Gleaners Bible Studies B4

THINGS CHRISTIANS MUST BELIEVE (PART 1)

Study 1

About God



Genesis 1: 1-4; Psalm 139: 1-4; Isaiah 40: 18-26; Hebrews 11: 5-6

In these studies we are going to look at some facts which must be believed if your Christian life is to be based on reality. It is important for you to understand, as you study these matters, that they are not optional, but essential if you are to build God-given truth into your Christian experience.

If you read the story of Paul's shipwreck in *Acts* 27, you will find that at the height of the storm, when disaster seemed inevitable, Paul stood up and said, "*Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God.*" (*Acts* 27: 25) Linked with this belief in God was his assurance of their safety, because of what God had said to him. I wonder how many people could stand up in our world today, with all its distress and disturbance, and boldly say, "*I believe God.*" Can you? Furthermore, if you can say this, do you really know what you are saying? Our first study therefore is on Belief in God.

We live in a world where unbelief or disbelief is very popular. Some people would try and tell us that God is dead; that man has 'grown up' and does not need the 'old-fashioned' images of God as the Father-figure, etc. Others would say that we can find God within ourselves; that man is his own god. Still others would affirm, 'I am an atheist. I don't believe in the existence of God at all.' These are all ideas that are prevalent in our increasingly sophisticated and educated world. Never has there been an age, or so it seems, more marked by 'God-lessness.' Yet the Bible states quite clearly that the man or woman who says, "There is no God," or more literally, "No God for me", is a FOOL. (Psalm 14: 1) It is very sad to reflect that man, for all his wisdom and education, does not know God. (Read 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31) However, we who are Christians, and claim to know God, would do well at the very outset of our study to remember that we cannot know God fully. God is infinite, our minds are finite. God is not bound by time and space as we are.

But there are some things that we can know about Him and for our purposes we are going to approach the subject of God in three ways:

1. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Apart from the Bible, we cannot know a great deal about God, although we can learn some things from natural reason. Yet the Bible itself does not seek to prove the existence of God. The fact that there is a God is assumed throughout the Scriptures. The very first verse of the Bible is an example of this. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1: 1) God's existence is presented as a statement of fact that needs no proof. As you read your Bible you will find there are many questions asked and answered about His character and His ways, but never is there any question about His existence.

However, even apart from the Bible, there are some evidences for the existence of God.

- a) Mankind has always believed in a Universal Being, and even in the earliest histories and legends of peoples all around the world, the original concept was ONE God, who was Creator.
- b) Creation must have a creator. This is the law of cause and effect. No effect can be without a cause. We, as human beings, are effects which must have had a cause. The universe could not originate without a cause. But we must come eventually to an 'uncaused' cause, who is God.
- c) The wonderful design and order which we see in creation demands an infinite designer. No one would think a television set could come

into being without an intelligent designer. How much more incredible it is to believe that the universe, in it's infinite complexity, could have happened by chance! The Bible itself draws our attention to this in *Psalm 19: 1 and Romans 1: 19 & 20.*

d) Our fourth evidence is that, since man is an intelligent, moral being, his creator must have been of a much higher order, in order to create him. The creation cannot be greater than the creator. Considering these evidences we must surely believe that God IS. (Hebrews 11: 6)

2. THE EXPRESSION OF GOD

The Bible does tell us much about the God in whom we believe. Here are some of His characteristics and attributes. Study them carefully and read the references. They show what a wonderful God He is.

- a) God is a Spirit. (John 4: 24) This means that God does not have a body. He is invisible. However, He can, and has, revealed Himself to man in visible forms. But in the person of Jesus Christ, God came into the world in a human body. (John 1: 14, 18; Colossians 1: 15; Hebrews 1: 3)
- b) God is a Person. Personal names are used in reference to Him, (Exodus 3: 14; Matthew 11: 25) Personal characteristics are ascribed to Him, such as (i) knowledge, (Isaiah 55: 9); (ii) emotions. (Genesis 6: 6) and (iii) will, (Joshua 3: 10). c) The Unity of God. Scripture clearly teaches that there is one God. Read 1 Timothy 2: 5. The false teaching that there are many gods is, apart from anything else, contrary to reason. There can only be ONE Supreme Being otherwise He would not BE supreme.
- d) The Trinity. The Bible teaches not only that there is one God, but also that there are three persons in the Godhead Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a mystery to our human minds, but although we cannot understand it, we can believe it because God's Word says it is so. The word "trinity" is not found in the Bible, but the truth is found in these and other passages. (i) Baptism of Jesus, (*Matthew 3: 16, 17*); (ii) Disciples' commission, (*Matthew 28: 19*); (iii) Paul's benediction (*2 Corinthians 13: 14*) Further, the Father is called God in *Romans 1: 7*. The Son is called God in *Hebrews 1: 8*. The Holy Spirit is called God in *Acts 5: 3 & 4*.

The Person of God can best be described by His characteristics or attributes.

- a) God is omnipresent. This means that God is present everywhere at the same time. (*Jeremiah 23: 24*)
- b) God is omniscient. In other words, He knows all things. He knows every thought and deed of man, (*Psalm 139: 1-6; Proverbs 15: 3*). He knows everything that takes place in the universe, even to the death of a sparrow, (*Matthew 10: 29*).
- c) God is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. The universe is His creation and He maintains it by His power. There is nothing He cannot do. (Matthew 19: 26; Luke 1: 37)
- d) God is eternal. He never had a beginning and He will never cease to exist. (*Psalm 90: 2*)
- e) God is unchangeable. "I am the Lord, I do not change". (Malachi 3: 6a; James 1: 17)
- f) God is holy. He is absolutely pure and sinless, (Isaiah 6: 3). He hates evil and loves goodness. He must separate Himself from sinners, and must punish sin, (Isaiah 59: 1 & 2; Romans 6: 23a).
- g) God is just. Everything He does is right and fair (Genesis 18: 25b; Psalm 97: 1 & 2; 119: 137). He fulfils all His promises.
- h) God is love. Although God hates sin, He loves sinners. (John 3: 16; 1 John 4: 7-9)

3. OUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD

In the passage we read in *Hebrews 11*, it states that the one who comes to God must believe that HE IS. Obviously there is no point coming to a person whom we do not believe exists. Then, "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11: 6) What a tremendously thrilling thought, that the God whom we cannot explain, is the God whose blessing we can experience. David, in *Psalm 34: 8* says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." Faith always brings its reward. The God of the Bible, the God of the Christian, is the true and living God. (1 Timothy 4: 10) He is the God who has been made known to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, (1 John 5: 20). What a wonderful and utterly dependable God we have! How amazing to think that if you and I have been truly born again, then we are members of His family. We can come to Him and say, "Father!" and He will listen.

Study 2

About Jesus Christ



John 1: 1-14; Hebrews 1: 1-3

One of the most important questions that we can ever be asked is the question that the Lord Jesus put to the Scribes and Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ?" (Matthew 22: 42) The crucial test of anyone's faith is based on what they believe about Him. Satan will go to any lengths to make us err in our appreciation of Christ. If you were to look closely at all the erroneous cults, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, you would find that they all err in their teaching about the person of Christ'. The Lord Jesus is the wonderful person who stands at the centre of ALL Christian belief. He is the central theme of Holy Scripture. Therefore we are going to study things that we must believe about Him, if we are to be sound in doctrine.

1. When we speak of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, we are thinking especially about His Deity.

You have possibly heard this word used quite often. It covers all the truth which is connected with Him as God. With this in mind, look at **John 1: 1 & 2** and notice what it teaches us about the Lord Jesus, who is here described as "the Word of God", for He is the one through whom God speaks. (Hebrews. 1: 2) It tells of:

- a) His Pre-existence. He existed "in the beginning". Before even the world began, the Lord Jesus was there. As God, He is eternal. He is "before all things". (Colossians 1: 17) However far back we go, the Lord Jesus was "with God", sharing everything with Him (John 17: 5) More than that, He "was God". Perhaps you find difficulty in understanding this. It is not easy to put into simple language, so perhaps these four points will help:
 - i) God, the Father, addresses the Son as God in $\it Hebrews~1:~8$
 - ii) Men called Him God, and He did not refuse their worship, (John 20: 28)
 - iii) Demons recognised Him as God, (Mark 1: 24; Luke 8: 28).
 - iv) He declared Himself to be God, (John 10: 30, 36).

Jehovah's Witnesses will deny this, as will many other false cults. But we shall see as we go through these studies, that everything about Christianity depends on this fact – that Jesus Christ IS God.

- b) He is Omnipotent He has unlimited power. (Matthew 28: 18; Revelation 1: 18) The works of God were performed by Christ, "All things were made through Him". (John 1: 3) Because the Lord Jesus is God, He made everything. His was the work of creation and He continues to uphold the universe. (Colossians 1: 16) This tells us so much about the power of the Lord Jesus as He shared everything with the Father. He was ONE with God the Father in all that was done.
- c) He is Omniscient He has unlimited knowledge. (John 21: 17)
- d) He is Omnipresent He is with His servants everywhere. (Matthew 28: 20)

e) He is Unchangeable – He is "the same yesterday, today and for ever". (Hebrews 13: 8)

We have outlined five great facts which we must believe if we are to give the Lord Jesus the right place in our thoughts. Study them carefully.

- 2. `Now we are going to think of the Incarnation of Christ, that is His Manhood. It is the very foundation-stone of Christianity that the Lord Jesus, who was God, came into the world as a Man. It is absolutely essential that we understand and believe this. John 1: 14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us", and 1 Timothy 3: 16 states, "God was manifest in the flesh". Let us look at five points in this connection.
- a) The coming of Christ was predicted in the Old Testament. (Isaiah 7: 14)
- b) History records the birth of our Lord. His birth was different from all other births, because:
 - i) He was conceived of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1: 35)
 - ii) He was born of a virgin Mary. (Matthew 1: 18-23)
 - iii) Yet He was truly man, possessing a body (Hebrews 10: 5), a soul (Matthew 26: 38), and a spirit. (Luke 23: 46) As a boy He grew up in Nazareth (Luke 2: 39-40), and as a man He "went about doing good". (Acts 10: 38) In every way He was truly man, except that He never sinned. He was absolutely sinless! Paul's testimony of Christ was, "He knew no sin", (2 Corinthians 5: 21) Peter said of Christ, "He did no sin". (1 Peter 2: 22) John adds conclusively, "and in Him there is no sin". (1 John 3: 5) This is one of the foundation truths of the Christian faith, for unless the Lord Jesus was completely sinless, He could never be our Saviour.
- c) Christ came in human form in order to:
 - i) Reveal to us the Father. (John 14: 9 & 10)
 - ii) Put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (Hebrews 9: 26)
 - iii) Destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3: 8; Hebrews 2: 14)
- d) He rose again and ascended back to Heaven as a glorified Man. Always remember this!
 - i) The resurrection of Christ was necessary in order to fulfil prophecy, to complete His work on the cross. (Romans 4: 25) and to enable Him to undertake His present work in Heaven.
 - ii) Christ's resurrected body was real. It was the same body that was crucified, because it had the print of the nails and spearwound. (John 20: 27) Yet it was a changed (i.e. glorified) body, with power to overcome physical limitations.
 - iii) After His resurrection, Christ appeared to certain of His followers at least ten times. Read through *John 20* and see there how He was recognised by those who knew Him. Altogether more than five hundred reliable witnesses saw Him after He arose. (1 Corinthians 15: 6)
 - iv) Again, the resurrection of Christ is a very important truth. If there was no resurrection, there would be no Christian faith. (1 Corinthians 15: 17-22) It is yet another proof that the Lord Jesus was sinless – "death had no power over Him". (Acts 2: 24)
 - v) Read Luke 24: 50-53 and you will see that from Bethany, Jesus ascended (was carried up) into Heaven as a Man. (Mark 16: 19; Acts 1: 9)
 - vi) He ascended so that He might enter into His reward, (Philippians 2: 9-11), and continue His ministry for His people. (Hebrews 4: 14-16)
- e) He is Coming Again as a Man.

Acts 1: 11 says that it is "This same Jesus.. will so come". All who love the Lord Jesus will one day meet Him at His coming, and will then be WITH Him forever.

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God?

Study the above lesson carefully, keep it by you for reference. It is SO important to have a right appreciation of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Study 3

About the Holy Spirit



John 14: 16-26; John 16: 1-15; Galatians 5: 22-23

We come now to the study of belief in the Holy Spirit, who is the third person of the Trinity. We must always refer to the Spirit as a Person, and we shall learn that the Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son. as God.

In John 16, the disciples were realising that the Lord Jesus was about to leave them. They must have had a sense of impending loneliness, maybe even fear. But the Lord Jesus had already given them a wonderful promise. He had said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you for ever." (John 14: 16) Again, He said, "If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you, but if I depart, I will send Him to you". (John 16: 7) This Comforter was the Holy Spirit.

Let us look together at some important facts concerning the Holy Spirit and His work.

- 1. HIS PERSON. I want to stress again that the Holy Spirit is always referred to as 'He' and not 'It'. You will find that the Jehovah's Witnesses and other erroneous cults deny that the Holy Spirit is a Person. So we must look at some Scriptures which prove definitely that He is just as personal as the Lord Jesus Christ himself.
- a) The Holy Spirit speaks. In Acts 10: 19, & 20 the Holy Spirit says, "I have sent". In Acts 13: 2, He says, "I have called". In Revelation 2 and 3, seven times we read of what "the Spirit says to the Churches."
- b) The Holy Spirit has a will of His own. (1 Corinthians 12: 11) He strives with men, (Genesis 6: 3) and guides the sons of God. (Romans 8: 14)
- c) The Holy Spirit has feelings. He may be grieved (Isaiah 63: 10, Ephesians 4: 30) and insulted, (Hebrews 10: 29) He can be lied to. (Acts 5: 3-5, 9) Ananias and Sapphira did not realise when they lied to Peter, that they were actually lying to the Holy Spirit.
- d) The Holy Spirit has intelligence. He has a mind. (Romans 8: 27) He searches the deep things of God and He knows the mind of God. (1 Corinthians 2: 10, 11)

A mere influence or force has no will, mind or feelings, nor can it speak of itself as "I". The Holy Spirit is a Person. Let us always remember this.

- 2. HIS DEITY. There are many verses in the Scriptures which would show us that the attributes of God are also possessed by the Holy Spirit. The very words "Holy Spirit" (Luke 11: 13), teach that He is a Spirit and that He is Holy. He is Eternal. (Hebrews 9: 14) He is linked in an equal way with God the Father and God the Son. (Matthew 28: 19; 2 Corinthians 13: 14) He is omnipotent being associated with God in creation. (Genesis 1: 2) He is omniscient knowing the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2: 10) He is omnipresent it is impossible to escape from Him. (Psalm 139: 7-10) He is righteous in His reproof, (John 16: 8-11), and His love is brought out in Romans 15: 30. Finally and conclusively, the Spirit is explicitly called 'God' in Acts 5: 3 & 4.
- **3. HIS WORK.** There are seven great areas of activity especially mentioned in connection with the Holy Spirit. Space does not permit us to go into all these in detail, but for your own further personal study they are listed here.
- i) His work in creation.

This is the Spirit's work in relation to the Universe. (Genesis 1: 2; Job 26: 13a; 33: 4; and Psalm 104: 30)

ii) and iii) His work of inspiration and illumination.

This is the Spirit's work in relation to Scripture. (2 Peter 1: 21) See also 2 Samuel 23: 2, Acts 28: 25. For the Christian today, the Holy Spirit acts as our illuminator, or guide, to understanding spiritual things. (John 14: 26; 16: 13; 1 Corinthians 2: 10)

iv) His work in the Incarnation.

This is the Spirit's work in relation to Christ, and there are many Scriptures in connection with this. Here are just a few. Luke 1: 35; Luke 3: 22; 4: 18; Hebrews 9: 14; 1 Peter 3: 18.

v) His work in conviction.

This is the Spirit's work in relation to the world. (John 16: 8-11) The presence of the Holy Spirit in the world today is also a restraining influence over ungodly and rebellious men. Without His restraint, man would be given over to every atrocity.

vi) His work of regeneration.

This is the Spirit's work in relation to the one who repents. (*John 3: 5-7*) It is important to remember too, that eternal life, once received, can NEVER BE LOST.

vii) His work of sanctification.

This is the Spirit's work in relation to the believer. (1 Peter 1: 2) When a person is born again, he is sanctified or SET APART for God. This only happens once, but sanctification is also a daily process for the rest of one's life. To accomplish this work, the Holy Spirit indwells each believer permanently, (1 John 2: 27) giving him power over sin, (Romans 8: 9-14), producing fruit in his life, (Galatians 5: 22), and desiring to fill him, (Ephesians 5: 18). It is possible for the true child of God to hinder the work by grieving Him, (Ephesians 4: 30), or quenching Him (1 Thessalonians 5: 19). But remember, what we can never do in our own strength, the Holy Spirit can, and will, give us power to do. This is the secret of VICTORY in our lives – allow Him to have full control.

Often the filling of the Holy Spirit is confused with His baptism. The baptism of the Spirit is every believer's unconditional blessing at the moment of his conversion. The filling of the Spirit is conditional, depending upon (among other things) the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5: 22 & 23) The Spirit of God longs to fill daily and completely the heart and life of every believer. Let us make sure we give Him every opportunity to do so!

Study 4

About the Bible



Psalm 19: 7-14; 119: 9-16; 1 Peter 1: 22-25; 2 Peter 1: 19-21

The authority of the Bible is a crucial question and one which is very much in dispute today. Many people think it is unfashionable to believe the Bible to be true. And while the statements and claims of the Scriptures are not proof in themselves, nevertheless they are significant and cannot be ignored. The Bible is still reputed to be the world's best-selling book. Yet many refuse to believe what it teaches. In this set of lessons we have been considering basic Christian doctrine, but if we did not have the Bible, it would be impossible to know these great truths. When the Bible claims to be the Word of God, it reveals to us that we can know God.

The Bible itself is a miracle. There is no other book to compare with it. Thirty-six different people took part in its writing over a period of 1600 years. You would therefore expect it to be disjointed and contradictory in places. But the more you read it, the more you will discover its wonderful unity. It seems as if behind all those who wrote it and all those who in later years collected the writings and put them together, there was a great unseen hand – and of course there was!

1. INSPIRATION.

In 2 Timothy 3: 16 we read: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The word "inspiration" here is not to be confused with the common usage of the word, as when we say Shakespeare was 'inspired' to write his plays, or Handel was 'inspired' to compose 'The Messiah'. Inspiration in the Biblical sense is unique. The word translated 'inspired' actually means 'God-breathed'. It refers not to the writers, but to what is written. This is an important point, and I want you to really grasp it. In 2 Peter 1: 20 & 21, another important statement is made. "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. For prophecy never came by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Here again, the divine origin of the Scripture is emphasised.

It is important to realise too, that the writers of the Scriptures were not mere writing machines, like automatons, 'worked' by God to produce His message. Nor did He dictate the words as the Biblical view of inspiration has so often been wrongly portrayed. It is quite clear that each writer had a style of his own. David did not write like Jeremiah, John did not write like Paul – God used their different human personalities. But He so guided and controlled these men, that what they wrote is what He wanted written. To me, this makes the Bible even more wonderful!

Other indications of the Scripture's supernatural origins are sprinkled throughout its contents, but the most significant of all, however, is our Lord's view of the Scriptures. What did HE think of it? How did HE use it? In *Matthew 5: 18* He emphatically confirmed the truth of the first five books of the Bible (there referred to as 'the law'), so often held in dispute. He frequently quoted Scripture as final authority, stating "it is written", (see Matthew 4: 4). He spoke of Himself and of events surrounding His life, as being fulfilments of the Scriptures. (Matthew 26: 54, 56) But His most sweeping endorsement and acceptance of the Old Testament, was when He declared with finality, "Scripture cannot be broken". (John 10: 35) So then, if we accept Jesus as the Son of God, we must also accept the Bible, as the Word of God.

2. REVELATION.

Although the Bible is made up of sixty-six books, it has one main subject. Christ is the grand and central theme of the Scriptures. The Old Testament contains many prophecies concerning Christ. The New Testament tells of His coming. A most important point to remember is that the Bible is the only written revelation which God has given to man. There are those who will call at your door and say that we need the Bible PLUS the 'Book of Mormon' or the Bible PLUS something else. In the last chapter of the Bible, *Revelation 22: 18 & 19*, God warns men against adding to the Bible OR taking away from it.

We can learn from the Bible what we can learn from nowhere else, for it is unique in its contents. It tells us about the creation of the universe, the entrance of sin, and the beginning of history. From it we can learn what God Himself is like, for God reveals Himself in His Word. History, Poetry, Law or Prophecy – whatever we read, all reveal to us the character of God. The Bible is like a wonderful lamp that illuminates so many things concerning God and ourselves. It reveals man's sin and God's salvation, and shows us God's love in giving Christ to the world. So much is given to us, to know and understand. The Christian must believe that through His Word – the Bible – God speaks to men and women today.

3. APPLICATION

As we close this study we cannot leave it without thinking about the effect the Word of God must have upon our lives. In *Hebrews 4: 12 & 13* we read that God's Word is *'living', 'powerful'* and *'sharp'*, and this is why it has the ability to change our lives as we read it. Read *1 Peter 1: 22-25* carefully, for there we see that the Word of God is incorruptible seed resulting in the beginning of our new life as Christians. *Psalm 19: 7-8* shows the character of the Word in its purity and power. We must believe that the only way in which our lives can be kept clean and pure and useful for God is by "taking heed" to the instruction of His Word. The Psalmist David could say, *"Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You"*. *(Psalm 119: 11)* Make sure that this is YOUR objective in life!

Questions

Study 1 ABOUT GOD

- Give two reasons why you think the person who says "There is no God," is a fool.
- 2. a) How does the Bible deal with the 'existence of God'?
- b) Give one piece of evidence, apart from the Bible, that proves the existence of God.
- 3. a) What do we mean when we speak of the 'Trinity'?
 - b) Give one example of where this truth is found in Scripture.
- 4. How can we best describe God? Give three examples with Scripture references.
- 5. What have you learnt about God from your OWN experience?

Study 2 ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

- Give two examples from Scripture which prove that Jesus Christ is God.
- 2. In what way was the birth of Jesus different to all other births?
- 3. What do the Scriptures teach us about the sinless character of the Lord Jesus?
- 4. Why did the Lord Jesus come into the world in human form?
- 5. Why is the resurrection of Christ so important to the Christian faith?
 - Give Scripture references to support your answer.

Study 3 ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

- What evidence have we to show that the Holy Spirit is a Person? – Two examples will suffice.
- Name four attributes of the Holy Spirit which show His deity. Give supporting references.
- Give Scripture references to show the Holy Spirit's work in relation to:
 - a) The Birth of Christ.
 - b) The Life of Christ.
 - c) The Death of Christ.
- 4. What is the Holy Spirit's work in relation to the world?
- 5. What is the difference in a believer's life between the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit?

Study 4 ABOUT THE BIBLE

- 1. In your own words, say what you understand by the statement, 'The Bible is inspired.'
- 2. What would you say is the most significant indication for the divine origin of the Scriptures?
- 3. a) Why is the Bible unique in relation to its contents?
 - b) What warning is given to those who add to, or take from, the Bible?
- 4. Why is the Bible able to radically change people's lives?
- 5. What will be the result if we 'take heed' to God's Word?