IVP CLASSICS

Basic Christianity

JOHN STOTT

FOREWORD BY RICK WARREN



OVER 2.5 MILLION COPIES SOLD

For fifty years *Basic Christianity* has exposed the backbone of the Christian faith. Its uncompromising clarity, intelligent logic and easy application make this one of the most enduring of Christian classics. In a time of ambiguity and confusion I can think of no other book I would rather recommend. Every evangelist should consider *Basic Christianity* a masterclass in communicating the gospel. This book is a must-read for those who are seeking God, those wishing to refresh their own faith, or those who hope to lead others into the loving arms of Jesus Christ.
Rev. William Van Der Hart, evangelist and pastor

Lucid, clear and compelling. After *Mere Christianity*, perhaps no other book has helped more people come to faith. I'm thrilled that this classic has been appropriately shaped and refreshed for a modern audience without losing any of its timeless charm and persuasive brilliance. Having led and organized university missions for over twenty-five years I was sobered to be reminded of what a debt we all owe to this book and its author. 'Christ is Christianity' and no other book exemplifies a Christ-centred apologetic more simply and clearly.
Rev. Richard Cunningham, Director of UCCF: The Christian Unions

We can thank God that in the past few years those committed to Christian orthodoxy have been realizing the importance of the subjective and experiential aspects of the Christian gospel and using these in introducing Christianity to others. But the danger is that we can get so carried away by this that we forget the heart of what Christianity is all about. At such times it is good to go back to tried and tested expositions that have stood the test of time. And what better resource is there for this than John Stott's classic *Basic Christianity*?
Ajith Fernando, National Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka

Clear, penetrating and fresh, *Basic Christianity* has everything that you want to say to someone who wants to know what Christianity is all about. With an engaging and accessible style, John Stott lays out the truth of the gospel. The account of the Bible's message is wonderfully straightforward and the challenge

to respond to Jesus Christ is compelling. By the time you've read the first few pages you'll already be thinking of people to give this book to: don't pull back!
Rev. Dominic Smart, Gilcomston South Church, Aberdeen

This was the classic forerunner of strong, balanced evangelistic books, and I am delighted it is being republished fifty years later. It led many to faith then, and it will again.
Canon Dr Michael Green

Anything John Stott says is worth listening to...anything he writes is worth reading. *Basic Christianity* is not only a classic 'must-read' for every believer, it is truly a blessing preserved on the written page for the enrichment of this generation, and those to come.
Anne Graham Lotz, author and speaker

John Stott's books have helped millions around the world to a better understanding of the Christian faith. I, for one, am extremely grateful for the way in which he explains complex and difficult issues with great clarity, insight and wisdom. *Basic Christianity* has become a classic of our time.
Nicky Gumbel, Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton and pioneer of the Alpha course

[This slim volume] has introduced more people to Christ than any book I know other than the Bible.
Jim Sire, author

Basic Christianity

John Stott



InterVarsity Press
P.O. Box 1400
Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426
World Wide Web: www.ivpress.com
E-mail: email@ivpress.com
New edition © John Stott 2008
First published 1958

Published in the United States of America by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, with permission from Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Design: Cindy Kiple
Images: Matt Tilghman/iStockphoto
ISBN 978-0-8308-6379-2

All John Stott's royalties from this book have been irrevocably assigned to Langham Literature (formerly the Evangelical Literature Trust). Langham Literature is a programme of the Langham Partnership International (LPI), founded by John Stott. Chris Wright is the International Ministries Director.

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If you would like to run a *Basic Christianity* course, downloadable resources are available from www.ivpbooks.com/basicchristianity.

FOREWORD

There are a few landmark books that everyone in the world should read. This is one of the rare few.

In the twenty-first century, you cannot afford to ignore this book! Whether you are a sceptic, raised in another faith, a spiritual seeker or a Christian believer, you need to know why 2.3 billion people call themselves ‘Christians’. You need to know what they believe and why they believe it.

This book is especially essential for leaders in business, government, academia, media, entertainment, journalism and other fields that work directly with people. To be able to have an intelligent conversation with one-third of our world’s population, you need to understand their worldview.

John Stott’s *Basic Christianty* is a classic introduction to the faith that has transformed billions of lives.

Rick Warren
Pastor, Saddleback Church

Preface to the fiftieth-anniversary edition

Every three years a mission is held in Cambridge University, and one such took place in November 1952. Invited to be the chief missioner, I knew that my responsibilities would include giving a series of eight evening addresses in Great St Mary's, the university church. I also understood that a university mission would present a wonderful, if daunting, opportunity to lay before the university a systematic unfolding of the gospel, including the divine-human person of Jesus, the significance of his death and the evidence for his resurrection, the paradox of our humanness, made in God's image but fallen and rebellious, the possibility of a new birth into a new life, the challenge of personal commitment and the cost of discipleship.

This foundation outline proved to be the first of fifty university missions, beginning with Cambridge, Oxford, Durham and London, continuing with so-called 'red brick' universities, then crossing the Atlantic for missions in American and Canadian universities, continuing in Australia and New Zealand, and culminating in a number of missions in the universities of Africa and Asia.

Of course the gospel outline developed as it reflected local situations and as repetition encouraged improvement. But out of this foundational material *Basic Christianity* was born. It has been used worldwide, both to lead people from many different cultures and situations to Christ, and to establish young Christians in their faith. For example, a major general wrote:

> I was brought to the foot of the cross by your *Basic Christianity* which I was reading (in 1965) at 40,000 feet in an RAF aircraft! I have never ceased to be grateful and have passed on very many copies...

And a young woman wrote:

> When I was in the sixth form at school (way back in 1971) I was searching for God whoever He was, and [for] a life with meaning and purpose...A Christian teacher at school, knowing of my search, lent me *Basic Christianity*. I devoured the book! I was so excited for even though I had been confirmed I had never really understood the basic tenets of Christianity. I did not even really understand why Christ died.

But the publishers (IVP) and I have naturally wondered how best and most appropriately to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Basic Christianity*.

It was obviously necessary to update the language, not least by use of a modern translation of the Bible, and to respond to sensitivities relating to gender. We are grateful to David Stone for taking care of these sensitivities. In many ways a new book seemed to be needed, or at least a radical revision of the original. But I feel I have already, in *Why I am a Christian* (IVP, 2004), made my own contemporary statement of the gospel and do not feel the need to write another, even if I could. Besides, *Basic Christianity* is something of a period piece. It reflects the cultures of its own day and needs to be allowed to remain itself. We hope and pray that God will use it as he has done in the past, all over the world.

I end with the words of a young man who wrote to me in 1988 as follows:

> I regard myself as having a somewhat insecure and rootless background. My mother is Brazilian, of Italian extraction, and my father is English. In 1980 – still going through a severe adolescence - I went to Argentina. It was near the end of my time there that I experienced a marvellous change within me. I started to thirst to know the truth, whatever it might be. I read *Basic Christianity*...the words seemed to bounce out at me from the page. I felt convinced I'd discovered the truth although as yet I didn't know that Jesus was God and that he was calling me to an intimate relationship with him. It was only later that year when I was back in England...that I finally made a personal act of surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

John Stott
December 2007

PREFACE

‘Hostile to the church, friendly to Jesus Christ.’ These words describe large numbers of people, especially the young, today.

They are opposed to anything which looks like an institution. They cannot stand the establishment and its entrenched privileges. And they reject the church – not without some justification – because they see it as hopelessly corrupted by such evils.

Yet what they have rejected is the contemporary church, not Jesus Christ himself. It is precisely because they see a contradiction between the founder of Christianity and the current state of the church he founded that they are so critical and hold back. The person and teaching of Jesus have not lost their appeal, however. For one thing, he was himself an anti-establishment figure, and some of his words had revolutionary overtones. His ideals appear to have been entirely honourable. He breathed love and peace wherever he went. And, for another thing, he always practised what he preached.

But was he *true*?

An appreciable number of people throughout the world are still brought up in Christian homes where the truth of Christ and of Christianity is assumed. But when their critical faculties develop and they begin to think for themselves, they find it easier to discard the religion of their childhood than to make the effort to investigate whether or not it is true.

Very many others do not grow up in a Christian environment. Instead they absorb the teaching of Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, or ways of thinking which have no room for God at all.

Yet both groups, if and when they read about Jesus, find that he holds a fascination they cannot easily escape.

So our starting point is the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. He certainly existed. There can be no reasonable doubt about that. His existence as an historical figure is vouched for by pagan as well as Christian writers.

And, whatever else may be said about him, he was also very much a human being. He was born, he grew, he worked and sweated, rested and slept, he ate and drank, suffered and died like other people. He had a real human body and real human emotions.

But can we really believe that he was also in some sense ‘God’? Isn’t the deity of Jesus a rather picturesque Christian superstition? Is there any evidence

for this amazing Christian assertion that the carpenter of Nazareth was the unique Son of God?

This question is fundamental. We cannot dodge round it. We must be honest. If Jesus was not God in human flesh, then Christianity is thoroughly discredited. We are left with just another religion with some beautiful ideas and noble ethics; its unique distinctiveness is gone.

But there *is* evidence for the deity of Jesus – good, strong, historical, cumulative evidence; evidence to which an honest person can subscribe without committing intellectual suicide. There are the extravagant claims which Jesus made for himself, so bold and yet so unassuming. Then there is his unique character. His strength and gentleness, his uncompromising righteousness and tender compassion, his care for children and his love for those at the margins, his self-mastery and self-sacrifice have won the admiration of the world. What is more, his cruel death was not the end of him. It is claimed that he rose again from death, and the circumstantial evidence for his resurrection is most compelling.

But suppose Jesus was the Son of God – is basic Christianity merely an acceptance of this fact? No. Once persuaded of who he is, we must examine what he came to do. What did he intend to achieve? The Bible's answer is that he 'came into the world to save sinners'. Jesus of Nazareth is the heaven-sent Rescuer whom we all need. We need to be forgiven and brought into friendship with the all-holy God, from whom our sins have separated us. We need to be set free from our selfishness and given strength to live up to our ideals. We need to learn to love others, friend and enemy alike. This is the meaning of what we call 'salvation'. This is what Christ came to win for us by his death and resurrection.

So is basic Christianity the belief that Jesus is the Son of God who came to be the Saviour of the world? No, it is not even that. To accept that he is divine, to acknowledge our need of salvation, and to believe in the effectiveness of what he did for us are still not enough. Christianity is not just about what we *believe*; it's also about how we *behave*. Our intellectual belief may be beyond criticism; but we have to put our beliefs into practice.

What then must we do? We must commit ourselves, heart and mind, soul and will, home and life, personally and unreservedly to Jesus Christ. We must humble ourselves before him. We must trust in him as *our* Saviour and submit to him as *our* Lord; and then go on to take our place as loyal members of the church and responsible citizens in the community.

This is basic Christianity, the theme of this book. But before we start by looking at the evidence for Jesus Christ being divine, we need to pause in order to reflect on the right approach to take. The Christian claim is that we can find

God in Jesus Christ. Examining this claim will be much more straightforward when we realize, firstly, that God is himself seeking us and, secondly, that we must ourselves seek God.

PART ONE:
WHO CHRIST IS

Chapter 4

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

We have considered the extravagant claims which Jesus made and the selfless character which he displayed. We now come to examine the evidence for his historical resurrection from the dead.

Clearly, if it is true, the resurrection is enormously significant. If Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, then he was beyond dispute a unique figure. It is not a question of his spiritual survival, nor of his physical resuscitation, but of his conquest of death and his resurrection to a new plane of existence altogether. We do not know of anyone else who has had this experience. Modern people are therefore as scornful as the philosophers in Athens who heard Paul preach on the Areopagus: 'When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered.'

The argument is not that his resurrection establishes his deity, but that it fits with it. It is only to be expected that a supernatural person would come to and leave the earth in a supernatural way. This is in fact what the New Testament teaches and what, because of this, the church has always believed. His birth was natural, but his conception was supernatural. His death was natural, but his resurrection was supernatural. His miraculous conception and resurrection do not prove his deity, but they are consistent with it.[1]

Jesus himself never predicted his death without adding that he would rise, and described his coming resurrection as a 'sign'. Paul, at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, wrote that Jesus was 'appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead' (TNIV), and the earliest sermons of the apostles recorded in the Acts repeatedly assert that it was through the resurrection that God reversed the human court's verdict on Jesus and completely vindicated him.

In writing about the resurrection, Luke, who is known to have been a painstaking and accurate historian, says that there are 'many convincing proofs'. We may not feel able to go as far as Thomas Arnold, who called the resurrection

‘the best attested fact in history’, but certainly many impartial investigators have judged the evidence to be extremely good. For instance, Sir Edward Clarke KC wrote to the Rev. E. L. Macassey:

> As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter Day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The Gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.

What is this evidence? It can be summarized by making four statements.

The body had gone

The resurrection accounts in the four Gospels begin with the visit of certain women to the tomb early on Easter Sunday morning. When they arrived they were stunned to discover that the body of Jesus had disappeared.

A few weeks later the apostles began to preach that Jesus had risen. It was the main thrust of their message. But they could hardly have expected anyone to believe them if the body of Jesus was still in Joseph’s tomb – just a few minutes’ walk away! No. The tomb was empty. The body had gone. There can be no doubt about this fact. The question is how to explain it.

First, there is the theory that *the women went to the wrong tomb*. It was still dark, and they were overwhelmed with sorrow. The claim is that they could easily have made a mistake.

This sounds plausible on the surface, but it doesn’t stand up. To begin with, it cannot have been completely dark. It is true that John says the women came ‘while it was still dark’. But in Matthew 28:1 it is ‘at dawn’, while Luke says it was ‘very early in the morning’, and Mark distinctly states that it was ‘just after sunrise’.

Furthermore, these women weren’t fools. At least two of them had seen for themselves where Joseph and Nicodemus had laid the body. They had even watched the whole process of burial, ‘sitting there opposite the tomb’. The same two (Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses) returned at dawn, bringing

with them Salome, Joanna and ‘the other women’, so that if one mistook the path or the tomb, she is likely to have been corrected by the others. And if Mary Magdalene went to the wrong place the first time, she can hardly have repeated her error when she returned in the full light of morning and stayed on in the garden till Jesus met her.

Besides, it wasn’t mere sentiment that brought them to the tomb so early in the morning. They had a job to do. They had bought spices and were going to complete the anointing of their Lord’s body, since the timing of the burial so close to the Sabbath had meant that they couldn’t complete the task properly two days previously. These devoted and businesslike women were not the kind to be easily deceived or to give up on what they had come to do. Again, even if *they* mistook the tomb, would Peter and John, who ran to verify their story, make the same mistake, and others who doubtless came later, including Joseph and Nicodemus themselves?

The second explanation of the empty tomb is *the coma theory*. Those who uphold this view maintain that Jesus did not actually die on the cross, but only lost consciousness. He then revived in the tomb, left it and later made himself known to the disciples.

This theory simply bristles with problems. It is thoroughly perverse. The evidence entirely contradicts it. Pilate was indeed surprised that Jesus was already dead, but he was sufficiently convinced by the centurion’s assurance to give Joseph permission to remove the body from the cross. The reason the centurion was so certain is that he must have been present when ‘one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water’. So Joseph and Nicodemus took down his body, wrapped it in strips of linen and laid it in Joseph’s new tomb.

Are we then seriously to believe that Jesus had just temporarily lost consciousness? That after the rigours and pains of trial, mockery, flogging and crucifixion he could survive thirty-six hours in a stone tomb with neither warmth nor food nor medical care? That he could then rally sufficiently to perform the superhuman feat of shifting the boulder which was in front of the mouth of the tomb, and this without disturbing the Roman guard? That then, weak and sickly and hungry, he could appear to the disciples in such a way as to give them the impression that he had vanquished death? That he could go on to claim that he had died and risen, could send them out all over the world and promise to be with them to the end of time? That he could live somewhere in hiding for forty days, making occasional surprise appearances, and then finally disappear without any explanation? Such a view is incredible.

Thirdly, there is the idea that *thieves stole the body*. There is no shred of

evidence for this supposition. Nor is it explained how thieves could have fooled the Roman guard. Nor can one imagine why thieves should have taken the body, but left the strips of linen it was wrapped in, nor what possible motive they could have had for doing such a thing.

Fourthly, it has been argued that the *disciples removed the body*. This, Matthew tells us, is the rumour which the Jewish authorities spread right from the start. He describes how Pilate, having given permission to Joseph to remove Christ's body, received a deputation of chief priests and Pharisees, who said:

> Sir, we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.

Pilate agreed. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how,' he said, and so they 'made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard'. Matthew goes on to describe how the stone, the seal and the guard could not prevent the resurrection, and how the guard went into the city to report to the chief priests what had happened. After consultation they bribed the soldiers and told them:

> You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

But the story does not hold water. Is it likely that a highly disciplined detachment of guards, whether Roman or Jewish, would all fall asleep on duty? And if any of them stayed awake, how did the women get past them and roll back the stone?

Even supposing the disciples could have succeeded in removing the body of Jesus, there is a significant psychological consideration which is enough to pour cold water on the whole theory. We learn from the first part of the Acts of the Apostles that the resurrection was what they concentrated on in their early preaching. 'You killed him, but God raised him, and we are witnesses,' they kept saying. Are we then to believe that they were proclaiming what they knew to be a deliberate lie? If they had themselves taken the body of Jesus, to go on and preach that he had been raised from the dead would be knowingly to spread a

planned deception. But the thing is that they didn't only preach it; they suffered for it. They were prepared to go to prison, to be flogged – and even to be put to death. And for what? Something they knew to be a blatant untruth?

This simply does not ring true. It is so unlikely as to be virtually impossible. If anything is clear from the Gospels and the Acts, it is that the apostles were sincere. They may have been deceived, if you like, but they were not deceivers. Hypocrites and martyrs are not made of the same stuff.

The fifth and perhaps the least unreasonable (though still hypothetical) explanation of the disappearance of Christ's body is that *the Roman or Jewish authorities took it into their own custody*. They would certainly have had sufficient motive for doing so. They had heard that Jesus had talked about being raised from the dead, and were afraid that someone would pretend it had happened. So (the argument runs), in order to forestall trickery, they took the precaution of confiscating the corpse.

But when it is examined, this hypothetical reconstruction of what happened also falls apart. We have already seen that, not long after Jesus' death, the Christians were boldly proclaiming his resurrection. The news spread rapidly. This new movement threatened to undermine the foundations of Judaism and to disturb the peace of Jerusalem. The Jews feared conversions; the Romans were apprehensive about riots. The authorities had one obvious course of action available to them. They could produce the remains of the body and publish a statement of what they had done.

Instead, they were silent and resorted to violence. They arrested the apostles, threatened them, flogged them, imprisoned them, belittled them, plotted against them, and even killed some of them. But all this was entirely unnecessary if they had in their own possession the dead body of Jesus. The church was founded on the resurrection. Disprove the resurrection, and the church would have collapsed. But they couldn't, because they didn't have the body. What the authorities *didn't* say is as clear a pointer to the truth of the resurrection as what the apostles *did* say.

What the authorities didn't say is as clear a pointer to the truth of the resurrection as what the apostles did say.

These are the theories which have been invented to try to explain the emptiness of the tomb and the disappearance of the body. None of them is satisfactory.

None of them can be backed up by any historical evidence. Since there is no adequate alternative explanation, is it not entirely reasonable to prefer the uncomplicated and restrained account we find in the Gospels, setting out the events of the first Easter Day? The body of Jesus was not removed by people; it was raised by God.

The graveclothes were undisturbed

It is a remarkable fact that the accounts which say that the body of Jesus had gone also tell us that the strips of linen used to wrap the body had not gone. It is John who lays particular emphasis on this fact, for he went with Peter on that dramatic early morning race to the tomb. The account he gives of this incident (20:1–10) bears the unmistakable marks of first-hand experience. He got there before Peter, but on arriving at the tomb he did no more than look in, until Peter came and entered it. 'Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.' The question is: what did he see which made him believe? The story suggests that it was not just the absence of the body, but the presence of the strips of linen and, in particular, the fact that they were undisturbed.

Let us try to reconstruct the story.[2] John tells us (19:38–42) that, while Joseph asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, Nicodemus 'brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.' That is to say, as they wound the linen 'bandages' round his body, they sprinkled the powdered spices into the folds. A separate cloth will have been used for his head.[3] In this way they wrapped his body and head completely, leaving just his face and neck bare, according to oriental custom. They then laid the body on a stone slab which had been hewn out of the side of the cave-tomb.

Now supposing we had been present in the tomb when the resurrection of Jesus actually took place. What would we have seen? Should we have seen Jesus begin to move, and then yawn and stretch and get up? No. We do not believe that he returned to this life. He did not recover consciousness after a faint. He had died, and he rose again. His was a resurrection, not a resuscitation. We believe that he passed miraculously from death into an altogether new sphere of existence. What then should we have seen, had we been there? We should suddenly have noticed that the body had disappeared. It would have been

transformed into something new and different and wonderful. It would have passed through the graveclothes, as it was later to pass through closed doors, leaving them untouched and almost undisturbed. Almost, but not quite. For the strips of linen, under the weight of all those spices, once the support of the body had been removed, would have subsided or collapsed, and would now be lying flat. A gap would have appeared between the strips of linen used for the body and the cloth wrapped around the head, where his face and neck had been. And the head cloth itself, because of the complicated criss-cross pattern of the bandages, might well have retained its concave shape, a crumpled turban, but with no head inside it.

A careful study of the text of John's narrative suggests that it is just these three characteristics of the discarded graveclothes which he saw. First, he saw the strips of linen 'lying there'. The word is repeated twice, and the first time it is placed in an emphatic position in the Greek sentence. We might translate, 'He saw, as they were lying (or 'collapsed'), the strips of linen.' Next, the head cloth was 'still lying in its place, separate from the linen' (TNIV). This is unlikely to mean that it had been bundled up and tossed into a corner. It lay still on the stone slab, but was separated from the body cloths by a noticeable space. Third, this same head cloth was 'lying in its place...' This last word has been translated 'twirled', a word which aptly describes the rounded shape which the empty head cloth still preserved.

It is not hard to imagine the sight which greeted the eyes of the apostles when they reached the tomb: the stone slab, the collapsed graveclothes, the shell of the head cloth and the gap between the two. No wonder they 'saw and believed'. A glance at these graveclothes both proved the reality of what had happened and indicated the nature of the resurrection. The strips of linen hadn't been touched, folded or manipulated by any human being. They were like a discarded chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged.

That the state of the graveclothes was intended to be visible, corroborative evidence for the resurrection is further suggested by the fact that Mary Magdalene (who had returned to the tomb after bringing the news to Peter and John) 'bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot'. Presumably this means that they sat on the stone slab with the graveclothes between them. Both Matthew and Mark add that one of them said, 'He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.'[4] Whether or not we believe in angels, these allusions to the place where Jesus had been laid down, emphasized both by where the angels were and by what the angels said, at least confirm what the Gospel writers thought. The position of the strips of linen and the absence of

the body were both witnesses together to his resurrection.

Jesus was seen

The Gospels include some extraordinary stories of how Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. We are told of ten separate appearances of the risen Lord to what Peter calls ‘chosen witnesses’. It is said that he appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the women returning from the tomb, to Peter, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the ten gathered in the upper room, to the eleven including Thomas a week later, to ‘more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time’, probably on the mountainside in Galilee, to James, to some disciples including Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John by the side of Lake Galilee, and to many on the Mount of Olives near Bethany at the time of the ascension. Paul adds himself at the end of his list of those who saw the risen Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15, referring to his experience on the Damascus Road. And since Luke tells us at the beginning of the Acts that Jesus ‘presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive’ and ‘appeared to them [the apostles] over a period of forty days’, there may well have been other appearances, of which no record has survived.

We cannot lightly dismiss this body of living evidence about the resurrection. We must find some explanation of what these accounts are telling us. Only three are possible. One is that they were inventions; the second that they were hallucinations; the third that they were true.

Were they *inventions*? There is no need to devote much space to repudiating this suggestion. The resurrection appearances cannot be deliberate inventions. For one thing, the narratives are restrained and simple; for another, they are graphic and brought to life by the detailed touches which sound like the work of an eyewitness. The stories of the race to the tomb in John 20 and of the walk to Emmaus in Luke 24 are too vivid and real to have been invented.

Besides, if they *are* inventions, they’re certainly not very good ones. If we had wanted to concoct the resurrection, we could probably have done much better ourselves! We should have been careful to avoid the complicated jigsaw puzzle of events which the four Gospels together produce. We should have got rid of, or at least watered down, the doubts and fears of the apostles. We should probably have included a dramatic account of the resurrection itself, describing the power and glory of the Son of God as he snapped the chains of death and burst out of the tomb in triumph. But no-one saw it happen, and we have no

description of it. Again, we would have chosen someone with a better reputation than Mary Magdalene as the first witness.

Actually, there is an even weightier objection to the theory of invention than the naïve simplicity of the narratives. It is the obvious fact, which we have already mentioned, that the apostles, together with the Gospel writers in particular and the early church in general, were utterly convinced that Jesus had risen. The whole New Testament breathes an atmosphere of certainty and conquest. Its writers may have been, if you like, tragically misled; they were definitely not deliberately misleading.

If these accounts were not inventions, were the appearances themselves *hallucinations*? This opinion has been widely held and confidently expressed; and of course hallucinations are not an uncommon phenomenon. A hallucination is the 'apparent perception of an external object when no such object is present', and is associated most frequently with someone who is suffering from some form of mental ill health. Most of us have known people who see things and hear voices, and live sometimes or always in an imaginary world of their own. It is simply not credible to claim that the apostles were unbalanced people like this. Mary Magdalene may have been, but hardly blustering Peter and doubting Thomas.

It is true that hallucinations can occur in people who are otherwise quite ordinary and normal, but such cases are usually associated with two particular characteristics. First, they happen as the climax to a period of exaggerated wishful thinking. Second, the conditions of time, place and mood are favourable. There must be both a strong inward desire and a set of predisposing outward circumstances.

When we look at the Gospel narratives of the resurrection, however, both these factors are missing. Far from wishful thinking, it was just the opposite. When the women first found the tomb empty, they were 'trembling and bewildered', they fled from the scene and they were 'afraid'. When Mary Magdalene and the other women reported that Jesus was alive, we read that the apostles 'did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense'. When Jesus himself came and stood among them 'they were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost', so that Jesus 'rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe'. Thomas was adamant in his refusal to believe unless he could actually see and touch the nail-wounds. When Jesus later met the eleven and others on a mountain in Galilee, 'they worshipped him; but some doubted'. There was no wishful thinking here, no naïve credulity, no blind acceptance. Far from being gullible and easily led, the disciples were cautious, sceptical and 'slow to believe'. They were not susceptible to

hallucinations. Nor would strange visions have satisfied them. Their faith was grounded upon the hard facts of experience that could be verified.

Not only this, but the outwardly favourable circumstances were missing too. Had the appearances all taken place in one or two particularly sacred places, hallowed by memories of Jesus, and had those who saw him been expecting to do so, our suspicions might well be aroused. If we had only the story of the appearances in the upper room, we should have good reason to doubt and ask questions. It's not hard to imagine the eleven disciples gathering in the special place where Jesus had spent some of his last hours with them. We can picture them keeping his place vacant, talking together over old times and remembering his promises to return. It's not too much of a leap to think of them beginning to wonder if he might come back after all, and then hoping that he would, until the eagerness of their expectation was rewarded by his sudden appearance. It would be a cruel delusion, yes, but an understandable one.

But this was not the case. Indeed, an investigation of the ten appearances reveals a striking variety in the circumstances of person, place and mood in which they occurred. He was seen by individuals alone (Mary Magdalene, Peter and James), by small groups and by more than five hundred people together. He appeared in the garden of the tomb, near Jerusalem, in the upper room, on the road to Emmaus, by the lake of Galilee, on a Galilee mountain and on the Mount of Olives.

If there was variety in person and place, there was also variety in mood. Mary Magdalene was weeping; the other women were afraid and astonished; Peter was full of remorse, and Thomas of scepticism. The Emmaus pair were distracted by the events of the week and the disciples in Galilee by their fishing. Yet through their doubts and fears, through their unbelief and preoccupation, the risen Lord made himself known to them.

It is unreasonable to dismiss these appearances of Jesus as hallucinations being experienced by people with disturbed minds. So, if they were neither inventions nor hallucinations, the only alternative left is that they actually happened. The risen Lord was seen.

The disciples were changed

Perhaps the transformation of the disciples of Jesus is the greatest evidence of all for the resurrection, because it is entirely uncontrived. They do not invite us to look at themselves, as they invite us to look at the empty tomb and the collapsed

graveclothes and the Lord whom they had seen. We can see the change in them without being asked to look. The men who figure in the pages of the Gospels are new and different men in the Acts of the Apostles, the New Testament book which tells the story of the first Christians. The death of their Master left them despondent, disillusioned, and near to despair. But in the Acts they emerge as those who risk their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and who turn the world upside down.

What has brought about such a change? How can we account for their new faith and power, joy and love? There's no doubt that the events of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit had a lot to do with it. But the Holy Spirit came only when Jesus had risen and returned to heaven. It is as if the resurrection was the key which unlocked extraordinary moral and spiritual power. Two examples stand out.

The first is Simon Peter. The story of the trial and death of Jesus has been a complete nightmare for him. He has denied Christ three times. He has cursed and sworn as if he had never known the gentle influence of Jesus in his life. He has gone out into the night to weep bitterly. When Jesus is dead, he joins the others in the upper room, behind barred doors 'for fear of the Jews', and is utterly dejected.

But when we turn over one or two pages in the Bible, we see him standing, perhaps on the steps outside the very same house in Jerusalem, preaching so boldly and so powerfully to a vast crowd that three thousand people believe in Christ and are baptized. We turn on to the next chapters of the Acts and we watch him defying the very Sanhedrin who had condemned Jesus to death just a few weeks earlier, happy to be counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, and later calmly sleeping in his cell on the night before his expected execution.

He is a new man. The shifting sands have been blown away; true to the meaning of his nickname, 'Peter', he is a real rock now. What has made the difference?

Or take James, who later occupied a position of leadership in the Jerusalem church. He is one of 'the brothers of the Lord', who are represented throughout the Gospels as not believing in Jesus: 'Even his brothers did not believe in him.' But when we reach the first chapter of the Acts, the list which Luke gives of the disciples gathered together ends with the words 'and...his brothers'. James is evidently a believer now. What has made the difference? What convinced him? Perhaps we have the clue we are seeking in 1 Corinthians 15:7 where Paul, cataloguing those who had seen the risen Jesus, adds 'he appeared to James'.

It was the resurrection which transformed Peter's fear into courage, and James's doubt into faith. It was the resurrection which changed the Jewish

Sabbath into the Christian Sunday. It was the resurrection which changed Saul the Pharisee into Paul the apostle, the fanatical persecutor into a preacher of the very faith he previously tried to destroy. ‘Last of all’, Paul wrote, ‘he appeared to me also.’

These are the strands of the evidence for the resurrection. The body had disappeared. The graveclothes remained undisturbed. The Lord was seen. And the disciples were changed. There is no adequate explanation of these events other than the great Christian affirmation: ‘The Lord is risen indeed.’

Over these last three chapters we have undertaken a careful investigation of the most absorbing personality of history, a modest carpenter from Nazareth who became a peasant preacher and died a criminal’s death.

- His claims were astonishing.
- He seems to have been morally perfect.
- He rose from the dead.

Added together, the weight of all this evidence is pretty impressive. It paves the way for the last step of faith where we come to bow before Jesus and say, along with doubting Thomas, ‘My Lord and my God.’

Study Questions

1. Why is the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead so important? What does it prove?
2. What are the four statements which summarize the evidence for the resurrection?
3. What explanations have been put forward to account for the empty tomb? What do you make of them?
4. What is so remarkable about the fact that the graveclothes were undisturbed?
5. How would you answer someone who said that the appearances of Jesus

after his resurrection were inventions or hallucinations?

6. What does the experience of the disciples of Jesus contribute to our ability to believe that he was raised from the dead?

PART TWO:
WHAT WE NEED

Chapter 5

THE FACT AND NATURE OF SIN

We have looked in some detail at the evidence for the unique deity of Jesus of Nazareth. As a result, we may well have become convinced that, yes, he is indeed the Lord, the Son of God. Yet the focus of the New Testament is not just on who he was, but on what he came to do. He is presented not simply as the Lord from heaven, but also as the Saviour of sinners. Indeed, the two cannot be separated, for the effectiveness of what he did depends absolutely on the truth of who he was.

But in order to appreciate what exactly it was that Jesus achieved, we need to understand who *we* are as well as who *he* was. His work was done for us. It was the work of a person for persons, a mission undertaken for needy people by the only one who was able to meet their need. His ability lies in his deity; our need lies in our sin. We have investigated his claim to be able to help us; we must now look at the nature of the help we need.

So we turn from Christ in particular to humanity in general, from what the Bible reveals about the sinlessness and glory that are in him to what it has to say about the sin and shame that are in us. Only then, after we have clearly grasped what we are, shall we be in a position to perceive the wonder of what he has done for us and offers to us. We need to be convinced about the accuracy of the diagnosis before we will be ready to take the medicine God prescribes.

Sin is an unpopular subject, and Christians are often criticized for going on about it too much. But they only do so because they are realists. Sin is not a convenient invention of church ministers to keep them in their job; it is a fact of human experience.

The history of the last hundred years or so has convinced many people that the problem of evil is located in human beings themselves, not merely in human society. The nineteenth century saw a flourishing of liberal optimism. It was widely believed that human nature was fundamentally good, that evil was largely caused by ignorance and bad housing, and that education and social reform

would enable people to live together in happiness and goodwill. But this illusion has been shattered by the hard facts of history. Educational opportunities have spread rapidly throughout the world, and many welfare states have been created. But our human capacity to get it wrong seems undaunted. The persistence of conflict on the world stage and the widespread denial of human rights, together with the general increase of violence and crime, have forced thoughtful people to acknowledge that a hard core of selfishness exists in each and every one of us.

Much that we take for granted in a 'civilized' society is actually based upon the assumption of human sin. Nearly all legislation has grown up because we simply cannot be trusted to settle our disputes with justice and without self-interest. A promise is not enough; we need a contract. Doors are not enough; we have to lock and bolt them. The payment of fares is not enough; tickets have to be issued, inspected and collected. Law and order are not enough; we need the police to enforce them. All this is due to our sin. We cannot trust one another. We need protection against one another. It is a terrible indication of what human nature is really like.

The universality of sin

The Bible writers are quite clear that sin is universal. 'There is no-one who does not sin,' says King Solomon in an aside during his great prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. 'Indeed, there is no-one on earth who is righteous, no-one who does what is right and never sins,' adds the Preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes (TNIV). Several of the psalms comment sadly on the universality of human sin. Psalm 14, which describes the godless 'fool', gives a very pessimistic description of human wickedness:

> They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;
> there is no-one who does good.
> The LORD looks down from heaven
> on the human race
> to see if there are any who understand,
> any who seek God.
> All have turned away,
> all have become corrupt;
> there is no-one who does good,
> not even one.

The psalmists' conscience tells them that if God were to rise up in judgment against humanity, none could escape his condemnation. 'If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?' (TNIV) Hence the prayer, 'Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no-one living is righteous before you.'

The prophets are as insistent as the psalmists on the fact that all people are sinners, and no statements are more definite than the two which are to be found in the second half of the book of Isaiah. 'We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way' (TNIV), and 'All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.'

It isn't only the Old Testament writers who share this view. Paul opens his letter to the Romans with a closely reasoned argument, which extends over the first three chapters, that everyone, no matter who they are, is a sinner in God's sight. He writes about the corrupt behaviour of the pagan world and then adds that his own people, the people of Israel, are no better. They have been entrusted with God's holy law – and even teach it to others. Yet they break it just as much as anyone else. Paul goes on to quote from the psalms and the prophet Isaiah to illustrate his theme, and concludes, 'There is no difference [between Jew and Gentile], for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' John, another New Testament writer, is, if anything, even more explicit when he declares, 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves,' and 'If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar.'[1]

But what is sin? Yes, it affects everyone – but what exactly is it? Several words are used in the Bible to describe its nature. They can be put into two groups, according to whether wrongdoing is seen negatively or positively. Negatively, it is shortcoming. One word represents it as a lapse, a slip, a blunder. Another pictures it as the failure to hit a target. Yet another shows it to be an inner badness, having a character which falls short of what is good.

Positively, sin is wrongdoing. One word describes sin as trespassing over a boundary. Another reveals it as failing to keep the law, and another as an act which contravenes justice.

Both these groups of words imply the existence of a clear standard of behaviour. It is either an ideal which we fail to reach, or a law which we break. 'Anyone...who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins,' says James. That is the negative aspect. 'Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness,' says John. That is the positive aspect.

The Bible accepts the fact that people have different standards. The people of Israel have the law of Moses. Everyone else has the law of conscience. But everyone has broken the law they know. Everyone has fallen short of their own standard. What is our ethical code? It may be the law of Moses or the teaching of

Jesus. It may be the decent thing, or the done thing, or the conventions of society. It may be Buddhism's eightfold path or Islam's five pillars of conduct. But whatever it is, we have not succeeded in observing it. We all stand self-condemned.

This comes as a genuine surprise to many people. They have their ideals and think they achieve them, more or less. They do not go in for introspection. They are not unduly self-critical. They know they have had occasional lapses. They are aware of certain character defects. But they are not particularly worried by them, and think of themselves as no worse than anyone else. All this is understandable enough, until we remember two things. First, our sense of success or failure depends on how high our standards are. We'd find it quite easy to consider ourselves good at high-jumping if the bar were never raised more than a few inches! Secondly, God is interested in the thought behind the deed and the motive behind the action. Jesus clearly taught this in the Sermon on the Mount, set out for us in chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew's Gospel. With these two principles in mind, a healthy exercise would be to take the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 as our standard and see how very far short of it we all fall.

The Ten Commandments

1. You shall have no other gods before me

This is God's demand for our exclusive worship. We don't have to worship the sun, the moon and the stars to break this law. We break it whenever we give to something or someone other than God himself the first place in our thoughts or our affections. It may be some engrossing sport, an absorbing hobby, or selfish ambition. Or it may be someone whom we idolize. We may worship a god of gold and silver in the form of safe investments and a healthy bank balance, or a god of wood and stone in the form of property and possessions. None of these things is necessarily wrong in itself. It becomes wrong only when we give to it the place in our lives which belongs only to God. Sin is basically the placing of self where God should be. The way a wit once described the typical Victorian Englishman is true of us all: 'a self-made man who worships his creator'.

For us to keep this first commandment would be, as Jesus said, to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind; to make his will our guide and his glory our goal; to put him first in thought, word and deed; in work and leisure; in friendships and career; in the use of our money,

time and talents; at work and at home. No-one has ever kept this commandment except Jesus of Nazareth.

2. You shall not make for yourself an image

If the first commandment is about *what* we worship, the second is about *how* we worship. In the first God demands our exclusive worship, and in the second our sincere and spiritual worship. For 'God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'[2]

We may never have manufactured some statue or figurine and bowed down to worship it, but what distorted mental images of God do we hold in our minds? And although this commandment does not forbid the use of all external forms in worship, it does imply that they are useless unless there is inward reality as well. We may have attended church – but have we ever really worshipped God? We may have said prayers – but have we ever really prayed? We may have read the Bible – but have we ever let God speak to us through it and have we done what he said? It is no good approaching God with our lips if our hearts are far from him.[3] To do so is sheer hypocrisy.

3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God

The name of God represents the nature of God. This is why there is so much in the Bible which tells us to respect his name, and why in the Lord's Prayer we are taught to pray that his name may be 'hallowed' or kept special. His holy name can be dragged in the mud by our careless use of language, and most of us would do well to revise our vocabulary from time to time. But to take God's name in vain is not just a matter of words – it's also about thoughts and deeds. Whenever our behaviour is inconsistent with our belief, when what we do contradicts what we say, we take God's name in vain. To call God 'Lord' and disobey him is to take his name in vain. To call God 'Father' and be filled with anxiety and doubts is to deny his name. To take God's name in vain is to talk one way and act another. This too is hypocrisy.

4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy

The Jews' Sabbath and the Christians' Sunday are part of what God has put in place for us. To set apart one day in seven is not just a human arrangement or a social convenience. It is God's plan. He made the Sabbath for people, Jesus emphasized,[4] and since he also made the people for whom he made the Sabbath, he adapted it to people's needs. Our bodies and minds need rest, and our spirits need the opportunity for worship. This is why the Sabbath is set aside as a day of rest and a day of worship.

Not only are we to keep it like this ourselves, for our own good, but we are to do all we can for the common good to ensure that others do not have to work unnecessarily on this day.

So Sunday is a 'holy' day, set apart for God. It is the Lord's day, not our day. It should therefore be spent in his way, not in ours, to worship and serve him – and not just for our self-centred pleasure.

5. Honour your father and your mother

This fifth commandment still comes in the first half of the law which is all about our duty to God. For our parents, at least while we are children, represent God's authority to us. Yet often it is in their own homes that people, young people especially, can be at their most selfish and inconsiderate. It is all too easy to be ungrateful and negligent, and to fail to show our parents due respect and affection. How often do we contact them or visit them? Or do they need support of one kind or another which we could give, but fail to make available to them?

6. You shall not murder

This is not just about the crime of murder. After all, if looks could kill, many would kill with a look. And if murder can be committed by cutting words, many are clearly guilty. Indeed Jesus said that to be angry with someone without good reason, or to be insulting, are as serious as actually killing someone. John draws the right conclusion when he writes, 'Anyone who hates a fellow believer is a murderer' (1 John 3:15 TNIV). Every loss of temper, every outburst of uncontrolled passion, every stirring of sullen rage, every bitter resentment and thirsting for revenge – all these things are murder. We can kill by malicious gossip. We can kill by studied neglect and cruelty. We can kill by spite and jealousy. We have probably all done so.

7. You shall not commit adultery

Again, this commandment has a far wider application than being unfaithful in marriage. It includes any sort of sex outside the marriage relationship for which it was designed. It also includes all sexual perversions, for although men and women are not necessarily responsible for the urges they have, they are responsible for what they do about them. It includes selfish demands within marriage, and any behaviour which drives a partner to want to end the relationship. It includes the use of pornography, and giving in to impure fantasies. Jesus made this clear when he said, 'Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'

Just as to think murderous thoughts is to commit murder, so to think

adulterous thoughts is to commit adultery. This commandment embraces every abuse of a sacred and beautiful gift of God.

8. You shall not steal

To steal is to rob a person of anything which belongs to him or is due to him. Taking money or property is not the only way in which this commandment can be broken. Tax evasion is robbery. So is dodging the customs. So is working short hours. What people call 'scrounging', God calls stealing. To overwork and underpay your staff is to break this commandment. There can be few of us, if any, who have been thoroughly honest in personal and business affairs.

These negative commandments also imply a positive counterpart. In order truly to avoid murder, we must do all we can to promote the health and support the life of others. It isn't enough to refrain from the act of adultery. The commandment requires the right, healthy and honourable attitude of each sex towards the other. Similarly, not stealing is no particular virtue if we are miserly or mean. In his New Testament letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes the point that it isn't enough for thieves to stop stealing; they must also start working. And he says this not just so that they can provide for their own needs, but also so that they may have something to share with those in need.

9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour

The last five commandments express a respect for the rights of others which is implied in true love. To break these commandments is to rob people of the things most precious to them – life ('you shall not murder'), their home or honour ('you shall not commit adultery'), their property ('you shall not steal'), and now their reputation ('you shall not give false testimony against your neighbour').

This commandment doesn't only apply in a court of law. It does include perjury. But it also refers to all forms of scandal, slander, idle talk and gossip, all lies and deliberate exaggerations or distortions of the truth. We can give false testimony by listening to unkind rumours as well as by passing them on, by making cruel jokes at somebody else's expense, by creating false impressions, by failing to correct statements which we know to be untrue, and by what we do *not* say as well as by what we *do* say.

10. You shall not covet

The tenth commandment is in some ways the most revealing of all. It turns the Ten Commandments from an external legal code into an internal moral standard. We can be brought to book by the law of the land for theft – but not for

covetousness. For covetousness belongs to the inner life. It lurks in the heart and the mind. What lust is to adultery and temper is to murder, covetousness is to theft.

The particular things which we are not to covet and which are mentioned in the commandment are surprisingly modern. In the housing shortage there is much coveting of our neighbour's house, and divorce would not be so common if people did not covet their neighbour's wife or husband. 'Greed...is idolatry,' wrote Paul, and by contrast, 'godliness with contentment is great gain'.

Listing these commandments brings to light an ugly catalogue of sins. So much takes place beneath the surface of our lives, in the secret places of our minds, which other people do not see and which we manage to conceal even from ourselves. But God sees these things. His eye penetrates into every corner of our hearts: 'Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.' He sees us as we really are, and his law shows up our sins for what they really are. Indeed, the purpose of the law was to expose sin, for 'through the law we become conscious of sin'.

So much takes place beneath the surface of our lives... But God sees these things. His eye penetrates into every corner of our hearts

When C. H. Spurgeon, a famous nineteenth-century preacher, was only fourteen years old, he experienced a tremendous sense of his own sinfulness. Two truths came home to him as never before: 'God's majesty and my sinfulness'. He had a crushing sense of how unworthy he was.

> I do not hesitate to say that those who examined my life would not have seen any extraordinary sin, yet as I looked upon *myself* I saw outrageous sin against God. I was not like other boys, untruthful, dishonest, swearing and so on. But of a sudden, I met Moses carrying the law...God's Ten Words...and as I read them, they all seemed to join in condemning me in the sight of the thrice holy Jehovah.

In our case, too, there is nothing like the law of God for convincing us of our sinfulness.

Study Questions

1. Why is sin such an unpopular subject?
2. Why does an investigation into basic Christianity need to examine sin so carefully?
3. How does the Bible underline the universality of sin?
4. If you had to define what sin is, what would you say?
5. In what ways are the Ten Commandments useful for us today?

Chapter 6

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

We have looked at the universality and the nature of human sin. We might prefer to leave this unpleasant subject and pass on immediately to the good news of Christ's salvation, but we are not yet ready to do so. We need to grasp what the results of sin are before we can fully appreciate what God has done for us and what he offers to us in Christ.

Is sin really so very serious? The best way to understand its evil consequences is to look at its effects on God, on ourselves and on other people.

Alienation from God

Even though we may not realize it now, the most terrible result of sin is that it cuts us off from God. Our highest destiny is to know God, to be in personal relationship with him. Our chief claim to nobility as human beings is that we were made in the image of God and are therefore capable of knowing him. But this God whom we are meant to know and whom we ought to know is a righteous Being, infinite in his moral perfection. The Bible consistently stresses this truth:

> For this is what the high and exalted One says –
> he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
> 'I live in a high and holy place...'
>
> The King of kings and Lord of lords, who...lives in unapproachable light.
>
> God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

> Our God is a consuming fire.
>
> Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire?
> Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?
>
> Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
> you cannot tolerate wrong.[1]

All the individuals in the Bible who have caught a glimpse of God's glory have drawn back from the sight, overwhelmed by the awareness of their own sins. *Moses*, to whom God appeared in the bush that was on fire but was not burnt up, 'hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God'. *Job*, to whom God spoke 'out of the storm' in words which revealed the full extent of his majesty, cried out, 'My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.' *Isaiah*, a young man at the threshold of his career, had a vision of God as the King of Israel 'seated on a throne, high and exalted', surrounded by worshipping angels who sang of his holiness and glory, and said, 'Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.' When *Ezekiel* received his strange vision of living winged creatures and whirring wheels, and above them a throne, and on the throne a figure like that of a man, enveloped in the brightness of fire and of the rainbow, he recognized it as 'the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD', and he added, 'When I saw it, I fell face down.' *Saul of Tarsus*, travelling to Damascus, mad with rage against the Christians, was struck to the ground and blinded by a brilliant light which flashed from heaven more brightly than the sun, and wrote later of his vision of the risen Christ, 'He appeared to me also.' The aged *John*, exiled on the island of Patmos, describes in detail his vision of the risen Jesus in heaven, whose 'eyes were like blazing fire' and whose 'face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance', and he tells us, 'When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.'[2]

If the curtain which veils the indescribable majesty of God could be drawn aside – even for a moment – we too would be unable to bear the sight. As it is, we're only dimly aware of how pure and brilliant the glory of almighty God must be. However, we know enough to realize that we could never approach such a God while still in our sins. A great chasm yawns between God in his holiness and us in our sin. 'For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?' asks Paul.

The fact that sin cuts us off from God was brought home dramatically in Old Testament times by the way the tabernacle and the temple were constructed.

Both these structures, designed to house the presence of God among his people, were made in two compartments. The first and larger one was called the Holy Place, while the further and smaller area was known as the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. In this inner sanctuary was what was called the Shekinah glory, the visible symbol of God's presence. Between the two was the 'veil', a thick curtain which barred access into the Holy of Holies. No-one was allowed to pass through into God's presence except the high priest, and he only on the annual Day of Atonement and then only if he took with him the blood of a sacrifice for sins.

What was visibly demonstrated to the Israelites in this way is underlined by the teaching we find in the Old and the New Testaments. Sin brings inevitable separation, and this separation is 'death', spiritual death, the cutting off of a person from God, the only source of true life. 'The wages of sin is death.'

More than that, if in this life we deliberately reject Jesus Christ, the only one through whom we may find eternal life, we will die eternally in the next world. Hell is a grim and dreadful reality. We must not let ourselves be deceived about this. Jesus himself spoke of it. He called it 'darkness' because it is an infinite separation from God who is light. The Bible also calls it 'the second death' and 'the lake of fire', terms which describe symbolically the loss of eternal life and the dreadful thirst of the soul which are the inevitable result of being banished from God's presence.[3]

This separation from God which is caused by sin is not only taught in the Bible; it is confirmed by human experience. I can still remember my own sense of confusion when as a boy I said my prayers and tried to enter God's presence. I could not understand why God seemed so far away and I could not get near him. He seemed so remote and distant. I know the reason now. Isaiah has given me the answer:

> Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save,
> nor his ear too dull to hear.
> But your iniquities have separated
> you from your God;
> your sins have hidden his face from you,
> so that he will not hear.[4]

We are tempted to say to God, as does the writer of the book of Lamentations, 'You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through.' But in fact God is not responsible for the cloud. We are. Our sins blot out God's face from us as effectively as the clouds cover the sun.

Many people have told me that they have had the same bleak experience.

Sometimes, in emergencies, in danger, in joy or in the contemplation of beauty, they feel that God is near to them. But, more often than not, they find God to be inexplicably absent, and they feel abandoned. This is not just a feeling; it is a fact. Until our sins are forgiven, we are indeed exiles, far from our true home. We have no relationship with God. In biblical terms we are 'lost', or 'dead through the transgressions and sins' which we have committed.

Our sins blot out
God's face from us as
effectively as the clouds
cover the sun.

It is this that accounts for the restlessness of men and women today. There is a hunger in our hearts which only God can satisfy, a vacuum which only he can fill. The demand for sensational news, extravagant love or crime stories in the media; the current epidemic of drugs, sex and violence – all these things are symptoms of our search for satisfaction. They betray our thirst for God and our separation from him. Augustine was right in the often-quoted words which come near the beginning of his *Confessions*: 'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.' This situation is tragic beyond words. We are missing the destiny for which God made us.

Bondage to self

Sin not only alienates; it enslaves. It separates us from God and it also brings us into captivity.

We need now to consider the 'inwardness' of sin. It is more than the wrong things we do; it is a deep-seated inner sickness. In fact, the sins we commit are merely the external and visible indications of this internal and invisible illness, the symptoms of a moral disease. The image Jesus used is that of a tree and its fruit. The kind of fruit a tree bears, he said (whether figs or grapes, for example), and their condition (whether good or bad), depend on the nature and health of the tree itself. 'For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.'

In this respect, Jesus Christ is at odds with many modern commentators. It is certainly true that we are all influenced for good or ill by our education and environment, and by the political and economic system under which we live. It is also true that we should seek justice, freedom and well-being for our fellow

human beings. Yet Jesus did not attribute the evils of human society to these. According to him, the problem lies with our very nature, with what he called our ‘heart’. Here are his exact words:

> For from within, out of your hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile you.[5]

The Old Testament had already taught this truth. As Jeremiah put it, ‘The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?’ Indeed, the Bible contains many references to this infection of human nature – what we call ‘original sin’. It is a tendency or bias of self-centredness, which we inherit, which is rooted deeply in our human personality, and which reveals itself in a thousand ugly ways. Paul’s label for it is ‘the sinful nature’, and he sets out a catalogue of what it produces.

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.[6]

It is because sin is an internal sickness of human nature that we are in bondage. It is not so much particular acts or habits which enslave us, but rather the evil infection from which these spring. This is what lies behind the New Testament description of us as ‘slaves’. We resent it, but it is true. Jesus really upset some of the religious people of his day when he said to them, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’

They retorted, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?’

Jesus answered them, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.’

In several of his letters Paul describes this humiliation into which sin brings us.

> You used to be slaves to sin.
>
> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

> At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.[7]

The example of our lack of self-discipline which the New Testament writer James focuses on is the difficulty we have in controlling our tongue. In a chapter full of graphic metaphor he says that 'those who are never at fault in what they say are perfect, able to keep their whole body in check'. He points out that 'the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts'. Its influence spreads like fire; it is 'a world of evil' and 'corrupts the whole person'. We can tame all kinds of animals and birds, he adds, 'but no-one can tame the tongue'.[8]

We know this only too well. We have high ideals, but weak wills. We want to live a good life, but we are chained in the prison of our self-centredness. However much we may boast of being free, the reality is that we are slaves.

We need to come to God and admit with sorrow:

> It is not finished, Lord,
> There is not one thing done,
> There is no battle of my life
> That I have really won.
> And now I come to tell thee
> How I fought to fail,
> My human, all too human, tale
> Of weakness and futility.[9]

It is no use giving us rules about how to behave; we cannot keep them. However much God might say 'You shall not', we shall – right to the end of time. A lecture will not solve our problem; we need a Saviour. The education of the mind is not enough without a change of heart. Humanity has discovered the secrets of physical power and been able to harness the immense resources of nuclear energy. Now we need spiritual power, to set us free from ourselves, to conquer and control ourselves, the power to give us moral character to match our scientific achievement.

Conflict with others

But our list of the terrible consequences of sin is still not complete. There is one more to consider: the effect it has on our relationships with others.

We have seen that sin is a deep-seated infection of human nature. It lies at

the root of our personality. It controls our ego. In fact, sin is self. And all the sins we commit are assertions of the self against either God or other people. The Ten Commandments, although a series of negative prohibitions, set out our duty to God and to others. This is made even clearer in the positive summary of God's law which Jesus made when he linked a verse from Leviticus (19:18) to a verse in Deuteronomy (6:5): 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'

It is important to notice that the first commandment concerns our duty to God, and not our duty to other people. We are to love God first; and then we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. So God's order is that we put him first, others next, self last. Sin is the reversal of the order. It is to put ourselves first, our neighbour next, and God somewhere in the background. Peter Ustinov, who wrote his autobiography and entitled it *Dear Me* was simply giving expression to what we all think of ourselves. When the ice cream is brought into the children's party, the cry goes up, 'Me first!' As we grow up, we learn not to *say* that kind of thing; but we still *think* it. William Temple's way of describing original sin expresses this truth perfectly:

> I am the centre of the world I see; where the horizon is depends on where I stand...Education may make my self-centredness less disastrous by widening my horizon of interest; so far it is like climbing a tower, which widens the horizon for physical vision, while leaving me still the centre and standard of reference.[10]

This basic self-centredness affects all our behaviour. We do not find it easy to adjust to other people. We tend either to despise them or to envy them, either to feel superior or to consider ourselves inferior. We rarely think of ourselves with the 'sober judgment' which Paul urged upon his readers. Sometimes we are full of inappropriate self-pity, at other times of self-esteem, self-will or self-love.

All the relationships of life are complicated – parents and children, husband and wife, employer and employed. There are many reasons for society's problems with the younger generation, and much is due to lack of security in the home; but the fact is that unruly young people are (for whatever reason) asserting themselves against society. Hundreds of divorces could be prevented if people were humble enough to blame themselves more than their partner. Whenever couples have been to see me because their marriage was under threat, I have noticed that each tells a different story - a story sometimes so different that one would not guess they were describing the same situation.

Most quarrels are due to a misunderstanding, and the misunderstanding is due to our failure to appreciate the other person's point of view. It is more natural to us to talk than to listen, to argue than to submit. This is true in industrial disputes as much as in domestic quarrels. Many conflicts in the world of employment could be resolved if both sides first examined themselves critically and then examined the other side charitably, rather than our normal practice of being charitable to ourselves and critical of others. The same could be said of complex international unrest. The tensions of today are due largely to fear and foolishness. Our outlook is one-sided. We exaggerate the virtues in ourselves and the vices in others.

It is sadly all too easy to write in this way about social relationships today. The only reason for doing so is to show how human sin or self-centredness is the cause of all our troubles. This is what brings us into conflict with each other. If only the spirit of self-assertion could be replaced by the spirit of self-sacrifice, our conflicts would cease. And self-sacrifice is what the Bible means by 'love'. While sin draws in to itself, love spends itself for others. The characteristic of sin is the desire to get; the characteristic of love is the desire to give.

> Love ever gives,
> Forgives, outlives,
> And ever stands with open hands,
> And while it lives it gives.
> For this is love's prerogative,
> To give – and give – and give.

What man needs is a radical change of nature, what Professor H. M. Gwatkin called 'a change from self to unself'. We cannot do this for ourselves any more than patients needing surgery can perform their own operations. Again, we need a Saviour.

Writing about sin like this has only one purpose. It is to convince us of our need of Jesus Christ, and to help us understand and accept what he offers. Faith is born out of need. We shall never put our trust in Christ until we have first despaired of ourselves. As he himself said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.' Only when we have realized and faced up to the seriousness of what we are suffering from will we admit our urgent need for a cure.

Study Questions

1. How would you respond to the suggestion that sin is not really all that serious?
2. Why does sin have such a catastrophic effect on our relationship with God?
3. Why is slavery such an appropriate image to use when thinking about the effect our sin has on us?
4. How might we justify the assertion that sin is the root cause of all the problems we have in our relationships with other people?

PART THREE:
WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE

PART FOUR:
HOW TO RESPOND

APPENDIX

The Impact of Basic Christianity

This morning a Japanese copy of *Basic Christianity* was returned to me by the mother of a Japanese missionary. She's now looking for an opportunity of publicly confessing Christ. Many, many times Japanese (usually students)...have been helped to find the Lord through this book.
From an OMF missionary in Japan, 1993

...I recently received a call from the chaplain of a prison (north of Sydney, Australia). I have been supplying the chaplain with books...and he was happy to tell me a Turkish young man had become a Christian and it was the book *Basic Christianity* in Turkish which had given him a clear understanding of Christianity and the truth.
Australia, 2001

Upon hearing my first sermon after twenty years of intellectual indifference, I knew that the time had come to find out whether the claims of Jesus Christ were actually true! A wise person suggested five small books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Stott. Only 140 pages long, *Basic Christianity* makes a thorough statement of the biblical position that Jesus is God...
From a church newsletter book review (1992); the letter writer says he first read the book in 1976

I have learned and studied some years your book *Basic Christianity*, and the blessings I got from it could not be measured. I hope and believe that all who read would get the blessings of God enormously and tremendously, I am sure.
From a mission secretary, Myanmar, 1990

I grew up in a Christian home...although I tried many times to be a Christian I was never successful...I turned to Spiritualism...began to drink heavily...suffered from depression and suicidal tendencies.

About a year ago...God began to work in my life...I began to read my Bible and promised God that if he answered my questions I would become a Christian. One day I found a copy of *Basic Christianity* on my bookshelf. It had been there for fifteen to twenty years. The book convinced me that God was real and that Jesus really did die on the cross for my sins. It also said that the answers to my questions would be revealed to me only after I had committed my life to Christ. I knelt down...and committed my life to Christ. Words cannot describe the joy and peace that came over me...
From a correspondent in South Africa, 1990

Yesterday, I spoke at [a] seminary chapel in Manila. With me was Abdul...who gave a great testimony. He is a Muslim-background Filipino...

While in college he was witnessed to by a Filipina Christian who gave him one of your books. I think it was *Basic Christianity*. He read it three times and it was used to bring him to Christ.
From a missionary in the Philippines, 1989

On February 17, 1986 I found our Lord. It was through your book *Basic Christianity* that I was able to open my eyes and more importantly my heart. What a precious gift I have found through your writings.
From a lady correspondent in the US, 1987

Just finished reading *Basic Christianity*, and your approach to God has touched me beyond words. I am reading the Bible with more understanding now thanks to you and the Spirit...I am presently in prison for the second time...and really tired of living a negative life. Please pray for me.
From a US prison, 1986

I should have written this letter years ago...However, this is the appropriate time of my life to...write and say a very deep ‘thank you’ for being a powerful instrument in God’s hand.

...Although I was from a ‘religious’ background, I had never heard of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ...Then one day, my mother-in-law gave me a book by you called *Basic Christianity*. I accepted the book only because I did not want to

hurt the feelings of one of the most kind and loving persons I had ever known...I put the book aside for several months with no intention to read it. However, I was short of reading material one flight, and I hurriedly grabbed this book as I was rushing to leave for Amsterdam...

It was in a little room in Amsterdam that I read your book and fully committed my life to Jesus. I was flooded with unbelievable love and transformed in character...
From a former pilot, now an ordained minister, 1982

I am writing to you as the one-year anniversary of a very important time in my life approaches...[A year ago] through the action of the Holy Spirit, with your book *Basic Christianity* as one of the instruments, I came to know Jesus Christ as my Saviour.

When I came to chapter 10, 'Making a decision', I was ready to change my life...
From a correspondent in Oklahoma, 1980

When translating your book I've got the feeling that I know you personally. Your book has strengthened my belief and explained much that was unclear to me before.
From a Swedish prisoner, 1969

I was converted as an undergraduate at Cambridge...when I was trying to think through what it *really* means to be a Christian, I found your book *Basic Christianity* absolutely invaluable.
From an Anglican minister

It was back in the fall of 1971 that I first heard of John Stott. Two years later, I had the privilege of meeting him as he spoke at an InterVarsity Christian Union meeting...Truth is, from a human point of view, I owe my salvation to John Stott. It was reading his book *Basic Christianity*, in December of 1971 – the book had been given to me by a recently converted friend, my *best* friend. Reading it brought instant conviction of a gospel message I had until then (I was 18) felt unsophisticated and unnecessary...the sense of peace was palpable. I never doubted I was saved, not then nor in the thirty-five years that have followed...
From a professor of theology in the USA

I write today after finishing your book *Basic Christianity* and, in reference to that, I wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Being twenty years old, I suppose that I am the product of a generation much filled with cynicism. Therefore, I looked entirely on the material and not on the moral to satisfy my needs and curiosities – of course, without fulfilment.

A young woman from Nottingham

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 1:1–2; Luke 1:68.
2. Romans 1:1–4.
3. Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19–20.
4. John 1:1, 14.
5. Matthew 1:21; 1 Timothy 1:15; Luke 19:10; Luke 15:3–7.
6. Psalm 14:2–3 (TNIV).
7. Hebrews 11:6.
8. Jeremiah 29:13.
9. P. Carnegie Simpson, *The Fact of Christ*, 1930; James Clarke edition, 1952, pp. 23, 24.

Chapter 2

1. For a discussion of the authenticity of the New Testament, see F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, Inter-Varsity Press, 6th edition, 2000.
2. John 6:35 (TNIV); 8:12; 11:25–26 (TNIV); 14:6; Matthew 11:28–29.
3. Mark 8:29; John 8:56; 5:46; 5:39; Luke 24:27, 44.
4. Luke 4:18–19 (TNIV).
5. Matthew 11:28–30; John 6:35; 7:37.
6. John 6:29; 3:36; 8:24; 16:8–9.
7. Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26 (TNIV).
8. John 15:26; 16:14 (TNIV).
9. Mark 1:15; 14:61–62; 8:27–29.
10. Luke 10:23–24; cf. Matthew 13:16–17.
11. John 5:17; 10:30; 14:11.
12. John 19:7.
13. John 8:19; 14:7; 12:45; 14:9; 12:44; 14:1; Mark 9:37; John 15:23; 5:23.
14. Mark 2:1–12; Luke 7:36–50.
15. John 6:35; 14:6; 11:25; 15:4–5; 4:10–15; Mark 10:17, 21; John 10:28; 17:2; 5:21.
16. Mark 6:2–3; John 7:15 (TNIV), 46; Luke 4:32 (TNIV); Matthew 7:28–29.
17. John 5:22, 28, 29; Matthew 25:31–46.
18. John 12:47–48; Matthew 10:32–33; 7:23.
19. John 6:35; 8:12; 11:25.
20. P. T. Forsyth, *This Life and the Next*, Independent Press, 1947.
21. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, HarperCollins, 2002.

Chapter 3

1. P. Carnegie Simpson, *The Fact of Christ*, 1930; James Clarke edition, 1952, pp. 19–22.
2. Tennyson, quoted by Carnegie Simpson, ibid., p. 62.
3. James Denney, *Studies in Theology*, Hodder and Stoughton, 9th edition, 1906, p. 41.
4. 1 Peter 1:19; 2:22; 1 John 1:8–10; 3:5.
5. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 7:26; 4:15 (TNIV).
6. Matthew 27:24; Luke 23:13; Matthew 27:3–4; Luke 23:41, 47.

Chapter 4

1. We are not concerned here with the virgin birth of Jesus, for it is not used in the New Testament to demonstrate his Messiahship or deity, as is the resurrection. The case for the virgin birth is well argued in *The Virgin Birth* by John Gresham Machen, Lutterworth Press, 1958.
2. Following Henry Latham, *The Risen Master*, Leighton Bell, 1904.
3. This is clear from John's account of the burial clothes of Lazarus. For when Jesus resuscitated him, 'The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face' (11:44).
4. John 20:11–12; Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:6.

Chapter 5

1. Romans 3:22–23; 1 John 1:8, 10.
2. John 4:24 (TNIV).
3. Isaiah 29:13; Mark 7:6.
4. Mark 2:27.

Chapter 6

1. Isaiah 57:15 (TNIV); 1 Timothy 6:15–16; 1 John 1:5–6; Hebrews 12:29 (Deuteronomy 4:24); Isaiah 33:14; Habakkuk 1:13.
2. Exodus 3:1–6; Job 42:5–6; Isaiah 6:1–5; Ezekiel 1:26–28; Acts 9:1–9; 1 Corinthians 15:8; Revelation 1:9–17.
3. See, for instance, Matthew 25:30; Revelation 20:14–15; Luke 16:19–31.
4. Isaiah 59:1–2.
5. Mark 7:21–23 (TNIV).
6. Galatians 5:19–21.
7. Romans 6:17; Ephesians 2:3; Titus 3:3.
8. James 3:1–12 (TNIV).
9. Studdert Kennedy.
10. *Christianity and Social Order*, 1942; SCM Press edition, 1950, pp. 36–37.

Chapter 7

1. Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 4:14.
2. John 3:16; Colossians 1:19–20.
3. Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22.
4. Zechariah 13:7; cf. Mark 14:27; Daniel 9:25–26; Isaiah 53; Luke 24:46.
5. Mark 8:31; Luke 12:50; John 17:1; 12:27–28; 18:11; Matthew 26:53–54.
6. Galatians 2:20; 6:14; 1 Corinthians 1:22–24; 2:2; 15:3.
7. Hebrews 9:26; Revelation 5:5, 6, 12.
8. 1 Peter 2:18–25.
9. Mark 10:45; Matthew 26:28.
10. 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 3:18 (TNIV); 1 John 3:5.
11. Leviticus 5:17 (TNIV).
12. Leviticus 10:17; 16:22.
13. 1 Peter 1:2, 18, 19.
14. Galatians 2:21.

Chapter 8

1. See John 3:3–7 (TNIV).
2. 2 Corinthians 5:17, literally.
3. See John 16:7 (TNIV); 14:17.
4. See Acts 2:4; Ephesians 5:18; Romans 8:9 (TNIV).
5. Galatians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 6:19.
6. Matthew 28:19; 16:18.
7. Galatians 3:29.
8. Ephesians 4:3–4; Philippians 2:1; 2 Corinthians 13:14.

Chapter 9

1. Luke 14:28–30 (TNIV).
2. Mark 8:34–38 (TNIV).
3. Philippians 2:10–11.
4. Matthew 10:34, 37.
5. 2 Corinthians 6:14.
6. Mark 8:38; Matthew 10:32–33 (TNIV).
7. Mark 8:35–37.

Chapter 10

1. Revelation 3:20 (TNIV).
2. Proverbs 27:1; Hebrews 3:7–8.

Chapter 11

1. See, for example, Acts 17:28.
2. For our heavenly Father's care, see Matthew 6:7–13, 25–34 and 7:7–12, and for his discipline, Hebrews 12:3–11 (TNIV).
3. 1 John 5:10–12 (TNIV).
4. See also the systematic aids offered by the Navigators, Turner House, 54 The Avenue, Southampton SO17 1XQ, http://www.navigators.co.uk.
5. Romans 5:5; 8:15–16.
6. See Romans 8:9–17 (TNIV).
7. 1 John 1:9; 2:1–2 (TNIV).
8. 1 Peter 2:2.
9. Galatians 5:16, 22–23.
10. Organizations such as Scripture Union publish schemes and notes for various age groups and interests. Inter-Varsity Press publish for students and others *Search the Scriptures* (an advanced course lasting three years).
11. For instance, *The New Bible Commentary*, revised edition edited by D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer and G. J. Wenham (Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), also available on CD as part of the IVP Bible Study Collection.
12. See, for instance, 2 Corinthians 6:14.
13. See, for example, 1 Peter 2:11; Philippians 3:20; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18.

About the Author

John Stott

John R. W. Stott (1921-2011) has been known worldwide as a preacher, evangelist and communicator of Scripture. For many years he served as rector of All Souls Church in London, where he carried out an effective urban pastoral ministry. A leader among evangelicals in Britain, the United States and around the world, Stott was a principal framer of the landmark Lausanne Covenant (1974). His many books, including *Why I Am a Christian* and *The Cross of Christ*, have sold millions of copies around the world and in dozens of languages.

Whether in the West or in the Two-Thirds World, a hallmark of Stott's ministry has been expository preaching that addresses the hearts and minds of contemporary men and women. Stott was honored by *Time* magazine in 2005 as one of the "100 Most Influential People in the World."

The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling

What is a life of radical discipleship? At root, it means we let Jesus set the agenda of our lives. We aren't selective. We don't pick and choose what is congenial and stay away from what is costly. No. He is Lord of all of life.

In the last book by the leading evangelical churchman of the twentieth century, John Stott opens up what it means at root to be a follower of Jesus. He explores eight aspects of Christian discipleship which are too often neglected and yet deserve to be taken seriously.

Here, including the last public sermon he ever preached, Stott offers wisdom gained from a lifetime of consistent Christian commitment. In addition, he poignantly reflects on his last years of life and ministry.

The message is simple, classic and personal: Jesus is Lord. He calls. We follow.

+Christian Leadership

The most influential leader in the early church was undoubtedly the apostle Paul. He never lost the vision of God's single new humanity--Jews and Gentiles together. And in his letters we watch him exercising his leadership skills among the early Christians.

This study guide by John Stott is based on his book *Basic Christian Leadership* and covers the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, in which Paul responds to a complex church situation and to questions the Corinthians have

addressed to him. He does so with clarity, wisdom, humility, love and gentleness--qualities that we can learn from as leaders today.

+The Cross

+Sermon on the Mount

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Through his Son, Jesus Christ, God offers you his love.

How can you know God's love? How can you trust Jesus? Six studies based on John Stott's *Basic Christianity* explore the life and character of this man who altered history forever. Discover him here for the first time; or meet him again in a new and deeper way.

Christian Leadership

The most influential leader in the early church was undoubtedly the apostle Paul. He never lost the vision of God's single new humanity--Jews and Gentiles together. And in his letters we watch him exercising his leadership skills among the early Christians.

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The Cross

Sermon on the Mount

Christian Mission in the Modern World

In recent years, the mission of the church has been defined in two almost exclusive ways. On the one hand are those who say the church must focus on evangelism and discipleship alone. On the other hand are those who advocate concentrating almost solely on societal reform.

In this classic book, John Stott shows that Christian mission must encompass *both* evangelism and social action. He begins with careful definitions of five key terms--*mission, evangelism, dialogue, salvation* and *conversion.* Then, through a thorough biblical exploration of these concepts, Stott provides a model for ministry to people's spiritual and physical needs alike.

Ultimately, Stott points to the example of Jesus, who modeled both the

Great Commission of proclamation and the Great Commandment of love and service. This balanced, holistic approach to mission points the way forward for the work of the church in the world.

Contents

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The Fight: A Practical Handbook for Christian Living

by John White

"As you enter the Christian life, you may have periods of darkness or of doubt. You may encounter painful struggle and discouragement. But there will also be moments of exultation and glory. And most important of all, you will become free."

There is joy and triumph in the Christian life. But the victory can come through struggle. John White knows this balance and gives us the encouragement to persevere.

Here is John White's classic guide to the basic areas of Christian living we wrestle with throughout our lives: faith, prayer, temptation, evangelism, guidance, Bible study, fellowship and work. White offers new Christians sound first steps and older Christians refreshing insights into the struggles and joys of freedom in Christ.

"If praying, studying the Bible, getting guidance, getting along with fellow Christians, witnessing, and the like are struggles for ou, here's your book," says *Christianity Today*.

The Cost of Commitment

by John White

"The way of the cross is a magnificent obsession with a heavenly pearl, beside which everything else in life has no value."

Following Christ, says John White, is not cheap. The cost is substantial. There will be suffering and loss. But the benefits, rewards and joys that come with our commitment to him are well worth the sacrifices that must be made to answer the call to Christ.

Consider the cost. Then take up your cross. And follow Jesus in the only life worth living.

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