

What is required to hold all of these realities together, according to the psalm?

Think of all of the spiritual realities spoken of in the psalm:

- giving glory to God,
- rejecting self-glorification and idolatry (false belief),
- clarity of belief,
- trust in the LORD,
- blessing from the LORD,
- worship of the LORD.

Which of them are strengths of your personal life; of the life of your fellowship? Which are weaknesses? What can you do to more fully practice your personal strengths and strengthen your weaknesses? What can you do as leaders in your fellowship to enhance strengths and strengthen weakness.

Pray together about these critical matters, seeking the blessing of the LORD.

Finally, sing a song of praise to the LORD that focus on Him (and not on you). Shout aloud together the final word of the psalm, "Hallelujah!"

# FAITH, VISION, & THE GLORY OF GOD

Seven Discussion Guides for Bible Study

Based on the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship  
Doctrinal Basis

For InterVarsity Staff and Students

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What is the New Testament name of God? (Check out Matthew 28: 19 for the resurrected Jesus’ answer to this question).

3. What two false paths, two spiritual dead-ends, does the psalm begin by rejecting?

How is self-glorification inconsistent with the characteristics of the LORD we have just been praising? Can you both self-glorify and a worshipper of the LORD? Why not?

What is the central error of idolatry? Is it in making visual representations of the deity? Is that all of the error? Is idolatry only an ancient problem? Can you identify contemporary forms of idolatry? What does idolatry produce in the lives of its devotees? How are self-glorification and idolatry connected? How is idolatry inconsistent with the characteristics of the LORD we have just been praising? Can you be both a worshipper of the LORD and a worshipper of idols? Why not?

How is worship related to clarity of belief in the light of this psalm and its rejection of idolatry and self-glorification?

4. The key verb in vv. 9-11 is “trust.” Who is called to trust? In what are God’s people called to trust? How is “trust” something more than intellectual assent to the statements in these verses about the LORD? How is this “something more” related to those statements? Does it make sense to say, “I agree that the Lord is our help and shield,” and not “trust” Him?
5. What is the key verb in vv. 12-15? Can you settle on a definition of this word? What does the psalm mean by stating “The LORD remembers us ...?” Can the LORD have a memory lapse? If not, what does this statement mean? How is the LORD’s remembering related to his blessing? Who are the recipients of blessing from the LORD? What connection does the psalm assume between vv. 9-11 and 12-15?
6. Now think the psalm together. What connections can you discern in the psalm between the rejection of false belief, clarity of belief, trust, giving God glory, and worship? How are each of these ideas, which are important for the psalm, dependent on the others?
  - For example, what effect does false belief have on worship; on giving glory to God; on trusting in God and receiving His blessing?
  - Or, how does self-glorification undercut trust in the LORD; worship to the LORD; clarity of belief about the LORD; trust in the LORD?
  - Or, what effect does clarity of belief have on trust in the LORD; worship to the LORD; false beliefs about the LORD?

# FAITH, GIVING GLORY TO GOD, ☞ THE DOCTRINAL BASIS: PSALM 115

*“We believe ... To God be the glory forever”*

Our Doctrinal Basis begins each of its statements by asserting “We believe ...” and concludes with a ringing affirmation “To God be all glory.” This framework is designed to help us see what value doctrinal conviction brings to the life of Christian discipleship. To probe the relationship of faith, worship, and living to the glory of God, we turn to a study of Psalm 115.

1. Alec Motyer says that Psalm 115 “is as alive as an act of worship as it is in its theology.” (See, *New Bible Commentary* (1994), p. 563). Motyer suggests that we should see the psalm as antiphonal worship involving two choirs, a congregation, and a leader interacting to praise the LORD. To get something of the feel of this lively interaction read the psalm aloud in the following way. Divide your group into two parts (A and B, below). Get one person to volunteer to be the leader. And all will read the parts for the congregation (All). Read it in the follow way:

All	w. 1-3
Leader	w. 4-8
A	v. 9a
B	v. 9b
A	v. 10a
B	v. 10b
A	v. 11a
B	v. 11b
All	v. 12a
All	v. 12b-13
Leader	w. 14-15
All	w. 16-18

2. The most frequently repeated word in this psalm is “LORD.” It is important to remember that this is not a generic name like our English “God.” It is the particular name of the Old Testament God of the covenant of grace. Sometimes it is translated “Yahweh,” taking the Hebrew consonants of the name, and supplying likely vowels. In older translations of the Bible it is rendered by “Jehovah.”

What does all this repetition tell you about what the author was trying to accomplish in writing this poem? Look through the psalm and make a list of the attributes of the LORD. Now turn your list into praise. Offer short expressions of praise and adoration to the LORD using your own words, but based on the concepts and words of the psalm.

## DOCTRINAL BASIS

*We believe in:*

*The only true God, the almighty Creator of all things, existing eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—full of love and glory.*

*The unique divine inspiration, entire trustworthiness and authority of the Bible.*

*The value and dignity of all people: created in God’s image to live in love and holiness, but alienated from God and each other because of our sin and guilt, and justly subject to God’s wrath.*

*Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, who lived as a perfect example, who assumed the judgment due sinners by dying in our place, and who was bodily raised from the dead and ascended as Savior and Lord.*

*Justification by God’s grace to all who repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.*

*The indwelling presence and transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all believers a new life and a new calling to obedient service.*

*The unity of all believers in Jesus Christ, manifest in worshiping and witnessing churches, making disciples throughout the world.*

*The victorious reign and future personal return of Jesus Christ, who will judge all people with justice and mercy, giving over the unrepentant to eternal condemnation but receiving the redeemed into eternal life.*

*To God be glory forever.*

# INTRODUCTION: VISION & THE DOCTRINAL BASIS

*“Where there is no vision the people perish (Proverbs 29:18a).”*

Perhaps like us, you have heard this sentence solemnly intoned in more than one “Vision talk.” The presenters of these talks suggest that we take on board the simple and important truth that “without a plan we are dead in the water.” And they hint that we should just get right down to work on the plan or just go along with the plan that has already been made up for us. However, this saying from Proverbs reaches much deeper than advocating planning as a significant aspect of human flourishing. This deeper layer of meaning is the spirit in which we offer this set of Bible study/discussions on the IVCF Doctrinal Basis.

Two words in the proverb need to be examined more closely. “Vision” is a word drawn from the orbit of Hebrew prophecy. It is “prophetic vision.” It describes what prophets come to see or know as from the LORD and are called to pass on to the people of God. You can find OT examples of this prophetic vision in Isaiah 6 or Ezekiel 1-2 or I Kings 22. “Vision” is a medium of God’s revelation of himself and his plans. In its broadest sense it means “God’s revelation.”

“Perish” is one possible sense of the original Hebrew word, but its basic meaning is “run wild” or “run amok.” It is the verb used to describe the wild, orgiastic rebellion of Israel in the incident of the “golden calf” in Exodus 32: 6. This “running wild” into idolatry resulted in the death of thousands, perishing, quite literally. Amos uses this word to describe the gradual but remorseless decline into idolatry of Israel, with the result that God’s people experience a famine of hearing the words of the LORD and live in rebellious wildness oriented to national death. Abandoning God’s revelation and turning to our own best thoughts, yes, our idolatrous thoughts, always is a pathway to spiritual death.

Putting these two ideas together, we get a fuller and more accurate translation: “Where there is no revelation from God, the people descend into idolatry, moral decadence, and spiritual ruin.”

This translation is reinforced if we consider the next line in this verse, “but blessed is the one who keeps the law.” Most of the sentence-long proverbs contain two lines that re-echo and reinforce one another. This is an example of the basic Hebrew poetic convention of parallelism. In this case the lines reinforce and deepen one another by contrast. If the absence of revelation from God brings disaster, “keeping” God’s fatherly instruction (torah) leads to blessing, to richness and peace and joy.

Unless our plans and goals and personal lives are receptive and submissive to God’s revelation to us, we too decline into idolatry, evil, disorder, and ultimately into spiritual death. Conversely where we embrace and obey God’s revelation, there we can expect real life and goodness and growth. What we do with the revelation of God,

For further reading and study:

John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Baker, 1984).

Wenham exhaustively surveys the four Gospels to discover what they teach and reflect of Jesus’ view of the Old Testament and how that bears on the meaning and authority of the apostles. Provides an unsurpassed grounding for a high view of Biblical authority.

J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2005).

A classic exposition of a high view of Scripture. Packer argues for the view expressed in the IVCF Doctrinal Basis thoroughly, thoughtfully, compellingly.

Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Eerdmans, 2002).

Telford Work, a younger evangelical theologian, offers us a fresh and faithful and high view of Scripture with an eye on the challenges of our post-Christian and post-modern age.

the status of “enemies” in terms of the commandment he originally places before us? Why (in the terms of this passage)? Do you think of anyone as being your enemies? One way of setting aside this passage is to deny that we have enemies, so think deeply about this question. What should you begin to do toward these adversaries in obedience to the command to “love your neighbor?”

What do you learn from this case study about Jesus’ method of interpreting the commands of Scripture? How does this suggest his method is different from the method of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law?

8. Summarize what you have learned about the interpretation of Scripture from the teaching of Jesus. How do these interpretive methods relate to Jesus’ foundational basic beliefs about Scripture? How do these basic beliefs and interpretive methods challenge your own engagement with Scripture? How should they guide your planning for the life of your campus fellowship? Think, for example, about your large group gatherings. Do they include teaching that faithfully comes from the Bible? Do they “set aside” some of the more challenging teaching from Scripture? Do they include searching, inwardly challenging application of Scripture to the situations of your fellowship and its members? Ask the same questions about your small group gatherings. As the leaders of the fellowship and sponsors of those gatherings, do they make you “least” or “great” in the kingdom of heaven?
9. Think back through the earlier Bible study/discussions in this short series. How does this view of the authority of Scripture derived from Jesus’ teaching form a foundation for your conclusions about our Doctrinal Basis? Are you satisfied so far as you know that the statements in the Doctrinal Basis we have considered faithfully reflect the teaching of Holy Scripture, that they neither set aside Biblical teaching nor add the prejudices of our culture to Scripture? Are you prepared to affirm the Doctrinal Basis without reservation, not because it belongs to InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, but because it summarizes faithfully the teaching of Holy Scripture? Will you do so?

how we embrace it and seek to understand it and put it into action, marks out the way of spiritual blessing for ourselves as disciples and for the Christian communities in which we participate and which we seek to serve as leaders.

What has all this to do with the IV Doctrinal Basis? This short statement is offered to us as a succinct summary of the basic truths disclosed to us in God’s revelation in Scripture. These are the truths that a close and persistent reading of the Bible has characteristically led Christian disciples to receive and believe throughout two millennia of history. In offering this Bible discussion guide to you, we are inviting you to deepen your understanding of the revelation of God by testing it against carefully selected passages of Scripture. This modest effort to deepen understanding of God’s truth can pay enormous benefits by forming clarity, zeal, courage, and conviction in you and your fellowship. It will mark out the way of God for you, the way that leads not to a wild waste of time but to peace, joy, spiritual power, and blessing.

We invite you, then, to regard the Doctrinal Basis as your basic Vision Statement. Let it form your understanding of what you are called to do and why you are called to do it. The Doctrinal Basis will not give you a specific set of programmatic plans for your life or for your fellowship. But it will give you the vision of God, the vision that sets directions, tests our priorities and interests, and informs and transforms our understanding of what we are called to do and be in the coming months and years on into eternity.

It seems helpful to make several observations about this particular Bible study discussion guide. First, the individual studies in this guide are not addressed to all of the articles or items in the Doctrinal Basis. Rather, we have chosen those statements in the Doctrinal Basis that seemed both most basic and most contested. These are the truths that are most apt to be squeezed out of us in the spiritually hostile environment of the contemporary university. More importantly, they are also what we take to be the most foundational issues, the perennial issues, for understanding and growing in Christian faith. These are the truths that have fired the zeal of faithful believers through the ages. These are the truths that ordinary men and women have confessed as they followed their Lord in suffering service and even martyrdom. These are the truths that have been the vehicle of revival and renewal in many cultures over many years. These are the first and the eternal things. Engage them with eagerness, fidelity, and hope.

Secondly, each passage of Scripture we have selected contains doctrinal truth and application to life. So we have asked questions to probe the application of truth to life as well as questions designed to further doctrinal understanding. Do not evade the applications! Such evasion has given doctrinal teaching a bad name among many earnest believers. God’s revelation is always designed to lead us into richer, fuller, more holy living. Note especially that the Doctrinal Basis begins with “We believe ...,” and concludes with “to God be the glory forever.” Indeed, one of our studies asks you to reflect on this framework in the light of Psalm 115. At minimum these studies should lead you to a new depth of gratitude and worship. Do not evade the applications!

Thirdly, this guide is a work in progress. We invite your feedback and suggestions for improvement. You can contact us at [tlrevethan@facultyministry.org](mailto:tlrevethan@facultyministry.org).

Finally, each study concludes with some suggestions for further reading and study. We hope that these studies will encourage eagerness for further learning. They are only the barest beginning, and we are praying that you will be led into the life-long joy of learning and understanding the revelation of our God. So, this might be a place to make some suggestions for further study and reading that will allow you to gain an overview of Christian theology:

J. R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (IVP Classics) (InterVarsity Press, 2007).

Evangelistic messages preached on several American university campuses by the most outstanding evangelical leader of the last generation and an alum of the IV movement in the United Kingdom. A model of clarity and simplicity, this work shows how a profound grasp of Christian truth empowers evangelism.

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993).

A masterful exposition of core Christian convictions by a theological teacher of great distinction. This book became a surprise best seller (who would ever believe that theology would sell?), with more than one million in circulation. It could be one of the few books written in our time that folk will willingly read in the next one or two hundred years. As Packer has said to students about the writings of others, "Sell your shirt to buy this book!"

Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* (InterVarsity Press, 1999).

A textbook-like survey of Christian theology, with self-paced assignments for personal study and excellent suggestions for further reading. One of the authors of this study guide used this work as his sole preparation (that included no course work) for comprehensive examinations in Systematic Theology at a notable evangelical seminary and passed easily!

stances? What does v. 20 add to Jesus' description of the two ways to approach Scripture? How does this verse raise a more serious issue than being called "least in the kingdom of heaven?" What does that all of this suggest to you about the seriousness of the stance we take toward Holy Scripture?

Summarize your discussion about these two challenging verses. What do they tell you about Jesus' basic belief about the practice of the authority of Holy Scripture?

4. Our Doctrinal Basis says, "We believe in the unique divine inspiration, authority, and trustworthiness of the Bible." This statement is intended as a summary of the teaching of the whole Scripture on the foundational characteristics of Scripture. It is true that none of the key words in this statement are found in Matthew 5:17-20. Nevertheless, several of the key concepts are found in Jesus' "perspective setting manifesto." What contribution does Jesus' teaching in this important paragraph make to our Doctrinal Basis? Why is it important that the teacher in Matthew 5 is the Lord Jesus?
5. Matthew 5: 21-48 is a series of six case studies of Scriptural interpretation in the light of the basic perspectives set in 5:17-20. Read vv. 21-48 silently, looking for the repetitions in each of the case studies. What does Jesus mean by "You have heard that it was said ...?" Does he refer to the text of the OT with these words? What evidence in the passage gives you the best basis for answering this question? What do you learn from the repetition of "... but I tell you that...?"
6. In the interest of time we will focus our attention on the first (vv. 21-26) and last (vv. 43-48) of these interpretive case studies. This is not to say that these are the most important teachings in the passage. Each case study is wonderfully significant, and we would urge you, particularly if this discussion of the text of Matthew grabs your attention and your spirit, to consider the portions we are overlooking (but we hope not "setting aside!").

What is the commandment under consideration in vv. 21-26? What does Jesus say is spiritually and morally equivalent to murder? What is the difference between being "angry" toward a brother or sister and saying "Raca (roughly, "You are stupid") and "You fool?"

What do the two little stories in vv. 23-26 add to Jesus' teaching?

What do you learn from this case study about Jesus' method of interpreting the commands of Scripture? How does this suggest his method is different from the method of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law?

7. What commandment is under consideration in vv. 43-48? Can you find the command, "...hate your enemy" anywhere in the OT? What light does that shed on the meaning of "You have heard it said...?" Who does Jesus focus on in his teaching here? Who would his contemporaries have viewed as enemies? What does Jesus call for in our relationship to enemies? How does this alter

# OUR LORD'S VIEW OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

## MATTHEW 5: 17-48

*“We believe in the unique divine inspiration, authority, and trustworthiness of the Bible.”*

This passage is a part of the “Sermon on the Mount,” perhaps the most profound and far-reaching sermon ever preached. In this wonderful teaching, Jesus describes the way of Christian discipleship, the kind of life that is formed by and consistent with the Kingdom of God. His introduction is a brief sketch of the inward character (5: 1-12) and social influence (5: 13-16) of his disciples. Then Jesus immediately turns to the question of the place of the Law and Prophets, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in the life of his disciples. The place Jesus gives to this topic and the extent and depth of his teaching suggests something of its importance. Jesus says many other things about the OT in the course of his ministry, but this statement is something of a thesis statement, a perspective-setting manifesto.

1. Read Matthew 5: 17-20 aloud. What false impression is Jesus seeking to correct? Why might his contemporaries have thought that he was seeking “to abolish the Law and Prophets?” Think together for a few moments about the relationship of authority and creativity. Are they opposites in conflict with one another? If not, how do they interact? Jesus clearly was very creative in his approach to life and ministry. How does what he says here guide us into a richly creative life?
2. Focus more closely on vv. 17-18. How does Jesus characterize his relationship with the OT? What does he mean by “fulfill?” Think through the meaning of his statement about “the smallest letter” and “the least stroke of a pen.” Should we take this statement literally? If we do, what should we make of the diverse manuscripts of the Bible with their variations in minor details of text? If it is not a literal statement, what then does Jesus mean? Jesus begins the statement in v. 18 by saying, “Truly I tell you...” Why is the principal in this verse of such great significance?

Summarize your discussion of these critically important verses. What do they tell you about Jesus’ basic belief about the nature of Holy Scripture?

3. Now look at vv. 19-20. Verse 19 sets up a contrast between two different practices or approaches to Scripture. What are these two contrasting stances? Can you share ways you have seen both of these stances in actual situations? How are you tempted to “set aside” the commands of Scripture? Have you seen situations where someone has effectively taught others to “set aside” a commandment? Why is the order of the verbs “practices and teaches these commands” critically important? What is the outcome from each of these two

Thanks are due to several folk for making this guide available. Jim Lundgren, Senior Vice- President and Director of Campus Ministry of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship raised the issue of how we should use the Doctrinal Basis and commissioned the production of this guide. Nancy Thomas (IVCF Faculty Ministry and Associate Director of Faculty Development, Union University) and David Thomas (Associate Professor of History, Union University) and Will Metzger (InterVarsity Campus Staff Member at University of Delaware), my generous co-authors, gave time and energy from their already full lives and beyond their “day jobs” to contribute studies to this collection. And Barbara Trevethan generously provided proof reading that saved your authors from embarrassing mistakes. Errors that remain should be attributed to your editor, and not to these good folk.

In the end, you should know that we are praying that his little discussion guide will be a tool in the hand of our Almighty God to bring doctrinal renewal to InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, starting with your fellowship and your life. May the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, pour out clarity of understanding of God’s truth, zeal for obedient practice of God’s truth, and eternal rejoicing in the God of truth. To God be the glory forever!

# GOD, THE GLORIOUS TRINITY

## JOHN 14

*We believe in the only true God, the almighty Creator of all things, existing eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, full of love and glory.*

1. Notice where and when this dialogue between Jesus and his disciples takes place in the whole narrative of the gospel. Then read the chapter aloud. To indicate something of its character as a dialogue, consider assigning parts to Jesus, Thomas, Phillip and Judas.
2. Jesus' initial statement (v. 1) seeks to calm the troubled hearts of the disciples. What was so troubling for them? Read 13: 33-38. How have Jesus' own statements troubled the disciples? To what circumstance is the instruction in our chapter directed?
3. Jesus' instruction in John 14 divides naturally into two segments: vv. 1-14 and vv. 15-30. What is distinctive about each section? What similarities can you notice? What title might you give to each section to summarize its theme and remind you what is in these wonderful verses? Consider as many suggestions as you can offer as a group, and then decide among yourselves, at least provisionally, what title is your best suggestion.
4. Throughout the chapter Jesus makes several wonderful promises to his disciples. Identify each promise (by verse). How do these promises offer comfort to the troubled disciples? How do they comfort and challenge us? Are there particular experiences, which you could share as a group, that are fulfillments of these promises in your life?
5. Jesus also challenges his disciples. What challenges can you observe? How does Jesus relate love and obedience in this chapter? Why is this challenge, in particular, important for the future of these disciples? Is this how you think of love; of obedience? Can you share an experience when you have seen love and obedience related as Jesus says they are?
5. In several ways Jesus makes statements and claims about his identity. Where in the text are these claims found? How would you summarize Jesus claim in this chapter about his identity?
6. Now review the whole chapter and observe everything you can about the relationship of Jesus and the Father? What does the Father do? What does Jesus do? What things do they do in distinction to one another? What do they do that is a simultaneous action? It will help you to write these observations on a piece of paper or marker pad, so you can keep track of them? How does the statement in v. 28 and v. 30 compare with and relate to the statements in

For further reading and study:

Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven and Hell* (The Bible Speaks Today) (InterVarsity, 2006)

A survey of the Bible's teaching on human destiny, with very capable and faithful expositions of the key passages in Scripture about last judgment and eternal destiny. The best survey of this material available.

J. I. Packer, "God the Judge," *Knowing God* (Chapter 14) (InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 138-147.

A classic statement of Bible-based faith, this a one of the few work produced in our era which will still be read in a century from now (should Christ not return sooner). This chapter makes the case for the Biblical view of judgment from Scripture and defends it cogently by argument.

C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Harper One, 2001).

A "fictional" account of the meaning of Jesus' claim that all people are headed to one of two destinies. Faithful to the teaching of Jesus and stimulating to the imagination.

Return to one of the first questions we discussed: Why is it significant that the one speaking here is Jesus?

10. How should this description of the final judgment and destiny of the human race (“all nations”) affect you? How does it cause you to view the people in your life? Consider the classic statement by C.S. Lewis in his “Weight of Glory” sermon:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

*(The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses (Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 14-15)*

What should you do in response to this passage? Notice the fourfold repetition “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” How does this become a statement of the priorities of discipleship to Jesus? How could you begin fulfill this description of discipleship, knowing the King will take great delight in even your most halting efforts?

v. 1, 7, 9, 10? Does Jesus mean that his is less divine than the Father when he says “The Father is greater than I” or “I do exactly what my Father has commanded me?” Why or why not?

7. Jesus instruction to the disciples focuses on the Holy Spirit in vv. 15-30. Observe everything that you can about the identity and deeds of the Holy Spirit in these verses. What indications do we hear that cause us to think of the Spirit as a Person and not a thing or a force? In what ways is the Holy Spirit a divine being in these instructions? Again, keeping track of these observations in writing is helpful.
8. Review the whole chapter and observe everything you can about the relationship of the Father and the Spirit; of Jesus and the Spirit? Again, write down these observations to keep them before your mind. How does Jesus keep the Father, the Spirit, and himself distinct from one another in his statements? How do the Father, the Spirit, and Jesus himself act together in almost indistinguishable ways?
9. Questions #5-8 introduce us to the main outlines of the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity. We might summarize that doctrine in the following statements:
  - The whole Bible teaches and assumes that there is one Creator God, whose majesty and glory necessarily exceed our greatest human capacities to understand. The knowledge of God revealed in the Bible is true, but all of those truths lead us to an awe-filled mystery before the uncreated greatness of the Most High.
  - In the Bible, especially in the New Testament, we encounter three distinct, fully divine persons, all of whom are worthy of our praise and worship.
  - These three persons in the one God relate to one another in the fullness of eternal love.
  - The three persons have differing and distinctive roles and works in achieving the salvation of sinners.
  - Despite these differing functions, to encounter one person in relationship is to encounter each of the other two divine persons (usually referred to as divine perichoresis).

Of course, there is a long and convoluted history of discussion of these basic convictions drawn from the Scriptures. But these are, in fact, the Biblical truths believed by all faithful disciples, and it is to them that we refer when we talk about the doctrine of the Trinity.

Not all of these truths are mentioned in John 14. Which of them is not mentioned? To what passages of Scripture might you turn to find teaching about the truths not mentioned in John 14? Which are mentioned; in which statements of Jesus?

10. In discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, Gerald Bray says,

...the Christian doctrine of the Trinity did not emerge from some kind of philosophical speculation about God, but from the realities of the Christian spiritual experience of him. From the beginning, that experience was definitive for the new faith, and so it has remained ever since. To confess God as a Trinity is to worship him in our hearts, as those hearts are stirred by the Spirit of the Son, crying, "Abba! Father!"

(Gerald Bray, *Out of the Box: the Christian Experience of God in Trinity*, *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, ed. Timothy George (Baker Academic, 2007). p. 55.)

How is "the doctrine of the Trinity" related to Christian discipleship in these instructions of Jesus? How are the truths of the Trinity that are mentioned in John 14 related to the promises Jesus makes to his disciples; to Jesus' challenge about love and obedience?

11. Take some time to think about how the doctrine of the Trinity is related to two topics of great importance to InterVarsity student leaders:

- How is the truth about the Trinity related to your mission on campus? Think specifically about the promises and challenges of John 14.
- How should your prayers be affected by the knowledge that God is a Holy Trinity?

Spend time praying about these matters together. Worship God together in His greatness, mystery, and tri-personal reality. Sing a hymn of praise to the Trinity. Perhaps the most familiar is "Holy, Holy, Holy" (#10 in InterVarsity's Hymns II). Claim the promises of John 14, especially vv. 12-14, as you think about and plan to lead your fellowship. Seek the love and obedience that mark the disciples of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father.

In v. 40 Jesus describes those who have been served by the "righteous" as "the least of these brothers [and sisters] of mine." Who are these needy people? To see to whom Jesus refers as his "brothers," look at Matthew 12: 48-50; 28:10. Who does Jesus view as his brothers? Who are "the least of these" in the teaching of Jesus? See to whom Jesus refers as "these little ones" see Matthew 10:42, and more fully Matthew 18: 6, 10, 14. Who does Jesus view as "the least of these?" What does this tell you about the criterion of judgment in this passage? How does that lead you to think differently about the meaning of this passage than you might otherwise?

Consider the following observation by R. T. France (The Gospel of Matthew (Tyndale New Testament Commentary) (InterVarsity Press, 1985), p. 355):

Until fairly recently it was generally assumed that this passage grounded eternal salvation on works of kindness to all in need, and that therefore its message was a sort of humanitarian ethic, with no specifically Christian content. As such, it was an embarrassment to those who based their understanding of the gospel on Paul's teaching that one is justified by faith in Christ and by "good works." Was Matthew (or Jesus?) then against Paul?

More recent interpreters have insisted, however, that such an interpretation does not do justice to the description of those in need as Jesus' brothers, nor to the use elsewhere in Matthew of language about "these little ones." It is therefore increasingly accepted that the criterion of judgment is not kindness to the needy in general, but the response of the nations to disciples in need... the criterion of judgment becomes not mere philanthropy, but men's response to the kingdom of heaven as it is presented to them in the person of Jesus' "brothers." It is, therefore, as in [Matthew] 7:21-23, ultimately a question of their relationship to Jesus himself.

7. Focus, now, on vv. 41-45, the King's verdict on those on his left. How are these folk described? What do they receive? What evil have they done? Why, then, do they receive this negative judgment, according to the judge? How do they respond to the verdict? What does that tell you about them?
8. Pay particularly close attention to the stark contrast between these two groups. How do they stand in relationship to the Son of Man? How does Jesus describe their destiny (see especially v. 46)?
9. Many find this passage surprising and troubling. What aspects of this passage did you find surprising? What did you find troubling? How do you feel about this passage?

Marxists first, and then many secularists, claim "religion is the opiate of the masses." They claim that people come to believe what they say they believe because it makes them happy or peaceful or because it gives them good feelings about themselves. How does this passage fit with this description? How does it challenge your own assumptions about how you should determine what to believe?

# JESUS, JUDGMENT, ✠ ETERNAL DESTINY

## MATTHEW 25: 31 – 46

*We believe in the victorious reign and future personal return of Jesus Christ, who will judge all people with justice and mercy, giving over the unrepentant to eternal condemnation but receiving the redeemed to eternal life.*

1. Read the passage aloud. On first hearing, what strikes you most in this passage? Why is it significant that the one speaking here is Jesus?
2. Sometimes this passage is described as a parable. Do you think that is a correct description? To begin to answer this question compare our passage to the one immediately preceding it in Matthew 25: 14-30. Everyone agrees that this earlier passage is a parable, "The parable of the talents." How are the two passages similar? How are they different?
3. An Old Testament passage is clearly in the background of this teaching of Jesus, namely the vision of the Son of Man in Daniel 7: 9-14. Compare Daniel 7 with our passage, reading each passage closely and carefully. How are they similar? Note particularly the ways in which Jesus' teaching goes beyond that of Daniel. For example, who is the judge, whose throne is seen in the vision, who is judged, on what basis are they judged?
4. Now, focus on vv. 31-33. What sort of scene is this, when will it take place, who will be involved in the scene? What do you learn from these three sentences about the Lord Jesus? What do you learn about "all the nations?"

Verses 32-33 use a simile (note "he will separate ... as a shepherd ..."). It draws on a common event in rural Palestine at the time of Jesus. Sheep and goats were regularly mixed in flocks, and the goats were hard to distinguish from the commercially more valuable sheep. Shepherds had to distinguish between sheep and goats in their mixed herd and separate them. What does Jesus tell us about his judgment by the use of this simile?

5. The King speaks first to those on his right in vv. 34 – 40 and then to those on his left in vv. 41 – 45. Compare what he says in these two sections? What similarities do you see? What repetitions do you observe? What differences can you note? How are each of these features important to the meaning of Jesus' teaching here?
6. Focus closely on vv. 34-40. How are these folk described? What do they receive? What have they done, according to the judge? How do they respond to the verdict? What does that tell you about them?

For further reading and study:

Brian Edgar, *The Message of the Trinity* (The Bible Speaks Today) (InterVarsity Press, 2002).

This is the best place to start thinking about the Trinity. It is an excellent survey of the whole of Scripture, expounding the main passages relevant to the conviction that the living God is triune.

*God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, ed. Timothy George (Baker, 2006).

A collection of essays written by Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant scholars, that demonstrates the centrality of the Trinity to the entire Christian tradition. Considers some of the contemporary challenges to this foundational Christian teaching and conviction.

Gerald L. Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993).

Bray addresses the full range of the doctrine of God, but he focuses his exposition on the Tri-unity of God in a wonderfully insightful way. A tremendous resource for more advanced study

# WHO IS JESUS?

## HEBREWS 1:1 – 3: 6

*We believe in Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, who lived as a perfect example, who assumed the judgment due sinners by dying in our place, and who was bodily raised from the dead and ascended as Savior and Lord.*

1. Read Hebrews 1:1-4.
  - a. The author of Hebrews refers to God speaking to the prophets, but does not feel the need to explain either the prophets or the various ways of speaking. Take a moment to recall some of the prophets or look them up. What are some of the various ways in which God spoke? What does this tell you about the author of Hebrews and his audience? What does this tell you about God's commitment to speaking to us?
  - b. That word "but" in Heb 1:2 indicates contrast. How is the word spoken through the Son different from the word spoken through the prophets? What do verses 1:1-1:3 tell us about who Jesus is? (Relationship to God; relationship to the created order; accomplishments.)
  - c. Many of us have been praised, but no one in my immediate circle of friends has ever been called "the radiance of God's glory." Does this passage give us the liberty to think of the Son as merely the greatest of teachers? In this passage, what is ascribed to Jesus that is never ascribed to teachers?
  - d. To call Jesus "fully divine" is both an idea and a commitment. What characteristics of God clearly and easily apply to Jesus? What characteristics of God do not? What parts of this attribution ("fully divine") might need further inquiry, repentance, or reflective prayer on your part?
2. Read Hebrews 2:1 – 3:1-6
  - a. Psalm 8 is interpreted to speak about the Messiah (Christologically), not about humankind in general (anthropologically). As the author of Hebrews reads it here, Psalm 8 is about Jesus, not us.
  - b. Hebrews 1 deals directly with the divine nature and authority of the Son of God. Hebrews 2 is more about the Incarnation. In what ways does this passage describe Jesus as "fully human"?

It is important to have the group turn to II Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Notice the parallel or comparison between what Christ became and what sinners become. Christ, when on the cross, was bearing the sins of others, was treated as sinful, and justly under God's wrath and curse (Galatians 3:13). Yet He never actually sinned, but remained inherently righteous. In a parallel but reversed way, those who by faith trust that their sins were borne by Christ are now "in Him." The faithful, just, and loving God treats them as actually righteous. Yet in reality they have never done anything righteous; they remain sinners. They are simultaneously justified and sinful. As a consequence of their right standing with God, their efforts to be righteous, to do good works, are pleasing to God. And they finally will be completely renewed in glory at death or when Christ returns in glory. We do not have a split personality. We are responsible to become what we really are in Christ, a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17).

### **Trusts God who Justifies the Wicked**

Romans 4:5 probably is the most audacious and astounding phrase in Scripture, because it is a blatant contradiction. Romans 3:26 confirms this: God remains "just and the one who justifies." We have a light view of both our sin and God's holiness, so we don't appreciate how startling is this statement.

### **The Blessing of Forgiveness**

We conclude with an emotional expression of praise and worship by David, the shepherd boy who became King. A person sought out by the Lord, because he was "a man after his (God's own heart" (I Samuel 13:14). Also a great sinner who committed adultery and murder. In Psalm 51:1-5, 17 His repentance is expressed, which makes these verses from Psalm 32:1-2 meaningful. A fitting conclusion would be to read Romans 5:1-2, 8-11. Theology leads to doxology.

## SUMMARY STATEMENT

Christ's condemnation (treated as cursed) was entirely due to the sins of others credited to Him.

Our commendation (treated as righteous) is entirely due to the righteousness of God/Jesus credited to us.

If salvation is in any way caused by human effort/deeds, then the saved can boast. They have made themselves different from those without salvation. This also puts aside all racial barriers that can arise. In that day there was a very serious division between Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles). All those in God's spiritual family are brothers and sisters, a unity created by His Spirit (Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 2:14-22, 4:4-5).

### **Repentance and Upholding the Law**

God's law is eternal because it is an external expression of the nature of God Himself (see Leader's Note: Context). The New Testament makes it clear that certain Old Testament laws and sacrifices were only applicable under the theocratic government of Israel, or were fulfilled in Christ's coming. God's moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments or in Jesus' dual command to love God totally and to love our neighbor as ourselves, still applies to everyone. The moral law guides us to what is right and makes us aware of our need for Christ (Romans 3:20).

True humility results from repentance (change of attitude involving sin and desire to turn away from it and to God). This is not just regret or unhappiness about our mistakes, but a conviction that we have sinned against our Maker (Psalm 51:1-6, 17; II Corinthians 7:10-11). The IVCF Doctrinal Statement includes repentance because it accompanies saving faith. They are two sides of one coin. Some scriptures connect them (Matthew 21:32; Mark 1:15; Acts 5:31, 20:21). Other verses do not. A comparison of Scripture teaches that both are necessary to becoming a Christian, and for continuing the Christian life. Just as with faith, repentance is commanded yet not a work we do, but God's gift (Acts 11:18; II Timothy 2:25; Ephesians 2:8-9). Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:12-13).

### 6. **Gift Righteousness Credited to the Unrighteous:** Romans 4:1-8

#### **Introduction**

These verses provide a wonderful conclusion. They begin with an example (Abraham) from the Old Testament, which confirms that the method of becoming right with God has always been the same: Faith alone connecting us with a righteousness provided by God as a gift. Christianity is not a new religion but a fulfillment in Christ of promises initially revealed to the Jews.

#### **Credited to Him as Righteousness; His Faith is Credited as Righteousness; Credits Righteousness Apart from Works** (Genesis 15:6, 22)

Discuss first verses 1-6. The image conveyed to us by "credit" seems impersonal and financial. But the Biblical word and concept (the translation was "impute") is more relational and suitable to describe the result in our relationship with God that follows from Christ's satisfying the justice of God. Now the accomplishments and resources of Christ are transferred to sinners who turn and trust. A modern analogy might be our being given unlimited use of a credit card for access to an account containing all the assets of Christ. (Compare Romans 4:20-25)

- c. Again, to call Jesus "fully human" is both an idea and a commitment. What characteristics of humanity clearly and easily apply to Jesus? What characteristics of humanity do not? What parts of this attribution ("fully human") might need further inquiry, repentance, or reflective prayer on your part?
  - d. Hebrews 2:8 states that "God left nothing that is not subject to him." Yet the next verse observes, "at present, we do not see everything subject to him." Can you list some examples of this tension from your own experience or that of others?
  - e. If Christ identifies with us in suffering (Hebrews 2:9, 14, 17, 18) and has power over those who make us (the church) suffer (Hebrews 2:8), why do we still suffer? How does the author of Hebrews respond to this? (A variety of answers are possible, but for one example, see Hebrews 2:9, 3:1, and 12:1-2.)
  - f. In the midst of our own suffering, persecution, and drifting, how is Jesus an example for us to follow? How might they help you prepare for the suffering that you know will come at some point?
  - g. What do these verses tell us about Jesus' purposes?
3. Read Luke 24 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-15. These are rich passages for learning, reflection, and worship. For today, though, simply reflect on the kindness that Jesus offers to the disciples and to us in his insistence that they and we recognize the resurrection of his body.
  4. Why is Jesus the foundation of our hope?
  5. Take some time to re-read these passages. Pray that familiarity with these passages would open to you more of the depth of God's love for you. Pray that these parts of Scripture might help you to love the Lord your God more fully and faithfully, and to love your neighbor more directly. It may be helpful to keep your Bible open to these passages, but close with a time of thanksgiving for the verses you studied today.

Suggestions for further reading and study:

George Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews* (Zondervan, 2002).

We used this very helpful commentary in preparing this study. It is a great resource for beginning readers for understanding Hebrews.

David Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs* (Eerdmans, 2004).

An examination and application of the meaning of Jesus' identity for life in the culture of the early Twenty-first Century. Profound analysis of theology and culture.

Michael Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Westminster John Knox, 2005).

Places our understanding of the person and work of Jesus within the developing story of God's covenant grace.

### **Redemption**

To bring/buy back. Similar in meaning to rescue, salvation. A plan was designed and a cost involved in bringing sinners back into relationship with their Maker (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14).

### **Sacrifice of Atonement**

Make restitution, erase the wrong done, satisfy the offended one, thereby the alienated sinner is reconciled because justice is done. Under His supreme characteristic of holiness are God's primary equal attributes of justice and grace. Neither can be disregarded. God's righteous anger with sinners is eliminated by the sacrificial bloody death of Christ as required by justice (Leviticus 17:11; Ezekiel 16:63; Hebrews 2:17; Romans 2:5-9). His merciful grace restores the relationship with sinners (I John 4:9-10).

#### 4. **God's Justice Vindicated:** Romans 3:25b-26

### **Demonstrate His Justice**

The crucifixion of Christ normally is attributed to the love of God. Here the justice of God in not excusing sinners is emphasized. If God was only love, everyone would receive salvation, and hell would not exist. If He is primarily justice, no one would pass His test and heaven be empty. As mentioned when discussing atonement, these characteristics are twins (equal) in Him. Justice and mercy embrace at the cross. This should cause wonder and worship.

The author C.S. Lewis portrays the lion Aslan (a Christ image) meeting the claim of his own justice, requiring death for the sinner. Edmund is a traitor in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Aslan voluntarily gives his life as a substitute, then rises from the dead showing his sacrifice is accepted.

### **Sins Committed Beforehand Unpunished**

God is so patient. There is a sense in which it can be said he overlooked or delayed requiring a perfect sacrifice of atonement for the sins of those true believers who lived before Christ. Only now was there a perfect and public atonement for them. This was applied retroactively, for they were saved on the same basis (faith in the promise of God's gift of forgiveness and righteousness via a peace-bringing Servant-King-Messiah-Savior). They trusted God's Word, yet did not know His name or the way it would be done. (Acts 17:30; Hebrews 9:15b)

#### 5. **Pride Undercut, Yet Faith Promotes Humility and Upholds the Law:** Romans 3:27-31

### **Humility, Not Pride**

God's way of salvation is both exclusive and inclusive. Christ is the only way back to our Creator/Redeemer God. Faith is the great equalizer among all people. Every other religion requires doing something to become acceptable. But what if you can't perform the deeds necessary? Many people are poor, handicapped, mentally disabled, etc. Christ requires only repentance and faith—and His Spirit helps in both. Grace reigns, even enabling our response. (Romans 5:21; John 6:37, 65)

These are two ways to meet God's high requirements: our effort working to keep the law or faith receiving the gift of righteousness provided by a perfect law keeper. These two ways are mutually exclusive. Paul explains in Philippians 3:3-11 (especially vs. 7-9) his former confidence at keeping the law was demolished (see Romans 7:4-13). Replacing legalism was the "righteousness that comes from God and is by faith in Christ." It is clearly implied by the context here and in Romans that it is not only in Christ alone (as the Doctrinal Statement says) but also by faith alone and grace alone. The International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), of which IVCF (USA) is a member, has a Statement of Faith (1947) saying: "The justification of the sinner by the grace of God through faith alone."

Sometimes James 2:24, "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone," is interpreted as contradicting Paul. The context clearly shows James as rebuking people who hear the word, but don't do it. These folk profess faith and know the facts about God (even as demons do), but evidently they do not possess saving faith. True faith changes people, and is marked by good deeds. This fruit is the result of the Spirit's working through us. It is never the ground or cause of our righteousness. We are saved by faith alone, but a faith that is alone (barren, not producing fruit) is not saving faith.

### In Jesus Christ

The Bible does not consider faith by itself as virtuous. Rather, faith is only commendable if it has the proper object. Faith is in, or through, something. If the object is unworthy, so is the faith. I can have faith/belief that a chair will support me, yet if its leg is broken, my faith is ill-founded. Christ is unequivocally trustworthy. So also in vs. 25, faith in His blood—i.e. His atoning sacrificial death, which fulfilled the penalty for law breaking and opened the giving of God's mercy.

### 3. **A Justification by Grace:** Romans 3:23-25a

#### Justified

A verdict of acquittal and declaration by God that a sinner is righteous solely on the basis of what Christ has done. So God alone gets the glory. The believing sinner is not saved by her faith, but by Christ. She is still a sinner in this life, yet she is treated as righteous not because of some inherent goodness, but because of the goodness of our substitute/representative. He lived the life of perfect obedience I should have lived and died the death that I deserved. Thus united with Christ (in Christ) we draw on His accomplishments on our behalf throughout the Christian life. More on this when we discuss verses from Romans 4—where crediting (impart/impute) righteousness is taught.

#### Grace

We can love someone because of the benefits that come to us. Grace is love and favor given not out of obligation or for anything that we get back. The recipient is undeserving. (Romans 5:6-8, 11:6; II Timothy 1:9)

## THE MEANING OF THE CROSS OF JESUS

### ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

*We believe Jesus "assumed the judgment due sinners by dying in our place."*

1. This passage in Isaiah was written many centuries before the time of Jesus. What is odd about considering an OT passage written many years before the event of the cross in order to understand the much later event? On the other hand, what does it tell you about the cross if this passage actually does interpret the event before it happened?
2. Read the passage aloud, but slowly and carefully. As it is being read, seek to answer the question, "How does this passage offer us a portrait of Jesus?" What particular lines seem highly relevant to Jesus' life and death? Pay attention to details as well as to the general portrait. In particular, what statements here seem to foretell the actual events surrounding the death of the Lord?
3. The song contains five stanzas, each containing three verses:
  - 52: 13-15
  - 53: 1-3
  - 53: 4-6
  - 53: 7-9
  - 53: 10-12
 Give a title to each stanza that helps you recall what is said in those verses. How do these stanzas relate to one another? What does that tell you about the structure of the passage?
4. The first and last stanzas direct us to the exaltation of the Servant. What do you learn about his exaltation from these verses? How does the final stanza answer the enigma raised in the first stanza? How is this a fitting climax to the song?
5. What theme do the second and fourth stanzas share? Focus especially on 53: 7-9, and think about the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. What striking parallels can you identify? How does the description of the Servant in 53: 1-3 compare to the visual representations of Jesus with which you are familiar? Does the New Testament ever offer us a physical description of Jesus? How does it help you to understand the Gospels when you know that Jesus, the Servant, "had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him?" If this is so, what did attract men and women to the Lord Jesus?

6. The structure of the Song of the Suffering Servant causes us to focus on the central stanza (in technical literary terms this structure is called a "chiasm"). What do we learn about the suffering and death of the Servant from these verses? Why does he suffer? For whom does he suffer? Who is the ultimate cause of his suffering?

Compare this stanza to 53:10. What does it say about the relationship of the LORD to the suffering of the Servant? What is a "sin offering?" (To help you understand this term, see Leviticus 4, the OT passage in which the LORD ordained the "sin offering" for his people.

How does this central stanza "hold together" the whole Song of the Servant?

7. Review the whole passage and note each place where the idea is expressed that the Servant suffered and dies in the place of sinners. How many times is this foundational idea expressed? What does this tell you about the importance of "substitution" in understanding the cross of Jesus?
8. The Song of the Servant gives an important perspective for understanding more deeply many of the events and sayings of Jesus. Consider the following four events in the life of Jesus (we are referring to Matthew for simplicity of reference, but you could just as easily consider other Gospels):
- Jesus' prediction of his death in Matthew 20: 17-28, and especially his statement in v. 28 about his mission
  - Jesus' word at the Last Supper in Matthew 26: 26-30
  - Jesus' suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26: 36-45
  - Jesus' cry from the cross of agony and abandonment in Matthew 27: 45-54

When you think about these events in the light of the Song of the Servant, how is your understanding and appreciation of Jesus death deepened? How does this thought experiment deepen your love and devotion to Jesus?

9. There are many legitimate ways to express real faith in Jesus. One that flows from our consideration of Isaiah 52:12-53:12 would be to return to the central stanza of the Song in vv. 4-6. Read them silently, substituting your name for "our." For example, "Surely he took up Tom's pain and bore Tom's suffering ... and the LORD has laid on him Tom's iniquity."

Does such a reading express what you desire to be true for you?

Spend your concluding time together offering prayers of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus, the servant on whom was laid your sins. Conclude your time of prayer by reading vv. 4-6 in unison.

## *Leader's Notes*

### JUSTIFICATION – ROMANS 3:21-4:8

1. **The Context:** Romans 3:19-20

Here is a summary of Paul's diagnosis of the moral bankruptcy of humanity. All are accountable for they have some knowledge of the true God, either via His revealing Himself in the gospel (1:16-17), creation (1:18-21, 25), requirements of his law imprinted on their hearts (2:14-15), or in his written commandments (2:17-23, 27). Picture a court room. Paul, the prosecutor, is summarizing the case of the criminal behavior of the human race. The gavel hits the desk with a loud thud, and the judgment of God is pronounced—GUILTY.

The Good News of the wonder of justification stuns us only when you grasp the bad news that our sinful human nature makes it impossible to become acceptable (righteous) to God by our efforts to keep God's perfect law. Law refers to the unique written revelation of God in what we call the Old Testament and summarized in the Ten Commandments. It is like a workman's level which, put alongside both our outward actions and our inner attitudes, exposes our bent toward sin. (See Romans 7:7-13)

2. **An Alien Righteousness:** Romans 3:21-22

Revealed in these verses is God's alternate way of becoming acceptable (approved, counted as right/good). This way is totally "foreign," since it is from outside of us and our world. In leading others through these and the subsequent verses, prepare yourself by meditating, praying, experiencing anew the wonder of God's grace. Your enthusiasm and personal engagement with these life changing truths could be a catalyst for your group. Take the following words and phrases and think of ways to help the group elaborate and experience them. It is very important that you study the verses referenced throughout the Leader's Notes.

#### **Righteousness**

Moral purity, blamelessness, perfectly right with God; all requirements of God's law met (see Romans 8:1-4) including the penalty for breaking it. Illustration: An eraser removes our falling grade. A perfect score is put next to our name.

#### **From God**

God is the source, author, origin, initiator. Contrasted with "from us"; anything we do by trying to manufacture goodness. Rather, it is by His grace.

#### **Comes through Faith/Believe**

Trust, reliance on, receive (John 1:12-13). Faith is the means, instrument, connector to Christ and His righteousness. The empty hand that reaches out. It is paradoxically both required of us and a gift to us (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-10; Hebrews 12:2).

For further reading and study:

J. I. Packer, "Justification," *New Bible Dictionary* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), pp. 636-640.

An article from a standard and quite excellent Bible study resource. This article is a model of focused brevity and clarity, setting out clearly the basic definitions needed to understand the meaning of justification, interpreting the most important passages (including Romans 3 – 4), and tracing the theme of justification through Scripture.

Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (James Clark, 1957).

A Reformation era classic, this is Luther's response to an attack on the Reformed understanding of the Gospel by Erasmus of Rotterdam. Luther's spirited defense of sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fidei, soli gloria Deo, the great Reformation watchwords, is as lively and compelling as the day it was written. Today Luther is viewed, even by most Catholics, as more on target than his opponents. The work can be found in many editions, but if you can come up with this edition, Packer's introductory essay is worth reading, as well.

Alan Spence, *The Promise of Peace: A Unified Theory of the Atonement* (T and T Clark, 2006).

The author, an evangelist and human rights activist in South Africa, offers profound insights into the logic of the redemption with urgency and pastoral depth. This is not simply another summary of Christian doctrine; it is judicious and passionate – at times even polemical – defense of the heart of the gospel for our time.

For further reading and study:

Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross: Wisdom Unsearchable, Love Indestructible* (The Bible Speaks Today) (InterVarsity Press, 2001).

A survey of the critical passages of the Bible relevant to the meaning of the cross, with well conceived exposition and application of those passages.

John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (InterVarsity Press, 1986).

Considers the full range of meaning associated with the cross, giving insightful treatment of the atonement, but also considering the meaning of the cross for the life of Christian discipleship. Perhaps Stott's finest book.

Henri Blocher, *Songs of the Servant* (InterVarsity Press, 1975).

Profound theological exposition of the servant songs of Isaiah. Blocher, a French evangelical, combines the skill of a Biblical exegete with the insight of a seasoned theologian, a combination that results in exposition of great depth and insight.

# JUSTIFICATION

## ROMANS 3:21-4:8

*“Justification by God’s grace to all who repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.”*

(Leader – Be sure to study the Leader’s Notes)

### Introducing the Study

Here are two situations. Maybe you’ve experienced one of them. First, you’ve been in a country where another language is spoken that you have only begun to learn, and you struggle to comprehend...or perhaps you were called upon to translate in class and had to rely on a dictionary. Describe what it was like.

### Leader

1. Give a quick summary of the context from Romans 3:19-20. Then explain that the passage from Romans contains many words that have to be translated and is full of concepts to interpret. We will study together by using other passages to help us, and some illustrations from the study guide.

2. Read aloud this story about Monique:

Monique appeared happy as she walked off the platform waving her college diploma. But inwardly she was torn apart. She was facing a double problem. Her arrest for stealing a large amount of money from her employer was imminent. Orders to leave with her Army unit for duty in a war zone overseas had just come. How could she satisfy the just penalty she deserved for breaking the law and make good the commitment to serve honorably and obediently the demanding requirements of her commander? She felt doomed. If only someone would pay her debt and volunteer to take her place, fulfilling the requirements expected. That would be expecting too much.

Monique’s dilemma on the human level is magnified on the spiritual level. We have broken God’s moral laws, and the just penalty is our spiritual death for eternity. We are unable to meet His requirements to perfectly love and obey our Maker, and love others more than we love ourselves. Yet this seemingly unsolvable dilemma is solved when our awesome God designs a rescue.

Then read the doctrinal statement on Justification (above).

1. Discuss “righteousness” in vs. 21-22. What are some synonyms? Contrast: A righteousness from God with a righteousness by law keeping.
2. What is faith? Synonyms? Origin? Is it something we do or a gift from God that simply connects us with what Christ has done? What does it mean to say I am saved by faith alone; I am saved by Christ alone? How does this help you as

a Christian when you fall back into trying to earn God’s favor? (See Galatians 3:1-3, 11-13)

3. Justifying (vs. 24) is something God does. Can you describe what it means? On what basis does God justify us? What is the difference between grace and love?
4. Leader begins by explaining “sins committed beforehand unpunished” using Leader’s Notes and Hebrews 9:15. This is not a major point in the passage. Move on. Can anyone give the Old Testament background, or explain in vs. 25-26 the phrase “a sacrifice of atonement”? Why was the crucifixion necessary? (Leaders: See Leader’s Notes on Justification, dual attributes offered, and blood atonement, Leviticus 17:11. Retell the incident where Aslan substituted himself for the traitor, Edmund.) How does the doctrine that God satisfied His law of justice in requiring death for sin help you deal with self-condemnation and guilt over reoccurring sin?
5. From verses 27-31, explain how the principle of our justification by faith, not by trying to do any works to earn God’s favor, excludes (demolishes) boasting? In what areas of your life do you see pride? What has helped to keep you humble? Why might you be tempted to disregard God’s law when living the Christian life? In what areas of college life could IVCF leaders set an example for others?
6. As we look at Romans 4:1-6, we see Abraham, the Father of the Jews, being credited with righteousness. This phrase is repeated three times in verses 3-6. Think of the story at the beginning of the study about Monique. She not only needed somebody to bear the punishment for the laws she broke, but also to substitute for her in meeting the high standards with which she was unable to comply. God, in Christ, has addressed this dual dilemma. He bore the death penalty for us, and He kept the righteous law on our behalf. Let’s look at II Corinthians 5:21 where there is a parallel between what was credited to Christ and what was credited to us. It could be called “The Great Exchange.” (Leader: See Leader’s Notes. You may have to explain this, and then take questions.)

What would most people say is their deepest, most basic need? What does this passage identify as the real need that is provided by Christ? Do you realize that the gift of a righteousness we have not and cannot attain, credited to us, is the heart of the gospel? (See Romans 1:16-17).

7. We read in verses 7-8 the words of David, King of Israel, yet an adulterer and murderer. What sins have trapped you? What evils are prevalent in the various systems of our culture? In our evangelical sub-culture? Take time to rejoice in the God who justifies the wicked.
8. Read aloud Romans 5:1-2, 8-11 and summary statement from Leader’s Notes. Pray.