

Faith Foundations

Introduction

“Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28: 18-20).

The aim of the Faith Foundations course is to help you grasp and understand what Christians believe! This course teaches the main principles of the Christian faith with biblical depth, spiritual passion and a freshness that makes this course an ideal way to develop our discipleship. It will provide basic building blocks to help people build up their faith in God and equip them for future service. It is a course that will give each person the opportunity to discover new things about their faith and have their questions answered.

The course is intended to provide a good understanding of all the main aspects of faith found in the Bible in an easy to grasp and enjoyable format, securing and grounding Christians in the faith. This course is the natural next step after doing something like Christianity Explored or Alpha. However it is also useful for those who are older in the faith and who would like to reinvigorate themselves spiritually by going over the foundations of their faith afresh. Each session lasts approximately an hour and half with a talk, discussion time and the opportunity to get to know others in the Church more deeply. Between the sessions you will have the privilege of getting to know others in the group in a one to one situation.

Faith Foundations has been designed to provide essential teaching for all Christians. Having completed this course, Christians will not only be enabled to love God better and live for Him, but also gain a secure understanding of the faith, learning how to handle secondary issues with humility and major issues with clarity. This discipleship course will need your commitment to serious study and an ambition to want to know the Bible better and to be ready to change what you believe so that it conforms to what the Bible teaches. This course is new with the hope that you can refine it to help many Christians grow in their faith.

A Typical session

Each session starts with coffee/tea and cake, followed by an opportunity to reflect on what we have discovered so far about the Christian faith. The next part of the session will be the main talk on one of the big themes using this booklet as a guide to what will be covered in that session. The final part of the session is work in small groups where there are two questions to help the small group discover how the theme relates to their life and the life of the Church. The talks aim to cover the faith foundations that are essential to the Christian faith.

- 7.45pm Arrive. Coffee, tea and cakes
- 8.00pm Reflection on what we know of the Christian faith so far
- 8.15pm Main talk
- 8.45pm Group work
- 9.20pm Looking ahead to the next session and closing prayer

The weekly sessions are supplemented by some one-to-one work with another member of the course. You will be asked to covenant with another member of the course to read the Bible together over the weeks of the course asking God to help you grow in your faith and ministry.

This material will cover the letter to the Philippians and the letter of James. Additional study support booklet will be provided.

Thank you for deciding to take up this course. I look forward to working with you as we lay the foundations of our faith.

Peter Breckwoldt

Session 1 – Can we believe the Bible?

Can we trust the Bible?

If I say that I want to run my life according to the teachings of the Bible, then what am I actually saying? Am I saying...

1. It contains objective truth...
2. It has inherent authority...
3. It is relevant for every age...
4. It is a manual for life...
5. ...

Its source

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The origin of the Bible, and what the Bible says about itself

3 comments:

1. Not existing words with new power; nor words which God uses to inspire.
2. Writers were important but still God's word
3. Only the originals inspired

Inerrancy

Authority

The Authority of the Old Testament

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Two points to take note of:

1. He didn't just seem to accept Scripture, so not to upset the Jews; rather Jesus died to fulfil it.
2. He shows the importance of the Old Testament, and we should be Christians of the whole Bible.

The Authority of the New Testament

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What about the various translations that are on offer today?

The 1611 Authorised Version was a translation of the Greek text, though not necessarily complete. The attempt by the translators was for literary excellence – it was seen even in 1611 as being slightly old fashioned.

Revised Standard Version, 1946. This translation was less literal; some minor inaccuracies, but a good version.

New English Bible, 1970. A production of some well-known biblical scholars of their time, but has certain weaknesses.

Good News Bible, 1976. This went for what is called 'dynamic equivalent' translation. This is based on two key principles: (1) grammatical structures of the original not reproduced; (2) information known then and not now is to be made explicit. The advantage that this translation has is that it is clear, natural, simple and unambiguous in its use of language. However, there are reservations with regard to it.

New International Version, 1979. This had 100 scholars committed to the authority and the infallibility of the Bible. It is an accurate translation, clear and concise. However, it has in recent years come under some criticism as not being politically correct.

There have subsequently been two further translations: (1) a gender neutral NIV; (2) the English Standard Version which was published in 2001. This version has sought to look at each word and phrase and to weigh it carefully against the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts to ensure, as far as possible, accuracy and clarity. The overall philosophy of the ESV is the essential literal translation.

Finally, we see that the events recorded in the New Testament took place very close to the time the New Testament was written.

The Bible, is it full of contradictions?

No, you will find slightly differing viewpoints, but not contradictions.

Has science disproved the Bible?

No. Archaeology continues to support the word of God by what is being discovered nearly every week in the Holy Land. If we focus on what the Bible is about, then the problems will begin to disappear. In 1701 Bishop James Ussher dated creation back to 4004BC – and of course it is still believed by many today.

We need to remember that the Bible is not a scientific textbook; the Bible is seeking to answer the question 'why', while science is seeking to answer the question 'how'. This, though simplistic, is a helpful way of looking at the Bible. The Bible, in essence, is an account of how God is at work in his world and universe.

Questions

1. Does the Old Testament have any value other than providing some interesting background information for the New Testament?
2. A puzzled member of your home group asks, "The authority of the Bible is clearly not much use in practice. Christians come to different conclusions about a verse or even a passage, and of course they have been filtered through fallible minds over many years. So why is the authority of the Bible so important?" How would you reply to the member of your home group?

Session 2 – God, how can we know him and what is he like?

The proofs of the existence of God

We need to ask why people want to know about God in the first place. For some it may well be out of intellectual curiosity; for others it will be about a real desire to know God. It may well be that they are asking the questions, 'Why am I here?' and 'What is my purpose in life?'

It was the prophet Isaiah who said:

“The Lord said, “Go and tell this people: “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.”” (Isaiah 6:9-10)

Isaiah shows us that not every hearer sees and believes in the Living God. This is underlined in Psalm 14, where we read:

“The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”” (Psalm 14:1)

Historically, however, there have been proofs sought to be established about belief in God:

1. The ontological argument
2. The cosmological argument
3. The teleological argument
4. The moral argument

General Revelation

1. The observable universe
2. The nature of man

Special Revelation

Then there are two special revelations about God that speak about him:

1. Jesus Christ
2. The Bible

The other key areas in which we can begin to explore the idea of belief in God is that of the witness of the church and individual Christians:

1. The witness of the Church
2. The witness of the believer

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” (John 16:13-14)

Here we see the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit as the one who reveals the truth about God to the hearts of believers and into the life of the Church.

This, however, will bring to us some questions that will certainly need to be answered:

Is God in control?

We need to see what the Bible says about some key issues, namely:

1. Is God the ruler of the world? (John 12:31; John 14:30)
2. Is God sovereign? (Psalm 24:1; Isaiah 40:22-23; John 19:11)
3. The problem of evil – here, again, the Bible can offer us help (Habakkuk 1:2-4)

What are the key things we can learn about God?

1. God is sovereign (Colossians 2:15).
2. We live in a fallen world (Genesis 3:1-15).
3. God is at work in the world (John 3:16).
4. The purposes of God in the final analysis are perfect (Psalm 18:30).

How is God at work in the world?

We learn about God's work in the world through the idea of providence, which can be defined as the continual activity of the creator who, with overflowing goodness and grace, upholds his creatures in ordered existence (Colossians 1:17). He guides and governs all events and circumstances and free acts of angels and men (Genesis 45:5-8), and he directs everything to an appointed goal for his own glory (Ephesians 1:9-12). Ultimately the Bible is working towards the end of this world and the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 22).

This biblical picture stands over and against a whole series of ideas that are very common in our world today, namely:

Providence can be explored in four ways:

1. Natural order
2. God's providence and the history of the world
3. God's providence and personal circumstances
4. God's providence and freedom

1. Pantheism
2. Deism
3. Dualism
4. Indeterminism
5. Determinism
6. The doctrine of chance
7. The doctrine of fate

This finally leads us to the question:

If God is good, why is there suffering?

1. God is not to blame for suffering. There is a difference between how the Bible begins and the consequences of our rebellion (Genesis 1 and Genesis 3).
2. The question is then asked, 'Why hasn't God done something?' Of course, God has done something. But if you imagine for a moment that God steps in every time there is suffering or every time he sees evil, our world would not make sense. Secondly, we would see human freedom being inhibited and our own responses would be massively restricted. Thirdly, the value of suffering would in some sense be lost to us, because we recognise that sometimes suffering brings about a deeper understanding of ourselves and allows us to serve others in a way we could not in any other circumstance. We need to hold onto the fact that God not only sees, but he cares for a suffering world; this we recognise in the work, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. Finally, we have to answer the question, 'What about natural disasters?' We must not make a false sense of division between moral and natural evil. It was CS Lewis who recognised that the majority of human suffering comes from the hands of human beings. But the Bible in Genesis 3 tells us that nature itself shares in the impact of man's rebellion against God. We also see that sometimes natural disasters are made worse by the actions of men and women. Finally disease, though not part of the world as God originally made it (Genesis 1), ultimately can be used by God to bring him glory in the midst of people's suffering. We see this in the work of Jesus Christ as he brings hope to those who suffer.

Questions

1. “Without any direct revelation man can know a considerable amount about God and about his demands.” We can see this attitude in the world around us. In contrast to this someone else might say, “Without direct revelation man can know nothing of any significance about God.” Where does the truth lie?
2. What difference should having the Holy Spirit make to your search for the truth about Christian doctrine? How should you think of yourselves being guided by God today?

Session 3 – The uniqueness of Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ is the very centre of the Christian faith. That runs counter to our society today. Why? It seems that many faiths and people with no faith at all are interested and willing to accept Jesus at least to a certain level:

1. Hindus would gladly assimilate him.
2. The Koran affirms him in his virgin birth.
3. Other philosophies are ready to accept that he is a great teacher.

The big problem is his claim to uniqueness. This is the distinctive factor for the Christian, that Jesus Christ claims to be Lord, Saviour and God. At the heart of the Christian faith is the person of Jesus. So the question in this session is, 'How can we know that Jesus is God?'

Why we believe Jesus is God

1. His claims
 - a. Jesus' links to the Old Testament claims of a Messiah (Isaiah 61:1-2)
 - b. Other special claims (the 'I am's') (John 6:35; 10:11; etc)
 - c. He claimed unity with the Father (John 10:30)
 - d. Jesus shows his divinity by forgiving sins (Mark 2)
2. His sinless character
 - a. He claimed it for himself (John 8:46-47)

- b. Those who knew him accepted his claim (1 John 3:5)
- c. His enemies could find no fault (Luke 23:4)
- d. Passing acquaintances were struck by his sinlessness (Luke 19:28-44)

3. His unrivalled teaching

Jesus' teaching stands out by its power and authority

The ethical and doctrinal emphasis is clear from what he taught

- a. Its unparalleled authority (Matthew 7:28-29)
- b. His teaching had honesty (John 8:58)
- c. His teaching showed new possibilities (John 3:16)

4. The testimony of his disciples

- a. Peter (Acts 2)
- b. John (1 John 1:1-5)
- c. Paul (Acts 26:1ff)

Against the backdrop of answering this question of why we believe Jesus is God, we now have to explore some crucial questions about Jesus that still cause us issues today:

1. Was Jesus born of a virgin? If so, why?

2. Limited accounts – only Matthew and Luke.
3. The incredulity of the modern mind to believe the story.
4. Why is it important anyway?

There are things to say about why Jesus was born of a virgin:

1. It fulfils the Old Testament (Isaiah 9:6-7)
 2. Christ is one with those he came to save (Matthew 3:13-15)
 3. Jesus is unique as God's Son (Hebrews 1:1-4)
 4. We have a perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 10:11-18)
5. Is Jesus the God-Man? How are we to understand his unique place in history?

From the earliest times there have been debates. The Council of Chalcedon in 451AD said:

“We should confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son... perfect in Godhead... perfect in manhood... of one substance with the Father in the Godhead... of one substance with us in manhood... made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation... the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in the one person and one substance.”

6. Did Christ rise from the dead?

This is a highly disputed area in Christian theology. It is a matter that has been debated by both non-Christians and Christians alike. Clearly the significance of Jesus' resurrection cannot be lost from the Christian faith, for if Christ did not rise then this course is frankly a waste of time! The key piece of evidence upon which the resurrection is built is that of the empty tomb.

The empty tomb

When faced with the empty tomb on Easter Sunday, we are faced with four possible responses:

1. The disciples stole the body
2. The authorities disposed of the body
3. Perhaps Jesus never really died (he swooned on the cross)
4. Jesus really did rise from the dead

“Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth.”
Sherlock Holmes

The appearances after the resurrection

The Bible records that the risen Christ was seen on more than 11 occasions and by up to 550 people (1 Corinthians 15:6). We will have to ask the questions – was this a delusion? Was this a hallucination? Or was this a reality?

The following responses can be made when these arguments are used:

1. Hallucinations are highly individualistic.
2. Such events are usually concerned with something that has been long awaited and desired.
3. Psychic experiences usually occur in particular places at particular times.
4. They usually recur over a long period of time, with some degree of regularity.

There are five reasons for believing that people saw Jesus Christ rise from the dead:

1. The accounts are independent

2. They are eyewitness accounts (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)
3. Their witness is based on observation and experiment (see Thomas in John 20 and Mary in Matthew 28).
4. The witnesses support each other
5. The witnesses include men and women of outstanding character (John 20)

So we have seen that there is firstly the evidence of the empty tomb, and secondly the appearances after the resurrection.

Transformed lives

Please notice the transformation that takes place in the disciples' lives following the resurrection. It had only been a short period of time since Judas had betrayed Jesus and since then Jesus had been deserted by the disciples and disowned by Peter. It appears that prior to the resurrection the disciples were leaderless and in despair. Yet, 50 days later, Peter spoke to a great crowd in Jerusalem about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These same disciples would travel the world proclaiming that Christ had indeed risen and would risk and lose their lives by teaching such truth.

It was the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives and the lives of men and women who turn to follow Christ which provides us with the final piece of evidence which supports the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus' miracles

7. Why did Jesus do miracles?

1. Because he is God ()
2. To reveal his nature as God ()
3. To point people to himself ()

Conclusion

Does this really matter? It is interesting to note that the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15) saw that the resurrection was central to the Christian faith. He saw that if Christ had not been raised then our faith would indeed be futile. So he wanted to assert that Christ is fully God and the resurrection authenticated who he was. He then went on to say that the resurrection shows the great power of God, for if God can raise Christ to life, then we too can be raised if we put our faith in him.

We need to hold to the shocking truth that if Christ did not rise from the dead then we are still in our sins – the resurrection shows that the penalty for our sins has been paid. So, if Christ did not rise, the penalty and payment is still needed. What should encourage us is that in his death and resurrection we find atonement and forgiveness. Finally, those who have fallen asleep in Christ (those who have died) would be lost if Christ had not risen from the grave, for the resurrection is absolutely crucial for the Christian hope of a future life.

Questions

1. What arguments would you put to a friend who is not yet a Christian to show them that Jesus was in fact God?
2. Since sinning is “only human”, how could Jesus have been fully man and yet not have sinned?

Session 4 – This is the gospel for all the world

For us to grow in our discipleship it is important that we know the gospel and to be able to explain it to those who are not yet Christians. It is important to know the gospel in depth.

Man's situation

1. We are slaves in need of deliverance. The Bible shows that all men and women are sinners and slaves to sin (Romans 6).
2. As sinners we merit judgement and need forgiveness. God will not overlook our sin and let us off; rather the Bible says that we will receive punishment and so Jesus spent his life calling men to repentance.

Why can't God just forgive?

1. Because of our sinful nature we would not last in the presence of a holy God.
2. God is a prisoner to his own nature. He cannot just overlook sin.

So man is under judgement and is in need of redemption. When we turn to the life of Jesus we find that his life forces us to make a decision. His very coming divides men and this is what is at the heart of John's gospel (John 3:8 and John 3:36). The question is: will we choose darkness or light?

The Bible reminds us in Ephesians 2 that because of sin man is dead and in need of regeneration (Romans 6:23), and the culmination or wages of sin is death – death of the soul.

This, then, is our picture of man.

But God...

1. God wills salvation. The gospel message must start with God (John 3:16). We need to recognise that it is God who makes the first move.
2. The death of Christ was crucial to his mission. We do not see Christ's death as a tragic end, but as the very beginning. The Bible teaches us that Jesus knew the time had come, he accepted the will of his Father and was willing to go to the cross to save and rescue us (John 19:10f).
3. His death was an identification with sinners.
4. He himself was innocent. So we mustn't see Christ's death as a penalty for his own sin. The writers of the New Testament make it crystal clear that Jesus was without sin.
5. Jesus died in our place.

At the very heart of the Christian gospel is mercy and grace. Mercy can be described as compassion towards one in need who is unable to help himself; grace is the undeserved, unmerited favour and mercy of God.

So what can we discover about this great salvation?

The Bible shows that Jesus is not the one *in* whom we achieve our reconciliation with God, but the one *through* whom we receive our reconciliation with God (Romans 5:10).

Penal / penalty

6. The dividing factor between God and man is sin, and sin produced God's wrath. Only a sacrifice acceptable to God could create a new relationship of forgiveness between God and man. So the death of Christ means remission of sins.

7. Jesus was a ransom for many. The idea here is that Jesus paid the price so that we might go free. In a sense this develops the idea of substitution and brings in the idea of penal substitution (see Exodus 21:30).

8. Christ triumphant. The dominant note across the New Testament is that of victory, and we see this in the preaching of the disciples following the resurrection (Acts 4:32f).

Here we need to ask the question – victory over what?

1. Over sin.
2. Over evil forces.
3. Over the powers and principalities of this world.

9. Salvation is universal. We should realise that Jesus is indeed the Saviour of the world, and this gospel is the gospel for the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20).

10. Predestination. Salvation is for all, but not all receive salvation. We need to remind ourselves constantly that salvation is a gift from God, it is his choice and he calls out the elect from the world to be drawn into his kingdom (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).
 - a. Predestination is a biblical truth, which we discover when we become Christians.
 - b. Predestination is an eternal secret, in which we find the combination of human responsibility and divine sovereignty.
 - c. Predestination is a family truth – it is not for those outside the faith.
 - d. Predestination is a truth to be guarded. This is not an area in which we are to speculate, for it is in the realms of God's sovereignty.

We must reflect upon the fact that predestination is connected with God's love (Romans 9:19f).

Predestination is given to us as assurance (Romans 8:29f).

Predestination is related to ethical ends, because we are meant to produce the qualities of God's character in our lives (Colossians 3:12).

Man's response

In the Bible we see man's response as threefold:

1. Repentance. Putting aside everything that is evil (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). In a sense it is turning back to God.

2. Faith. This is a warm personal trust in a living Saviour, Jesus Christ. We see faith as given by God (Romans 12:13). We walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). We stand by faith (Romans 11:20). We are counted righteous by faith (Romans 4:5).
3. Holy living. This is the idea of throwing off the old life and putting on the new life (Colossians 3). Our faith produces reaction – that of good works, a change of lifestyle, wanting to be with God.

We must also recognise that there is a cost for the gospel. Supremely we see that in the death of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, for us upon the cross. But we also need to see the other side, that we, too, as Christians are called to take up our cross and to follow Christ. So the focus is also on Christian suffering:

1. As Christians we walk in the path of Christ (Colossians 1:24).
2. Suffering is a means by which people are tested or are purified (Psalm 66:10; James 1).
3. Suffering is a means by which people are brought closer to God (Psalm 119:69; Romans 8:35-37).
4. God calls us to trust him in our suffering, not to understand it (Romans 8:28).
5. Suffering is a way to resurrection and glory (Romans 8:18; Hebrews 12:1-2)

Finally, it is important for us to realise that we need to hone the whole gospel down to some simple truths that we are able to explain to a person who isn't yet a Christian. We need to be able to explain clearly what needs to happen and to show what God has done.

Questions

1. God is supposed to be our Father, and any father can forgive his children's sin without going to all the bother of making sure at least someone is punished. The story of the prodigal son makes this crystal clear! Was the cross really necessary?
2. Recently I attended a conference devoted entirely to the gospel. I had hoped to be personally moved and I wasn't much. Does it matter that the gospel no longer thrills me as it used to?

Session 5 – Assurance – how can we be sure?

The first thing to say is that having assurance is one of the great truths of the Bible. Yet, it is amazing that many people believe that having assurance is both presumptuous and arrogant. The apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 4, makes assurance a very clear teaching. The evidence for assurance from the Bible is powerful and clear:

In Job (Job 19:25f)

In David (Psalm 23:4)

In the life of the apostle Paul (Romans 8:38)

In the letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:22)

In Peter's writing (2 Peter 1:10)

In the apostle John's writing (1 John 3:14; 1 John 5:13)

So right at the outset we can see that assurance is a central truth that is taught from the Bible. We need to recognise that the language that is used in the Bible is that of persuasion, confidence, knowledge and certainty. We need to see that, like Paul, we too can have confidence in the assurance that God has called us into his kingdom and he will not let us go, even though we may be the chief of sinners, have a deep sense of guilt and recognise that we have done nothing to deserve such love. We can still view our salvation with certainty!

Doubt

Doubt is a real issue both for the Christian and for the genuine enquirer. It is an experience that most Christians at some stage may well pass through.

1. We can doubt because we have a short memory. We forget what God has done by calling us from death and giving us life. You will remember that in the Old Testament people are always being encouraged to remember. (Deuteronomy 7:17; Joshua 1:13; 1 Chronicles 16:11). Our faith, then, is based upon our memory.
2. We can doubt because we have a limited view of God. What we need to do is view our life not from our perspective, but from God's. We need to understand that we need to get our life in balance, to try to see his nature as a whole and to balance our transiency with his imminence, and his anger with his love. So what we need is a bigger view of God.
3. We can doubt because we have poor foundations. The Bible tells of a situation where an epileptic boy could not be healed by the disciples (Matthew 17:14). We see how ineffective the disciples became in the situation because of their uncertainties and lack of real foundation of faith. You see it is easy to have an experience of Christ but have no foundation or knowledge. This then leads to doubt.
4. We can doubt because we fail to turn to Christ. Maybe people have come to church on a regular basis, said the right things and maybe even done the right things, yet never have made that step of commitment. We may have made a positive assumption about them having faith, without really helping them to explore and own the faith for themselves (Romans 10:9).

5. We can doubt because of a lack of evidence of growth. This can come about because:

we expect too much too soon

we have not really got ourselves rooted into Christ (Luke 8:6, 13)

we are going through a barren period of life (Psalm 22:1-2)

we have failed to put our faith into action and so we are not growing (James 2).

6. We can doubt because of an emotional issue. These people are often the hardest to help. Elijah was just such a person who, though having a great victory over the prophets of Baal, suddenly found himself in despondent doubt (1 Kings 19:3). The response is to try to have a balanced life with a regular diet and with good friendships.

7. We can doubt because of our own fears. This may be why someone does not commit themselves to Christ – they dare not believe that it could be true. In a sense we see this in the disciples at the resurrection in Luke 24 – the disciples could not believe the truth of the resurrection.

Does my doubt mean that I am not saved?

Let me say straightaway that it is possible to live the Christian life without ever arriving at assurance. Remember it is by faith we are saved, not by the assurance

of it – just as we see in the story of the thief on the cross who turned to Christ and believed.

Is there any antidote to doubt?

There are three possible ways in which we can respond to the whole question of doubt:

1. The promises of God. We need to remind ourselves constantly that when God speaks he will act. He is utterly faithful and is always true. Remember our Heavenly Father will reject no-one who comes to him in penitence and faith (John 3:16).
2. The finished work of Christ. Once again we need to remind ourselves that the cross is the pledge and proof of God's determination that we are redeemed. It reminds us that there is nothing further for us to do (Hebrews 7:27).
3. The continuing work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit in our lives is God's guarantee (Ephesians 1:14). Remember, we are sealed with the Spirit, and it is the Spirit who affirms all the truths of the Scriptures (1 John 4:13).

Why should we desire assurance?

1. Assurance gives present peace and comfort. We recognise that each of us is in a battle and we face a tension between being a child of God and living in the world. It allows us, in a sense, to get on living for God (Philippians 4:12).
2. Assurance makes a Christian an active Christian. We are reminded that we have an absolute, guaranteed future, so it allows us not to dwell on the past

but to look ahead and to serve God where we are (Philippians 3:14; Hebrews 12:1-2).

3. Assurance makes a Christian a committed Christian. When doubt takes hold we find ourselves dragged back. We are reminded in the Bible that a city divided against itself cannot stand; and Elijah encouraged the people to decide (1 Kings 18:21) – we see here that assurance and commitment are linked.

What about guidance?

Guidance can be divided into two areas:

1. Guidance from the outside.

The Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). Its aim is to make clear what we should do, how we should live (Exodus 20:2-7, 13-17). But we have to admit that there are many things on which the Bible is not clear. Its primary aim is to help us to see things from God's perspective.

Circumstances. Paul on his missionary journey would often move when the persecution began. For example, he took a lack of response from the Jews in a particular city as a sign to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 14:19-20). But we need to say that this is not an infallible guide.

The Church. The Church has an important role of interpreting Scriptures and establishing Christian principles. It is a group of like-minded people from whom we can gain guidance.

People. We can turn to individuals, to other Christians, and ask their advice. Asking others for help can in fact be a very humbling experience. Remember, be willing to take advice, even though it does not fit in with your own plans (Jeremiah 42:2-3).

2. Guidance from the inside.

The Holy Spirit. In John 16 we see the role of the Holy Spirit is guiding the disciples in the matter of their basic faith. There may be times of special, almost supernatural, guidance (Acts 10). But the main role of the Spirit is to keep them true to the Bible's teaching.

Feelings. Interestingly the Bible never says that we will have inner feelings that we are going the right way. We need to recognise straight away that our feelings are affected by many things, some of which may not be spiritually based.

Our minds. This is where guidance really happens – we are to renew our minds (Romans 12:2). God is a rational God and has given us minds to think his thoughts after him. We are to make up our minds when we take on board all that God has said and done.

Finally, we recognise that our doubts, the issues that cause us to doubt God's goodness and his love, often can be settled when we turn to God and seek his guidance as we look to his word, to his Spirit, to his church and to Christian brothers and sisters who gather around us, that we can pray to have our faith strengthened and have our courage emboldened to live for God in this world.

Questions

1. A member of the youth group comes to you and asks how they can be sure that they are a Christian. How would you emphasise the work of the Spirit and the Bible in a conversation with a teenager?
2. What would you tell another member of the Church family who wanted to have confidence in their relationship with God? How would you use the teaching of election to emphasise the assurance that a Christian can have (Ephesians 2:1-10)?

Session 6 – The Church – what is it all about?

The Church refers to all the people who belong to the Lord. It is the people who have been purchased by the blood of Christ. In the Bible we find various images and expressions that help us to describe and understand the Church. The Church is called the body of Christ, the family of God, the people of God, the elect, the bride of Christ, the company of the redeemed, the communion of saints and the new Israel.

What is the Church?

1. 'Ecclesia'. This is the main word used for the Church in the Bible – it occurs 114 times in the New Testament and 46 times in the writing of the apostle Paul (Acts 11:22; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 1:2). Interestingly it only occurs twice in the gospels.

2. The Church's origin is with and in Jesus Christ. The ministry of Jesus began with his announcement of the kingdom and by his choosing of twelve disciples, on whom the Church is to be built (Matthew 16:18).

3. The images of the Church are many:
 - a. It is local and universal
 - b. It is invisible and visible

This has been seen in a variety of ways:

- a. The true Church in any congregation is those who are saved.
- b. Visible and invisible run together like railway lines.
- c. Two sides of the same coin.
- d. Visible congregation has an inner core which makes it what it is.

What is important to grasp is that the Church is not just what we see around us today; rather we have to recognise that we have both a heritage of a Church (ie, the saints who have gone before us and are now with the Lord) and the saints who are yet to come before our Lord's return.

Why should I belong to any Church?

1. Because God works through people and groups (Genesis 12:1-5). We see this in the choice of Abraham, leading to a people who will enter the promised land. It is important that we do not become individualistic but rather see ourselves as part of a group, a company of believers.
2. Jesus intended us to belong together. He chose twelve men; he gave them two community sacraments or signs (baptism and communion). He gave us a mission project – to share God's love with the world (John 3:16).

What does the Church do?

It is to be the vehicle of God's grace in the world and we fulfil that function in five main ways:

1. Worship – that is in giving praise and glory to God. We may express this worship in a variety of ways: hymns (Ephesians 5:19); the reading of the Bible (1 Timothy 4:13); preaching (1 Timothy 4:13); a statement of faith (Romans 10:9); prayer, building up and fellowship

However we may encounter today many attitudes to the Church and to worship...

- a. I can be a Christian and worship God on my own.
- b. Coming to worship / Church on Sunday is a habit.
- c. The 'telephone box' experience – I am making my communion with God (Colossians 4:2).
- d. Worshippers are to worship in Spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). This is the kind of worship that the Father seeks.

2. Fellowship – this is about having something in common; fellowship is sharing what we have in common with those around us who are on the same spiritual level.
3. Sharing – this is more than just in a physical way, it is about opening and sharing our lives (Acts 6:1).
4. Prayer – the opportunity to talk to God not just on our own but also with others.
5. Evangelism – we are vehicles of God’s grace and therefore can never be a static society. God calls the Church to be active in the world, to represent him and to share his love.

We will act in this way for three main reasons:

1. It is out of our love for Christ (1 John 3:17).
2. It is out of an awareness of the value of human life (Luke 12:7).
3. It is out of thanksgiving for what we have received (Psalm 107:8-9).

Some practical questions:

Which Church should I go to?

Acts 2:42 – it is from this passage that we can see a pattern that should be the mark by which we should judge whether or not this is a Church which we should be involved in and committed to. So, what are the marks of a Church that we should look for:

1. Biblical preaching. This is of utmost importance in any Church that we attend. The Bible is our handbook; it is the final authority for the life of the believer and the life of the Church (2 Timothy 3:16).
2. Warm fellowship.
3. Meaningful prayer. Does the congregation consider prayer to be a vital factor both individually and corporately?

Should a Christian always go to the nearest Church?

This is what I would call the pub question. Do we always go to the nearest pub? I guess not. What we look for in a place we might go to eat and drink is what the atmosphere is like, what the company is like and what the beer and food are like. The answer to this question will depend on how we respond to the points that have been made above.

What if there is no Church like this in our area?

This then poses the question about whether I am in the place God wants me to be. I guess it then becomes a matter of priorities (Matthew 6:33).

What happens if there are things I do not like in the Church?

I would imagine that in any Church you attend you are sure to find things you do not like. So our response to this question must be what our reaction will be to the whole question of our attitude to worship – if the attitude is right, then things will not worry us too much. Remember, that when we come to a Church we must be ready to be open to new ideas, open to evaluate traditions against the Bible's teaching, ready to bend a little and learn a lot. The key is, does it reflect the Bible's teaching? In short, be positive!

What does it mean to be fully involved?

Surely the key to this question is faithfulness and commitment:

1. Being faithful to a small group (Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 10:25)
2. Being faithful to a central group. Don't just settle for small groups, but be faithful in regular attendance at the main meetings.
3. Being faithful in service (Ephesians 4:12). This is what I guess has become known in Church circles as 'every-member ministry'.
4. Being faithful in giving (1 Corinthians 16:1f). Yes, this is always a difficult subject but we need to recognise that if we are to be fully involved it must affect every aspect of our lives, including our wallet / purse.

How can I be of service?

Jesus gave us the example of service in Mark 10:43-45, and again in John 13:14-16. What should our response be?

1. Don't wait to be asked.
2. Don't think that anything is below you.
3. Find a task and ministry that God has given you to do.

What should our priorities be?

Overall we need to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and the things that belong to God to God (Matthew 22:21). The church is an opportunity and a place where we can find ourselves being both spiritually refreshed and greatly

encouraged. It is a privilege to be able to worship God with others and we should take every opportunity, whether in a large gathering or in a small group, to find ways in which we can be spiritually blessed and be a blessing to others. The focus of the Church is upon a relationship – a relationship with God by our Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, but also a relationship with other believers who are now our brothers and sisters. Let me mention three other things to take on board:

1. Take time to be alone with God (Mark 6:31) so that you can be both physically and spiritually refreshed. This was an important priority for Jesus and should be one for us.
2. Love one another (John 13:34). Remember that Christ loved us and gave his life for us so that we might be redeemed and drawn into his family. We should take up our cross and follow him. If we can't love those in the Church, then how are we going to love those outside?
3. Remember that you are sent back into the world (John 17:15). We are not called to be a holy society, but rather to be people who live in the world and who share the love of God with those around us seeking, as the first disciples did, to be fishers of men.

Conclusion

Why should I bother with the Church? Let me summarise it with 8 clear reasons:

1. It is commanded by Jesus ().
2. Jesus demonstrated his commitment to the group (he was the Good Shepherd of the sheep).
3. To hold back from the fellowship is to deny the Holy Spirit.
4. To be loved by the group is to be valued.
5. You will be strengthened by the group.
6. The giving and receiving of love is the business of being a Christian.

7. The love of Christians for one another is one of the best ways of being effective in sharing our faith.
8. You will have to live with the group in heaven!

Questions

1. You have been asked to prepare a sermon series on the life of the church. What 8 topics would you address, and what Bible passages would you use to teach core truths about the Church?
2. A friend emails you from another part of the country and is asking for your advice on what Church to go to. What tips and words of encouragement would you give about looking for another Church? What would you rule in and what would you rule out?

Session 7 – Who is the Holy Spirit, and what does he do?

Who is the Holy Spirit?

1. The Holy Spirit is God

- a. His name. The name of God and the name of the Holy Spirit are frequently linked (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:12).
- b. His attributes.
 - i. Omnipresence – present in all places at the same time (Psalm 139:7-10)
 - ii. Omniscience – having infinite knowledge and understanding (Isaiah 40:13,14)
 - iii. Omnipotence – having unlimited power (1 Corinthians 12:11)
 - iv. Eternity (Hebrews 9:14)
- c. His works.
 - i. Creation (Genesis 1:2)
 - ii. Renovation (Psalm 104:30)
 - iii. Regeneration (John 3:5,6)
 - iv. Resurrection (Romans 8:11)
- d. His connections! (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:13)

2. What does the Church say?

a. The Nicene Creed.

“The Holy Spirit, the Lord... who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified”

b. The Athanasian Creed.

“The Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal... So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.”

3. The Holy Spirit is personal.

- a. He, not ‘it’. In the Greek of John’s gospel the masculine pronoun is used for him five times (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:8, 16:13, 16:14).
- b. Personality. The New Testament writers speak of him as possessing mind, feeling and will (Romans 8:27; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Corinthians 12:11).

Questions to consider

1. Why is it important that the Holy Spirit is God?
2. In this age of DIY liturgy does it matter what the creeds say about the Holy Spirit?
3. Why is the Holy Spirit so often called ‘it’?
4. How do we know that the Holy Spirit is personal?

What does the Holy Spirit do?

1. Christian conversion
 - a. Conviction of sin (John 16:8-10)
 - b. Pointing to Jesus (John 15:26)

- c. New birth (John 3:6-8)
- d. Belonging (Romans 8:9)
- e. Guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:22)
- f. Assurance (Romans 8:16)

2. Christian holiness

Before describing the fruit of the Spirit, Paul encourages Christians to *'live by the Spirit'*.

'Here is the greatest single secret of holiness which the New Testament reveals. It is not to strive to live like Christ, but to let Christ by his Spirit live and reign in us.'
John Stott

Paul commands us to *'be filled with the Spirit'* (Ephesians 5:18). This is not speaking of a dramatic one-off experience. The Greek literally means 'go on being filled', and speaks of a continuous and growing submission to the Holy Spirit.

Health warning: Living by the Spirit can seriously change your life!

For details, look at the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23).

3. Christian understanding.

- a. Through his Spirit, God caused the Scriptures to be written (2 Timothy 3:16).
- b. Through his Spirit, God enables the Scriptures to be understood (Psalm 119:18).

4. Christian fellowship.

The Church began on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit united a group of individuals into one fellowship (Ephesians 4:4).

5. Christian service.

- a. The Holy Spirit equips Christians with gifts which are to be used for the building up of Christians and for evangelism to non-Christians.
- b. They are given for a purpose and not for self gratification!
- c. Not every Christian is given the same gifts (1 Corinthians 12:29, 30).
- d. The variety of gifts enable the Church to function properly (1 Corinthians 12:4-26).
- e. We must use our gifts (Romans 12:3-8).

Paul provides us with examples of Spirit-given gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. Some of these are very practical and down to earth, whilst others are more 'spiritual'. In each of these passages, Paul emphasises the need for all gifts to be exercised in love (*'the most excellent way'*)

Questions

1. "Being filled with the Spirit is a definite post-conversion experience which every Christian should receive." Do you agree? What are the marks of being filled with the Spirit (Deuteronomy 34:9; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 4:7-12; Acts 6:2-5, 8-10; Acts 11:22-24; Ephesians 5:18-21)?
2. Can you expect a non-Christian to understand the new life that the Spirit brings? How would you attempt to describe it to the person?

3. Why is it wrong to boast about our gifts, and equally wrong to be over-modest about them? So then, how can we become more like Jesus?

Session 8 – What happens when I die?

The Christian faith stands or falls on whether or not Jesus Christ actually and physically rose from the dead on the third day. The resurrection proves to us in no uncertain terms that God has complete power over death. I would say that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important historical event that has ever taken place in the world. The call of Christ to his disciples is to follow him. To walk in his footsteps will include going through our own resurrection, resulting in life abundant.

Christianity is a historical faith. Christianity is part of history that is linked to the teaching of God's word where we discover how God has acted decisively in our history. The Bible records specific events in both the Old and New Testaments and how God has impacted our world. We also need to see that history will come to a close in the end, and this will be at God's bidding.

So we should see that this teaching sets Christianity at odds with modern ideas of existentialism. For the existentialist, historical considerations are seen as irrelevant. For them, it makes no difference whether God actually created the world or whether the fall of the human race actually took place in history and it makes no difference whether Jesus died and rose again from the dead.

What we will unpack in this session are the final events of life and of the world.

How do we know that Jesus rose from the dead?

The most powerful image of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God is his resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4). This issue has huge implications:

Did it happen? Is the resurrection story the great exception to the usual end of human life?

Many consider the resurrection of Jesus to be one of the most accredited and certain events of history.

Historical facts about the resurrection:

1. Jesus died due to the torture of the cross.
2. Jesus was buried.
3. Jesus' death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope.
4. The gospels state that Jesus' tomb was discovered to be empty just a few days later.
5. At that time the disciples had the literal experiences of encountering the risen Jesus.
6. The disciples were transformed doubters to bold proclaimers of his death and resurrection, even willing to die for this belief.
7. The resurrection became the central message of the Christian Church.

The resurrection story has its critics. We see that in the accounts of the guards (Matthew 28:11f), and all the way to the present there have been efforts to explain away this great event.

Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important?

1. There is little dispute amongst Christians that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event of all time. It is through the resurrection of Christ that we discover afresh the depth of his deity (Romans 1:14).
2. We have hope that is not wishful, but is solid and sure (1 Peter 1:3).
3. It is through Christ's resurrection that he proclaimed light to both Jew and Gentile alike (Acts 26:22-23).
4. It is through the resurrection that he furnished proof to all people that he had power over life and death (Acts 17:30, 31).
5. It is through the resurrection that Jesus guarantees our own resurrection (Acts 2:24).

For these reasons, then, we should make it a priority as Christians to seeking to understand the resurrection and to be ready to study it and to share the good news of it with those whom we meet. It is through this event of the resurrection that Jesus Christ identifies his power to save us, for without the resurrection he would be a good teacher, but with no power to save us, a hero who died on the cross.

A further point to note is that the resurrection speaks to us of the accuracy and the inspiration of the Bible itself, for there are dozens of prophecies that are recorded about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, written hundreds of years before they occurred (Isaiah 53).

Why was it necessary for Jesus to return to heaven?

The importance of the ascension is often overlooked by the Church today. We have special celebrations to remember the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus, but the ascension is all but forgotten by the Church. However we need to see that the ascension is an event which has profound importance for the life of the Church and the believer, for it marks the moment of Christ ascending to the highest place before his return.

“When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.” (Luke 24:50-53)

Jesus took his disciples to a mountain. When he had finished praying he gave his last instructions to them. Now was the time for him to return to heaven. Suddenly as the disciples watched in silent amazement, Jesus rose in the air to heaven. Finally a cloud hid him from their sight (Acts 1:9-10).

What did the disciples do?

1. They worshipped the Lord Jesus (Luke 24:52).
2. They returned to the city with great joy (Luke 24:52).
3. They told people what had happened (Acts 2:14).

Five reasons for Jesus going to heaven:

1. To prepare a home for his people (friends) (John 14:2).

2. To be an advocate before the Father (1 John 2:1). Jesus is willing to plead our case before the Father in heaven – Jesus testifies before the Father on the grounds of his own sacrifice so that we are then forgiven by the Father and have access to him.
3. In order to receive instruction over the final years of the earth (Revelation 5:5-7). Jesus receives from the Father control over the end events of the world. Revelation tells us that when the seven seals are waiting to be opened Jesus is the only one who is worthy to do that task. As each seal is opened so a tremendous event takes place – it seems that as Jesus is at the Father’s right hand he is able to intercede for his people.
4. To wait for the fullness of time when all those who are God’s elect will have turned to him in repentance and faith. Jesus ascended into heaven to prepare and wait for the day when he, with the Father, would welcome his own people and see that they accept him as both Messiah and King. We remember that Jesus will return with his people, the true Church (Isaiah 9:6; Micah 4:1-14). Jesus’ return will be a wonderful day.
5. To pour out the Holy Spirit upon all believers (John 14:16-18; Acts 2). It was Jesus himself who told his disciples, before he suffered and died, that he would return and send the Holy Spirit to them from the Father. This Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete, in the Greek language, namely the Comforter. He was reminding his disciples that they would not be left as orphans but rather the Spirit of Christ would indwell them and that they, through their life and witness, would glorify Jesus.

We also need to remember that Jesus ascended to enter the heavenly Holy of Holies to continue his work there as the great High Priest. For in heaven, Jesus reigns as King and intercedes for us as our High Priest. It is from all the authority given to him that he is able to pour out his Spirit upon the Church.

Jesus, as he sits at the Father's right hand, not only exercises the role of King of Kings but also fulfils the role of cosmic Judge; for he is the judge over all nations and all people (Acts 7:55-56).

Jesus will come again

Jesus came quietly and humbly as a Saviour to die on the cross; he came insignificantly to be born as a baby in Bethlehem, but the Bible makes it very clear that he will come again in power and glory as the King to reign and judge.

How do we know that Jesus will come again?

There are three key things that we can agree upon:

1. Jesus came and appeared to his followers over 2,000 years ago (2 Peter 1:16).
2. Jesus will eventually return (John 14:2-3).
3. Jesus will judge (Revelation 19:11).

We can say with absolute clarity that the Bible teaches that Jesus will return (Acts 1:10-11).

How does the Bible describe Jesus' coming again?

1. Every eye will see him; He will come on the clouds; even those who pierced him; all the world will know (Revelation 1:7).

2. We are told that the Lord himself will issue a command and with the voice of an archangel and with a trumpet the dead in Christ will rise (1 Thessalonians 4:16).
3. It will be a calamitous event and the earth will mourn (Matthew 24:30).
4. It will be an unexpected event (Matthew 24:44).
5. It will be a day of destruction, for the heavens will disappear with a roar (2 Peter 3:10).

What is the purpose of the second coming?

1. To complete the work of redemption. The coming of Christ will complete the redemptive purposes of God from across the ages. All of God's enemies (sin, death and the Devil) will be removed from the world (1 Corinthians 15:22-28).
2. To establish a new order. The world will be returned to God's original purpose for mankind and creation (Genesis 1-2; 2 Peter 3:1-13; Revelation 22:1-15). The second coming implements the victory that was achieved at Jesus' first coming.
3. To raise from the dead all who have died. The power of the voice of Christ will be so effective that it will raise those who have died; those who are believers will rise to life and those who are not believers will rise to be condemned (John 5:28-29).
4. To judge all people. Christ will judge both the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1).
5. To deliver the Church. It seems that just prior to the return of Christ there will be an intense period of persecution of the Lord's people (Daniel 7:21), but at its coming the Lord will deliver his people from their enemies (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

How should the certainty of Jesus' second coming affect our daily lives?

The apostle Paul reminds us that we are to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled lives, waiting patiently for the blessed hope that is the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ at his coming. So the second coming teaches us to live godly lives in a way which will honour him.

Questions

1. How should you react as a Christian to the death of someone you have loved very much and who is a Christian? What difference would it make if the person wasn't a Christian?
2. You have been asked to lead a workshop on the second coming. Even though many of the details are not known to us, what can we say *will* happen at the second coming? How would you attempt to teach it?

Session 9 – “In the world, but not of the world”

Every Christian faces a real tension of living in the world. We need to remind ourselves that becoming a Christian is not an escape but an entry into a battle. In this section we are going to explore the question, ‘How can we live in the world?’

What do we mean by the world?

In the Bible, the word for world is used in a variety of ways:

1. The physical world, the cosmos.
2. The people who live on the planet.
3. The age in which we live.

What can we say about the world?

1. It is a fallen world (Genesis 3:1-15). This is not as the world was intended by God.
2. It is set against the church (John 16:1-4).
3. Satan is its ruler (John 12:31).
4. The world exerts pressure on the people of God (Romans 12:2).

5. The Christian is called to be a light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

The next thing we need to ask ourselves is, 'What happens when I am tempted?'

1. We should expect temptation (1 Timothy 5:14-15).

2. We cannot be tempted by God (James 1:3).

3. However, we may be tested by God (1 Corinthians 10:13). What we need to remind ourselves is that temptation is always towards evil, but testing is towards good.

4. We cannot escape the blame for sin (James 1:14).

5. Temptation itself is not sin (Hebrews 4:15). We need to remember that giving in to temptation is sin.

6. Temptation is harder to combat the more we give in to it (2 Peter 2:19).

A case study:

Look briefly at Genesis 3.

Here we see three aspects of the work of the devil:

1. The devil sought to undermine the authority of God (v3).
2. The devil encouraged Eve to an attitude of superiority (v4).
3. The devil encouraged open rebellion (v5).

And the three failings of Eve:

1. Eve ceased looking for guidance.
2. Eve depended on her own sense and inner feelings.
3. She was deceived by a plausible rationalisation.

So the question is, 'How are we to combat temptation?' If we turn to Ephesians 6:10, we are told about how we are to stand:

1. We need a sure foundation
2. We need to refocus on Christ and not on the world.

3. We need to live by the power of God.

Maybe you are asking yourself the question, 'Why do I still sin?' Paul, himself, addressed this issue in his letter to the Romans, and in it he highlights some vital truths for us to take hold of:

1. We must understand what Paul means by being 'dead to sin'.
2. New life is a relationship with Christ.
3. We remain human and therefore imperfect and liable to stumble.
4. We are aware of the power of evil.
5. The fact that we are in a battle and occasionally we fail should not discourage us because victory is certain (Romans 8).
6. It is a battle of the will (Romans 7:25).

How do we live as Christians in the world?

We need to recognise that the world's standards are very different from those we find in the Bible. This has brought about two kinds of responses, to give encouragement and guidance to Christians about how we should live in the world.

1. Quietism, or 'let go and let God'. This idea is in a sense trying to remove us from the life of the world, and aiming to live a holy life resting upon God (Galatians 2:20). This is also emphasised by the fact that we are seen as clay in the hands of the living God (Jeremiah 18). You might well then ask, 'Why do we sin?'

2. Pietism. This approach emphasises a need for practical Christianity, for self-discipline and for spiritual exercise (Colossians 3:5-14). I would have to admit that I am more on the pietistic side than the quietistic.

Let me highlight three things that will help us in our battle with temptation and sin, which will also help to develop us to become more like Christ:

1. Remembering our aim. There is a goal to the Christian life, there is a prize to be won, there is a crown to be received, there is a fight to be engaged with and there is a race to be won (Philippians 3:14; Colossians 2:18; Philippians 4:1; 2 Corinthians 10:14; Hebrews 12:1).
2. Living according to the right Spirit. Our aim is not to live according to the spirit of this age, but according to the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9-11). This is expanded in Colossians 2:6-8 in which Paul makes four statements about false teaching:
 - a. It is hollow
 - b. It is deceptive
 - c. It is human
 - d. Its origin is evil
3. Being in our right minds. To help us to be sanctified, we need to develop a Christian mind (Romans 8:6). This is a work of God. The writer Blamires, in his book, 'The Christian Mind', gives six marks:
 - a. Its supernatural origin.
 - b. Its awareness of evil.
 - c. Its conception of the truth.
 - d. Its acceptance of authority.
 - e. Its concern for the person.
 - f. Its sacramental cast.

Our final question should be, 'What should the Christian attitude be to possessions?'

Of course there is much that has been written about this, particularly in the book of Acts where this area comes into prominence, though it is certainly referred to in the gospels (eg, Matthew 19).

1. Are possessions good or bad? We need to remember that God created all things and he has given them to man (Genesis 1:28f).
2. Do possessions help or hinder Christian growth? (1 Timothy 6:9)
3. Do possessions help or hinder Christian ministry? (1 Corinthians 8:9)
4. Is there a Christian example to help me? (Philippians 4:10)

The secret of living in our world is contentment. It may well be helpful to study and reflect upon people such as Hudson Taylor and other Christians who have lived in our world and who have found the secret of being both transformed by the power of the Spirit and living in the world with a degree of peace that comes from God.

Questions

1. "The trouble is I don't want to be holy!" What reasons does the Bible put forward for our wanting to live lives of holiness? Are some reasons more important than others?
2. A member of the Church family who is on the PCC comes to you asking for advice because with their job and their very active involvement in the Church they never take a day off, and yet they seem to thrive on it. What advice would you give and what does the Bible seem to direct them to do?
3. If a member of a small group within the life of the Church was living with their boy/girlfriend, what ought you to do about it? What guidance does the Bible give to us?