

## 4 | Theology of the Greek Scriptures

*The story of the New Testament in view of the activity of God*

### Enrichment Version

The Enrichment Version is designed for those who wish to explore New Testament themes without the intention of pursuing either a certificate or a degree. This syllabus is identical to the one used by credit and degree-track students, except Internet articles, videos, listings of secondary resources, exams, and writing assignments have been removed. There is nothing to submit for professorial review or grading. Therefore, the Enrichment syllabus is available for downloading without cost. Interested parties may glean substantial knowledge, comprehension, and understanding of major New Testament themes through this guide.

The study deals with core New Testament concepts, where God is the initiator of spiritual blessings which he brings to the world in Jesus Christ. The focus is on *meaning*. The course is organized in three modules: (1) The Greek Scriptures and Theology, (2) Core Content, (3) God and Man.

### Objectives

1. Formulate conclusions about the theological content of specific biblical texts
2. Appraise the theological relationship of the Old and New Testaments
3. Determine the acts of God and man's expected response

### Course Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, the student will be able to

- Summarize fundamental theological themes in the New Testament
- Interpret passages that produce theological conclusions
- Apply theological insights in modern day situations

### A Letter of Introduction

Assuming that you have taken The Greek Scriptures, you are now acquainted with the people, places, and events recorded in the New Testament. By now, you have a good acquaintance with the entire Bible. Our task at hand is to explore the meaning and significance of the content.

The course contains the word "theology," because it is about meaning. Here is where you will find insight to God's person and acts. This is not a study in apologetics, where we argue for the existence of God or the validity of the text itself. Our concern is to see what we can find from the biblical text that will help

shape our lives in a better way.

In your exploration, you will discover numerous themes. There will be both continuity and consummation of those same themes found in the Old Testament.

Dedicate the amount of time needed to do a good job with the course. Be thorough, but do not get bogged down in unrelated details. Create a schedule for study and hold to it. Getting that first assignment done quickly will prove of great value in completing the course.

Enjoy your study!

## Procedure

1. First, review the content of the entire course syllabus.
2. Begin your study with Module 1. Read the material carefully.
3. As you come to the end of Module 1, consult the Things to Know listed below as a review
4. Once you have mastered Module 1, move on to the other modules.

## Things to Know

### Module 1

1. The nature of theological inquiry
2. The character of the Greek Scriptures
3. The major themes of the Greek Scriptures

### Module 2

1. Acquaintance with the role of Jesus Christ in providing redemption to humanity
2. An understanding of the expectant behavior of the Christian

### Module 3

1. How the New Testament represents God
2. God's role in human redemption
3. The distinction between the natural man and the redeemed man

## Copyright Policy

NationsUniversity®, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the U.S. Copyright Act for online education. Any use of those materials outside this environment may violate the law.

# Theology of the Greek Scriptures

The novice reader of the New Testament will no doubt be motivated by curiosity. He/she will have little concern for "theology." After becoming familiar with the various compositions, one will raise the inevitable question, What basic message is the New Testament sending? This question is wrapped in more specific questions. Are the Gospels simply interesting biographies of Jesus? Is Acts of Apostles no more than a history of the early church? What value are the Epistles to modern people? Of what possible value is the Apocalypse?

The answers to the above questions are actually "theological" in nature. That is, the basic message of the New Testament relates to God's actions and man's response. The Gospels and Acts cannot be reduced to mere biography and history. They have a higher purpose that lies beyond what appears to be the story of the life of Jesus and his early disciples. The Epistles, although written to an assortment of persons in diverse situations, direct attention to principles that have ongoing application. The Apocalypse, rightly understood within its genre, sends comforting assurance to those who follow the Christ of the Gospels.

"Theology" is derived from the Greek language and means, literally, "a word about God." In modern usage, the term may be defined as man's attempt to know God. Theology may be understood as the facts and their significance for the whole interpretation of the character of God and of His working in history. The "Greek Scriptures" is another expression to designate the New Testament. "Greek" simply suggests the composition was written originally in Greek. The word "Scriptures" indicates the nature of the writing. Here, the "Greek Scriptures" refer to those twenty-seven books that have historically comprised the New Testament. These books are considered on a par with the Old Testament (the "Hebrew Scriptures") with respect to their divine instigation by God. Whereas the Hebrew Scriptures anticipated the fulfillment of God's purposes in Christ, the Greek Scriptures concentrate of Jesus Christ, in whom God's purpose has now been fulfilled. Thus, the terms "promise" and "fulfillment" present an accurate image of the connection between the two Testaments.

This course addresses the vital message of the New Testament. We have elected to divide it into five modules. Module 1 is general in nature and concerns the sources and the theological message. Module 2 looks at the primary focus: core content. Module 3 explores the character of God and humanity.

## MODULE 1 The Greek Scriptures and Theology

The primary focus of this course can be expressed in a question: What is the major interest of the New Testament? Among the many topics discussed and issues addressed, there must be some common theme that runs through the entire body of material. Else it would be an encyclopedia of miscellaneous items. In a word, we could say the major interest is God's work in Jesus Christ. The course, then, is concerned with those matters that pertain to God's redemptive activity that found culmination in the ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ and the subsequent meaning for humanity.

The message of the Old Testament culminates in the New Testament. The story begun in the Old Testament continues into the New, where a fuller meaning is revealed. One cannot fully appreciate either testament without the other. They fit as volumes 1 and 2 of the same work, as introduction and conclusion to the same story. The Old and New Testaments are complementary, not antagonistic to each other.

The New Testament is a compilation of written documents, which Christians believe bear the stamp of God. Although attributed to several human writers, both the human agents and their compositions assume an authoritative posture. Recorded events attest to divine activity that has eternal implications.

The central message of the New Testament is the good news that God has sent his Son, Jesus, to provide human redemption. Jesus is the fulfillment of the blessing which God promised through Abraham. The entire world awaited the action of God, an action that exploded with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is the written record of those events that centered on the coming of the Son of God to dwell among mankind in flesh and blood.

A unique feature of the New Testament is the story it tells. Assuming an open system, the New Testament writers not only recognized God as creator of the universe; he breaks into it in a unique way in the incarnation of his Son. Man is not simply subject to God's laws. He is destined for fellowship with God--a communion that is made possible by God's act in Jesus Christ.

The module is divided into three units. Unit 1 offers an introduction to theology. Unit 2 describes the character of the Greek Scriptures. Unit 3 gives an overview of the message of the New Testament. We want to catch a vision of what the New Testament intends to communicate and note the place of Jesus in human redemption. While the mission of Jesus is the subject of the entire New Testament, the Gospels introduce Jesus, his teaching, and the reason for his rejection.

## Unit 1. The Task of New Testament Theology

Before pursuing specific theological topics, we should make certain we understand the nature of theological study. Simply, theology is man's attempt to know about God and his activity. New Testament theology focuses on the Greek Scriptures in an attempt to organize from that corpus a coherent view of and about God and his work in Jesus Christ. Topics included in New Testament theology embrace everything that has bearing on those actions.

Since discovering the meaning of major New Testament topics and themes calls for human reflection, the approach one makes to the biblical text is critical. Basic assumptions about the text will condition the conclusions one draws. What appears to be a simple "it means what it says" can turn out to be, "it means what I want it to say." For example, the outcome can be dramatically different for one who approaches the biblical text as myth from one who approaches the text as an historical document. The image one gets of the New Testament witness will be different if one denies the miracles. The outcome will be drastically skewed if the interpreter denies the crucifixion and resurrection. A rationalistic approach will yield a different outcome from an existential approach. Even among a community of believers, one may be inclined to study the Bible in its historical context, while another sees everything as having a direct application to self with total disregard for the historical context. We hope the course will open a window to the challenges that face one who endeavors to examine the "theological" aspects of Scripture.

New Testament theology has limitations. Some questions are either difficult or have no answer that humans can comprehend. For example, the fusion of the deity and humanity of Jesus lies beyond human explanation. It calls for affirmation rather than explanation. In reality, theology may not be so much about explanation as it is presentation. Certainly, texts must be explained. But the phenomenon itself may remain puzzling. And there are some texts which escape modern explanation because of the distance of time and difference in culture. Still, the limitations do not negate reaching general conclusions. And it is these general conclusions that the theologian must reach. He/she will analyze various texts and draw conclusions about the meaning of individual topics. These individual topics will then be examined in light of other topics. If one finds contradictions, one is obliged to re-examine the texts and review the assumptions that underlie the conclusions. Ultimately, theology is a human endeavor, but the topics of theology are divine disclosures.

**a. The nature of theology.** In modern parlance, "theology" is an encompassing term that can mean different things to different people. Some are afraid of the term altogether, believing it to be equivalent to heretical doctrine. However, the word is a perfectly good term, although it must be defined more

specifically, if it is to hold value for the user.

Starting with the root, “theology” is merely a word about God. From a scientific vantage, it is a “human” enterprise, being man’s projection of what God is like. In its broadest application, theology is not limited to belief in concept or definition of God. It is a word about *any* god. When applied to the Jewish, Christian, or Muslim faiths, the word is used in a more limited way. And even here, the Jewish concept would be governed by the Hebrew Scriptures, the Christian view would take into account both the Old and New Testaments, and the Muslim perceptive would focus on the Qur’an. Hence, the Christian would speak of “biblical” theology or may even divide biblical theology into “Old Testament” theology and “New Testament” theology.

There are still several ways in which the Christian may look at theology. One can argue for “systematic” theology as well as for “historical” theology. “Systematic” suggests drawing conclusions from a collection of passages that bear on the same subject and treating them all with equal value for all time. For example, one can trace a theme through both testaments and consider the idea found in the first reference to be as advanced as that found in the last reference. In this instance, there is no development of thought or change allowed. What would one do, for instance, with sacrifices, if this were always the case? “Historical” suggests an extension over a period of time. In doing theology, one must reckon with whether theology is progressive and, if so, to what extent and in what areas. By progressive, we mean that in time, the depth of meaning advances or changes.

Theology is commonly used inclusively for many sub-topics. Specifically, the term references “God,” but normally, it includes all topics that have any association with God. Some sub-topics are christology (the study of Jesus Christ), ecclesiology (the study of the church), eschatology (the study of the end times), and pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit), etc.

Theology is often looked upon as a clarification of doctrine for a religious group. It may assume that regardless of the teaching within the biblical text, the meaning for the more modern church has changed with advances in society. For example, the advent of the scientific method does not allow the miraculous element into pure science. So, did the Bible writers develop their thoughts out of ignorance or accommodation? If so, how does one account for miracles, creation, the virgin birth, and resurrection? In addition to providing a modern interpretation of the miraculous, theology is also used to justify changing social standards. It reinterprets biblical condemnation of homosexual activity and divorce; it redefines the role of women and marriage; it turns instructions to masters and slaves into strict prohibitions; it treats personal freedom as primary and supports revolution when denied. Obviously, the illustrations are not of the same weight and may not apply literally to every circumstance. The point here is that theology is sometimes used as the justification for changing the biblical message to fit a more modern time.

Biblical theology is objective science. The biblical theologian should be aware of philosophy and history. But his/her major task is to identify the basic ideas that are rooted in the biblical text and explain them. The theologian’s work is verified by the witness of the sacred writers. When dealing with a single biblical composition, the theologian is still obliged to do his/her work in relation with the whole. Each writing is studied in relation to the others. The goal is to present a clear, complete, and comprehensive analysis of biblical teaching as it relates to the God described in the Bible. In pursuit of this goal, biblical theology is dependent upon sound exegesis and solid hermeneutical methodology. Whereas exegesis pertains to drawing meaning from a text, theology analyzes the broader landscape in search for comprehensive meaning.

**b. History of biblical theology.** Biblical theology, in any truly scientific form, dates only from the 18th century. Offspring as it was of German rationalism, it has yet been found deserving of cultivation and scientific study by the most orthodox theology. Indeed, Pietism, too, urged its claims as biblical dogma, over against the too scholastic dogma of orthodoxy.

**Before the modern era.** Patristic theology, no doubt, was biblical, and the Alexandrian School deserves special notice. The scholastic theology of the Middle Ages leaned on the Fathers rather than on the Bible.

Biblical theology, in spirit, though not in form, found a revival at the Reformation. But this was followed by a 17th century type of scholasticism, polemical and confessional. Throughout the entire 18th century, there were manifest endeavors to throw off the scholastic yoke and return to biblical simplicity. But it was from the rationalistic side that the first vindication of biblical theology as a science of independent rank was made.

**Old Testament theology.** The influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher led to a severance of the Old Testament from the New Testament, and attention centered on the latter. Kayser (1813) and DeWette (d. 1850) pursued the perfecting of the science, particularly in matters of method. It was in the second quarter of the 19th century that the biblical theology of the Old Testament began to receive the full attention it deserved. It has been declared the merit of Georg W. F. Hegel's philosophy to have taught men to see, in the various biblical systems of doctrine, a complete development. But it must also be said that the Hegelian philosophy affected biblical theology in a prejudicial manner.

Old Testament theology, no less than that of the New Testament, was set forth by Heinrich Ewald (1803-75). His interest in New Testament theology was due to his strong feeling that the New Testament is really the second part of the record of Israel's revelation.

James Robertson, in his *Early Religion of Israel* (2nd ed., 1892), treated biblical theology of the Old Testament only in a way subsidiary to the consideration of the historico-critical problems. *The Conception of Revelation in the Old Testament* was dealt with by F. E. König in 1882 in a comprehensive manner. With regard to the order and relation of the documents, König understood revelation in Israel in a supranaturalistic sense. Significant also for the progress of Old Testament biblical theology was *The Theological and the Historical View of the Old Testament*, by C. Siegfried (1890), who insisted on the development of the higher religion of Israel being studied from the elder prophets as starting-point, instead of the law. For extended study in the history of Old Testament theology, see: Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens, and Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992); and Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993).

**New Testament theology.** New Testament theology was furthered by Neander in the 1830s. He summarized the doctrine of the redeemer and presented the doctrinal teaching of the apostolic writers in a manner that showed the different shades of thought peculiar to each of them, together with an essential unity.

Having first dealt with the teachings of Jesus, F. C. Baur then set out the materials of the New Testament theology in three periods, making Paul well-nigh the founder of Christianity. For him only four epistles of Paul were genuine products of the apostolic age, namely, Romans, the two Corinthians, Galatians, together with the Revelation. To the growth and history of the New Testament Baur applied the method of the Hegelian dialectic. (The above is an adaptation of "Biblical Theology" by James Lindsay, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, which is in the public domain.)

**c. Doing New Testament theology.** Despite the claims of modern scholars to have invented the science of theology, men have been engaged in theological discussion from the onset of history. New Testament theological discussion was a hot topic for Jesus and the Pharisees. The publication of the first New Testament compositions, perhaps with one of Paul's letters, indicates the seriousness of continuing discussion. Among Paul's first letters was the Epistle to the Galatians. Surely, this letter remarked upon and anticipated much lively discussion among recipients and those who in Paul's mind betrayed the gospel. The larger issue pertained to the nature of the gospel, faith, and grace. Together with 1 Thessalonians, the content would have covered the major topics covered in this course--God, man, Christ, the Spirit, the church, and eschatology. As other compositions came into being, discussions widened and collateral material came into play. Ideas presented may have been enhanced, but it is our opinion that the later authors did not take issue with the earlier ones.

New Testament theology draws on Old Testament theology. In the modern age, the divisions of Old

Testament theology pose some difficulty. Modern criticism has practically transformed that mode of representing the process of Israel's religious development, which had been customary or traditional. On this latter view, the Patriarchal Age was succeeded by the Mosaic Age, with its law-giving under Moses, followed, after a period of Judges and monarchy, by the Age of Prophecy. Then there was the Exile preparing the way, after the Return, for the new theocracy, wherein the Law of Moses was sought with more persistent endeavor, though not without legalistic result. Such were the historic bases for Old Testament theology, but the modifications proposed by newer criticism are serious.

The most critical issue in the divisions between law and prophecy has been the proposal to invert the order of law and prophecy, and speak rather of the Prophets and the Law. The Law is taken to belong to the post-prophetic period--in short, to the period of the return from the Exile, whereas, in the traditional scheme of the order of revelation, the Law was found in full force both at the Exodus and the Return, with a dead-letter period between. The garment of legalism, the newer criticism asserts, could not have suited the Israelite nation in its early stage, as it does after the teachings of the prophets and the discipline of the Exile. Against this, the older scheme prefers the objection that an external and legalistic system is made the outcome of the lofty spiritual teaching of the prophets. The letter appears super-imposed upon the spirit. Criticism, however, postulates for the ritual codes of the Pentateuch an influence parallel in time with that of prophetism.

The critical views also postulate a primal period in which the religion of the prophets, with their view of Israel's vocation, was observed. They also speak of a final period of Judaism between the Return and the Maccabees, in which are seen at work the Levitical law, and various anti-legal tendencies. It must be obvious that attempts to integrate the Old Testament theology amid the prevailing uncertainties of criticism is tentative at best. For the Old Testament writers, religion was primary, history secondary and incidental. We must resist the urge to speculate beyond the natural and traditional view of Israel's religious development. (A portion of the above has been adapted from "Biblical Theology" by James Lindsay, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, which is in the public domain.) Further insight into Old Testament theology development is in Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

## Unit 2. Character of the Greek Scriptures

God began revealing himself and his intentions for mankind through the ancients, the record of which is contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. His intentions were not fully understood until after the resurrection of Jesus. The Gospels begin to show how God culminated his design for human redemption. Through Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, God defeated Satan and provided spiritual life.

Scripture informs Christians of the work of God. It is understood to be true and accurate. It should be read carefully, interpreted in keeping with its overall themes, and heeded appropriately. Scripture is the final authority in spiritual matters. Hence, any local church assembly makes a claim to correctness on the basis of the Scriptures. The struggle to know what is cultural or what is a matter of personal judgment presents every generation with a challenge. Christians individually struggle to know how to apply principles from Scripture to real life situations. Scripture was never intended to be read as a rule book but as an openness to the mind of God. Its wisdom has a divine source. It is timeless. Though every situation may not be addressed, the principles of good and evil are sufficiently clear to render a proper course for most questions.

The first unit invites you to explore the Gospels from a theological perspective. As you wrestle with the biblical text, block from your mind any preconceived ideas you have carried to the text. Enjoy looking at it afresh. What you know about characters and events will serve you well. But for the meaning of these things, let's start anew, just as we did with the Old Testament.

Your pursuit will follow a simple strategy. You will read a passage. Then with pencil and paper, you will

make notes of what appear to be important words, concepts, and themes. Occasionally, you will be alerted to special literary structures that may hold important clues. The quest is theological. That is, your intent is to discover what the biblical text says about God and his activity that is important for the life of mankind. The basic strategy outlined in the early part of Unit 1 is to be repeated under the *Activities* that follow.

### a. The Gospels

**Matthew and Mark.** The Gospels of Matthew and Mark introduce this portrait of the Gospels. While the two compositions may have been directed to slightly different audiences (perhaps Matthew to Jewish believers and Mark to a Roman Christian audience), their general theme is the same. Theologically, they are in agreement. They present the God-human encounter in a unified manner.

**Activity 1: Matthew 1:18-3:17.** Read the selection. Identify key ideas. Look for ideas that give special significance to the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. Notice the use of Old Testament quotations. Examine these passages in their original setting and note the novel way that Matthew applies them. What does this tell you about the way "fulfill" should be defined? What is the major message of this passage?

**Activity 2: Matthew 5-7.** Open your Bible to Matthew 5-8 and perform the same task as with the preceding selection. Can you identify themes that keep recurring? How would you describe the central message of the Sermon on the Mount?

**Activity 3: Mark 12:1-12.** Move on to Mark 12:1-12 and analyze the text as you did in the two sections above. What is the central idea expressed in this Parable of the Tenants?

**Luke.** The Gospel of Luke appears to have had a Greek Christian audience. Although addressed to a man named Theophilus, the Gospel is indeed intended for a wider audience. And it anticipates the writing of Acts of Apostles. The author's choice of material and the arrangement will point to his general message.

**Activity 1: Luke 4:1-30.** Read the passage carefully. Note that Luke 4 embraces several incidents in Jesus' life. The first thirty verses tell of the temptation of Jesus following his baptism and his rejection at Nazareth. Your task is to ascertain the central message intended by the author. The Gospel is more than a simple story of Jesus' activities. There is a reason for telling about these episodes in his life. What do you think that may be?

**Activity 2: Luke 10:25-37.** In analyzing the Parable of the Good Samaritan, you will find that the parable was offered by Jesus in response to questions raised by a legal expert. The expert was attempting to ensnare Jesus. For the parable to make sense, you must know what question it answers. Even then, there may be theological understanding that extends to the present time. What do you think?

**Activity 3: Luke 24:45-49.** Clearly in this passage a theological idea appears. Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." What are the "Scriptures" to which he refers? What specifically are the disciples to understand from the Scriptures?

**John.** The Fourth Gospel is different from the three Synoptic Gospels because of the material selected for inclusion. While the basic message is the same, John's Gospel has its own unique purpose. Be aware of its uniqueness as you read. Notice that the passages chosen for the activities below all interrelate.

**Activity 1: John 1:1-14.** Here, you must first identify the person addressed as the "Word." Who is he? What relationship does he sustain to deity and to God himself? What did the Word do that was so significant? How did the Word reveal himself and God? What would be the ramification of denying the divinity of the Word?

**Activity 2: John 15:1-17.** First, you need to establish the identity of the "vine." Then, decide to whom the speaker addresses his admonition. What point is he making? What is the significance of his point? How does this particular address apply to modern people?

**Activity 3: John 17.** What do you gather from the prayer of Jesus? How is the relationship he claims with God different from that which an ordinary person might have with God? What role is Jesus playing between the disciples and God? What gives him the right to mediate as he does?

**b. Acts of Apostles.** The fifth book of the New Testament is placed after the four Gospels for two reasons. One, it follows in time the story of the Gospels and it is a sequel to one of these Gospels--Luke. The two volumes of Luke-Acts extend the story of Jesus and his apostles over two-thirds of the 1st century C.E. The two compositions were written by the same person, a Gentile named Luke, who was a physician and companion of Paul. Luke was not an apostle or personal disciple of Jesus, but he constructed his accounts by either careful investigation (his Gospel) or association with Paul (Acts).

The two books are very different in nature, but they show interest in the same concerns. The Gospel according to Luke is written in the form of a "gospel," showing the same traits as the Gospels authored by Matthew and Mark and, to some extent, as the Gospel authored by John. But Acts is a moving historical and chronological account of the actions of select apostles--especially of Peter and Paul. Peter is dubbed the apostle to the Jews; Paul is known as the apostle to the Gentiles. But the reason for the account is to note that the apostles were faithful to the commission of Jesus to preach the gospel to the entire world (Luke 24:47-49). Luke makes the connection in the opening of Acts (1:1-8). His account follows roughly the pattern established by the commission to preach in Jerusalem/Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Theological themes found in Acts are an extension of those found in the Gospel of Luke. You will note special attention is given to the needy, the sick, and the disenfranchised (Samaritans, a eunuch, Gentiles). But the distinctive message is one of repentance and faith in Jesus the Christ. Attention is directed to the kingdom of God and the church and topics associated with God's acts in this regard. Of special importance are the terms on which Gentiles are admitted to the kingdom.

**c. The Epistles and The Apocalypse.** The Epistles—twenty-one in number—are letters. They are written generally to teach, correct, encourage, and warn believers. Often, the teaching element is supplemented by correction, encouragement, and warning. Or, we could say that correction, encouragement, and warning are given within the context of teaching. The Apocalypse is cast as a work that consists of seven distinct letters embedded within a larger context of apocalyptic. It too was intended to teach, correct, encourage, and warn.

So, as we consider the character of the Epistles and the Apocalypse, we find they have a decidedly theological purpose. They are devoted to both doctrine and praxis. While not a *commentary* on the Gospels, they do supplement them by showing the implications of the person and teachings of Jesus for the community of believers that began to come into being at first Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection.

When reading the Epistles and Apocalypse for theological purposes, it is wise to recognize that not one of the compositions was written as a purely theological document. Therefore, we should not treat the material as a compendium on theological topics. When men write free-standing books on theology, they bring together scattered passages to create an exhaustive digest on particular sub-disciplines. The same could be said of this course. Treating Scripture in this fashion is artificial--though not an unprofitable or improper pursuit. It is just that we should never force biblical passages into neat categories without full consideration of the original context in which an idea is found. Sound exegesis should precede theological reflection. Let us illustrate this point.

The Epistles speak of baptism, spiritual gifts, and salvation by faith. Past interpretations and personal backgrounds often cause interpreters to strain out meaning without seeing how the subjects relate to healthy doctrine. Baptism easily takes on a modern Protestant approach when it is removed from the

equation of salvation by the blood of Christ. Spiritual gifts are extended into the present time without due consideration to their purpose in the early church. Salvation by faith easily neglects human participation in a divine process.

The Apocalypse mentions an angel sent to each of the seven churches, talks of Babylon, and notes a 1,000-year reign. By giving undue respect to the biblical text itself, interpreters sometime use these notations to build theories that are elsewhere untenable and unsupported by Scripture. Building a theology requires a diligent and fair assessment of the biblical text, where care is taken to read it within its original setting.

### Unit 3. The Message of the Greek Scriptures

You became aware, through your study of BRS 3, that the Bible contains a wide variety of literary genre. The New Testament may have less variety, but it offers additional and new literary styles to its Old Testament counterpart. The individual literary compositions are worthy of study as literature. But more significant than their literary artistry, New Testament compositions are "theological" in tone, i.e., they contain "a word about God." Their intention is neither to merely inform nor to entertain. Their ultimate goal is to draw all who are willing into a spiritual relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

As with the Old Testament, local customs, word studies, comparative studies, and archaeological discoveries can shed light on a New Testament passage. These often provide important insights that can help flesh out passages. But the student must remember that background studies do not govern the meaning of the Bible; they only bring enlightenment. The text itself must govern interpretation, for meaning derives from the source, not from the reader.

Together, the books of the entire Bible form a coherent whole. The correct understanding of a New Testament passage must be consistent with the message of the whole Bible, as well as with other New Testament passages. For example, the Gospels are consistent with each other, with the Epistles, and they are in harmony with the Old Testament. We look not for contradictions but for fullness of meaning.

Basic assumptions about the Bible often influence one's understanding of the text. If the student makes improper assumptions about the Bible as a whole or a specific text, even the most obvious meaning may be missed. So, we begin with reading the Bible as literature. Then, we look for its theological meaning. The literary form is a vehicle for expressing theological content.

The course is introduced with a discovery activity and biblical readings that will provide an overview of the basic theme of the New Testament. Unit 1 summarizes three basic concepts of the New Testament as it is found in its constituent parts. These are (a) God's initiative, (b) a universal message, and (c) the kingdom of God.

**a. God's initiative.** According to the New Testament, God loved his human creation, even when man did evil (Rom. 5:8). His love led him to send Jesus, his unique Son, that humans may be redeemed through their faith in him (John 3:16). That salvation makes certain demands of man, but it is not *based* on man's innovations. The concept receives support from three propositions: incarnation, pronouncements, and signs.

***The Son of God enters the world.*** As God's initiative was displayed throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (Matt. 1:18-25; John 1:1-18; Rom. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:1-4), it is no less conspicuous in the Greek Scriptures. It takes a more direct form in the birth of Jesus Christ.

***Divine pronouncements.*** Old Testament prophets had foretold a messiah, according to the New Testament. Angels bear the word about Jesus' birth (Luke 1:26-35). God himself speaks at the baptism of Jesus and the transfiguration. The witness comes from above and not simply from Jesus or his disciples (Matt. 17:1-8; Luke 1:21-22).

**Miracles.** Signs of divine authority and authenticity are shown in the miracles of Jesus. The grand miracle of all is the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension to the right hand of the Father. Divine demonstrations of authority are also present with the apostles through an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

**The concept and process of redemption.** The gospel declaration speaks distinctly of sin and God's impending judgment. Sin alienates one from God. But it also shows the way to prepare for that judgment. Paul's letter to the Romans details man's plight, the work of Christ, and the way man finds God's grace.

Paul's epistle to the Romans reveals that righteousness is extended to man in Christ. Abraham illustrated the demands of faith which God's righteousness requires. The failure of the Jews to keep the law by faith and the gentiles' refusal to acknowledge God present the human predicament. Without the intervention of God, that situation would have remained. But the activity of God in Jesus Christ has provided escape--through faith.

Paul's epistle to the saints in Rome is a thorough presentation of a simple theme: "The gospel is God's power unto salvation" (1:17). The author shows that "righteousness" is of God and, furthermore, that those who come to righteousness must do so through faith in Jesus Christ. Justification before God is accessed through faith and not by works of merit. The behavior that follows one's burial into Jesus Christ through immersion in water is in keeping with his newly found righteousness and the character of his Lord.

**Romans is a proclamation of the revelation of God's righteousness.** The gospel concerns Jesus, the Son of God. He entered the world as a Jew of the lineage of King David and was declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection (Rom. 1:1-4). The "gospel of God" had been promised through prophets, whose message formed part of the Old Testament (Rom. 1:2). Through Jesus Christ, God calls men to obedience of faith (Rom. 1:4-5).

**God is faithful and righteous; therefore, he offers man the means to become righteous.** The gospel is God's power unto salvation because in it God has revealed how man may become righteous (Rom. 1:16-17). Since the wrath of God is against all unrighteousness, gospel proclamation becomes urgent (Rom. 1:18-32). Rejection of Jesus leads to eternal damnation.

The judgment of God is according to truth. God's goodness and forbearance lead to human repentance. His wrath unto judgment is stored by hardness of heart (Romans 2). Human unrighteousness does not make God unrighteous when he judges unrighteous man (Romans 3:1-8). Both Jews and non-Jews commit unrighteousness and find themselves in line for God's judgment. But God himself revealed unto men a righteousness to which all could attain (Rom. 3:9-31).

Having died to sin, the believer must no longer indulge in the sinful life. Having been baptized into the death of Christ, the believer has been raised through the glory of God to pursue a new life. The old man was crucified and the body of sin done away. He has been justified and set apart for life unto God. Sin, therefore, is not to reign in the Christian. His bodily members are now instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:1-14). Inasmuch as the Christian has been justified from sin, he is free from its bondage to be a servant of righteousness. Servants of God bear fruit unto sanctification and eternal life (Rom. 6:15-23).

**The gospel is a message of victory.** There is no condemnation in Jesus Christ, because the law of the Spirit of life frees one from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-4). The mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:5-25). The Holy Spirit helps the Christian in his weaknesses (Romans 8:26-30), having been given as a guarantee of our inheritance (Eph. 1:13).

The gospel holds a demand for one's entire self. Believers are urged to give their bodies as a living sacrifice to God. They are not to be fashioned according to the world but transformed by the renewal of the mind unto the will of God (Rom. 12:1-2). Love, unselfishness, diligence, joy, prayer, service, hospitality, sympathy, unity, humility, restraint, honorable thoughts, peace, and the return of good for evil

are marks of each Christian's life (Rom. 12:10-21).

The gospel declares this principle: Each one called of God is his servant. A servant has no right to reject his fellow servant because he is weak in faith. God will give him power to stand (Rom. 14:1-4). The gospel molds estranged people into a bond of love. The strong in faith are expected to bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1). Disciples are required to build one another toward unity in Christ, for this is what their Master did for them (Rom. 15:2-7).

**Activity.** Go back to "a" above and read all the passages cited. As you do so, write out the basic concepts you find within these texts. First, see if you agree with the statements made in this syllabus as a summary of those texts. Then, write out the implications you find. Note the assumptions that are being made in order to support your conclusions. For example, one assumption may be that the Bible presents Jesus accurately. If so, then the conclusions drawn from the authors of Scripture have binding significance. If not, then what the authors say has no merit at all. What other assumptions are being made?

**b. A universal message.** Because it is from God and because it is intended for all people, the gospel message carries hope and assurance.

**God's firm foundation and a faith for the world.** The Gospels present the object of faith. Acts presents Christ to the world. The Epistles explain the gospel. The Apocalypse offers assurance against opposition. Believers are admonished to fidelity to the central tenets and practices of the faith. All human creeds and expressions of faith must be judged by the biblical message itself. The gospel is good news because its saving message is intended for people of every race and nationality.

**Jesus Christ, the redeemer of mankind.** The message of the gospel is derived from Jesus, who is redeemer, king, and *teacher*. Jesus attributes the source of his teaching to God. He speaks nothing of himself; only what the Father gave him to say. From the biblical perspective, Jesus is more than a hero, a mythical figure, or a mere example of good. He is the Holy One of God, to whom men and women are drawn for salvation. As noted in BRS 2, the Gospels present Jesus as an incarnated divine being, the Son of God, who came to earth for the purpose of renewing men in the image of God. The narrative of each of the Four Gospels moves toward the general conclusion that he is the Savior, whose mission was to bring men into a spiritual relationship with God and enable them to experience eternal life.

A spiritual relationship with God implies holiness and god-likeness. Inasmuch as God is the source of these qualities, the ability to be holy rests with him. By contrast, mankind is sinful, rebellious, and unrighteous. However, the Father loved man to the extent that he sent his Son to redeem him. Through the Son, one becomes a new creature and is made anew in holiness.

The sole source for understanding this phenomenon is the Bible. It alone describes how man becomes righteous through the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ. A subjective feeling about one's relationship with God has no validity unless it coincides with the written text. Since holiness is attained through faith, the human has no claim to it otherwise. Faith is made complete through submission to faith's demands.

The central message of the New Testament is anchored in both the teaching and the person of Jesus Christ. He announced the good news about the kingdom of God which he himself was now bringing to men. But Jesus was more than simply a teacher and prophet to the church; he was also the Messiah. He was at once the bearer of the message and its essential content. This One who simultaneously revealed the mind of God and became the instrument of human redemption is the focus of the gospel.

The culmination of God's activity on the part of man's redemption centers in Jesus Christ. The biblical readings in Unit 1 made it clear that this Jesus was no ordinary person. What specifically is unique about him?

**Jesus is "holy" because he is divine.** An old man named Simeon and an aged prophetess named

Anna knew that Jesus was more than a mere baby. He was God's salvation to the world (Luke 2:25-38). The apostles Peter and John knew Jesus to be God's holy Servant, whom God himself anointed (Acts 4:23-30). Jesus is God's Son. Eternal with God and creator with him, Jesus is the effulgence of his glory and the very image of his substance. He presently sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Hebrews 1:1-4). Jesus challenged men to holiness through observance of his words and love for one another (John 15). Nevertheless, the Jewish leaders took his claim to be king to Pilate and demanded crucifixion.

**Jesus had a unique relationship with God.** Jesus demonstrated an intimate relationship with God in numerous ways. He performed miracles that attested to intimacy with God (Matthew 9:2-6; John 14:10-11; 20:30-31). His teaching and his behavior showed divine character (Matthew 7:28-29; 15:32-38; Mark 8:1-9; Luke 8:31-32; John 5:19-40; 7:37-46; 11:33-38a). Events associated with his baptism (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34), the transfiguration (Matthew 7:1-5), and his resurrection (Acts 1:3) revealed Jesus' Sonship.

**Jesus' claim of identification with the Father focuses attention on his unique person.** Jesus' relationship to Abraham and God's promise to Abraham underscored his uniqueness (John 8:31-59). Among the Jews, a sharp division arose over whether he was the Christ (John 10:19-42). The entire Apocalypse affirms the close relationship which Jesus maintains with God. Much of the language used to characterize Jesus is drawn from Old Testament passages. Jesus is "worthy" to take the sealed scroll and open it. He is worshiped as is God. He is the one who provides victory as he holds death and Hades in his hands. For further study, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

**Finality.** The gospel of Jesus Christ is the finality of God's revelation. Jesus is uniquely the one and only Savior in all the world for all time.

**c. The kingdom of God.** The kingdom of God is a perennial theme of the Bible. It receives attention in the selection of Israel as God's holy people (Exod. 19:3-6). It was the focus of the future when the intentions of God were made known through David (Psalms 2, 110), Daniel (2:44) and Isaiah (2:1-4). Both John the baptizer and Jesus began their ministries declaring the nearness of the kingdom of God (Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17).

If the gospel represents God's initiative in the world, how should those who respond to the gospel represent him? What kind of fellowship do they comprise? How does this fellowship function? These are questions that will await further elaboration in other courses, but a few observations should be made.

**Jesus Christ enables spiritual victory to those who respond to his call to faithful allegiance.** If the gospel is to have universal appeal, it should carry with it the assurance of victory even when opposed by the strongest of forces. The disciples of Jesus become a victorious army as they battle the influence and power of Satan.

**The church in the world.** Jesus taught that the kingdom of God exists in the world and that Satan's efforts to thwart it are present. Two questions face the disciples. One is, What should be our relationship with the world? The second is, How should we respond to the world? Christians should measure their association with the secular environment carefully. They know that, on one hand, they must live in the world. On the other hand, they are called by Jesus to holiness and proclamation.

**The church is a community that reflects the love of God.** The Word that became flesh continues to create and nurture people of faith in his likeness. Together, his people form a body that is connected with its head, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). Through common worship and activity, the saints strengthen each other and reach out in Jesus' name to their friends, neighbors, and spiritual enemies.

*[The following has been adapted from The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, which is in the public domain.]*

The commencement of Jesus' ministry is described in these words, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (Matt. 4:23, NIV). Luke states the expansion of his activity in the following way: "After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1, NIV). When the Twelve are sent forth by themselves, the purpose of their mission is to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Luke 9:2). The parables told by Jesus, which formed a prominent portion of his teaching, are denominated collectively as "the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11). Many of these begin with the phrase, "The kingdom of heaven is like." (Matt. 13:11).

Observe that the phrases "the kingdom," "the kingdom of God," "the kingdom of heaven" are used interchangeably. The last of the three, "the kingdom of heaven," is confined to Matthew, which does not, however, always make use of it; and it is not certain what may have been the reason for the substitution. The simplest explanation would be that heaven is a name for God, as, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the penitent says, "I have sinned against heaven," and we ourselves might say, "Heaven forbid!" It is not, however, improbable that the true meaning has to be learned from two petitions of the Lord's Prayer, the one of which is exegetical of the other, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Here the disciples are instructed to pray that the kingdom of God may come, but this is equivalent to the petition that the will of God may be done on earth. Jesus is, however, aware of a region in the universe where the will of God is at present being perfectly and universally done, and he elevates the minds and hearts of those who pray. The kingdom of heaven would thus be so entitled because it is already realized there, and is, through prayer and effort, to be transferred thence to this earth.

Although the phrase held this master position in the teaching of Jesus, it was not of His invention. It was employed before him by John the Baptist, of whom we read, in [Matt. 3:1f.](#), "And in those days comes John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Indeed, the phrase is far older; for we find it in [Dan. 2:44](#), in a passage where the prophet is explaining to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon the image of gold, silver, iron and clay, which, in his dream, he had seen shattered by "a stone cut out without hands." He interprets it as a succession of world-kingdoms, destined to be destroyed by "a kingdom of God," which shall last forever; and, in his famous vision of the "son of man" in [Dan. 7:14](#), it is said, "There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

These passages in Daniel form undoubtedly the proximate source of the phrase; yet the idea which it represents mounts far higher. From the first the Jewish state was governed by laws believed to be derived directly from heaven. When the people demanded a king, that they might be like other nations, they were reproached for desiring any king but God Himself. With this sublime conception the actual monarchy was only a compromise, the reigning monarch passing for Yahweh's representative on earth. In David, the man after God's own heart, the compromise was not unsatisfactory; in Solomon it was still tolerable; but in the majority of the kings of both Judah and Israel it was a dismal and disastrous failure. No wonder that the pious sighed and prayed that Yahweh might take to himself his great power and reign, or that the prophets predicted the coming of a ruler who would be far nearer to God than the actual kings and of whose reign there would be no end. Even when the political kingdom perished and the people were carried away into Babylon, the religious among them did not cease to cherish the hope, and the very aspect of the world powers then and subsequently menacing them only widened their conceptions of what that kingdom must be which could overcome them all. The return from Babylon seemed a miraculous confirmation of their faith, and it looked as if the day long prayed for were about to dawn. Alas, it proved a day of small things. The era of the Maccabees was only a transitory gleam; in the person of Herod the Great a usurper occupied the throne; and the eagles of the Romans were hovering on the horizon. Still messianic hopes flourished, and messianic language filled the mouths of the people.

**Use by Jesus in contrast with Jewish conceptions.** Schurer, in his *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (II, 11, 126ff.), has drawn up a kind of Messianic creed, in no fewer than eleven

articles, which he believes was extensively diffused at this period. The Sadducees, indeed, had no participation in these dreams, as they would have called them, being absorbed in money-making and courtiership. But the Pharisees cherished them and the Zealots received their name from the ardor with which they embraced them. The true custodians, however, of these conceptions were the *Prosdechomenoi*, as they have been called, from what is said of them in the New Testament, that they "waited for the kingdom of God." To this class belonged such men as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea ([Luke 23:51](#)). It is in the beginning of the Gospel of Luke that we are introduced to its most numerous representatives, in the groups surrounding the infant Baptist and the infant Savior ([Luke 2:25](#), [Luke 2:38](#)). The truest expression of their sentiments must be sought in the inspired hymns which rose from them on this occasion. The center of their aspirations, as there depicted, is a kingdom of God - not, however, of worldly splendor and force, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; beginning in humility, and passing to exaltation only through the dark valley of contrition.

Such was the circle in which both the Baptist and Jesus were reared and it was out of this atmosphere that the conception of the kingdom of God came into their minds. It has frequently been said that, in making use of this term, Jesus accommodated himself to the opinions and language of his fellow-countrymen; and there is truth in this, because, in order to secure a footing on the solid earth of history, he had to connect his own activity with the world in which he found himself. Yet the idea was native to his home and his race, and therefore to himself; and it is not improbable that he may at first have been unaware of the wide difference between his own thoughts on the subject and those of his contemporaries.

When, however, he began, in the course of his ministry, to speak of the kingdom of God, it soon became manifest that by him and by his contemporaries it was used in different senses. This contrast went on increasing until there was a great gulf fixed between him and them. The difference cannot better be expressed than by saying, as is done by B. Weiss, that He and they laid the accent on different halves of the phrase, they emphasizing "the kingdom" and he "of God." They were thinking of the expulsion of the Romans, of a Jewish king and court, and of a world-wide dominion going forth from Mt. Zion; he was thinking of righteousness, holiness, and peace, of the doing of the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven. So earthly were the expectations of the Jewish multitude that he had to escape from their hands when they tried to take him by force and make him a king. The authorities never acknowledged the pretensions of one who seemed to them a religious dreamer, and, as they clung to their own conceptions, they grew more and more bitter against the one who was turning the most cherished hopes of a nation into ridicule, besides threatening to bring down on them the heavy hand of the Romans. And at last they settled the controversy between him and them by nailing him to a tree.

At one time Jesus had felt the glamor of the popular messianic ideas, and at all times he must have been under temptation to accommodate his own ideas to the prejudices of those on whose favor his success seemed to be dependent. The struggle of his mind and will with such solicitations is embodied in what is called the temptation in the wilderness ([Matt. 4:1-11](#)). There he was tempted to accept the dominion of the world at the price of compromise with evil, to be a bread-king, and to curry favor with the multitude by some display, like springing from the pinnacle of the temple. The incidents of this scene look like representative samples of a long experience; but they are placed before the commencement of his public activity in order to show that he had already overcome them; and throughout his ministry he may be said to have been continually declaring, as he did in so many words at its close, that His kingdom was not of this world.

It is very strange that, in spite of this, he should be believed, even by Christian scholars, to have held a purely futuristic and apocalyptic view of the kingdom himself. He was all the time expecting that the heavens would open and the kingdom descend from heaven to earth, a pure and perfect work of God. This is exactly what was expected by the Jewish multitude, as is stated in [Luke 19:11](#). It is precisely what the authorities believed him to be anticipating. The controversy between him and them was as to whether Yahweh would intervene on his behalf or not. When no intervention took place, they believed they were justified in condemning him.

It was by Johannes Weiss that this hypothesis was started in recent times. It has been worked out by Schweitzer as the final issue of modern speculation on the life of Christ (see his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*). But in opposition to it can be quoted not a few sayings of Jesus which indicate that, in his view, the kingdom of God had already begun and was making progress during his earthly ministry, and that it was destined to make progress not by catastrophic and apocalyptic interference with the course of Providence. Of such sayings the most remarkable is [Luke 17:20f.](#), "And being asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God comes, he answered, The kingdom of God comes not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you."

In the nature of the case the kingdom must have been growing from stage to stage during his earthly ministry. He himself was there, embodying the kingdom in his person; and the circle gathered around him partook of the blessings of the kingdom. This circle might have grown large enough to be coextensive with the country. Therefore, Jesus retained the consciousness of being the Messiah, and offered himself in this character to his fellow-countrymen by the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But the citizens of the kingdom had to enter it one by one, not in a body, as the Jews were expecting. Strait was the gate; it was the narrow gate of repentance. Jesus began by repeating the initial word of the teaching of his forerunner. He had too much reason to continue repeating it, as the hypocrisy and worldliness of Pharisees and Sadducees called for denunciation from his lips. To the frailties of the publicans and sinners, on the contrary, he showed a strange mildness. This was because he knew the way of bringing such sinners to his feet to confess their sins themselves. To the penitent he granted pardon, claiming that the Son of man had power on earth to forgive sins. Then followed the exposition of righteousness, of which the Sermon on the Mount is a perfect specimen. Yet it commences with another watchword--that of blessedness. In other passages, he promises "rest," "peace" and the like. Again and again, where he might be expected to employ the term "kingdom of God," (the Synoptics) he substitutes "life" or "eternal life" (Gospel of John). Such were the blessings he had come into the world to bestow; and the most comprehensive designation for them all was "the kingdom of God."

It is true, there was always imperfection attaching to the kingdom as realized in his lifetime, because he himself was not yet made perfect. Steadily, from the commencement of the last stage of his career, he began to speak of his own dying and rising again. To those nearest him such language was at the time a total mystery, but the day came when his apostles were able to speak of his death and ascension as the crown and glory of his whole career. When his life seemed to be plunging over the precipice, its course was so diverted by the providence of God that, by dying, he became the Redeemer of mankind and, by missing the throne of the Jews, attained to that of the universe, becoming King of kings and Lord of lords. (James Stalker)

The kingdom of God is a perennial theme of the Bible. It receives attention in the selection of Israel as God's holy people (Exod. 19:3-6). It was the focus of the future when the intentions of God were made known through David (Psalms 2, 110), Daniel (2:44) and Isaiah (2:1-4). Both John the baptizer and Jesus began their ministries declaring the nearness of the kingdom of God (Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17).

## MODULE **2** Core Content

We have completed the sweep of New Testament compositions. You are now able to identify the major characters. You know the location of significant sites. And you have become acquainted with leading events. There remains an additional task in our initial excursion of the Greek Scriptures. That task is a synopsis of the content covered.

The task is three-fold. One requires an analysis of the New Testament with the goal of identifying crucial themes and concepts. The second requires a synthesis of how the individual themes interrelated to create a whole "system" of faith. Third, an evaluation must be made regarding how the ancient concepts carry forward to the modern age. Each of these steps is critical, if the New Testament witness is true.

Since we are dealing primarily with written testimony, the literary compositions of the New Testament become the primary source for reaching the goal of theological study. By dividing the material loosely by genre (Gospels, historical narrative, epistles, apocalypse), we gain a chronological perspective. That perspective is important, for it lines out the story. First, the Gospels present Jesus as the Christ. Then, Acts describes how the church came into being. The Epistles fit mainly into the period covered by Acts. The Apocalypse depicts a latest period.

This module brings the material found in the diverse letters into a synthesis. While it is not our primary task here to offer a systematic treatment of the Epistles, we shall isolate some topics around which the authors developed their presentations. These are done as three “concerns.” The first to be considered is redemption from sin (Unit 1). The second is the “new man” (Unit 2). The third is the “new life.” It is easy to miss major themes that flow through a body of independent literary compositions. But identifying the essential themes is imperative, if the New Testament has any meaning.

## Unit 1. Basic Concerns of the Epistles: The Redeemed Life

The gospel is the good news about what God has done and is doing in the interest of human redemption. It is the joyous revelation that fellowship with God can be renewed through Jesus Christ, who frees men and women from servitude to evil spirits, law, and sin. The salvation which the gospel announces is connected with sacrifice, propitiation, atonement, justification, reconciliation, sonship, a new creation, and eternal life.

The facts of salvation are revealed in the message by which men are called to faith in Christ. To preach the gospel is to preach Christ and thereby bring men to life in him. The practical application of Jesus’ redeeming activity is the overriding theme of the Epistles.

The Epistles depict all men as being under the power of sin. The Gentile, having failed to acknowledge God properly, is without excuse, since God’s power and deity were plainly visible. The Law of Moses was given to the Jew, but the Jew could not find justification by the Law. The Jew failed to arrive at a law of righteousness, because he sought it by works rather than by faith. The Law simply accented the presence of sin.

Because all ungodliness and unrighteousness are the objects of God’s wrath, a day of wrath and righteous judgment await the human race. Yet all is not hopeless, for there is good news in the manifestation of God’s own righteousness. Through Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, God’s righteousness is now extended to all who come to faith in Christ. The Epistles describe how God’s grace offers humanity a means to escape God’s judgment and to be triumphant over Satan’s condemning power. In declaring the theology of redemption, the Epistles demonstrate how redemption becomes a reality through the working of God’s Spirit in the lives of the redeemed.

The unit treats three topics. These are (a) The way of righteousness, (b) Law and grace, and (c) A body of truth.

**a. The way to righteousness.** God had planned for human salvation before the worlds were created. His purposes were pre-determined, then promised and foretold through Old Testament law and prophecy. God’s intentions remained a mystery, however, until he revealed them by the Holy Spirit through the apostles and New Testament prophets. This, the only plan for making man righteous, focused on Jesus, who became the manifestation of God’s righteousness.

Salvation does not come to men as a result of righteous works, but by God’s grace and mercy. God’s divine power provides the means to life and godliness by enabling men to become partakers of the divine nature. Spiritual sonship, holiness, and fellowship with the Father are realized through Jesus Christ. Jesus was made man’s righteousness that all glorying might be in the Lord rather than in oneself. The

gospel is God's power unto salvation, because it is the good news of the Christ-event which calls all men to sonship through faith in him.

Redemption is made possible by the shedding of the blood of the Son of God and by his resurrection. Through the risen Christ, a person can become victorious over his spiritual enemy and safe from the impending wrath of God. The gospel assures man a new relationship with the Sovereign of human history. It brings confidence in the ultimate victory of right. It offers hope for the individual and for society.

The exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God set him above all authority and power. He was made head over the church, which is described as the fullness of Christ. Put to death for men's trespasses and raised for their justification, Christ became a mediator between God and men. Through him, God continues to forgive the sins of the child of God who confesses them.

The general resurrection and consummation of all things shall occur when death and every rule, authority, and power are brought to an end. All men shall die and face judgment, but Christ will come again for those who are faithful to him. To those who patiently do well in seeking glory, honor, and immortality, God will grant eternal life. For those who are factious and obey wickedness instead of the truth, there will be wrath and fury.

God, through the resurrection of Jesus, has provided the Christian with hope of an incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading heavenly inheritance. Having been made just and freed from the condemnation of sin, Christians live at peace with God. As his sons, they are heirs who can rejoice in the hope of sharing his glory. Presently their faith is proved by trials, but the saints are being prepared for praise, glory, and honor which shall come at the return of Jesus. Meanwhile, they are guarded through faith by God's power.

The redeeming act of God focuses on Jesus who "appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory." The main tenets of the faith are (1) God is the creator, (2) God has redeemed men through his Son Jesus Christ, (3) a new rule for life was enacted, and (4) Christians share in the hope of an eternal kingdom.

The gospel is objectively completed in the person of Jesus. But man's response to the divine is not merely acknowledgment of the act of Christ. Rather, it is the creation of a relationship with the person of Christ. The true spiritual content of one's faith in Christ is the creation of fellowship with God.

**b. Law and grace.** The Law of Moses had a form of knowledge and truth. However, the righteousness of God was manifested apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bore witness to it. The Old Covenant was a shadow of the good things to come in Christ. It could not perfect the worshiper. Although the Law was in itself spiritual, man is carnal. The Law identified the lawless, ungodly, murderers, immoral, and oath breakers. But because of man's carnal nature, the Law was inadequate for justifying men who sin. Its regulations concerning meat, drink, and washings were carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation. Thus, those under the Law were under ward until Christ came. Christ is the end of the Law, that anyone who has faith may be justified. Now as many as are baptized into Christ are clothed with him.

Since the believer is no longer under bondage to a system of law but under grace, sin ceases to have dominion over him. He has freedom in Christ--freedom from sin and freedom from the bondage of the Law. The disciple, through the body of Christ, is made dead to the Law by being joined to him who was raised from the dead. Having died with Christ, he is dead to the rudiments of the world. He need not be subjected to ordinances against touching and tasting, inasmuch as these are men's doctrines. They may have a show of wisdom, but rudimentary regulations are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

The practice of making personal judgments is roundly condemned. Charges of wrong-doing must be sustained by two or three witnesses. No one has the right to judge another in matters of food or with respect to a holy day. Each man is to be fully assured in his own mind and observe his custom unto the Lord, for "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy

in the Holy Spirit." Whether one eats or drinks, he should do it to the glory of God and give no offense to the Jews, the Greeks, or to the church of God.

A clear conscience is important, for "everything that does not come from faith is sin." When the Christian keeps God's commandments and performs what is pleasing to him, his conscience does not condemn him. He may then expect to receive of God whatever he may ask.

This freedom is not to be construed as granting a license to sin, for one is the servant of that which he obeys. The Christian has now yielded himself to obey from the heart a new form of teaching. Being made free from sin, he is a servant of righteousness. The natural and expected result of the new life is right living.

In a unique way, the Christian upholds the Law with his faith. The whole Law is fulfilled in one word: "Love your neighbor as yourself." One must therefore not let his liberty in Christ become a stumbling block to the weak brother. In Christ all things may be "lawful," but not all things are expedient. All things are simply not helpful or strengthening. The Christian is to seek the good of his neighbor, which means he will pursue peace and the things beneficial for edifying another.

It is not circumcision or the lack of circumcision that matters, but whether one has become a "new" person. The criterion of Christian conduct is the character of Christ, which expresses itself in love. The aim of love is oneness of mind, which comes from the Spirit. The object of one's behavior is the glory of God.

The author of Hebrews provides a summation of the matter when he encouraged his audience to draw near to God with a true heart of faith and a good conscience, to hold fast the confession of their hope and to provoke one another to love and good works. The reason for his injunction was that if one turns away from Jesus, there is no other remedy for his sins. There remains only a "fearful expectation of judgment." A more severe condemnation faces the man who tramples the Son of God, counts the blood that sanctified him as unholy, and insults the Spirit of grace, than one who violated Moses' law.

Lying behind the message of forgiving love is a body of factual truth to be believed and an ethical demand to be followed. The Christian is free from "law," yet Christian freedom does not dispense with "law" altogether. Salvation is contingent on confessing Jesus to be Lord and believing God raised him from the dead, and upon a continued life of faith. Attention is now turned to the body of truth which must be believed to receive salvation.

**c. A body of truth.** The New Testament attests to the presence of "truth" from several points of reference. Men were formerly judged for "hindering" the truth by neglecting to honor the Creator and by pursuing fleshly lusts. Now, salvation rests in acceptance of the truth, which is in Jesus. Aside from the idea that Jesus himself is the embodiment of Truth, the early church thought in terms of there being a "body" of truth, which served the believing community as a standard by which spiritual matters could be judged.

Apostolic witnesses did not follow cunningly devised fables in making known the power and coming of Christ. They observed the fulfillment of prophecy, which occurred when God moved men to speak through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit also worked through others who proclaimed the mystery of God's redemptive act, making their announcements authoritative.

Paul's claim to a message which came only by revelation of Jesus Christ was understood by him to be normative, that is, not simply information but what is expected to be the believer's standard of faith and practice. He proclaimed his message everywhere he went. He encouraged others to declare and hold fast the same truths. He begged the Philippians to do the things they learned from him and admonished the Thessalonians to stand firm in the traditions he had taught them, whether in person or by epistle. Instructing Timothy on a number of spiritual items, Paul encouraged him not only to abide by his spiritual training but to pass this instruction to others.

The injunctions to propagate apostolic instruction arose out of the nature of the message. The oral and written proclamation of "inspired" ministries form the norm for "sound teaching." Scripture therefore defines divine truth. The Scriptures are profitable for completing and equipping the man of God for every good work. It is no surprise that considerable warning is given against perverting the gospel truth, a perversion which could be either theological or ethical in nature.

While Jude was planning to write concerning the common salvation, circumstances made it expedient for him to write an exhortation to his audience "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." Believers were admonished not to go beyond what is written in the Scriptures. To advance beyond the teaching of Christ will separate one from God's fellowship. A man is assured that he knows God if his life is in keeping with the teaching of Jesus. Nonetheless, false teachers and doctrines contrary to truth were anticipated.

The possibility of theological error is accented in Paul's instruction to Timothy to guard against disputes that produce "envy, quarreling, malicious talk, suspicious, and constant friction." Since fornication, uncleanness, covetousness or idolatry, filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting do not become saints and will keep one from any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, they define in a negative way the ethical concerns of this truth.

Even Christians had been known to be distracted. Some desired to be teachers of the Law but were ignorant of the message of the gospel. In his letter to Titus, Paul concluded a section of constructive admonition with the injunction to shun foolish controversies, genealogies, arguments, and quarrels about the Law, because they are unprofitable and useless.

False teachers were often characterized by their divisiveness, sensuality, or lack of the Holy Spirit. Teachers who forbade marriage and commanded abstinence from meats were branded false, because they had given heed to demonic teaching. Some were erring concerning the truth by saying that the resurrection had passed already. Others were turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.

Anyone who denied the Father and the Son, who denied that Jesus is the Christ, or who would not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh was identified as an "antichrist." John's first epistle was written to encourage Christians against those who would lead them astray, adding that everyone who does righteousness is begotten of him. The teachings of professing prophets were to be tested by the teachings known to be true.

Paul recognized that some would create dissensions, so he admonished that they be shunned. He encouraged the Corinthians to be of the same mind in order to prevent divisions. His task was to preach the gospel, not to build a large personal following. Paul commended the Corinthians for their adherence to gospel teaching. But, believing the word of God should not be tampered with or handled deceitfully, he expressed concern that Christians would be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Since the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ, the Christian should be careful not to allow anyone to delude him with persuasiveness of speech or deceive him with empty words. One's faith can be destroyed through philosophy, deceit, human traditions, covetousness, and sensuality. Christians were therefore exhorted against being carried away by diverse and strange teachings. In view of the risk that the error of the wicked would cause one to fall from his own steadfastness, the elect ones were encouraged to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord Christ. The next section treats these demands as they appear in the Epistles.

## **Unit 2. Basic Concerns of the Epistles: The New Man**

The righteousness of God was revealed in Jesus Christ to make it possible for man to enter a new relationship with God. When one is baptized (immersed) into Christ, he rises to a new kind of existence. Declared righteous in Christ, the believer is now in a relation to God in which righteousness is a matter of

grace, and not of works. The freedom one enjoys by being in Christ enables him to respond gratefully to God's love by pursuing heavenly interests through the direction of the Holy Spirit.

It is tempting to read the Epistles as theological pieces, because the authors go into some detail about the person of Christ, issues related to the local church, and general doctrinal points. These discussions are essential to the authors' purpose in writing, for these "theological" positions undergird the practical application that follows the discussion. The Pauline epistles, especially, normally begin with a prayer that speaks to the spiritual health of his readers. Then, he may spend the last half of an epistle encouraging his readers to embrace the Christian walk. Consequently, what we find in the Epistles generally is an urgent issue that calls for the writing. Solving the issue becomes prerequisite to living in the "new man" mode. The issue may be theological or it may be some human action that interferes with the new ethic.

The "new man" pertains to the redeemed person, whose conduct is defined by the person and teaching of Christ. The gospel aims at the "old" man. When the old man responds to that gospel, he becomes a "new" man. The Epistles target the "new" man, for they are intended to help him develop into the likeness of Christ. Note this element as you read.

The unit has three sections. These are (a) A redeemed person is a "new" person, (b) A new person is a holy person, and (c) A holy person has God's Spirit.

**a. A redeemed person is a "new" person.** The idea of a "new" person points to the reconstruction of one in the "likeness" or "image" of God (Eph. 4:17-5:2). In other words, the believer assumes the "mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:1-13). Christ, who revealed God more fully than ever before, radiates divine glory. He is the embodiment and expression of all the divine attributes. Sinful man is transformed into the likeness of God when he surrenders his own will to that of the Father and takes on "divine" characteristics. The act may be a one-time occurrence at baptism, but the process of "living" as a new person goes on throughout life.

The new person has a new "nature." That does not mean one cannot sin as a Christian, for even the redeemed are subject to temptations (James 1:2-15). The Christian does not habitually continue to perform sinful acts (1 John 1:5-10). One's new nature is *not* to sin. That is, one is no longer dedicated to a life of ungodly attitudes and behavior. Rather, the new person testifies to the goodness of God. He/she thinks of God and others first. By thinking and behaving in a manner that befits the divine nature of God, the believer fulfills God's intentions for the human. Thus, sin no longer reigns in the new person. The *new* person lives in a manner that is consistent with the character of the new nature.

**Activity.** Revisit Romans 6. Work through the passage, answering the following:

1. What is the meaning of the question, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (v. 1)
2. To what does Paul refer when he says, "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (v. 5).
3. Explain the statement, "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him" (v. 8).
4. What is the meaning of the statement, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11).
5. Explain, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body" (v. 12).

**b. A new person is a "holy" person.** Now constituted a spiritual people, believers shun profane relationships to form a holy nation. This designation separates them from the worldly order, although they must continue to function in the world and relate to the those who have chosen to remain outside the kingdom of God. Even as a composite body, Christians possess characteristics that distinguish them as "holy," *i.e.*, set apart for a special mission. At the individual level, citizens of this holy nation have

abandoned their natural or secular impulses and assumed spiritual aspirations. Now under God's domain, they are called to perform his will, which is to be found in historical revelation. It is in this sense that they are "set apart." They are set apart for God's glorification.

God himself does the "sanctifying," *i.e.*, God makes men holy, as only he can do. It is not something humans are able to accomplish on their own. God works this sanctification through the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:2), given to each believer upon his/her baptism. The Spirit's sanctifying work does not guarantee a person will never turn back to the world, but it does assist the believer in his struggles with the world. Rejection of God's prescription for a sanctified life is to renounce God, who gives the Holy Spirit.

The biblical text is clear that blind obedience to a list of moral injunctions does not constitute one a holy person. But the person now made holy is subject to attitudes and behavior that are appropriate to holy living. The security of the believer lies in God's unfailing love. God's willingness to save comes from his person. Demonstration of his saving ability is found in the atonement made by Christ and by Christ's resurrection. But man's personal salvation lies with his continued faith, which has root in the grace of God. He is not given a pass on spiritual living. He is given grace to pursue spiritual interests.

When you analyze a biblical book as a whole, you will observe that Christians are warned against false teachers and the lure of the world. Because of the temptations that confront them, they are encouraged to turn aside from the ways that marked the old life and live as a holy person. Much of the Epistles is devoted to warning and correction, an indication that man even in his "holy" state, is pulled by unholy matters.

**c. A holy person has God's Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is God in action, being the empowerment for moral victory. The Spirit seals the believer and becomes an earnest of eternal redemption. Guiding and sustaining the individual by renewing and actualizing sonship, he helps the Christian in his infirmity and makes intercession for him before God. With God's Spirit dwelling in them, Christians individually and collectively become God's temple, precious living stones in a spiritual house.

The Spirit's presence in the life of the believer means he/she is "worthy" of the call of God and the gospel of his Son. Having been made alive unto the Lord, Christians are dedicated to his praise. Constituted a holy priesthood, they continually offer the fruit of a redeemed life as spiritual sacrifices to God.

Comprehending the work of the Spirit of God in the believer is no easy task. In fact, we may say that comprehension is beyond human understanding. That is not to deny the presence of the Spirit in one's life; it is to say that there are some things about spiritual reality that man does not grasp completely. The Christian, therefore, starts with affirming the theological concept that God's Spirit resides within the person who has been redeemed by the blood of Christ. This presence is no mysterious force that compels the believer to act against his/her will. But the "Holy" Spirit works in the interest of the believer's "holiness." Without the power of the Spirit in one's life, one would have reason to think that holy living is a matter of personal accomplishment. Since that is impossible, the Spirit's presence becomes essential to salvation and a necessary ingredient in God work among those who choose to honor him. It is by the Spirit that one is baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). The Spirit guarantees that God is true to his promises and will deliver the faithful who are now no longer enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:1-6). Hence, the Spirit ties the believer to God through sanctification and continually connects the two through prayer, attitudes, and conduct. In this manner, the believer testifies to God's work in the world. Simultaneously, the Spirit's presence makes known to the Christian that he/she is not alone in the spiritual battle that rages about. He/she is free from the claim of Satan who holds the unredeemed in bondage.

**Activity.** Revisit Galatians 5. Answer the following.

1. What circumstance led Paul to describe the Christians in Galatia as slipping again into bondage? (vv. 1-15)

2. What does it mean to “live by the Spirit”? (vv. 16-18)
3. Enumerate “the acts of the sinful nature” (vv. 19-21).
4. What qualities characterize “the fruit of the Spirit” (vv. 22-24).

## Unit 3. Basic Concerns of the Gospel: The New Life

It is far easier to talk about theological issues than it is to incorporate them into practical living. To state that Jesus is the center of the gospel is a correct statement. But we must ask, Why? Of what significance is the fact? For sure, redemption is impossible without the incarnation of Christ. But it is also impossible without faith in him and in his redeeming activity. The reason for the incarnation was to enable humans of all descriptions to be remade spiritually in the image of their Creator.

Development in the image of God implies growth into moral character patterned after Christ. The means may be through a form of law, example, or the intuition of an educated conscience. While observing legal requirements is not a condition of salvation, in the sense that man is able to attain righteousness by keeping law, it is, nevertheless, part of the Christian walk. The New Testament speaks of keeping the commandments and obeying Christ, *i.e.*, submitting to his will. Even the demand that believers “love” is a command. One often learns from example—the example of Christ—and becomes a similar example to others. The human conscience is in need of education from the divine mind as revealed in Scripture.

Faith and ethics go hand in hand. God’s act in Christ is the basis of righteousness, but it takes faith, an act of man, to access it. God then sanctifies one through the Holy Spirit, but this does not remove human responsibility to turn away from sin and pursue a “new life,” *i.e.*, adopt a new code of conduct.

The New Testament is intended to be far more than a statement of Christian theology. It is intended to lead its readers into a redeemed life. The “new life” in Christ is the end result of preaching the gospel. The new life is essential to sustaining a spiritual relationship with God and becomes a vital part of the journey toward salvation.

The unit directs your attention to three topics. These are (a) Expectant behavior, (b) Growing in faith, and (c) Relationships. Together, the topics contribute to understanding what is meant by the “new life” in Christ.

### a. Expectant behavior

**Kingdom ethics.** New Testament ethics are neither systematic nor legalistic. They are grounded in the nature of the Creator and designed to help man to a wholesome life. With the essence of the new life being oneness with Christ, the ethical teaching is Christ-centered. Love and righteousness are prominent moral principles in Paul. Love is supreme in John’s writings. Faith and loyalty are the central ethical appeals of Hebrews. James stresses faith’s practical meaning. Peter’s ethical thought is seen in his call to holy living, spiritual growth, and in the principle of suffering.

Because their citizenship is in heaven, Christians are considered sojourners and pilgrims on earth. Those lustful yearnings belonging to the former manner of life are put aside in favor of a righteous and holy renewal of the mind. Acts and attitudes of unrighteousness are against God’s nature and the life which the Creator has ordered for man.

The disciple can no longer afford to have his character fashioned by the world. The cravings of the flesh and boasting can prevent the Father from residing within him. Hence he is to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul and demonstrate seemly behavior before the unbelievers. The spiritual conflict with Satan demands alertness and armor appropriate for the battle: faith, hope, love, truth, righteousness,

peace, prayer, and perseverance.

There are several "lists" of sins in the New Testament which, taken together, form a detailed definition of unrighteousness. Held in common by the kind of selfish attitude which alienates man from God, they conveniently fall into five categories, although some of the categories are inter-related: (1) sex (lasciviousness, fornication, adultery, passion, unnatural affection), (2) insobriety (drunkenness, obsession for pleasure, and attending reveling which leave one without self-control), (3) speech (reviling and railing, clamor, whisperings, backbiting, falsehood, foolishness, and shameful talking), (4) self-centered emotions (jealousy, envy, pride, haughtiness, unruliness, covetousness, idolatry, sorcery, anger, wrath, hatefulness, maliciousness, and bitterness), and (5) relations (lack of mercy, hypocrisy, deceitfulness, enmity, strife, tumults, thanklessness, murder, kidnapping, betrayals, faction, disobedience to parents, despising God, extortion, stealing, and invention of evil).

Life is to be characterized by a constant looking to Jesus and the loss of one's own arrogance. As God's elect, each Christian is to assume a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness. Other individual duties include personal purity, sobriety, orderliness, self-control, and an obligation to serve and help others. Summarily, converts are expected to work hard, mind their own affairs, set a good example, show respect to governing authorities, and enjoy a healthy family life.

**Ethics of the heart.** The appeal for ethical responsibility is attached to various motives. Paul, for example, set forth the examples of Christ as a motive. In doing so, he emphasized the invitation to service and edification. He urged men to please God and reminded Christians of their fellowship with Christ.

Proper life in the Christian community, however, rests upon love. Love is the central commandment of the gospel--love for God and for others. It is pre-eminent because it binds Christ-like characteristics together. The attitude is ideally represented in that of Christ when he willingly left his place with God to die for man. Clearly, personal interests should not take precedence over the well-being of another person.

Although the abstinence from every form of evil is essential, the new life in Christ is far more than restraint from evil. Morality is not the simple acquisition of a set of virtues. It is a new inward relationship with God.

A spiritual relationship with God is sustained by an inward disposition of the heart as well as by outward rites. In other words, the sincerity of one's love for God and his fellows is to be proved. Knowing to do good but neglecting to do it is just as sinful as a lawless act. Love for another person is demonstrated through proper action. Serving the needs of a brother, for example, necessitates more than merely wishing him well. Love requires responding to another's need in a manner that recalls one's own reprieve from the judgment of death. In a real and practical sense, love is one's exalted desire of wanting the very best for others.

Nothing should be done through faction, jealousy, vain-glory, or partiality. These are earthly, sensual, and devilish. Wars and fighting come from a preoccupation with pleasures--lust and the inability to find satisfaction for base desires. Christians should be able to settle any differences or be willing to suffer default rather than take their grievances into civil court. To act without complaining and arguing is their objective, for they are to be lights in a perverse world.

Christians are to work good toward all men, but especially toward those of the family of God. They should work industriously for the sake of the needy that they may use their abundance to supply the wants of others. Pure religion includes caring for the fatherless and widows and remembering the poor and the incarcerated.

As churches were instructed on giving of financial or material goods, it was pointed out that their service was both to the needy and to God. The disciples were not instructed to give a stated amount of money, but to give as they had purposed in their hearts. Contributions are made cheerfully, not grudgingly or of necessity. The proper attitude is illustrated by the Christians of Macedonia who, offering themselves first,

gave freely and even beyond their means.

Christians were expected to bear one another's burdens and gently restore any brother who may be overtaken in a trespass. Careful not to cause a brother to stumble, they should exhort and edify one another, admonish the disorderly, encourage the faint-hearted, support the weak, and be longsuffering toward all. Even a brother from whom fellowship has been withdrawn is to be admonished and counted a brother.

#### **b. Growing in faith**

**Maturing in Christ.** Christians mature spiritually through the development of faith, knowledge, and love. As babes they feed on milk, but in due time they should become full grown and nourish on spiritual meat. Saints are expected to grow beyond the first principles--repentance, faith toward God, the teachings of baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment--and become teachers of others.

Since one bears responsibility to God for oneself, one needs to realize that all life is in the hands of God. One should joyfully take advantage of every moment of time as one lays aside worry and anxiety, planning tomorrow in keeping with his servant position. With proper attention to working out one's own salvation, the child of God recognizes the conditional nature of that salvation. But as one grows in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love, one is assured entrance into the eternal kingdom of Christ.

**Discipline.** Christians are to strive for godliness and contentment. Since riches bring the temptation of covetousness, the rich are charged to be humble, have their hopes set on God, and be ready to distribute their means. Social snobbery and class distinctions are therefore disallowed by the law of love, which requires the sharing of possessions with those in need.

Because the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God, care should be exercised in the use of the tongue. Swearing is to be replaced with an answer fitting a person of integrity. Pure and gracious speech will follow naturally when one's thoughts are centered upon things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.

Though personal judgment has no place among Christians, open sin in the body is not to be sanctioned. Fellowship is to be withheld from the Christian who continually defies God's revealed way of life. The Corinthian church was instructed to remove a man who was living with his father's wife. The saints there were further asked not to associate with any brother guilty of immorality, greed, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, or robbery. Likewise, the Thessalonians were commanded to withdraw themselves from every brother who walked disorderly. In their case, the disciplinary action was especially aimed at lazy busybodies. Public reproof of the sinner was designed to bring him to repentance, remove sin from the church, and provoke Christians to fear. But discipline was not intended as a substitute for brotherly responsibility.

Considerable attention is given to the principle of suffering. The example of Christ is cited to encourage the elect to endure grief patiently, even when suffering is without justification. Suffering for Jesus may be God's chastening. Therefore, one should rejoice in trials, knowing that the proving of his faith works steadfastness. The fruit of patience and faith in persecutions is eternal salvation.

Strong emphasis is placed on prayer. New Testament authors acquainted the saints with the manner of prayer, its efficacy, and the work of Christ as an intercessor. Proper observance of the Lord's Supper was also stressed as a communion with Christ.

**c. Relationships.** The Christian life also embraces proper human relationships. Fitting man-woman relationships in both the married and unmarried states are emphasized. Appropriate parent-child and master-servant relationships are stressed. And so are fitting relations with older and younger men and

women, widows, elders, and one's own family.

Instruction is given relative to a woman's apparel, her conduct in learning, her teaching or having dominion over a man, and her proper function and relation to God. Older women are made responsible for training younger women to be good wives and mothers.

The elect are exhorted to be in subjection to civil authorities and their ordinances, because civil government is ordained by God. They have divinely appointed functions. Christians should not only respect those in positions of rule but pray for them as well. They should also pay taxes.

The world in general gives passing notice to these injunctions, finding it relatively easy to lay the injunctions aside in its quest for human rights and individual freedoms. For example, the worldly order may favor sexual satisfaction ahead of fidelity. It is often more open to consenting to deviant behavior in their children. It detests any idea of differencing male-female roles in public affairs. Criticism of governing officials is free game.

Without recognizing that each human is God's creation, secularists consider themselves as the owners of their bodies. Not considering that they had no choice in regard to ethnicity, gender, physique, or time and place of birth, they find it easy to discredit God for their position. If, as their philosophy holds, they are their own person, then they must bear responsibility for their sex, station, and looks. Christians, on the other hand, accept their station in life, for they know God is their physical and spiritual creator and that the circumstances of life function to allow them to demonstrate their stewardship. Hence, there is a big gap between the worldview of the believer and the unbeliever.

**Activity.** Revisit Romans 13-14 and 1 Peter 2-3. Seek out an answer to the following:

1. What is a Christian's basic responsibility to political authorities?
2. What kind of relationship should a Christian have with others?
3. What kind of relationship should a Christian have with the worldly order?
4. How do you understand Peter's instructions regarding slaves?
5. How would you describe the husband-wife relationship?

## MODULE **3** God and Man

Two subjects which dominate the New Testament are God and man. On one end, God has made himself known through Jesus Christ in unmistakable ways. The Creator's interest focuses on his prized creation--man. This interest led him to enter the stream of human history. God moved history toward a crowning act that involved sending his Son to die for mankind. God is presented as a God of love, mercy, holiness, and justice. He acts on behalf of humanity and even becomes vulnerable to human action. He is not a weak God, but a bold caring God who will go to ultimate links to demonstrate his love and mercy. To be sure, God is holy and separate from his creation, but he is also intimate with it.

God always appears in the text as the Supreme Being, the object of adoration and praise, just as he did in the Old Testament. This was held in highest agreement. But the contention between the Pharisees and Jesus turned on whether Jesus gloried God or whether his claims blasphemed God. A key concern in addressing theology is how Jesus fits between God and man. A haunting question is, How can he be both

God and man? It is important to remember that Jesus never displaces God, who is the Father. He has come to do the Father's will and thereby glorifies the Father. For an early and very extensive treatment of this question, see Hilary of Poitiers book *On the Trinity*, especially Book 9 (available on the internet).

Mankind appears in a "lost" condition. Wickedness is ever present and man cannot escape it. While the text comes short of pronouncing man as evil, it leaves no doubt that his condition is bad and in need of redemption. Forgiveness of sin can be granted only by God. And only God can provide the means for forgiveness. Otherwise, man would be in control of his own destiny. Through Jesus, men and women are called to live to the glory of God and embrace those features of character that reflect the nature of God.

Now that you have a general "feel" for the message of the Scriptures, the goal of Modules 2-5 is to examine major ideas in more detail. You have two options as to how to prepare for the modular exam. *One*, you may read from Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*. Guthrie's treatment is thorough and encyclopedic in nature. His work is not a true "theology" in the classic sense, where he thinks through the individual statements in order to create a synthesis or system for viewing the Bible's contents. Rather, it is a summary of the various statements the New Testament has made on many topics. Having said that, we recognize that Guthrie calls his book *New Testament "Theology"* and opens by defining the task of theology. This illustrates how the term "theology" is used by different parties. Your *second* option is to study the material in this syllabus, which is an adaptation from The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, which is now in the public domain. The *I.S.B.E.* material is of a summary nature and calls for the review of select biblical references.

The module is divided into three units: (1) The Person of God, (2) The Acts of God, and (3) Man.

## Unit 1. The Person of God

There can be no question but that the chief actor in the Bible is God. This is true with both the Old Testament and the New. God created and sustains the universe. He also engages with humanity with respect to physical and spiritual matters.

God is presented in the New Testament as the sovereign creator, who demonstrates his love for humans when they behave in ways that dishonor him by contradicting their created stature. Although the New Testament contains no detailed summary of the qualities of God and no philosophical proofs for his existence, it describes him in unmistakable terms. He has been intimately involved with man since before the first one appeared on earth and has continued that involvement throughout history. God is neither part of the cosmos nor apart from it. He is simultaneously other than anything that exists and approachable by the human creature. In his "Son," he became incarnate and dwelt in the flesh in order to demonstrate his love, deliver a message of salvation, and pronounce the defeat of Satan.

Much of what we meet in the New Testament about God is already revealed in the Old Testament. The New Testament extends the story of God's intentions to restore humans to a plane of holiness. To do so will require an extraordinary act on his part. The restoration of the image of God within man must be accomplished by God; otherwise, man could claim to have no need of God.

The portrait of God differs remarkably from that of other gods mankind is known to worship. Unlike the gods of the ancients, the God of the New Testament cannot be reduced to spirits to be feared and appeased. He is not merely a part of the universe or the sum total of all souls. He is not so distant that he cannot be approached. He has not created a fatalistic cosmos and made everyone a machine. He is love, holy, and merciful. His wrath is sure, but it can be averted through a means which he himself has made possible in Jesus Christ.

**a. Context.** The material has been adapted from the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, which is in the public domain.

**Dependence on the Old Testament.** The whole of the New Testament presupposes and rests upon the Old Testament. Jesus Christ and his disciples accepted the idea of God revealed in the Old Testament and as it was reflected in Jewish religion. So much was it a matter of course, that it never occurred to them to proclaim or enforce the idea of God. Nor did they consciously feel the need of amending or changing it. They sought to correct some deductions made by later Judaism, but their point of departure was always the higher teaching of the prophets and Psalms, and their conscious endeavor in presenting God to men was to fulfill the Law and the Prophets ([Matt. 5:17](#)). Ideas concerning God in the Old Testament reappear in the New Testament. He is one, supreme, living, personal and spiritual, holy, righteous, and merciful. His power and knowledge are all-sufficient, and he is not limited in time or place. Nor can it be said that any distinctly new attributes are ascribed to God in the New Testament. Yet there is a difference. The conception and all its factors are placed in a new relation to man and the universe, whereby their meaning is transformed, enhanced, and enriched. The last trace of particularism disappears. God can no longer bear a proper name to associate him with Israel, or to distinguish him from other gods, for he is the God of all the earth, who is no respecter of persons or nations. Two new elements entered men's religious thought and gradually lifted its whole content to a new plane--Jesus Christ's experience and manifestation of the divine fatherhood, and the conviction that Christ himself was the full and final revelation of God.

**Gentile affinity.** Greek thought was not taken over bodily as was that of Hebrew thought, and it did not influence the fountain head of New Testament ideas. It did not color the mind and teaching of Jesus Christ. It affected the form rather than matter of New Testament teaching. It appears in the clear-cut distinction between flesh and spirit, mind and body, which emerges in Paul's epistles. In this instance, the Greek language helped define more accurately the spirituality of God. The idea of the *logos* in John, and the kindred idea of Christ as the image of God in Paul may be reminiscent of the Platonic and Stoic schools, but this is the constructive concept employed in the New Testament to define the religious significance of Christ and his essential relation to God.

**Absence of theistic proofs.** Philosophy never appears in the New Testament on its own account, but only as subservient to Christian experience. In the New Testament as in the Old Testament, the existence of God is taken for granted as the universal basis of all life and thought. Only in three passages of Paul's, addressed to pagan audiences, do we find anything approaching a natural theology. These are concerned rather with defining the nature of God than with proving his existence. When the people of Lystra would have worshipped Paul and Barnabas as pagan gods, the apostle protests that God is not like men, and bases his majesty upon his creatorship of all things ([Acts 14:15](#)). He urges the same argument at Athens, and appeals for its confirmation to the evidences of man's need of God, which he had found in Athens itself ([Acts 17:23-31](#)). The same natural witness of the soul is again in Romans made the ground of universal responsibility to God ([Acts 1:18-21](#)). No formal proof of God's existence is offered in the New Testament. Nor are the metaphysical attributes of God, his infinity, omnipotence and omniscience, as defined in systematic theology, at all set forth in the New Testament. The ground for these deductions is provided in the religious experience that finds God in Christ all-sufficient.

**b. Metaphysical attributes.** The abstract being of God and his metaphysical attributes are implied, but not defined, in the New Testament. His infinity, omnipotence, and omniscience are not enunciated in terms, but they are postulated in the whole scheme of salvation which he is carrying to completion. He is Lord of heaven and earth ([Matt. 11:25](#)). The forces of nature are at his command ([Matt. 5:45](#); [6:30](#)). He can answer every prayer and satisfy every need ([Matt. 7:7-12](#)). All things are possible to him ([Mark 10:27](#); [14:36](#)). He created all things ([Eph. 3:9](#)). All earthly powers are derived from Him ([Rom. 13:1](#)). By his power, he raised Christ from the dead and subjected to him "all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion" in heaven and on earth ([Eph. 1:20-21](#); compare [Matt. 28:18](#)). Every power and condition of existence are subordinated to the might of his love unto his saints ([Rom. 8:38-39](#)).

Neither time nor place can limit him. He is the eternal God ([Rom. 16:26](#)). His knowledge is as infinite as his power; he knows what the Son and the angels know not ([Mark 13:32](#)). He knows the hearts of men ([Luke 16:15](#)) and all their needs ([Matt. 6:8, 32](#)). His knowledge is especially manifested in his wisdom by which he works out his purpose of salvation, "the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal

purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" ([Eph. 3:10-11](#)). The New Testament implies that all perfections of power, condition, and being exist in God and are revealed in his love. They are not developed or established on metaphysical grounds. They flow out of his perfect fatherhood. Earthly fathers do what good they can for their children, but the heavenly father does all things for the best for his children--"God is at work in all things for the good of those who love him" ([Matt. 7:11](#); [Rom. 8:28](#)).

It is both assumed through the New Testament and stated categorically that God is one ([Mark 12:29](#); [Rom. 3:30](#); [Eph. 4:6](#)). No truth had sunk more deeply into the Hebrew mind by this time than the unity of God. Yet it is obvious from what has been written, that Jesus Christ claimed a power, authority, and position so unique that they can only be adequately described by calling him God. The apostolic church both in worship and in doctrine accorded him that honor. All that they knew of God as now fully and finally revealed was summed up in his person, "for in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" ([Col. 2:9](#)). If they did not call him God, they recognized and named him everything that God meant for them.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit is a third term that represents a divine person in the experience, thought, and language of Christ and his disciples. In the Johannine account of Christ's teaching, the Holy Spirit has a close affinity with Christ. Paul seems also to identify them in at least one passage: "the Lord is the Spirit" ([2 Cor. 3:17](#)). But in other places the three names are ranged side by side as representing three distinct persons ([Matt. 28:19](#); [2 Cor. 13:14](#); [Eph. 4:4-6](#)).

But how does the unity of God prevail with the divine status of the Son and the distinct subsistence of the Holy Spirit? Jesus Christ affirmed a unity between himself and the Father ([John 10:30](#)), a unity, too, which might be realized in a wider sphere, where the Father, the Son and believers should form one society ([John 17:21, 23](#)). The experience of the first Christians as a rule found Christ so entirely sufficient to their spiritual needs and so filled with all the fullness of God, that the problem of divine unity did not trouble them. Paul expresses his conception of the relation of Christ to God under the figure of the image. Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" ([Col. 1:15](#); [2 Cor. 4:4](#)). Another writer employs a similar metaphor. Christ is "the effulgence of (God's) glory, and the very image of his substance" ([Heb. 1:3](#)). These figures do not carry us beyond the fact that Christ in all things represented God because he participated in his being. In the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, the doctrine of the Word is developed for the same purpose. The eternal Reason of God who was ever with him, and of him, issues forth as revealed thought, or spoken word, in the person of Jesus Christ, who therefore is the eternal Word of God incarnate. So far and no farther the New Testament goes. Jesus Christ is God revealed. We know nothing of God, but that which is manifest in him. His love, holiness, righteousness and purpose of grace, ordering and guiding all things to realize the ends of his fatherly love, all this we know in and through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit takes of Christ's and declares it to men ([John 16:14](#)). The problems of the coordination of the One with the Three, of personality with the plurality of consciousness, of the Infinite with the finite, and of the Eternal God with the Word made flesh lie beyond human explanation. The Holy Spirit was given to teach the apostles and guide them in truth ([John 16:13](#)). "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" ([Matt. 28:20](#)).

**c. Moral attributes.** The nature and character of God are summed up in the twofold relation of Father and King in which he stands to men, and any abstract statements that may be made about him. Any attributes that may be ascribed to him are deductions from his royal fatherhood.

Christ relates directly the spirituality of God to his Fatherhood. "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers. God is Spirit" ([John 4:23](#)). Figurative expressions denoting the same truth are the Johannine phrases, "God is life" ([1 John 5:20](#)), and "God is light" ([1 John 1:5](#)).

Love is the most characteristic attribute of Fatherhood. It is the abstract term that most fully expresses the concrete character of God as Father. In John's theology, it is used to sum up all God's perfections in one general formula. God is love, and where no love is, there can be no knowledge of God and no realization of him ([1 John 4:8, 16](#)). With one exception ([Luke 11:42](#)), the phrase "the love of God" appears in the teaching of Jesus only as it is represented in the Fourth Gospel. There it expresses the bond of union and

communion, issuing from God, that holds together the whole spiritual society, God, Christ, and believers ([John 10; 14:21](#)). Christ's mission was that of revelation, rather than of interpretation, and what in person and act he represents before men as the living Father, the apostles describe as universal love. They saw and realized this love first in the Son, and especially in his sacrificial death. It is "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" ([Rom. 8:39](#)). "God commends his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" ([Rom. 5:8](#); cf. [Eph. 2:4](#)). Love was fully made known in Christ's death ([1 John 3:16](#)). The whole process of the incarnation and death of Christ was also a sacrifice of God's and the one supreme manifestation of his nature as love ([1 John 4:9-10](#); cf. [John 3:16](#)). The love of God is his fatherly relation to Christ extended to men through Christ. By the Father's love bestowed upon us, we are called children of God ([1 John 3:1](#)). Love is not only an emotion of tenderness and beneficence which bestows on men the greatest gifts, but a relation to God which constitutes their entire law of life. It imposes upon men the highest moral demands, and communicates to them the moral energy by which alone they can be met. It is law and grace combined. The love of God is perfected only in those who keep the word of Jesus Christ the righteous ([1 John 2:5](#)). "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" ([1 John 5:3](#)). It is manifested especially in brotherly love ([1 John 4:12, 20](#)). It cannot dwell with worldliness ([1 John 2:15](#)) or selfishness ([1 John 3:17](#)). Man derives it from God as he is made the son of God, begotten of him ([1 John 4:7](#)).

Righteousness and holiness were familiar ideas to Jesus and his disciples, as elements in the divine character. They were current in the thought of their time, and they stood foremost in the Old Testament conception. They were therefore adopted in their entirety in the New Testament, but they stand in a different context. They are coordinated with and even subordinated to, the idea of love. As kingship stands to fatherhood, so righteousness and holiness stand to love.

Once we find the phrase "Holy Father" spoken by Jesus ([John 17:11](#); cf. [1 Peter 1:15-16](#)). But generally the idea of holiness is associated with God in his activity through the Holy Spirit, which renews, enlightens, purifies and cleanses the lives of men. Every vestige of artificial, ceremonial, non-moral meaning disappears from the idea of holiness in the New Testament. The sense of separation remains only as separation from sin. So Christ as high priest is "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners" ([Heb. 7:26](#)). Where it dwells, no uncleanness must be ([1 Cor. 6:19](#)). Holiness is not a legal or abstract morality, but a life made pure and noble by the love of God shed abroad in men's hearts ([Rom. 5:5](#)). "The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" ([Rom. 14:17](#)).

Righteousness as a quality of character is practically identical with holiness in the New Testament. It is opposed to sin ([Rom. 6:13,10](#)) and iniquity ([2 Cor. 6:14](#)). It is coupled with goodness and truth as the fruit of the light ([Eph. 5:9](#); cf. [2 Tim. 2:22](#)). It implies a rule or standard of conduct, which in effect is one with the life of love and holiness. It is brought home to men by the conviction of the Holy Spirit ([John 16:8](#)). In its origin it is the righteousness of God ([Matt. 6:33](#); cf. [John 17:25](#)). In Paul's theology, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe" ([Rom. 3:22](#)) is the act of God, out of free grace, declaring and treating the sinner as righteous, that he thereby may become righteous, even as "we love, because he first loved us" ([1 John 4:19](#)). The whole character of God, then, whether we call it love, holiness or righteousness, is revealed in his work of salvation. He goes forth to men in love and mercy, that they may be made citizens of his kingdom, heirs of his righteousness, and participators in his love.

## Unit 2. The Character of God

In this unit, we attempt to describe something of the character of God. To do so, we have chosen three terms: father, king, and faithfulness. Obviously, no human can do an adequate job of describing God's character. The approach here is to examine three aspects that pertain to God's position, role, and being in hopes of capturing the essence of his character.

The idea that God is a "father" describes God's assumed "spiritual" role with humans. The New Testament speaks of God as a "father" figure in order to describe an intimate relationship that is possible through Jesus Christ. He is the perfect father; he is approachable; he cares for us, even in a world filled

with hurt and disappointment.

Another aspect of God that is worthy of discussion is his role as king. As a kingly figure, God is in a position to be the undisputed ruler of the universe. This rule means that all powers are subject to him--both good and evil. An interesting part of his kingship is that he shares it with Christ, to whom the church and all spiritual forces are also subject. The kingly role removes any doubt about his sovereignty. Those who submit themselves to his rule constitute the kingdom of God that is governed by spiritual rules.

God is also faithful. His faithfulness grants assurance of deliverance from this evil world to those who place themselves under his spiritual rule. There can be no doubting that in Jesus Christ, man rests in God's care. This is not just a wish or thought; it is realized in the person of God himself.

The three images merge in one person. Together, they describe God as loving and merciful, whose rule is indisputable, and whose promises are assured. For the believer, this means he *can* have an intimate relationship with God, although he is sovereign and totally "other" than his human creation. This also means God hears our groaning and acts out of love even toward those who choose to go their own way. And when he makes a promise to the believer, there should be no concern that he will not keep it. This portrait of God is not held by any other religious system. God's character is what makes him God!

**a. The fatherhood of God.** The fundamental and central idea about God in New Testament teaching is his fatherhood; it determines all that follows. In some sense, the idea was not unknown to pagan religions. Greeks and Romans acknowledged Father Zeus or Jupiter as the creator and preserver of nature, and as standing in some special relation to men. In the Old Testament the idea appears frequently, and has a richer content. Not only is God the creator and preserver of Israel, but he deals with her as a father with his child. "Like as a father pities his children, so Yahweh pities them that fear him" ([Psa. 103:13](#); cf. [Deut. 1:31](#); [Jer. 3:4, 19](#); [31:20](#); [Isa. 63:16](#); [Hosea 11:1](#); [Mal. 3:17](#)). Even his chastisements are "as a man chastens his son" ([Deut. 8:5](#); [Isa. 64:8](#)). The same idea is expressed under the figure of a mother's tender care ([Isa. 49:15](#); [66:13](#); [Psa. 27:10](#)), and it is embedded in the covenant relation. But in the Old Testament the idea does not occupy the central and determinative position it has in New Testament, and it is always limited to Israel.

In the teaching of Jesus Christ, God is preeminently the Father. It is his customary term for the Supreme Being, and it is noteworthy that Jesus' usage has never been quite naturalized. We still say "God" where Jesus would have said "the Father." He meant that the essential nature of God, and his relation to men, is best expressed by the attitude and relation of a father to his children; God is Father in an infinitely higher and more perfect degree than any man. He is "good" and "perfect," the heavenly Father, in contrast with men, who, even as fathers, are evil ([Matt. 5:48](#); [7:11](#)). What in them is an ideal imperfectly and intermittently realized, is in him completely fulfilled. Christ thought not of the physical relation of origin and derivation, but of the personal relation of love and care which a father bestows upon his children. The former relation is indeed implied, for the Father is ever working in the world ([John 5:17](#)), and all things lie in his power ([Luke 22:42](#)). By his preserving power, the least as well as the greatest creature lives ([Matt. 6:26](#); [10:29](#)). But it is not the fact of God's creative, preserving, and governing power that Christ emphasizes so much as the manner of it. He is absolutely good in all his actions and relations ([Matt. 7:11](#); [Mark 10:18](#)). To him men and beasts turn for all they need, and in him they find safety, rest, and peace ([Matt. 6:26, 32](#); [7:11](#)). His goodness is spontaneous and touches all living things, even upon the unjust and his enemies ([Matt. 5:45](#)). He rewards the obedient ([Matt. 6:1](#); [7:21](#)), forgives the disobedient ([Matt. 6:14](#); cf. [18:35](#)), and restores the prodigal ([Luke 15:11](#)). To the Father, therefore, should men pray for all good things ([Matt. 6:9](#)), and he is the ideal of all perfection, to which they should seek to attain ([Matt. 5:48](#)). Such is the general character of God as expressed in his fatherhood, but it is realized in different ways by those who stand before him in different relations.

Jesus Christ knows the Father as no one else does, and is related to him in a unique manner. The idea is central in his teaching, because the fact is fundamental in his experience. On his first personal appearance in history he declares that he must be about his Father's business ([Luke 2:49](#)), and at the last he commends his spirit into his Father's hands. Throughout his life, his filial consciousness is perfect and

unbroken. "I and the Father are one" ([John 10:30](#)). As he knows the Father, so the Father knows and acknowledges him. At the opening of his ministry, and again at its climax in the transfiguration, the Father bears witness to his perfect sonship ([Mark 1:11; 9:7](#)). It was a relation of mutual love and confidence. "The Father loves the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" ([John 3:35; 5:20](#)). The Father sent the Son into the world and entrusted him with his message and power ([Matt. 11:27](#)). He gave him those who believed in him, to receive his word ([John 6:37, 44-45; 17:6, 8](#)). He does the works and speaks the words of the Father who sent him ([John 5:36; 8:18, 29; 14:24](#)). His dependence upon the Father and his trust in him are equally complete ([John 11:41; 12:27; 17](#)). In this perfect union of Christ with God, unclouded by sin and unbroken by infidelity, God became for a human all that he could and would become. Christ's filial consciousness was in fact and experience the full and final revelation of God. "No one knows the Son, save the Father; neither does any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son wills to reveal him" ([Matt. 11:27](#)). Not only can we see in Christ what perfect sonship is, but in his filial consciousness the Father himself is so completely reflected that we may know the perfect Father also. "He who has seen me has seen the Father" ([John 8:19; 14:9](#)). So completely is the mind and will of Christ identified with that of the Father, that they relate, and the words and works of the Father shine out through Christ. "The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abides in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me" ([John 14:10-11](#)). As the Father, so is the Son, for men to honor or to hate ([John 5:23; 15:23](#)). In the last day, when he comes to execute the judgment which the Father has entrusted to him, he shall come in the glory of the Father ([Matt. 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26](#)). In all this Jesus is aware that his relation to the Father is unique. What in him is original and realized, in others can only be an ideal to be gradually realized by his communication. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes unto the Father, but by me" ([John 14:6](#)). He is, therefore, rightly called the "only begotten son" ([John 3:16](#)), "the unique one." His contemporaries believed that he made himself equal to God ([John 5:18](#)). The numerous references here to John's Gospel point out an emphasis in the teaching ministry of Jesus worthy of further study. The word "father" appears 58 times in Matthew, 18 times in Mark, and 51 times in Luke (some of these are parallel, referring to the same incident). In comparison, the word "father" appears 113 times in the Gospel of John. The word "son" appears about an equal number of times in each of the four Gospels. John's focus appears to be on the Father, so much so that one can see John's Gospel to be a book about the Father/Son relationship with narrative added for context.

Through Christ, his disciples and hearers, too, may know God as their Father. He speaks of "your Father" and "your heavenly Father." To them as individuals, it means a personal relation; he is "your Father" ([Matt. 6:4,18](#)). Their whole conduct should be determined by the consciousness of the Father's intimate presence ([Matt. 6:1,4](#)). To do his will is the ideal of life ([Matt. 7:21; 12:50](#)). More explicitly, it is to act as he does, to love and forgive as he loves and forgives ([Matt. 5:45](#)); and, finally, to be perfect as he is perfect ([Matt. 5:48](#)). Thus do men become sons of their Father who is in heaven. Their peace and safety lay in their knowledge of his constant and all-sufficient care ([Matt. 6:26, 32](#)). The ultimate goal of men's relation to Christ is that through him they should come to a relation with the Father like his relation both to the Father and to them, wherein Father, Son, and believers form a social unity ([John 14:21; 17:21, 23](#)).

While God's fatherhood is realized and revealed originally and fully in Christ, it also has significance for all men. Every man is born a child of God and heir of his kingdom ([Luke 18:16](#)). During childhood, all men are objects of his fatherly love and care ([Matt. 18:10](#)), and it is not his will that one of them should perish ([Matt. 18:14](#)). Even if they become his enemies, he still bestows his beneficence upon the evil and the unjust ([Matt. 5:44,45; Luke 6:35](#)). The prodigal son may become unworthy to be called a son, but the father always remains a father. Men may become so far unfaithful that in them the fatherhood is no longer manifest and that their inner spirits do not own God, but the devil, as their father ([John 8:42-44](#)). So their filial relation to God may be broken, but his nature and attitude are not changed. He is the Father absolutely, and as Father is he perfect ([Matt. 5:48](#)). The essential and universal divine Fatherhood finds its eternal and continual object in the unique Son who is in the bosom of the Father. As a relation with men, it is qualified by their attitude to God. While some by faithlessness make it of no avail, others by obedience become in the reality of their experience sons of their Father in heaven.

In the apostolic teaching, although the fatherhood of God is not so prominent as in the Gospels, it lies at the root of the whole system of salvation. Paul's central doctrine of justification by faith is but the

scholastic form of the parable of the Prodigal Son. John's idea that God is love is but an abstract statement of his fatherhood. In complete accord with Christ's teaching, that only through himself men know the Father and come to him, the whole apostolic system of grace is mediated through Christ the Son of God, sent because "God so loved the world" ([John 3:16](#)), that through his death men might be reconciled to God ([Rom. 5:10; 8:3](#)). He speaks to men through the Son who is the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance ([Heb. 1:2-3](#)). The central position assigned to Christ involves the central position of the fatherhood.

As in the teaching of Jesus, so in that of the apostles, we distinguish three different relationships in which the fatherhood is revealed in varying degrees. Primarily he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ([Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3](#)). As such he is the source of every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ ([Eph. 1:3](#)). Through Christ we have access unto the Father ([Eph. 2:18](#)). He is, therefore, God our Father ([Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3](#)). Believers are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus ([Gal. 3:26](#)). "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" ([Rom. 8:14](#)). These receive the spirit of adoption whereby they cry, "Abba, Father" ([Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6](#)).

The apostles' teaching, like Christ's, is that man in sin cannot possess the filial consciousness or know God as Father. But God, in his attitude to man, is always and essentially Father. In the sense of creaturehood and dependence, man in any condition is a son of God ([Acts 17:28](#)). And to speak of any other natural sonship which is not also morally realized is meaningless. From God's standpoint, man even in his sin is a possible son, in the personal and moral sense; and the whole process and power of his awakening to the realization of his sonship issues from the fatherly love of God, who sent his Son and gave the Spirit ([Rom. 5:5, 8](#)). He is "the Father" absolutely, "one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ" ([Eph. 4:6-7](#)).

**b. God as king.** After the divine Fatherhood, the kingdom of God (Mark and Luke) or of heaven (Matthew) is the next ruling conception in the teaching of Jesus. As the doctrine of the Fatherhood sets forth the individual relation of men to God, that of the kingdom defines their collective and social condition, as determined by the rule of the Father.

Christ adopted and transformed the Old Testament idea of Yahweh's rule into an inner and spiritual principle of his gospel, without, however, quite detaching it from the external and apocalyptic thought of his time. He employs the Jewish idea insofar as it involves the enforcing of God's rule. In the future he anticipates such a reorganization of social conditions in the manifestation of God's reign over men and nature, as will ultimately amount to a regeneration of all things in accordance with the will of God ([Mark 9:1; 13:30; Matt. 16:28; 19:28](#)). But he eliminated the particularism and favoritism toward the Jews, as well as the non-moral, easy optimism as to their destiny in the kingdom. The blessings of the kingdom are moral and spiritual in their nature, and the conditions of entrance into it are moral too ([Matt. 8:11; 21:31, 43; 23:37-38; Luke 13:29](#)). They are humility, hunger and thirst after righteousness, the love of mercy, purity, peace, and service ([Matt. 5:3-10; 18:1, 3](#); cf. [Matt. 20:26-28; 25:34; 7:21; John 3:3; Luke 17:20-21](#)). The king of such a kingdom is, therefore, righteous, loving, and gracious toward all men. He governs by the inner communion of spirit with spirit and by the loving coordination of the will of his subjects with his own will.

Generally in Mark and Luke, and sometimes in Matthew, it is called the kingdom of God. In several parables, the Father takes the place of king, and it is the Father who gives the kingdom ([Luke 12:32](#)). God the Father is therefore the King, and we are entitled to argue from Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom to his idea of God. The will of God is the law of the kingdom, and the ideal of the kingdom is, therefore, the character of God.

But in some passages Christ reveals the consciousness of his own kingship. He approves Peter's confession of his messiahship, which involves kingship ([Matt. 16:16](#)). He speaks of a time in the immediate future when men shall see "the Son of man coming in his kingdom" ([Matt. 16:28](#)). As judge of all men, he designates himself king ([Matt. 25:34; Luke 19:38](#)). He accepts the title king from Pilate ([Matt.](#)

[27:11,12](#); [Mark 15:2](#); [Luke 23:3](#); [John 18:37](#)), and claims a kingdom which is not of this world ([John 18:36](#)). His disciples look to him for the restoration of the kingdom ([Acts 1:6](#)). His kingdom, like that of God, is inner, moral, and spiritual.

But there can be only one moral kingdom, and only one supreme authority in the spiritual realm. The coordination of the two kingships must be found in their relation to the fatherhood. The two ideas are not antithetical or even independent. They may have been separate and even opposed as Christ found them, but he used them in a unique manner. God, as Father, rules a spiritual kingdom by love and righteousness, and ordered nature and history to fulfill his purpose of grace. Men's prayer should be that the Father's kingdom may come ([Matt. 6:9-10](#)). They enter the kingdom by doing the Father's will ([Matt. 7:21](#)). It is their Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom ([Luke 12:32](#)). The fatherhood is primary, but it carries with it authority, government, law and order, care and provision, to set up a kingdom reflecting a Father's love and expressing his will. And as Christ is the revealer and mediator of Fatherhood, he also is the messenger and bearer of the kingdom. In his person, preaching and works, the kingdom is present to men ([Matt. 4:17, 23](#); [12:28](#)), and as its king he claims men's allegiance and obedience ([Matt. 11:28-29](#)). His sonship constitutes his relation to the kingdom. As son he obeys the Father, depends upon him, represents him to men, and is one with him. And in virtue of this relation, he is the messenger of the kingdom and its principle, and at the same time he shares with the Father its authority and kingship.

In the apostolic writings, the emphasis upon the elements of kingship, authority, law, and righteousness is greater than in the Gospels. The kingdom is related to God ([Col. 4:11](#); [1 Thess. 2:12](#); [2 Thess. 1:5](#)), and to Christ ([Col. 1:13](#); [2 Tim. 4:1, 18](#); [2 Peter 1:11](#)), and to both together ([Eph. 5:5](#); compare [1 Cor. 15:24](#)). The phrase "the kingdom of the Son of his love" sums up the idea of the joint kingship, based upon the relation of Father and Son.

**c. The faithfulness of God.** It is one thing to describe God as sovereign, creator, and a father figure. But this rings of authority and suggests arbitrary action. What about his "faithfulness"? Where is the assurance that he will deliver on his promises? What is there here that speaks of assurance and guarantees?

The gospel is alone in making the claim that God has acted on man's behalf and swears by his own person (the highest authority possible) that he will be faithful to embrace those whose lives are sustained by faith. The issue brings up two very important points. First, we are compelled to deal with the nature of God; second we must ask of the basis on which man is recognized by God.

**The nature of God.** As to the first point, it should be recognized that God does not act in an arbitrary manner toward people of faith or even toward those who turn aside from him. If so, this would be a flaw in his character. He would be characterized as a God who could not be trusted and whose interest is turned inward. The whole tenor of scripture—both Old and New Testaments—is that God loves man, the creature he created in his own image. God is not inclined to move against man arbitrarily. His love compels him to act in man's best interest (John 3:16). His righteousness requires him to move against wickedness, but that is not an arbitrary matter. It is one of principle rooted in the character of God.

The matter is well illustrated by the writer of the Book of Hebrews. There it is said, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.' . . . Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 6:13-20). The passage accents God's eternal purpose and the accomplishment of that purpose in Jesus Christ. Faithfulness is part of God's character.

**The nature of salvation.** God's purpose for humanity is also for faithfulness. Unlike God, who is without sin, man cannot achieve righteousness on his own or even by keeping divine injunctions. That was proved through the experience of Israel (Romans 2-3). Righteous becomes a reality for humans through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Man pursues the divine will, but observance of commands *per se* does not make one righteous. Consequently, the faithfulness of God becomes an avenue through which mortals can become faithful. There is human responsibility, to be sure, but the means to faithfulness comes from God. God then guarantees he will deliver on his promise by sending his Spirit as a guarantee—as assurance—that God will act in man's favor (Romans 8; Eph. 1:3-14). Assurance is a vital element in man's relationship with God. To deny this assurance is an affront on God's character; to deny the role of Jesus Christ blasphemous.

## Unit 3. Man

The human—man—is God's preeminent creation. He has been given dominion over the animals and plant kingdoms. With an endowment of reason and a commission to explore and manage his surroundings, man operates with a divine mandate. Being made in the image of God, he possesses divine-like characteristics. He is capable of love and hate, good and evil, faith and rebellion. We should not be surprised, therefore, to find that some men choose one path and some choose another. While God's desire is for man to pursue the higher road, he sometimes follows the path of foolishness.

Whether man's choices are good or bad, man remains the object of God's love and care. He is neither a pawn in God's hand, nor the subject of indifference. He relies upon God for his every breath and every morsel of food. He cannot control his own destiny, but depends upon God for redemption. We cannot fathom the absolutes of man's character, but we can know enough to understand our common plight and to appreciate the acts of God on our behalf.

The New Testament uses four contrasts to describe man in the redeemed and unredeemed state. An article on man in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* identifies these. They are sometimes confusing; some have seen more in the terms than is implied. By examining these in perspective, we should expect to see the contrasts clearly. The first is the "carnal man" (*sarkikos anthropos*) vs. the "spiritual man" (*pneumatikos anthropos*) ([Rom. 8:1-14](#); [1 Cor. 3:1, 3-4](#)). The second is the "outward man" (*exoanthropos*) vs. the "inward man" (*esoanthropos*) ([2 Cor. 4:16](#); [Rom. 7:22](#); [Eph. 3:16](#)). A third is the "old man" (*palaios anthropos*) vs. the "new man" (*neos anthropos* or *kainos anthropos*) ([Rom. 6:6](#); [Eph. 4:22](#); [Col. 3:9](#); [Eph. 2:15](#); [4:24](#); [Col. 3:10](#)). And a fourth contrast is the "natural man" (*psuchikos anthropos*) vs. the "spiritual man" (*pneumatikos anthropos*) ([2 Cor. 2:14](#); [3:3-4](#); [Eph. 2:3](#); [1 Cor. 2:15](#); [3:1](#); [14:37](#); [15:46](#); [Gal. 6:1](#)). The contrasts present a portrait of man in the pre-conversion state and in the after-conversion state. One should be careful not to impose conditions on either the unredeemed or the redeemed that takeaway human responsibility.

The unit breaks the discussion into three parts. Part (a) examines man in the pre-conversion state; part (b) looks at man in the after-conversion state; part (c) entertains the question of predestination.

**a. Man in the pre-conversion state.** The idea of the "natural man" refers to man as he is by nature, contrasted with man as he becomes by grace. This phrase is exclusively Pauline.

**The old man.** The "old man" is the "natural man" considered chronologically--prior to that operation of the Holy Spirit by which he is renovated into the "new man." The old house is the house as it was before it was remodeled; an old garment is the garment as it was before it was re-fashioned; and the "old man" is man as he was before he was regenerated and sanctified by the grace of the Spirit. "Our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:6, NIV). Here the "old self" is called the "body of sin," as the physical organism is called the body of the soul or spirit, and is to be crucified and destroyed, in order that man may no longer be the servant of sin. Paul admonishes, "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires . . . Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22,

24, NIV). The "old self" has been corrupted, and we are called upon to "put it off." The figure is that of putting off old clothes which are unclean and putting on those garments which have come from the wash clean and snowy white.

When Paul calls the "natural man" the "old man," and describes it as the "body of sin" which is "corrupted," and tells us that it must be "crucified" and "put off" in order that we may not serve sin, but may have righteousness and holiness and knowledge and the image of God, we get some conception of the moral meaning which he is endeavoring to convey by these contrasts ([Gal. 5:19-24](#)).

There is another Pauline antithesis which helps us understand what he means by the "natural man." It is the distinction which he draws between the "carnal mind" and the "spiritual mind." The critical reference is [Rom. 8:1-14](#). In this place the "carnal mind" is identified with the "law of death," and the "spiritual mind" is identified with the "law of the Spirit." These two "laws" are two principles and codes: the one makes man to be at "enmity against God" and leads to "death"; the other makes him the friend of God, and leads to "life and peace." The word "carnal" connotes all that is fallen and sinful and unregenerated in man. In its gross sense the "carnal" signifies that which is contrary to nature, or nature expressing itself in low and bestial forms of sin.

The "natural man," the "old man," the "outward man," or the "carnal man" may be redirected by the Spirit, as he is second-born or regenerated. There is an "old" life, an "outward" life, a "carnal" life, a "natural" life, as contrasted with the "new" life, the "inward" life, the "spiritual" life, the "gracious" life.

**The outward man.** Paul establishes a contrast between "the inward man" and "the outward man." "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16, NIV). Now what sort of man is the "outward man" as contrasted with the "inward man"? In Greek, the *exo-anthropos* is set over against the *eso-anthropos*.

The contrast here drawn between the "outward" and the "inward man," though illustrated by the contrast in [Rom. 7:22](#) between the law in the members of his body and his inner being, and in [Eph. 4:22](#); [Col. 3:9](#) between "the old self" and "the new self" is not precisely the same. Those contrasts relate to the difference between the sensual and the moral nature, "the flesh" and "the spirit"; this to the difference between the material and the spiritual nature (Stanley).

"The outward man" is the body, and "the inward man" is the soul, or immaterial principle in the human make-up. As the body is wasted by the afflictions of life, the soul is renewed. What is death to the body is life to the soul. The afflictions of life, culminating in death itself, have diametrically opposite effects upon the body and upon the soul. They kill the one; they quicken the other.

The renewal of man's nature comes at conversion to Jesus Christ where, at baptism, God gives his Spirit to dwell with the inward man. As the one is broken down by the adverse dispensations of life, the other is built up by the discipline of the Spirit.

**The inward man.** The "inward man" is a designation of human nature viewed as internally and centrally regenerated, as contrasted with the "outward man" ([2 Cor. 4:16](#); [Rom. 7:22](#); [Eph. 3:16](#)). This phrase indicates the whole human nature conceived as affected from within--in the secret, inside, and true springs of activity--by the Holy Spirit of God. Such a change is not superficial, but a change in the inner central self; not a mere external reformation, but an internal transformation. Grace operates not from the circumference toward the center, but from the center toward the circumference, of life. The product is a man renovated in his "inward parts," changed in the dynamic center of his heart.

**Depravity.** The question of man's nature is traceable to the Genesis account of "the fall of man." The language of "the fall" is missing in the biblical text. The idea derives from the sin of Adam and Eve. The effect is often said to have permanently marked all other humans who would come after. This idea led to a reordering of baptism in the 5th century.

**b. The new man.** Generally described, the "new man" is man as he becomes under the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, contrasted with man as he is by nature.

**The spiritual man.** The "spiritual man" is a designation given in opposition to the "carnal man" and to the "natural man" ([Rom. 8:1-14](#); [1 Cor. 2:15](#); [3:1,3-4](#); [2:14](#); [3:11](#); [14:37](#); [15:46](#); [Gal. 6:1](#); [Eph. 2:3](#)). All three of these terms are personifications of human nature. The "carnal man" is human nature viewed as ruled and dominated by sensual appetites and fleshly desires--as energized by those impulses which have close association with the bodily affections. The "natural man" is human nature ruled and dominated by human reason--those higher powers of the soul not yet influenced by divine grace. The "spiritual man" is this same human nature after it has been seized upon and interpenetrated by the Holy Spirit. The spiritual life is that life of which the Holy Spirit is the author and preserver; and the "spiritual man" is that nature or character in man which the Holy Spirit originates, preserves, determines, disciplines, sanctifies, and glorifies.

**The new man.** The "new man" is an appellation yielded by the contrasted idea of the "old man" ([Rom. 6:6](#); [Eph. 4:22](#); [Col. 3:9](#); [Eph. 2:15](#); [4:24](#); [Col. 3:10](#)). The "old" is "corrupt" and expresses itself in evil "deeds"; the "new" possesses the "image of God" and is marked by "knowledge," "righteousness," and "holiness." There are two Greek words for "new"-- *neos* and *kainos*. The former means new in the sense of young, as the new-born child is a young thing; the latter means "new" in the sense of renovated, as when the house which has been rebuilt is called a new house. The converted man is "new" (*neo-anthropos*) in the sense that he is a "babe in Christ," and "new" (*kaino-anthropos*) in the sense that his moral nature is renovated and built over again.

In the New Testament there are five different verbs used to express the action put forth in making the "old man" a "new man."

(1) In [Eph. 2:10](#) and [4:24](#), man is said to be "created" (*ktizo*), and in [2 Cor. 5:17](#) the product is called a "new creature" (*kaine ktisis*), a renovated creature. Out of the "old man" the Holy Spirit has created the "new man."

(2) In [1 Peter 1:3,13](#) and elsewhere, he is said to be "begotten again" (*anagennao*), and the product is a "babe in Christ" ([1 Cor. 3:1](#)). The "old man" thus becomes the "new man" by a spiritual begetting; his paternity is assigned to the Holy Spirit.

(3) In [Eph. 2:5](#) and elsewhere, he is said to be "quicken" (*zoopoieo*), and the product is represented as a creature which has been made "alive from the dead" ([Rom. 6:13](#)). The "old man," being "dead in trespasses and sins" ([Eph. 2:1](#)), is brought forth from his sin-grave by a spiritual resurrection.

(4) In [Eph. 4:23](#) he is represented as being made "young" (*ananeo*), and the product is a child of the Spirit at the commencement of his religious experience.

(5) In [2 Cor. 4:16](#) and in [Rom. 12:2](#), he is said to be "renovated" (*anakainoo*). The "old man" is renovated into the "new man." Sinful human nature is taken by the Spirit and morally recast.

The "new man" is the converted, regenerated man. Regeneration is a new life, a new creation, a new birth, a spiritual determination, an attachment to the holy, a new understanding, a heart of flesh, a good conscience. The regenerated man is a man with a new governing disposition--a "new man," an "inward man," a "spiritual man."

**c. Predestination.** Any discussion of the natural and spiritual man is bound to bring up the question of God's predestination and human depravity.

The following is adapted from the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, which is now in the public domain.

Predestination pertains to salvation effected by God, who has called and elected persons to life eternal. The idea of predestination is set forth in [Rom. 8:29,30](#). The idea recurs in Ephesians 1, where it is said (1:4-5) that God hath chosen us in Christ "before the foundation of the world," having predestinated or "foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ." It is said, further, that our salvation imports "the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure" (1:9), which he purposed in Christ. This "eternal purpose" to save men through Christ is again referred to in [Eph. 3:11](#). The predestined certainty of God's gracious work in Christ was meant to encourage and reassure all who trust in his grace. In [Rom. 9:14-25](#). The absolute sovereignty of God is put in a form whereby election is made to originate in the divine will apart from all human merit, whether actual or foreseen. But from this assertion of God's free supremacy we can derive no concrete theodicy, or do more than infer that God is just and wise in his exercise of free grace, even when his doings are most perplexing to us.

The needful thing is to understand the nature of the cooperation that takes place between the divine and the human factors or elements. It must be carefully observed that nothing in Scripture points to any personal and inexorable predestination to reprobation, in any sense corresponding to the personal election to salvation. A non-election there may be, but not in any sense that annuls full personal responsibility. The idea of reprobation was first introduced by Gottschalk, a monk of the 9th century, long after the predestination doctrine had received its first full and positive exposition by Augustine (5th century). Augustine, following upon the indecision shown by the fathers in the first three centuries of the church, made the doctrine of a special predestination his foundation for special grace, in opposition to Pelagius. Augustine gave new prominence in his theory to the absolute will of God. He made divine grace the only ground of man's salvation; it was to him the irresistible power working faith within the heart, and bringing freedom as its result. It was to him God's absolute predestination that determined who were believers. But Augustine held predestination as an inference from his conception of the Fall and of grace, rather than as a metaphysical principle.

In the Middle Ages, Anselm, Peter Lombard, and Aquinas, followed the Augustinian views only to a certain extent. Aquinas admits that predestination implies a relation to grace, but holds that grace is not of the essence of predestination. Predestination is, to Aquinas, a part of Providence, and it presupposes election in the order of reason. Though divine goodness in general be without election, Aquinas thinks the communication of a particular good cannot be without election. Predestination has, for him, its foundation in the goodness of God, which is its reason. Aquinas thinks predestination most surely takes effect, but not as from necessity; the effect takes place under the working of contingency. From such views we are recalled to the idea of a rigorous predestination, by Thomas Bradwardine and John Wycliff, in pre-Reformation times. We are thus brought up to the decretal system--so called from Calvin's making predestination consist of the eternal decree of God--which became, in its metaphysical principle, the fundamental position of the whole Reformed theology after the Reformation.

The theology of the Reformed church adopted the Calvinistic doctrine of the decree of predestination and election. Calvin, however, simply carried the Augustinian theory to its logical and necessary conclusion, and he was the first to adopt the doctrine as the cardinal point or primordial principle of a theological system. Zwingli, it must be remembered, was, even before Calvin, of consistent deterministic leanings, as part of his large speculative views, which were not without a tendency to universalism. Salvation was, to Calvin, the execution of a divine decree, which was supposed to fix the extent and conditions of such salvation.

Reprobation was, for Calvin, involved in election, and divine foreknowledge and foreordination were taken to be identical. Calvin's mode of defining predestination was as the eternal decree of God, by which he has decided with himself what is to become of each and every individual. For all, he maintains, are not created in like condition, but eternal life ordained for some, eternal condemnation for others. Calvin confesses that this is a "horrible decree," and it is not surprising to find competent theologians in our time denying such a form of predestinarianism any place in the teachings of Paul, who never speaks of reprobation.

It is generally overlooked, however, that theological advance registered by Calvin is to be seen by study of the views of the Middle Ages, and on to the Reformation, not by viewing Calvinism in our post-Reformation lights. It was love--"the fatherly love of God," as he terms it--the efficiency of saving love--which Calvin insisted upon in his teaching about God. But Calvin also heightened men's ideas as to the certitude of personal salvation. It is but fair to Calvin to remember that he maintained divine sovereignty to be that of divine wisdom, righteousness, and love, and expressly rejected the notion of absolute power as, in this connection, a heathenish idea. The Calvinistic doctrine was not absolute, but mediated in Christ, and conditioned upon faith.

Luther and the Lutheran church at first shared the doctrine of predestination and election, Luther in his treatment of free will reproducing the Augustinian form of the doctrine in a strict manner. The predestination of Luther and Melancthon proceeded, not from their conception of God, but rather from the doctrine of sin and grace. Melancthon was less disposed than Luther to press the doctrine of absolute predestination, and, in his "synergistic" tendencies, laid increasing stress on human freedom, until he at length rejected the doctrine of absolute predestination. But the Lutheran "Formula of Concord," prepared in 1577, was not a very logical and consistent presentation of the case, for, opposed at points to Augustinianism, it fell back, in the end, on election in the Augustinian spirit. Or, to put the matter in another form, the "Formula of Concord" may be said to have held with Augustinianism, but to have differed by maintaining a Universal call along with a particular election, and it rejected the decree of reprobation. Later Lutheranism adopted a moderate form of doctrine, wherein predestination was often identified with prescience. But Lutheranism ought not, in strictness, to be identified, as is sometimes done, with the Arminian theory. The Lutheran doctrine of predestination was further developed by Schleiermacher, who emphasized the efficiency of grace, while adopting its universality in the Lutheran sense.

Arminianism, in its earliest assertion, maintained simply universal grace and conditional election. Arminius gave grace supreme place, and made it, when welcome, pass into saving grace. He made election depend on faith, which latter is the condition of universal grace. Arminianism rejects the so-called common grace of the predestination theory, and its effectual grace for the elect, for, in the Arminian view, saving grace can in no case be missed save by resistance or neglect. Arminianism holds the awakened human will to cooperate with divine grace, in such wise that it rests with the human will whether the divine grace is really accepted or rejected. It is the claim of Arminianism to do more justice than Calvinism to faith and repentance, as conditions of personal salvation, and precedent thereto. The Arminian standpoint admits the foreknowledge of God, but denies foreordination.

Wesleyanism, or Methodist Arminianism, maintains, like Calvinism, the will of God to be supreme. But it distinguishes between the desires and the determinations of God. It takes divine foreknowledge to precede the divine volitions. It makes God's prescience purely intuitional, and regards that which he knows as nowise necessitated by such knowledge, a conception of God which differentiates the Wesleyan type of thought from Calvinism. God is held to have left events in the moral sphere contingent upon the human will. Hence, human probation is based upon this position, as to man's free choice. Influence of God upon man's will is postulated, for its right guidance and direction, but not in any coercive sense, as Augustinianism seems to Wesleyanism to imply. Thus, it is hoped to preserve just balance, and maintain proper responsibility, between the divine and the human factors in this spiritual cooperation. (James Lindsay)

## Conclusion

The gospel bears witness to Jesus, the unique one of God, who revealed God more fully than he had ever been revealed. The gospel identifies the character of the new man in Christ. It describes the life of those who are remade in a likeness to God. The principles it sets forth are of divine origin and intended for man's good.

The goal of the gospel is a redeemed person who will dedicate his/her energies to the service of others. That service or ministry may be any type of service performed in the name of Christ by a Christian. This service to other humans is conjoined with service to God and must be congruent with the nature of the gospel. One who serves or ministers may be an agent of God for effecting change in the life of human beings through the message of proclamation. Or one may be a servant for the alleviation of physical, mental, or spiritual want. In either case, one is acting under the authority of Christ. It is the New Testament which defines the nature and task of Christian ministry.

The Epistles bring to the believer an understanding of the life one is expected to live under Christ. They show the application of those principles taught by Jesus and unfold more fully the mystery of redemption. The redemption offered by God presupposes definite concepts of truth, a truth rooted in theological ideas. For those who accept it, there are expectations in ethical and social behavior and in attitudes toward God.

Redemption is a dramatic process which had a historical point of beginning and develops toward maturity throughout the believer's earthly existence. By the grace of God who sent his Son to die for him, man becomes united with Christ in the likeness of his resurrection. He simultaneously escapes from the threat of God's wrath by being loosed from the throes of unrighteousness and enjoys the peace and well-being that comes from a close fellowship with the Sovereign of the universe.

There is a sense in which the Epistles may be conceived as offering a "pattern" for life, but one should be careful not to reduce the gospel to forms and ceremonies. The best safeguard against an abuse of the gospel is a dedication to objective pursuit of God's will. Such study will lay bare God's instructions for mankind and enable one to seek out the proper application of the Scriptures to modern living.

This exploration of the New Testament has aimed at determining the general content of the Greek Scriptures. It is hoped that the student may judge it objectively and make a proper response to it.

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Syllabus Developer**

Mac Lynn, STD, *San Francisco Theological Seminary*  
*D.Admin. (honorary), The International University*

### **Contributor**

*David Moore, Ph.D., D.Min., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

**NationsUniversity®**

West Monroe, Louisiana, U.S.A.  
©May 2017