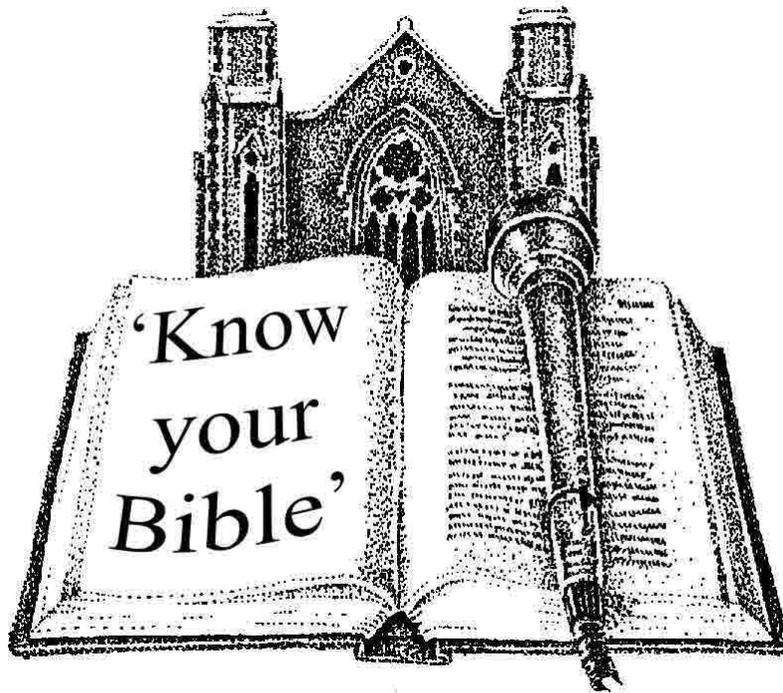


Stepping Stones

(A popular catechism)

Study Notes by Stuart Olyott



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1: WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT

A verse to learn by heart:

"For of him and through him and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen."
(Romans 11:36).

Points to take to heart:

1. Everything everywhere has a purpose - it is here for a reason. When you discover the purpose of something, you will value it. Until then, it will seem useless.
2. The Bible reveals what the purpose of everything is.
3. What the Bible says about everything in general applies to **us** and to **all** we do.

Reading: Psalm 103

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2: LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

A verse to learn by heart:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."
(2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Points to take to heart:

1. Every one of us is on a journey through life and through death to the hereafter.
2. Seeing that we were made to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever, **He** is the one to steer us through.
3. The Scriptures are the Word of God. He speaks in all the Book, but He does not speak outside it.
4. To travel safely we must listen to **all** the Scriptures say, and **only** to what they say.
5. We are to **listen** and **obey** - and that's all!

Reading: Psalm 19

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3: HE IS THERE AND HE IS NOT SILENT

A verse to learn by heart:

"He who comes to God must believe that He is,
and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."
(Hebrews 11:6)

Points to take to heart:

1. The existence of God cannot be proved - nor does it need to be. Men and women **know** He exists, but suppress the truth.
2. If we **could** prove the existence of God, we would have to abandon Christianity (in which everything works from God to man, and never the other way round).
3. The evidence for God's existence is staring men and women in the face, but, because they are fallen, they will neither examine it nor accept it.
4. Spiritual things have to be spiritually discerned.
5. In this unbelieving world we can trust, pray, live, invite ... and, most important of all, we can **proclaim** the gospel.
6. "Life is the only cure for death."

Readings: Psalm 145

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4: "I AM WHO I AM"

A verse to learn by heart s

"God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."
(John 4:24)

Points to take to heart:

1. God is a Spirit - but what **sort** of Spirit is He? He has certain essential characteristics without which He would not be God. These are called His attributes.
 2. Some of the attributes of God belong to Him alone. He does not communicate them to mankind. So we call these His **communicable attributes**.
 3. There are other attributes which God does give people, to some extent. We call these His communicable **attributes**.
 4. Examples of God incommunicable attributes are His eternity, immanence (He is present in this world, yet is not part of it), immutability (unchangeability), impassibility (He is unable to suffer), independence, infinity, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, transcendence (He is above His creation, and distinct from it).
 5. Examples of God's communicable attributes are His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. These attributes are revealed in His actions towards His creatures.
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5: THE THREE ARE ONE

A verse to learn by heart :

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."
(Matthew 28:19).

Points to take to heart :

1. Only God understands God. What He says about Himself is clear, life can see **what** the truth is, but we cannot explain **how** it can be so.
2. There is only one God, and God is one.
3. There is more than one who is God. This is clear even in the Old Testament, which also hints at His three-ness.
4. The Father is God. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son, is God. The Holy Spirit is God. There are three distinct Persons who are God, distinguished by their personal properties.
5. Within the Godhead there is priority, but not superiority. This is also seen in the way God acts.
6. God has revealed this truth, so we should love it. It is the foundation upon which every gospel doctrine rests.
7. We should come to this God, worship Him and pray to Him. We should also admire His Word in which He has revealed all these things.

Readings: Exodus 3:1-6. Isaiah 6:1-8. Matthew 3:13-17.

God of the Scriptures

1. God of the Scriptures, we worship You;
No other god is living and true.
You are a Spirit, 'I AM' Your Name,
Everywhere present, always the same.

Eternal Father! Eternal Son!
Eternal Spirit! Three who are One -
Equal in Godhood, equal in might,
Equal in glory - God infinite!

2. God of the Scriptures, we worship You,
Holy, all-powerful, all-knowing too;
Fountain of goodness, yet strict and just,
Absolute Wisdom! Truth we can trust!

Father begetting eternally!
Lord, thus begotten, God's Son to be!
Spirit proceeding, sent by the Son
Straight from the Father! Three, but yet One!

3. God of the Scriptures, we worship You,
Who planned, before time, all You would do;
Maker of all things, Your people's Friend,
Ruler of history, Judge at the end.

Father! who chose us in covenant love,
Son! who redeemed us, sent from above,
Spirit! who called us and makes us new,
God of the Scriptures, we worship You!

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6: NO CHANCE

A verse to learn by heart :

"He does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'"
(Daniel 4:35).

Points to take to heart:

1. God has decided in eternity everything which happens, whatever it may be. This is called His **decree**.
2. The decree of God is:
 - founded in wisdom.
 - eternal.
 - according to the counsel of His will.
 - unconditional.
 - unchangeable.
 - absolute (it includes everything) and effective.
 - for His own glory.
3. The decree of God does not:
 - make Him responsible for sin.
 - make men and women into mere puppets.
 - discourage unconverted people from seeking Christ.
4. Because of the decree of God, believers have peace, while there is no peace possible for the unconverted - they have everything against them.

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7: SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

A verse to learn by heart:

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible"
(Hebrews 11:3).

Points to take to heart:

1. God decided in eternity everything which was going to happen, whatever it might be. He made the universe as the stage on which His decree was going to be worked out. So we now consider God's work of **creation**.
2. In considering this subject we must look at **all** the evidence. The resurrected Christ directs us to the Scriptures which cannot deceive us in any way.
3. What the Scriptures teach about creation is easy to summarise: Before the creation only the triune God existed in eternity // Then God, unmoved by any necessity, created - in the beginning // He spoke and the universe came into being out of nothing // He completed His work of creation in 6 days and rested on the 7th // He did this only a few thousand years ago, for His own glory // Everything He made was very good.
4. No one who believes in the God of the Scriptures has any trouble believing this.
5. The Scripture's teaching on creation is not shaken by any objections, ancient or modern. Nor are there any convincing alternative explanations of the universe.
6. Those who believe the Scripture's teaching on creation live **very** differently from those who don't.

Reading: Genesis 1:1-2:3

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8: WE FELL FROM THERE

A verse to learn by heart:

"So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"
(Genesis 1:27).

Points to take to heart :

1. Increasing numbers of Christians have become neo-evangelicals, believing in theistic evolution or 'progressive creation'.
2. The Bible's teaching on the creation of man rejects this teaching completely:
(Genesis 1:27, 5:2, 6:7, Matthew 19:4-6, 1 Corinthians 15:39, 11:8,12 - the decisive text is Genesis 2:7)
3. The Bible's teaching on the creation of woman makes these recent ideas impossible:
(Genesis 2:18-25, 1 Corinthians 11:8, 12, 1Timothy 2:13).
4. The Bible teaches very clearly what was the original state of our race :
 - body and soul.
 - male and female.
 - in the image of God.
 - wisdom, holiness, righteousness.
 - dominion over the creatures.
 - creation ordinances (labour: Sabbath: marriage).
5. Unless we remember from what heights we have fallen, we will never understand our need to be saved.

Reading: Genesis 2:4-25

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9: ADAM'S FALL WAS OUR FALL

A verse to learn by heart :

"Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Points to take to heart :

1. Man as he was at first.
Man is the apex of God's creation. God created man male and female, in His own image and in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, to rule over the other creatures.
2. The covenant of life.
After the creation God placed man in the Garden of Eden. He made a covenant with him to give him life, if he perfectly obeyed; God told him not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil or he would die.
3. The Fall.
Left to the freedom of their own wills, our first parents sinned against God and fell from their original condition. They ate the forbidden fruit. Sin is disobeying or not conforming to God's law in any way.
4. Us.
All Adam's natural descendants sinned in him and fell with him in his first disobedience. And so we have all been plunged into a condition of sin and misery. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one exception. He did not descend from Adam in the ordinary way. All in Adam, God considers as guilty as Adam. All in Christ, God considers as righteous as Christ. The representative principle which ruins us is also what saves us!

Reading: Genesis 31:1-24

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10: STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT SIN

A verse to learn by heart :

"There is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"
(Romans 3:23).

Points to take to heart :

1. What sin is.

Sin is mixing up **yes** and **no**. It is saying **yes** to what God says **no** to. It is saying **no** to what God says **yes** to.

2. Why we sin.

Our problem is what is commonly called **original** sin. As we saw last time, we sinned in Adam and fell with him in his first disobedience. We are guilty, we are not right with God. Our whole **nature** is corrupt. So we now sin **naturally**.

The corruption of sin is found in **every** part of our being, although we are not as bad as it is possible to be. God restrains our wickedness. But we cannot do **anything** which pleases Him.

3. What sin does to us.

Because of our fall we have lost fellowship with God, and have brought His anger and curse on ourselves. We are therefore subject to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.

Reading: Romans 3:10-28

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11: WHO CHOSE WHO

A verse to learn by heart :

"(He) has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began."
(2 Timothy 1:9).

Points to take to heart:

1. Who this doctrine is for
Believers, backsliders, unbelievers - for all.
2. What the doctrine is
From all eternity God has chosen particular people to be saved - not because of anything good in them, but out of His sheer kindness. They will be saved through the Lord Jesus Christ alone.
3. What this doctrine underlines
God is free to save who He wants. He is entirely just. He saves His elect through His Word's command to repent and believe. To deny this doctrine is sinful.
4. The source from which this doctrine springs
Those whom the Father chose, those for whom Christ died, those whom the Holy Spirit calls, are not three sets of people but one. The Persons of the Godhead covenanted together to do this great work of grace - it is a covenant of grace.
5. The effects this doctrine has
Awe, worship, humility, amazement, thanksgiving, joy. It places on us the responsibility to make our calling and election sure, and moves us to evangelise.

Reading: Matthew 11:20-30

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12: ONLY ONE WAY

A verse to learn by heart:

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
(Acts 4:12).

Points to take to heart:

1. There is a Redeemer
God has chosen to save definite people out of lost humanity by means of a Redeemer (one who buys back).
2. There is only one Redeemer
The Bible denies that people of all beliefs will be saved if they are good and sincere. Those who do not receive the Lord Jesus Christ as He is offered in the gospel are eternally lost.
3. This Redeemer is the eternal Son of God
He is God in the same sense as are the Father and the Holy Spirit, and equal with them in power and glory.
4. This Redeemer became, and remains, man
He became man without ceasing to be God. Neither nature was changed in any way (conversion). Nor did the two natures mix to make something between the two (composition). Nor does He have two personalities (confusion).
5. This Redeemer has two distinct natures, yet is one person for ever
He is like that now and for ever. His human nature is not everywhere, but **He** is with us by His Spirit. He is the **Lord** (Jehovah), **Jesus** (man), **Christ** (one Person with two natures, anointed to redeem His people).

Reading: John 1:1-18

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13: SON OF MARY, SON OF GOD

A verse to learn by heart:

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”, which is translated “God with us”” (Matthew 1:23).

Points to take to heart:

1. Tonight's truth
Christ, the Son of God, became man by assuming a real body and a reasoning soul. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, who gave birth to Him; yet He was sinless.
2. The virgin birth
We give our attention to Christ, not to Mary. To have a real human nature He **had** to be born. To be born sinless, He **had** to be conceived by the Holy Spirit in a virgin's womb. She was not sinless. She did not remain a virgin. Christ's sinlessness is due to the Holy Spirit's activity, not Mary's virginity.
3. A real body and a reasoning soul
Christ was (and is) truly human, body and soul.
4. All this was essential for our salvation

Only God can save, so the Saviour had to be **God**. Because it was man that needed saving, it was necessary that a **Man** be perfectly obedient to God and suffer for sin. Who else could bring sinful men and women to the Living God, except the **God-Man**?

Readings: Matthew 1:18-25. Luke 1:26-38

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14: HERE IS THE KEY

A verse to learn by heart :

'And Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
(Matthew 16:16).

	<u>Prophet</u>	<u>Priest</u>	<u>King</u>
MAN as he was (Adam)	Knowledge	Righteousness	Holiness
MAN as he is (fallen)	Ignorance	Guilt	Sinfulness
ISRAEL	Moses and the prophets	Aaron and his household	David and his line
CHRIST (on earth)	The Word Him- self teaching	His one final sacrifice for sins	His claims His power
CHRIST (in heaven)	His Spirit inspired Scriptures & applies them	His intercession	All authority in heaven and on earth
CONVERSION	The mind is taught the law & gospel	The conscience is aware of its need of righteousness	The will is activated to choose and accept Christ
GROWTH IN GRACE (A true church)	Faithful preaching of the Word of God	Right administration of both sacraments	Exercise of Scriptural discipline

Reading: Matthew 16:13-28

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15: GOD'S LAST WORD STILL SPEAKS

A verse to learn by heart:

'From childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' (2 Timothy 3:15).

Points to take to heart:

1. Tonight's truth
Christ is our Prophet, Priest and King. As a Prophet He reveals the will of God to us for our salvation. He does this by His Word and Spirit.
2. THE Prophet
Christ's Spirit inspired both the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. It is a mark of His finished work that there are no prophets and apostles today. THE Prophet has come.
3. False prophets
Christ does not now speak anywhere except by His Spirit through the Word. Those who teach otherwise are false prophets.
4. The place of human instruments
Christ still raises up men to study and proclaim what He has already revealed. These men do not say anything new. So Christ remains the only Prophet there is today.
5. Closing comments
Books summarising or explaining Scripture are helpful, but no one is actually hearing Christ unless He speaks to them by His Spirit through the Word.

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16: A PRICE FOR A PEOPLE

A verse to learn by heart:

'The church of God which he purchased with his own blood'
(Acts 20:28).

Points to take to heart:

1. See how Christ's priestly work is taught in the Bible.
He was an **actual** substitute for sins who actually turned away the righteous anger of God, **actually** reconciled a people to God, **actually** redeemed from the curse of the Law and **actually** intercedes in heaven.
2. Who for?
Only three answers are possible - (i) for all people without distinction: (ii) for no one in particular: (iii) for some people in particular.
3. The Bible answers the question.
God's word declares answer (iii) to be correct. We shall look at passages which teach this, and at some which appear **not** to do so.
4. A return to this truth would affect us deeply.
We would love the Saviour more, would know greater assurance and comfort, would worship Him with more feeling, and would give ourselves to biblical evangelism.

What is more, the unconverted would see the **freeness** of the gospel offer.

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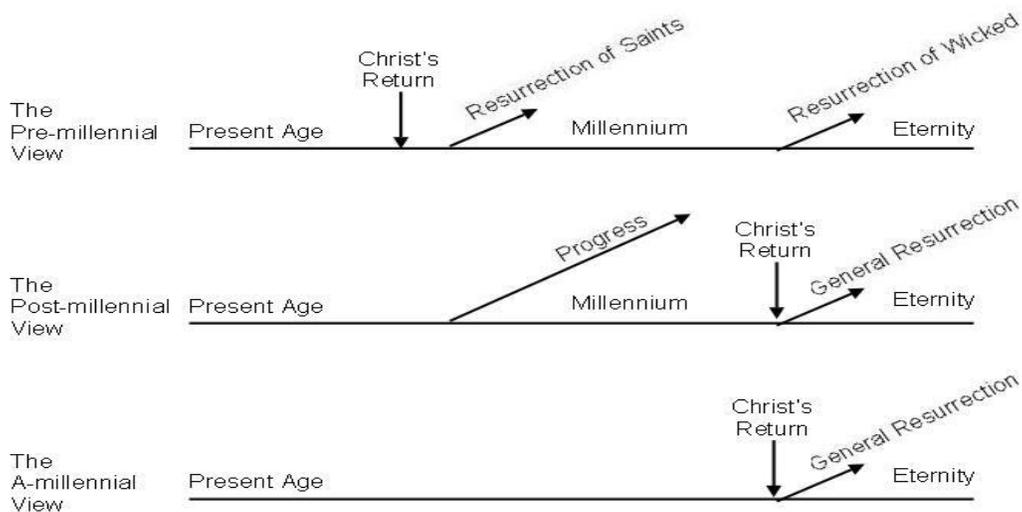
17: KING OF KINGS

A verse to learn by heart:

'He has on his robe and on his thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.'
(Revelation 19:16).

Points to take to heart:

1. The New Testament teaches everywhere that Christ is King.
2. If He were not King, you would be lost.
You cannot convert yourself, keep going in the faith, or overcome the obstacles between here and heaven. There must be kingly acts in your life.
3. Christ's kingdom is clearly described.
It is present, spiritual and invisible, growing, and will at last be complete. The kingdom and the church are not the same thing, but they are composed of the same people.
4. Not everyone is agreed about when He will see "all enemies under his feet".



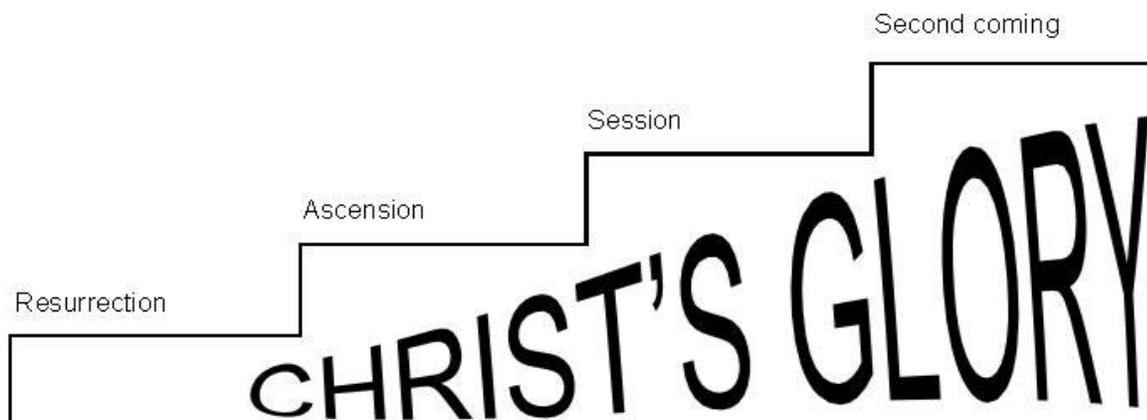
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18: BEHOLD THE MAN!

A verse to learn by heart:

'(God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead.'
(Acts 17:31).

Points to take to heart:



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19 : CHOSEN, CALLED AND FAITHFUL

A verse to learn by heart:

'(He) has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.'
(2 Timothy 1:9).

Points to take to heart:

1. This message is about the Spirit's work
He applies redemption to God's elect - so that they experience it themselves, and enter into it.
2. Why some people accept the gospel and others don't
The reason is not in the gospel itself, nor in the nature of the hearers. The reason is that some are effectually called and some are not.
3. What effectual calling is
God's Spirit convinces us that we are sinful and miserable. He enlightens our mind in the knowledge of Christ. He renews our wills. So He persuades and makes us able to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, who is freely offered to us in the gospel.
4. Two wrong ideas to avoid
 - I. The fact that you have had a deep religious experience does not mean that you have been called. Where is your faith now? Is your life becoming more like Christ's? These are the questions that count.
 - II. Do not say you would like to repent and believe but you can't, because God has not given you His Spirit. You are commanded to do it. So do it! Only then will you know that the Spirit has called you.

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20: RIGHT WITH GOD

A verse to learn by heart:

'For (God) made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.'
(2 Corinthians 5:21).

Points to take to heart:

1. This message is about justification
Justification is the act of God's free grace by which He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight. He does so only because He counts the righteousness of Christ as ours. Justification is received by faith alone.
2. Justification is a declaration
It is not something which happens to a sinner, but something which he is said to be.
3. The key is imputation
My sin is put to Christ's account, and He is treated as if He had sinned my sin. His perfect righteousness is put to my account, and God treats me as if I had lived Christ's perfect life!
4. It is God who justifies
Not my faith. Faith is only the instrument by which I receive the righteousness of God. It is not the source of that righteousness.
5. Justification is an act
Completed in a moment. You are not justified until you repent and believe the gospel; but when you do, you are justified for ever. You do not need a good life to get it. But whoever God justifies. He sanctifies.

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21: CHILDREN OF GOD – AND SURE OF IT!

A verse to learn by heart:

'The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.'
(Romans 8:16).

Points to take to heart:

This verse speaks about adoption and assurance.

1. Adoption

Adoption is the act of God's free grace by which we become His sons with all the rights and privileges of being His

All people are not children of God - only believers. This adoptive sonship is the highest privilege which the gospel offers, and is the secret of knowing how to live the Christian life. Christians who remember their adoption become worshipful, keen to go to heaven, content, and concerned for personal holiness.

2. Assurance

Assurance of salvation is the believer's normal experience. Some true Christians do not have this assurance. Some unbelievers have false assurance.

We get assurance by seeing how God describes true believers in His Word. The Spirit shows us that what is true of believers in general is true of us personally. Assurance increases and decreases but, by being exposed to the Bible, every believer may come to have it.

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22: CALLED TO BE SAINTS

A verse to learn by heart:

'Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.
(Hebrews 12:14).

Points to take to heart:

This message is about sanctification and perseverance.

1. Sanctification

Sanctification is the process by which believers become more and more like Christ in their character. Believers are inwardly changed and all their behaviour reflects this. The change is progressive and accompanied by a deep-seated fear of sinning.

Sanctification is hard work - yet God's work. The believer works hard at being different, and this is the proof that God is at work in him. The place of the Bible is all important in this. It is God's chosen instrument for sanctifying His people, though difficult experiences also have their place.

2. Perseverance

Whoever God changes, He changes for ever. A true Christian may wander from the Lord (backsliding) but he never finally walks out on Him (apostasy). He holds fast to the end because he is held fast by the Lord. Apostasy proves that a person was never a true Christian.

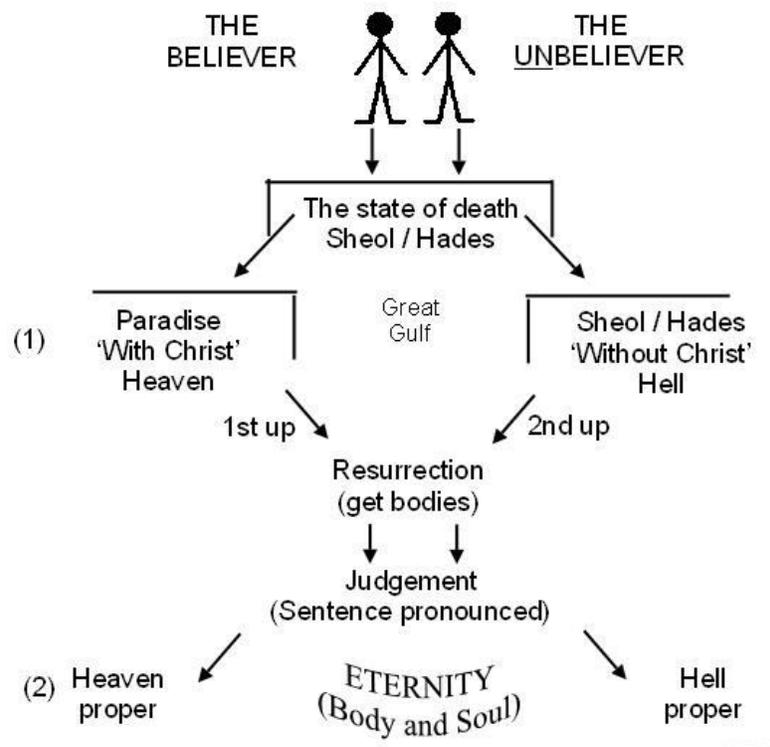
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23: FOR EVER AND EVER...

A verse to learn by heart:

'There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.' (Acts 24:15).

Points to take to heart:



(1) Differs very little from (2), except :-

- No bodies yet
- Rewards not yet received
- Not all the elect are yet there

"To him to whom much is given, much shall be required"

Readings: Luke 16:19-31. Revelation 20:11-31:8