

**CHALLENGE
TO
ENCOUNTER**

CHALLENGE TO ENCOUNTER

by

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*Developed in Cooperation With
the Global University Staff*

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Global University has prepared this course to help you to understand how a Christian can intelligently approach some of the questions raised by philosophy and theology. The author discusses the nature of truth, the existence of God, the claims of Jesus Christ, and the authority of the Bible. He proposes that Christianity, while intelligent, is more than intellectual assent. It involves encounter and commitment, centered on Jesus Christ. You can read this as a book or you can study it as a correspondence course. Your instructor will be happy to interact with you. His address is stamped in front of your book.

The author, Jerry Sandidge, an ordained minister, worked several years with university students, editing a Christian magazine for them and serving as the director of *University Action* in Brussels, Belgium, a program oriented towards developing spiritual growth in students.

He received a bachelor of arts degree in Bible and a master of arts degree in religious education from Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri in the United States. He also received the master of education degree in guidance and counseling from the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. The Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium conferred on Rev. Sandidge the bachelor of arts degree in philosophy from the Institute of Philosophy and the master of arts degree in moral and religious science from the Faculty of Theology. He also received the doctor of philosophy degree in religious studies from the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.

LESSON ORGANIZATION

The organization of each lesson is identical. It is made this way to facilitate your personal study. You are free to read as you wish, but we suggest that you take time to digest the material carefully and thoughtfully.

Each lesson opens with a short introductory comment which is intended to indicate something of its general content. The *Questions for Thought* which follow are to stimulate your thinking and to indicate specific approaches within the lesson. It is important to keep these questions in mind as you read the lesson development.

The *Word Study* action is an aid to the understanding of important terms used in the lesson. Perhaps many of them are already known to you. Often, however, they are used in a technical sense that you may not know, even if the words themselves are familiar. Again, keep them in mind as you read and refer back to them as you have need.

The *Lesson Development* is the basic material to be studied. It is divided into sections which should be dealt with in one study period if possible. In case you are unfamiliar with the authors and works mentioned, explanatory footnotes and references are given. The Bible references are given with the hope that you will take the time to look them up: the Bible is the essential textbook for any course on Christianity. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are from the Revised Standard Version, produced by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1946 and 1952. It would be to your advantage to get a Bible in this translation to use as you work through the lessons.

At the end of the lesson, after a list of the books which have been cited, there is a section called *Further Study Suggestions*. This is a list of books which you would find helpful in pursuing the subject further.

The *Personal Study* section, which follows, is designed to do two things: (1) to get you involved in a meaningful way in

personal Bible study and reflection, and (2) to relate the subject of each lesson to the Scriptures and to your personal life.

Finally, though this is not a course for credit and there are no examinations as such, there is a series of questions called the *Self Check Review*. This is simply an organized way of reviewing the material. It is suggested—though not required, of course, that you write in answers to the questions about content before checking the answers, which are found at the end of the *Self Check Review* section. Interspersed with these questions are “thought provokers,” designed for you to relate the topic to your personal situation.

In the back of this book is the *Student Interaction*. The first part, *interaction A*, is an invitation for you to look back at the material of the entire course. We kindly request that you complete this section and mail it to the local office. The address is located near the front of the book.

Interaction B is an invitation for you to react to the course itself and to give your evaluation of it. We ask you, *whether you finish the course or not*, to tell us what you sincerely think of it. This is of the utmost importance to us so, *please*, whenever you stop studying the course and for whatever reason, send your opinions on *Interaction B* to the local office. The address is located near the front of the book.

Finally, *Interaction C* is an invitation for you to record your position with regard to an encounter with Jesus Christ, or to ask for more personal contact. Again, you may complete this section whenever you wish, but you should do so only if you sincerely desire to.

The course is designed so that you may study it on your own wherever you are. If you have problems or questions concerning the material, please contact your local office; you will receive prompt attention. At other times you may want to discuss the contents with other people. You will notice that the format of this course also lends itself to group study and discussion. But whether you study this alone or with others, we trust that through it you will come to a better understanding of the nature and basis of Christian commitment.

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

“Thought constitutes the greatness of men” (Pascal, *Pensées*, 346). These words by Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the French mathematician and philosopher, serve to remind us that we must approach man primarily as a thinking being. This course is an invitation to think—to think about truth and the ultimate realities of life. It takes into account that each person is unique, just as every snowflake is different and each leaf has an individual pattern. Everyone has his own personal history, his own view of life, and his own apprehensions of truth and reality. It is hoped that while this course offers a glimpse of one perception of the meaning of life, it will allow for individual and cultural differences.

I am a Christian. This is the view of life I have chosen to adopt. I want to discuss with you some of the matters which Christians consider vital. That said, I hasten to add that I like people—all people—even those who are not of my persuasion. I feel a special affinity for students. For the past eight years nearly all of my time has been spent with university students. I have found them to be kind and considerate. Without being rude or sarcastic they permit me to hold my beliefs. Yet many of them do not share these beliefs. Always there are reasons for this. Some feel that religion and church are simply not important today. Others have been turned off by the failings of Christians they have seen. Many hate hypocrisy more than anything else and will not identify with something of which they are not thoroughly convinced.

It is to this kind of person that I am writing, whether he be a student or not. I want to address those who are attracted to Jesus

Christ but who for the moment can not honestly and conscientiously “sign on the dotted line” of total commitment. At times it may appear that I am rather narrow in my view but after all truth itself is narrow, for it maintains that non-truth is error and must be discarded. This is the subject of the first lesson—*truth*.

Truth is absolute, but the understanding of truth, or wisdom, is not. Even so, no one person—not even one group of people—can pretend to be all-wise. Socrates (469-399 B.C.) was called the “wisest man in Greece.” He himself had doubts about this statement, so he set out to examine all those persons who had a reputation for wisdom. He came to the conclusion that he *was* wiser than them all. Why? “Because he at least knew that he knew nothing and they were ignorant even of their ignorance” (Armstrong, p. 27).

I hope to have some of the wisdom of Socrates, for I do not claim to have *all* the answers. I do attempt in the first lesson, however, to deal with the question of truth and how we can know it for sure. There is something unique about truth. It is what St. Augustine (A. D. 354-430) said: “Truth, wherever it may be found, must be avidly accepted” (as quoted in Fremantle, p. 14). Indeed, all I ask of you as you study these lessons is that you accept truth wherever you find it.

The second lesson is about *God*. Now there is a great difference between “arriving at a possible God at the extreme limit of man's reason, or as the First Cause of nature” (Fremantle, p. 16), and an actual God who is interested in man and involved in human affairs. The process whereby we arrive at the former view of God is the domain of philosophy. The study of the latter view is the field of theology, and the response to its implications can be called religion or faith.

There is no attempt here to discredit philosophy. In fact, there was a time in the Middle Ages and before, when philosophy and theology were considered parts of the same science.^a There was free exchange between philosophers and theologians. But over the centuries these two areas have become separated, for better or worse. Though I do not ignore philosophical methods or

implications, my purpose here is more theological than philosophical. This is important to note as you study these pages.

The core, or heart, of Christianity is contained in the very name—Christ. There cannot be any serious consideration of the Christian faith without taking a genuine look at its founder. Thus the person and work of Jesus Christ is the subject of the third lesson. As Anne Fremantle states concisely,

Christian philosophy is an intellectual inquiry into the nature of being, which accepts as a premise the possible existence of a Power outside man that is both the object and the instigator of man's search; or, as Christ put it, that He is Himself “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Fremantle, p. 16).

And what Paul Tournier, the Swiss psychiatrist, said about his counseling may be aptly applied to Christ: “The truth is that it is far more interesting to understand one man thoroughly than to examine a hundred superficially” (Tournier, p. 21). Even so, we cannot know everything about Jesus. As his biographer, contemporary, and friend put it so forcefully: “There are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

The primary source for learning about Jesus is the most authoritative collection of works about Him—*the Bible*. A consideration of the Bible as a book of sacred writings is the theme of the fourth lesson. There has been, and still is, a great deal of misunderstanding about the Bible. Some Christians have perpetuated the idea—by implication if not by explicit statement—that since God has spoken to man in the Bible, it is no longer necessary for man to think. I must reject such an approach to the understanding of the Scriptures. The person who is considering Christianity seriously must think about what the Bible says. It is through understanding and reflection that one can arrive at a basic confidence, or faith, in the message of the Bible. Faith and reason should not be enemies but the very best of friends. Since, then, the thinking person wishes to found his

faith in something certain, the purpose of the fourth lesson is to establish the credibility of the Bible.

The Bible is not just factual. It inspires those who are seeking truth and who desire to know by experience the joy of discovering reality. Hence the fifth lesson is on the subject of *personal religious experience*. In this lesson I move to the practical level, for my purpose is to deal with truth, God, Jesus, and the Bible not merely from an intellectual point of view, but from the view of commitment.

One day in class my philosophy professor talked about three types of philosophers, and although he was speaking of philosophers, I think what he said can be applied to all of us. He said that the three kinds are the intellectual man, the emotional man, and the man of will.^b For each there is a corresponding philosophy. With the first type corresponds the reign of reason in positivistic materialism. With the second corresponds pantheistic idealism. With the third corresponds Christianity. You may not know what all these terms mean, but certainly you can understand the last one, the man of will.

Lesson five will put these three elements in proper perspective, but basically a Christian is a person of the *will*. That does not mean that one's reason or emotions play no part in life and religion; they certainly do. But primarily, when we are talking about Christianity, we are talking about something requiring a commitment of ourselves, an act of will.

On one occasion a woman came to Paul Tournier for counseling. As she related painful episodes from her childhood, she was fearful that Dr. Tournier might pass an unfair judgment on her mother. So she was trying her best to be perfectly honest. Tournier wrote that he might forget many of the facts she told him, but he would never forget what happened during that interview, as he realized at a deep level the woman's concern for truth. He described what happened in this way:

I passed from information to communion. Information is intellectual, whereas communion is spiritual; but

information was the path that led to communion. Information speaks of personages. Communion touches the person. Through information I can understand a case; only through communion shall I be able to understand a person. Men expect of us that we should understand them as cases; but they also want to be understood as persons (Tournier, p. 25).

This, too, is my sincere desire in these pages. I want to speak in such a way that some sort of communion can be established. You see, it is not just information I want to communicate. It is something deeper, something at a spiritual level, a personal level, the subliminal level of the human will.

Emil Brunner (1899-1966)^c said that “it is so much more comfortable to have a pantheistic philosophy than to believe in a Lord God” (Baillie, p. 55).^d A neutral God makes no claims or demands on our will and requires no investment of our lives.

What is contained here is presented as a challenge— to reading, to consideration, to commitment. It is not presented in an attitude of “here it is, take it or leave it” No, not at all. It is presented as an invitation—to think and, in the poetic terminology of the Psalmist, “taste and see that the Lord is good!” (Psalm 34:8).

Jerry L. Sandidge

Leuven, Belgium
November, 1977

^a“Before the thirteenth century, the whole of learning, including both the human sciences and the divine or theological science, was called *philosophie*. This term denoted the whole of Christian wisdom, as with St. Augustine” (Van Steenberghen, p. 34).

^bThese three types were first put forth by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), a German philosopher.

^cEmil Heinrich Brunner was a Swiss theologian of the reformed tradition. He helped direct the course of contemporary Protestant

theology. He served as both a pastor and a university professor, and authored over ten books on theology and philosophy.

^dBaillie is quoting from Brunner's book *Man in Revolt*.

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Lesson One

How Can I Know
Anything for Sure?



|

A French graduate student in chemistry was weary of the pressures in his studies so he decided to get away for a weekend. The city he visited happened to be where I lived. Through some rather unusual circumstances we met and got acquainted. We shared ideas about God, religion and values. He expressed his uncertainties to me later in a letter:

I should confess that I have become very skeptical, not to say atheistic, in recent years. Like many of my friends, we look at the church as something that was, but not giving any solutions for the future.

The fundamental ideal of right and wrong changes so much with time, culture, philosophies and religions that no one can predict what a presumably loving God will take as criteria.

We are living in an epoch of transition. Life has been changing so radically lately that a person has trouble knowing which are the real values and where to stand. In this changing world it is important to have an open mind.....

The university student expressed some honest and significant questions. Hopefully you are like him and many others today who are beginning to doubt their doubts. This course is based on the assumption that you are serious in wanting to understand what Christianity has to say about these and similar questions.

LESSON OUTLINE

- The Nature of Truth
- Criteria for Testing Truth
- Obstacles to Clear Thinking
- Causes of Doubt
- A Challenge

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

1. How would you define truth?
2. What weaknesses can you see in the first eight criteria for testing truth, especially if each one was to be used as the sole criterion?
3. For a truth to be systematically consistent, what four aspects must come together in agreement?
4. Of the four obstacles to clear thinking, which do you feel is most abused by Christians?
5. What cause or causes for doubt have been the most troublesome for you?
6. Are you willing to investigate sincerely the authenticity of the Christian response to the great questions of life?

WORD STUDY

- absolute** — Free from imperfection; perfect.
- antinomy** — A contradiction between two apparently equally valid principles or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles.
- axiology** — The study of the nature, types, and criteria of values and of value judgments, especially in ethics.
- empiricist** — One who believes that all knowledge depends on sense perception or experience.
- epistemology** — That branch of philosophy which studies the nature, possibility and limits, as well as the validity of knowledge.
- relativism** — A theory that knowledge is relative to the limited nature of the mind and conditions of knowing; that ethical truths depend upon the individuals and groups holding them.

LESSON DEVELOPMENT

A popular notion in the world today is the idea that there is no fundamental right and wrong. Modern man thinks of ethical standards and truth as relative, based on convenience, situation, or privilege. Some would say they vary according to culture, epoch, or practice. He may therefore feel uncomfortable with the thought of “knowing something for sure.” He hesitates to accept an absolute standard in any area of life.

A consideration of right and wrong leads us to the question of values, or axiology, to use a philosophical term. The study of values in this context leads us directly to the very problem of knowledge. This age-old problem of knowledge is the main subject of this lesson.

Philosophers have wrestled with this question since the time of the ancient Greeks. Its technical term in philosophy is epistemology, coming from the Greek word epistemology, meaning “knowledge.” Thus, epistemology is the study or theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge.

But not only is this a philosophical matter, it is also a matter of practical significance. The need for assurance or a firm conviction about what is true is important in our times when doubt and pessimism are so prevalent. This question, whether one is aware of it or not, is at the very core of personal existence. It is for this reason we begin this study with a discussion of knowledge and truth.

THE NATURE OF TRUTH

Absolute or Relative?

Protagoras of Abdera⁹ argued that truth is not absolute, but relative. It is just a matter of opinion. What is true for you, is true for you; what is true for me, is true for me. Many people today believe this. I remember the professor saying in a psychology class once, “There is only *one* absolute, and it is that there are no absolutes.”

The idea is that since each person sees things differently, absolute truth is impossible. This is the position of the empiricist—that is, one who says that all knowledge depends on sense perception. This leads to the belief that “man is the measure of all things. Since all things are moving and changing, man creates his own reality, hence his own truth.

The empiricist is right in some ways. For example, we all experience our environment in slightly different ways. A person who is blind has many experiences that are unknown to a seeing person. I happen to be slightly color-blind and even this changes my perception to some degree.

Unfortunately, the empiricist has gone too far. Because *some* things are relative, he has concluded that *all* things are relative, which is an unwarranted generalization. Empiricism, when applied in this all-inclusive way leads to relativism (that truth is relative) and ends in skepticism (nothing can be known for certain). To say that the opinions of all men are true is to grant that the opinions of a person's opponents are true. To make truth relative to culture, circumstances or the times is to lead to confusion, then to skepticism, and finally to despair.

Christian teaching rejects the idea that truth is relative. Jesus announced, “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). Later, He made the awesome proclamation: I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Think about the colossal implications of these two assertions! Jesus is saying that to be related to Him is to be related to truth *itself-Absolute Truth.*

How Absolute?

Denying the absoluteness of truth involves a self-contradiction. It is to affirm as an absolute truth the relativity of truth. Doing this makes us illogical and contradictory.

Remember the professor's statement: "There is only one absolute, and that is that there are no absolutes. *Absolute truth is the standard by which even the veracity of opinions is judged.* Thus there could be no valid opinions without absolute truth by which to judge them.

Since there *is* absolute truth, it follows that not all things or ideas are true. Truth implies error. It is necessary, therefore, to establish some criteria for separating truth from error. Before we can do that we must have a working definition of truth.

Truth Defined

Professor Carnell says, "The true is a quality of a judgment or proposition, which, when followed out into the total witness of facts in our experience, does not disappoint our expectations" (Carnell, p. 45). Thus, truth is in accordance with the actual state of affairs. It is that which conforms to an essential reality. For example, if you are told that a Professor Sutta lectures at the University of Manila and you go there and discover that this is indeed a fact, then this statement is true. "Truth, then, in its simplest dimensions, is a judgment which corresponds to things as they actually are" (Ibid. p. 46).

To be very precise, we must go one step further. Truth is ultimately the perfect correspondence or harmony with the mind of God, who *is* Truth. Because God is the author of all facts, there is no reality apart from His eternal nature. "For that mind," says Dr. Carnell, "was the blueprint according to which the contingent universe was formed" (Ibid.).

The mind of God knows reality perfectly; therefore "truth is a property of that judgment which coincides with the mind of God" (Ibid. p. 47). If we disagree with God's interpretation of reality then we are in error for God is absolute truth and cannot err or lie. God's statement on the matter comes from the Old Testament: "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man,

that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it?" (Numbers 23:19).

The true is not something above God; it is that which agrees with God. From the Christian perspective then, truth is seen as correspondence with the mind of God.

CRITERIA FOR TESTING TRUTH

If truth is that which corresponds with the mind of God, how do we know when *our* judgment corresponds with God's mind? Dr. Carnell lists several criteria that commend themselves to rational men as a guide to judge the truthfulness of a statement.^b

Instinct

Instinct can help us on the lowest level of judgment. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), founder of psychoanalysis, defended the validity of this test. He went so far as to think that anything instinctive must be true.

It is true that instinct provides motivational power but it provides very little in the way of guidance. For example, on a desert island, I might feel the urge to drink any water in sight. Instinct would tell me I had a true thirst. But it would not be much help in determining the safety of the water for drinking. So, although instinct may urge you to seek the truth, it fails to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Moreover, instincts can be environmentally conditioned. Then it is impossible to tell what is instinctive and what is acquired by conditioning. So, even if instinct can suggest truth, it cannot itself evaluate it.

Custom

There is some value in custom, provided the custom was originally based on truth. A custom is any habit or pattern which has become established for an individual or in a given group of people. In most societies, for example, it has been the custom for young people to show respect for parents and elders. But customs can be good or bad, right or wrong, true to the mind of God or out of harmony with the mind of God.

The custom, for example, in which a widow used to throw herself into the flames containing the bier and body of her dead husband, is not generally considered today to be a good custom. Every culture has good and not-so-good customs. Customs in various places and in different times may actually conflict with each other. Thus, custom alone cannot be a reliable test for truth.

Tradition

Traditions are simply customs that have become rigid within a culture. The common argument for tradition usually states: "So many people could not be wrong for so long a time." Some forms of Christianity which have their roots deep in the past are filled with traditions and may even be appealing to them as an evidence of truth for dogma or practice. As in the case of customs, traditions are often helpful. If they were originally based on truth, they give us roots in the past that can be a stabilizing influence. These traditions can serve as reminders of things that are important.

But traditions too have their weaknesses. They are dependent for value upon their sources. But even if their sources are good, there is the danger of corruptive change over long periods of time. A tradition based on truth and transmitted in purity is useful. If its source is false, or if it has been corrupted by time, then it can be bad-even dangerous.

Finally, there can also be conflicting traditions. Truth must establish tradition, and not tradition truth.

Consensus Gentium

This term simply means "the consent of the nations." What is believed by everyone, everywhere, always sounds like a foolproof criterion for establishing truth. This sounds more convincing than it really is.

For example, not too many centuries ago, people believed that the sun came up each morning and set each evening. We speak of it that way because those handy phrases match what appears to happen from our perspective. But every school child

now knows that it is just an illusion caused by the earth's rotation.

It is a good thing to believe what your forefathers believed, if what they believed is true. However, it is necessary to find out if what they believed *is* true. A Communist roommate of a Christian student remarked one day, "We have always been taught that there is no God, but suppose there is one."

Thus, "a proposition must be true to be worthy of the belief at all, but it does not follow that what is believed by all is true" (Carnell, p. 49). This test of truth proves to be insufficient in itself.

Feelings

Everyone knows what it is to follow feelings, "hunches" emotions, inspirations, and even convictions. They are, you might say, a universal, commonly used way of determining beliefs and actions. Probably more important decisions than we care to admit have been based on hunches or the inspiration of the moment. This is not all bad. Emotions are an integral part of the human make-up. For most people, how they "feel" about a thing is important.

But while they do give us an indication of what may be true, feelings are not really a reliable test for truth. They are vague, ill-defined, often unstable and fallible. They are apt to be subject to physical fatigue, sickness or some other imbalance of the bodily functions. Truth must have something more objective than feelings to determine its validity.

Sense Perception

The impressions we receive through the five senses-sight, touch, hearing, taste, smell-would appear to be a reliable test for truth. Indeed, these are a source of truth. Most of the time we can rely on personal experience. But it is limited and our senses can be deceived. For example, trainrails appear to join in the distance. A boat oar half emerged in water appears bent. And most of us have no doubt experienced seeing a mirage on a hot dusty day.

Also, we accept as valid knowledge many things we have not experienced with our senses, such as historical material and geographical data. For example, we did not experience the Napoleonic Wars, so we must rely upon written records for any true knowledge of them. We must rely upon maps to provide an accurate picture of a country where we have not been ourselves. So, we cannot depend fully upon sense perception alone to know truth.

Correspondence

Correspondence declares that an idea is true if it coincides with reality. For example, the idea “tree” is true when it meets successfully with the tree out there in nature, in reality.

There is great value to correspondence, especially in the case of concrete reality. For example, archaeological discoveries of the past century have confirmed much information given to us in the Bible. Geographical locations, identification of peoples, places, events, cultures, and many other facts have been validated positively because of the correspondence between the findings of archaeology and the biblical record.

So correspondence may be used as a good *definition* of truth, but it is defective as a *test* for truth, for such correspondence must in some way be established. Another problem is, how could this test be used to measure the value and truth of intangibles such as love, happiness, beauty, or joy?

Pragmatism

Pragmatism defines truth as *that which works*. This would seem to be a very simple and direct way to find truth and it is, in fact, a way that we use almost every day at a practical level. if a cook follows a recipe accurately, she can expect the results to be as predicted. But if she uses substitutes, or misreads the instructions, the original recipe cannot be blamed for failure.

So there is merit to this approach, for we would not expect ultimate truth to have poor consequences or bad results. But sometimes things that seem to be *working* are not in our best

interests. Our limited vision of future consequences reduces the value of pragmatism as a test for truth. It is possible for things to work temporarily, seeming to produce favorable results, when the basis for them is not true. For example, a man in financial difficulty might solve his problems by embezzling money from the firm he works for. His solution may seem for a time to “work” but in the end such actions will prove to be unsatisfactory and costly.

The validity of truth cannot rest solely on the “workability” of pragmatism. Pragmatism can lead to skepticism and despair as well, for that which works-or is true-for one person may not work-or be true-for another. Because Christianity is true, it does work, but we do not base its truth on workability.

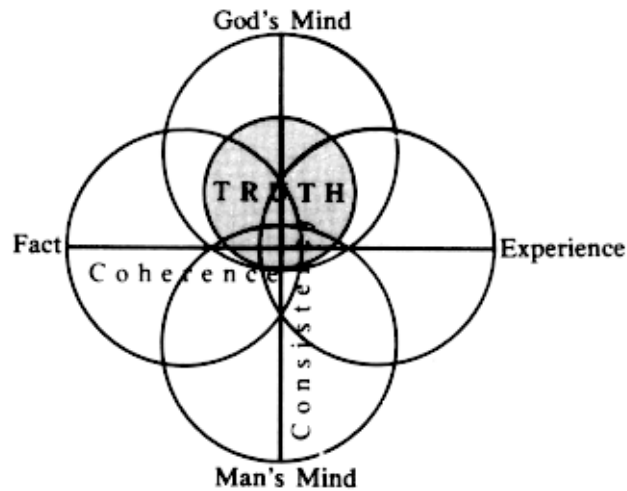
Systematic Consistency

Systematic consistency provides the most reliable test for truth. It involves two parts, *consistency* and *coherence*.

Consistency means that every true idea will be consistent with what else is known. The parts or features of the whole must be in agreement with one another. There are some who mistakenly teach that in Christianity there are ultimate or eternal paradoxes (apparent contradictions) or antinomies. But such apparent contradictions can be tolerated because there will be a final resolution of seemingly conflicting ideas in the mind of God.

Consistency is not enough, however, for even though it shows the absence of error, we must also know how, when, and why truth sticks together. *Coherence* means *how truth holds together*. It is a comprehensive view of all the facts. The cohesiveness of ideas, their fitting relationship to one another, forms a solid foundation for determining truth.

Systematic consistency, then, is *that which is logically self consistent (noncontradictory) and fitting with the world of fact and experience*. Together, these correspond with truth as it is in the mind of God, since God by nature is self-consistent and is the author of all facts.



The above sketch serves to illustrate the idea that truth is that in which there is cohesiveness between fact and experience, as well as consistency between the mind of rational man and the mind of God, or Absolute Truth.

It is well to review in your mind these nine tests for truth discussed here. Can you see that *systematic consistency* embraces all of them? None of the first eight are sufficient alone to verify truth. But something that is true quite often elicits a positive response in each of them so that the overwhelming impression is positive.

OBSTACLES TO CLEAR THINKING

All of us, when faced with new ideas, must be sure we are thinking clearly on the subject at hand. If it is only propaganda that is coming to us, we must be aware of it. If we are asked to examine truth and old prejudices are in the way, we need to recognize them for what they are so that we can overcome them. Consider these common obstacles to clear thinking as Professor Titus outlines them (Titus, pp. 26-29). Keep your thinking about Christianity as honest and rational as possible.

Prejudice

A prejudice is a mental bias, a prejudgment, which can lead to ignoring or minimizing sound evidence. There are many kinds of prejudice in the world today and they can make it difficult, even impossible, to reach accurate conclusions. Prejudices are usually *emotionally* oriented rather than *fact* oriented.

Propaganda

The term propaganda, as it is commonly used, means the selective or slanted use of information in order to further or to hurt a cause. It is in this sense a form of human manipulation. It is a powerful tool used by some in an attempt to control thinking. Propagandists play on the emotions, using highly charged language in order to obtain a predetermined response. Propaganda is not the approach of biblical Christianity and is in no way the objective or approach of this material.

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is the belief that knowledge is guaranteed or “validated” by an authority. It is supposed to be accepted on “blind faith” without regard to the way in which it does or does not harmonize with fact and experience.

Christians are sometimes accused of authoritarianism because they have accepted the Bible as the final authority. Christians themselves do not accept this suggestion because they are convinced that the Bible gives evidence of harmonizing fact with experience. (This will be discussed in lesson four.)

Fallacies in Logic

Violations of the principles of logic can be divided into three groups: terminology, premises, and generalizations.

Semantical fallacies (terminology) are the faulty, careless, or improper use of words. You may inadvertently change the meaning of a word in some discussion. *Law*, for example, can be applied to natural law, legislative law, or moral law. Care must be taken not to use the same word-law-while changing your meaning of it.

Formal fallacies (premises) occur in the misuse of those steps in reasoning which would cause us to draw invalid conclusions from our basic propositions or premises. Take the following argument as an example of a formal fallacy. Men wear trousers. Person A wears trousers. Therefore, Person A is a man. In the first premise we have not stated that *only* men wear trousers, and thus the conclusion drawn is based on faulty reasoning.

Empirical fallacies (generalizations) arise from making hasty generalizations. Because event B followed event A, we may wrongly assume or generalize that there is a direct causal relationship---that A caused B. For example, I may not eat anything for my evening meal and go to bed and wake up the next morning with a terrible headache. Now to generalize that not eating before a night's sleep causes headaches is improper.^c

Thus, to avoid fallacies in logic, we must avoid misusing terminology and premises and avoid making too broad generalizations.

CAUSES OF DOUBT

Honest doubters are those who have genuine intellectual difficulties and are willing to have them resolved. As far as doubts about Christianity are concerned, there are four basic causes for questioning its validity. Perhaps you can identify with one or more of these causes. If so, may I suggest that you be honest with yourself, admit it, and try to overcome the cause or causes.

Inconsistency Among Christians

It is sad but true that some professing Christians are bad examples of what Christianity is all about. It is reasonable for non-Christians to expect from Christians high ethical standards and the consistent practice of their faith. Perhaps the only "Bible" you have read is the life of some Christian. May I suggest that you not judge Christianity on that basis. Rather, examine Christianity on the basis of its principles. Put the effort of heart and mind to the

task of going directly to the “textbook” of Christianity -the Bible itself-and apply yourself to it and to these lessons.

Lack of Information

Perhaps right now you are in the throes of intellectual doubt and want to search out the truth concerning Christianity. Often, people who are not Christians have mistaken ideas about what Christianity really teaches. The only way to find out for sure is to study the Bible for yourself and find out from sincere and informed Christians what they believe. To be really intellectually honest, you must not reject Christianity until you have put forth an effort to learn as much as possible about it from accurate sources.

Moral Resistance

I must say this kindly, but say it nevertheless. Many people do not accept Christianity because they know something about it--its high moral and ethical standards and they do not want to adjust their lives accordingly. At this point you should examine your motives and your doubts. It could be that you will find you do not *want* Jesus to be the Son of God and the Bible to be God's book because it may oppose your present life-style. This is a common reason for not embracing Christianity. Some people come to a point of belief, and then, instead of accepting, they reject it because they fear the consequences or feel they lack the inner strength to live as a Christian should.

Spiritual Insensitivity

This is the basic cause of doubt. The apostle Paul, greatest of all theologians and a genuine intellectual, said: “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

It is at this point that I am reminded of the limitations of these lessons. At best I can only point out facts and pertinent information as alternatives to doubt. No one can fully “prove” the validity of the Christian way of life to you, except the Spirit of God. If you are open and willing to receive truth, His Spirit

will give you inner assurance regarding spiritual realities and experiences.

A CHALLENGE

There is really little point in your continuing in this course unless you take a tough-minded, stick-with-it attitude. If there is no God, then the sooner we find out the better. If belief in God is not true, then it is an evil that should be removed once and for all. On the other hand, if there is a God, then to know and to understand God's mind and workings is the most important thing in our existence.

If Jesus was simply another ethical teacher, then why all the excitement? If the Bible is just one of many holy books recorded by man in his blind search for the divine, then why bother to read it and seek to understand it? If prayer is merely "talking to oneself," then it would be well to give up such nonsense immediately.

What am I trying to say? Simply this. Take the time, energy and self-discipline to consider seriously the message and meaning of Christianity. May I suggest the following:

1. Complete all five basic lessons in this course. Use the *Questions for Thought, Self-Check Review* and *Personal Study* sections as tools for "digging in" to each lesson.
2. Obtain a Bible and look up the references used in the lessons and especially in the *Personal Study* section at the end of each lesson. There you will be asked to read certain passages from the Bible and comment on them.
3. Adopt the attitude of the experimental method. As you have time and inclination, read in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Read short consecutive passages--marking, questioning, and reflecting.
4. At the end of each lesson there will be a short list of books for further study, each related to the topic of that

lesson. Go to a library or bookshop and read further in some area that is of special interest or concern to you.

I realize that this is a demanding request. But I also know that it may change your life for the better. Let me encourage you not to start with any preconceived judgments. The first followers of Jesus Christ were attracted to Him *before* they had all their questions answered and doubts settled. The same can happen to you just as it did to them.

^a Protagoras (c. 483-484 B.C.), a Greek philosopher who was most famous for developing the principles of debate. Some scholars would not consider him a philosopher, but simply a “traveling professor.” His most famous statement is “man is the measure of all things.” It is from such statements that his doctrine of relativism comes, although again, not all scholars of ancient philosophy would agree on this exact interpretation of his famous saying.

^bThese criteria are discussed in detail in Carnell, pp. 47-62. A fuller treatment of these same criteria may be found in *An Introduction to Philosophy*, 3rd ed., 1963, pp. 52-82, by Edgar Sheffield Brightman.

^cThe empiricist, discussed earlier, is guilty of making too broad generalizations and granting too much credit to sense perception.

REFERENCES CITED-LESSON ONE

1. Brightman, Edgar Sheffield. *An Introduction to Philosophy*, 3rd ed. New York, New York, USA: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963.
2. Carnell, Edward John. *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966.
3. Titus, Harold H. *Living Issues in Philosophy*. New York, New York, USA: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970.

FURTHER STUDY SUGGESTIONS

- Carnell, Edward John. *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966.
Chapters 3-6 are especially helpful on the subjects of the nature of and criteria for truth.
- Keyser, Leander S. *A System of Christian Evidence*. Burlington, Iowa, USA: The Lutheran Literacy Board, 1953.
Chapters 2 and 19-21 are of particular relevance to the topic of doubt and doubters.
- Pike, Kenneth L. *With Heart and Mind*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970.
Chapters 1-6 discuss the intellect, which relates to the subject of epistemology.
- Ramm, Bernard L. *The God Who Makes a Difference*. Waco, Texas, USA: Word Books, Publisher, 1972.
Chapters 2 and 4 contain material on both the nature of truth and the problem of doubt.
- Trueblood, Elton. *A Place to Stand*. New York, New York., USA: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969.
Chapters 1 and 2 present very helpful insights into the role of the mind and having certainty of faith.

PERSONAL STUDY

1 Read in the New Testament John 18 and notice especially verses 28-40. What meaning or significance do you give to the following sentences?

Jesus said: "Every one who is of the truth hears my voice" (v. 37).

.....
Pilate asked: "What is truth?" (v. 38). How would you answer his question?

.....
.....
.....

2 List the major weaknesses of the first eight criteria for testing truth.

Instinct

Custom

Tradition

Consensus Gentium

Feelings

Sense Perception

Correspondence

Pragmatism

What is the primary strength of Systematic Consistency?

.....
.....
.....

3 Read in the New Testament Matthew 15:1-9 about the dangers of dead tradition. Write down in a few sentences your immediate reaction to this account.

.....
.....
.....

4 After thinking about it, which *one* of the four causes of doubt would be most suitable in your case? Why?

.....
.....
.....

5 State briefly why you are (or are not) interested in accepting the challenge discussed above.

.....
.....
.....

PERSONAL STUDY RESPONSES GUIDELINES

The answers to these questions may vary with the student, but the following elements should be found in your answer.

- 1 a. Jesus is saying that if you really understand the nature of truth, you will recognize His claims to be the *revealer* of truth.
- b. Pilate shows his inability to define truth or to understand its nature. In the context of the passage there is the suggestion that truth was *relative* for Pilate--Pilate was a Roman and the truth announced by a Jew had no personal meaning for him. My answer would include the concepts of coherence and consistency and would have some reference to truth as it is found in the mind of God.

2 The major weaknesses of the first eight criteria for testing truth are as follows:

- instinct — provides no guidance for distinguishing between alternatives; can be modified by environment; cannot evaluate claims to truth.
- custom — varies and in fact may conflict from place to place or time to time; provides no final answer.
- tradition — dependent upon sources and the transmission processes; can be as good or as bad as the sources and the transmission.
- consensus gentium — may show widespread misunderstanding or lack of knowledge, not necessarily general acceptance of truth.
- feelings — too vague, often fallible, and subject to the state of physical or mental health.
- sense perception — easily deceived and limited to personal experience.
- correspondence — fails as a test since it is incapable of actually establishing correspondence; also inadequate for measuring intangibles.

pragmatism — man's limited perspective fails to detect what *is* actually “working” and what only *seems* to be “working;” also, what works (is true) for one may not work (be true) for another.

The strength of systematic consistency is that it embraces all of the preceding and in addition provides the means for finding agreement between fact and experience and for showing how things fit or hold together.

3 Truth can be twisted for one's own benefit. Jesus was more interested in the *purpose* of law and tradition than in their precise *execution*. He understood that if one sought to act in accord with the reasons behind the law or tradition, there would not be the problem of using it for one's own end.

4 This is a totally personal answer, but you should be able to identify at least one of the causes given in this lesson. You might have other reasons as well, but you should be able to trace the origins of these doubts.

5 Again, this is a totally personal answer, but honesty is necessary.

SELF-CHECK REVIEW

1 “What is truth?” asked Pontius Pilate when faced with Jesus Christ (John 18:38). Which of these statements define the Christian view? Circle the letter of those statements.

- a) Truth agrees with reality.
- b) Truth is only relative.
- c) Truth cannot be known for certain.
- d) Truth agrees with the mind of God.
- e) Truth is another name for God.
- f) Truth is an absolute, superior to God.

Thought provoker: Can you define what you mean by truth? Does this definition change according to what you are talking about-science, arts, or religion?

2 Match the strengths and weaknesses with the criteria for truth listed below. Write the numbers for the weaknesses and strengths in the appropriate blanks.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>a + Instinct</p> <p>b + Tradition</p> <p>c + Feelings</p> <p>d + Sense perception</p> <p>e + Pragmatism</p> | <p>1) <u>over-subjective, influence by physical factors</u></p> <p>2) provides motivational power</p> <p>3) seen as stabilizing influence</p> <p>4) assumes that workability is good for all, always</p> <p>5) shows consistency between truth and results</p> <p>6) integral part of human make-up</p> <p>7) providing incomplete and sometimes inaccurate data</p> <p>8) over-dependent on accurate transmission of valuable source</p> <p>9) able to be altered by conditioning</p> <p>10) source for truth personally experienced</p> |
|--|---|

Thought provoker: What criteria for truth do you most commonly use in matters affecting behavior and belief?

3 Which of the following statements indicate the advantages of the systematic consistency test for faith? Circle the letters for the answers you select.

- a) It embraces the other tests.
- b) It is based on paradoxes.
- c) It examines the relationship between facts.
- d) It establishes whether or not there are contradictions.
- e) It shows that God is self-consistent.
- f) It tests the cohesiveness of ideas.

Thought provoker: We all desire greater consistency and coherence in our thinking and in our relationships. What areas do you feel need most attention in your case?

4 Match the definition with the obstacle to clear thinking. Write the letter of the appropriate obstacle in the blank provided.

- | | |
|--|---|
| a <u>Prejudice</u> | 1) <u>unquestioning acceptance of</u>
testimony from a respected
source |
| b <u>Propaganda</u> | |
| c <u>Authoritarianism</u> | 2) <u>misuse of words or mistakes</u>
in the reasoning process |
| d <u>Logical fallacies</u> | 3) <u>emotional predisposition to</u>
judge without full
consideration of the facts |
| | 4) <u>deliberate choice of facts or</u>
ideas to favor a particular
viewpoint |

Thought provoker: Since it is impossible for anyone to be entirely objective, you have detected the author's bias. Have you been able to identify your own?

5 What causes of honest doubt would be presented by the following statements? Write the letter of the appropriate cause of doubt in the blank in front of the statement.

- | | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| a | <u>Everyone knows the Bible</u>
<u>is</u> full of errors | <u>1) Inconsistency</u>
2) Information Shortage |
| b | I just don't see the point of believing in God | 3) Moral Resistance
4) Spiritual Insensitivity |
| c | The Christian churches are full of hypocrites | |
| d | If you're a Christian, you're not allowed to think | |
| e | I'm having too much fun to become a Christian | |
| f | Christianity is for old people and children | |
| g | Prayer is a psychological cathartic | |
| h | Jesus was a great teacher, but I don't know what He said. | |
| I | Christians are no different from other people. | |

Thought provoker: If you have ever held any of these views, can you honestly defend them now?

SELF-CHECK REVIEW ANSWERS**1** a), d), and e)**2** **a** 2) + 9)**b** 3) + 8)**c** 1) + 6)**d** 7) + 10)**e** 5) + 4)**3** a), c), d), and f)**4** **a** 3)**b** 4)**c** 1)**d** 2)**5** **a** 2)**b** 3) and 4)**c** 1) and 2)**d** 2)**e** 3) and 4)**f** 2), 3), and 4)**g** 2) and 4)**h** 2)**i** 1)



Lesson Two

Is There a God?



Agnosticism says that God has not made man, but man has made God. A sociological view of religion sees religion as a *human projection*.

However, there is another point of view. What appears as a human projection in one frame of reference may appear as a reflection of *divine realities* in another. Peter Berger, the Austrian-born (now American) professor of sociology, mentions what he calls “signals of transcendence” within the human situation. By this expression he means “phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our ‘natural’ reality but that appear to point beyond that reality” (Berger, p. 70). Such phenomena belong to ordinary, everyday awareness.

One such signal of transcendence he mentions is the element of *play* that can be found in any human culture. The joy of play somehow takes on a timeless quality and provides a liberation and peace which transcends the moment. For example, children intently playing “make-believe” games in the park are oblivious to time.

Berger relates an experience of this transcendence from memories of World War II in his native city of Vienna. Just before the Soviet troops occupied Vienna in 1945, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra gave a regularly scheduled concert. The invasion occurred and the entry of the Soviet army interrupted the concert schedule for about a week, and then they went on as planned. Invasion, the overthrow of an empire, the appearance of another, and yet only a small break in concerts. How could this be? Well, Berger says, it was “an affirmation of the ultimate triumph of all human gestures of creative beauty over the gestures of destruction, and even over the ugliness of war and death” (Ibid. p. 78). Within the reality of play is a signal of transcendence, pointing beyond man’s nature to a higher justification.

Such a signal relates to *faith*. For faith does not rest on a mysterious revelation open to only a mystic few, but on what we experience in our ordinary lives. Our whole human experience is oriented toward *hope*. In a world where we are surrounded by death on all sides, a certain “NO!” to death rises up, bringing with it the feeling that there *is more!* Where do such feelings come from? Is it possible that this signal of transcendence or higher justification comes from God? Is there a God? If so, what is God like? These important questions are the subject of this lesson.

LESSON OUTLINE

- Atheism and Agnosticism
- The Problem of Proving God
- The *A Posteriori* Evidence
- The *A Priori* Evidence
- Evidence From Axiology
- God As “He” Rather Than “It”
- A Challenge

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

1. What is the difference between an *atheist* and an *agnostic*?
2. Can the existence of God be proved in the same way that you could prove that water can be formed from two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen?
3. How is *a posteriori* reasoning used as a “pointer” to God?
4. How do the concepts of the *cosmological argument* and the *teleological argument* subtly differ?
5. How is *a priori* reasoning used as a “pointer” to God?
6. What is the *ontological argument*?
7. Does the argument from *morality* and *aesthetics* serve as an effective “pointer” to a personal God?
8. Should God be called “He” rather than “It?”
9. Have you ever tested the reality of God by talking (praying) directly to this Being?

WORD STUDY

- agnosticism** — The belief that the existence of any ultimate reality (as God) is unknown and probably unknowable.
- a posteriori** — Literally, *from the latter*. Conclusions derived by reasoning from the observed facts; backtracks from effect to cause.
- a priori** — Literally, *from the former*. Proceeds from cause to effect; deductive reasoning; relating to or devised by reasoning from self-evident propositions; presupposed by experience.
- atheism** — Disbelief in the existence of deity; the doctrine that there is no deity.
- cosmological** — Dealing with the universe as an orderly system; dealing with the origin, structure, and space-time relationships of the universe.
- ontological** — Relating to the nature and relations of *being*.
- teleological** — Having to do with the study of evidences of design or purpose in nature; character attributed to nature or natural processes of being directed toward an end or shaped by a purpose.

LESSON DEVELOPMENT

Personal problems and tense emotional experiences can blot out all aspects of joy and hope in a person. Through a very complex process of rationalization, an individual suffering from such problems can be led to a position of atheism. Dr. Orlo Strunk, Jr. describes such a process as “neurotic atheism” (Strunk, p. 107). He quotes from the writings of Ignace Lepp, a former Marxist, now a Roman Catholic psychotherapist, to illustrate “a young girl’s flight to atheism” (Lepp, pp. 157-158).

Lisa gave up her belief in God because of the influence of existentialist philosophy. She felt Christianity “was all nonsense” and that life was “rotten” and absurd. Therefore she saw no reason to restrain herself from any pleasure or whim. She proudly quoted the writings of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre³ to justify her attitude.

However, it was not only this so-called “intellectual evidence” that turned her into an existential atheist. Lisa went through some difficult emotional and moral traumas. She met a well-known and distinguished man and became his mistress. After a few months he grew weary of her and left her totally disillusioned. She questioned how anything could be sacred in the world if a man of such distinction was in reality only a scoundrel. In reading Camus and Sartre she sought to find philosophical confirmation of her own personal disappointments in life. Finally came her personal revolt against society--unusual dress, petty crimes, even involvement in a murder.

Lisa’s was a life of despair and hopelessness with no God, no meaning, no fulfillment and no future. The picture is sad, but it has not been exaggerated. Sadder still is that many young adults can identify with Lisa. Perhaps you can too. If so, do not give up. There is *hope* and there are *genuine answers* to life’s problems.

ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Atheism

The literal and simplest definition of an atheist is “one who believes there is no God.” If you are convinced that there is not a God of *any* kind, if your mind is made up, then there is little point in going on with these lessons. But if you defend atheism in a soft voice, or if you are dissatisfied with atheism as an intellectual and spiritual stance, then read on and consider the evidence for the reality of God in the world today.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), often called the Father of the Reformation, once observed that “God is what we hang our heart on.” If it be power, or science, or revolution, or money, or the state, or any of a thousand other things, all of us depend on something and give our final allegiance to it. In this sense, real atheism is impossible because everyone “hangs his heart” on at least one thing. This one thing becomes our God.

Agnosticism

In such a technological age as ours, agnosticism seems to be an appealing and tempting position. Agnosticism “is the view that knowledge of God is limited or impossible, it is neither possible to affirm nor to deny God’s existence” (Titus, p. 240). Such an open-ended, unanswerable position leaves the impression of genuine humility, but actually it is a depressing one. If you are of this persuasion, and can sincerely say, ‘I just don’t know!’--then I encourage you to consider the following pages, not only with your mind (intellect) but also with your heart (will).

A perceptive youth, acknowledging the complex problems of the twentieth century, wrote a poem entitled “Searching for Miracles” and sent it to a well-known clergyman. Attached to it was a note saying, “I hope it comes true.” Whether or not it came true for this person, I do not know. But I can say that it *is* possible! Here it is. Read it thoughtfully.

I’m looking for a miracle in my life.
I’m looking for that Someone

Who does not condemn...
Who will take me as I am...
Who ends all strife...
Who wants me to be free.
I'm looking for that Someone
Who really cares...
Who makes me want to dare...
Who can give me reality ...
Who makes me tread grounds untrod
I'm looking for that Someone everyone calls *God!*

THE PROBLEM OF PROVING GOD

An outstanding American newspaperman, Louis Cassels, has faced the question of proving God's existence. He says,

Can the reality of God be proved? To give you a straight and unequivocal answer at once, it can. . . . But you can only prove it to yourself. No one can prove it to you. There are many logical arguments which may lead you to the belief that God is a reasonable probability, but the only proof which can finally resolve your doubts is to experience His reality for yourself (Cassels, P. 6).

I would agree with Louis Cassels that to *prove* God from merely an intellectual standpoint is impossible. Yet, there are many powerful, compelling "pointers" that can lead one to think in a "God-towardness" way.

In discussing evidence for the existence of God, I will not appeal very much to the Bible as a source. There are two important reasons for this.

First, the existence of God is assumed in Scripture. The Bible begins with the simple affirmation of God's activity: "In the beginning God . . ." (Genesis 1:1), and continues throughout to take God's existence for granted. As one theologian has put it: "It does not seem to have occurred to any of the writers of either the Old or New Testaments to attempt to prove or argue for the existence of God. Everywhere and at all times it is a fact taken for granted (Thiessen, p. 56).

Second, those who are examining the claims of Christianity and those who are assailed with doubt about the existence of God want some other proof besides what the Bible says. They question its authority. Therefore, we will consider rational, logical evidences for the existence of God.

THE A POSTERIORI EVIDENCE

A posteriori reasoning is reasoning from the observed facts. It looks at the effect and moves back to the cause. It bases cause on the effect observed.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), considered one of the greatest intellectuals in human history, proposed his famous “*Quinque Viae*” (*Five Ways*) in which God’s existence can be demonstrated. This material has long stood as classic theistic literature. It is interesting to note that today there is renewed interest in these pointers to God.

These “theistic proofs” were first addressed by Aquinas to thinking men, providing them with reasons “why it is more intelligent to believe than to disbelieve God’s existence” (Reid, p. 162).

Motion

“Anything which is moved must be moved by something else.” Such movement is not an infinite process; so, finally you work your way back to the “first source of motion which is moved by nothing else: and such a source all men understand to be God.”

This, in Aquinas’ own words, is the same idea as Aristotle’s^b pre-Christian concept of an Unmoved Mover. After analyzing substance and movement in nature, Aristotle concluded that a First Mover or a First Principle must exist. An examination of his conclusion reveals that through nature, he became aware of the existence of God and became convinced that all nature depends upon God for its existence. Without this first cause, there would be no existence at all.

Causation

It is impossible for anything to be the cause of itself. An infinite regression of causes is impossible and contradictory. There must be a first cause somewhere. "We must therefore posit some first cause: and all men call this God."

Actually, this really adds nothing to Aquinas' idea of motion. But taken together, they are varieties of what has come to be called the *cosmological argument*. Since this argument was first formulated by Aquinas in the thirteenth century it has stood more or less unchallenged, except by a few writers and scientists.

Possibility and Necessity

The third argument of Aquinas is taken from possibility and necessity and is as follows. Experience leads us to conclude that all things are interdependent, and indeed each depends on another for its own existence. Things are capable of existing or not existing. They are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for all things to always exist. Yet, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing existing. But this is illogical, for from nothing, nothing would come. Thus, there must be something of which the existence is necessary. That which, by necessity, has always existed is what "all men speak of as God." Everything but God is dependent upon something else to bring it into existence.

Gradation of Being

Gradations of perfection exist in the universe. "Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like." These beings are spoken of as good or less good, "according to their different degrees of approach to what is greatest of all." In other words, there is in the universe a standard of comparison which is itself perfect "and this we call God."

Governance of the World

This is more commonly known as the teleological argument or the argument from *design*. *Telos* is the Greek word meaning "end." Order and arrangement in the universe imply that intelligence and purpose are behind it. "Things" exist but do not "know." Yet, they fulfill a purpose, not by chance, but by design or intention. Since this intention is not of itself, it is to be found

in some intelligent Being “by which all natural things are directed towards ends. And this intelligent Being we call God.”

Thomas Aquinas’ *Five Ways* may be considered as five distinct arguments which are interrelated, or as one proof with five aspects. There are some Christian philosophers who argue that the totality of these arguments is to be thought of as one argument and that this was the original intent of Aquinas. I grant that Aquinas’ line of reasoning has some weaknesses and that there have been those who have attacked it. But it is also true that when taken as a whole it does have a cumulative effect. The arguments certainly serve as “pointers” to a Being or First Cause, that is intelligent, free, eternal and incomprehensibly great. The basic weakness of these “proofs” is that they do not explain God in terms of personality, love, and response to man and the world. But this we will deal with later.

THE A PRIORI EVIDENCE

A priori means that form of reasoning which proceeds from cause to effect, or knowledge that is self-evident, that is recognized to be true apart from observation or experience. In this sense, the *a priori* arguments for God’s existence say that there is something deep inside every man which acknowledges responsibility to Someone out there.

Ontological Argument

The term “ontological” comes from the Greek word *ontos*, which means “being.” During the Middle Ages a churchman by the name of St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), a very original thinker, put this argument together. ^c

Anselm began with the Bible verse, “The fool says in his heart, there is no God” (Psalm 14:1). For Anselm, man could never think of a greater Being than God. Man is a “knowing center” who believes in the existence of Absolute Truth. All men have the capacity of knowing God. On this basis he sought to “prove” God’s existence in the very idea of God--“the Greatest Conceivable Being.”

Although Anselm's statement does not *prove* the existence of God, it indicates that God must be, and that He is infinite and perfect. God is a being in the truest and highest sense. God's existence has not been proved, but our mental powers will not allow us to think otherwise.^d

Innate Idea of God

The concept of the innate idea of God is similar to the ontological argument. In its simplest form it says that every person is *born* with the concept of God implanted in his mind. As a person grows older, the idea of God gets clearer, or stronger. From this impression comes the idea that there must be a God. Now the concept a person has may be very articulate or barely on the edge of consciousness, but during crisis times it may suddenly come alive.

Another way to say this is to speak of man having a "built-in" religious nature or an ultimate religious faculty like volition or thought. Henry Thiessen, a contemporary Protestant theologian, holds the belief that the knowledge of the existence of God is *intuitive*. He says, "both Scripture and history prove that the belief in God is universal" (Thiessen, p. 55).

History and anthropology both show that the religious element of man's nature is as universal as the rational and social ones. "This supreme Being is to be found among all the peoples of the primitive cultures, not indeed everywhere in the same form or the same vigor, but still everywhere prominent enough to make his dominant position indubitable" (Ibid).

Man's Finitude

We are continually reminded of our limitations. According to Aristotle, man knows that he is a finite being. "Man has a sense of his finitude" (Ramm, p. 90).

In this century there has been a great awareness of the frailty of man. We live in an age of pessimism. The horrors of war, the

threat of nuclear annihilation and other forms of man's inhumanity to man have caused people to question the wisdom and good sense of modern man. Some current literature emphasizes the finiteness of man. A feeling of nihilism^e seems to have gripped many today, especially among the younger generation.

During a time when man feels small and alone, is there not a longing for strength, comfort and support from some source beyond himself? It is when a person feels a deep sense of finitude that he is confronted by Infinity, *God*. Some theologians recognize in every man a "sense of dependence." The next step, then, is to realize that God—the Infinite—is That One on whom man can and should depend.

EVIDENCE FROM AXIOLOGY

Axiology is a philosophical term meaning "the study of values." There are two significant areas of evidence from axiology which serve as important pointers to the existence of God. Both are born of the awareness in man of *values*. The first deals with *moral values*, and the second has to do with *aesthetic values*.

Moral Argument

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a German philosopher, believed that Thomas Aquinas' *Five Ways* were theoretical and did not prove any knowledge of God as a moral Being. So on the basis of *conscience* he argues for the reality of God, as well as for freedom and immortality.^f

Such great minds as C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)^g and Carl Jung (1875-1961)^h believed that every man has a *moral sense* which has been present in every people, age and culture known to history and anthropology. The great Viennese psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl (1905-), founder of the concept of logotherapy, believes that one of the most basic human needs is the "will for meaning." Man, he says, can endure almost any suffering if he can see a purpose in it. On the other hand, he will be miserable

even amidst wealth if he cannot relate his life to some larger context which makes life meaningful.

Augustus Strong, a systematic theologian, states,

Conscience recognizes the existence of a moral law which has supreme authority. Known violations of this moral law are followed by feelings of ill-desert and fears of judgment. The moral law, since it is not self-imposed, and these threats of judgment, since they are not self-executing, respectively argue the existence of a holy will that has imposed the law, and of a punitive power that will execute the threats of the moral nature (Strong, p. 82).

In other words, “conscience recognizes the existence of a great Lawgiver, God, and the certainty of the punishment of all violations of His law” (Thiessen, p. 62).

Aesthetic Argument

The aesthetic argument begins by assuming that a sense of beauty exists universally among men. The recognition of the sublime and the beautiful in the universe is seen as direct evidence of the existence of a *personal* God. For example, in nature there are no color clashes in flowers, sunsets, or trees. There is harmony and beauty in the human form, in animal life, and in the sea.

The fact that man has an aesthetic faculty by which he is able to recognize and appreciate beauty around him is strong evidence of this universal aesthetic value. The concept of what is described as “beautiful” may vary from culture to culture. But this is not the point. The point is that in every normal human being there is a *sense* of beauty, the ability to render judgment on what is attractive. Moreover, man has the ability and skill to create beauty himself--works of art, a symphony, a song, a poem, a building.

How is it that the beauty of the world and man’s aesthetic ability and appreciation correspond so favorably? It must have been by design. But design connotes intelligence, and

intelligence implies personality--which once again leads us back to *God!*

GOD AS “HE” RATHER THAN “IT”

Belief systems tend to be accepted by a person when he is *ready* to accept them and not by convincing argumentation. For example, let's go back to Lisa's plight, presented at the beginning of this lesson. She admitted to being an atheist. If she had been confronted with rational evidences for the existence of God, we know what effect it would have had. No matter how clearly the rational arguments might have been presented, Lisa was not in the proper frame of mind to appreciate them.

The best that rational thought can do is to provide a series of “pointers” to the existence of God. If you can accept some or all of these, then at best you have insight into the First Cause, Supreme Being, or Great Intellect. This is not an act of faith, it is simply mental assent to logical hypotheses, drawn from clear evidence presented in a meaningful way.

Up to now, except for the poem quoted earlier, we have implied that God is an “It” rather than a Being with *personal* attributes. You would quickly catch a subtle shift to personal pronouns with reference to God, especially if no reason for doing so were given. But it is necessary to realize that God is “He” rather than “It.”

The Author of time and space is obviously not restricted by them as we are. God transcends all human categories. But when all of this is said, it still comes more naturally to speak of God as “He.” Louis Cassels says on this point:

We use personal pronouns to refer to God because we have personality--the attributes of living, thinking, purposeful being--the highest and most complex phenomenon in the created universe which is open to our rational observation. God, as the “Ground of all Being,” is infinitely more than we can conceive when we try to

project person-hood to the ultimate degree. He certainly is not *less* than a living person. Therefore, we refer to God as “He” not because we hold any anthropomorphic concept of Him, but because it is the least inadequate pronoun we possess (Cassels, p. 10).

A British scientist, Robert L. F. Boyd, professor of Physics, University College, London, and Professor of Astronomy at the Royal Institution, helps us on this point of God being a *Person*. He discusses three kinds of knowledge--mathematical knowledge, scientific knowledge, and personal knowledge (Boyd, pp. 10-11).

In *pure mathematics* the knower is isolated. His knowledge is the result of the axioms he has created. Until the axioms are related to the physical world the mathematics are sterile. There is simply the “I-and-nothing-more” relationship, if such can be called a relationship.

Scientific knowledge, on the other hand, finds its data outside, in the material world. This leads to new knowledge of the world. The scientist stands and surveys the phenomena, but they do not look back or respond. He is in the superior position, an “I-it” relationship.

The primary means of acquiring *personal knowledge* is by *encounter*. It may also be called experiential knowledge. Although knowledge by experience is sometimes more broadly defined, I am using the expression to refer to the “I-You” relationship. Observation is no substitute for a genuine encounter and an exchange between minds. The personal encounter involves a self-revelation, an unveiling, an “I-You” relationship.¹

It is in this third category of knowledge that we see God as “He” rather than “It.” As Saint Augustine said more than a thousand years ago: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until we find rest in thee” (*Confessions*, Book 1, paragraph 1).

A CHALLENGE

The whole approach of the Bible differs from what we have been discussing in that the Bible *assumes* the existence of a personal, loving God. But there is yet another difference. Scripture records God's search for man rather than man's search for God. It is not enough merely to be convinced that God exists and then just walk away from Him feeling that you have solved one more philosophical question!

In spite of all that has been said, the point is not to "prove" that God exists by logical reasoning. Rather it is that God has acted on our behalf and has allowed Himself to be known.

God *does* exist—as the First Cause, Unmoved Mover, Ground of all Being, and any other philosophical term you may want to use! But more importantly, He is a person who has been speaking to and acting upon the human situation throughout history. He spoke first to Abraham, then through His prophets, as the Old Testament records. Then finally, in the fullest possible way, He spoke through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, His Son.

In closing this lesson I would like to challenge you to face God. Test His reality. I heard of one honest student who, while wrestling with doubts about God, prayed: "God, if there is a God, help me to understand You and know You. If you care, care for me. If You want me, come to me. Amen."

You have probably talked with many of your friends about God. Hopefully, you have applied this lesson to yourself. You have perhaps wondered and thought about this important question often. Take one more step and talk to God yourself. Just speak to Him as you would to a close friend, even though you may not feel He is very close at the moment. This will put you beyond the level of "cold proofs" into the realm of personal encounter, the "I-You."

If you feel you need a place to start, you can repeat the same prayer-poem quoted earlier. Another suggestion would be to speak to God in the following words:

One can fear a Reality
and respect a Being,

But one loves a Father
 who is all love in Himself.
 Give me such unqualified love
 for you, Father.
 If others still choose
 to mold their own gods,
 Let it not be because of me (Gesch, p. 60).

^aCamus (1913-1960) and Sartre (1905), both Frenchmen, are two of the best-known modern existentialist philosophers. Their writings have had a great impact upon current thought.

^bAristotle (384-322 B.C.), a Greek and a student of Plato, wrote on almost all the sciences known in his time. He is one of the greatest philosophers of all time.

I am aware of the rebuttals to St. Anselm. His ontological proof was first attacked by Guanilo, a monk and contemporary of Anselm. He *criticized* the argument “on behalf of the fool.” Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) *denied* the proof. Duns Scotus (1265-1308) *rephrased* it. René Descartes (1596-1650) *reaffirmed* it. Gottfried von Leibniz (1646-1716) *modified* it. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) *refuted* it. Georg Hegel (1770-1831) *revamped* and *reaffirmed* it. Most modern philosophers have assumed that the critique by Kant was decisive. However, recently it has been given a new lease on life by two American philosophers: U. Malcom and C. Hartshorne. They say God’s existence is either logically necessary or logically impossible. Since it has not been shown to be logically impossible, it is therefore logically necessary. Nevertheless my purpose is not to provide conclusive evidence, but simply to present the ontological argument as a pointer to God. (The summary of the rebuttals to St. Anselm is adapted from Fremantle, p. 88.)

^d For a rendering of the actual texts of Aquinas and Anselm see Bierman and Gould, *Philosophy for a New Generation*, chapters 54-55.

^e Harold H. Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, page 542, says that nihilism is usually used “to refer to the social doctrine that conditions are so evil that the present social order ought to be swept aside or destroyed to make room for something better.”

^f It is interesting to note here that the apostle Paul used this basic argument as well in his Epistle to the Romans. (See Romans 1:19, 32; 2:14-16.)

^g C. S. Lewis was an English author and professor who turned from agnosticism to Christianity. He is famous for his books on Christian themes.

^h Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychologist and son of an evangelical clergyman. He was greatly influenced by Sigmund Freud and introduced into psychology the now common terms “introversion” and “extroversion.”

ⁱ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York, N.Y., USA: Washington Square Press, 1963), pages 2-154. The term logotherapy stems from the Greek *logos* which denotes meaning. Logotherapy focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as on man’s search for such a meaning.” According to Dr. Frankl “striving to find a meaning to one’s life is the primary motivational force in man.” As a psychotherapist, he uses logotherapy to stress the *future* rather than the *past* as is done in psychoanalysis. The patient is confronted with and reoriented toward the meaning of his life.

^j Admittedly there are criticisms to be made for all of these arguments. I realize they are not “airtight” or perfect. But it is the collective power of these items which serve as convincing pointers to the reality of God.

^k Cassels is using a term invented by the German theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965).

^l The Austrian Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber (1878-1965) first coined the dialogical terms of “I-it.” and “I-you.” His book on this subject dates in an early draft from the fall of 1919 but was not published until 1923 under the title *Ich und Du*.

Since that time many Christian thinkers, including Dr. Robert Boyd quoted above, have used the terms “I-You”, to describe the confrontation of a person with Jesus Christ. But Buber, being Jewish, did not think of the “You” as being Christ but God Himself. In these lessons the term is used to discuss the encounter between man and Jesus.

Probably the best translation into English from the German of Buber’s work is by Walter Kaufmann, *I and Thou* by Martin Buber; New York, N.Y. USA: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970.

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FURTHER STUDY SUGGESTIONS

Bierman, A. K. and Gould, James A. *Philosophy For A New Generation*. London, England: The Macmillan Company, 1970. Chapters 54 and 55 contain the actual text of St. Anselm and Thomas Aquinas on their rational arguments for the existence of God, as well as other helpful and interesting philosophical texts.

Boyd, Robert F. L. *Can God Be Known?* London, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970.

This 16-page booklet is excellent on the question of epistemology, discussed in the first lesson. It was useful in this lesson in talking about the three kinds of knowledge.

Brown, Colin. *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*. London, England: Tyndale Press, 1969.

Chapter 1 discusses the classical arguments for the existence of God. However, the entire book is highly recommended for persons interested in Christianity and philosophy.

Cassels, Louis. *Christian Primer*. Garden City, New York, USA: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964.

Chapter 1 relates especially well to the subject of this lesson.

Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York, New York, USA: Washington Square Press, 1963.

Though not a religious book in the strict sense, it is a moving first-hand account of man's need for a faith to live by, learned in the confines of a Nazi concentration camp of World War II.

Reid, J. K. S. *Christian Apologetics*. London, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969.

Chapter 6 relates to the topic of this lesson and especially the rational "proofs" for the existence of God.

Strunk, Orlo, Jr. *The Choice Called Atheism*. Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Abingdon Press, 1968.

Chapter 1 is particularly relevant to the section in this lesson on atheism and agnosticism.

Titus, Harold H. *Living Issues in Philosophy*. London, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970.

This book has a very good section on epistemology, the subject of the first lesson of this course. It also has good material on the subject of this lesson. See chapter 19 on values and chapter 24 on religion. It also has a very good glossary of philosophical terms.

PERSONAL STUDY

1 Read in the New Testament Romans 1:1-2:29.

What do you learn from 1:18-25 about the relationship between man and God?

.....
.....

What support for the moral argument for the existence of God do you find in 1:18-19 and 2:13-16?

.....
.....
.....

2 Briefly write the strengths, or positive aspects, of the evidence presented under the following headings.

A Posteriori

.....
.....

A Priori.....

.....
.....
.....

Axiology.....

.....
.....
.....

3 If a Supreme Being makes sense to you, does it also follow that such a Being has personal attributes and can relate to man? Why or why not, in your opinion?

.....
.....
.....

4 Do you want to discover the reality of God by means of a personal encounter--an "I-You" experience?

.....
.....
.....

5 Compose a short prayer to God expressing your deepest thoughts, dreams and questions.

.....
.....
.....

PERSONAL STUDY RESPONSES GUIDELINES

Remember, these answers are only suggestive of the things you might include.

- 1 Man has deliberately chosen not to accept the truth God has revealed. This rebellion has resulted in a state where now man sees the wrath of God, but even that does not bring him back to a point of honoring or giving thanks to Him.

In verses 18-19 Paul states that men can and should know what is good and true, for God has made all things plain to them. There is a “moral sense” or “conscience” present in men, which they have chosen to ignore. This is the moral argument. In chapter 2, verses 13-16, Paul maintains that it is not written laws that show us what is right and wrong, but “laws written on the heart. Men, by nature, have a conscience by which they will be judged, and those who have “conflicting thoughts,” i.e., have not followed the conscience given them, will stand accused.

- 2 *A posteriori* arguments for the existence of God are firmly rooted in facts. The methodology is that of the scientific method: begin with what is and look for the cause.

A priori arguments appeal to the universality of the religious element (including man’s finitude) in man. Since it is universal, it must have a valid basis.

Axiology arguments again appeal to universality--the universality of the concepts right and wrong. If laws or morality are present in all cultures and times, Something or Someone had to make the laws and the moral sensitivity in man.

- 3 This answer depends entirely on where you are in your thinking. Reasons why you may see God as having personal attributes include the one given under “Aesthetic Argument,” the statement by Cassels, the argument of Boyd, or simply the religious culture of which you are a part. Reasons why you are not able to see this position may relate to your doubts concerning the existence of God in the first place.

4 Your answer.

5 Your answer, but it might include the following:

- feelings about yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, your good points and your bad points, your sense of accomplishment and your feelings of inadequacy.
- questions about life and God, the meaning of existence in general and your life in particular, the reasons for evil and tragedy.
- your hopes for the future, both in the world and in your own life, your particular aspirations for making something worth-while out of what you do and are.
- the needs you have or know about and want to see met, whether they are very general (“I need to know what to do with my life”) or very particular (“I need to find a cheap place to stay”).
- things for which you are thankful, which you have come to appreciate and to value, and which would make your life less fulfilled if you were to lose them.

SELF-CHECK REVIEW

1 Atheists, agnostics, and Christians have a definite attitude toward the idea of God. Each has its basic stance, its appeal, and (on the level of argument) its weaknesses. Which group(s) might have used these arguments? Write the appropriate letter or letters in the blank in front of the arguments.

- ... **a** You can't be sure of anything including God. 1) Atheists
 ... **b** Everyone has something which is "God" for him. 2) Agnostics
 ... **c** Man does not need a God in order to live happily. 3) Christians
 ... **d** The existence of God cannot be objectively proved beyond all doubt.
 ... **e** It is a sign of psychological weakness to believe in God.
 ... **f** We are alone in an uncaring universe.
 ... **g** God can be proved only by personally experiencing Him.

Thought provoker: What are the weaknesses of these statements, judging from your experience and knowledge of life?

2 Please complete these statements about the *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God. Write your answers in the blank provided.

- a** The *Five Ways* were formulated by
- b** The law of motion points to a.....
- c** The argument from first cause is the argument.
- d** The degrees of perfection imply a.....
- e** The argument from design is the argument.
- f** One weakness of these arguments is that they point to God only as.....
- g** These are less proofs than..... to God's existence.

Thought provoker: Do you see reason and order in the universe, or do you disagree with bi-mathematicians who are now saying that the argument for *chance* in the origins and developing of life as we know it is statistically untenable?

3 Please complete these statements about the *a priori* arguments for the existence of God. Write your answers in the blank provided.

- a** The ontological argument was first stated by
-
- b** For the thinking man, God is the
-
- c** The idea of God may also be argued to be.....
-
- d** The universality of belief in God indicates that it is.....
-
- e** In contrast, man recognizes the existence of God who is the
-

Thought provoker: What things in your society indicate a dissatisfaction with rationalism and a return (however misinformed) to a “sense of dependence?” (You may think of the preoccupation with the ESP, drug-experiences, astrology, and other occult practices.)

4 Which of these statements is consistent with the arguments from axiology? Circle the letter corresponding to the correct statements.

- a) All men have an innate sense of right and wrong.
- b) Men can be miserable and rich if life is meaningful.
- c) Conscience recognizes the existence of God as lawgiver.
- d) A universal sense of beauty implies the existence of a Designer/Creator.
- e) Because artists have a great sense of aesthetics, they are very religious.
- f) "Beauty is truth, truth beauty. That is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know" (John Keats).
- g) Kant formulated an argument on this basis.

Thought provoker: Do you find the argument from values (moral and aesthetic) more or less valid than the earlier pointers? How basic are these values in your life?

5 Relate the kinds of knowledge to the name given by Boyd and to the relationship implied. Write the numbers representing the appropriate name and relationship in the blank provided.

a + Knowledge through encounter with persons

b + Knowledge created from axioms

c + Knowledge through observation of data

- 1) mathematical
- 2) scientific
- 3) personal
- 4) I-You
- 5) I-It
- 6) I-Nothing-More

Thought provoker: Does the idea of God as a Person have more meaning to you than God as a creative force (an It)? Do you think it likely that a personal God would want to make Himself known to an intelligent part of His creation?

SELF-CHECK REVIEW ANSWERS

- 1**
- a 2)
 - b 3)
 - c 1)
 - d 2) and 3)
 - e 1) and 2)
 - f 1)
 - g 3)
- 2**
- a quinas
 - b First Mover/Principle
 - c Cosmological
 - d Perfect Standard
 - e Teleological
 - f Creator/First Cause
 - g Pointers
- 3**
- a St. Anselm
 - b Greatest Conceivable Being
 - c Innate
 - d Intuitive
 - e Infinite
- 4**
- a) c), d), and g)
- 5**
- a 3) + 4)
 - b 1) + 6)
 - c 2) + 5)



Lesson Three

What about Jesus?



In the previous lessons, we have attempted to encourage you to pursue this course in a thoughtful way, to give you some of the many “pointers” to God, and to help you perceive God as one having personality. So far we have spoken of Jesus Christ only briefly. But in this lesson we will attempt to examine in more detail the Man and His claims. We will present what we have chosen to accept as sufficient evidence to believe that He was who He said He was and that those claims are relevant to our situation here and now.

The Christian perspective on life is positive. It is “Yes,” it is purposeful. As Christians, we feel that we have found the answer to life's meaning through Jesus Christ, by accepting the fact that He is who He said He was. It is like stepping out of a cave into a brilliant sun—suddenly there is light. The rootless, vague, uneasy feelings diminish. Christians try to communicate this wonderful discovery to others in terms that will make people want to have an “I-You” encounter with Jesus Christ.^a

In December 1971, at eighty-seven years of age, the world-renowned author-evangelist Dr. E. Stanley Jones suffered a paralyzing stroke. For five hours he lay totally helpless. His daughter was called to his bedside. When she arrived, he recognized her and indicated that he wanted to say something important.

“Daughter,” he said, in a feeble, almost inaudible voice, “I cannot die now. I have to live to complete another book—The Divine Yes” (Jones, p 7).^b With great hardship and difficulty the manuscript was finished, but only with the aid of a cassette tape recorder because he could not see or write well enough. The book was published in the spring of 1974, two years after his death.

The title for the book came from the words of the apostle Paul when he said: “The divine ‘yes’ has at last sounded in him

(Christ), for in him is the ‘yes’ that affirms all the promises of God” (2 Corinthians 1:19-20, Moffat's translation).

Dr. Jones, after a full life of service as a Christian minister, most of it in India, and after experiencing a paralyzing illness, could still write with firm conviction these words:

At last, then, at long last the Divine Yes has sounded through Him. Jesus is the Yes. . . that there is a God, a Father lying behind this universe caring for all creation; that this Father is manifested in the face of Jesus Christ and life can be utterly changed; that our emptiness can become fullness as every recess of our inner and outer lives is invaded by the Holy Spirit (Jones, p. 21).

LESSON OUTLINE

- The Divinity of Jesus
- The Resurrection of Jesus
- The Purpose of Jesus
- More on Discipleship
- A Challenge

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

1. What is the significance of man's plea for God to “stretch His hand” toward us and to “speak to us?”
2. What do historians do with the “Christ myth?”
3. Is it enough to agree that Jesus was a moralist?
4. How does Jesus compare with the founders of the other three major world religions?
5. Have you met persons who have experienced the same change in their lives as the disciple Peter did?
6. What does discipleship mean for the Christian?
7. Are you personally challenged by the person of Jesus Christ?

WORD STUDY

- axiomatic** — Having to do with a proposition regarded as a self-evident truth.
- encounter** — To come upon face to face; to meet.
- eschatological** — Relating to the end of the world or to events associated with it in religious expectation.
- gospel** — The good news concerning Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Capitalized, one of the first four books of the New Testament telling of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- incarnate** — In flesh, with bodily form and substance; relating to the unity of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ.
- Messiah** — The expected king and deliverer of the Jews; a professed or accepted leader of some hope or cause.

LESSON DEVELOPMENT

“I want God to stretch His hand toward me, to uncover His face, to speak to me!” This is the plea of one of the characters in Ingmar Bergman's *Seventh Seal*.

Literature has many such eloquent expressions of man's desperation and his feeling of being alone in the universe. Perhaps one of the most poignant examples comes from the potent pen of Shakespeare, when he puts these words into the mouth of Macbeth upon hearing of the death of his wife:

.....Out, out brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing (*Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V).

It is to address ourselves to this very feeling of man's despair that this course was written.

In lesson one we attempted to build a case strong enough for you to give yourself to an honest study of this material. In the second lesson the purpose was to show the many pointers to God and to establish that God can best be expressed as *He*, rather than *It*. We must now consider the Person of Christ.

God, in fact, *has* revealed Himself. Man is *not* alone in the universe. Not only has God spoken to us in nature, but He has also stretched His hand toward us through His Son, Jesus Christ. “He (Christ) reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power” (Hebrews 1:3). The phrase “the very stamp of his nature” is a translation of the Greek word for *character*. The ancient Greeks used this word to describe the etching on the face of a coin, seal, or stamp. Thus, the biblical writer, in using this expression, is saying that Christ *is the exact representation* of God's nature. He was with us in time and space and is a part of human history. It is of utmost importance, therefore, to consider the Person of Jesus Christ carefully and thoughtfully.

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS

Orthodox Christian teaching maintains that Jesus Christ is divine, was virgin born, performed supernatural acts, died on the cross for the salvation of all men, completed the redemptive plan in His resurrection from the dead and ascension to the Father, and now reigns as Lord of Lords and King of Kings. What a claim! Not only the church but Jesus Himself makes these claims.

Now consider for a moment. These are fantastic claims. We are reduced to four possible responses to these amazing assertions: Jesus was *legendary*, a *liar*, a *lunatic*, or *Lord*.

Was He Legendary?

The theory that Jesus and His ministry are legends is the most serious objection to the divinity of Christ, but it is held by few people. It has several groups of followers, but is primarily expressed in two ways. Some make a categorical statement: “Historians today have fairly well dismissed Jesus as being historical” (McDowell, p. 83).^c

Others, such as Avrum Stroll, professor of philosophy, University of California, however, are more subtle. He alleged: “A Jesus probably did exist but so many legends have grown about him that it is impossible for scholars to find out anything about the real man” (Montgomery, 1969, p. 37).

In this statement the followers of Jesus are being accused of giving the world a false portrait of Him. The accusation is made to sound reasonable because the people of first century Palestine were looking for a “Messiah” or deliverer who had been promised by their prophets throughout their history. The disciples of Jesus are supposed to have introduced later claims of deity for Him. Professor John W. Montgomery points out several reasons why this idea is not acceptable (Montgomery, 1965, pp. 66-72).

First, there was a great difference between the idea that most Jews had of the Messiah and the messianic picture that Jesus

painted of Himself. He was just not the type they expected and would have been a poor candidate from their point of view.

Second, the apostles and followers of Jesus were men of high ethical standards. Their training would render them incapable psychologically, religiously, and ethically of trying to make Him a deity. For example, the name of God was so revered that the Jews would not even pronounce it, let alone ascribe it to an ordinary person. Knowing their deep, centuries-old traditions along this line it is difficult to believe that they would have fabricated such a tale.

Third, the historical evidence for the resurrection could not have been an invention of fanatic followers in an attempt to elevate Jesus to deity. The life of Jesus was recorded within a very few years of His death. Not enough time had elapsed for myth or legend to spring up in the early records. At least two of the books about His life were eyewitness accounts (those by Matthew and John). The other writers certainly had access to eyewitness accounts and other primary sources.

The fact is, the disciples of Jesus are pictured in the New Testament documents as men difficult to convince, open to doubt. They were certainly not the sort of men to conceive the sort of legends about Jesus that could convince much of the world for almost two thousand years that Jesus is divine. No, although this is a serious charge, it must be dismissed as inadequate and impossible.

The belief that there was no historical Jesus Christ simply ignores the abundance of evidence relating to His existence. F. F. Bruce, Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, England, expresses the weakness of such an approach when he says,

Some writers may toy with the fancy of a Christ-myth, but they do not do so on the grounds of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the Christ-myth theories (Bruce, p. 119).

Was He a Liar?

Did Jesus deliberately deceive the people? This accusation does not seem reasonable to most people. Even those who do not believe Him to be deity, usually *still* believe Him to have been a good man. They admire Him as a man of high ethical and moral standards, a great teacher, an important moral philosopher and a great example to follow.

Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a Briton turned American, vigorously attacked Christianity in his book *The Age of Reason*. Yet this strong opponent of Christianity said of Jesus,

Nothing that is here said can apply even with the most distant disrespect to the real character of Jesus Christ. He was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practiced was of the most benevolent kind; and though similar systems of morality have been preached by Confucius, and by some of the Greek philosophers, many years before . . . and by many good men in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any (Foerstes, pp. 200-201).

Jesus was the greatest moralist the world has ever seen. Could He at the same time be devious, a charlatan? Would a “good” man intentionally deceive the masses by claiming to be *God in the flesh*, if in fact He was not? He vehemently declared to His generation that the devil is a liar and father of liars, and those who lie are the children of the devil (see John 8:44). He Himself claimed to be the Son of God. If the claim He made to deity is to be rejected, His whole life, ministry, teaching, and reputation have much less meaning for us today.

But His life, ministry, teaching, and reputation *all solidly supported His claim to deity*. He said of Himself,

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves (John 14:10-11).

Jesus did not have the reputation of being a liar. The charge cannot be sustained. Sound ethical philosophy would not support it.

Was Jesus a Lunatic?

The only way a person might accept Jesus as the greatest moralist but *not* as the divine Son of God would be to believe that He was mentally unbalanced, or perhaps self-deceived. This does not appear to be a very reasonable conclusion, for it is not likely that a mentally unbalanced person would achieve the distinction of being rated among the greatest men who ever lived.

Yet there are some great people who have chosen to believe it. One such person was Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), the famous humanitarian doctor and philosopher. In his book *Quest for the Historical Jesus* he took the position that Jesus had an honest misunderstanding of His nature. He felt it was necessary, then, to vindicate Jesus from the charge of psychiatric illness. His medical dissertation of 1913, presented to the University of Strasbourg, was entitled *Psychiatric Study of Jesus*. He attempted to show that the human Jesus "could be sane and yet think of himself as the eschatological Son of Man who would come again at the end of the age, with the heavenly host to judge the world" (Montgomery, 1965, pp. 63-64).

The work by Dr. Schweitzer was an honest, human attempt to explain Jesus within the historical context of things. However, the fact that his explanation is insufficient is evidenced by the lack of scholars and other people who follow or accept his thesis about Jesus.

We simply cannot avoid the conclusion that Jesus *was* insane if He thought of Himself as the incarnate Son of God and yet was not. But in view of the soundness of Jesus' teachings, we simply cannot accept that He was mentally deranged. In fact the opposite is true. Psychiatrist J. T. Fisher has made the following graphic assertions concerning Jesus,

If you were to take the sum total of all authoritative articles ever written by the most qualified of psychologists and psychiatrists on the subject of mental

hygiene—if you were to combine them and refine and cleave out the excess verbiage . . . and if you were to have these unadulterated bits of pure scientific knowledge, concisely expressed by the most capable of living poets, you would have an awkward and incomplete summation of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). And it would suffer immeasurably through comparison. For nearly two thousand years the Christian world has been holding in its hand the complete answer to its restless and fruitless yearnings. Here . . . rests the blueprint for successful human life, with optimism, mental health and contentment (Fisher p. 273, and quoted by Montgomery, 1965, p. 65).

Is Jesus Truly Lord?

If Jesus cannot be charged with being a myth dreamed up by overenthusiastic followers, or a liar, or mentally unbalanced, then there is only one alternative left. He must have been who He said He was—the Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man.

When Jesus was in the upper room with His disciples He told them many things. One thing He said to them was, “You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am” (John 13:13). We now have the responsibility to grapple with Christ's claims, their perplexities and difficulties. But ultimately the question before us can be simply stated: *Is Jesus Christ Lord or not?* A person must be totally convinced of this fact both intellectually and emotionally before realizing the full impact of Jesus Christ in his personal life.

As long as Jesus remains just an intellectual curiosity outside ourselves, there is no personal contact with the living God. The ultimate step is to accept Him as *your* Lord, to know Him personally and experientially.

We have tried to show here that the evidence for Jesus Christ is intellectually sound. The record in the four Gospels reveals His perfection, His sinless nature, and His humility. Further evidence comes from the historical impact throughout the centuries of His timeless message with the divine stamp or authority and miracles. Wherever Christianity has gone, it has

taken with it an enhanced respect for the individual and a feeling of responsibility for service to God and others.

In the entire Western World, every time a calendar is viewed, every time a date is announced, every time a coin is struck, there is a testimony to the One who is pivotal to all history. We count the years as before Christ (B.C.) or as in the year of our Lord (Latin, *anno domini*, A.D.). His birth is heralded by atheist and agnostic, believer and unbeliever, in just this fashion alone (Menzies, p. 88).

The evidences from history, ethics, psychology and experience are clearly in favor of Jesus as Lord. Some people may refuse the evidence because of the demands involved. But there must be moral honesty in deciding for yourself who Jesus was and is.

The following chart summarizes this section and pictures graphically the various alternatives regarding Jesus' identity.^d Consider it carefully. Can you accept that His claims were true? If so, you still have the most important choice to make.

JESUS CLAIMS DEITY

Three possibilities

His claims were *false*.

He knew He was false. It was deliberate. He was a *liar*.

He did not know His claims were untrue. He just thought He was who He said He was. He was a *tunatic*.

He is a *myth* or *legend*.

He never really existed. He is a *myth*.

He existed but so many tales have been invented about Him that we can't know the truth. He is a *legend*.

His claims are *true*

He is who He said He was, and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is *Lord*.

Yet, there are two choices, one of which must be made.

You can *accept* You can *reject*

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

All but four of the major religions of the world have their beginnings in philosophical propositions. These four are based on the influence of a personality, a founder. They are Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. *Abraham*, the father of Judaism, died about 1900 B.C. The original account of the death of *Buddha* recorded in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* states that when he died it was “with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains behind.” *Mohammed*, the founder of Islam, died in A.D. 632 at the age of sixty-one. His tomb is visited regularly by faithful pilgrims. Within the orthodox teaching of Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam there is no textual claim for the *bodily* resurrection of its founder (McDowell, pp. 185-187). In Christianity there is!

Christ is unique in this respect, for He taught not only that He would die on the cross, but that He would be raised to life again after three days. This all happened just as He had predicted. Those trustworthy men who recorded Jesus' life were eyewitnesses, along with many others, to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His resurrection is *the* miracle of the New Testament. It is also the most significant miracle for all humanity for all time.

There have been elaborate attempts to disprove and discredit this unusual fact of history. Some have said that Jesus never really died but simply fainted from the pain and the torture. Another idea, as old as the resurrection itself, says that the body of Jesus was stolen from the tomb by His friends and followers (Matthew 28:13). Others teach that enemies of Jesus stole His body. A more sophisticated approach says that the tomb was not really empty, but that the followers of Jesus received a supernatural vision of Christ and the resurrection was simply the awareness of the Spirit of Christ lingering with them. In other words, it was not really a bodily resurrection, but a spiritual one.

A fourth theory says the followers of Jesus were so grief-stricken and their desire to see Jesus alive was so intense that they experienced hallucinations or were victims of optical illusions. Others have said that the body of Jesus was never in

the tomb, that the corpse was never properly buried but tossed into a pit with the bodies of the criminals executed with Jesus. Some believe that the disciples and loyal followers simply went to the wrong tomb.

All of these notions to explain away the resurrection must be rejected. Why? For at least four major reasons.

First, these theories project a wide range of explanations which are mutually exclusive and incongruous with the recorded story.

Second, there are no reasonable grounds to accuse the followers of Jesus of being either liars, thieves, mentally unbalanced, or stupid.

Third, the resurrection of Jesus is attested to in the New Testament by over 500 people who saw Him in several post-resurrection appearances. The apostle Paul records: "Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep (died)" (1 Corinthians 15:6).^e

Fourth, Christians say they have truth, light, life, and power. It is illogical to charge that these same people would try to advance upon the world a grand hoax such as the resurrection of Jesus if in fact it did not actually happen. Moreover, many of the eyewitnesses let themselves be put to death rather than deny the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. They would not have given their lives to defend what they knew to be a deception. The resurrection did occur. It is not a hoax, but true.

Just a word about another of the very interesting evidences of the deity of Jesus Christ as well as of the facts surrounding His death. One means God used in the Old Testament to educate people to His ways was through *prophets* who were given messages from God to the people. These messages included scores of prophecies given, down through the centuries, by one or another of God's spokesmen concerning the promised Messiah or Deliverer who would come. All of the predictions about His birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection were perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

So much more could be said on the resurrection. Perhaps you can study it further by reading some of the sources listed at the end of this chapter. Let me summarize this important section in the words of a New Testament scholar, Dr. Bernard Ramm,

The Christian accepts the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a historical fact. He finds it conceivable because of his Christian theism; its rationale is found in his Christian theology; and its historicity is proved by an unbroken, extensive testimony from the Old Testament predictions through the pages of the New Testament record, and into Church history in the writings of the Fathers and in the earliest creeds (Ramm, p. 193).

THE PURPOSE OF JESUS

If Jesus Christ is the Son of God and if He died on the cross and rose from the dead, what is the *real* purpose and meaning behind it? Well, at the very heart of Christianity is a personal, individual encounter with Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the clearest way to understand the purpose of Jesus' coming into the world is to look at one of the classic forms of encounter between Jesus and another person. Consider the slow transformation of the character of one of the very first followers of Jesus—Simon, a Galilean fisherman.

Simon was a professional fisherman, tanned from toil in the sun, with the smell of the outdoors upon him. He was quick, hotheaded, and impulsive. Simon's brother, Andrew, introduced him to Jesus. As they met, Jesus said to him, "You are Simon, John's son—but you shall be called Peter 'the rock'" (John 1:42, *The Living Bible*). Jesus knew immediately the transformation which would come to Simon and indicated so by changing his name to Peter, meaning rock. Jesus knew the transformation that would take place, changing Simon from the excitable and impulsive person that he was to Peter, who would become "solid as a rock."

This is the way Jesus sees every person. He sees and knows their weaknesses; and He plans, when they turn to Him, to make

them strong, whole, healthy personalities. It is the way He sees me, and it is the way He sees you.

You may say, “But I have not accepted Jesus. How can He know me?” Well, let me tell you that your innermost thoughts are as an open book to Him. There may be secrets hidden from all the rest of the world, but there are none hidden from Him. Jesus knows me and He knows you. Jesus follows the course of every person who is born—hoping, trying at some point, to get his attention. The fact that you have come this far in the study has not been accidental! Follow Peter's experience with Jesus.

How did the changes in Peter's life come about? There were basically three steps involved.

First, there was an act of the will on the part of Peter. He made a conscious self-surrender to Christ. There were times later when he made mistakes. He was not perfected all at once. There were occasions when he spoke out of turn, acted too quickly, made rash promises; yet he had made a commitment to Christ and he *continued* to follow, believe, and trust Jesus. Slowly he began to understand, to change, as Christ's influence became stronger in his life.

Second, Peter realized that he must intellectually accept Christ without hesitation or reservation. He first yielded his will (heart) and his emotions (feelings) to Jesus. But Peter realized too that he must do the same thing with his intellect and reason. He did not stop thinking nor did he commit “intellectual suicide.” But he did determine to trust Christ in spite of unanswered questions, personal perplexities, or seemingly logical objections. This is what Jesus called *faith*. He taught that if one could only have faith to believe, even without seeing Jesus, then assurance, insight and understanding would follow (John 20:29).

Third, Peter gave Jesus full and unquestioning obedience for the rest of his life. This is the ultimate test of commitment. It is the willingness to follow Christ without knowing the exact course of the journey, without expecting it to be always easy.

This is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) would call *discipleship* (Bonhoeffer, p. 36). He was a young but highly esteemed German theologian whose writings have been translated into many languages.

The Jesus-encounter is costly. It means subjecting your own will to the will of God. Peter may have begun to follow Jesus without realizing the full implications of what he was doing. As the problems he faced grew greater, he found his faith had also grown. He also found that in spite of difficulties, life was better when he turned it over to Christ.

This is the purpose of Jesus' coming: that sons of men might become sons of God, by the Son of God becoming the Son of Man. God wanted *sons* to share in His life and activity forever, and this is the way He has chosen to accomplish His purpose. All people, just like Peter, can be transformed under the strong yet tender influence of Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

MORE ON DISCIPLESHIP

The objective of this lesson is not simply to lead you to nod your head in assent to the fact that there was a historical Jesus who still is what He claimed to be. Intellectual assent is not enough. For you to believe in Jesus as you would in Caesar or Plato falls far short of our goal.

Caesar and Plato are dead. This is why to be passionately “for” them or “against” them is never a question. But Jesus Christ is *alive*. “There are still people who love Him and hate Him. There is a passion for the love of Christ and a passion for His destruction. The fury of so many against Him is a proof that He is not dead” (Bowie, p. 8).^f This is the reason that once Jesus is fully understood, an indifferent attitude toward Him is impossible.

We must bow to His authority and accept His teaching. We must allow our opinions to be molded by His opinions, our views to be conditioned by His views. And this includes His uncomfortable and unfashionable teaching (Stott, p. 210).

When we are called to follow Jesus Christ, it is a call to an exclusive attachment to Him. Discipleship thus means adherence to Christ. Christianity is not simply knowing a great deal of religious information, but knowing and giving allegiance to Jesus as Lord.

Do you find it hard to believe in Jesus? Perhaps it is because you are resisting surrender to Him. Do not be like every mountain brook that follows the course of least resistance. Bonhoeffer was hanged because his Christian commitment conflicted with the regime. He speaks of “cheap grace” and “costly grace.” “Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate” (Bonhoeffer, p. 36).

Christ speaks of self-denial, reconciliation with our fellow man, service to others, getting intensely involved in life and the struggle for good against evil, and yes, even suffering if need be. Discipleship means allegiance to the triumphant Christ, whatever the cost, but not as a hermit detached from society. It means taking a stand for truth in the noise and stench of the market place.

What value would you place on cheap grace, shallow experience, haphazard worship, and on disciples who are less than loyal? There have been far too many of these kinds of Christians. This is one reason why Christianity is not taken seriously. Unfortunately, some who claim to be Christians do not take it seriously enough themselves. The call of Christ is to full discipleship—the will, the intellect, and the emotions deliberately and knowingly given to Jesus Christ, Lord of All.

A CHALLENGE

C.S. Lewis sets forth a very clear challenge which summarizes this lesson well:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level of the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell.

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to (Lewis, p. 56).

Too many people are ready to dismiss Christianity with one wave of the hand for no other reason than that they are unwilling to face up to the challenge of Jesus Christ. As you here and now are confronted with the person of Christ, do not be afraid of the moral implications of accepting Him into your life. Do not turn away into the night of despair, rejecting Him, until you have thoroughly examined and considered the evidence. This is what many people are either too afraid or too lazy to do. There is an escapist's fear of facing up to the challenge of Christian standards of behavior and Christian discipleship. It appears easier, more comfortable, to run away.

Jesus Christ came to bring reconciliation between man and God. It is in that spirit of reconciliation that Jesus has invited all people everywhere, regardless of race, color, background, past behavior, current problems—*all* are invited to come to Him.

So, why do people want to relegate Jesus to an unopened book and bypass Him as if He had nothing significant to offer? Whatever the reason may be, please do not do that yourself. Rather, look deep into yourself and pray this prayer as you take another important step towards Him:

Father, do not let me be content
to regard Jesus
as only a great teacher.
Let Him never be less to me
than my best friend,
my eternal savior,
my unfailing strength,
my undying hope

And let what Jesus means to me
always show through (Gesch, p. 60).

^aAs explained in a footnote in the last lesson, I am using Martin Buber's expression "I-You" to refer to a person's encounter with the God-Man, Jesus Christ. In this context it is strictly a Christian expression.

^bSome of the material came from the flyleaf of the book. The introduction to this great man's spiritual "last will and testament" was written by his daughter, Eunice Jones Matthews.

^c This statement was made by a Marxist who was running for political office in the state of New York, USA.

^dThis chart has been adapted and expanded from one in McDowell, p. 108.

^e Note that Paul is inviting investigation by emphasizing that these eyewitnesses were still available for questioning. As Paul said when making his defense before a Roman court: "This was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26).

^fBowie is quoting from Giovanni Papini's *Life of Christ*, 1923, p. 6. Papini (1881-1956), Italian philosopher, historian, and critic, was an opponent of Christianity. In 1920 he was converted to Roman Catholicism and is now best known for his famous book *Storia di Cristo* (Life of Christ), written in 1921.

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FURTHER STUDY SUGGESTIONS

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York, New York, USA: The MacMillan Company, 1961.

This whole book is worth reading. It has influenced many lives for Jesus Christ.

Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York, New York, USA: The MacMillan Company, 1965.

My recommendation is that every person should take the time to read this splendid book by this great British literary critic, writer, and Christian.

McDowell, Josh, ed. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. San Bernadino, California, USA: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1972.

This volume is full of quotes, facts, and information concerning Christianity. Chapters 5-10 contain a discussion of Jesus Christ.

Morison, Frank. *Who Moved the Stone?* London, England: Faber and Faber Limited, 1969.

An excellent study on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Ramm, Bernard. *Protestant Christian Evidences*. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1953.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss Jesus and the resurrection. This book is very valuable for personal study.

Stott, John R. W. *Christ the Controversialist*. London, England: Tyndale Press, 1970.

A good general work of value to the serious student of Christianity.

PERSONAL STUDY

1 Read Philippians 2:5-11 in the New Testament. What does this text tell you about a God “with skin on”?

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2 Evaluate, according to your own opinion, the four possibilities as to the claims of Jesus. (Write a sentence about each.)

Legend.....

.....

Liar

.....

Lunatic

.....

Lord.....

.....

3 Read the resurrection story (Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-14; Luke 24:1-41; John 20). From the accounts in Matthew and Luke, trace the reactions of two classes of people in these accounts: disciples (believers) and others (non-believers).

Disciples:.....

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Others:.....

.....

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4 The distinctive nature of Christianity as compared to other major world religions is that Christ was resurrected and is alive. What implications does this have for you with regard to a personal relationship with Him?

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5 It was pointed out that the Old Testament contains information about Jesus hundreds of years before His birth in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7). Read the following Old Testament texts and see if you can identify the specific item of information the text gives about Jesus.

Isaiah 7:14

.....

Micah 5:2.....

.....

Zechariah 11:12-13.....

.....

Isaiah 53:9

.....

6 What are your feelings about the change which came about in Simon's life and the challenge of full discipleship?

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PERSONAL STUDY RESPONSES GUIDELINES

1 God took on human form and became a man. He came as an obedient servant, who was willing to obey even to the point of death. His duties of a servant are now over, and one day everyone will recognize the Lordship of the Man-God.

2 Your answer. My position is clear from the text.

3 Believers	Women— perplexed (Luke 24:4) Disciples— frightened (Luke 24:5) fear and great joy (Matt. 28:8) understanding (Luke 24:8) worship (Matt. 28:9) Disciples— unbelief (Luke 24:13) confusion and sadness (Emmaus) (Luke 24:13-24) belief and joy (Emmaus) (Luke 24:31-35) startled, frightened, and questioning (Luke 24:37-38) too good to be true (disbelieved for joy) (Luke 24:41) worship and doubt (Matt. 28:17) understanding (Luke 24:45) joy and worship (Luke 24:52-53)
Non-believers	Guards—fear and trembling (Matt. 28:4) Guards and chief priests— made up story to explain the problem of a missing body (Matt. 28:11-15)

4 One can only relate to something that *IS*. If Jesus is alive, then a relationship is possible. Thus, only if the resurrection is a fact can a personal relationship be established.

- 5 Isaiah 7:14 — A young woman (virgin) shall bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel (God is with us). Jesus (the Messiah) would be betrayed for thirty shekels (Matt. 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6)
- Micah 5:2 — Bethlehem will be the birthplace of the Messiah
- Zechariah 11:12-13 — Jesus (the Messiah) would be betrayed for thirty shekels (Matt. 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6)
- Isaiah 53:9 — He would be buried in the grave of a rich man (Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-41)
- 6 Your answer. You might look at the gradual and continuing change in attitude and behavior which are exhibited in Simon's life.

SELF CHECK REVIEW

1 In what ways has God responded to the despairing pleas of mankind? Circle the letter of the correct responses.

- a) He has left man to a meaningless life.
- b) He has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ.
- c) His nature is revealed in Nature, and that is sufficient.
- d) He has entered time and space and human history.
- e) He has shown that man is alone in the universe.

Thought provoker: What does this show about the character of God?
What does this show about the nature of life?

2 Match the following arguments about the legendary Jesus with the responses made by the Christian. Write the number for the appropriate responses in the blanks provided.

- | | |
|--|--|
| a The disciples deliberately falsified the story. | 1) These men were doubters, hard to convince. |
| b The disciples fooled themselves. | 2) Insufficient time and abundance of eyewitnesses argue against this. |
| c The disciples were desperately looking for a Messiah. | 3) Calling someone "God" was against Jewish tradition. |
| d The disciples fanatically invented the resurrection. | 4) The disciples were ethically incapable of fabricating a legend. |
| e The disciples ascribed deity to Jesus in order to be more important. | 5) Jesus was unlike the deliverer of Jewish thought. |

Thought provoker: Is there sufficient evidence for you to believe that Jesus was historical?

3 Which ones of the following arguments answer the idea that Jesus deliberately deceived the people? Circle the letter of the appropriate arguments.

- a) He claimed to be God in the flesh.
- b) He is universally admired as a virtuous man.
- c) Lying would be inconsistent with His character.
- d) He opposed the devil as a liar.
- e) He appealed to God's authority and the works God did through Him.

Thought provoker: Do you agree with opponents of Christianity that Jesus was a good man and a great moral teacher?

4 The resurrection of its founder sets Christianity apart from other religions. Which of the following are reasonable evidences for the resurrection? Circle the letter of the evidences you choose.

- a) The tomb the disciples went to was empty; they never found Jesus' body.
- b) The death and resurrection correspond to detailed prophecies.
- c) The disciples desired the resurrection so much that they believed it.
- d) The disciples died rather than deny the resurrection.
- e) Five hundred eyewitnesses could testify to it.

Thought provoker: If there was this kind of evidence for another historical event, would you believe it?

5 Some of these statements regarding Simon Peter's encounter with Jesus are true; some are false. Please distinguish between them by writing T (true) or F (false) in the blank in front of each statement.

- **a** He was suddenly perfect.
- **b** He accepted Jesus without reservation.
- **c** He believed in cheap grace.
- **d** His commitment was an act of the will.
- **e** He was never excitable and impulsive afterwards.
- **f** He was turned into a rock.
- **g** His life exemplifies discipleship.
- **h** He committed intellectual suicide.
- **i** He trusted Christ even when he didn't understand everything.
- **j** He continued to give Jesus unquestioning obedience.

Thought provoker: Jesus chose Peter for his potential, not his past performance. Do you judge yourself and others this way?

6 Complete the following statements which add up to something of a definition of *Christian discipleship*. Write your answer, taken from the Lesson Development, in the blank provided.

- a** Being passionately for.....
- b** Accepting His.....and
- c** An exclusive to Jesus.
- d** More than knowing a great deal of
- e** Knowing Jesus as
- f** Getting intensely..... in life
- g** with our fellow man
- h** Standing for.....in everyday life.

Thought provoker: Is there anything in your life which resembles this kind of commitment? What similarities and what differences are there in its demands?

SELF-CHECK REVIEW ANSWERS

- 1** b) and d)
- 2** a) 4)
b) 2)
c) 5)
d) 1)
e) 3)
- 3** b) c), and e)
- 4** b) d), and e)
- 5** a) F
b) T
c) F
d) T
e) F
f) F
g) T
h) F
i) T
j) T
- 6** a) Jesus
b) authority/teaching
c) attachment
d) religious information
e) Lord
f) involved
g) reconciliation
h) truth



Lesson Four

Is the Bible
the Word of God?



A favorite professor of mine, Dr. Donald F. Johns, writing about revelation, explains that the prejudice of humanism against the notion of God makes it view the Bible as just another book (Johns, p. 19). Once the idea of God is accepted, the concept of revelation can also be accepted.

First, there is the *possibility* of revelation. A God who is able to create the universe would also be powerful enough to disclose Himself to man.

Second, there is the *probability* of revelation. The character of God manifested in creation makes revelation probable. God the Creator would probably desire to make Himself known to those creatures of His who would understand Him.

Third, there is the *desirability* of revelation. Men of all ages and in all places have desired a supernatural revelation of some kind. Every culture has always had a religion. It does not seem that God would create man with a desire He did not intend to satisfy.

Fourth, there is the *necessity* of revelation. Conscience and reason alone are enough to convince a man of personal sin, but revelation is necessary for man to be saved from sin. Only some kind of divinely revealed plan of salvation can guarantee that man can be saved from the *penalty* and *power of sin*.

We have already considered the self-revelation of God in His Son Jesus Christ. But what sources or documents are there to tell us about the life and teachings of Jesus? Can such documents be trusted? Well, the Bible is our source book, or handbook, on Christ and Christianity. We must consider this book and seek to know something of its background and trustworthiness. That is the subject of this lesson.

LESSON OUTLINE

- Where the Bible Came From
- Difficulties in the Bible
- Authority of the Bible
- How to Understand the Bible
- A Challenge

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

1. What is the major difference between a love story and a scientific textbook?
2. What would be some important factors in the production of an infallible book?
3. Does modern scientific research and discovery help or harm the concept of an infallible Bible?
4. What kinds of errors would you most expect to find in the Bible?
5. How is logic used in considering the authority of the Bible?
6. How would you make a personal, in-depth study of the Bible?
7. Are you willing to study seriously some portion of the New Testament?
8. Are you willing to accept truth wherever you discover it?

WORD STUDY

- antitype** — Something that corresponds to, or is foreshadowed in, a type.
- apocalyptic** — The biblical book of Revelation; having to do with predicting the ultimate destiny of the world.
- Aramaic** — Semitic language known since the ninth century B.C. and adopted as customary speech by various non-Aramaean peoples, including the Jews after the Babylonian exile.
- higher criticism** — and the purpose and meaning of the authors.
- humanism** — A philosophy that asserts man's capacity for self-realization through reason and that often rejects supernaturalism.
- inerrancy** — Exemption from error; infallibility.
- prophecy** — Declaration of God's will and purpose.
- typology** — A doctrine that things in the Christian era are symbolized or prefigured by things in the Old Testament.
- type** — Something that serves as a representation of a thing that is yet to come into being.

LESSON DEVELOPMENT

A few years ago I met a professor of anthropology at a large university. He had just become a Christian in the sense discussed in chapter three—through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He was in the process of trying to fit together the scientific discipline of anthropology and his new faith.

We were discussing the early chapters of Genesis about the origin of man and the authorship of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). With a bit of disappointment he said, “I only wish Moses had said a little more about the origin of man!”

Similar longings have been expressed many times about the Bible. It is important to realize from the very beginning that the Bible is special literature and was written for a very special purpose. It was not intended for the courtroom or laboratory. It is not a detective story in which man, armed with a few clues, tries to track down an elusive God.

The Bible can best be described as a love story, a historical account of God and men coming together in love and understanding. The Bible *assumes* the reality and personality of God. The Bible was not written to give ammunition for an argument, or to prove a point, or to simply provide a “holy book” for another religious system.

It is well to note with Michael Green, the English-Anglican minister, the special purpose of the Bible.

The Bible is not a book of science. It is a book which speaks of the total relationship of man to man, to the universe, and to God. In so far as it enters into scientific fields, it does so in ordinary everyday language which speaks of the sun as “rising” and the heavens as being “up.” It is no part of the prerogative of the man or religion to prescribe to the scientist what he may believe about the physical universe on the grounds of a particular interpretation of the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible encourages us to believe that God meant man to be

dominant over nature and to seek out the Creator's ways in His universe (Green, p. 43).

WHERE THE BIBLE CAME FROM

We normally think of the Bible as one book with the two parts we have mentioned, the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is also true to say that the Bible is a compilation or aggregate of smaller books. It is "living literature," a kind of encyclopedia of spiritual treasures. There is *unity* with *diversity* in the Bible, a paradox that points to supernatural authorship. Briefly consider the following six aspects related to the Bible. (An entire lesson could be devoted to each of these topics.)

Time

About 1600 years were occupied in the writing and compiling of the Bible. Moses began about 1500 B.C. The apostle John wrote the last book of the Bible (last in terms of location and time sequence) about A.D. 100. The vast span of years precludes much collaboration in producing a symmetrical whole. Yet the profound sense of unity in the Scriptures indicates the continuous influence of God in directing such a complete and exquisite piece of literature.

Authorship

There are about forty different persons who participated in the writing of the Bible. These authors came from many walks of life. Types of people included herdsmen (Amos), sages (Solomon), kings (David), peasants (Micah), fishermen (Peter), physicians (Luke), scholars (Paul), statesmen (Daniel), tax collectors (Matthew), and priests (Isaiah). You can see that just as there was a vast span of time involved in the writing of the Scriptures, there were equally vast differences in background, education, vocabulary, and experiences of the people who wrote. Without supernatural guidance, the combined writing of such a diverse group would certainly have produced anything but a unified whole.

Language

At least three languages were employed in conveying the written message of God to men. *Hebrew* was the primary language of the Old Testament. *Greek* was the main language of the New Testament. During the first century, Greek was the international language of the ancient world. *Aramaic* was also used in some portions of both the Old and New Testaments. It was the primary language of the biblical world for about two hundred years (about 500-300 B.C.). The persons who wrote the Bible used the languages which were most commonly spoken and understood in their day. No special divinely revealed or technical language was used.

Literary Form

Many literary forms or styles are utilized in the Bible. There is law of various kinds: civil law, criminal law, ethical law and ritual law. There are poetry, history, parable and allegory, philosophy, biography, personal correspondence, doctrine, memoirs, and diaries. There are also the distinctively biblical forms of prophecy and apocalyptic literature.

Place

Many locations are represented in the actual writing of the Bible, almost as many as where the action itself occurred. For example Moses writes in the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula and the apostle Paul dictates letters in the prison of Rome; David sings his psalms on the hillsides of Palestine and John writes from the little island of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor (now known as Turkey); Daniel sees visions of the future as a captive in Babylon and Isaiah prophesies in the holy city of Jerusalem. The Bible was written from a score of countries in the ancient Mediterranean area and on three continents—Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Subject Matter

The Bible covers a wealth of subject matter including all of those feelings, emotions, problems and areas of interest that are common to man. We have already noted with Michael Green that the Bible “is a book which speaks of the total relationship of man

to man, to the universe, and to God” (Green, p. 43). Because this is true, one finds such diverse topics as genealogy, ethics, rules for good health (both physical and mental), childbearing advice, geography, history, principles of leadership, battles and battle strategy, friendship, and prayers. Almost everything imaginable of interest and importance to man is at least touched on—if not directly, then indirectly. Most of the great questions of life are raised and discussed.

Yet the Bible wonderfully “fits together.” This can only be explained by admitting that the Scriptures are inspired. The word translated “inspired” in the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16) is the Greek word *theopneustos* which literally means “God-breathed.” That is, it has the essence of divinity within it, giving it life and meaning. This “God-breathed” quality has effectively preserved the Bible from any serious error or flaw through hundreds of years, many versions, and translations into many languages.

DIFFICULTIES IN THE BIBLE

A very common opinion today is that the Bible contains many errors, discrepancies, contradictions, exaggerations and myths. The interpretation of certain scientific discoveries and the impact of destructive criticism have convinced many people that we need not, indeed cannot, put much confidence in the Bible. I frankly admit that the biblical text and, in part, its content present some problems. But for the most part, these problems are minimal and have no bearing on the truth and divine character of the Bible.

The French scholar, René Pache, has discussed this matter of difficulties in the Bible. The following remarks are based on his comments and research (Pache, pp. 141-158).

First, there are *imaginary* difficulties. The so-called “insolvable problems” in the Scripture have been grossly exaggerated. Usually these are superficial and reveal a serious lack of study and thought on the part of the critic. Questions such as “Where did Cain get his wife?” and “How could a small-throated whale possibly swallow Jonah whole?” are examples of this level of questioning.^a

Second, there are seeming difficulties that are resolved in due course of time with *more complete information*. It is a serious mistake to charge the Bible with error simply because it *appears* to be out of line with present knowledge.

For example, a century ago, many scholars made charges about the “historical inaccuracies” of the Bible. But the science of biblical archaeology has systematically eliminated many objections of this type. For a long time the Hittites, mentioned many times in the Old Testament, were treated with great skepticism by historians. These ancient people were mentioned only in the Bible and not in any other sources of antiquity. Thus it was assumed that the Bible was in error and that these people never existed. However, excavations at Boghaz-koi, Turkey, begun in 1906, proved to be on the site of the capital of the ancient Hittite empire!

Also, modern psychiatry is just now beginning to discover things about the human personality which the Bible alluded to centuries ago. O. Hobart Mowrer, a highly respected psychologist, refers to the words of Jesus to illustrate a modern concept in psychology. He says, “the idea of having one's sins proclaimed or shouted from the housetops comes from the book of Luke.”^b Then after quoting Luke, Professor Mowrer continues,

This passage shows a nice appreciation of the fact that guilt which forms the core of “neurosis” will be “admitted” involuntarily, “symptomatically,” if it has not previously been revealed to at least a few persons and atoned for in a conscious and deliberate way (Mowrer, p. 96).

Based on this and other examples, Dr. Mowrer concludes that Jesus Christ was “a remarkably astute clinician” (Ibid. p. 97).

Third, there are some difficulties that are *more apparent than real*. Quite often, careful study shows that seemingly contradictory passages of Scripture are really complementary. For as Pache says,

It is a first principle of historical science that any solution which affords a possible method of harmonizing any two statements is preferable to the assumption of inaccuracy or errors—whether those statements are found in the same or different writers. To act on any other basis, it is clearly acknowledged, is to assume, not prove error (Pache, p. 221).

For example, it has been charged that there are two conflicting accounts of creation, one found in Genesis 1 and the other in Genesis 2. It is alleged by some that the language is different, that the thought forms are at variance, and that two different conceptions of God are presented.

When viewed closely, what appears to be a problem is really a difference in *purpose*. The purposes of the two chapters are different, thus it is acceptable to use a slightly different style of language. Genesis 1 is the account of the creation of the universe and its inhabitants, including man as a part of nature. Genesis 2, however, gives further details, such as a description of man's surroundings, the test of obedience, and details of the creation of Eve. Thus, the main purpose of Genesis 2 is to describe the nature of things leading up to the fall. Chapter 1 is simply a record of God's creative acts. The two chapters are not contradictory nor simply repetitious (based on Free, pp. 12-15, 29-31).

Further, how foolish it would have been for the writer of Genesis to place these two accounts side by side if, in fact, they were not meant to be that way. The error here is in the judgment of the critics and not in the Scripture itself.

Fourth, it is certainly recognized that there are questions for which Bible scholars have *not yet found* completely satisfying answers. Fortunately, these are few in number and are of minor consequence. For example, there are some *variations among the different ancient manuscripts*. The wonder of it is that these are few in number and insignificant to the message of the whole. Nevertheless, biblical textual criticism is constantly working on them to discover precisely what the Bible says.

In the centuries before printing there were a few *errors made by the scribes or copyists*. These usually had to do with only a single letter or word, perhaps occasionally a phrase or short text of the Bible. But again, the consequence of such errors is rather small.

Another problem is that it is not always possible to bring out the *exact shade of meaning* found in the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek text. Thus there may be a word used in the language of translation that was not the most explicit word that might have been used. It is also true that in some passages the *exact chronology or sequence of events* is difficult to determine. However, such difficulties do not affect the great doctrinal themes of Scripture.

The fact that so few mistakes have found their way into the manuscripts is further indication of its divine origin and preservation. This is remarkable in view of the time span covered, diversity of cultures and authors, and the wide variety of subject matter presented. Even more remarkable is the fact of almost two thousand years of church history during which the Bible has been translated scores of times into different languages, and often many times into a single language. Yet, it has remained essentially the same regardless of its worldwide distribution and handling.

AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE^c

C. H. Dodd, a great English scholar,^d said that the Bible has been regarded by Christianity as more than a collection of religious literature or liturgical material. "It has been regarded as the supreme doctrinal authority in faith and morals, divine in origin and consequently infallible. Historic Christianity has been a religion of revelation" (Dodd, p. 8). This means that *the ultimate truth of Christianity cannot be discovered by human reason alone, but must have the participation of God by the Holy Spirit to attest to the veracity of the Word of God*. This was the more or less unquestioned position of Christianity until the eighteenth century. Since then, the authority of the Bible has been under severe attack by a movement on the European

continent called “destructive criticism” or “negative criticism.” Many books have been written attempting to put human reason, instead of Scripture, in the place of authority. The Christian community has suffered damage from theologians who have attempted to destroy the historical Christian position concerning the respect for and place of the Scriptures.

Yet with a multitude of Christian believers, I reaffirm my confidence in the Bible and in the fact that I *can* trust it. Those who have attacked the Bible over the years have only strengthened its position. They have not been able to destroy its message or its trustworthiness.

Three methods will be discussed in seeking to establish the inerrancy of the Bible.

The Confessional Method

The confessional method is the method by which the Bible is confessed to be the Word of God by faith alone. No rational defenses are given on the grounds that reason cannot be used to prove that which is above it. Its advantage is that such an approach can make use of current scientific tools of biblical studies and still not abandon an underlying confidence in Scripture. Of course this method has not satisfied everyone, but it is good for those “inclined to believe.” It does leave something to be desired for the more questioning person.

The Presupposition Method

The presupposition method begins with just that—the presupposition that the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—speaks to man with absolute authority in the Bible. Scripture is thus “self-attesting.” The method of reasoning proceeds in the following way:

Premise A: The Bible is God's infallible Word.

Premise B: The Bible affirms its own infallibility.

Premise C: The self-affirmation of the Bible is an infallible affirmation.

Conclusion: The Bible is God's infallible Word.

As you can see, the conclusion is explicitly stated in the first premise. In logic, this is called *circular reasoning* because it “begs the question.” To affirm the authority of the Bible because it makes the claim, and then believe the claim because it is inspired does not seem to be a very good argument on the surface. But we are entirely within the boundaries of logic in such a procedure.

It is perfectly permissible to begin with the assertion that the Bible claims for itself divine inspiration. The process of deductive reasoning demands that the truth of the *conclusion* be dependent on the truth of the *premise*. The Bible asserts repeatedly that it is precisely what God intended to be spoken to man. In fact, over 3800 times in the Old Testament alone, the idea is expressed that it is the “Word of God.”

The classical Method

The classical method is concerned with both *internal* and *external* evidence. It starts with the premise that Scripture can be found to be generally trustworthy and concludes that Scripture is indeed infallible.

The reasoning unfolds as follows:

Premise A: The Bible is a reliable and trustworthy document.

Premise B: On the basis of this reliable document we have enough evidence to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Premise C: Jesus Christ, being the Son of God, is an infallible authority.

Premise D: Jesus Christ teaches that the Bible is the very Word of God.

Premise E: Since the Word comes from God, it is utterly trustworthy because God is utterly trustworthy.

Conclusion: On the basis of Jesus Christ as the infallible authority, Christians believe the Bible to be trustworthy or infallible.

Notice that the classical method does not use circular reasoning. Each premise involves both inductive and deductive reasoning by fallible, rational creatures. It contains neither a presupposed assumption nor a subjective “leap of faith.” It is involved with careful historical investigation as well as with logical inferences. We have the historical date, the biblical documents, and the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The argument is based on the integrity of Jesus Christ (the subject of lesson three).

Martin Kähler, a nineteenth century German theologian, expressed it this way: “We do not believe in Christ because we believe in the Bible, but we believe in the Bible because we believe in Christ” (Montgomery, p. 247).^e

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, had an interesting argument for the inspiration of Scripture. He said that the Bible must be the invention of one of three kinds of authors: good men (or angels), bad men (or devils), or God. Good men or angels could not have invented it, for they would not and could not make a book and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying the Lord has said thus, or so, when it was their own invention. Bad men or devils could not have invented it, for they could not make a book that commands all just duty and discourages sin and judges wrongdoing. The conclusion is therefore obvious that the Bible must have been written under the direction and inspiration of God, as it in fact claims.

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

Since the Bible is the reliable Word of God, and its teachings are in direct accord with the truth, it follows that it should be read in a particular way. We must not read the Bible as we would the newspaper, Shakespeare, or a scientific journal. It must be read carefully, meditatively, and devotionally.

We must watch not to interpret or understand the Bible according to our preconceived notions. It is quite easy to bring our own personal biases into our understanding of the Bible so it *becomes suited* to our own life-style, to what we want to believe, or what we have been previously taught. However, if we do this we misuse the Bible and destroy its effectiveness. Let's allow the Bible to affect us, to influence our way of thinking and our personal life-style. You see, the purpose or goal of biblical revelation is not to be found simply in a body of material, but in a confrontation with a Person. That Person, Jesus Christ as God in the flesh, is communicated in the Bible. He gives the subject matter of the Bible its meaning and depth.

It is true that only the New Testament speaks directly of Jesus. Yet, the Old Testament spoke of the coming of Christ. Thus, Jesus is the "golden thread" (or theme) that runs throughout Scripture giving it continuity and design. Consider the following chart as illustrative of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

OLD TESTAMENT	NEW TESTAMENT
Begins with God	Begins with Christ
Moses and the prophets	Christ and the apostles
Outward form developing inward principles	Inward principles developing
Typology and prophecy	<i>Old</i> unfolded in the New
Promise	Antitype and fulfillment
Begins: "Where are you?" (Man—Genesis 3:9)	Realization
	Begins: "Where is He?" (Christ—Matthew 2:2)

The Old and the New Testaments are like two men carrying a large cluster of grapes on a pole. The one in front (which is the Old Testament) gets a glimpse of the grapes as he takes up his burden and leads the way. The one behind (which is the New Testament) has a full view of the one going before and also of the wonderful fruit which is theirs. *Redemption*, as the theme of the Bible, is anticipated in the Old Testament, accomplished in

the Gospels, and applied and consummated in the Epistles and Apocalypse.

The principles of understanding the Bible can be summarized for the purpose of simplicity under three headings. They may be called the ABC's of interpreting the Bible— *accuracy*, *background*, and *common sense*.

Accuracy

Persons, places, events, objects, and words must be accurately defined or located within a particular passage of the text. It is important to find out who is speaking, who is listening, and what is being said. You should assemble as many as possible of the important facts related to the passage you are reading or studying.

Background

The Bible must always be interpreted in the light of its background and context. No verse or passage should be interpreted as an isolated text, disconnected and secluded. It is also good to remember that the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible. I mean by this that often a concept is introduced by one writer, enlarged upon by another, and given its fullest meaning by yet another biblical writer. There is no collision of ideas or teaching, but it is important to understand the context of a passage in order to realize fully how it relates to the whole of Scripture. The need to consider its cultural and geographical setting cannot be overemphasized.

Common Sense

To use common sense in reading the Bible implies understanding that the Bible means what it says and should usually be taken at face value. However, keep in mind that the frequent use of highly figurative and poetic language must be taken into account. For example, the “four corners of the earth,” the “circle of the earth”, or the earth as “God's footstool” are uses of figurative language. Such language is not to be understood in a literal sense because then the Bible would be vastly out of relationship with what we know to be true about the spherical earth and the limitless universe. Remember,

the Bible uses terms commonly known or understood by the people of its day rather than introducing advanced scientific terms which would violate the main intent of Scripture.

On several occasions I have had opportunity to speak with people who do not believe the Bible and what it says about God. Objections are raised, generally, in all sincerity. After dealing with their intellectual questions and difficulties, I have often had opportunity to express, in simple everyday language, my personal faith in terms of encounter and experience. Usually, the person to whom I am speaking responds by saying something like, "But I've never heard Christianity spoken of in this way before." Or, "Oh, if I only had that simple faith and trust that you talk about." You see, it is not just intellectual reasoning, but a matter for the will and the heart, the feelings and emotions. Faith is not belief in a book, but encounter with a Person.

My suggestion to you is this: take the time and energy required to conduct a thorough reading of the New Testament. Try to arrange a systematic schedule of study and follow it. Have pencil and paper beside you for notes to be made on your Bible readings. Write down any questions, problems, insights and thoughts to be followed up later or talked over with a friend. As you approach the Scriptures do so asking the Spirit of God to help make the depth, meaning, and truth of what you read applicable to your questions and to your life. Let me assure you that any effort you put forth is not lost time nor wasted energy. Remember that to see light, however dim it may be at first, is better than to continue stumbling around in the dark. As you approach the light you do see, you will discover it will approach you. When you and the Light meet, that is encounter and that is the objective of this book. The apostle John said of Jesus, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

A CHALLENGE

If we cannot trust the Bible, then how can we be sure of the picture it gives us of Jesus? God knew this question would

be raised. That is why He not only sent His *Living Word* (Jesus) into the world, but also preserved for us in truth and accuracy His *written Word* (Scripture). When so much today is taken as relative and it seems there are no absolutes left in the world, we need to reemphasize that God can be trusted, as well as His Son and His Word. They do not present a false picture, “old-wives tales,” or an outmoded purpose for living.

If you have come this far in the study, I assume that you are willing to proceed with some of the suggestions just given. The next question, then, is “Where to begin?”

“If you genuinely want to hear the voice of God speaking to you through the Bible,” said Louis Cassels, “you must be prepared not merely to read it, but to study it seriously and systematically” (Cassels, pp. 33-34).

Normally the correct approach to a book is to start at the beginning and read it through. But you will recall that the Bible is a collection of books. You will probably understand it best if you start not with Genesis, but with the New Testament.

Begin with the Gospel of Luke; then continue with the Acts of the Apostles. These were written by the same person and they tell a single, unbroken story.^f In the Gospel, Luke recounts the life of Jesus Christ—His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. It was written for a non-Jewish audience by a non-Jew. Luke was a physician and a very careful recorder of the events of Jesus' life. He also had an eye for significant detail.

In the Acts, Luke relates the beginning of the Christian church after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. He traces the impact and spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to the far corners of the ancient Roman Empire. He gives special attention to the exciting voyages of the apostle Paul, with whom he traveled extensively.

After reading Luke and Acts, you should next read the Gospel of John. John stresses the words of Jesus rather than His deeds or the events of His life, although some of the major events are noted, as well as several of His miracles. John's

account is of great significance because he was perhaps the closest personal friend of Jesus.

The Epistles (letters) of Paul should be read next. The books of the Bible written by Paul are named after either the *person* to whom they are addressed or the *churches* to which they were written. The books of Romans, Galatians, and Corinthians were intended for young churches and new Christians to help them to apply the faith of Christianity to problems and situations in their day. Consequently, they are very helpful to us today in sorting out some of the finer points of Christianity and applying our faith to culture.

By studying these books mentioned so far, you will certainly have a thorough view of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the practice of the early church. From there, the rest of the New Testament can be read in any order that appeals to you, but may I suggest that you save the book of Revelation for the last. The writer of the Gospel of John is also the author of Revelation. It is apocalyptic literature and is written in a highly figurative style and has provided scholars with material for study and debate for centuries. It is interesting reading, but not the sort of thing to be done first.

Naturally the Old Testament must not be forgotten. But you should ease your way into it *after* reading the New Testament. You should begin with the Psalms for they are the greatest collection of devotional poetry the world has ever known. You may find Proverbs interesting at this point.

Then try reading some of the prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel. Go next to Genesis and Exodus and begin to trace the remarkable account of God's involvement in the lives and affairs of His people.

Though I have suggested some of the books of the Bible as a priority on your reading list, that does not imply that the others are unimportant. Nor does it mean that the order may not be altered, if you have a special interest in placing another section first. The whole Bible is profitable, but there are some portions that will be better appreciated if you have the background we are suggesting.

There is something about studying the Scripture that grips the human heart and causes one to think, reflect, act. May this be your discovery as it has been mine and that of many, many others.

^a Some scholars believe that Cain married his sister, but incest cannot be charged since at that time there were few human beings on the earth (Genesis 4:17). As for the whale, the text does not say “whale” but a “great fish” (Jonah 1:17). The Greek word which is used in Matthew 12:40 and translated “whale” in the Revised Standard Version has as equally valid alternatives, the meanings “sea monster” and “huge fish”. Some species of sharks living today are capable of swallowing a human body whole.

^b Mowrer is referring to Luke 12:1-4 where Jesus was denouncing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. A large crowd of people had gathered to listen. Jesus then turned and addressed His disciples. These four verses are a part of His comments to them.

^c Much of this section has been summarized from John A. Montgomery's book *God's Inerrant Word*, chapter 11.

^d C. H. Dodd (1884-1973) graduated from Oxford in 1901. He devoted a lifetime to New Testament studies, translating, teaching. He is the author of more than twenty books.

^e Montgomery was quoting from Kähler's book *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*.

^f Compare, for example, Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-5. Notice the continuation of the important events for Theophilus.

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8. Pache, René. *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1969.

FURTHER STUDY SUGGESTIONS

Henry, Carl F. H., ed. *Revelation and the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Book House, 1958.

A very scholarly compilation of material of great relevance to the subject of this lesson.

Kuitest, H. M. *Do You Understand What You Read?* Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970.

This book, originally published in Dutch, is good on reading and interpreting the Bible.

Montgomery, John Warwick, ed. *God's Inerrant Word*. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974.

This book has merit for the whole of this lesson. Chapter 11 has been summarized in the section here on the "Authority of the Bible."

Neil, William. *The Rediscovery of the Bible*. London, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965.

Chapters 1-13 are especially related to this lesson. Its small size makes it an easy reference tool.

Pache, René. *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1969.

This book, written by a Frenchman, discusses the Bible in a practical and scholarly way. It is good for further personal study.

Tenney, Merrill C., ed. *The Bible—The Living Word of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970.

This ten-chapter book by ten leading New Testament scholars is relevant and helpful to the subject of this lesson.

PERSONAL STUDY

1 Read Acts 1:1-5. Write a brief statement about what the author Luke tells us about Jesus Christ.

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.....

2 The gospel writer John tells us that he records some of the “signs” or miracles performed by Jesus so that his readers may believe that Jesus is the Son of God (see John 20:30-31). Refer to two or three of these signs in this Gospel and say how they lead to a belief in the deity of Jesus.

a

b

c

3 What do you learn about the overall purpose for the Bible from a careful reading of 2 Timothy 3:16-17?

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4 Read Hebrews 1:1-4; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 1 John 1:1-4. After reading these passages, write down your general impressions about the relationships between the Living Word (Jesus) and the written Word (Scripture).

.....

5 Are you willing to study the Bible, following some of the suggestions outlined at the end of this chapter? If so, put a number in the order of preference (up to three) on the line beside the section of the Bible you would like to read and study.

.... Luke/Acts

.... John

.... Romans/Galatians

.... 1 and 2 Corinthians

.... Psalms

.... Isaiah/Jeremiah

.... Genesis

.... Other.....

PERSONAL STUDY RESPONSES GUIDELINES

- 1** The Gospel of Luke is only the beginning of what Jesus said and did. He presented Himself alive with many proofs. He appeared on earth for forty days. He spoke of the Kingdom of God. He reiterated the promise of the Holy Spirit. He ascended to heaven (“was taken up”) after giving instructions to the disciples.
- 2** Examples could include the following:
 1. John 2:1-11 — supernatural control of natural elements
 2. John 4:7-30 — supernatural knowledge of a person's situation
 3. John 5:2-9 — supernatural ability to heal
 4. John 6:1-14 — supernatural control of natural elements
 5. John 9:1-17 — supernatural ability to heal
 6. John 11:1-44 — supernatural ability to restore life to the dead
 7. John 13:21-30 — supernatural knowledge of a person's intentions
- 3** It is for teaching, reproof, correction, and training, so that the man of God can be complete and equipped for the life of discipleship.
- 4** Hebrews 1:1-4 — The Son (who is the image of God) is the ultimate way of God speaking, although the Old Testament Scriptures record other ways God spoke.
1 Peter 1:10-12 — The Son is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Scripture.
1 John 1:1-4 — The written Word is a means by which we enter into fellowship with the Living Word, the Son.
- 5** My preference would be Luke/Acts, John, and then either Romans/Galatians or 1 and 2 Corinthians.

SELF-CHECK REVIEW

1 The Bible possesses a profound sense of unity. Which of the following, which would *normally* detract from unity, are present in the Bible? Circle the appropriate letters.

- a) being God-breathed
- b) diversity of subjects
- c) exaggerations and myths
- d) variety of styles
- e) collaboration between authors
- f) span in time and place
- g) multiple authorship
- h) use of several languages

Thought provoker: You have doubtless read anthologies of poetry or prose with a central theme imposed by an editor. How does this “unity” compare with the unity of the Bible, in your opinion?

2 Which of the following tend to confirm that the Bible is accurate and that the difficulties are in fact minimal? Circle the appropriate letters.

- a) historical inaccuracies
- b) discoveries in psychology
- c) textual criticism
- d) archaeological discoveries
- e) superficial examination
- f) enduring sameness
- g) apparent contradictions
- h) greater understanding of the original languages

Thought provoker: Do you study the textual problems and finer points of interpretations *before* or *after* you read a work like the *Iliad*. Is it fair to the Bible to treat it differently?

5 How should you study the Bible? Select the methods which seem most appropriate and circle the appropriate letters.

- a) Read Genesis to Revelation in a week.
- b) Study systematically and intelligently.
- c) Try to impose on the Bible your own views.
- d) Pray for God's help as you read.
- e) Read the books by Luke first.
- f) Read during lectures.
- g) Let the Bible influence your thoughts and life-style.

Thought provoker: What do you see as the major obstacles hindering you from beginning to read the Bible in the way suggested?

SELF-CHECK REVIEW ANSWERS

1 b) d), f), g), and h)

2 b) c), d), f), and h)

3 a 2)

b 3)

c 1)

d 2)

e 3)

4 a B

b A

c C

d A and B

e A and B

f C

g B and C

h A and B

5 b) d), e), and g)



Lesson Five

Is
Christian
Experience
Valid?



In his book *The Healing of Persons* (pp. 42-43), the renowned Swiss physician and psychiatrist, Dr. Paul Tournier, relates the case of a male patient who had a host of personal problems. Among his difficulties were an alcoholic father, rebellion against the career mapped out for him, his wife's death after only a year of marriage, conflicts in his second marriage, and financial troubles.

During treatment by Dr. Tournier, this young man was "brought face to face with Jesus Christ." He opened his life and began to share his need at a very deep level. "This religious experience," says Dr. Tournier, "brought about a noticeable improvement in his physical condition." But this experience did not immediately resolve all his difficulties, for "a religious experience, however profound, does not at one blow solve the problems of a person's life." Only after years of uncertain development did this man, helped by his faith in Christ, establish his home and find true happiness. Dr. Tournier gave some practical advice based on this example:

Experience will not permit an oversimplified approach, as if some flight of the spirit were all that was necessary to ensure a moral life free of difficulties, and unblemished physical and nervous health. But experience does nevertheless show how closely a person's physical and psychological state depends on victories which are won only in the realm of the spirit.

Later in this same book (p. 240), Dr. Tournier points out that

. . . religious experiences are not just a matter of euphoria. Once the original enthusiasm has passed, they continue to bear fruit to the benefit of a person's nervous balance, in concrete results in his life. When these results include the confession of a serious fault, reconciliation, and the ending of moral indiscipline, it would be childish to

attribute their effects to a state of euphoria brought about by autosuggestion.

There are many people today who would try to explain personal religious experience as simply a crutch, a sign of weakness, or a form of escapism. But in fact the true Christian experience leads to the opposite—the facing of life *as it is*, but with a firm faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ. A personal religious experience with Jesus provides an added dimension to life, for God and a human being are brought into a meaningful relationship with each other. This encounter is not a one-time experience alone, but it initiates a continuing communion. With it a radical change for the better is begun and from it develops a progressive transformation through the power of the Spirit of God. Our problems and difficulties begin to diminish in importance and can be handled, because God is our helper, His Holy Spirit is strengthening us, and slowly but surely we are becoming in fact what we are in potential—*Sons of God*.

LESSON OUTLINE

- Experience Alone is Inadequate
- Four Levels of Belief
- Religious Conversion
- Outstanding Examples of Conversion
- Man of the Will
- A Challenge
- Implications of Encounter

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

1. What value do you place upon personal religious experience?
2. What relationship does a subjective experience have to an objective reality?
3. Do you think that it is possible to have different levels of belief or faith?
4. What is the underlying difference between “religious conversion” as understood by most religions and as understood by Christianity?
5. Can you give your own definition of conversion as it relates to religious experience?
6. What does the term “subconscious incubation” say to you about religious conversion?
7. Do you personally know someone whom you would consider to be a Christian in the sense we are discussing? If so, what one thing characterizes that person's life of faith for you?
8. Have you come to the place where you are seriously considering becoming a Christian yourself?

WORD STUDY

- apostasy** — Renunciation of a religious faith.
- Christian** — An experience associated with a definite and decisive adoption of Christianity.
- objective** — Emphasizing or expressing the nature of reality as it is apart from personal reflections or feelings.
- Regeneration** — An act of being formed again; spiritual renewal; a radical change for the better.
- subjective** — Characteristic of or belonging to reality as personally perceived; relating to experience or knowledge as conditioned by personal mental characteristics or states.

LESSON DEVELOPMENT

An important official was traveling the main road between two large cities. In his possession were letters granting him the power to search out Christians wherever they could be found and to bring them back to the authorities in Jerusalem. He was almost to his destination when suddenly, and without warning, he was surrounded by a bright light. The official fell to the ground and the company came to a halt. He heard a voice calling him by name: "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Stunned, Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," was the reply. "But rise and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do."

His traveling companions stood speechless. They had heard the voice but seen no one. Unsteadily, Saul rose from the ground. Although his eyes were open, he could see nothing. He had to be led by the hand for the rest of the journey. Saul was shaken to the very roots of his personality by this experience. For three days he could not see and he neither ate nor drank. He spent his time in prayer until a reluctant messenger—one of the Christians he had set out to arrest—came with instructions supernaturally revealed to him by God (see Acts 9:1-25).

The blindness and fasting were temporary, but his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus resulted in a permanent and complete change in his life. The whole thrust of his life had been revolutionized within an extremely short period of time. Saul was later known as the apostle Paul.^a His contribution to Christianity is probably unsurpassed by any individual outside of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

This kind of spectacular religious experience is the exception rather than the rule, but that in no way negates its validity. Paul's consequent dedication to Christ and the sufferings he later endured for the cause of Christ attest to this. But why the change? Because he had a personal and dramatic encounter with the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Another important official was returning home after a visit to Jerusalem. He was a deeply religious man on a quest for truth.

He had hoped that at Jerusalem he would receive the answer to his questions.

But as he was being driven along, he was reading with furrowed brow a scroll of the Scriptures. How could he understand when the religious experts could not interpret their own Scriptures to him? Where was God? What was the meaning of the prophecies he was reading about a “Suffering Servant?” Were there no answers?

A lone passerby interrupted his thoughts. He was actually offering to help the official with his problems! As they conversed, it was evident that this man held the key to the passage that had been so puzzling. He knew Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The official listened carefully and eagerly as the stranger told him the facts about Jesus and related them to his personal situation. Here was the answer to those questions. Here was truth.

The official—we do not know his name, just that he was a minister in the Ethiopian government—had no visionary experience of Jesus Christ as did Paul. Yet he too had a real *encounter* with Jesus.

From intellectual understanding he passed to an act of the will: he was baptized at the nearest oasis as a demonstration of his complete trust in Jesus. When he left the stranger—the evangelist Philip—we are told that he was a transformed person, who returned home joyfully. His intellect was satisfied; he had found purpose and reason in life (see Acts 8:26–40).^b

The Ethiopian official's encounter with Jesus was not dramatic. Yet in its effect it was as supernatural and as radical as it was for Paul. It revolutionized his life. In this sense it was just as valid—no more and no less.

EXPERIENCE ALONE IS INADEQUATE

Are all religious experiences valid? Religious experience *per se* is not what I am advocating. One Christian writer says bluntly: “Experience alone is too flimsy a base on which to rest the Christian system. . . . Religious sensation by itself can only prove itself” (Pinnock, p. 69). If I asserted that God exists just on

the basis of my personal experience, my assertion would be objectively unfounded. All that could be claimed would be that I had had an experience of some kind. The focus would be on what I perceive to have *happened* to me, rather than on the objective reality of what God had *spoken* and *done*. Behind the subjective experience there *must be an objective reality* to support it.

Certainly Christians believe in the validity of subjective experiences. Christianity abounds with unique experiences, but we do not appeal to experience alone, or experience for its own sake. Valid religious experiences must be based on truth and must be supported by the Word of God. Christianity's uniqueness, as the Bible indicates, is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Although the philosophy of pragmatism has many shortcomings, it does make one strong point: "Whatever passes as true must have direct tangency with life and experience" (Ramm, p. 208). *Direct tangency with life* indicates that it must touch on, relate to, and be connected with life and experience.

We are speaking now in very general terms. If I have had a religious experience, it may or may not have been a valid one. There are all kinds of experiences—nearly all religions can point to some. The argument from experience can be used to justify anything from the use of drugs, to participation in witchcraft, to the values of Zen. Christianity does not, as was stated before, appeal to experience for its own sake. Christianity has built into it a system of checks and balances which should serve to prevent going to extremes. Personal religious experiences (subjective in nature) must be verified, confirmed, supported, and checked by what is outlined in Scripture and approved by God.

What evidence is there to evaluate a religious experience?

Well, perhaps it is good to ask yourself two important questions. First, "What is the objective reality to which this subjective experience corresponds?" When you are able to answer this first question by "Jesus Christ as presented in Scripture," then the second one is "How many other people have

had the same or similar experience related to the same objective reality?" Now let us apply these two evidences to the experiences of Paul on the Damascus road and the Ethiopian official.

First, did Paul's experience correspond to some objective reality? Yes, it did. For him, the reality was Jesus Christ. Ever after, when he related the events of that day, he associated his experience with the resurrected Christ and the Lord's call to repentance and obedience.^c

As for the Ethiopian official, he saw no vision and heard no voice. Rather Philip told him "the good news of Jesus" (Acts 8:35). But when he had received this instruction, he asked to be baptized, affirming "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). This is all we know of his encounter. Tradition has it that when he returned to Ethiopia, he shared the message of Jesus; the result was the founding of the Christian church in Ethiopia.

Second, have there been others who have had the same or a similar experience related to Jesus? Yes, there have been many others. Remember that the most important part of these encounters mentioned was the complete transformation of a person's life. Each transformed life is added evidence of the reality and power of Jesus Christ, and the pages of history are full of examples of people whose life orientation was changed after encountering Him. The physical phenomena which accompanied Paul's encounter were unique. They were also all *temporary*. The transformation of his life was *permanent*. A personal encounter with Jesus Christ may or may not be accompanied by such unique outward sensations. It may be more in keeping with the experience of the Ethiopian. But nonetheless it will always be a life changing experience. The evidence from testimonials is overwhelming and we shall consider several of these later.

FOUR LEVELS OF BELIEF

Before discussing the specifics of religious conversion and sharing further examples of such, I must first emphasize the kind

of conversion we are seeking to establish as true. Dr. Walter Houston Clark, an American professor of psychology, says that religious *faith*^d, is “one of the most subtle and important problems of religious development” (Clark, p. 219). It involves more than just sitting down and thinking about it, coming to some acceptable conclusion and thereon building your faith. Reason has its proper role, but it is not the whole of what we have been saying about Christianity.

On the surface it appears easy to discover if a person is religious. Just ask him. Researchers, scholars and pollsters have done this repeatedly and have learned that most people are “believers,” to some degree at least, in a God and in life after death. But if we look more closely into the matter of religious faith, “we find the situation more complicated” (Ibid., p. 220). Therefore, it is important to our study to consider what Dr. Clark calls the four levels of belief.^e

Level One: Faith as Mere Words

His first level, technically called “stimulus-response verbalism,” is belief that is bound up in the power and use of words. Many people's “faith” is on this verbal level. Religion is simply a vocabulary, a way of expressing altruistic concepts, or transcendental symbolism. Belief, or faith, or religious experience on this level, is not very vital to one's life and conduct. One can take it or leave it and it makes little difference either way.

Level Two: Faith as Understanding

The second level of belief which Clark calls “intellectual comprehension,” is a very popular level of operation. It is into this category that the various proofs (remember we called them “pointers” in lesson two) for the existence of God fall. Reason and logic are the chief tools. However, they are incomplete if relied upon exclusively. This kind of belief may well not have any “relation with life nor affect it in the slightest degree” (Ibid.).

Of course reason plays a part in the development of faith, but the will and the emotions must also be involved. Scripture

emphasizes that we can and must understand God and His way of working in the world. Many texts clearly state God's position on the matter. "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure" (1 Kings 4:29). "For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6). There are literally dozens of such biblical encouragements that suggest the faculty of reason is important in our approach to God. The apostle Paul reiterates the importance of reason when he urges the Corinthians: "Do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature" (1 Corinthians 14:20).

Intellectual comprehension, when divorced from will and emotion, is weak in that it is unable to relate to a personal God and does not provide a life changing experience.

Level Three: Faith as Action

This level of belief called "behavioral demonstration" combines intellectual comprehension with action. Clark says, "A man's actions demonstrate his real beliefs much more clearly than do his words" (Clark, p. 233). A classic example of this kind of belief is given in the story Jesus told about the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Here was a man who not only believed intellectually in human dignity, but demonstrated that belief by his acts of mercy. This is getting very close to a true faith as far as Christianity is concerned. Practical, day-to-day living out of faith is a sure indication of valid Christian experience.

The main problem with this level, when related to Christian faith, is that it can be valid for any belief embodying a set of worthy moral or humanitarian standards, whether or not they are related to a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Even when virtuous action breaks forth we are never quite sure that a positive religious conviction lies at the root of it" (Clark, p. 223).

Level Four: Faith as Integration

Level four—called "comprehensive integration"—is a combination of "Faith as Understanding" and "Faith as Action," integrated with personal faith and commitment to truth as

revealed in Jesus Christ. The three previous levels are partial. Taken alone, they are not satisfactory.

“A belief becomes totally wholesome and fully admirable only when verbalized conviction is well comprehended through critical and creative thought, the whole well integrated with behavior to form a Gestalt perfectly convincing even to a misanthropic observer. The true saint has a universal appeal (Ibid.).

A person with mature faith is one who acts upon what truth he understands and continues to seek answers to puzzling or nagging questions. He blends ideals with practice and develops a consistent pattern of what he should *believe* with that kind of person he should *be*. As Dr. Orlo Strunk put it: “Our theology must become our psychology” (Strunk, p. 140). This indicates a mature faith, a growing faith, a faith built upon fact. It is a faith that is centered in history and rooted in reality. It is realistic about life and at the same time expresses a total confidence in the ability and power of God to accomplish His purpose in the earth and in the lives of each individual who will give Him the chance. This is a faith with an *expanded concept of reality* that goes beyond what is visible and temporal to the invisible and eternal. It is my hope that you are ready to move to this level of faith, which we must now discuss in more detail as religious conversion.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

The religious experiences talked of in this chapter are generally known as conversions. Some psychologists consider religious conversion to be simply transitional. A person who is searching finds a new body of ideas more to his liking than those he holds, so he accepts the new. It may be a sudden decision, or it may be gradual. In this general sense, conversion could just as easily be away from religion as toward it. Apostasy, or rejection of faith, may be as much conversion as is acceptance. Indeed the term may be applied in a non-religious context. For example, a person may switch to a left-wing political party from a right-wing political party. Or, someone may gradually change his attitude from dedication to anarchy and revolution to acceptance

of diplomacy and peaceful compromise. In each case some kind of conversion experience is involved.

Spiritual conversion is more complex. It is not simply transitional, although there is a transfer from one set of values to another. And while conversion is unique to each individual—for every human life is different—there are nevertheless recognizable stages in the process. The first two stages are hard to list separately because either of them can occur first. So let us say that the first and second stages involve a period of *unrest* and what some psychologists call *subconscious incubation*.

In the period of unrest there is a sense of unworthiness or incompleteness, a strange sense that something is missing from one's life. There may be a feeling of meaninglessness, or depression, or despair. During the period of subconscious incubation there are subtle factors at work in the psyche which slowly but surely lead a person to the realization that a dynamic religious faith is the only answer to life's great questions. In both cases, an acceptance of Jesus Christ is seen as the logical, proper, and necessary step that must be taken.

It may be that this is where you are now. You are reading this course in an attempt to find some answers. You are headed in the right direction, certainly not because I wrote it, but because the items discussed here will help you if you give God a chance in your life.

The third stage is the period of crisis or decision. However long or short the time of unrest and incubation may be, “the event of conversion comes to focus in a crisis of ultimate concern” (Johnson, p. 117). The *event* of conversion is the moment when the answer to the questions and the relief from the unrest are personally accepted. It is looking back and realizing that God was there all the time. It is facing the future and acknowledging that God is there as well. It is finally admitting that God is, in fact, present in the present. We stop running. We quit our game of intellectual hide and seek. We stop rationalizing our way out of a moral and spiritual corner. We are willing to be found, to be loved, to be changed by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul Tournier relates the story of a Jewish friend of his with whom he had conversations over a period of several months. This friend was seeking spiritual reality. Long discussions between them were getting nowhere. One day the friend went to Dr. Tournier to say he had found Christ as the reality he was looking for. The man had met a Christian who told him that he was an “intellectual glutton.” This caused the man to examine himself very deeply. He realized that he needed simply to commit himself to Christ and that then everything would fall into place. Tournier summarized his friend's experience in these words:

Examining his conscience, he had suddenly seen that his inexhaustible religious discussions, however interesting they might be, were nothing but a kind of intemperance, and that they were blocking the road to his conversion (Tournier, p. 114).

The moment of realization and acceptance is different for everyone. With some people there is a physical phenomenon which accompanies it. John Wesley (1703-1791), the great English minister, described his conversion as “being strangely warmed.” With others there is a psychological manifestation. One person described it this way: it was “as if a strong current of life had suddenly been poured into me.” With most, there is a change in their feelings. They feel at peace; they feel loved; they are full of joy. These personal experiences are good, but they are valid only because they correspond to an objective reality. A fundamental transformation has taken place in each life. Scripture promises this change, although it does not promise any particular expressions accompanying the change. What does happen is *regeneration*: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Bible describes this in many other ways—new birth, adoption by God, justification by faith, reconciliation to God, gift of new life, liberation, etc.

All these terms imply that the event of conversion is both an end and a beginning. The subconscious incubation and unrest give way to the new birth (the event) which in turn leads to

growth and maturation. Hence *continuity* is the final stage of conversion, and it is lifelong. Some new Christians experience a rosy afterglow to their conversion: for a few days everything is wonderful. But remember Tournier's warning that a religious experience does not make all our problems go away instantaneously.

What good is this experience then? First, life for the Christian, instead of being a fragmented collection of joys and pains, fits together and begins to make sense. Second, the pains and problems can be shared with God, who has the power and wisdom to heal and resolve them or to help us deal with them. Third, in spite of the problems, there is a sense of inner peace, because God is there and because there is a reason for living. Fourth, loneliness is over, because Jesus is a friend who does not go away and because there are other Christians to relate to. Fifth, God's Word provides, not pat answers, but standards for a consistent and coherent life-style.^f Finally, the Christian perspective on time includes eternity so that, without escapism, there is relief from tension in the face of inexplicable set-backs and injustices.

By conversion I am not talking about a religion *of* experience, in which what happens to you or how you feel is the final authority. No, not at all. Religion of experience alone avoids the strain of theology, the challenge of intellectual pursuit, and becomes simply a passing fashion which people accept if it happens to suit their interest. R. A. Knox in *Enthusiasm* has eloquently demonstrated the pitfalls in a faith that relies too heavily on experience alone. But do not refuse a faith simply because it includes experience.

OUTSTANDING EXAMPLES OF CONVERSION ^G

An evidence for the validity of Christian conversion is that people of all nationalities, cultures, and times have shared in the same experience. Another evidence is that it works! Thousands of cases could be cited, and documentation given, to illustrate and prove the impact of Christian conversion. The examples selected here represent different cultures, different backgrounds, different starting points, and different kinds of personality. The

mechanics of their conversion experience differ, too, but the effects are the same: a new world-view and a new life-style, centered in Jesus Christ.

Professor O. Hallesby, Norway

The late Dr. Hallesby wrote a book entitled *Why I Am a Christian*. This book is a simple direct presentation in which he relates his spiritual saga from skepticism and doubt to a firm Christian faith. Because of his education, he shared the doubts of many educated people. He was convinced that if a person did not know Christian life from his own experience, intellectual difficulties would quickly make him skeptical.

For him doubters were of two kinds. One kind was “those who live in doubt because their skepticism shields them from the accusations of conscience.” This kind of doubt, he believed, could never be overcome by logical arguments because it is based in emotion rather than reason. Only personal experience could lead such a doubter to faith. The second kind of doubter, according to him, was one who was in painful distress because of his doubt and was really tired of uncertainty. He felt that this was his position. He was intellectually honest about wanting to *know for sure*. His sympathy with the honest doubter is evident when he says,

I, too, have passed through the various states of doubt. I have felt its anguish. But I also know a way out of doubt and into faith, a way which is open to all doubters, and this way does not do violence to any of our human faculties, not even to our reasoning powers.

Dr. Hallesby found the way out of doubt because he was completely honest about wanting to know the truth. Scripture teaches that any one who honestly wants to know will get to know. “If any man's will is to do his (God's) will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (John 7:17). Here, Jesus promises to give personal assurance on the basis of experience. The only condition is to be willing to do the will of God.

These words of Jesus tell us something very important about doubt. It is not due to great educational or intellectual achievements.

Nor is it due, at the other extreme, to a modesty which feels so much knowledge is lacking that truth cannot be known. "The cause of your doubt is something entirely different," says Hallesby. "You lack certain experiences. That is why you find yourself in doubt and uncertainty."

This man's conversion was not spectacular in the same way as the apostle Paul's but it was just as definite and complete. Like the Ethiopian official, he sincerely desired to know truth, and this knowledge was given to him in an unspectacular but definite way. His life demonstrated the change that had come about in him. As a result of the conversion he experienced, the meaning in life he found, and the answers to questions he discovered, he was able to help others who were honestly seeking truth.

Sadhu Sundar Shigh, India

Sadhu Sundar Singh is a recent example of a life transformed by a vision of Jesus. An Indian youth who once bitterly persecuted Christians, Sundar Singh became one of the most remarkable ministers of the gospel of the twentieth century.

As a Sikh of a prominent family, Sudar was deeply religious, but his religion could not satisfy his search for reality. His early life was beset with disappointments. Illness and the death of his mother contributed to his deep despair. He decided to stay in his room three days and three nights waiting for a revelation of truth. If none came by a certain hour, he decided he would throw himself on the tracks in front of a fast-moving train.

Three days and two nights passed without any revelation of truth. Only a few hours remained before his appointment with death. In agony of soul he cried, "O God, reveal Thyself before I die."

That night he fell asleep, and while sleeping he had a dream in which Jesus Christ appeared and spoke to him in Hindustani: "You are praying to know the right way; why do you not take it?"

I am the way.” That night Sundar became a Christian. He said: “I can serve no one else but Jesus!”

From the moment of his encounter with Jesus, he was different. His despair was gone. He had a purpose in life. Nothing could turn him away from his desire to serve Christ—not pleading, not the offer of wealth, not even persecution. His family disowned him and tried to poison him, but he recovered and fled. He was baptized and spent the rest of his life serving Christ and helping people. As a celibate and mystic, he was considered eccentric and strange by other Christians. But the fact is he was a changed man, and through persecutions of the worst sort, he witnessed to the power of Jesus Christ. It is not known when he died; he was last seen and heard from in 1929 when he attempted to enter Tibet in order to bring the good news of Jesus to that forbidden land. The Indian government announced in 1933 that he was presumed dead. His life of rugged discipleship remains as an example of the difference Christ makes in a personal life.

Ni To-Sheng, China

Ni To-Sheng was born in China in 1903 to a slave woman who had been forced to marry. As a result, he had a very difficult childhood. At the age of eighteen, he was faced with the person of Jesus Christ. Ni To-Sheng accepted Him in a straightforward, unspectacular way. By this act of the will, he committed himself to follow Christ in total, lifelong obedience. His understanding of commitment is seen in his life of giving and self-sacrifice.

Despite the agonies of persecution and the hardships of imprisonment for his faith, he ministered to his people. When he could no longer preach and teach, he turned to writing. The non-Asian Christian community today knows Ni To-Sheng best as Watchman Nee, the author of many books on the spiritual life, the church, personal devotions and other spiritual themes.

He died in prison in 1972 at the age of sixty-nine. Very little is known about his twenty years in prison except that he endured many hardships. A favorite expression of his was: “I want nothing for myself,

I want everything for the Lord.” Certainly the life of this oriental martyr is an inspiration to Christians; it demonstrates what it means to be a totally committed Christian. Remember that the conversion of Watchman Nee seemed to have no unusual outward signs to confirm it, yet the transformed life and the high ideals put into practice against all odds are evidence of a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ.

C. S. Lewis, England

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) is one of the most read Christian authors of this century. He was born and raised in Great Britain. He was a graduate of Oxford University and later became a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge.

Professor Lewis became a Christian only after he had subjected the Christian faith to the most difficult intellectual tests. It was at the age of forty that he became convinced of the existence of God.

Surprised by Joy (1955), his “spiritual autobiography,” was written “partly in answer to requests that I would tell how I passed from Atheism to Christianity.” First Lewis became a theist. Then there followed a period of searching, when he investigated various religions—temple prostitution, monstrosities, cruelty. He came to the point where he felt that no religion had such a historical claim as Christianity. Yet Lewis still thought of God as impersonal. Nor had he come to see the necessity and purpose of Jesus Christ. He began to attend church, although the idea was unattractive to him. Soon he began to see that if God existed at all, then He had to be a God with the ability to love, to feel, and to reach man. It was then that the full message of Christianity, including the incarnation of Christ, made sense. He expressed it this way: “Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not ‘a religion,’ nor ‘a philosophy.’ It is the summing up and actuality of them all.”

He describes his encounter with Christ in very personal terms. It was not a highly emotional experience, nor was it

something he thought a great deal about before it happened. He says, in fact, that what “I found was something I had not wanted.” Yet somehow “the final step was taken” and C. S. Lewis became a Christian.

In later life he continued to excel in the field of literary criticism, and he authored many Christian “classics,” in addition to *Surprised by Joy*. His *Mere Christianity*, one of several books on aspects of Christian thought, was recommended in lesson three; his *Screwtape Letters* and the Space trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*) are world-famous; even his series for children, the modern mythology of *Narnia*, makes fascinating reading for adults. Lewis, together with his friends like J. R. R. Tolkien and Dorothy L.

Sayers, is a demonstration that the scholar-artist can be a Christian, and that this enhances—not destroys—his intellect and creative talent.

Lewis personifies the honest search for truth. He was convinced that in a God-directed universe, the honest seeker would find truth.

What I like about experience is that it is such an honest thing. You may take any number of wrong turnings; but keep your eyes open and you will not be allowed to go very far before the warning signs appear. You may have deceived yourself, but experience is not trying to deceive you. The universe rings true wherever you fairly test it.

The foregoing examples of Christian conversion experiences show that for some the encounter with Jesus Christ was sudden and emotionally overwhelming, while for others it was a gradual and gentle recognition. Some find it easy to believe when presented with the claims of Jesus Christ. A few have been given supernatural evidence to aid in the decision, while others must approach faith by intellectual reasoning. The important thing is that these men, representative of so many others, all encountered Jesus Christ and found Him to satisfy their expectations.

THE MAN OF THE WILL

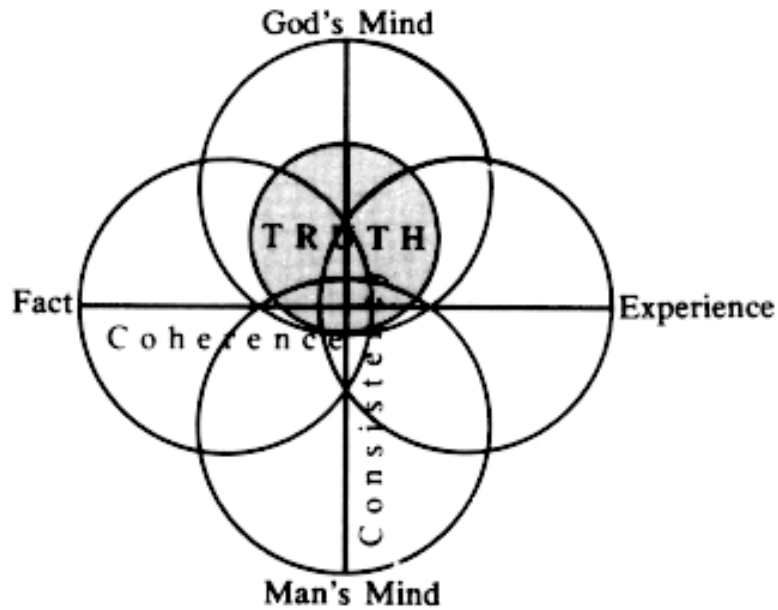
C.S. Lewis was convinced—and I am too—that the search for truth (what Lewis calls “experience”) leads ultimately to an encounter with Jesus Christ. The problem so often is intellectual dishonesty along the way. But I believe that your arrival at this point in this course indicates you are sincerely willing to accept truth wherever you find it. Moreover, I believe that you are sincerely ready to act upon that truth.

In the Introduction, I mentioned three kinds of persons: the man of intellect, the man of emotion, and the man of the will. Each of us has these characteristics within us. The fault of the first two types is that they neglect or refuse to admit the importance of the others. The intellectual man will not accept the validity of feelings and refuses to accept the validity of religious experience where non-rational elements may be involved. The emotional man is unwilling to discipline himself to think things through, and, while intolerant of the rational approach, falls short in his own religious experience by failing to find the objective reality to which it corresponds.

What then is the man of will, whom I identified with the informed and committed Christian? He is the man who integrates the intellectual and emotional aspects, and moves beyond them by conscious choice. If he starts primarily at an emotional level (like Paul), he is ready to submit his experience to the rigors of intellectual inquiry. As Pinnock says, “The heart cannot delight in what the mind rejects as false” (quoted in McDowell, p. 3). If he begins from an intellectual level (like the Ethiopian official), he is ready to move beyond mere verbal assent, which is the lowest level of belief as mere intellectual comprehension. The man of the will *acts* upon what truth he understands.

The first disciples of Jesus Christ had “favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). They had moved to coherent action. What they knew about Jesus and what they had felt in the earth-shaking experience of Pentecost (read Acts 2:1-42 for the full account) had been integrated by their will and turned outward into action that others could understand and appreciate. If it is genuine, the encounter experience of conversion will be followed by a life-style consistent with and flowing out of truth. And Truth is the One who is encountered. The diagram below

illustrates Christian conversion and the new life of coherent action which Christians call discipleship.



The Christian is neither a naive enthusiast relying on emotional experiences, nor an intellectual pygmy giving verbal assent to an irrelevant code. The Christian is a person who has met Jesus Christ and, having understood and accepted His claims, has entered into life with a new and different perspective. He does not claim to have all the answers, nor is he instantaneously perfect. But he continues to seek answers to his unresolved questions, and with God's help he works on those personality traits which are displeasing to Him. The Christian endeavors to blend ideals with practice, and sets about developing a consistent pattern of behavior. For the Christian, the truth about believing, being, and doing are all found in that same objective reality—Jesus Christ the Lord. The coherent and consistent life is found in being like Him!

A CHALLENGE

In lesson one I challenged you to complete the study of this material. You have done that. In lessons two and three I challenged you to pray and ask God for help in your search for truth and that Christ might be revealed to you. Lesson four contained a challenge to read the New Testament.

Now comes the final but most important challenge. It involves more than any of the others. They were challenges to your time, your pride, or your past prejudices. *Now I challenge you to accept Jesus Christ, to identify with Him, to encounter His life changing power, and to decide to take on a new walk and a new direction in life.*

But it is essential to understand the *implications of* such an encounter of decision before entering into it. Frank Colquhoun, an English-Anglican minister, has written a helpful book entitled *Total Christianity*, in which he says that being a Christian involves four things. First is the experience of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or *commitment*, as he calls it. We have dealt with this aspect of Christianity rather extensively in this lesson. Second is *community* or participation. This is seen as the reaching out to other Christians and other people in general. It is here that a local gathering of Christians plays an important role. The Church, in spite of imperfections, *is* the Body of Christ. Therefore, we should be involved there. Third is *creed* or a belief system. There must be sound rational and spiritual bases for all our attitudes and actions. Dogma, theology or specific beliefs must provide an inner foundation to our experience and commitment. Fourth is *conduct* or ethics. As Christians we serve a new Master. We have a moral and spiritual responsibility to Him. The sincere Christian has a particular life-style, a pattern of morality, a way of behaving that does not contradict his statement of faith.

Thus to be a “total” Christian requires commitment (personal religious experience), community (integration into the church), creed (a belief system based on Scripture and the use of our minds), and conduct (an ethic for life). Such a faith is not intended to be easy, but it is by far the best way. It is personal, yet social. It is experiential, yet rational. It touches every aspect of our being.

How do you go about accepting Jesus Christ? How can you have an encounter with Him? How can you have an experience of conversion and begin a coherent and consistent life? This is not a recipe, but here is a list of suggestions, which you could take as *steps toward God*. The Bible assures you that He is more than ready to meet you, if you move in His direction: “You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart I will be found by you, says the lord” (Jeremiah 29:13-14).

Steps Toward God

1. Recognize that you do not have the ability within yourself to bring inner harmony and peace. Admit that you have broken God's law, that you are guilty, and that you need and want help (Romans 3:23).
2. Recognize that Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6), and hence the only One who can help you and bring peace. Also, realize that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are the only means by which you receive forgiveness and regeneration (Acts 4:12).
3. Ask Jesus to come to you, to cleanse you, to forgive you, to change you, to refresh you and to give you new life (2 Corinthians 5:17).
4. By an act of your will, give your whole life to Jesus Christ, so that He can help you make it a more beautiful thing than you ever dreamed possible. Determine to follow Jesus, which implies your willingness to obey Him in everything, and put His way first.
5. Carry out that promise by praying, reading the Bible and finding a place of worship. Following your commitment, obey the Bible by seeking to be baptized and participating with other committed Christians in the Lord's Supper.
6. Finally, go on developing as a new person in Jesus Christ, following the instructions in 2 Peter 1:5-8 for an effective Christian life.

IMPLICATIONS OF ENCOUNTER

If you follow these steps slowly, sincerely, and deliberately, the Holy Spirit of God will make them real and important in your personal experience.

If you have made the choice to accept Jesus Christ into your life, I encourage you to continue in your new faith. Some time ago I was conducting a Bible study for university students. In the middle of the lecture a girl raised her hand and asked me a personal question. Just a few weeks before she had decided to become a committed Christian rather than a mere “culture Christian.” Now she was facing certain questions and problems as a result of her new commitment. Her question to me was: “Do you ever have any doubts or questions with regard to the Bible, Jesus or Christianity?”

Without hesitation I replied: “Yes, of course. But as a Christian I approach the question from the standpoint of someone on the *inside* rather than someone on the *outside*. And I have great confidence in the Holy Spirit to keep His word when Jesus said that He (the Holy Spirit) would lead us into all truth. I do not wait to have faith until every question I have is resolved. For the Christian, faith comes first and understanding always follows.”

I had one professor in seminary who said: “A question properly asked is a problem half solved.” In a very real sense this is true. We need to ask the right questions. This course has attempted to pose the questions—at least some of them—and to point you in the right direction.

From my own experience I can tell you there is joy in being a Christian. It is not a mere week-end journey; it is a lifelong pilgrimage. It is not like reading fiction; it is experiencing fact. It is not just existence in a dull world; it is the exhilaration of mountain climbing. It is not retreating from the world into fantasy; it is looking life square in the face. It is not sitting in the stadium; it is moving into the arena and becoming involved yourself. And this life is for you who accept this invitation to encounter.

REMINDER: Please do not forget to complete the Student Interactions according to the instructions given in the Course Information. Remember that Interaction A is a guide review of the material covered in the course. You should prepare for it as you would for an examination, paying particular attention to the material covered in the Self-Check Reviews. When you have completed Interaction A, please mail it as instructed.

Since you have completed the course, your comments in Interaction B will be particularly valuable. Please be frank and thorough in the way you fill in this section. It will help us be aware of what is needed, and we may be able to help you with supplementary material.

You may recall that Interaction C is an invitation to record your position on an encounter with Jesus Christ or to ask for personal contact. Without wishing to pressure you, we say that we welcome your response in Interaction C.

^aThe Bible places a great deal of importance on the name given to an individual. "In Scripture names were generally descriptive of a person, of his position, of some circumstance affecting him, hope entertained concerning him, etc., so that 'the name' often came to stand for the person" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "Name"). When a person had a radical change in circumstances or an encounter with God, it was not unusual for him to take or to receive a new name. There are numerous instances of this in Scripture. You will recall from lesson three that Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter.

Modern psychologists agree that the name becomes a symbol of the self, and a well-liked name inspires confidence and self-esteem, while an unpopular, embarrassing, or strange name increases the psychological problems relating to self-worth.

^bNote that this account is immediately before that of the apostle Paul. Thus, side by side in Acts, you have two very clear but very different conversion experiences.

^cPaul's conversion experience has already been cited. However, he later recounted his experience as a part of his defense after being arrested as a Christian. See Acts 22:1-21 and 26:1-23 and compare them with 9:1-25 and you will have a complete picture of Paul's encounter with Jesus and the effect it had upon his life.

^dClark uses “faith” in much the same way as I have been talking about “religious experiences” with regard to an encounter with Jesus Christ. Very shortly now, I will use the term “conversion,” to describe the religious experience of faith in Jesus Christ, which constitutes becoming a Christian.

^eThese four levels are discussed in Clark's book pages 220-224. While I have used his basic outline, which concerns primarily the psychological aspects of belief, I have supplemented it with my own thoughts.

^fRemember from lesson one the criteria for testing truth? Perhaps it would be good to turn back to those pages dealing with *coherent consistency*.

^gEach of the following testimonials came from an autobiographical (Hallesby, Lewis) or biographical (Sadhu Sundar Singh, Ni To-Sheng) account. In each case only *one* source was used, which is listed in the “Reference Cited” section at the end of the lesson, and page citations are not given.

REFERENCES CITED LESSON FIVE

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2. Colquhoun, Frank. *Total Christianity*. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1965.
3. Davey, Cyril J. *Sadhu Sundar Singh*. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1963.
4. Hallesby, O. *Why I Am a Christian*. London, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968.
5. Johnson, Paul E. *Psychology of Religion*. New York, New York, USA: Abingdon Press, 1959.
6. Kinnear, Angus I. *Against the Tide*. Eastbourne, England: Victory Press, 1973.
7. Knox, R. A. *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1973.
8. Lewis, C. S. *Surprised by Joy*. London, England: Collins Fontana Books, 1973.
9. McDowell, Josh. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. San Bernadino, California, USA: Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1972.
10. Pinnock, Clark. *Set Forth Your Case*. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1973.
11. Ramm, Bernard. *Protestant Christian Evidences*. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1966.
12. Strunk, Orlo. *The Choice Called Atheism*. Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Abingdon Press, 1968.
13. Tournier, Paul. *The Healing of Persons*. New York, New York, USA: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965.

FURTHER STUDY SUGGESTIONS

Allport, Gordon W. *The Individual and His Religion*. New York, New York, USA: The Macmillan Company, 1960 (paperback edition).

The whole book is profitable as a psychological interpretation of religion. Chapters five and six are especially good on the nature of doubt and faith.

Baillie, John. *Invitation to Pilgrimage*. London, England: Penguin Books, 1960.

The book was written for the "Christian agnostic," i.e., the person who may be Christian in name only but not in faith or experience. The author speaks clearly but sympathetically to such a person.

Colquhoun, Frank. *Total Christianity*. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1965.

A minister in the Church of England writes forcefully on what it means to be a Christian. This book is highly recommended for new Christians and those who want to know the demands of Christian living.

Davey, Cyril J. *Sadhu Sundar Singh*. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1963.

The biography of the great Indian Christian mystic whose life was summarized in this lesson.

Edman, V. Raymond, editor. *Crisis Experiences*. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: Dimension Books, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., no date.

This 96 page book recounts experiences in the lives of nine outstanding Christians, mostly American or British. The book is a reprint of a series of magazine articles.

Hallesby, O. *Why I Am a Christian*. London, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968.

In this excellent book, Professor Hallesby answers objections to and doubts about Christianity, using illustrations from his own life.

Kinnear, Angus I. *Against the Tide*. Eastbourne, England: Victory Press, 1973.

This is the moving story of Watchman Nee. It is an excellent biography, carefully researched and well written.

Kitwood, T. M. *What Is Human?* London, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970.

The author discusses three views of man: humanist, existentialist, Christian. He gives a brief appraisal of the first two philosophies and writes to any who have "not found the way to a full Christian belief."

Lewis, C. S. *Surprised by Joy*. London, England: Collins Fontana Books, 1973.

This is the autobiography of one of the most creative and provocative Christian writers of this century. It is an attempt to trace his search for spiritual meaning and to show how he found it in Jesus Christ. Any of Lewis' books are worth reading.

Little, Paul E. *Know Why You Believe*. Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971.

An excellent book. Chapter 12 relates especially to the topics discussed. It is from this chapter that the title was taken, "Is Christian Experience Valid?"

PERSONAL STUDY

1 Read the following Scripture texts—Romans 3:21-23, 6:23, 10:8-13; John 1:12; John 1:9. Write a brief sentence, based on these verses, about each of the following words which are important in a consideration of Christian conversion.

Sin

.....

Confession

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Belief

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Sons of God.....

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2 Reflect upon the idea of *subconscious incubation* as discussed in this lesson. Can you list some of the things that have happened in your life which helped influence you to consider Christianity and this course?

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3 Have you known persons who have been an example of Christianity in the way I have described? If so, list the main characteristics of their life of faith for you.

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.....

4 If you want to become a Christian now, it is possible. Simply ask Jesus Christ to forgive you of all wrongdoing and to make you acceptable in His sight. Pray as though you were talking to a friend, for you will be. Write in the space below why you want to accept Christ.

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.....
.....
.....

5 If you want help in starting a prayer of repentance and confession use the following one and then add your own words at the end.

“Lord Jesus, I confess my need of You and desire to give You my life and my future. Forgive all my wrong deeds and shortcomings, and make my life clean. Make me a child of God and help me every day to live for Your glory and honor. I invite you to become the Lord of my life and the center of my existence. Send the Holy Spirit to guide, strengthen, and empower me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.”

Now write the impressions you had when you prayed and what effect you feel these will have on your life.

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PERSONAL STUDY RESPONSES GUIDELINES

- 1** Sin — *Everyone* has sinned; the result of sin is *death*; sin can be *forgiven*.

Confession — If we confess (acknowledge and be sorry for) our sins, Jesus will forgive us. If we confess (acknowledge and proclaim, a second meaning of the word) Jesus Christ, we shall be saved from the effects of sin.

Belief — Belief is a matter of the heart (the will), results in our standing before God with no shame or guilt, makes us all equal before God, and is the means by which we receive the power to become more like God (His children).

Sons of God — Becoming Sons (children) of God is accomplished by our accepting Jesus as Lord and by believing He is who He said He was. But it is also a process by which His power transforms us into His image so that we bear a “family resemblance.”
- 2** Your answer; but you might include events which have clearly shown you your personal needs (for friendship, direction in life, forgiveness, etc.) and contacts with informed and committed Christians.
- 3** Your answer; perhaps these Christians have shown qualities such as concern, consistency, and commitment.
- 4** Your answer; perhaps you appreciate now your need of forgiveness and Christ’s ability alone to meet this need. Perhaps you are tired of a meaningless existence, and desire the new life and purpose Jesus gives. Perhaps you realize that God has been slowly revealing Himself to you, because you have been seeking truth.
- 5** Your answer.

SELF-CHECK REVIEW QUESTIONS

1 After studying the conversion experiences of the Ethiopian official and Saul (Acts 8 and 9), please match the events with the person and put them in chronological order by marking **x-1**, **y-1**, **y-2**, etc.

- **a** was healed and baptized
 - **b** had encounter with Jesus Christ in a vision
 - **c** was baptized as evidence of faith
 - **d** persecuted Christians to please God
 - **e** accepted explanations from a Christian
 - **f** saw a light and heard a voice
 - **g** had encounter with Jesus Christ in Scripture
 - **h** declared faith in Jesus as Son of God
 - **i** offered obedience to Jesus
 - **j** studied the Scriptures looking for truth
- x) Ethiopian
y) Saul

Thought provoker: Can you detect the basic elements of search-encounter response seen here, in the beginning of friendships you have made? Perhaps you were lonely, met someone, were attracted, etc. Is there a pattern for you? Can you relate this to where you are in your relationship with Jesus Christ?

2 Christian conversion is a unique experience for each person. Which of the following elements would be special or extraordinary, and which would be common among those who have been converted? Write **N** for those which are *not usual* and **U** for those which are *usual*.

- **a** seeing a vision
- **b** subconscious incubation
- **c** period of unrest
- **d** search for spiritual reality
- **e** crying and shaking
- **f** realizing the need for Jesus Christ
- **g** feeling strong currents of life
- **h** being strangely warmed
- **i** accepting new life from Christ
- **j** being regenerated
- **k** being instantaneously delivered from drugs
- **l** deciding to follow Jesus for ever

Thought provoker: How does Christian conversion differ from any other radical personal experience you have had? How do you react to those differences?

3 The men used as examples of conversion show a number of qualities in their lives. Write in the blank provided the initials of the man or men who best show the following qualities; if none, write **X**; if all, write **ALL**.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| a intellectual doubt | O. Hallesby |
| b desperate need of God | Sadhu Sundar Singh |
| c intellectual arrogance | Ni To-Sheng |
| d commitment and service | C. S. Lewis |
| e sincere desire for truth | |
| f endurance under persecution | |
| g new purpose | |
| h high ideals put into practice | |
| i retreat from life | |
| j outstanding scholarship | |

Thought provoker: Consider the qualities which predominate in your life. Which negative traits do you need help in overcoming? Which positive traits do you need help in developing?

4 Please match the kind of faith with the appropriate technical term for the level of belief and its definition. Write the numbers for term and definition in the blanks provided.

a..... +.....faith as words

b +faith as understanding

c..... +.....faith as action

d +.....faith as integration

- 1) behavioral demonstration
- 2) comprehensive integration
- 3) intellectual comprehension
- 4) stimulus-response verbalism
- 5) verbalized and comprehended conviction carried out in consistent behavior
- 6) vocabulary dissociated from life-style
- 7) understanding shown in action
- 8) reasoned belief dissociated from action

Thought provoker: At various times and for various things, we all hold different levels of belief. Find something in your life for each level, then ask yourself if there is correlation between the amount of time you.

5 Please circle the letter of the descriptions which would be consistent with the concept of the man of will.

- a) seeks emotional experiences
- b) seeks encounter with truth
- c) subjects emotional experiences to intellectual scrutiny
- d) acts upon truth as felt and understood
- e) rejects experiences with any emotion
- f) desires to unite belief and experience in coherent action
- g) is intolerant of rational approach to religion
- h) accepts the validity of feelings
- i) claims to have all the answers
- j) chooses to identify with Jesus Christ

Thought provoker: In the human psyche the domains of intellect, emotion, and will are evidently difficult to separate. Consider, however, whether you yourself have been primarily a “man of intellect” or a “man of emotion” and whether you prepared to become a “man of will.”

SELF-CHECK REVIEW ANSWERS

- 1 a** y-5
b y-3
c x-5
d y-1
e x-2
f y-2
g x-3
h x-4
i y-4
j x-1
- 2 a** N
b U
c U
d U
e N
f U
g N
h N
i U
j U
k N
l U
- 3 a** OH, CSL
b SSS
c X
d ALL
e OH, SSS, CSL
f SSS, NTS
g ALL
h NTS
i X
j OH, CSL
- 4 a** 4) + 6)
b 3) + 8)
c 1) + 7)
d 2) + 5)
- 5 b)** c), d), f), h), and j)

CHALLENGE TO ENCOUNTER

**STUDENT
INTERACTIONS**

INSTRUCTIONS

The first part of this student Interaction booklet, *Interaction A*, gives you an opportunity to review the entire contents of this course. Please answer the questions on the answer sheet given on page 189 and return it along with *Interaction B* and *Interaction C* to your local ICI director.

Interaction B gives you an opportunity to express your opinions of this course and how it is valuable? Your opinion is valuable to us. This is why even if you do not complete this study for one reason or another, please indicate your response on form B and return it to us as soon as you can.

Interaction C lets you tell us of your encounter with Jesus Christ. Let us know if you wish further personal contact from us.

STUDENT INTERACTION A

1 Please match the statements with the criteria for truth which they best describe. Write the numbers for the appropriate statements in the blanks provided.

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| <p>.... a Feelings</p> <p>.... b Instinct</p> <p>.... c Pragmatism</p> <p>.... d Sense perception</p> <p>.... e Systematic consistency</p> <p>.... f Tradition</p> | <p>1) Practical, but often overgeneralized</p> <p>2) Stabilizing influence, but overdependent on source and transmission</p> <p>3) Oversubjective but important part of human personality</p> <p>4) Fact-related but indicating cohesion and agreement</p> <p>5) Source of truth experienced, but sometimes incomplete and inaccurate</p> <p>6) Forceful but altered by conditioning</p> |
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2 Even though we cannot know all truth, we can define it. What is truth from a Christian perspective?

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3 Please match the argument for God's existence with its definition and formulation, by selecting the appropriate numbers from each column.

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| <p>a +.....axiological</p> <p>b +.....cosmological</p> <p>c +.....ontological</p> <p>d +.....teleological</p> | <p>1) argument from design</p> <p>2) argument from first cause</p> <p>3) argument from idea of God</p> <p>4) argument from values</p> <p>5) Anselm</p> <p>6) Aquinas</p> <p>7) Kant</p> |
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4 Though the arguments listed in question three are treated as “scientific knowledge,” they fall short of proving the existence of God. What are the shortcomings of these kinds of arguments and how, according to Christianity, can we get to know that God exists.

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5 Which of the following statements are evidence for the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Please circle the appropriate letters.

- a)** The disciples needed someone to be a Messiah.
- b)** The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus correspond in detail to prophecy.
- c)** Jesus' own claim is supported by His character.
- d)** Jesus called God, “Father.”
- e)** The disciples were ethically incapable of inventing the resurrection.
- f)** Jesus' claim to be God's Son was approved by the religious leaders.
- g)** Five hundred eyewitnesses could testify to His resurrection.
- h)** Jesus foretold His own death and resurrection.
- i)** Jesus' body was never found; the tomb was empty.
- j)** Jesus appealed to His miracles as signs of God's approval and His authority.

6 Often people judge Christians by what they are not. Write a paragraph about what being a Christian disciple should imply.

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7 In one sense the Bible is like any literature; in another sense it is different because it is God's revelation to man. Which of these approaches are recommended for intelligent study of the Bible because it is *literature* (mark with L)? Which of these approaches are recommended because it is the *Bible* particularly and therefore God's Word (mark with B)? Which of these approaches are *not recommended* at all (mark with X)?

- **a** Read Genesis 1 and Revelation 22; guess the rest.
- **b** Read systematically and intelligently.
- **c** Use encyclopedia and dictionaries when you have difficulties.
- **d** Read Luke and Acts first.
- **e** Ask for God's help as you read.
- **f** Understand the Old Testament in light of the New.
- **g** Impose your views on the text.
- **h** Try to understand words in the sense used by the author.
- **i** Read commentaries but don't read the text.
- **j** Tackle the difficulties of the text before reading it.
- **k** Let your life be influenced by its message.
- **l** Distinguish between literal and pictorial language.
- **m** Pray when you don't understand something.
- **n** Read to see what God says to *you*.

8 What arguments could you present for the Bible as an infallible authority? Make a *list*. underlining those arguments *you* feel are strongest.

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9 This is the conversion experience of a young Belgian woman. Please read it carefully before beginning the identification questions on next page.

- 1) She was a culture Christian, for whom church-going was mechanical.
- 2) As a student, she adopted a materialistic philosophy and abandoned church-going.
- 3) She got involved in hypnotism and spiritism.
- 4) She had family problems and was near suicide.
- 5) She came into contact with a foreign student who was an informed and committed Christian.
- 6) She was intrigued by the student's apology for an inconsiderate action.
- 7) She refuted the student's witness about Christ with logical arguments.
- 8) While maintaining contact with the student, she chose to ignore his encouragements to read the Bible.

- 9) Seven months later she had a sudden revelation of the beauty of nature.
- 10) With it, she had the urge to read the Gospels.
- 11) She read the Gospels rapidly, without understanding.
- 12) Though she found the Bible boring, she willed to keep reading it.
- 13) She met more informed and committed Christians, who impressed her with their peacefulness and sense of fulfillment.
- 14) She realized that life could be meaningful and that her problems could be resolved.
- 15) Having had a religious experience of God in nature and imitating the Christians she associated with—she thought she was a Christian.
- 16) She realized that she was not a Christian after all, for she had not had the life-transforming experience of regeneration
- 17) She felt and understood the need of Jesus Christ, and consciously decided by an act of will to commit herself to Him.
- 18) She read a booklet which gave her steps to take to become a Christian and she followed these instructions.
- 19) When no outward expressions of conversion came, she had doubts, but she made a conscious decision to resist doubts.
- 20) She began to read the Bible slowly, using a study guide.
- 21) Through the Bible and the study guide, her questions began to be answered.
- 22) She established contact with the Christians of *University Action*.
- 23) Through reading the Bible she was convinced of her need to be baptized and to participate with other committed Christians in the Lord's Supper.
- 24) She has gained a new sense of self-worth, replacing her former inferiority complex.
- 25) She has learned to accept her family difficulties and has developed a stable relationship there.
- 26) She has found a job where she is content and appreciated and is dedicated to developing a consistent Christian life-style.

In your opinion, which of the previous sentences are clear illustrations of each of the aspects of Christian conversion? Write the numbers of appropriate statements in the blanks provided.

- **a** period of unrest
- **b** subconscious incubation
- **c** search for truth
- **d** event of conversion
- **e** continuity

In your opinion, which of the previous sentences clearly indicate the truth of each of these statements? Again, write all appropriate numbers in the blanks.

- **f** Religious experiences must be related to the objective reality of Jesus Christ.
- **g** Many people's faith is on a verbal level only.
- **h** Conversion comes about when belief is intelligently and willfully transformed into action.
- **i** Becoming a Christian does not mean being automatically rid of all problems; it does mean that there is hope.
- **j** For the Christian, faith comes first and understanding always follows.

ANSWER SHEETS

INTERACTION A

If you wish to receive a grade for this course, please record your answers for Interactions A on these pages and forward it to your ICI instructor with B and C.

- 1** a.....
b.....
c.....
d.....
e.....
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- 3** a..... +.....
b..... +.....
c..... +.....
d..... +.....

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- 5** a) f)
b) g)
c) h)
d) i)
e) j)

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7 **a**..... **h**.....
 b..... **i**.....
 c..... **j**.....
 d..... **k**.....
 e..... **l**.....
 f..... **m**.....
 g..... **n**.....

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1 **a**..... **f**.....
 b..... **g**.....
 c..... **h**.....
 d..... **i**.....
 e..... **j**.....

STUDENT INTERACTION B

You are invited to give your opinions about this course, *whatever they may be*. Please complete this section as fully as possible *whenever you stop studying* this course, whether you finish this course or not.

IN GENERAL, I think this course
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SPECIFICALLY,

Lesson One
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Lesson Two
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Lesson Three
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Lesson Four
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Lesson Five
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Personal Study and Self-Check Review
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... I completed the course.

... I stopped studying this course after lesson
because
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SUGGESTIONS: I wish this course had talked more about

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I would be interested in a similar study on the subject of

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Signed

(please print)

Name

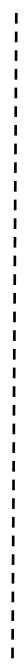
Address

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Phone

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STUDENT INTERACTION C

You may complete this sheet *at any time* and mail it to the ICI office listed on page 4.

You are under no pressure to complete this sheet; only put a check (4) by those you can honestly say describe your personal situation. This is your decision—your intelligent act of the will.

STATEMENT

- I have read about Jesus Christ in the Bible.
- I have understood the unique claim of Jesus to be the Son of God, “the Way, the Truth and the Life.”
- I have realized that I need the new life that Jesus promises.
- I have asked Jesus Christ to forgive me for my past and to give me new life.
- I have made an act of my will in giving my whole life to Jesus Christ.
- I have decided to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

STATEMENT

- I would like more explanations of what it means to be a Christian.
- I would like to talk to someone about my intellectual difficulties.
- I would like answers to the questions I have written on the back of this sheet.
- I would like to know where to find other committed Christians.

Signed

(please print)

Name

Address

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Phone

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Now that you have completed the student interaction questions, please detach this section from the book and mail it to your local office. The address is stamped near the front of your book.

**SEND US THE NAMES AND ADDRESSES
OF YOUR FRIENDS**

We will send them lesson 1 of "The Great Questions of Life."

Print Clearly

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Country

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