



Lead U Foundations  
Participant's Guide

Note: The Lead U Participant's Guide has been written by Kyle D. Rapinchuk for the purposes of Lead U discipleship at First Baptist Church Branson of Branson, Missouri. However, we hope that others will utilize our resources in their own discipleship program, so permission is granted to reproduce this participant's guide, provided it is not sold, to church members, students, or others who wish to complete this course.

## Lead U Foundations Schedule

Session 1: The Role of Theology in Discipleship (Dr. Kyle Rapinchuk)

*Why is theology important for discipleship?*

Session 2: The Drama of Doctrine (Dr. Kyle Rapinchuk)

*What is the Gospel? What is the story of the Bible? How do we live out and live in this story?*

Session 3: The Doctrine of Scripture (Dr. Jay Todd)

*What is the Bible? How did we get it? How should we read it?*

Session 4: The Doctrine of God (Dr. Kyle Rapinchuk)

*Who is God? What is the Trinity? Who is the Father?*

Session 5: The Doctrine of the Son, Jesus Christ (Dr. Kyle Rapinchuk)

*Who is the Son of God? Who is Jesus? What is the Incarnation?*

Session 6: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Church (Dr. Brad Pardue)

*Who is the Holy Spirit? What is the Church?*

Session 7: The Doctrine of Man and Sin (Dr. Jay Todd)

*What is man? What is the imago Dei? What is our purpose? What is sin?*

Session 8: The Doctrine of Salvation/Redemption (Dr. Kyle Rapinchuk)

*What are salvation, justification, adoption, sanctification, and perseverance?*

Session 9: The Doctrine of Eschatology/Last Things (Dr. Kyle Rapinchuk)

*What is the end? What is the judgment? What is the resurrection?*

Session 10: Southern Baptist Distinctives (Dr. Neil Franks)

*What are Southern Baptist distinctives? What is the Baptist Faith & Message?*

## What is Lead U?

Lead U is a formal discipleship program aimed at training Christians in and through the local church in order better to accomplish the biblical call for disciples who follow Jesus. We believe that discipleship includes the call to be disciple-makers, and being disciple-makers requires being equipped to instruct others in, at the very least, the foundational aspects of the Christian faith.

At fbcBranson, we have defined a disciple as one who displays Christ-like attitude, Christ-like actions, and Christ-like accountability.

- ❖ *Attitude*: in prayer concerning all things and applying Scripture's teachings in all things
- ❖ *Action*: serving all, sacrificing for the kingdom
- ❖ *Accountability*: to be mentored/disciple by someone, while mentoring or discipling someone else

Our process is...

- ❖ *Discovering* a person who needs the gospel
- ❖ *Developing* through discipling and mentoring
- ❖ *Deploying* them in places where they can grow and repeat the process.

In addition to discipling the members of the local church, however, we also hope that Lead U can be a means to train up lay leaders and future vocational ministers by equipping them with the knowledge, practice, and mentoring needed to grow into roles that God may be calling them to in the future.

Although subject to change, the following is an example for how the Lead U curriculum may develop beyond this initial Foundations level class.

### **LeadU<sub>1</sub> Foundations (summer and/or video):**

- Theology & Christian Discipleship 101—Foundations: An Introduction to Theology and the Christian Life

### **LeadU<sub>2</sub> (Fall—7-8 weeks each):**

- Christian Discipleship 201: Drama of Doctrine: Learning to Live in God's Story
- Theology 201: Doctrine of the Church

### **LeadU<sub>3</sub> (Spring—7-8 weeks each):**

- Christian Discipleship 301: Church/Baptist History & Historical Theology
- Theology 301: Doctrine of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

### **LeadU<sub>4</sub> (Fall—7-8 weeks each):**

- Christian Discipleship 401: Doctrine of Scripture & Principles of Interpretation
- Theology 401: Doctrine of Man, Sin, and Salvation/Redemption

### **LeadU<sub>5</sub> (Spring—7-8 weeks each):**

- Christian Discipleship 501: Spiritual Disciplines and the Christian Life
- Theology 501: Doctrine of Eschatology/Last Things

### **LeadU<sub>6</sub> (As needed):**

- Pastoral Discipleship and Leadership Training

## How to Use the Participant's Guide

The participant's guide is designed for those involved in the Lead U program to take as much away from each lesson as possible, both with respect to information received and in-session application of the concepts.

For each session, the participant's guide will include a brief introduction to the topic to be addressed during that session. Following this introduction, the guide will provide discussion questions designed to help learners immediately apply material they have learned. Third, the participant's guide will provide suggested reading and other resources that will help learners dive deeper into the material. In most cases, we have identified recommended resources at a variety of levels so participants from beginner to more advanced levels can get the most out of the study.

Finally, the last section in each session is the recommended reading to be done in preparation for the next week from our companion volume, *Christian Beliefs: 20 Basics Every Christian Should Know* by Wayne Grudem. Although participants can attend the study without doing the reading, we recommend that all participants complete this reading in advance of the session to allow for the best learning possible.



## Introduction: What is discipleship?



### **The nature of Christian discipleship**

A full discussion of discipleship would take a long time to develop fully from Scripture. We do think, however, that discipleship has three clear “stages.” First, we must become disciples ourselves through repentance and trust in Jesus Christ (God-focused). Second, we must respond to Jesus’ command for what disciples are supposed to do (others-focused).

Third, we must daily assess our heart, our motivations, and our life (self-focused).

*First, discipleship is a commitment to follow.* Jesus called his disciples with a very simple command: follow me. What does it mean to follow Jesus? I have asked this question of many students and received some great answers in response.

“Following Jesus is believing and submitting to God and His Word, surrendering all you have and are to Him, and letting Him change you from the inside out, conforming your heart to the image of Christ and being set apart from the rest of the world, desiring Him above all else and letting loving God and loving others be the driving force in all you do.”

“To follow Jesus is to accept Him as the perfect sacrifice, repent of your sins, and seek a relationship with the LORD, welcome the Holy Spirit, and strive for a Christ-like life.”

“Following Jesus is loving God and others through the way we live, conforming closer to God’s will and Christ’s character each day, and living our entire lives in view of advancing the kingdom of Christ.”

“To follow Jesus is to humbly surrender your life to Him and embrace His mindset of loving God and loving others.”

Following Jesus, as suggested by the definitions above, looks like developing Christ-like character that manifests itself in loving God and others. It means surrendering our own will and our own plan to God’s will and God’s plan as expressed through His Son, Jesus Christ. Discipleship, in this sense, is God-focused.

*Second, discipleship is a commitment to make disciples.* Jesus’ final command to his disciples was to make more disciples (Matt 28:19-20), and making more disciples meant not only converting and baptizing them, but teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded. Teachings like the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) are certainly in mind here. But notice that Jesus’ words in this Great Commission are also commands. To teach new disciples to observe all that Jesus commanded means to teach disciples to make new disciples and teach them to make new disciples. It is a self-perpetuating process; it is a process of multiplication. We might rightfully ask, “If I am not making disciples, what

biblical grounds do I have for calling myself a disciple?” Discipleship, in this sense, is others-focused.

*Third, discipleship is a commitment to die. Yes, die. And we don't only intend the obvious spiritual meaning like dying to ourselves and taking up our cross daily (Luke 9:23), dying to sin (1 Pet 2:24), and dying to our old self (Eph 4:22ff; Col 3:9ff). We also mean that we must be prepared to die. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, “when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.” Most of the apostles lost their life as martyrs for their faith. Hundreds of thousands have done the same in the two millennia since Jesus' ascension. God does not ordain that all of Jesus' followers will die as martyrs, but He does demand that we are prepared to do so if necessary. We must consider our motives for following Jesus. Do we treasure Jesus so much that we are committed to the belief that to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil 1:21)? We must test our hearts, our minds, our motives, and our lives every day to ensure we are following Jesus, making disciples, and treasuring Jesus above anything this life has to offer. Discipleship, in this sense, is self-focused, but only in the sense that we assess ourselves to direct our gaze back where it belongs—on Jesus Christ.*

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. As mentioned in this introduction, this only scratches the surface of discipleship. What else do you see as important in a discussion on discipleship?
2. Read Acts 18:24-28. In what ways do Priscilla and Aquila advance Apollos' discipleship?
3. Who has discipled you in your life? How did they disciple you and why was it effective (or ineffective)?
4. Who are you discipling in your life right now? How could you begin or do a better job of doing this in your daily life?
5. What excuses do we make for not making disciples? How can we overcome these?

### ***Recommended Resources on Discipleship:***

Beginner:

- *Multiply* by Francis Chan
- *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* by Mark Dever
- *Gospel-Centered Discipleship* by Jonathan Dodson
- *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* by Eugene Peterson
- *Follow Me* by David Platt

Intermediate:

- *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Conversion and Discipleship* by Bill Hull and Scot McKnight



## Session 1: The Role of Theology in Discipleship



### What does studying theology have to do with discipleship?

A.W. Tozer once wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”<sup>1</sup> We think he is right. Our very existence as an image-bearer of Almighty God requires that we reflect God as He is, not as we have incorrectly assumed Him to be. In order to live a life that reflects God’s glory to the fullest, we must have a proper understanding of who He is.

Tozer’s insight is nothing new. A proper view of God was also the concern of the early church. As the Church grew and expanded throughout the world, it became more and more important for the Church to ensure that local congregations were teaching true things about God. Two things became central to this task. The first was a clear articulation of which books were authoritative Scripture. Although each of the individual books of what we now know as the New Testament were largely recognized, accepted, and utilized as authoritative Scripture, the Church had not yet declared them to be so. At the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, and reaffirmed at subsequent councils, the New Testament as we know it was agreed upon. To this day, we agree (or ought to agree) that our understanding of God comes first and foremost through the revelation of Him in the Scriptures (Old and New Testament).

The second key thing was the Rule of Faith. The Rule (measure, not law) of Faith was a summary of the Scriptures and the apostolic teaching. The Rule of Faith began as an attempt to ensure that those seeking baptism held an orthodox faith. It also served as parameters for proper interpretation of Scripture; because these truths had been taught and passed down from the apostles to the Church, any interpretation that denied central truths of this “rule” was rightly deemed heretical. Heresy mattered because it was wrong thinking about God; wrong thinking about God not only led to improper responses to God, but led, especially in extreme cases, to worshiping a false god.<sup>2</sup> The most popular form in which this Rule of Faith has been passed down to us is the Apostles’ Creed, which is quoted on the next page.

As Christians, we should have a commitment to sound doctrine. This, of course, should be foundational to our churches. Not only do we seek to teach true doctrine, we also ensure that the songs that we sing declare true things about

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<sup>1</sup>A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperOne, 1961), 1.

<sup>2</sup>A good example was Arianism, which claimed that the Son of God was a created being, which has been revived by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

God as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. Moreover, it is not simply a belief that *when* we teach we ought to do it rightly, though this is obviously true; rather, it is a belief that we must regularly teach sound doctrine so as to instruct each other in truth, correct possible misconceptions, and encourage one another to think rightly about God. If discipleship involves teaching others to obey Jesus' commandments (Matt 28), sound doctrine and theology would seem to be an integral part of that endeavor. This is why theology is important in a discussion of discipleship, and this is what the LeadU curriculum is designed to do.

### **Apostles' Creed<sup>3</sup>**

*I believe in God,  
the Father Almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ,  
his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by  
the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died,  
and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand  
of the Father.  
He will come again to judge  
the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.*

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What comes to your mind when you think about God?
2. How important a role has sound doctrine played in your life? Your church?
3. In what ways can you imagine that wrong doctrine could affect your lifestyle and/or your relationship with God?

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<sup>3</sup>Because the Apostles' Creed was not recorded first in English, there are various translations, just as there would be with English Bible translations. We follow the phrase "descended to the dead" rather than hell, based on a number of factors. For those familiar with the Apostles' Creed, this is the only "major" change.

4. What stands out to you from the Apostles' Creed (surprising, confusing, interesting, thought-provoking, something missing, etc.)?
5. What area of your understanding about God needs the most instruction, clarification, or correction? How can you grow in this area?

***Recommended Resources on Theology:***

**Beginner:**

- *Christian Beliefs: 20 Basics Every Christian Should Know* by Wayne Grudem
- *I Believe* by Alister McGrath
- *Affirming the Apostles' Creed* by J. I. Packer

**Intermediate:**

- *What Christians Ought to Believe* by Michael Bird
- *Doctrine* by Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears
- *Delighting in the Trinity* by Michael Reeves

**Advanced:**

- *A Theology for the Church* edited by Danny Akin
- *Christian Theology* by Millard Erickson
- *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem
- *Theology: The Basics* by Alister McGrath
- *The Apostles' Creed* video series by Vision Video

***Homework:***

- Read Session 2: The Drama of Doctrine



## Session 2: The Drama of Doctrine

*What is the Gospel? What is the story of the Bible? How do we live out and live in this story?*



The Bible presents a rich tapestry of truth in a variety of genres, cultures, and historical time periods through many different authors. The Bible has two testaments, three different languages, and 66 different books. It would be easy and understandable to view Scripture as a random collection of individual books—but it would be an inadequate way of ascertaining all that Scripture aims to teach us. This session intends to explain how the Bible can be, and we argue should be, understood as a single story—the true story of the whole world.

Although the Bible has many different genres, the majority of the Bible is narrative. There are plenty of good reasons for this fact, but we will only consider a few. First, stories capture our attention and keep our interest. If someone were to ask us about our day, and we chose to respond with a bullet point list of things we did, the response would be informative, and boring, and the listener will likely suffer it for only a short time before changing the subject. They will also likely remember precious little of the response. Responding with a story, however, not only captures and keeps the listener's attention, but it also helps the attentive listener remember far more of what is said. Stories are simply easier to recall than a list of facts. Stories have natural transitions, discernible structures, and memorable hooks to keep information in order.

I am reminded of my daughter Ana. At the dinner table, I will ask my children how their day was at school and what they learned. Ana, in preschool, rarely communicated more than a few bullet points about coloring pictures, learning a letter, and playing outside, even though she is an excellent talker. One day, though, her teacher had told her a story. I sat mesmerized as my five year old daughter told me a five minute story with barely a pause to remember what came next. More recently, my oldest daughter Karis, who mysteriously has the same "I learned nothing at school" response syndrome, was sitting in a group of college students who were discussing the gospel. I asked the students to communicate the story of the gospel in 2-3 minutes. Two students came up to me afterwards and told me that while they all sat around thinking, Karis, a six-year old first grader, had communicated the whole gospel from creation to resurrection. After my immediate reaction of pride in my daughter, I began to wonder whether this incident did not prove my point all along. I had been trying to stress that the gospel is not a list of propositions about God and Jesus, but a

story, *the* story of Jesus as the resolution of the story of the whole world.<sup>4</sup> A six year old knew the story, but eight college students struggled to articulate a response—we have taught them to forget about stories as they grow up, and we are missing out on so much as a result.

It makes sense, then, that if authors wanted to communicate information of the greatest significance that they would do so in a story. Going beyond genre, however, the Bible as a whole has a story-like quality to it. Consider how it begins and ends in the garden with the river and the tree of life (Gen 1-2//Rev 21-22). This is a classic bookending technique of stories. This is but one of dozens of examples of the Bible's story-like quality. The question, then, is not so much if the Bible has a story to tell, but what that story is. Many excellent books have been written on this topic (several are recommended at the end of this section), but two stand out as particularly helpful to our task.

## The Mission of God

The first is from a book called *The Mission of God* by Christopher Wright.<sup>5</sup> In this book Wright argues that we ought to approach the Bible as the revelation of God's mission and the *participation* in it of God's people, which serves then as a framework for understanding the whole of Scripture. It is both theological (telling us about God) and hermeneutical (an approach that teaches us how to read Scripture properly). According to Wright:

The Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation. The Bible is the drama of this God of purpose engaged in the mission of achieving that purpose universally, embracing past, present and future, Israel and the nations, 'life, the universe and everything,' and with its center, focus, climax, and completion in Jesus Christ. Mission is not just one of a long list of things that the Bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in that much-abused phrase, 'what it's all about.'<sup>6</sup>

Wright goes on to argue that our engagement with God's world "means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation."<sup>7</sup> Understood in this manner, the Old Testament becomes a story of Israel's role of being a light to the nations, the means of bringing redemptive blessing of God to all the nations of the world, as originally promised in the

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<sup>4</sup>Based on Scot McKnight's definition in *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 12.

<sup>5</sup>Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 22-23.

covenant with Abraham.<sup>8</sup> In the New Testament, Jesus identifies himself not only as the Old Testament Messiah, but also as the object of the meaning of the entire Old Testament Scripture. The entire meaning of the Old Testament finds its focus and fulfillment in both his death and resurrection and in the mission to all nations, which flows out of that event.<sup>9</sup>

## Drama of Scripture

The second helpful source is *The Drama of Scripture* by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen.<sup>10</sup> Their work builds well upon this mission of God storyline. They begin by highlighting two important truths. First, the Bible must be understood in the context of the one storyline of Scripture. Every event, book, character, command, prophecy, and poem of Scripture must be understood in light of this one storyline. They argue that the Bible is “a unified and progressively unfolding drama of God’s action in history for the salvation of the whole world.”<sup>11</sup> Second, they emphasize that the story of the Bible alone tells the true story of the world. It is not merely a set of beliefs, but it is “public truth”—it is the way the world actually is and came to be. Consequently, “faith in Jesus should be the means through which a Christian seeks to understand all of life and the whole of history.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition to this concept of mission, they seek to address the comprehensive scope of God’s redemptive work in creation and emphasize the believer’s own place within the biblical story. In order to bring together these three main emphases, they orient the whole of Scripture around the ideas of covenant and kingdom of God, which roughly represent the Old Testament and New Testament respectively. However, they explain the relationship as follows: “When God’s people enter into a covenant relationship with him, they are obligated to be his subject people and to live under his reign. As we soon see, covenant also insists that we take seriously God’s purposes with the whole of creation. Thus, covenant and kingdom are like two sides of the same coin, evoking the same reality in slightly different ways.”<sup>13</sup>

Finally, by using the kingdom of God as the overarching theme of Scripture, they come up with a six-act structure of the Bible (See Figure 1 on next page). What is particularly helpful about this six act drama is the metaphor of a drama itself and what it entails. A drama is a production. It has script-writers, actors, and an audience. Taking an illustration from N.T. Wright, Bartholomew and Goheen tell

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<sup>8</sup>Wright, *Mission of God*, 31.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>10</sup>Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 24.

the story of a lost Shakespeare play. A group of professional Shakespearean actors seek to perform the play, but they find that the fifth and final act is missing. However, based on their understanding of Shakespeare and the first four acts of the play, they are able to improvise the fifth act in a manner that reflects Shakespeare quite well.<sup>14</sup>

<b>Act 1</b>	God establishes His kingdom: Creation
<b>Act 2</b>	Rebellion in the kingdom: Fall
<b>Act 3</b>	The King chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated <b>Scene 1:</b> A People for the king <b>Scene 2:</b> A Land for His people
<b>Interlude</b>	A Kingdom story waiting for an ending: the inter-testamental period
<b>Act 4</b>	The Coming of the King: Redemption Accomplished
<b>Act 5</b>	Spreading the news of the King: The mission of the Church <b>Scene 1:</b> From Jerusalem to Rome <b>Scene 2:</b> And into all the World
<b>Act 6</b>	The Return of the King: Redemption Completed

**Figure 1. Six Act Drama of Scripture<sup>15</sup>**

Now consider the biblical story in light of this analogy. We as Christians begin the drama in the audience. We are watching God create. We watch Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon serve the Lord. We watch Jesus come as a baby, teach, die, and rise again. And then all of the sudden, in the middle of the fifth act, we are transported from the audience to the stage. We are now actors in God's drama, but we do not have a script. Nevertheless, we know a great deal about God, the author of Scripture; we ought to know a great deal of the script that has come before; in fact, unlike the Shakespeare play, we also know the ending. We are now expected to complete our scene in the drama in a manner worthy of the God who has written the script.

In order to live out the drama that we find ourselves in, we must know the script that has come before and the God who has had a hand in writing it. Without a firm foundation in the teaching of Scripture, we have no basis for thinking that we can live as God intends for us to live. As we explore the story of Scripture as revealed in the Old and New Testaments, we need to keep in mind that it is

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 197; N.T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 27.



shaping our understanding not only of God's redemption of creation but also what we are called to do in the world in which we live.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How might understanding the Bible as a story aid in the presentation of the gospel? (e. g., think in terms of its flexibility related to various evangelistic encounters)
2. How familiar are you with the biblical story? Tell each other the story of the Bible in 2-3 minutes. Discuss how you can refine your story-telling to include the most important aspects and communicate the gospel in its greatest depth and clarity in that short amount of time.
3. What are some ways you can put this lesson into practice?

**Recommended Resources for the Drama of Doctrine and the Story of the Bible:**

Beginner:

- *The True Story of the Whole World* by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen
- *God's Big Picture* by Vaughan Roberts

Intermediate:

- *The Drama of Scripture* by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen
- *The Mission of God's People* by Christopher J. H. Wright

Advanced:

- *The Mission of God* by Christopher J. H. Wright
- "A Drama-of-Redemption Model" in *Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* by Kevin Vanhoozer

**Homework:**

Companion reading in Grudem's *Christian Beliefs* for next week:

- "What is the Bible?" (Chapter 1, 13-20)



## Session 3: The Doctrine of Scripture

*What is the Bible? How did we get it? How should we read it?*



We live in a technological age in which seemingly every answer is available to us through a Google search from our smart phones. Yet an honest look around our culture says that we are asking more questions than ever before. Important questions, too. Who am I? What is my purpose? Isn't there more to life than *this*!? And the questions go on and on. Google searches will reveal "answers" to these questions, but hastily typed blogs, chat room comments, and the like that appear on the results list of our search leave a sense of emptiness at their clear lack of authority for our own life. If only answers to our most important questions came from something or someone that could speak authoritatively to these issues.

As Christians, we intuitively know that the Bible is just such a book, an authoritative answer from God that answers our deepest questions. So why don't we read it!? Session 1 explored for us some shocking statistics about Bible illiteracy, not only in our culture, but more importantly within the Church. I suggest a number of reasons for why we don't read the Bible, not least of which is the fact that we have become much less of a reading culture. But a more important reason, I think, is that we have misguided notions about what the Bible is and what it is supposed to *do* for us, and if the Bible does not live up to these expectations, then we simply stop reading it, even if we still claim its authority and importance. If we can correct these notions and replace them with a correct view of the nature of Scripture and the proper skills and tools for how to read it well, I think we will go a long way towards not only become better readers of Scripture, but we will find ourselves reading Scripture more frequently.

### Misguided Notions

So what are these misguided notions? The first might be surprising: *the Bible gives me the answer to all life's problems and questions*. Let me explain. In one sense, the Bible does indeed give us answers to all life's problems and questions insofar as it points us to the God who, through Jesus and through the Scriptures, has taught us how to live in relationship with him, something that obviously impacts every area of our life and thereby helps answer our questions about how to live. But most people don't mean that when they say *the Bible gives me the answer to all life's problems and questions*. What they often mean is that the Bible functions like an FAQ section on website. "What's my problem today? I'll go check the answer in the Bible?" This leads to verses taken out of context in an attempt to make the Bible do something (give me a direct answer to my specific

question) that it isn't meant to do. A second misguided notion is what we often mean when we say that *the Bible was written to me*. It is true, in God's providence, the written words of Scripture were inspired, preserved, and presented *to us* as God's Word for all people and all time. In this way, we can say that the Bible is written *to me* and *for me*, though not exclusively me, but rather everyone. But it is a far different statement to say that the Bible is written *to me* in the sense that it is a *direct* correspondence from God to me. God does speak *to me* through the Scriptures, but he does so through human authors, inspired by the Holy Spirit, who were writing to specific audiences in specific historical situations. If we fail to recognize this reality about Scripture, we again begin to take Scripture out of context. We must first understand the meaning of the text according to the intent of the original author so that we can rightly ascertain its significance for and impact on my life today. This, however, is hard work, which leads to the third misguided notion: *The clarity of Scripture means that it is easy to understand and I shouldn't have to work hard to figure out its significance for my life today*. The Bible is clear—scholars often speak of this idea as the perspicuity of Scripture. And indeed, many passages are clear, straightforward, and easily applicable to our lives. But the clarity of Scripture means that all things necessary for salvation are sufficiently clear for proper understanding and response, not that every passage of Scripture is easy to figure out.

Consider, then, what happens to believers who approach the Bible with these notions. A problem arises, a question needs answering, and they cannot find the Bible verse that directly answers their questions. "Is the Bible not sufficient since it doesn't answer my question? Maybe I missed it? Maybe this verse, even though it seems to mean something else, is actually the answer to my question?" Or consider the second notion, that the Bible was written directly *to me*. "I started my Bible reading plan. Genesis and the first part of Exodus have some pretty cool stories, though I haven't yet figured out what they mean to me. But this Tabernacle, and Leviticus, or really the rest of the Old Testament (except Psalms and Proverbs)? Maybe I'll just jump to Paul's letters. Those were written *to me*." And so we find ourselves as New Testament only (sometimes even Paul-only) Bible readers. Third, a misguided notion regarding the clarity of Scripture can lead us to a couple false ideas. On one hand we might believe falsely that because the Bible is not clear somewhere, then the Bible really isn't clear anywhere and can't be trusted. On the other hand, we might begin to believe that whatever my first thought is after reading a text must be the right meaning since the Bible is clear and easily understood.

These are just a few representative examples of misguided notions we have about Scripture. As with our discussion of the gospel, it is not that they are completely false, but merely that they lack precision and therefore have the potential to lead us into the kinds of problems explored above.

## What is the Bible?

If the Bible is not meant to be an answer book written directly *to me* so simply as never to require hard work, then what is it? Drawing from sessions one and two, if the gospel is the story of Jesus as the resolution of the story of Israel and the whole world, and the story of Scripture is in some ways the script of a drama in which we begin in the audience, learning about the script and the script-writer so that we can faithfully live out our part when we are thrust onto the stage, then we get closer, I think, to what the Bible is and does. As Jesus teaches in Luke 24, all the Law, Prophets, and Psalms speak of him. This does not mean that we try to insert Jesus into every verse of the Old Testament; it does mean that the overarching message of the entirety of the Old Testament (and all of Scripture) points us to Jesus. Jesus is the message of the Old and New Testaments alike. It is his story, not merely history, and as a result, it becomes our story.

Additionally, seeing the Bible as God's inspired story is a necessary corrective to many who, attempting to avoid the misguided notions discussed above, have gone too far in the other direction, treating the Bible as a history book that has no bearing on us at all. Rather, we need to strike a delicate balance, learning what the Bible teaches in its historical context, but then also rightly appropriating that teaching to live it out. Rowan Williams writes, "The Bible is not intended to be a mere chronicle of past events, but a living communication from God, telling us *now* what we need to know for our salvation."<sup>16</sup> If we can learn to balance diligent, thoughtful study of the Scriptures that takes seriously the challenges it presents us alongside embracing the reality the God still speaks to and for us through these same Scriptures, it is not only true that we will understand Scripture better, but we will also begin to delight in reading Scripture since we will remove our self-imposed obstacles to reading Scripture when we rightly understand its purpose in pointing us to Jesus and how to live in relationship with him.

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. What hinders you from reading Scripture? What are the biggest obstacles you face in reading Scripture?
2. What is a time in your life when the Scriptures clearly spoke to your situation at that time?
3. How have you been comforted or challenged through reading Scripture?
4. Do you delight in God's Word? Why or why not?
5. What tools do you use to help you read Scripture well?

### ***Recommended Resources for the Doctrine of Scripture & How to Read the Bible***

Beginner:

- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart
- *Read the Bible for Life* by George Guthrie

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<sup>16</sup>Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 33.

- *Knowing Scripture* by R. C. Sproul

Intermediate:

- *Grasping God's Word* by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays
- *Eat This Book* by Eugene Peterson
- *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* by Robert Stein
- *How to Read the Bible Through the Jesus Lens* by Michael Williams

Advanced:

- *On Christian Doctrine* by Saint Augustine of Hippo

### **Homework**

Companion reading in Grudem's *Christian Beliefs* for next week:

- "What is God Like?" (Chapter 2, 21-36)
- "What is the Trinity?" (Chapter 3, 37-42)







## Session 4: The Doctrine of God

*Who is God? What is the Trinity? Who is the Father?*



What is God like? This question has been asked in every culture in every age of history. Yet despite the frequency with which it has been asked, few questions have been considered more difficult and mysterious than the question of the nature of God. For Christians, however, we have immeasurable help. Not only has God revealed himself in his creation, but he has also revealed himself through the eternal Word, the Son Jesus Christ, and through his written Word, the Bible. In John 14:9 these two forms of revelation collide in Jesus' statement that "he who has seen me has seen the Father." The Word of God, the Bible, records the words of *the eternal Word*, claiming that he is the revelation of what God the Father is like. In Colossians 1:15 we see that Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" and Hebrews 1:3 declares Jesus to be "the exact imprint of his [the Father's] nature." Simply put, if we want to learn what God is like, we look to Jesus.

### The Attributes of God

When scholars discuss what God is like, they often begin by describing his attributes. In his excellent work *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer defines an attribute of God as "whatever God has in any way revealed as being true of Himself."<sup>17</sup> Among commonly identified attributes are God's self-existence and self-sufficiency, his eternality, his power, presence, justice, holiness, love, grace, mercy, sovereignty, and faithfulness. As Tozer rightly asserts, "the study of the attributes of God, far from being dull and heavy, may for the enlightened Christian be a sweet and absorbing spiritual exercise."<sup>18</sup> We hope that our exploration of who God is will be this kind of sweet spiritual exercise that not only informs our minds, but also warms our hearts and grows our affection for God.

### The Trinity

At the heart of who our God is, however, is not a list of attributes but the eternal love of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity, though standing as the central doctrine that differentiates Christianity from all other religions, is often ignored. We considered this sad reality in session one. Unfortunately a Foundations study such as this one can only begin to introduce some of the terminology and expressions of this doctrine as it has been approached in the history of the Church. A survey of the New Testament

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<sup>17</sup>A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961), 12.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

provides ample evidence that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all recognized as God. Most obviously, the New Testament often uses “God” as a shorthand reference to God the Father. With respect to Jesus, we see this in numerous passages, such as John 1:1, John 8:58, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:15-20, and Hebrews 1:1-4 among numerous others. The Holy Spirit is likewise identified as God in John 3:8, Acts 5:1-4, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 1 Corinthians 6:20, and other passages as well. And yet, the New Testament also makes clear that Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit do not constitute additional gods; rather the New Testament affirms the Oneness of God (articulated so clearly in the OT in Deut 6) in passages such as 1 Corinthians 8:4, 1 Timothy 2:5, and James 2:19.

How, then, is this to be reconciled? Can  $1+1+1=1$ , critics ask? The answer lies in recognizing a difference between the one substance of God and the three persons of God. If we say God is one person and three persons, or similarly one substance and three substances, then we contradict ourselves. But to say that we have three persons and one substance, while mysterious in some ways, is not contradictory. Others criticize Christianity by arguing that the Trinity is a doctrine that was “invented” later on to garner power over non-Trinitarians. But this is not only bad history, it is a poor reading of the New Testament. For example, already well-known passages as the Great Commission in Matthew 28 speak of baptizing in the *name* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Moreover, Richard Bauckham has demonstrated convincingly a very early high Christology; that is, Jesus is already recognized as God in the New Testament in a very important way, namely that he is included in the unique divine identity of Yahweh.<sup>19</sup> Simply summarized, Bauckham shows that the first century Jews were strictly monotheistic, yet when these Jewish Christians (e. g. Peter, Paul, etc.) write their letters and preach their sermons, they attribute to Jesus four things unique to Yahweh alone—the name above all names (Phil 2:5-11; Heb 1:4), the agent of creation (John 1; Col 1; Heb 1), his sovereignty over all things (John 3:35; 13:3; 16:15; Acts 10:36; 1 Cor 15:27-28), and being worthy of worship (Matt 28:17; Phil 2:9-11; Rev 4:11//5:9).

By the time the Council of Nicaea came around in AD 325 to deal with the issue of Arianism, the doctrine of the Trinity, though not formally stated by the Church, was already taught by Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and others in terms that came to be officially utilized and adopted at Nicaea. The Nicene Creed declared that the orthodox teaching of the Scriptures and ascribed to by the Church was that the Son was of the same substance (*homoousian*) with the Father, and that God was one substance/essence in three persons. One of the leading defenders of the Trinity during this tumultuous time was Athanasius. The Athanasian Creed, though not authored by Athanasius, summarizes well his defense of the Trinity. The Creed declares the following:

And the catholic [i. e., universal] faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing

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<sup>19</sup>Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.

Although we admit we can never fully understand the Trinity or the nature of God, that does not mean we cannot know God as he has revealed himself. And the wonderful reality is that God has chosen to reveal a great deal about himself, such that we can grow day after day in our understanding of him without ever exhausting the fullness of who he is.

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. What attribute of God is most difficult for you to understand?
2. How can knowing God as Father be comforting? How would you talk about the Fatherhood of God to someone who has had a bad experience with their earthly father?
3. Spend a few minutes explaining to each other the Trinity and why it is important. What areas of our Christian life does our understanding of God as Trinity daily influence? What about our relationship with others?

### ***Recommended Reading on The Doctrine of God and the Trinity***

Beginner:

- *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer
- *The Pleasures of God* by John Piper
- *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer

Intermediate:

- *Delighting in the Trinity* by Michael Reeves
- *Knowing God the Father through the Old Testament* by Christopher Wright

Advanced:

- *The Trinity (De Trinitate)* by Saint Augustine
- *Jesus and the God of Israel* by Richard Bauckham

### ***Homework***

Companion reading in Grudem's *Christian Beliefs* for next week:

- "Who is Christ?" (Chapter 9, 67-71)



## Session 5: The Doctrine of the Son of God, Jesus Christ

*Who is the Son of God? Who is Jesus? What is the Incarnation?*



One of the more difficult doctrines to explain in depth is the full humanity and fully deity of Jesus Christ. In theological terms, the two natures of Christ in the one person is called the *hypostatic union*. And yet despite its difficulty, the identity of Jesus as the God-man is absolutely essential to the Christian faith. Saint Anselm of Canterbury once explained redemption in the following terms: since “no one save God can make it and no one save man ought to make it, it is necessary for a God-Man to make it.”<sup>20</sup> Others have rightly pointed out that our eternity is determined by our answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?”, and how we live in response to that question.

### What is the Incarnation?

The word incarnation is literally “in the flesh” or “becoming flesh.” Although it never occurs in Scripture, “nevertheless it conveys the idea that in Jesus we see the perfect and permanent union of humanity and deity without either of these natures being impaired.”<sup>21</sup> The doctrine of the incarnation is the belief that the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). The central statement, and also the most important difficulty to resolve, of the incarnation is that Jesus is both *fully* God and *fully* man. Although the New Testament clearly teaches both truths, we do not get systematic explanations of *how* these two natures are united in the one person. As a result, despite numerous passages that help us in understanding this relationship, several false teachings arose, some which had more followers than others.

Among these early Christological heresies were Arianism, Apollinarianism, and Nestorianism. Just as the Council of Nicaea was a response to the Trinitarian heresy of Arianism, subsequent councils dealt with the problems created by these false teachings. At the Council of Constantinople in 381, Arianism and Apollinarianism were condemned. At the Council of Ephesus in 431, Nestorianism was the primary false teaching addressed. In 451 at the Council of Chalcedon, the bishops present sought to confirm the terms of Christological orthodoxy so that all of these false teachings were rightly understood as outside

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<sup>20</sup>Anselm, “Christ’s Atonement for Sin,” in *Readings in Christian Thought*, Second Edition, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 89.

<sup>21</sup>David K. Naugle, *Philosophy: A Student’s Guide*, Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 55.

the bounds of orthodoxy. Their conclusion, known as the Symbol of Chalcedon (or, Chalcedonian Creed) became and has remained the standard, orthodox statement of the doctrine of the incarnation. In this statement, the focus is on recognizing the unity of the two natures, explaining this relationship by means of what the relationship is not. It is a unity *without* confusion, *without* change, *without* division, *without* separation.

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, *inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.<sup>22</sup>

## Who is Jesus?

Beyond these difficult questions, however, lie other extremely important truths that Scripture reveals about the identity of Jesus. He is the Son of God, the eternal Word (John 1), the second person of the Trinity who has assumed human flesh. He is the Son of Man, both the prototype for all humanity, what humanity is supposed to be like, but also the divine figure of Daniel 7. He is the Christ, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah, meaning anointed one. This means he is the long-expected king who would bring about redemption, the son of David who is also the Son of God (2 Sam 7). Not only is he the promised king, but he is also the promised prophet (Deut 18:15-18; Matt 17; Acts 3). He is likewise the great high priest, not after the order of Aaron and the Levites, but after the order of Melchizedek (Gen 14; Psa 110; Hebrews). Each of these truths have profound implications for our lives, for how we live, pray, think, and worship. The doctrine of the Trinity stands at the center of the Christian faith, but we come to know the nature of the Father and the Holy Spirit best through the revelation of God in the Son, Jesus. It is in Jesus that we see best what God is like, and it is in Jesus that we see what we as humans are meant to be.

## Discussion Questions

1. How would you answer the question, "Who is Jesus?"
2. What does it mean that Jesus is Prophet? Priest? King?
3. In what ways do you daily cultivate your relationship with Jesus? What are the challenges you face in this relationship?

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<sup>22</sup>Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Volume 14*, accessed at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

## ***Recommended Reading on The Son of God, the Incarnation, and Jesus***

Beginner:

- *Christianity Today* articles from their Global Gospel Project
  - “By His Birth We Are Healed” by Oliver Crisp
  - “The Good God Who Came Down” by Michael Horton
  - “The Human Prototype” by Veli-Matti Karkkainen
  - “The Purpose Driven Cosmos” by Russell Moore
- *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* by John Piper

Intermediate:

- *Rejoicing in Christ* by Michael Reeves
- *Knowing Jesus in the Old Testament* by Christopher Wright

Advanced:

- *On the Incarnation of the Word* by Athanasius
- *On the Unity of Christ* by Cyril of Alexandria
- *Jesus and the God of Israel* by Richard Bauckham

## ***Homework***

Companion reading in Grudem’s *Christian Beliefs* for next week:

- “What is the Church?” (Chapter 17, 113-119)





## Session 6: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Church

*Who is the Holy Spirit? What is the Church?*



### **Who is the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, yet many struggle to understand the specific role that the Holy Spirit plays in the Godhead and in our lives. Much of this is due to debates between so-called “cessationist” Christians and “charismatic” Christians. Cessationists argue that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (speaking in tongues, healing, etc.) ceased with the apostolic era, whereas charismatic Christians believe these gifts are still present today and should be actively employed in the mission of the Church. Although there is certainly a need to understand these differences and to discuss them in a mature way, it is unfortunate that the disagreements among Christians on the manifestation of these few gifts has obscured much of what the Scriptures make clear about the Holy Spirit.

With respect to the Godhead, Scripture teaches that the Spirit is God and that he indwells believers. Jesus said to his disciples that it would be better for them if he left so that he could send the Helper to them (John 16:7). Not only is he the Helper, but the Spirit bears witness to Jesus (John 15:26-27) and he convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). With respect to the individual, the Spirit gives gifts to believers to be used in service to the Church and helps believers maximize those gifts in love for the benefit of others (1 Cor 12-14). Romans 8 makes clear that believers live by the Spirit and not by the flesh (8:3-17), that the Spirit bears witness to our new identity as sons of God (8:16-17), and that the Spirit intercedes for us when we do not know what to pray (8:26-27). For those who live in accordance with the Spirit of God, our lives do not look like they did before, but rather are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5). Even this brief survey makes it abundantly clear that the Christian life cannot be lived without daily dependence on the Spirit.

### **What is the Church? Christ-centered Community**

But it is important to point out that the Christian life is not individualistic. Though the Spirit helps us and indwells us as individuals, we are not meant to live the Christian life alone. From the beginning, those who professed faith in Jesus were part of a community. On the day of Pentecost, about three thousand persons were added to God’s people (Acts 2:41), and Luke then records how they responded. He says that “they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). They were together and had all things in common, they cared for one another’s needs, and they praised God together while having favor with all the people (Acts 2:42-47). For the earliest believers, living out one’s faith was not simply “me and God”; living out one’s faith was about responding to God’s redemption of an individual’s life by sharing life with others

who had been adopted by God as His children. In fact, part of John's assurance of salvation in 1 John 5 is not only that we love God but also that we love His children. It is a community.

Similarly, Hebrews 10:24-25 exhorts believers to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." There were some then, as there are some now, who think that personal faith will be sufficient. They think that because they are saved they don't need anyone else. We cannot say they are not saved, but we can say their view is unbiblical, and dangerous. In fact, the author of Hebrews follows up this exhortation about meeting together with a strongly worded passage about punishment and vengeance, concluding with the phrase "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). Those who do not have a community of believers surrounding them, encouraging them, and correcting them are in far greater danger of the type of judgment warned of in Hebrews 10:26-31. So the simple application is to meet together in Christ-centered community.

### **What is the Church? Christ-centered Worship**

But the Church is also not to be thought of as simply a social club. When believers gather together, they gather for a specific purpose: to worship our God and Father in the name of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit that indwells each of these believers. Christ-centered worship involves singing, praying, and reading, teaching, and hearing the Word of God. Additionally, the Church has been entrusted with the ordinances (sacraments) of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Eucharist), both of which serve as pictures of the gospel reality we live out each day. What happens when we gather for corporate worship is immensely beautiful, powerful, and important. Consider the pictures we see in Scripture of heaven. In passages like Revelation 4-5, we see a multitude bowed before the throne of God declaring that he is worthy to receive honor and glory and blessing and power forever and ever. This is the activity of eternity, and it is the very thing we gather to do on Sunday mornings! Each time we gather together for worship, we are preparing ourselves for and participating in our eternity.

### **What is the Church? God's Representative *in* and *to* the World**

In 1 Peter 2, Peter points out that the Church is God's chosen people, royal priests and a holy nation. Christ is the foundation, the cornerstone, by which we are built up into this spiritual house—the Church! In God's eternal plan, his people, adopted in Christ, are known as the Church. And the Church is God's temple (1 Cor 3:16-17); that is, the Church is the manifestation of God's presence on earth. They are meant to be his ambassadors (2 Cor 5), reconciling the world to God as his royal representatives. This is a huge task, and it means that the local church has a role to play in preparing individuals believers to live out effectively their role in the universal Church.

The local church, therefore, is also a place for discipleship, equipping, teaching, and encouragement so that the church gathered, when it becomes the church scattered, is not just "dismissed" but rather sent out on mission. God's people, both as individuals and the local church, are called to be *evangelistic* and *missional*. When we speak of being evangelistic, we are speaking of the proclamation of the gospel to those who do not

worship Jesus as Lord. Although the central purpose is the same in each case, evangelism can take many different forms—personal, small group, or large group; planned, relational, or situational, to name a few. The key in evangelism is that we proclaim the gospel. For many, evangelism is a scary thing; we could be ridiculed or rejected, or perhaps we operate out of fear that we may lead people further from Christ by hardening their hearts to the gospel if we do it in the wrong way. Many of these fears arise out of a misunderstanding of the nature of evangelism, so let us consider for a moment what evangelism *is not*.

\*Evangelism is NOT saving people—Do not bear the burden of saving people since only Jesus can save people

\*Evangelism is NOT changing hearts—Do not bear the burden of changing people’s hearts, since only the Holy Spirit can change hearts.

\*Evangelism is NOT getting decisions—Too often Christians misunderstand evangelism and use tactics that are manipulative in order to coerce a decision. It is not our job to make the decision for them. They must respond to the movement of the Spirit in the proclamation of the gospel.

So what *is* our task in evangelism? We are called to proclaim the gospel with accuracy and clarity and invite them to respond out of a motivation of love for the person who does not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus loved others in this way, which is why he not only died for their sins but was also evangelistic in inviting them to share in the new life that was made possible by his resurrection. Moreover, Jesus has commanded us to love God and love others, and part of loving others is responding to his call to make disciples and be fishers of men by being evangelistic.

Similarly, we aim to be missional. This word has been used in many different contexts and thereby has acquired numerous definitions, but we mean two primary things by being missional. First, missional is inherently purposeful. No one describes haphazard accidents as missions. Missions have plans, goals, and results, whether success or failure. Thus, when we speak of being missional, we mean to say that we are intentional at reaching those who do not know Jesus Christ. Second, missional is an adjective describing the type of living we aim to practice and produce. That means that being missional is not only being intentional in different events that we host or service projects that we do, but it means that we are intentionally living lives that reflect the change that has come about through relationship with Jesus Christ.

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. What does Christ-centered community look like to you? What are some of the benefits of Christ-centered community? What are the potential challenges that come with Christ-centered community?
2. In what ways have you been impacted or impacted others through gathered worship? What are the challenges to being fully invested in gathered worship?
3. What are the biggest obstacles in your life to sharing the gospel? What is your motivation for sharing (or not sharing) the gospel? Read 2 Corinthians 5. Based on this passage, how would you summarize Paul’s motivation for sharing the gospel?

4. How can you practice missional living in your own life? How can we produce missional living in others? How can we encourage one another in living missional lives?

### ***Recommended Resources on the Holy Spirit and the Church***

Beginner:

- ❖ *Forgotten God* by Francis Chan
- ❖ *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* by Mark Dever
- ❖ *I Am a Church Member* by Thom Rainer
- ❖ *What is the Church?* (Crucial Questions Series) by R. C. Sproul

Intermediate:

- ❖ *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever
- ❖ *Making Sense of the Church* by Wayne Grudem
- ❖ *Center Church* by Tim Keller
- ❖ *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* by Christopher J. H. Wright

Advanced:

- ❖ *On the Holy Spirit* by Saint Basil of Caesarea
- ❖ *God's Indwelling Presence* by Jim Hamilton
- ❖ *The Community of the Word* edited by Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier

### ***Homework***

Companion reading in Grudem's *Christian Beliefs* for next week:

- "What is Man?" (Chapter 7, 58-61)
- "What is Sin?" (Chapter 8, 62-66)





## Session 7: The Doctrine of Man and Sin

*What is man? What is the imago Dei? What is our purpose? What is sin?*



### **Who are we?**

As human beings, we are created in the image of God, the *imago Dei*. In the earliest chapters of Genesis, before we learn much of anything else, we learn who we are. And who we are as humans is foundationally and biblically linked to the God who created us. We are not accidental living beings searching out our purpose; instead we are purposeful creations of the Creator God, creations somehow *in his image*. That means that our identity is fundamentally situated first and foremost in the identity of our God. As Michael Reeves helpfully reminds us, “That we are made in the image of God can and does mean many things, but the fact that the God in whose image we are made is specifically the triune God of love has repercussions that echo all through Scripture. Made in the image of this God, we are created to delight in harmonious relationship. To love God, to love each other.”<sup>23</sup> Because the Creator God is Triune and has himself been in relationship from eternity, we too, as creatures in his image, are created for relationship, both vertically with God and horizontally with other humans.

### **What is the *imago Dei*?**

It is important to recognize in Scripture that human beings alone are created in the image of God. This reality has led many theologians and biblical scholars to explore exactly what it is that makes us different from the rest of creation. Is it our ability to reason, to love, to have language that primarily expresses this notion of image? There is no denying that humans’ ability to reason, love, and use language are vastly different than the rest of creation, but it is not the differences that are in fact the key to understanding this identity. Scot McKnight suggests that “the astounding element of being an Eikon [image-bearer] is not that humans are different from animals and the land and the sky and the stars, but that they, and they alone, are *like God* somehow.”<sup>24</sup> He goes on to give a lengthier discussion that is worth repeating here:

To be an Eikon means, first of all, to be in union with God as Eikons; second, it means to be in communion with other Eikons; and third, it means to *participate* with God in his creating, his ruling, his speaking, his naming, his ordering, his variety and beauty, his location, his partnering, and his resting, and to oblige God in his obligating of us. Thus, and Eikon is God-oriented, self-oriented, other-oriented, and cosmos-oriented. To be

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<sup>23</sup>Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 64-65.

<sup>24</sup>Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 21.

an Eikon is to be a missional being—one designed to love in this world. We are now back to perichoresis: to be an Eikon means to be summoned to participate in God’s overflowing perichoretic love—both within the Trinity and in the *missio Dei* with respect to the cosmos God has created. When we participate in this *missio Dei* we become Eikonic. To be an Eikon means to be in relationship.<sup>25</sup>

As image-bearers of God, we are called to be in right relationship with God and with others. Living as we do in a world where sin is prevalent and many do not live in right relationship with God, it becomes part of our task as image-bearers to point misdirected image-bearers back to the True Original, the Creator. As we discussed in session five, this is why the incarnation of the Son of God is so important. Jesus is for us not only the perfect picture of what God is like, but he is also for us the picture of the True Human, what humanity was supposed to be. Consequently, we have a standard who also providentially serves as the very one who can bring us back to our true purpose and is himself the end goal of our humanity! Our job, then, is to be God’s representatives on earth. We are, in the words of the Apostle Paul, God’s ambassadors who act on his behalf in the world to point the world back to him. This is our priestly vocation, the vocation Adam was given in the garden and that we are to recapture in the name of Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit.

### **What is our purpose?**

Since we are created in God’s image to reflect who he is to the world, and since we are priests and royal ambassadors of the True King, we have work to do. Unlike the stories of the ancient Near East, however, we were not created as slaves to do the heavy labor so the gods can sit around and rest. Rather, we were created to share in the relationship that the Triune God has enjoyed for eternity. It is this very enjoyment, then, that lies at the heart of our purpose. The Westminster Assembly understood this in writing the Westminster Catechism. The first question of the catechism asks, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer? “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” More recently, John Piper has written many books on this idea, a notion that he calls “Christian hedonism.” He argues that “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” Moreover, man’s chief end is not only to glorify God *and* enjoy him forever, but rather to “glorify God *by* enjoying him forever.”<sup>26</sup> Enjoying God, Piper rightly reflects, is the very essence of glorifying him and is a good summary of our purpose as Eikons of God.

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<sup>25</sup>McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 21.

<sup>26</sup>Piper discusses this idea and uses these phrases in most of his books, but the foundational work on this topic is John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1986).



## ***Discussion Questions***

1. What has been your understanding in the past about what it means to be created in the image of God? How was this session helpful in confirming, extending, or correcting those ideas?
2. Why might it be helpful to recognize Jesus as the “human prototype” or “true human,” that is, as a picture of what humanity is supposed to be?
3. In what ways can or do you live your life as an ambassador?
4. What are some examples in your life of when and how you have “enjoyed God”? What passages of Scripture communicate this idea? Besides enjoyment, what are some ways that we often relate to God—both good and bad?

## ***Recommended Resources on the Doctrine of Man and the Purpose of Life***

Beginner:

- ❖ *Desiring God* by John Piper
- ❖ *Don't Waste Your Life* by John Piper
- ❖ *Death by Living* by N. D. Wilson

Intermediate:

- ❖ *Desiring the Kingdom* by James K. A. Smith
- ❖ *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* by James B. Torrance

Advanced:

- ❖ *The Image of God in an Image-Driven Age: Explorations in Theological Anthropology* edited by Beth Felker Jones and Jeffrey Barbeau
- ❖ *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* by Richard Lints

## ***Homework***

Companion reading in Grudem's *Christian Beliefs* for next week:

- “What are Justification and Adoption?” (Chapter 14, 95-98)
- “What are Sanctification and Perseverance?” (Chapter 15, 99-107)



## Session 8: The Doctrine of Salvation and Redemption

*What are salvation, justification, adoption, sanctification, and perseverance?*



Have you ever taken a moment to consider how many times you have read a verse, perhaps even memorized it, and not really considered whether you understood all of it? For example, I once memorized 1 John 4:10, which reads, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the *propitiation* for our sins.” Do you know what propitiation means? I certainly didn’t, but yet I never took the time to look it up

for years. Yes, years! I am sure I’m not the only one who has encountered this problem, and unfortunately it can lead to us conflating certain terms together, like salvation and justification, and treating them as exactly the same thing. Though they may be closely related, there is a reason that the biblical authors chose separate words for these ideas, and we would do well to notice and embrace these distinctions in order to get a fuller picture of what Scripture teaches about our relationship with God. To this end, we want to look in this session at five words that occur regularly in Scripture and are important with respect to our standing before a holy God. For each term, I will provide a fairly standard definition provided in the book *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms (PDTT)*<sup>27</sup> followed by a brief discussion to introduce some of the ideas to be covered in the session.

### Salvation

*“A broad term referring to God’s activity on behalf of creation and especially humans in bringing all things to God’s intended goal. More specifically, salvation entails God’s deliverance of humans from the power and effects of sin and the Fall through the work of Jesus Christ so that creation in general and humans in particular can enjoy the fullness of life intended for what God has made” (PDTT, 105).*

As we discussed in Session 1, if we get the biblical view of salvation wrong, then it affects multiple areas of our theology. When we begin with a man-centered approach to salvation, we miss the bigger picture of what God’s salvation means in Scripture. The definition above helps correct possible misunderstandings by pointing to two important realities. First, human salvation is part of God’s larger program to redeem all of his creation (Rom 8:18-25). Second, salvation *from sins* is also a salvation *to something*, that is, “the fullness of life intended for what God has made,” namely relationship with the Triune God himself.

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<sup>27</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999).

## Justification

*“A forensic (legal) term related to the idea of acquittal, justification refers to the divine act whereby God makes humans, who are sinful and therefore worthy of condemnation, acceptable before a God who is holy and righteous” (PDTT, 69).*

Much debate has surrounded the term justification in recent years—really, in the past five hundred years! Part of what sparked the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther and the Reformers’ belief that Scripture taught justification by faith whereas the Catholic Church was teaching justification by faith and works. In recent years, the focus has been on the exact nature of the forensic judgment being made. Is justification God’s declaration that we are in the covenant family or is it God’s declaration of innocence?<sup>28</sup> Discussions of these differences are important, but what is certain is that justification is God’s declaration in a legal context. Moreover, it is important that this declaration is directly related to and dependent on the work of Christ. Of our own accord, we are clearly guilty before a holy God; yet because of Christ, the Father can look upon Christ’s finished work and justify us on account of Christ and not our own merit. In short, God grants us a status we did not earn (nor could earn) and that we did not deserve, all through the work of Christ—his life, death, and resurrection.

## Adoption

*“God’s act of making otherwise estranged human beings part of God’s spiritual family by including them as inheritors of the riches of divine glory” (PDTT, 7).*

Most Christians focus the majority of their attention with respect to the doctrine of redemption on terms like salvation and justification, but one of the more beautiful and consistent metaphors of redemption comes through the term adoption. Paul uses this term in Ephesians 1, Romans 8, and Galatians 4 to demonstrate that our redemption in Christ means that we are now a part of a new family, the family of God. In Ephesians 1-2, Paul makes this distinction in stark terms. In chapter 1 he reminds the Ephesian church that they are children of God by virtue of adoption; then in chapter 2 he reminds them what they were formerly—children of wrath who followed their father the Devil! What a beautiful change. Not only have we been saved, but we have gone from Satan as our father to God the Father as our own father. Moreover, since we have been redeemed by Christ and are now in Christ, we, like Christ, can call God *Abba*. *Abba* is a more personal, fatherly term, often compared to our “Daddy.” Furthermore, not only does our adoption mean we have the same Father as the Son, but it also means that we share in the Son’s inheritance (Eph 1; Rom 8). These are just a few of the beautiful realities of redemption that we better grasp when we focus on the term adoption.

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<sup>28</sup>For further reading, see John Piper, *The Future of Justification* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007); N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009). These two works are at an intermediate to advanced level.

## Sanctification

*“From the Hebrew and Greek, ‘to be set apart’ from common use, ‘to be made holy.’ The nature of sanctification is twofold in that Christians have been made holy through Christ and are called to continue to grow into and strive for holiness by cooperating with the indwelling Holy Spirit until they enjoy complete conformity to Christ (glorification)” (PDTT, 105).*

Sanctification, as the definition above expresses well, is a difficult term in that its nature is twofold. The initial act of sanctification is related closely to salvation and adoption, as it is a work done by God on our behalf. But after this initial conversion, the scriptures call us to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). There is a clear expectation that we are to grow in Christ daily, to put on the new self (Col 3), and to manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5). This growth from spiritual immaturity to ever-increasing levels of spiritual maturity is the process called sanctification.

## Perseverance

*“The mandate in Scripture to remain steadfast in the love of God and to patiently endure hardship, particularly in the face of persecution” (PDTT, 90).*

Similar to sanctification, perseverance can have a couple different meanings depending on context. In the definition above, perseverance relates to the call to remain true to the faith in the midst of trials and persecution. As the book of Hebrews constantly reminds us, we are “to hold fast our confession.” In this way, part of our growth in spiritual maturity (sanctification) means continuing to run the race despite challenges (Heb 12:1-2).

In another sense, however, perseverance can be related to the doctrinal teaching of perseverance of the saints (also called eternal security). The Baptist Faith & Message 2000, which serves as the doctrinal statement for the Southern Baptist Convention, states an adherence to the doctrine of eternal security. It is therefore important as a Southern Baptist church to understand this doctrine. As a brief introduction, my goal here is not to delineate this doctrine fully,<sup>29</sup> merely to remind us that many of these terms are intertwined. For example, if we get the heart of salvation wrong, we will misunderstand and misapply the doctrine of eternal security. For example, if the gospel is merely “Jesus died for my sins so I can go to heaven,” and the means of salvation is a prayer affirming belief in that truth, then it is difficult to explain why many who have undergone this ritual have subsequently rejected the faith. The alternatives are to deny the doctrine of eternal security or to affirm these people as Christians though their lives in no way match the New Testament picture of the redeemed follower of Jesus. Something has to give. I suggest that what needs to give is our misunderstanding of the gospel and salvation. If we start with a Trinity-centered gospel in which

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<sup>29</sup>Session 10 on Southern Baptist Distinctives is a better session to flesh out some of these nuances.

mankind is saved for relationship with God, then we can see that the Holy Spirit will help believers persevere in this relationship regardless of the circumstances.

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. Discuss in the group the story of your conversion. What led you to this decision? How did your life change afterwards?
2. How have you continued to grow in sanctification? What has been helpful to you in this process of sanctification?
3. What challenges have you faced in your growth in sanctification? What has helped you to persevere?
4. How can the metaphor of adoption help us better understand salvation? Think back to Session 4 and the recognition that some people struggle to view God as Father because of their bad experience with an earthly father. How might the passages on adoption help?

### ***Recommended Resources on the Doctrine of Redemption and Salvation***

Beginner:

- ❖ *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart* by J. D. Greear
- ❖ *Finally Alive* by John Piper
- ❖ *Can I Be Sure I'm Saved?* by R. C. Sproul
- ❖ *Can I Lose My Salvation?* by R. C. Sproul
- ❖ *What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?* by R. C. Sproul

Intermediate:

- ❖ *Union with Christ* by J. Todd Billings
- ❖ *A Community Called Atonement* by Scot McKnight
- ❖ *Holiness* by J. C. Ryle

Advanced:

- ❖ *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* by Walter Marshall
- ❖ *The Mortification of Sin* by John Owen

### ***Homework***

Companion reading in Grudem's *Christian Beliefs* for next week:

- "What Will Happen When Christ Returns?" (Chapter 18, 120-128)
- "What is the Final Judgment?" (Chapter 19, 129-133)
- "What is Heaven?" (Chapter 20, 134-137)







## Session 9: The Doctrine of Eschatology/Last Things

*What is the end? What is the judgment? What is the resurrection?*



Fascination with the “End Times” is nothing new. Since the time of Jesus, Christians have been writing about the return of Christ. When will it happen? What are the signs of his coming? Are the events of our lifetime a fulfillment of these signs? Questions like these have been asked and answered in a number of ways. In every century, including our own, there have been those who are so fascinated with the events of the end that they speak of little else. In response, there are many who take a completely opposite approach to the end times. They have little to no concern for the end, saying that since God wins nothing really matters. Some have jokingly referred to this position as *panmillennialism* since it will all *pan out* in the end. Although it is extremely important to understand that God wins in the end, it is nevertheless also true that Scripture teaches about the end and it is therefore worthy of attention. Yet at the same time, often the very ones who are most excited about the end times are some of the same ones who have missed the most important realities about the end times. Many of these misunderstandings, I would argue, go hand in hand with our misunderstandings of the gospel (see Session 1).

### How are we getting it wrong?

In Session 1 we discussed how our view of the gospel is sometimes off from what Scripture actually teaches. In short, we see heaven and not God as the end goal of life. True, the promise of Scripture is that we will dwell with God for eternity, but it is the *with God* part, not a heaven apart from God, that is the focus. Over time, however, the notion of heaven was not only misconstrued as the improper end, but many also began to misunderstand the nature of heaven itself. Think about what heaven is like. What images come to mind? For many in the church, not to mention the overwhelming majority of culture, heaven is a place in the clouds, floating in space. Although there is good reason to understand the intermediate state between death and the future resurrection in these terms, that is not the final reality of heaven. Revelation 21, as one of several possible examples, teaches that heaven is a place on earth. That is, the New Jerusalem comes down out of the clouds and takes up residence on a redeemed and restored earth. Moreover, we are not disembodied spirits floating through space, but enfleshed souls in resurrected bodies like Jesus himself. Our future reality, then, is not at all floating spirits playing harps on the clouds; our future reality is a physical body in a physical creation.

Unfortunately, many in the church have unwittingly embraced a modern age Gnosticism, an early church heresy that taught, among other things, that the material world was evil and salvation meant leaving our bodies to live as spirits

in another world. If that sounds less like a heresy and more like what the church you grew up in taught, it's not surprising. Unfortunately, this misunderstanding has been perpetuated in theological systems, children's Bible stories, and our songs.

### **What do we need to get right?**

When it comes to discussions of eschatology, there are a number of landmines standing in the way of fruitful conversation. Disagreements abound on how to read apocalyptic literature (esp. Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation), the nature and timing of the millennium, and the identity of the Beast. These are important questions because they are biblical, but they are not the most important, nor are they the most concrete. Among the key teachings on the end times, we must understand the judgment, the resurrection, and the new creation. Not that we must understand every detail, but there is sufficient clarity in Scripture to help us understand the major points of doctrine. For instance, with respect to the judgment, we can know that we will all one day stand before God and give account. We will either be found in Christ and in the Lamb's Book of Life, or we will be found guilty as rebels against God. With respect to the resurrection, we can know that we will be raised in an incorruptible body just as Jesus was (1 Cor 15; 2 Cor 5). Third, we can know with respect to the new creation that God will dwell with man on earth, just as he intended in the beginning, yet this time without the threat of sin. There is more we can glean as we go deeper into Scripture, but these are some helpful points of reference for what we ought to believe. Moreover, it is important because the reality that God wins over the forces of evil and that we will dwell with God because of Christ are great foundational points of hope that help us to persevere in the midst of trials.

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. What has been your background with respect to teaching on the end times? What kinds of conversations have you had on these issues?
2. How have you envisioned heaven and hell in the past? Has this been constant or has it changed over time?
3. How might our vision of the future impact our lives in the present?
4. What questions do you have about the end times?

### ***Recommended Resources on the Doctrine of Eschatology***

Beginner:

- *Are These the Last Days?* By R. C. Sproul
- *Heaven is a Place on Earth* by Michael Wittmer

Intermediate:

- *The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell* by Paul Helm
- *The Last Days According to Jesus* by R. C. Sproul
- *Surprised by Hope* by N. T. Wright

Advanced:

- *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* by Richard Bauckham
- *The Presence of the Future* by George Eldon Ladd

**Homework**

- Read the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. Available at:  
<http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>

Companion reading in Grudem's *Christian Beliefs* for next week:

- "Historic Confessions of the Faith (Appendix 1, 138-146)



## Session 10: Southern Baptist Distinctives

*What are Southern Baptist distinctives and the Baptist Faith & Message?*



The Apostles' Creed states that we believe in the holy catholic (i. e., universal) church. Yet it is an obvious reality for anyone who passes down a couple streets that not all churches are alike, manifested most prominently by the various denominations represented by those local churches. It is possible, indeed helpful, to affirm the universal church—the people of God—while at the same time embracing a denominational tradition. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. First, local churches practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Eucharist). Despite clear teaching that these ordinances are important for the local church, there are different interpretations of how these ordinances should be performed or what is happening when they are performed. In order to maintain unity within the church body and to provide clarity for practice, it becomes helpful for a local church to have clear guidelines for these practices.

As local churches have agreement on these practices, as well as other doctrinal positions, denominations often form. Often these denominations form because it becomes helpful to band together to cooperate with each other in accomplishing the mission of the Church through joint effort of local churches. This can happen among churches of differing doctrinal positions (inter-denominational work), but problems oftentimes arise in matter of procedure or practice in such cases. Among the many denominations around the world, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is currently the largest Protestant denomination in the United States in terms of membership (slightly over 15 million in 2016).<sup>30</sup>

### **What is distinctive about Southern Baptists?**

What, then, are the distinctive aspects of Southern Baptist churches? To begin, it is helpful to point to a couple documents. First, Southern Baptists would affirm foundational aspects of the Christian faith as outlined in the Apostles' Creed. Southern Baptists emphasize that they are “people of the book,” meaning they believe in the sole authority of Scripture, but this does not preclude affirming a document that accurately reflects what Scripture teaches. Second, Southern Baptists affirm the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, so called because its most recent edition was affirmed in the year 2000. The BF&M 2000 is a statement of faith that outlines Southern Baptist theology. For churches to remain a part of

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<sup>30</sup>Much more can be said about the rise and purpose of denominations, as well as their differences, but these will be reserved for the subsequent Lead U course on the Doctrine of the Church.

the SBC, they must affirm and practice in accordance with the teaching of the BF&M 2000. Much of the BF&M speaks to foundational aspects of the faith that would be true of other denominations. For example, there are articles on the doctrine of Scripture, doctrine of God, and doctrine of man that would largely be affirmed by other Protestant believers, especially evangelicals. However, there are several distinctive aspects of the BF&M, such as teachings on baptism, the Lord's Supper, eternal security, and men's and women's roles in the church and family.

Another distinctive of the SBC is its cooperative program. The Cooperative Program of the SBC funds the International Mission Board (IMB) and the North American Mission Board (NAMB). As a result of cooperative efforts of SBC churches, the SBC is able to send full-time missionaries to the field without the need of lengthy personal fundraising campaigns. This is an immeasurable advantage for the SBC in its ability to get missionaries to the field as quickly and securely as possible. The Cooperative Program also helps offset tuition expenses for students at six SBC seminaries.<sup>31</sup> The Cooperative Program also helps fund The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), which is "dedicated to engaging the culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ and speaking to issues in the public square for the protection of religious liberty and human flourishing."<sup>32</sup>

There are many other theological and practical distinctives of the SBC, as well as a rich and interesting history and a number of effective ministries that are worth exploring further. I hope that this brief introduction serves simply to pique our interest and encourage us to understand better the denomination in which fbcBranson lives out our mission together.

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. What is your denominational background? What were the distinctive aspects of that denomination?
2. What are some potential benefits and drawbacks of denominations?
3. Were there any statements in the BF&M 2000 that surprised you? What was the most helpful part of the BF&M in clarifying for you distinctive teachings of the SBC? What (if anything) was missing from the BF&M that surprised you?
4. Consider some of the doctrines we have explored in this Lead U Foundations series. Where do you see those represented in the BF&M?

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<sup>31</sup>The six SBC seminaries are: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, LA; Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX; Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO; and Gateway Baptist Theological Seminary in Ontario, CA (formerly Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, CA).

<sup>32</sup>The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, [erlc.com](http://erlc.com).

## **Recommended Resources for Southern Baptist Distinctives**

### Beginner:

- ❖ *One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptists* by Chad Brand and David Hankins
- ❖ *Southern Baptist Identity* by David S. Dockery and R. Albert Mohler
- ❖ *Readings in Baptist History* edited by Joseph Early, Jr.

### Intermediate:

- ❖ *The SBC and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Jason Allen
- ❖ *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* by James Leo Garrett, Jr.
- ❖ *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* by Anthony L. Schute and Nathan A. Finn

### Advanced:

- ❖ *A Theology for the Church* edited by Daniel L. Akin
- ❖ *Baptists in America: A History* by Thomas S. Kidd
- ❖ *The Baptist Heritage* by H. Leon McBeth

## **Homework:**

Thanks for completing the Lead U Foundations series. If you missed any of the sessions, you can go to [www.fcbbranson.com](http://www.fcbbranson.com) to find the video for each of the ten sessions.

Now that you have completed the Lead U Foundations series, we encourage you to explore other courses in the Lead U curriculum. You may also want to begin reading some of the recommended resources throughout the sessions. If you have questions, please email [info@fcbbranson.com](mailto:info@fcbbranson.com) or call the church office at (417) 334-7437.

