth and change.

Thus, seek genuine Christians, observe how they live and listen to what they say.

Summary. By studying the lives and testimonies of real Christians, you can get to know the GOD WHO CHANGES LIVES. The POWER OF GOD TO CHANGE LIVES is revealed in the lives of genuine Christians.

Summary. The 5 things that point to the existence of God:

If you want to know whether God exists, then:

1. Study the creation and discover the wonders, power, beauty and order of the work of God in creation.
2. Study the Bible and discover the thoughts, decisions, words and deeds of God in human history.
3. Study Jesus Christ and discover the nature, personality and character of God.
4. Listen to your heart and conscience and discover some important moral laws of God.

¹⁰ Unfortunately there are also *nominal Christians* or *cultural Christians*, people who are born in Christian families and raised in the Christian culture. Because they have not been born again, they live as the other people of this world. They call themselves “Christians”, but in the eyes of Jesus Christ they are NOT Christians (Matthew 5:20; Matthew 7:21-23)!

5. Study the lives and testimonies of genuine Christians and discover the power of God to change (transform) lives.

ASSIGNMENT BEFORE THE NEXT SESSION

1. Read the Bible passages again. Consider what the Bible says about the existence of God.
2. Consider the following problem: "If there is a God, why is there so much misery and suffering in the world?" Next time we will consider this problem.

- Review previous session

The 5 things that point to the existence of God.

- Question

“If there is a God, why is there so much suffering and death in the world?”

- Sharing in the group

Tell why you think that there is so much suffering and death in the world.

- Teaching from the Bible

People can point to many things as the cause of suffering and death.

The Bible reveals that there are 5 main reasons for suffering and death:

A. THE GODLESSNESS OF PEOPLE LEADS TO SUFFERING

1. The nature of godlessness.

What is the meaning of “godlessness”? **Read** Romans 1:18-23.

- “Godlessness” means two things:

- Godlessness is not believing in the existence of God at all and thus living an atheistic life-style in which the person himself is his own god and does what he pleases.

- Godlessness is not believing in the true God, but believing in gods which have been made or devised by people. These idols may be either idols of stone or non-existent ‘gods’ devised in their minds.

In short, godlessness is living without the true God who revealed himself in the Bible!

- What do godless people do with the true God?

Although people can know that there is a true God, they do not glorify or thank him. Although people realise that God exists and that he is powerful, they do not acknowledge his existence or power. They do not respect and honour him. Instead of worshipping and serving the true God, people worship and serve their own idols.

- Why do people make idols?

People make idols to look like themselves (Psalm 115:8), because they want to control their idols and thus control their own life-styles! The kinds of idols they make are the kinds that allow them to do what they like, even to live in sin! Their idols might require them to change with respect to “what they do” (religious duties), but do not require them to change with respect to “who they are” (i.e. to repent and reform their attitude, words, deeds, character, etc.)!

- What must happen in order that people respect and worship the true God?

When people begin to respect and worship the true God, they cannot continue to live just as they like. *The true God requires them to change with respect to who they are as well as with respect to what they do!*

2. The consequences of godlessness.

What are the consequences of godlessness? **Read** Romans 1:21.

Godlessness affects a person’s mind and heart. The Bible says, “Their thinking becomes futile”, that is, in God’s eyes, their thinking is worthless, useless and fruitless, because they do not know the truth that God has revealed. Without God’s truth and wisdom, people live in a world of lies and deceit. They deceive and are deceived and thus suffer and cause suffering to others!

The Bible also says, “Their foolish hearts become darkened”, that is, they lack the necessary “light” to live a moral life. Many people cannot find “power” in themselves to do the good things that they really want to do. Without moral character, people suffer and cause others to suffer!

The Bible says, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven over them” (Romans 1:18). The relationship with the true God has been broken.

Summarise: People suffer because either they deny the existence of the true and living God or they exchange the true God for gods that have been made or devised by people. In short, GODLESSNESS causes people to suffer!

B. THERE IS SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THE WICKEDNESS OF PEOPLE

1. The nature and extent of wickedness.

- What is the meaning of “wickedness”?

Read Romans 1:24-32. While “godlessness” expresses *the wrong relationship towards God*, “wickedness” expresses *the wrong relationship towards people*. People continually invent ways to do evil. People drag one another into indecent and depraved life-styles and do every conceivable kind of evil to one another. People also approve of the evil people do

in the world! Consider the things listed in Romans 1, like spiritual arrogance and making gods whom other people must worship, sexual immorality and perversion, commercial greed and deceit, social gossiping and boasting and political senselessness and faithlessness. People are filled with wickedness. No wonder, when people do these wicked things to one another, they all suffer!

2. Why do people do these wicked things to one another?

Read Romans 1:24-32. People's relationship to God determines their relationship to other people! When people exchange the true God for false idols or simply want to be gods themselves, then the true God gives them over to the sinful desires of their hearts, to shameful lusts and to a depraved mind. Then God allows people to become what they want to become and to do what they want to do. Thus people suffer the consequences of their own desires. Because they want to be God-less, they taste what a life without the true God is like! Because they choose to be *godless*, they become *wicked*.

- Who in this world do these wicked things to one another?

Read Romans 3:10-12,23. The Bible says that all people in the world do wicked things like these to one another.

Summary. People suffer because they do wickedness, promote wickedness or approve of wickedness. They pervert one another and harm one another. In short, WICKEDNESS causes people to suffer!

C. THERE IS SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THE FALSE BELIEFS OF PEOPLE

1. The nature of truth.

- What is truth?

Read Numbers 13:19. "Truth" is who God is and what God says and does.

- What are two very important truths?

Read Romans 1:18, 25; Isaiah 43:4 and Jeremiah 29:11. Two very important truths are:

- God wants to give *security* to people, that is, the knowledge that you are unconditionally loved and permanently accepted. In Isaiah 43:4 God says, "You are precious in my eyes and honoured in my sight, ... I love you, ..." The truth is what God says to his own people, "You are precious, honoured and loved by God!" That is real security!
- God wants to give *significance* to people, that is, the knowledge that what you do is meaningful and important. In Jeremiah 29:11 God says, "I know the plans I have for you, ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." The truth is that God gives you a meaningful and hopeful task! Your life is significant in God's eyes!" That is the real significance in life!

This, "the truth" about anything is inseparably bound to God and to his words and his deeds.

2. The resistance to the truth.

- Why and how do people suppress or exchange the truth?

Read Romans 1:18,22-23.

- People *suppress* the truth when they do not want to hear the truth, know the truth or live by the truth. They feel ashamed to be associated with God and so they deny or ignore the truth. They feel guilty or afraid about their relationship with God and so they avoid or resist the truth.
 - People *exchange* the truth when they deliberately believe in false beliefs and false values.
- Therefore, whenever people suppress or exchange the security and significance which God wants to give to the, they suffer!

Summary. People without the true and living God also tend to be without righteousness and the truth. When they do not know the truth about God, they cannot know the truth about themselves or the truth about the world. They don't know who they are, where they come from, why they are here or where they are going. They suffer because they feel insecure, disoriented, and worthless. They suffer because they see no meaning in life or because they have blindly committed themselves to a destructive lifestyle. In short, THE BELIEF IN LIES, FALSE BELIEFS AND BASE VALUES cause people to suffer.

3. The three wrong relationships.

Question. How does the Bible describe natural man?

By nature every human being has:

- a wrong relationship to God
- a wrong relationship to other people
- and a wrong relationship to himself.

By nature, every human being is:

- godless
- wicked
- and believes in lies, false beliefs and base values.

The Bible calls these three wrong relationships with one word, namely “sin”. The word “sin” means “to miss the goal of God”. The real reason for so much suffering in the world is “sin”. “Sin” is always defined in relationship to God and as a consequence also in relationship to other people and yourself.

- “The root of sin” is a broken relationship to the true and living God, or, independence from God and thus self-sufficiency.
- “The fruit of sin” is doing what God forbids and neglecting what God commands. The lists of sins in the Bible are all descriptions of the fruit of a tree which has as its root independence from God or a broken relationship with God.

“Sin” is:

- to miss Gods goals
- to transgress the commands
- and to twist Gods truths

Thus the real reason why there is so much suffering in the world is “sin”. People suffer because they are SINNERS.

Read Romans 8:7-8. How does the Bible describe the ability of natural man?

The natural man, i.e. the unregenerate unbeliever, has a hostile attitude towards the God of the Bible. He does not submit to God’s Word and *he cannot submit himself with his so-called “free will” or “personal effort” to God’s Word!* Natural man can do nothing by himself to please God!

D. THE REALITY OF DEATH CAUSE SUFFERING

Discuss the question below.

1. The meaning of the word “death”.

Read Romans 6:23; Ecclesiastes 5:15; Ecclesiastes 9:3-6. What does “death” mean to you?

The consequence of sin is “death”! Death is feared by all people. Death is so terrible, that many people do not even want to mention the word or think about death. Death is experienced by most people as the climax of all suffering. “Death” means “separation”.

- Death means *separation* from your body. Your body returns to the dust of the earth (1 Corinthians 15:50).
- Death means *separation* from your loved ones. You have to leave them behind
- Death means *separation* from your possessions, loss of all your education, loss of your job, leaving behind all your accomplishments and position. You can take nothing of all you have worked for so hard during your lifetime along with you in death (Psalm 49:10,17; 1 Timothy 6:7).
- Death is also *a terror* for those who are left behind. They must continually miss you and do not know what to expect when it is their turn to die. They live constantly in fear of death (Hebrews 2:15).

Summary. “Death” means separation from everything on earth and causes untold suffering to yourself and to all whom you leave behind. Death is the greatest enemy most people know. In short, DEATH causes people to suffer.

E. THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD CAUSE SUFFERING

“Judgement” in the Bible refers to two distinct kinds of judgements, namely, the present judgements of God and the future judgement of God. Both cause suffering.

1. The present judgements of God.

- How does God allow his present judgements to come over people?

Read Galatians 6:7-8. The present judgements that God allows to come over people are the immediate consequences of their own sins. God created the earth and man and determined the purpose for the existence of man. *God has also built laws into his creation and creatures.* If these laws are transgressed, they bring punishment with them. If you ignore the law of gravity, you can have a nasty fall. Likewise, if you transgress the spiritual and moral laws of God in creation, then God allows you to suffer. For example, laziness in work leads to poverty. Hatred leads to broken relationships. Tyranny and oppression lead to wars. Mismanagement of the earth leads to droughts or floods. Corruption in business leads to crime. Greed leads to destroying others. Sexual immorality leads to all kinds of sexual diseases. Taking drugs leads to slavery. In many such kinds of ways, the consequences of sin catch up with the sinner.

- How does God bring his present judgements over people?

Read Leviticus 26:14-33; Amos 4:6-12; Haggai 1:3-11 and Ezekiel 14:21. God controls the universe, including the events of history and the forces of nature. In times when people disobey God or when the relationship between people and God is broken, *then God withdraws his care from people or even punishes them.* He withdraws people’s basic needs of food and clothing. He causes people’s wages to be insufficient and blows their high expectations of life away. In this way, God uses all kinds of disasters like earthquakes, floods, and especially droughts and famines throughout history to show his displeasure against sin and to warn people to repent and turn back to him.

- What is the relationship between your personal sin and suffering?

Suffering can have different causes:

- Numbers 12:6-10: your own sin.
- 2 Samuel 24:15-17: the sin of another person.

- 1 Samuel 5:1-6: the sin of your nation.
- Luke 13:16: not sin, but the evil intentions of Satan.
- John 9:1-3: not sin, but the good intention of God.

Thus, on the whole human with every kind of cause is the consequence of the spiritual degeneration of mankind to which all men belong. The whole mankind is liable to suffer. The Bible rejects the idea that the suffering of an individual is directly proportional to his personal sin (which is the “karma-samsara” teaching of Hinduism). The Bible teaches that God not only deals with people as an individual, but also as a family, as a nation, and even as part of all mankind bound to Adam or a part of the body of believers bound to Jesus Christ (Romans 5:12,18-19). That is why any specific form of suffering as for example sickness, not necessarily the result of one’s personal sin. (We do not discuss the significance of suffering here).

- What is the real reason why God brings his present judgements on people?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:32; Hebrews 12:4-13. “When we (believers) are judged¹¹ by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be doomed¹² with the world (the unbelievers)” (1 Corinthians 11:32). *God brings his present judgements on people in order to safeguard them from eternal damnation!* He does not desire people to remain lost forever! The purpose of his present judgements is to discipline people, that is, to warn people, to expose their sins and to rebuke them for their sins. God’s goal is to do what is best for people *now*. To allow people to continue in their present sins, would lead to their ultimate slavery to sins and consequently to God’s eternal punishment for their sins. The purpose of God’s present judgements is to cause people to turn from their godlessness and wickedness and instead share in God’s holiness and righteousness.

2. The future judgement of God.

- By looking at the life-styles of wicked people, why would you describe life in this world as just or unjust?

Read Psalm 73:2-16. Life is manifestly unjust! The good suffer, the unselfish are exploited, the meek are terrorised, and the poor are deprived. On the other hand, the evil flourish, the selfish make fortunes, the brutal oppress the meek and the rich cause the poor to get poorer. Tyrants die peacefully in their beds while saints are tortured to death. If, as we are assuming, there is a God who is all-powerful and good, how can he possibly allow the injustices in the world to continue? If he does nothing about all the injustice in the world, either now or after this life in order to redress such gross injustice and put down such rampant evil, then:

- he is either not all-powerful and so cannot do it
- or he is not good and so does not care!

However, the Bible teaches very clearly that God is all-powerful and good and that justice on a cosmic scale will be done and that all the people who ever lived on earth will be present at *the last judgement!*

- What does God’s last judgement look like?

Read Hebrews 9:27; Matthew 25:31-33; Ecclesiastes 12:14. The Bible says that death is not the end! At the end of human history in this world, Jesus will return to earth and judge all the people that ever lived. This day is called “the Day of Judgement”. Jesus Christ will separate the Christians from the non-Christians and they will be judged. God will judge all people for everything they have done, both good and evil. God will even judge all hidden things. No one and nothing will escape his judgement!

- For what things will people be judged?

Read the Bible passages below. The non-Christians will be judged for the following things:

- Romans 5:12,17-19. God will punish all people for sharing in the fall into sin of the representative of all mankind, Adam.
- Matthew 13:41-42; Revelation 21:8. God will punish the world for its *evil* and the *wicked* people for their sins.
- Matthew 25:41-46. Even people who do not regard themselves as wicked will go to eternal punishment, because they are not righteous and have *neglected* to do what God commanded.
- John 3:18-21,36. God will punish people for their *unbelief*.
- 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. God will punish people for their *ignorance of God* and their *disobedience to the gospel*.
- Isaiah 2:11-12,17-19. God will put an end to the *arrogance and pride* of people and bring down the mighty political and military rulers from their thrones.
- Matthew 5:3-12. God will judge the needy with righteousness, the poor with justice, but send the rich away empty-handed and slay the wicked.

- Why will God’s future judgement be far worse than all present suffering?

Read the Bible passages below.

- Mark 9:42-49. The place of eternal punishment is called “the lake of fire” or “hell” and it is a place of fire, agony and torment. “Hell” is a place of burning without dying.
- Luke 16:23-31. Hell (here called “Hades”) is a place of no return – a place from which no one can get out.

¹¹ Greek: krinō

¹² Greek: katakrinō (cf. Romans 8:1)

- 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. Hell means to be punished with everlasting destruction, which does not mean annihilation, but suffering because they are removed and shut out from the loving presence of God and the majestic and powerful care of his creation.

- Matthew 25:45-46. Hell means eternal punishment, which is the opposite of eternal life.

The Bible says that “death” is not the end! After death there will be the final judgement. At the end of human history in this world, Jesus will return to earth and judge all the people that ever lived.

Jesus Christ warns that all unbelievers and all wicked people will suffer in the future age. This is very serious! Suffering in God’s future judgement will be far worse than the present physical death! The suffering is God’s future last judgement will be the worst suffering ever!

- Who will be thrown into the lake of fire?

Read John 14:6; Revelation 20:15. Everyone whose name was not found written in “the book of life”, that is, everyone who does not have eternal life, because he does not believe in Jesus Christ.

Summary. People suffer because God already brings their present sins into judgement. People also suffer because “they know that one day they will have to give an account of everything they have done. Even their hidden sins will be exposed and judged.” GOD’S PRESENT AND FUTURE JUDGEMENTS cause people to suffer.

Summary. The 5 main reasons for suffering:

1. There is suffering because of the godlessness of people.
2. There is suffering because of the wickedness of people.
3. There is suffering because of the false beliefs and values of people.
4. There is suffering because of the death of people.
5. There is suffering because of the judgement of God on people.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING SESSION

1. During the next week, read the Bible passages again. Consider what the Bible says about the reasons for suffering and death.
2. During the next week, consider the following question: “If you were God, what would you do to solve the problem of suffering and death?” Think of some solutions to the problem of suffering and death.

SESSION 3. THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND DEATH

Review of previous session

Review the 5 main reasons for suffering in the world.

Question

If you were God, how would you solve the problem of suffering and death?

Sharing in the group

Tell how you would solve the problem of suffering and death.

Tell what you are currently doing about it.

Teaching from the Bible

Man cannot solve the problem of suffering and death. Many attempts have been made to tackle this problem, but without success.

Finally, God has taken five steps through Jesus Christ as Mediator to solve the problem of suffering and death.

A. THE FIRST STEP: JESUS CHRIST BECAME A HUMAN BEING

1. God became a human being.

Read John 1:1,14-18; John 14:7-10; Philippians 2:5-7; 1 John 1:1.

Jesus Christ is God, but also took on the human nature. He is God Who humbled himself and took on a human likeness, entered his own creation and came to live among people on earth. He came as close as possible to lost and suffering mankind. He listened to them, understood them, felt compassion for them, spoke to them and helped them. He was a real Person in the history of the world. Thousands of people knew him personally, have seen his miracles with their own eyes, have heard his teachings with their own ears, have felt him with their own hands and have personally experienced his work of salvation! Jesus Christ identified himself with their feelings, problems, temptations and suffering.

2. He came to people in the world.

Why is going to someone who suffers better than only sending him a message?

Read Matthew 8:14-15; Luke 7:20-23; Acts 10:37-43. A doctor does not merely send a telephone text to wish you well, but goes to his patient to heal him! Likewise, God does not merely send a messenger or prophet to suffering mankind on earth. No, he goes himself to suffering mankind in the world! Only by God becoming Man can God really and completely identify with man, empathise with their feelings and problems, and be subjected to their temptations and sufferings. Jesus became completely as human beings except for two things:

- In his human nature *he had no human father*. He was born as a human from the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31-35).
- He *remained perfectly sinless* (Hebrews 4:15). Like other people, he was tempted, but never sinned.

As other human beings, he experienced hunger and thirst, was oppressed and persecuted, felt pain and grief. As other human beings, he suffered. God became Man in Jesus Christ in order to identify himself with suffering people on earth.

Why was his appearance as a Man more important than appearing as a “god”?

Jesus Christ appeared among people as a human being and not as a myth or shady apparition of a “god” (as for example the Hindu gods and Buddhist enlightened ones). If he did, he could not have identified himself with human beings! he would not have been acceptable to people in human history.

Summary. God’s way to solve the problem of sin, suffering and death was to **BECOME A HUMAN BEING HIMSELF**, enter his own creation and human history to identify himself with people and their problems of sin, needs, suffering and death. No “god” in any other religion did that!

B. THE SECOND STEP: JESUS CHRIST BECAME A SERVANT

1. Becoming a servant.

How would the coming of Jesus Christ as a Ruler be different from his coming as a Servant?

Read. Mark 10:42-45. Jesus Christ did not come as a mighty ruler into this world, but as a humble servant. If he had come as a mighty ruler, he could have used his position, power and riches to force people to serve him.¹³

And people would have served him for many selfish reasons: to gain esteem and a standing with him, or power and special privileges from him.

However, Jesus Christ came into the world, not as a mighty ruler, but as a humble servant. He came, not to be served, but to serve. He did not threaten, but taught. He used no violence, but convinced. Jesus Christ did not threaten, but taught the people. He never used force, but persuaded people. He did not show favouritism to the mighty and influential

¹³ As some religions that bribe people with money and privileges or force them with the sword to change their religion!

or to the rich and famous, but he especially associated with the suffering and the needy, and with the outcasts and sinners.

2. Serving brings suffering.

How did Jesus Christ set an example of servanthood to his followers?

Read Luke 5:29-32; Luke 7:18-22; Luke 19:7,10; John 13:4-5,12-15. Jesus Christ came into the world to heal the sick, to make the blind see, to cause the lame to walk, to cure the lepers, to make the deaf hear, to raise the dead, to preach the good news to the poor and call all sinners to repent. He came into the world to save people from their sins and suffering.

But also his serving cause suffering. People did not want to change and did not want to serve. Instead they spoke evil of Jesus Christ and resisted him, because he helped the needy.

do you still remember why there is so much suffering in the world? people suffer, because they are godless and unrighteous. People suffer, because no one wants to serve! There is so much suffering in the world, because people want to rule over others, but do not want to be a servant to anyone! Everyone desires to be served by others!

However, Jesus Christ came to serve. He came to save people from their sins and their suffering. God's method to solve the problem of sin and suffering is to serve!

The washing of feet was an example. Washing the dirty feet of people at the entrance was customary the duty of the lowest slave in the house. None of his disciples wanted to be the least by washing the feet of the others. But Jesus Christ took the place of the lowest servant and washed the feet of his disciples. *Only Jesus Christ was willing to be the lowest slave and manage the dirtiest jobs.* As the Highest Lord over everything in creation, he made himself the lowest slave on earth! As the greatest teacher of all people he taught not merely by reciting revelations, but by setting an example of service. Jesus Christ is the best Example of a Servant! He gave people an unforgettable example!

Summary. Jesus Christ solved the problem of sin and suffering of man by BECOMING A SERVANT HIMSELF, who was willing to tackle the lowest, dirtiest and most difficult tasks. He tackled the problem of suffering and the brokenness of man on earth. He came to seek what was lost and to heal what was broken.

C. THE THIRD STEP: JESUS CHRIST DIED ON THE CROSS

Introduce: According to Philippians 2:5-8, Jesus Christ humbled himself in three steps downward:¹⁴

- First, he humbled himself as God and took on the human nature
(*He possessed the divine nature from eternity, but added the human nature in history*)
- Second, he humbled himself among all people by becoming their servant.
- Third, he humbled himself to the very lowest place by dying on a cross as if he were a criminal.

Read the Bible passages below and **discuss** the questions below.

1. A sacrifice is absolutely necessary.

- The Old Testament sacrifices pointed to the absolute necessity of atonement.

Why was a sacrifice absolute necessary in the past?

Read Leviticus 20:26; Leviticus 4:1-7,20 and Hebrews 9:16-22. Why was it absolutely necessary that something or someone had to die? The Old Testament period was the period *before* Jesus Christ. The Old Testament teaches and illustrates why it was necessary that something or someone had to be sacrificed and die.

- **The nature of God.** God is holy and righteous and hates every kind of sin.

- **Atonement by God and reconciliation with God.** Therefore, human beings can only draw near to the holy God when his holy and righteous indignation (anger) against sin has been satisfied by the just punishment of their sins. This is called "atonement of sins". Only when atonement for the sins of a person has been made, can he be reconciled to God. A sacrifice that punishes sins and thus satisfies the righteous and holy anger of God against sin and that reconciles the sinner to God is called "a sacrifice of atonement". During the Old Testament period, God commanded people to bring animal sacrifices as sacrifices of atonement.

- **Atonement through blood.** A "covenant" is a will or testament and is ratified only by the death of someone. Thus, the Old Testament covenant was effective only by the shedding of the blood of animals.

- **Atonement through the blood of the Seed.** God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants "in his Seed" all the families on earth would be blessed. (Genesis 22:18-19). He ratified that covenant in the New Testament by *the shedding of blood* of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; cf. Genesis 15:9-21)

The animal sacrifices symbolised that the animal died in the place of the sinner. Every year, the high priest sprinkled blood before the curtain in the temple and smear blood on the horns of the incense altar in order to make atonement for his own sins and the sins of the people.

¹⁴ Jesus Christ humbled himself by descending to "the lower, earthly regions" (Ephesians 4:9-10; cf. psalm 139:15; John 3:12-13). This does not refer to the grave or the underworld (Hades, the realm of the dead), but to his incarnation (becoming a human being) on earth, just as "he ascended higher than all the heavens" refers to his ascension to heaven.

- The Old Testament sacrifices were imperfect and therefore temporary.

Why were the Old Testament sacrifices imperfect and thus temporary?

Read Hebrews 9:7-10; Hebrews 10:1-4. The Old Testament sacrifices were imperfect and temporary.

- **Animal sacrifices were ineffective.** We read that after these animal sacrifices were brought, the people still felt guilty for their sins. The people living during the Old Testament period continued to bring animal sacrifices, day after day, year after year, because they *continued to feel guilty and ashamed* of their sins. The blood of animals could not take away the guilt and shame of their committed sins! They could not remove the guilt and shame of their sins, because human beings are completely different than animals.

- **Animal sacrifices were only a preparation** for the New Testament period of fulfilment.

- **Animal sacrifices were “a shadow of the realities”**, which would come in the future. The animal sacrifices during the Old Testament period were only “types”, that is, “symbols” pointing to a future and real fulfilment. The animal sacrifices had to remind people of the guilt and shame of their sins, convince them that people cannot do anything to save themselves and point to the absolute necessity of a future sacrifice of atonement for their sins!

The law of animal sacrifices had to be fulfilled by a human sacrifice.

The *perfect and permanent solution* for the problem of *human sin* and *human suffering* was not the bringing of an animal sacrifice, but the bringing of a *human sacrifice*!

2. The perfect sacrifice must fulfil four conditions.

Who is the perfect and permanent human sacrifice that made atonement for human sins and reconciles sinners to God?

A perfect human sacrifice must fulfil four important conditions:

- First condition: The perfect sacrifice must be a *human*.

Read Philippians 2:6-7. Animal sacrifices or sacrifices of things like money or incense cannot be a perfect sacrifice. *Animals* or *things* are unlike human beings and cannot take away the guilt and shame of *human* sins. The *repeated* sacrifice of animals and things by people in the past history and in the present time proves that they cannot remove the guilt, shame or power of their human sins. If they could, they would have stopped!

However, Jesus Christ is God who took on the human nature. If Jesus were not a human being, he would not have qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of human beings. Because Jesus was a human being (John 1:1,14), he qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the forgiveness of human sins. This condition might have been fulfilled by any human being.

- Second condition: The perfect sacrifice must die *willingly*.

Read John 10:17-18; John 15:13; A human being that does not die willingly cannot be a perfect sacrifice. A person who dies unwillingly cannot take away the guilt and shame of human sins. Who is willing to become the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of others? Look around you, the more people possess things, the less they are willing to die themselves. People live selfish and protective life-styles. They build high fences around themselves, install alarm systems, keep dogs and guns and take out all kinds of life insurances. They do this, because they do not want to die! People eat health foods, exercise and pay lots of money to doctors in order to stretch life a little longer. There are not many human beings that are willing to die for other people.

However, Jesus Christ laid down his life by his own decision, deliberately and completely willing. If Jesus did not die willingly, he would not have qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of human beings and God could not have accepted his sacrifice as atonement for sins. Because Jesus died deliberately and completely willing, he qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the forgiveness of sins. This condition might have been fulfilled by a very few people.

- Third condition: The perfect sacrifice must be *sinless*.

Read Romans 3:23; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 7:26-27. A human being¹⁵ that is not sinless cannot be a perfect sacrifice! A person who has sinned at any time cannot take away the guilt and shame of human sins. Who among all human beings in the history of the world has always been sinless? The Bible says that all human beings in the history of the world have sinned. None of the great people who ever lived were sinless!

However, although Jesus Christ was tempted like all human beings, he always remained without sin. The Bible and all its witnesses say that Jesus Christ was always totally sinless. During his life on earth, he gave himself in an unselfish and self-sacrificial way in order to serve and to save the sinful people of the world. If Jesus were not sinless, he would not have qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of human beings. Because Jesus Christ was the only human being who was sinless, only he in the whole history of mankind qualified as a sacrifice of atonement for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, this condition could never have been fulfilled by any other than Jesus Christ!

- Fourth condition: The perfect sacrifice must be *God's choice* for the task.

Read 1 Peter 1:18-20; Matthew 3:16-17; John 1:29-34; John 3:16. A human being that has not been appointed by God for the task of dying for the sins of the world cannot be a perfect sacrifice. A human being who has not been chosen and called by God to die as a sinless sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the world, cannot take away the guilt and shame of human sins. Although there are several religious leaders who claim that they have been chosen and called by God,

¹⁵ Even if he were the greatest prophet.

none of them have been chosen by God and called by God to die as a sinless sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people in the world.

However, the God of the Bible

- *chose Jesus Christ before the creation of the world* (1 Peter 1:20)
- *predicted his coming during the Old Testament period* (Psalm 22: 16-18; Isaiah 53:5-6)
- *and called him at the right time in human history* (Galatians 4:4) (at the beginning of the New Testament period) to die as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of people.

He was called:

- *visibly* in the sight of many people by the descent of the Holy Spirit on him
- and called *audibly* by God's voice from heaven with the words: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17).

Although many other prophets received from God the command to bring a messenger that recites revelations to people, *none of them received their calling visibly or audibly in the sight of many people (as witnesses)*! None of these so-called prophets were *sinless*! The task to take away the holy and righteous wrath of God (by paying the penalty) and by reconciling these people to God was only given to Jesus Christ in the whole history of the world! If God had not chosen Jesus Christ for this task, he would also have been disqualified to be the atonement sacrifice for the sins of people. Jesus Christ was also not chosen democratically by majority vote to this task, but was the only One chosen in a sovereign way by the God of the Bible. Because Jesus Christ is the only One in human history who has been chosen on the basis of all four conditions, he is the only One in history qualified to be the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of people!

Conclusion. In human history, only Jesus Christ met all four conditions! Jesus Christ was not only human and completely willing to die for others, but he was also perfectly sinless and the only human being to whom God has given the task of being the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of this world!

3. The unique characteristics of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

What are three unique characteristics of the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus Christ?

Read Hebrews 9:12-14,24-26.

- The first unique characteristic: Jesus Christ is the high priest who works *in heaven*.

All other priests in the history of the world performed (and still perform) their duties in human buildings on earth as temples, church buildings and mosques.

But Jesus Christ did not work as a priest in any earthly building. He serves in the heavenly temple where he represents his people right in the presence of the God of the Bible! Therefore, religious ceremonies in earthly religious buildings cannot save anyone in the world.

- Second unique characteristic: Jesus Christ is the high priest who *sacrificed himself*.

All other priests in the history of the world brought (and still bring) an animal or something as a sacrifice.

But only Jesus Christ did not bring an animal or anything else as a sacrifice, but brought himself as the sacrifice of atonement! "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22)! Only by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ (i.e. his death on the cross) Jesus Christ obtained an eternal redemption which purifies people not simply outwardly and ceremoniously¹⁶, but inwardly and genuine eternal.

- Third unique characteristic: Jesus Christ is the high priest who *sacrificed only once*.

All other religions bring endless sacrifices (animals, incense, flowers, fruits, etc), sometimes daily, other times yearly.

But only Jesus Christ was not sacrificed again and again, but brought a perfect sacrifice of atonement only *once in history*! Thus he *once and for all time* permanently took away the impurities, the guilt, the shame, the power and the doom of sin! Therefore, sacrifices that are repeated today and the ceremonies that belong to it are completely useless! The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was a once in history sacrifice of atonement that can never and never will be repeated!

4. The purpose of the sacrifice of atonement of Christ.

Discuss. Why did Jesus Christ have to die?

All people in the world are by nature sinners and as such enemies of God. By nature, all people are ungodly, that is, they live their lives without God and miss God's purpose for their lives. And by nature all people are impure and remain impure in spite of performing purification rites. All people are powerless to change this hopeless condition by themselves.

¹⁶ All other religions in the world bring animals sacrifices, perform religious duties (as for example ablutions and eating "clean" food) and try to fulfill religious duties (as praying and fasting) in order to "purify" themselves. Their purification is always an outward, ritual and temporary, never inward, genuine or everlasting!

However, the death of Jesus Christ is God's means to justify sinners in his eyes and reconcile them to himself. And the death of Jesus Christ is God's means to purify unclean people and sanctify them (i.e. remove all impurities from them completely and to dedicate them to living a holy life)!

- The death of Jesus Christ *justifies* believers.

Read Romans 5:6-10; 1 Peter 2:24. Jesus Christ died to solve the greatest human *problem* called "sin". His death became God's punishment for our sins. *If God did not punish our sins, he might have been called merciful and loving, but certainly not holy and just (righteous)!*

Christ's death made it possible for us to be justified. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ is declared righteous (forgiven, saved, freed) and is forever regarded and treated as perfectly righteous, that is, all his sins have been forgiven! The problem that separated us from God, namely "sin", has been removed. At the moment a person believes in Jesus Christ, all his sins are put onto Christ's body and nailed to the cross. Also the feelings of guilt are completely removed from believers!

- The death of Jesus Christ *reconciles* believers.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20-21; 1 Peter 3:18. Jesus Christ died to take away the disastrous *consequences* of our sin, which are separation from God, living without God or even living as enemies of God.

Christ's death became the bridge that opens the way for all sinners back to God. His death made it possible for all unbelievers, ungodly people and enemies of God to become reconciled to God, that is, to become children of God. Jesus Christ is the Mediator, who brings lost people back to God. THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES that perfect atonement of sins has been made for the believer and that the believer will never be separated from God. Also the experience of being separated from God is removed from believers!

- The death of Jesus Christ *purifies* believers.

Read Genesis 3:8-10,21; Galatians 3:27. Jesus Christ died to remove the shame of impurity. Believers are clothed with the garments of righteousness, purity and holiness of Jesus Christ. The feelings of shame about impurities are removed from believers!

- The death of Jesus Christ *sanctifies* believers.

Read Hebrews 10:10,14. Jesus Christ died to make believers perfectly holy, i.e. to remove all their sins and impurities and to dedicate their lives to God. Also the experience of not being holy (i.e. the slavery to wrong things and the contamination of perversion) is removed from believers!

5. The manner in which Christ died.

Discuss. Why did Jesus die on a cross?

- Jesus died on a cross in order to take the curse away.

Read Galatians 3:10-11; Galatians 3:12-14. Fourteen hundred and fifty years *before* Jesus Christ, the prophet Moses said, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Deuteronomy 27:26). "Cursed" means, "marked for destruction". Not a single person in the whole world can keep the regulations of the ceremonial law and therefore all people in the whole world are "marked for destruction"! Without a Saviour, people are marked for destruction by God's eternal judgement. Whoever does not believe in Jesus Christ, stands *permanently* condemned (perfect tense) in God's eyes and God's wrath remains *continually* (present tense) on him (John 3:18,36).

Jesus Christ became a curse for us. Moses also said, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23). The life of Jesus Christ was destroyed by nailing him to a cross. Jesus Christ was crucified, that is, nailed to a cross, in order to redeem us from the curse of the law. His life was "destroyed" to save us from being "destroyed" by not keeping God's law perfectly.

- The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was a fulfilment of prophecy.

Read Psalm 22:16-18; Isaiah 53:5-6. One thousand years before Christ David prophesied that the hands and feet of the real Messiah King would be "pierced" (by long nails). And seven hundred years before Christ the prophet Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ would be "pierced" for our transgressions.

These prophecies are amazing, because *crucifixion* as a means of punishment was invented by the Romans and only introduced in Israel about 100 years before Christ! To be crucified for one's own sins was one of the worst sufferings the human race invented in all human history. But for Christ, to be crucified for the sins of all the people in the world, while he himself was completely sinless, was the worst suffering in all human history!

Summary¹⁷. Jesus Christ solved the problem of sin and suffering by his DEATH on the cross. He carried *the punishment for sin* and suffered *the experience of being forsaken by God*. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world

¹⁷ How can sins that are committed by believers in Jesus Christ and that are experienced in the present time, be atoned?

- 2 Corinthians 5:20-21. Jesus Christ died for all your sins. "Be reconciled to God." Regard every sin you have committed and have confessed as having been placed on the body of Christ and nailed to the cross 2000 years ago! Believe that God has removed all your sins and believe that God has imputed the righteousness of Christ to you!

that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST guarantees that he takes away sins, reconciles sinners to God and purifies and sanctifies them for ever!

D. THE FOURTH STEP: JESUS CHRIST WAS RESURRECTED FROM THE DEAD

1. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact.

What evidence proves that Jesus Christ was really resurrected from the dead?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.

Jesus Christ was really resurrected from the dead! “The gospel” or “good news” of the Bible is that Jesus Christ not only died for our sins, but that he was raised from the dead and lives! There are more eyewitnesses of his death and resurrection, as well as more written documentation of his death and resurrection, than for any other event in the history of mankind before this present century!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a miracle of God! Miracles cannot be proved or disproved by empirical science. Empirical science may not say that the resurrection of a dead person is impossible, because miracles like “life” itself and “the resurrection from the dead” cannot be proved or disproved by empirical science. Miracles do not belong to empirical science, but belong to the science of history and its facts are based on the dependability of its witnesses. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has been witnessed and attested by more people than any other historical event in the history of the ancient world. Moreover, these witnesses have proved to be of the highest moral quality. Archaeology as well as non-Christian historical documents supports their testimonies!

2. The importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Discover and discuss. What would happen if Christ were not really raised from the dead?

- Then God would not have accepted Christ’s work of salvation by his life on earth and his death on the cross.

Read Romans 1:2-4. *The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees that God the Father has accepted the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ by his life and by his death on the cross!* Romans 1:2-4 does not contrast Christ’s human nature with his divine nature, but speaks of two aspects of the human nature of the Son of God.

The contrast is between the human nature of Jesus Christ before his death by virtue of his descent from David and his human nature after his resurrection from the dead by the Holy Spirit. The contrast is between Christ’s human state of humiliation after his birth and Christ’s human state of exaltation after his resurrection! The “Spirit of holiness” refers to the Holy Spirit through whom Jesus Christ first took on the weakened human nature which all people possess (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit always dwelled in Jesus Christ. But between his incarnation and resurrection from the dead the glory that Christ possessed inwardly was not able to reveal itself outwardly. He was “flesh”, that is, his human nature was mortal and weak (but without sin). In this weakness (of his human body) he was crucified (2 Corinthians 13:4). But in his death he laid aside the weakness of his human nature (his mortality) and severed every connection with sin (of the people for whom he died) and death. Through the Holy Spirit, God raised his human nature up, so that from that moment onwards he would no longer live in the weakness of the flesh but in the power of the Spirit (Romans 8:11).

By his resurrection Jesus was *once for all* “appointed (declared)¹⁸ to be the Son of God clothed with power. *From all eternity he was the mighty Son of God, but was once for all in human history* declared to be the mighty Son of God through his resurrection, ascension, enthronement and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 1:6-8; Acts 17:31; 1 Peter 1:3). During his state of humiliation (before his resurrection) his almighty power was as it were hidden from the view of people. But his state of humiliation could not last forever. By his resurrection, his human state of exaltation began to shine forth. “God made this Jesus whom the Jews crucified you “Lord¹⁹ and Christ” (by his resurrection)(Acts 2:36). This does not imply that he was not Lord and Christ before his resurrection. It means that the power, glory and majesty of his exalted human state began to shine forth only at his resurrection.

The resurrection of Christ is:

- *the visible manifestation of the exalted human state of Lord Jesus Christ*
- *the conclusive evidence of the truth of all Christ taught*
- *and the validity of all his claims.*

The resurrection of Christ is the effective and powerful declaration of the truth of all his teachings and claims.

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- 1 John 1:8 - 2:2. Confess every sin at once and ask God to cleanse you. Believe that God (Christ) has forgiven you and has cleansed you from that specific sin. If you sin again, confess it immediately and receive his forgiveness and cleansing.
 - 1 Peter 4:1-5,12-19. Be prepared to suffer as a Christian! It costs a price to conquer a specific sin. Arm yourself with the attitude that when you withdraw from , you must suffer! Choose rather not to have friends than having the wrong friends; choose rather not to be popular and be understood than to belong to a group friends at the cost of a good conscience. Choose rather to exercise self-discipline than to give in to the desires of your body (sex, drugs, drinks, etc.). Choose rather to be honest than to keep up the appearance in front of people.
 - James 5:16. It helps to fight against a particular sin with the help of a mature friend.

¹⁸ Greek: horisthentos (aorist time, passive form)

¹⁹ The Greek word “kurios” (Lord) is the translation of the Hebrew word JaHWeH (LORD)! See Isaiah 4:3 and Mark 1:3.

In short, THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES that God the Father has accepted the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ on the cross! If Jesus Christ were not resurrected from the dead, then everything he had accomplished by his life and death would have been utterly useless. But now Jesus Christ has been resurrected from the dead! HE LIVES!!!

- Then faith in Jesus Christ would have been absolutely meaningless.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:17-20. *The resurrection of Jesus guarantees that faith in Jesus Christ is absolutely meaningful!* If Jesus Christ were not resurrected from the dead, faith in a dead Saviour would be utterly futile for living people. There would be no hope in any future and no life after death. Everything in life would end in death at the time of death and “death” would have the ultimate victory! For believers in Jesus Christ, that would be the ultimate suffering!

However, Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead and he lives! He was resurrected from the dead as the guarantee that God has accepted his death as an atoning sacrifice for sins. And he lives in order to apply his completed work of salvation in the lives of very many individuals and families in all the nations on earth. While all other prophets and religious leaders in the world lie dead in their graves, the grave of Jesus Christ is empty! Jesus Christ lives and is at this very moment actively working in heaven to save people on earth! Neither physical death nor eternal death (i.e. hell), but spiritual life and eternal life will have the ultimate victory!

3. The benefits of the resurrection of Jesus Christ for believers.

Discuss. What are the two great benefits of the resurrection of Jesus Christ for believers?

Read Romans 6:3-14.

- Believers receive a regenerated human spirit!

The first benefit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that the believer in Jesus Christ after his first coming receives (through the Holy Spirit) *a regenerated human spirit* through which he is able to live a genuine spiritual life on earth and grow spiritually. The enslaving power of sin dwelling in a person’s physical body has been broken. A believer in Jesus Christ can, wants to and will live the new life. He can, wants and will continually crucify his sinful deeds and increasingly bear the fruit of the Spirit.

- Believers receive a transformed human body!

The second benefit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that the believer in Jesus Christ will receive *a transformed and glorified human body* at the general resurrection of the dead at the second coming of Christ and will inherit the new heaven and the new earth on which only righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:8,27).

Summary. Jesus Christ solved the problem of sin and suffering of man by his RESURRECTION from the dead. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST guarantees a new spiritual life now on this present earth and a new glorified body in the future on the new earth.

E. THE FIFTH STEP: JESUS CHRIST ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN

Discuss the questions below.

1. The present authority of Jesus Christ.

Discuss. What is the present authority of Jesus Christ?

Read Luke 24:50-51; Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:18-23; Philippians 2:9-11. After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven. He is given the highest position and all authority in the universe. That is why he is called “Lord” (Acts 2:36; 1 Corinthians 12:3). He rules over the universe until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25) and until God has brought all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10). In the future, every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess that he is truly the Lord of the universe. God already predicted this 2700 years ago (Isaiah 45:21-23)! No other religion can make such predictions!

Jesus Christ is also the Lord of the world wide Church and the Lord of every Christian. He rules the universe and the world and all the nations in the world in the interest of the Christian Church and Christians.

- He rules the world through his Word, which is recorded in the Bible.
- He rules the world through his Holy Spirit, who works in the hearts and lives of people.
- And he rules the world through his angels, who especially rescue God’s people (Hebrews 1:14) and execute God’s judgements on earth (Revelation 8:6 – 9:21).

His work culminates in the final judgement and in creating the new heaven and new earth in which only righteousness will dwell.

2. The present task of Jesus Christ.

Discuss. What is the present task of Jesus Christ?

Read the Bible references below. The very special task of Jesus Christ now is to completely save all people in the world who come to God through him (John 6:37). Every person, who believes in Jesus Christ, can have the following assurances:

- John 3:16. The genuine Christian has the assurance that he has eternal life.
- Hebrews 4:15-16; 7:23-25. The genuine Christian has the assurance that Christ knows all his circumstances, sympathises with all his weaknesses, prays continually for him and helps him with all his needs.
- Philippians 1:6. The genuine Christian has the assurance that God will continue the good work he has begun in him until it is absolutely completed. No one will be able to destroy his justification or salvation (John 18:9).
- Romans 8:28-39. The genuine Christian has the assurance that everything that happens to him has Christ's permission and is used by Christ to accomplish his eternal purpose. Nothing can separate him from God's love, presence and care.
- 1 Corinthians 15:25; Matthew 22:44; Revelation 17:14. The genuine Christian has the assurance that all enemies of Jesus Christ and Christians will eventually be conquered.

This work of Christ is happening right now! Jesus Christ is right now praying that you too may know him, be saved and share his wonderful new life (John 17:20).

Summary. Jesus Christ solved the problem of sin and suffering by his ASCENSION into heaven by saving all people who come to God through him and by putting all his enemies under his feet. **THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST GUARANTEES that he rules the universe in the interest of the Christian Church and applies his completed work of salvation in the lives of individual people on earth.**

Summary. The 5 steps through which Jesus Christ as Mediator solved the problem of suffering and death:

1. Jesus Christ became *a human being* in order to reveal God and to identify himself completely with the suffering and needs of people on earth.
2. Jesus Christ became *a servant* in order to seek what is lost and to heal what is broken.
3. Jesus Christ *died on the cross* in order to take away the problem (sins) and the resulting consequence (separation from God).
4. Jesus Christ *was resurrected from the dead* in order to guarantee a new spiritual life on this present earth and a new glorified body on the future new earth.
5. Jesus Christ *ascended into heaven* in order to rule the universe in the interest of the Christian Church and to apply his completed work of salvation in the lives of individual people on earth.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION

1. During the next week, read the Bible passages again. Consider what the Bible says about the solution to the problem of suffering and death.
 2. During the next week, consider the following question: "What do you think would be an appropriate response to God for everything he has done for you?" We will discuss this during the next session.
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Review of the previous lesson.

Review the 5 steps that God has taken through Jesus Christ in order to solve the problem of sin and suffering.

Question.

What do you think would be an appropriate response to God for everything he has done for you?

Sharing in the group.

Share what you think is an appropriate response to God and why you think it is an appropriate response.

Teaching from the Bible.

God certainly desires, requires and therefore expects a response from man.

The following are 5 responses that God requires of people who desire to come to him:

A. GOD REQUIRES THAT PEOPLE CONVERT

1. The response that God requires is to convert.

What is the meaning of “repentance”?

- To change your thinking. Mark 1:14-15.

Jesus Christ says, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” “To repent”²⁰ literally means “*to change your mind*”. To repent means to change your thoughts from mere human opinions to what God says in the Bible. You change your thinking about God, yourself and the world. You change your attitude from pride to humble remorse about your sin. You change your self-righteousness (“I am right”) to God’s righteousness (“God is right”). You change your unhealthy independence to healthy mutual dependence. You change your thinking that you could save yourself to the acknowledgement that you need the Saviour, Jesus Christ. You change your lies to the truth. And you change your self-defence to submission.

- To change your behaviour. Acts 3:18-20.

Paul said, “Repent, then, and turn²¹ to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ” “To turn” literally means “to turn away from the wrong direction to the right direction in life”, “to reform your life” (Matthew 7:13-14). You turn from darkness to light and from Satan to the God of the Bible (Acts 26:18).

Repentance (conversion) means that you change from doing what is wrong in God’s eyes to doing what is good in God’s eyes. In short, you change the direction of your life. This includes changing your thinking, attitudes, motives, speaking and behaviour. When you repent, your sins will be wiped out. Even the sins, which you have committed in ignorance, will be wiped out. And when many people turn to God, then even your country will receive “a time of refreshment” or rather “a time of respite” from the judgement of God!

2. What are the implications of conversion to Jesus Christ?

- Jesus Christ is the only Way that leads to God. John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5.

Jesus makes it very clear that the only way to God is not determined by man, but by God himself! Jesus Christ died and was resurrected. He completed the work that leads to salvation. That is why only he determines how people can convert.

It is not true that “all religions lead to God”²². Jesus Christ says, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” And the apostles say, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*” And the apostle Paul says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Jesus Christ is the Only One who came to seek what is lost and heal what is broken (Luke 19:10).

- Conversion is a command of the Lord that must be obeyed. Mark 1:14-15.

“Repent and believe the gospel”. Both verbs are commands of Jesus Christ and not merely suggestions. People *must* repent/convert!

- Conversion leads to sorrow as God intended. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11.

The sorrow of the world. Some people do not repent/convert, but only feel a sorrow as the world does. They feel sorry and mourn because their sins have come into the light and they are confronted with feelings of guilt and shame. They feel sorry that they lost their possessions, received a bad name, lost their position of power, etc. because God brings his present judgements over them (Ezekiel 14:21).

The sorrow as God intends. People, who really repent/convert, feel sorry as God intends. They take what God calls “good” and “evil” (Isaiah 5:20) seriously and worry about the consequences. They fear evil and long for what is good.

²⁰ Greek: metanoëō

²¹ Greek: metanoëō kai epistrefō

²² A lie of Hinduism and New Age which in essence is Hinduism.

They are indignant about evil in the world and acknowledge that evil must be punished. They are zealous for doing the will of God.

3. How would you be able to repent practically?

- Repentance must be followed by faith in the gospel. Mark 1:14-15.

Jesus says, “Repent and believe the good news.” *Repentance (changing your thinking) is incomplete without believing in Jesus Christ. Conversion (turning away from evil) is insufficient without turning towards the God of the Bible.* Faith is the direction to which you turn. Repentance/conversion is only complete when you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and that he lives to give you eternal life.

- Faith in the gospel must be followed by confession of sin. James 5:16.

“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other, so that you may be healed.” Confess the transgression you committed (only to the person against whom you transgressed). Confess all your sins to God, because all sin is a transgression against God.

- Faith in the gospel must be followed by restitution (i.e. giving back things, compensating). Ezekiel 33:14-16.

Repentance/conversion must lead to righteousness, including returning (compensating) stolen goods.

- Faith in the gospel must be followed by crushing your idols. 2 Chronicles 34:3-7.

Idols may be made by the hands of man from materials or may be devised by the mind of man from his imagination. All idols must be destroyed. You could crush the idols and altars in your home and scatter the dust.

- Faith in the gospel must be followed by burning your wrong books, etc. Acts 19:18-20.

You could burn all occult devices, amulets and masks, pornography, bad DVD's etc.

- Faith in the gospel must be followed by turning away from the darkness to the light and from Satan to the God of the Bible. Acts 26:16-20; Matthew 7:13-14.

Guilt in God's eyes disappears when you accept his forgiveness. Shame in the eyes of people (family and neighbours) disappears when you receive God's loving acceptance. Evil deeds change by starting to do good deeds. Bad habits change when you adopt good habits. Repentance/conversion must lead you to entering the narrow gate and walking along the narrow path that leads to life. Note: in every instance faith in the gospel must follow your repentance/conversion (*Mark 1:14-15*)!

Summary. It is God's will that all people repent from their sin and believe the gospel. Repentance means changing your thinking and conversion means reforming your life. **REPENTANCE IS THE REACTION WITH YOUR FAITH (CONVICTION) AND CONVERSION IS THE REACTION WITH YOUR BEHAVIOUR.** In repentance you change your thinking about God and his revelation in Jesus Christ, about sin, atonement of sin and a change of behaviour and lifestyle.

B. GOD REQUIRES THAT PEOPLE RECEIVE JESUS CHRIST

1. The response that God requires is to receive Jesus Christ.

What is the meaning of “receiving”?

- Not every person will receive Jesus Christ! Luke 2:34.

Jesus Christ is destined to cause the falling of many and to be a sign that will be spoken against.

- A man is born again by receiving Jesus Christ. John 1:9-13.

Jesus Christ came to the world which he created himself and gave all people a certain measure of knowledge about God (John 1:9; Romans 1:19-20; 2:14-15). But even his own people (i.e. the nation of Israel) did not *know (recognize, acknowledge his claims)*²³, did not *welcome or receive him*²⁴! They are the people who stumble over Jesus Christ and are finally crushed.

“But all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” They are the people who “are born of God.” They are the people who have been raised out of an immoral and dead life and build their lives on the Foundation Jesus Christ. How someone responds to Jesus Christ, determines whether he goes to eternal punishment or to eternal life (Matthew 25:46)!

2. What are the implications of receiving Jesus Christ?

- To receive Jesus Christ together with all his claims. John 1:10-12.

It means to *know* Jesus Christ personally, to *acknowledge* his claims and to *welcome* him in your life.

- To receive Jesus Christ as the Lord whom you obey. Ephesians 3:16-17.

Jesus Christ lives in the believer by faith and the believer is rooted in and founded on love.

²³ Greek: ginōskō

²⁴ Greek: paralambanō

- To acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Master. Colossians 2:6-7.

By receiving Jesus Christ into your heart, you allow him to rule over your life. You obey his commands. You develop your invisible relationship with Christ by roots downward and develop your visible ministry for Jesus Christ by building upwards. Receiving Jesus Christ is the beginning of a continuous walking with Jesus Christ just as a newborn child remains in his family. Receiving Christ is the beginning of an everlasting relationship with Jesus Christ in which he controls your life, makes you grow to maturity and cause you to bear fruit that remains.

3. How could you receive Jesus Christ practically?

- Open the door of your heart and invite Christ into your heart and life. Revelation 3:20.

If you hear the good news concerning Jesus Christ today, open your heart and by prayer ask him to come into your heart to live there. He promised that he would do this immediately!

- Believe in Jesus Christ as he has revealed himself. John 1:12-13.

When you believe in Jesus Christ, you will receive him into your heart and life. That is how you are born from above or born anew by the Holy Spirit to become a child of God! “To receive Christ” is the same as “to believe in the Name of Christ”. “The Name” of Jesus Christ represents the characteristics/attributes of God and the works of God just as he revealed them in Jesus Christ. It does not represent the way how some people and some religions view Jesus Christ. Believing in Jesus Christ means believing in Jesus Christ in exactly the way the Bible reveals him!

The result of believing in the Name of Jesus Christ is that you receive your birthright with all the spiritual blessings attached to it. It means that you have been born again, have become a new creation, that you have been baptised with the Holy Spirit! Regeneration does not occur by belonging to a particular nation or race (Galatians 3:27-28), not family ties (i.e. blood relationship) and not by the free will of man (i.e. the flesh) and also not by natural birth (i.e. the will of a man).

- Faith comes by hearing, believing/trusting and obeying. Hebrews 11:6-8.

“Believing” in the Bible has three elements: hearing the truth from God, believing that God speaks the truth and obeying the truth of God! Noah first received an instruction from God, an indication of a future event that cannot be seen. He believed that God’s word was the truth. And he acted in obedience to this word! He received a warning from God with regard to the flood, believed that God spoke the truth even though most people around him mocked him. He took many years to build the ark. His faith had enormous consequences for the whole of mankind!

Abraham first received a calling from God with respect to moving to another country. He believed that God’s Word was the truth. And then he acted in obedience to that Word.

Thus, “faith” in Jesus Christ means:

- that you first *hear* and understand the good news
- then *put your trust in* Jesus Christ
- and finally *obey* Jesus Christ.

- Faith that Jesus Christ speaks personally to you and personally meets you.

Romans 10:13-17. “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ”. Faith does not only come through hearing the word about Christ (the gospel). Faith also comes by hearing the voice of Christ addressing you personally. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ! You hear with your ears, believe with your mind and heart, and receive Him with your whole being into your heart and life by means of a simple prayer.

“Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe that you died for my sins and that you have been resurrected from the dead and now lives!

I open the door of my heart and ask you to come into my life to be my Saviour and my Lord.

I will keep on trusting you and obeying you for the rest of my life. Amen.”

Summary. It is God’s will that all people receive Christ into their hearts and lives. A person begins his relationship with Christ by receiving him. RECEIVING IS THE REACTION WITH YOUR MIND AND EMPTY HANDS on the basis of your faith. You acknowledge his claims and receive him into your heart and life as Saviour and Lord.

C. GOD REQUIRES THAT PEOPLE CONFESS JESUS CHRIST

1. The response that God requires is to confess Jesus Christ.

What is the meaning of “confessing”?

- Confessing means “saying the same thing”. Mattheüs 10:32-33.

“Confessing” means literally: “to say the same”, i.e. to say with your mouth what your heart believes! Confessing is openly telling what lives in your heart. Jesus promises that every person who confesses him before people, he will also openly confess before God in heaven as someone belonging to him.

But Jesus also warns that a person cannot be a secret Christian. If a person is silent about Jesus Christ in front of people, Jesus Christ will also be silent about him in front of God. Thus, if you believe in your heart that Jesus Christ is your

Saviour and Lord, then you need to express this in words. Whoever believes with his heart and confesses with his mouth that Jesus Christ is the Saviour and Lord, will be saved!

- Confession means to openly declare. Romans 10:9,13.

“Confess” means literally “to publicly declare”, “to openly acknowledge” or “to witness with boldness and conviction”. “Confessing” is your verbal declaration about Jesus Christ. But note, it is a declaration with your mouth of the faith in your heart! God wants you to openly tell other people that you believe that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and Lord and that he is your Saviour and Lord!

A person that denies Jesus Christ, does not have God (1 John 2:23)! But a person who confesses Jesus Christ, also has God! A person cannot belong to God without believing in Jesus Christ!

No man can have two different masters (lords) in his life (Matthew 6:24)! Every human being is placed before a choice: he must choose and his choice will be clear from whom he keeps on talking about.

2. What are the implications of confessing Jesus Christ?

- You need to tell this to other people. Mark 5:19-20.

A Christian confesses that he is a Christian to his own family, his friends and his colleagues and tells them about the great things that God through Christ has done for him.

3. How do you practically confess Jesus Christ?

Romans 10:9-14. In the beginning of your Christian life, you confess Christ with your mouth by means of a prayer in which you call on his Name and receive him into your heart and life. Your open confession is the outward expression of your inner conviction that you have been justified (saved) by faith. You tell that you believe that Jesus Christ died in your [lace, but was also resurrected to guarantee a complete new life for you. So, ask Jesus Christ to come and live in your heart and life.

Summary. It is God’s will that all people confess Jesus Christ with their mouths as Saviour and Lord. **CONFESSION IS THE REACTION WITH YOUR MOUTH** on the basis of the faith in your heart. You confess that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and Lord, as well as your personal Saviour and Lord.

D. GOD REQUIRES THAT PEOPLE FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST

1. The response that God requires is to follow Jesus Christ.

- To follow Christ as his disciple. Luke 9:23.

Jesus Christ commands Christians to deny themselves *once for all*, to carry their cross *once for all* and to keep on following him as his disciple. In John 1:37 two men followed Jesus Christ in the sense that they went after him. But in John 1:44 Jesus Christ called Philip to follow him as his disciple. Christ himself sets the conditions for discipleship, i.e. what a person is required to do if he wants to follow Jesus Christ.

There are conditions for following Jesus Christ as his disciple. The Bible makes it very clear that people cannot set the conditions for how they come to God and how they follow him. This remains the privilege and authority of God and his Christ.

2. What are the implications of following Jesus Christ?

- Following requires self-denial and carrying your cross. Luke 9:23.

To deny yourself means to say “no” to governing your own life and “no” to your ambitions that are at odds with the interests of the kingdom of God.

Carrying your cross means being willing to bear the rejection, shame and persecution that sometimes go along with suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ.

- Following requires walking in the light. John 3:19-21.

Continuing to follow Christ means much more. Following Christ implies walking in the light, i.e., to have an open and transparent life on the basis of God’s truth, righteousness and holiness. “Light” is collective name for all the characteristics of God as his righteousness, holiness, love, mercy, truth, etc. “Darkness” is a collective name for ignorance, godlessness and unrighteousness; for every method of spiritual deceit, moral perversity and financial corruption. Avoid getting involved in secret organisations, in underhand activities and every form of moral and spiritual perversity.

- Following requires carrying the cross of Christ. Matthew 11:28-30.

“To take up the yoke of Christ” means to join Christ in his mission in the world, whether worldwide or in the local congregation. Following Christ means to be completely dependent on Christ, to lean on Christ and to learn from Christ. He is the teacher and I learn to obey all his commandments. He is the Team leader and I follow him wherever he leads. It does not necessarily require giving up your job or leaving your family, but it does mean serving Christ within your job and family.

- Following requires joining other Christians. John 1:44-46.

To follow Christ means joining other Christians who are also following Christ, participating in Christian activities and discovering and experiencing what it means to be a Christian.

- Following Christ requires serving together with Christ in the extension of his kingdom. John 12:26.

Following Christ means serving together with Christ in the extension of his kingdom.

- Following Christ requires becoming a fisher of men. Matthew 4:19.

Following Christ means being a fisher of men who would also be fishers of men.

3. How do you practically follow Christ?

In John 6:68-69 the disciples of Jesus Christ say, “You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” You will only follow Christ when you believe that only he speaks the words that lead to eternal life and that only he is the promised Saviour.

Summary. God requires that all people follow Christ as his disciple. This means, that you learn from him and obey him, serve him while living honest and transparent lives. This means being zealous to extend his kingship. FOLLOWING IS THE REACTION WITH YOUR FEET on the basis of the faith in your heart.

E. GOD REQUIRES THAT PEOPLE LOVE HIM

1. The response that God requires is to love Him.

- God requires that you love him with your whole being. Mark 12:30-31; (Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Leviticus 19:18).

God requires that people love him with all their heart, soul, mind and power and to love their neighbour as they love themselves. A person who does not love the God of the Bible, cannot love at all. He cannot love himself and he can also not love other people. The Bible makes it very clear that the relationship of love between God and people is the best way to express a genuine relationship with God, much more than observing religious requirements²⁵.

2. What are the implications of loving God?

- There are four kinds of love, three are natural and the last is given only by God:

- *Affection* (Greek: storge) is the love between parents and children

- *Sexual love* (Greek: eros) is the love between a man and a woman

- *Friendship* (Greek: filia) is the friendship between friends

- *Self-sacrificial love* (Greek: agape) is the love towards God, your neighbour and yourself. God requires self-sacrificial love, but also gives this self-sacrificial love to Christians! This love no one has by nature! It must be given (Romans 5:5)!

- The nature of the God of the Bible is love and he expresses his love in the following ways:

- Self-sacrificial love always takes the initiative instead of waiting around

- Self-sacrificial love gives instead of taking, serves instead of being served

- Self-sacrificial love involves all kinds of nationalities and not only the people of Israel

- Self-sacrificial love strives to attain the highest well-being for the other, namely, that he receives eternal life!

- The God of the Bible is the Source of love:

- The God of the Bible is the Only One who loves perfectly and only he is the Source of love (1 John 4:7-8).

- Whoever hates his brother is still in the darkness. He does not know where he is going (1 John 2:9-11).

- The God of the Bible requires self-sacrificial love of people, but also provides this love through his Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Self-sacrificial love is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) only when the Holy Spirit dwells in you

body (1 Corinthians 3:16).

- The love of Jesus Christ is the standard for love (John 13:34-35).

Jesus Christ commands his followers to love as he loves.

- Self-sacrificial love comes with your heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30-31)

- **The “heart”** is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23), “the centre of your inner life with its thoughts, emotions and will”. The heart is the ability to know God and relate to him (Deuteronomy 6:6). The heart is the place where the Holy Spirit lives (Ephesians 3:17). Genuine love is determined by knowing the God of the Bible, by relating to him and allowing the truths in the bible to determine your thoughts, emotions, wishes, choices and decisions.

- **The “soul”**²⁶ is “the life which God gives at creation” and differs from every other form of life on earth (Genesis 2:7). It is the being of man that consists of a material and visible body and an immaterial and invisible human spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Revelation 6:9). Genuine love is always with all your being.

- **The “mind”** is the ability to know and to reason (Romans 12:2). Genuine love is only possible with the truth which God revealed in the Bible.

²⁵ Religious requirements as ablutions and prayer, fasting and eating only clean foods, giving money, attending religious meetings, dressing in religious dress and circumcision, etc.

²⁶ Hebrew: nefesh

- **The “power”** refers to willpower and exertion. One may not respond to God’s love which is given whole-heartedly by half-heartedness! Genuine love is to do God’s will with commitment, with your whole being and on every area of life.

3. How do you love God (Christ) practically?

- By faith. Romans 5:5.

Without faith the Holy Spirit does not live in you (Ephesians 2:22; 4:17). And without the Holy Spirit you do not have “self-sacrificial love” within you (Romans 5:5)! Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). You can only love God if you believe in Jesus Christ (i.e. when the Spirit of Jesus Christ lives in you).

- By the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:6,13,22-23.

Without the Holy Spirit in you there is no self-sacrificial love in you. The faith in Jesus Christ is only effective through self-sacrificial love! Without self-sacrificial love faith remains theoretic, historic, not genuine (James 2:17,22; 1 John 3:16-17). And without self-sacrificial love all the characteristic features of a Christian are missing (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)!

- By obedience. John 14:21,23.

The self-sacrificial love is not the same as emotional sentimentalism, but manifests itself in obedience to the God of the Bible and the truths in the Bible.

Summary. God requires that all people love him with their whole being and with all their God-given abilities as heart, soul, mind and strength. **LOVING GOD IS THE REACTION WITH YOUR WHOLE PERSONALITY (BEING)** on the basis of your heart.

Summary. The 5 responses that God requires of people who come to him for salvation:

1. God requires that people *repent and convert*.
2. God requires that people *receive* Jesus Christ.
3. God requires that people *confess* Jesus Christ.
4. God requires that people *follow* Jesus Christ.
5. God requires that people *love*.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION

1. During the next week, read the Bible passages again. Consider what the Bible says about the response which God requires of people who desire to come to him.
2. Consider if you desire to come to Jesus Christ. If you do, consider by which one or more of these five responses do you want to express your coming to God?

Review of the previous session.

Review the 5 responses that God requires of people who desire to come to him.

- Share in the group

Tell which response (reaction) you like most if you want to come to God.

- Question.

What may a person who believes in Jesus Christ expect of the new life? of a Christian look like?

- Teaching from the Bible.

What does the Bible teach with respect to the future expectation?

The meaning of the expression: "in Jesus Christ". Ephesians 1:3-7; 2:4-6.

The expression "in Christ", "through Christ" and "with Christ" refers to the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ as Mediator between God and man.

"In Jesus Christ" means to be spiritually bound to Jesus Christ and his Body and to share in his completed work of salvation. The expression refers to the legal state or position of the Christian in the sight of God as well as to the real condition of the Christian. Jesus Christ sent his Holy Spirit from his glory and majesty in heaven into the heart and life of the believer, so that the believer dies to sin and is resurrected to live a new life. Thus, with regard to his state/position and to his condition a believer has not only been tried, judged, doomed, crucified and buried, but has also been made alive, has been resurrected from spiritual death and has been seated with Christ in the heavenly reality.

But there is also a time factor. The believer receives this glory not yet in full measure! The right to receive this has already been secured and the new life has already begun! Already now the life of a believer "is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3-4). Already now the name of the believer has been recorded in the heavenly register (Luke 10:20). Already now his interests are being promoted from heaven (Hebrews 9:24). Already now the believer is controlled by heavenly standards and motivated by heavenly grace (Colossians 3:1-2). Already now heavenly blessings descend on the believer (Ephesians 1:3-14). Already now heavenly grace fills his heart. Already now this heavenly power enables the believer to be "more than conquerors".

The Bible teaches "what a believer in Jesus Christ already now is":

- he has already been justified
- he has assurance of salvation
- and he has become a part of God's family.

These three things are called "the position of a Christian".

THE FIRST EXPECTATION: A BELIEVER'S POSITION IN CHRIST

1. Your position as a believer in Christ: You stand in the right relationship to God.

- A Christian has been perfectly justified. Romans 5:1-2.

Illustration. During a fight, a young man killed another person with his knife. He became very scared of what he had done and fled to his house. There he told his older brother what he had done and that he had terrible remorse. He was also in great trouble, because he could not reverse his evil deed and the police were hot on his trail. The older brother told the younger brother to take off his bloodstained clothes and wash himself. Then he gave his own clean clothes to his younger brother and helped him to escape. When the police arrived and saw the bloodstained knife and clothes, they arrested the older brother. The older brother was tried and sentenced to death. Years later the younger brother could no longer keep silent about what he had done and confessed everything to the judge. The judge said that the sentence for the evil deed had already been carried out and that the older brother had already been executed for the crime of his younger brother. The judge said that the just demand of the law had been fully satisfied. Although the younger brother was not innocent, the judge *declared* the younger brother completely *righteous* and set him free. The judge *regarded* and *treated* the younger brother as completely *righteous*, even though he was not and did not deserve it. The older brother *had died in the place of* his younger brother, so that the younger brother may be justified of his evil deed.

Likewise, when a person believes in Jesus Christ, he is "justified" (forgiven, declared free). He believes that Jesus Christ died on the cross in his place, so that the Judge, God, may *declare* him perfectly righteous and free and *regard and treat* him as completely righteous. Jesus Christ took all our sins away from us and allowed these sins to be put onto his body and nailed to the cross. Jesus Christ "was *pierced* for our transgressions"²⁷ and "*crushed* for our iniquities"²⁸. he bore the punishment in our place! He suffered in our place and as a substitution made atonement for our sins. Jesus Christ took *our sins* upon himself and gave us *his righteousness* (the result of his completed work of salvation)

²⁷ Hebrew: chahal (pierce) + peshah (transgression, rebellion).

²⁸ Hebrew: daka (crush) + awon (iniquity, twists)

(2 Corinthians 5:21) The righteousness which a person does not possess by nature is imputed (ascribed) to him! The previous relationship of enmity has been changed to friendship. The previous lost person is now saved forever!

- A Christian is now reconciled to God. Romans 5:9-10.

Jesus Christ brought a sacrifice of atonement on the cross. With this sacrifice of atonement Jesus Christ satisfied the righteous anger of God and took God's righteous punishment for our sins on himself. Thus God made peace with us and reconciled us to himself. God regards and treats us no longer as enemies (Psalm 5:5-6; Romans 5:9-10), but as friends (John 15:13-15)! God now treats us with mercy and love.

2. Your position as a believer in Christ: you have assurance of salvation.

- A Christian has three assurances. John 5:24; 10:27-28.

When a person believes in Jesus Christ, he immediately has three assurances:

- He possesses *eternal life*: already now on earth and finally in God's presence in heaven
- He possesses *eternal righteousness*: no on earth and also in the final judgement. He will never come into damnation (hell)
- He possesses *eternal protection*: no-one can snatch him out of the hand of Christ.

3. Your position as a believer in Christ: You have become a member of God's family.

- A Christian has been adopted by God into his household. Ephesians 1:5.

When someone hears the gospel and believes in Jesus Christ, "God adopts him as his son"²⁹ into his household and becomes his "heavenly Father". Regardless how imperfect his earthly father has been or still is, he receives a "Father" in heaven who is absolutely perfect in love, in righteousness and in his ability to help. Every Christian receives through the Spirit direct access to his heavenly Father (Ephesians 2:18; 3:12; Hebrews 4:14-16). Regardless how unhappy a Christian may be in his earthly family, in God's heavenly family relationships are determined by love, righteousness and care. Believers in Jesus Christ in the whole world are one another's "brothers and sisters".

A believer in Jesus Christ is "a member of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19), is as "a living stone built into a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:4-5), is part of "a chosen people", "a royal priesthood" and "a holy people" with responsibilities of a prophet (to declare the gospel), a priest (that prays and serves) and a king (that does God's will on earth) (1 Peter 2:9-10).

- A Christian is a member of the Body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13.

By regeneration through the Holy Spirit a Christian becomes a member of the Body of Christ (the Church).

- A Christian is also a citizen of the Kingdom of God. John 3:3-8.

By regeneration through the Holy Spirit a Christian enters the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the kingship of God through the Mediator, Jesus Christ, that is acknowledged in the heart and effective in the life of a Christian (Luke 17:20-21).

Summary. The first expectation of a believer is WHAT HE ALREADY IS IN CHRIST (HIS POSITION). Whoever believes in Jesus Christ, has a position in Christ: He stands in the right relationship to God, has assurance of eternal life and is a part of God's family and of God's kingdom!

B. THE SECOND EXPECTATION: A BELIEVER'S PROGRESS IN CHRIST

The Bible teaches, "what a believer in Jesus Christ ought to become".

He has the responsibility to make progress in three areas:

- He ought to grow as a Christian
- He ought to live as a Christian
- He ought to serve as a Christian

These three things are called "the progress of a Christian".

1. Your progress as a believer in Christ: You ought to grow as a Christian.

- A Christian ought to grow in different areas. Luke 2:52.

- physical (in stature)
- intellectual (in wisdom)
- social (in grace with people)
- spiritual (in grace with God)

- A Christian ought to grow up into Christ in all things. Ephesians 4:13-15.

He must not remain immature so that he is tossed back and forth by every wind of teaching and be dragged along by the cunning and craftiness of false teachers. He ought to grow in the truth by reading and studying the Bible and grow in love in all his relationships.

- A Christian ought to make roots downwards and build upwards. Colossians 2:6-7.

²⁹ Greek: eis huiouthesia

After he has received Christ Jesus as Lord, a Christian ought to walk in Christ. He ought to get *invisibly rooted* into Christ by for example having a daily quiet time, reading the Bible and praying in his inner room. And he ought to get *visibly built up* into the Body of Christ to become a mature Christian and a functioning labourer in the church.

2. Your progress as a Christian: You ought to live as a Christian.

- A Christian ought to glorify God with his body. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

Before a person became a believer in Jesus Christ, he lived in slavery to sin by offering the parts of his body to impurity and ever-increasing wickedness. He was unable not to sin (Romans 8:7-8). But after he became a Christian, he offers the parts of his body to righteousness leading to holiness (Romans 6:13,19).

- A Christian ought to glorify God with his spirit (mind). Romans 12:1-2.

A Christian no longer conforms to unbelievers and the godless people of this world, but is inwardly transformed by the renewal of his mind (Romans 12:1-2). In this way he is able to approve what the will of God is. A Christian ought to discern between true and false teaching (2 John 1:7-11). He ought to counter evil spirits and occult forces by making use of the full armour of God (Ephesians 6:11). The body of a Christian is the dwelling place of the Spirit of God and he ought to glorify God with his body and with his spirit (1 Corinthians 3:19-20)! He mirrors the glorious characteristics of God in his personality, character and in his reactions towards his circumstances (2 Corinthians 3:18).

- A Christian ought to resist all temptations. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Before he became a believer in Jesus Christ, he usually submitted to temptations (seductions) of this world such as wealth power and glory. But after he became a believer, the Holy Spirit in his body helps him to say “no” to these seductions. God promised that he would not allow that the Christian is tempted beyond his ability to resist and he promised that he would provide an escape with every temptation. A Christian therefore ought to fight against temptations and overcome them.

- A Christian ought to allow the Bible to correct his behaviour. 1 Timothy 3:16-17.

The Bible rebukes our sins, corrects our mistakes, trains us in righteous living and equips us to serve God practically. That is why a Christian ought to read the Bible regularly, study it, meditate on it and obey it.

- A Christian ought to bend his knees in prayer before God. Ephesians 3:14.

A Christian ought to bring all his problems and needs in prayer to God (Philippians 4:6-7). God will answer all his prayers either with a “yes”, “no” or “wait”. That is why a Christian ought to always pray, “let not my will, but your *perfect* will be done” (Luke 22:42).

3. Your progress as a believer in Christ: You ought to serve as a Christian.

- A Christian ought to bear much and lasting fruit. John 15:5,16.

Before he became a believer in Jesus Christ, he lived only for himself. But after he became a Christian, he desires to have lasting influence on other people. He helps other people to know Jesus Christ, to receive him and follow him as a disciple.

- A Christian ought to teach and encourage other people. Colossians 3:16.

That is why a Christian joins a group of Christians (or congregation)..

- A Christian ought to love other people with deeds. 1 John 3:16-18.

Love has much influence on people. By sharing your possessions with the needy and caring for the helpless, love receives hands and feet.

Summary. The second expectation of a believer is **WHAT HE MUST BECOME IN CHRIST (HIS PROGRESS)**. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ is continually engaged in a process of progress. He is occupied with what he is now becoming. He must grow as a Christian, live as a Christian and serve as a Christian.

C. THE THIRD EXPECTATION: A BELIEVER'S FUTURE IN CHRIST

The Bible teaches, “what a believer in Jesus Christ will become”.

He has a wonderful future

- and receives a Christ like human spirit
- a Christ like human body
- and a Christ like universe to live in

These three things are called “the future of the Christian”.

1. Your future as a believer in Christ: You will receive a Christ like human spirit (character).

- A Christian will receive a transformed human spirit (character) like that of Jesus Christ. 1 John 3:1-3.

Already now believers in Jesus Christ are called “children of God” Already now they are growing to Christ likeness and expect that they will be like Christ! That is why Christians commit themselves to live holy, righteous and with love. They practise to increasingly love as Christ. And they purify themselves again and again from sin that penetrates their lives.

But as long as they live on earth, they will not be able to reach their final goal, namely, to be completely conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ in spirit or character. That will only happen when they will see Christ face to face in heaven after death! When they see him as he is, they will be transformed into his likeness. Their character will be like his: they will be holy, righteous and loving as he is holy, righteous and loving!

2. Your future as a believer in Christ: You will receive a Christ like human body.

- A Christian will receive a body conformed to Christ's glorious body. Philippians 3:21.

As long as a believer is still living on the earth, his body is subjected to sickness, limitations and finally death (Hebrews 9:27) which characterises all people in this sinful world. Then they still possess the likeness of Adam, a man on this earth. Then they still experience the weakness, dishonour and transitoriness of their human bodies. Christians are now still flesh and blood (1 Corinthians 15:50) and wait for the complete transformation of their bodies. Therefore also Christians become sick and will die.

But Christians have a hopeful future! When Christ returns at his second coming, he will resurrect all people that have died on earth (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). And he will transform the bodies of Christians who are still living to be like his glorious body and he will destroy death (1 Corinthians 15:49-52). The bodies of believers will be imperishable, glorious, strong and spiritual (i.e. completely controlled by the Holy Spirit) (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

3. Your future as a believer in Christ: You will receive a Christ like universe.

- A Christian will experience the the renewal of all things. Romans 8:18-21; 2 Peter 3:9-13; Revelation 21:1-5.

As long as believers in Christ still live on this present sinful earth, will they know God and fellowship with God. But they will not yet be able to see God. *Christians live by faith and not by sight* (2 Corinthians 5:7). The whole creation groans because it is still subjected to the bondage to decay (Romans 8:21-22). The whole creation has a share in the punishment of the sins of people. The earth produces thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17), people do not care well for one another so that the earth is being polluted, deforested, abused and destroyed and people carry on with making war against one another (James 4:1-2).

But when Jesus Christ returns at his second coming, he will do three things:

- He will resurrect from the grave all people that have ever lived on the earth
- He will judge all people at the Last Judgement on the basis of how they lived. Only believers in Jesus Christ will be saved and inherit the kingdom of God in its final and perfect phase!
- He will burn this present earth and transform it to become the new earth on which only righteousness will dwell. On this present earth God himself will dwell in the *visible* image of Christ among the believers. On the new earth there will no longer be death, sickness, pain, persecution, etc! On this new earth there will no longer be suffering! On this new earth God will make all things new!

Summary. The third expectation of a believer is WHAT HE WILL BECOME IN CHRIST (HIS FUTURE). Whoever believes in Jesus Christ has a fantastic future in Christ! He will have a Christ like character, a Christ like body and live on the new earth where only Jesus Christ will rule!

Summary. Believers in Christ may have the following three certain expectations about the new life:

1. Justification. Your position as a believer in Jesus Christ is shortly called "justification".

Justification means that the Christian has been saved from the *penalty of sin*". This is salvation from *sin in the past*.

2. Sanctification. Your progress as a believer in Jesus Christ is shortly called "sanctification".

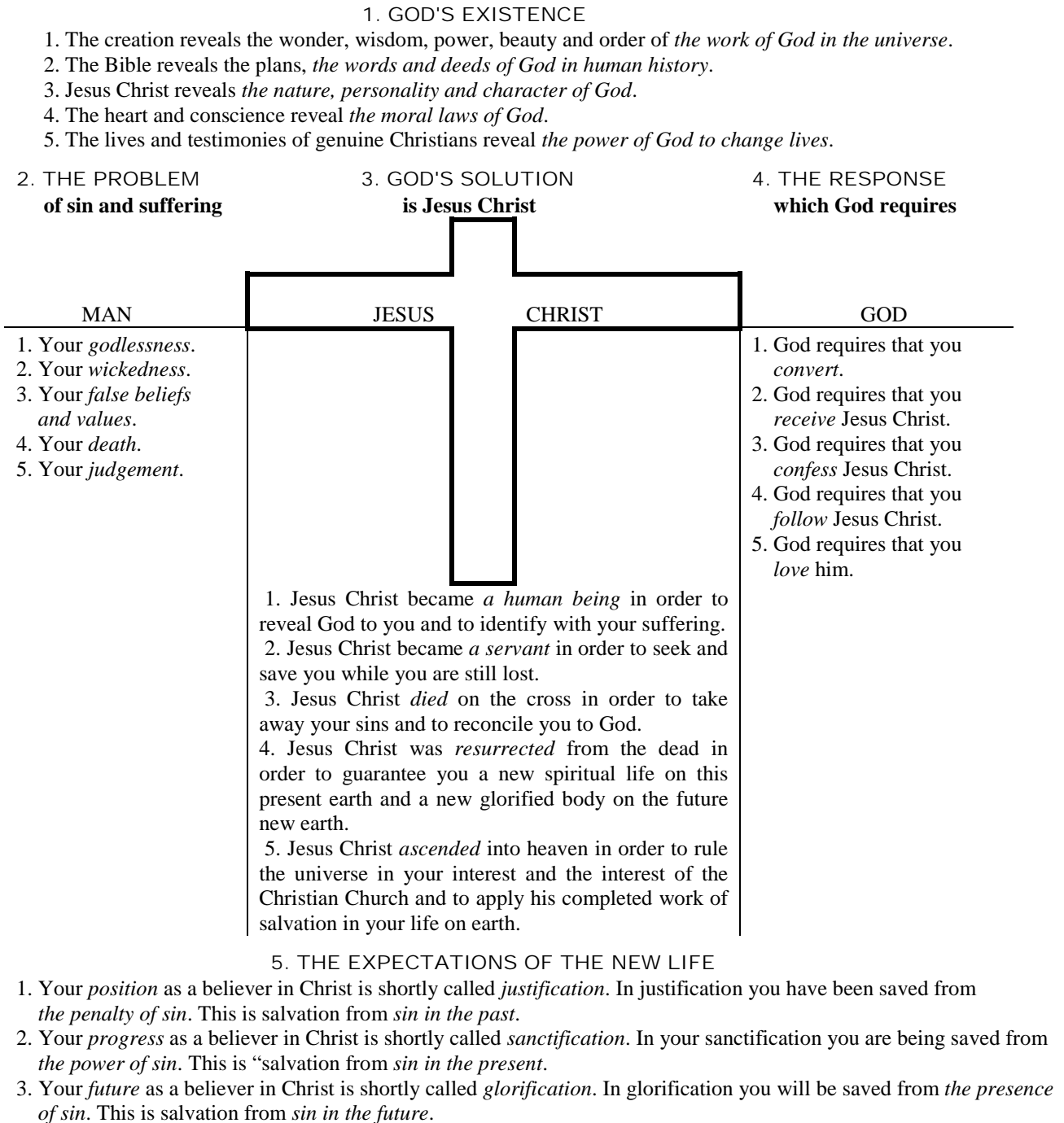
Sanctification means that the Christian is being saved from the *power of sin*. This is salvation from *sin in the present*.

3. Glorification. Your future as a believer in Jesus Christ is shortly called "glorification".

Glorification means that the Christian will be saved from the *presence of sin*. This is salvation from *sin in the future*.

D. OVERVIEW OF GOD'S SALVATION PLAN

Draw or photocopy the following diagram.



E. SHARING AND PRAYER

1. Sharing personal responses.

Ask people if they want to *share* the response they are willing to make to God.

2. Invitation to receive Jesus Christ.

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says,

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.
If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

3. Prayer to receive Jesus Christ.

Ask the people who want to make a response to pray with you (or to pray sentence by sentence after you). For example,

Dear Jesus Christ,

- I *confess* that I am a sinner and lost. I feel sorry for my sins and now *turn* to you.
- I *believe* that Jesus Christ died for my sin and was resurrected to give me a new life.
- I now *receive* you by asking you to come into my heart and life through your Holy Spirit.
- From now on, I commit myself to *follow* you and *love* you, to learn from you and obey you.
- I *confess* that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Amen

[A group of Christians by means of a prayer recommit their lives to Christ]

4. Assurance of salvation.

If as a Christian you made a response that God requires, you may have the above expectations with regard to your position, your progress and your future.

The Bible says,

“And this is the testimony:
God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
He who has the Son *has* life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.
I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God
so that you may *know* that you have eternal life.”

FINAL ASSIGNMENT

1. Read all the Bible passages of this study again. Think about:

- the existence of God,
- the reasons for suffering,
- God’s solution in Christ,
- the response which God requires,
- and the true and sure expectations which every believer in Christ may have.

Consider whether you ought to take a step towards Jesus Christ.

2. If you have not yet made a personal response to God, then pray to God and receive Jesus Christ into your heart and life.
3. People who would like to continue to search and discuss the Bible are requested to make an appointment.
4. People who have received Jesus Christ in their heart and life are invited to join a discipleship group (a beta course, a delta course or a dota course)