

# Basic Christianity

## Teacher's Guide

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## Overview

John Stott's *Basic Christianity* is about the **essential** content of the Gospel. You won't find the extent of the atonement, end times, or other issues about which evangelicals differ. The Gospel is about who Jesus Christ is, what he accomplished on the cross, and how we must respond to him. Christ is the object of our faith; the cross is the basis of our hope, and the life we live is the answer we give to God's Gospel call. This book examines all three aspects of Christianity.

Stott's book has eleven chapters. We've added another in the form of an introduction. For the most part, we'll take two sessions for each chapter, with a single principle to be learned in each session. You are encouraged to begin each session with a brief opening activity or illustration that demonstrates that principle in vivid and memorable terms. That way, as you go through the material with the students, they will discover the biblical foundation for the principle they just learned. At the top of each chapter in this guide, the principle will be given, and then you will find several suggested interactive games, activities, or illustrations. Hopefully these will help you to convey that principle in a memorable way. Feel free to substitute your own.

Typically teachers want two things from course material: *freedom* and *structure*. They want an opportunity to be creative; but they also want guidelines and enough material to make their task easy. The material you've been given here isn't just a list of statements and questions for the students to answer. That might be pretty boring; and there's more material than can probably be covered in 40 minutes. That's why the principle is the main thing. How you arrive at that principle is part of the fun, and the art, of teaching. The intent is to provide enough different things so that, as the teacher, you may select what to include and what to set aside.

***The object is to stimulate discussion:*** to get teenage students thinking and talking among themselves, and seeing how these principles apply to their lives and faith. The teacher is the guide and moderator for that discussion. The students should be the ones doing the work of examining the issues, and figuring out how to apply the principles. The teacher is there to help them do that, coaxing and cajoling them, leading them to the answers that they are perfectly capable of reaching themselves. These are young adults who have reached the age of knowing right from wrong. Let them exercise their hearts and minds.

As the letter to the parents points out, the intent of the course is not just to teach the principles of the Gospel, but the ***practices*** – and those practices should be simple but challenging. We want to encourage the students to actually practice between sessions. The activities and illustrations help the students to act out or explore the principle with each other in a relatively safe environment, so that they are equipped to apply it themselves in real life. Obviously the principle will be drawn from the Bible, but we also want the principle to be seen *in* life.

I'm sure you get the idea. Don't spend a lot of time on the activity or illustration. Five to ten minutes should be more than enough to start the lesson off. But please understand that a short visible or experiential introduction to the lesson, serving as a preview of things to come, lays a good foundation for learning the principle. Bring it to bear during the discussion which follows, pointing out how it helped to

explain or illustrate the principle. Point out where it succeeded, or even where it fell short. Explain both the truth of God's Word, and the struggle of living it out. It's easier to remember a "lesson" than a fact. Christ didn't teach principles directly. He taught *stories*, so the principles would be vividly remembered.

**OUR MISSION:** *to bring glory to God, through the transforming of lives, by the Gospel of Jesus Christ*

Our mission isn't just a slogan. Everyone in the church, whether adult or child, should be able to recite it from memory, without hesitation. *The Gospel is our mission, just as it is the mission of every true church.* The Gospel is not just information about Christ, or about the cross, or even about salvation. It is the proclamation of God's provision in Christ, which *must* lead to a changed life. It causes us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ; it provides us with an increasing discernment of God's will for his people; and just as importantly, it will produce an active and visible response to the Cross (Mt 7:24-26). We want to learn the Gospel in order to be conformed to the image of Christ *by* that Gospel. The book, *Basic Christianity*, is one way to implement our mission. It lets the students (and their parents) understand why the Gospel is crucial, not just to their own relationship with Christ, but to the mission of the Church. These children are an essential part of that mission. One day soon, they may be the ones leading the Church: teaching, encouraging, and exemplifying the life of Christ to one another. They too have been called to partake in the divine nature, and to take their place at Christ's table. They too have a part to play. And so we adult believers are called to equip them, so that they may fulfill their roles in the kingdom, to God's glory.

## Introduction – The Gospel

**The Principle:** Because of his love for you, God sent his son Jesus Christ to die on the cross to pay for your sins so that, by faith, you might live a life pleasing to God here, and also live eternally with him in heaven.

**Activity:** (choose one)

1. Have a student present the gospel to another and ask for a faithful response.
2. Have a student offer a wrapped (but empty) gift to another student in return for a dollar.
3. Have a student try to sell an apple to another student for five dollars.
4. Have a student attempt to buy the clothes of another student, haggling over the price.

Depending on which activity you choose, you might ask, “Would it make any difference what is being offered, or how much it will cost you?” And that’s your segway to the lesson.

This first session on the Gospel is included to “pad” the eleven chapters of the book with a twelfth. There are normally twelve weeks in a teaching semester. We want to ask the students what the Gospel is *before* they learn the answer. As mentioned in the *Introduction*, the purpose of the book *Basic Christianity* is to define the Gospel, and to evoke a response. But no two students are alike in the scope and depth of their understanding of the Gospel. This first chapter can help the teacher identify which students know the Gospel well, and which ones may be weak in their understanding. Then the teacher knows which points to emphasize and which ones may be set aside in each session. Hopefully the teacher who quizzes the students on the gospel here will pass along the findings on a case by case basis to the next teacher, and to the leadership. These are our future mothers and fathers, our missionaries and pastors. We want to be sure we know them well enough to guide and equip them on their individual journeys.

Let’s say you have five students. One knows the Gospel well, two know some but not all of it, one doesn’t know it at all, and the last student knows “a gospel” but is completely mistaken as to what it is (e.g. she thinks it is based on works and not grace). You have to find a way to bring everyone up to speed without boring those who have heard it all before, or losing those who have never heard it or learned it. You want to come to know your audience. You want to know who needs help outside of class, and perhaps which *family* needs support – in addition to their child – so that the church may come alongside them.

Presenting the Gospel up front is also helpful to provide a framework for the rest of the book. By using the Gospel as an overview for the book (like an introductory summary), it’s easier for the students to understand the component parts. THEN they can see where each part fits into the Gospel Frame. If students get part of the gospel “wrong” on the quiz, they are more likely to pay attention to the right answer when it is given. As young Christians, it’s important for them to know **what** they don’t know about the Gospel, and **why** it’s important, before we try to teach them what they ought to know. Putting the Gospel up front offers context and incentive.

Generally speaking, the Gospel consists of three parts:

1. Who Jesus Christ is
2. What he accomplished on the Cross
3. How we are to respond

But as we look at what undergirds the Gospel with power, there are other aspects of it that are just as important to our understanding, and to our response, as these are. When we say that Jesus was a historic, real person, that is a true statement, but it is incomplete. When we say that Jesus is our Savior, that is a true statement, but it is incomplete. When we say that Jesus is God, that is a true statement, but it is incomplete. The Gospel is a multi-faceted and comprehensive group of propositional truths. In the end, an unregenerated mind simply cannot accept them all. The Gospel is also a way of life, and not just an intellectual grasp of those truths. The Gospel is first heard, then understood, then embraced by faith, and finally, it is lived out... in faith.

Because the entire course is designed to explore these three parts in greater depth, this opening week can be very simple. The principle for this session is a very brief statement of the Gospel. That's all the students need to take away for now. We want to teach the *evangelion*, not the entire Gospel. What we use to evangelize is a subset of the Gospel. The Gospel, in its broadest sense, is the whole of Scripture; it is God's entire plan of salvation throughout human history. But we cannot present the whole of Scripture when we evangelize. And so we proclaim the Good News, the *evangelion*:

*If you repent from your sins, and believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, sent by God to die on the cross to redeem you from your sins, then you will be saved from the wrath of God, and you will live eternally in heaven with Him.*

Now, as you know, there's more to it than that. We need to define terms like "repent", "sins", "God", "Christ", and "wrath." But our goal for this session is to enable every student to recite a brief form of the *evangelion*, and to understand God's great love for them that sent Christ to the cross in their stead.

## Chapter 1 – The Right Approach

*Principle – God is the Initiator.* We want to see why he must be the initiator, and how he is the initiator. That's it. Everything else is designed to drive home that principle.

*Activity -* Any activity that demonstrates the need for someone to start things off is going to serve the purpose of showing this principle. The students might play “continue this story,” where one person starts off a story and stops part way through; then the next student must continue the story from that point; then he or she stops part way through and the next person picks it up, etc.

The students should see that how something is begun normally determines what will follow – there is an initiating action, and then there is an elicited response. It must continue from, and logically follow from, what was done before. That means they need to listen to what was said, and then determine how best to respond to it; even more, they must make provision for those who follow them by giving them something to build on. And isn't that just like the Church? There are those who walked with Christ before us, those who received the Gospel from them, and those who followed after them – all of them continuing the work and “story” of Christ.

You could do the same thing with a building project. Use a blueprint representing the Gospel. One person begins the work, and then stops part way through; the next person continues the work according to the blueprint. There is an overall design, and an *initiating act* that drives each subsequent step. God has a Plan of Salvation, designed before the foundation of the world. When the time was ripe, He sent Jesus Christ to the Cross to redeem his people. Everything we do must align with and further God's Plan of Salvation. It is His design to call and disciple his people to be a holy nation, a royal priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to Him. Just as Christ called and disciplined the first twelve, we take up our cross daily and follow him down that same path.

What may not be clear in this material is *why* God must be the initiator. This will become clearer when we get to *Man's Need* in Part Two. You may want to ask the students here why *they* think God initiated creation and salvation. They don't need to come to a clear understanding yet, but we do want to get them thinking about it. From a reformed perspective, the Fall made it *impossible* to hear the Gospel, or to see the kingdom. *John 3:3* “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [*or born from above*] he **cannot** see the kingdom of God.” God must first regenerate us so that we may hear the Gospel call and respond to it. *John 8:43* “Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you **cannot** hear My word.” The blind must be *made* to see, and the deaf must be *made* to hear, so they may see, hear, turn, and be healed (Isa 6:10; Mat 15:31). Jesus' miracles were a physical demonstration of this spiritual truth.

## ***Session 2 – God Has Spoken***

***Principle – Jesus had to come to reveal the Father in a way we could see and understand***

*Activity* – Bring a complex object into class that has a fairly simple exterior but complex inner workings. It should be something that the students cannot fully understand unless they open it up. Ask them to describe the object from what they see on the outside. Then open the object up and let them see the inside of it so they understand it more fully. Have them describe it again.

*Suggested objects*: a watch or clock that you can open up; a computer you understand so you can show all the inner components; a book with an interesting cover – then read a short portion; a stapler (like a Swingline) that you can pull open the top to show how it guides, punches, and bends the staples.

In the same way, God is complex and beyond the understanding of men. God is Spirit and Truth, and hard to “grasp” in a physical sense. God is infinite and we have no tangible concept of infinity. Christ came to open up God to us in a way we can understand, worship, and glorify.

God’s promises are sometimes “hidden” in the sense that until they are fulfilled, we don’t really know what they mean, or how they will come about. Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac. He knew God would not take away Isaac forever, because God had made a promise to Abraham. But he didn’t know what provision would be made. In the same way, the Jews knew the Messiah would come, but they didn’t know what he would be like, or when he would come, or how he would bring about the eternal salvation of Israel. They expected a physical king who would give them physical relief from their oppressors, not a carpenter who would become a Paschal Lamb.

Jesus came to teach us about God’s love and holiness, and to demonstrate a Way of Life to us. He came to show us God’s expectations of godliness, and a contrite heart. He came to teach us servanthood and true humility. He came to reveal the glory of God, and our great need for a Savior – that we cannot save ourselves, but God can save us – and so Jesus had to come for us.

The other part of the necessity of Christ’s coming is the necessity of the Canon of Scripture. It is the record of Christ’s life and teachings, death and resurrection, his example and commands. And yet reading and knowing the Bible, by itself, cannot save us – even though it is the very Word of God. This shows the necessity of the Helper, the Holy Spirit of Christ who lives in us. God must *initiate* our understanding of His Word. We cannot come to a saving faith in Christ without God first opening our hearts and minds to its truth. Nor can we respond to its truth, or pursue godly living, without God first empowering us and directing us to live such a life.

***Philippians 2:13*** for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

## Chapter 2 - The Claims of Christ

Chapter 2 will take three sessions. This first portion begins with an overview concerning why the claims of Christ are important, and where they fit in Christianity. The actual material that the students will go through is only two pages. The second session is two pages. The third session is a single page, but it requires the students to look up Scriptures and draw conclusions from them in class, as a group. This will give them an opportunity to find answers, and analyze the content of what they read, which is a valuable Bible Study skill for them to learn and practice.

*Principle* – **Christ is a uniquely divine person.**

*Activity* – Obtain something that is unique and one-of-a-kind. An autographed baseball is not unique unless it is the only baseball of its kind – the last ball hit by Hank Aaron, or the 60<sup>th</sup> homerun ball of Babe Ruth, etc. Although every one of us is unique, we are not unique in the way that Christ is unique. He has a unique, one-of-a-kind relation to God the Father, and to us. He cannot be compared to any other human being, or classified with them. He is not just another teacher. He is God-teacher. He is not just another intercessor. He is our Great High Priest. He is not just another prophet. He is the living Word of God. Jesus Christ is absolutely unique.

The sorts of things that identify us as unique in our relationship involve more than just looking like our parents, or having an adoption certificate. A family has behavior patterns, ways of looking at life, and activities that characterize them as a family. This is true of the Godhead. If you can get the students to identify family traits that they carry with them, they can better see how the Son reflects the character of the Father, and how the Spirit facilitates the will of both. Draw out how the relationships work within the students' families so they can see the parallel.

The next stage is to discover how believers are drawn into that relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Again, go back to family relationships. What happens when an uncle visits and the routine of the house is disrupted, or when friends stay over for the weekend? That's how it is when new believers come into the church and need to adapt to their new family, and their new family needs to adapt to them as well.

Not only should the students grasp Jesus' unique relation to the Father, and see how they are related to the Father through the Son, but also what their responsibilities are – what role do they play in the Great Commission, and in the local church? How does their relationship with Christ begin and how is it maintained? Discuss these in general terms. We'll be exploring the details of our response to the Gospel in Part Two of the book, but we want to set the stage for what is to come. Getting answers like, "faith", "love", "obedience", or "service" will suffice for now. As the course progresses, we'll get into what those things mean, and what they actually look like in practice, both within and without the church.

On the bottom of page 11, we have a preview of our response to Christ: *we are to believe **and** obey*. In the next session we'll get into how faith motivates our obedience, and not fear of punishment.

## ***Session 2 – His Indirect Claims***

Jesus not only *said* he was unique, but the things which he *did* uniquely belonged to God. We're going to look at just a few of those things.

*Principle* – Jesus is divine because the things he did were reserved to God

*Activity* – What things indicate that someone has been granted authority to do something? You might give one of the students the key to a room, without letting anyone else know it, and not letting the student reveal it until you say it's OK. Then tell several students privately that they are in charge of the class. See how everyone reacts when you say that one of them has been given authority to run the class for today. They will compete with one another, thinking they are the one. The others will question when several of them assert their authority. Interrupt and say that only the student with the key has the authority. Then ask the student with the key to hold it up for everyone to see.

***In the same way, only Christ has been given the keys to the kingdom:***

**Mat 28:18** “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” What Jesus did in forgiving sins, bestowing life, teaching the truth, and judging the world, showed that indeed all authority had been given to him. Yet Jesus delegated this authority to the Church: **Mat 16:19** “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

**But this authority is conditional:**

**Jn 15:7** If we abide in Christ and his words abide in us, then we may ask whatever we wish and it shall be given us. **1Jn 5:14** And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. Jesus was under those same conditions: **John 5:19** “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.”

And so, the answer to the first question about the requirement for forgiveness is *faith*. The requirements for the second question are love for Christ and his mercy, and forgiving others (**Mat 18:23-35**). The answer to the question asking whether these requirements are different than the requirement of faith is NO. It is *because* of our faith in Christ's atonement that we love him, and it is acting out of that faith that we are able to forgive others – as we have been forgiven. *Faith is what motivates all we do, not fear*. That's true of obedience as well. There is a tension between rejoicing that we have been freed from the penalty of sin, and knowing that we are bound to Christ. We live by grace, and yet we are obedient servants. We are not subject to the law, and yet it is God's will that we be holy as he is holy (**1Pet 1:16**).

In this session's lesson, that tension is evident in many of the passages cited. They reveal Christ at work, doing the work of his Father; THAT is his authority and ours. **John 5:36** “But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.” The challenge this session is to get the students to see that Christ's authority flowed from his willing submission to the Father; and in the same way, we willingly submit to Christ's rule in our own lives, thereby infusing our work with authority.

The last question on the page is to point out that Christ came to save his sheep, those who believe in him, those who have been given to him by the Father (Jn 17:6,9; 18:9), those whom he wishes (Jn 1:13).

On page 14, the difference it makes is that salvation isn't common sense. It isn't something men would have thought up. It isn't an accidental proclamation of something that happened to come into the mind of Jesus, independent of the Father's will. Rather, all of history, all of the Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is about the intent of God to make a people for himself, and draw them to through Christ into his presence. There was painstaking detail in everything that came to pass, so that when the time was ripe, Christ appeared. It is crucial to understand that it is GOD who speaks, and not men, and not even Christ on his own authority. It is because the Son submits to the Father (1Cor 11:3) that we submit to the Son. He is our example. If he will not speak on his own, then neither should we.

The connection between Jesus' words and God's love, is that his commandment (his word) is to love others as God loves us. When we do that, we experience God's love through his people; we abide there. The connection between Jesus' words and God's wrath, is that both are eternal; the only thing between us and the wrath of God is the Gospel, which is the vessel of God's love and mercy towards us – the Gospel is the Word of God; it is his provision to preserve his people from eternal destruction. To be without the Word of God is to be without salvation; we would be restricted to general revelation, which only tells us that there is a God, but not what he is like. God's Word is the Promise of Redemption, Forgiveness, and Eternal life. Until Christ returns, what we cling to is the Promise – for when he returns, what has been promised will be fulfilled in us. “Who hopes for what he already has?” (Rom 8:24)

On the last page, the answers are that Christ judges the world; he bestows life; death is eternal separation from God; and so, if we are sent away by Christ, we are sent away from life, and enter into eternal death. Because God's Word contains the promises of God, and because the words of Christ contained in the Canon of Scripture will be used to judge us, belief in these promises brings life itself, and salvation, and eternal joy. The Bible cannot be replaced or duplicated. *There is no alternative source of saving knowledge about God.*

**John 6:63** It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

We cannot discover God on our own. God reveals himself to us, in the life, work, and words of Christ.

### ***Session 3 - His Dramatic Claims***

*Principle* – **Christ’s parables and miracles were about spiritual truths**

*Activity* – Read an Aesop’s Fable (these are actually parables) and have the students give you the moral of the story. Here’s a short one:

A number of flies were attracted to a jar of honey that had been overturned on the table. They placed their feet in the honey and began to eat greedily. However, their feet became stuck, and their wings couldn’t free them, and so they suffocated. As they were dying they cried out, “??”

*Ans.* “*O foolish creatures that we are, we destroyed ourselves for the sake of a little pleasure.*”

The story is not about flies and honey. It’s about human nature. It’s about a truth that might not be so obvious in our own circumstances. And that’s what Jesus’ parables do. They open up our human nature for examination; they show our great need of salvation; and they reveal God’s provision, which is his Plan of Salvation.

Now read and have the students work through Christ’s *Parable of the Wicked Servants*. Let them wrestle with the imagery. Here are the answers they should come up with: The master of the house is God. The vineyard is Israel. The fruit is righteousness (Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11). The servants who are killed are the prophets of old (Lk 13:34). The son is the Son of God. The “owner of the vineyard” is returning to judge the wicked servants. The “other tenants” are the Gentiles (Jn 10:16; Col. 1:27). Christians await the return of Christ (Jn 14:3; 2Tim 4:8). Here we find the implication of the Trinity; but the only point we want to make is that the relation between the Father and Son is uniquely divine, which is the point of the chapter.

In the table, have the students fill out the right side, using the verses provided. The “I am” verses show how each miracle pointed to Jesus’ identity. That’s why miracles are claims about himself. The deaf and blind are physically healed. Those who are spiritually deaf and blind are likewise healed, so that they may hear the Gospel, and see the kingdom. The students will probably need some help figuring out the spiritual truths represented by the physical miracles. The lesson is just one page, but it may take some time to work through it. Please, don’t be too quick to offer them the answers.

## Chapter 3 – The Character of Christ

### Session 1 - WHAT CHRIST HIMSELF THOUGHT

*Principle* – Christ’s claims and his actions are unique, and exclusive to God.

*Activity* – Use a good name-brand product of any kind that has a well-known logo. Take another similar product that is a “cheap knock-off”; put the logo of the name-brand on that product and ask the students whether it is the name, or the product they are buying. Carry it one step further: can you separate the logo from the quality of the product? Does the one equate to the other? So making the claim to be the same, or using the logo unlawfully, does not turn a look-alike into the real thing.

You can use Levi jeans and compare them to Rustler, or a Craftsman tool and something from Harbor Freight. Be imaginative. The point is to show that only the maker has the right to use the logo with his name on it. You can do the same thing with titles or names of famous athletes. So it is with Christ. When he called himself the *Son of God*, or the *Son of Man*, these were not mere titles. They were exclusive claims. No one else dared use them, nor did they have the right to use them. They belong to Jesus Christ alone. His words and his deeds were designed to instill faith that his claims to be the Christ were true.

At the front of the lesson are three things we want to drive home in both sessions:

(1) *Christ never said anything that he didn’t actually do.* If he said he would heal, he healed. If he said he would provide, he provided – and abundantly. And so, if said he would save us, then he saved us indeed.

(2) *Christ made claims that were exclusive* – no other man ever did or ever would be able to make the claims that Christ made: about himself, about God, about history, and about salvation. They were the types of claims that only GOD would be capable of making: forgiving sins and raising men from the grave. The Pharisees and Sadducees recognized the exclusiveness of what he said, and so they accused him of blasphemy for equating himself with God, or of elevating himself to equal authority with God.

(3) *Christ’s blameless character was unique in all of human history.* There has only ever been one perfect man, and that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man. In him, the essential nature of both God and man live in complete harmony and are reconciled to one another.

In this first session, you’ll see that the title on the handout is, “What Christ thought of himself.” More accurately, it is what Jesus **said** about himself, and what he **did** to reveal himself as the Christ.

The adulteress who was about to be stoned was accused of a sin. Jesus then accused those who would stone her of being sinners as well. Jesus remained when all the others had left, because he was without sin. And therefore he alone had the right to judge her. But he didn’t. He forgave her.

In John 8:45-46, Jesus challenges the Sanhedrin to find fault with him. They are silent because they have failed over a three year period to prove by Scripture that he is a sinner of any kind. He has refuted every challenge, and moreover, he has been a source of unique goodness wherever he walked.

On the bullet points, you might ask the students whether they could make any one of those claims without lying. That moves into righteous living, and the same question: can you say you are without sin? This is not to impose a guilt trip on anyone. Our joy and delight, our amazement over God's grace, comes from recognizing the depth of our own personal sin in the sight of a righteous and holy God. Only then does God's great mercy overwhelm us. Only then does Christ's sacrifice and forgiveness drive us to our knees in thanksgiving and praise.

THAT's how it affects our relationship with God. You may hear answers like "humbling" and "awe." In this way, we want to move the students toward a proper response to God's grace. It should move us to do whatever we can to thank God for his love, and for his unique gift of Jesus Christ his son.

That leads us to change our attitude towards Christ. We often take him for granted, as if he owed it to us to go to the cross. But when we grasp how we look to God in our sin-filled state, we are grieved by our sin, frustrated that we cannot overcome it, and guilt-ridden that we cannot atone for it, nor do we want to atone. Unasked by us, and undesired by us, Christ went to the cross to settle our debt – out of love. And for that we have no words to express our gratitude and wonder.

Why the gap between the ideal of being completely Christlike, and the reality of having a fallen nature? It is so that Christ might be exalted, and that we might realize there will never be a time when we do not need him, and need the grace of God which comes to us through Jesus Christ alone.

Listen carefully to the students' answers concerning what they have learned about the character of Christ. Not all of them will say the same thing – nor do we want them to parrot only what has been said. This is the time to let the conversation take you where it will. Be ready to answer some challenging questions.

***Don't forget the last question.*** It's not asking what is objectively important, as if the student must find the right universal answer. It's a purely subjective question: "Why is that important – TO YOU?" We want to set the student's mind on applying what has been taught, and taking into his or her week to live out. Give each one a chance to share, even if you need to prod them a bit. They must personally respond to Christ's claims, just as they must respond to the Gospel – because they are one and the same.

## ***Session 2 - What Others Said About Christ***

***Principle*** – What others claimed about Christ made him unique among men

***Activity*** – In the first session we demonstrated what we mean by “unique” and “genuine”. We established that there is a difference between making a bare claim, and asserting something that must be proven. We based it on the idea that only one person can be the rightful owner of a unique title; only one corporation can rightfully own a brand name. This session we want to show how the testimony of Christ’s friends and foes both show that he is unique among men; and then we’re going to examine the evidence of Scripture itself to show that the character of Christ is uniquely human and supernatural.

***We’re looking for testimonials*** about commercial products: “I’ve used other products, but they never...” “I searched everywhere, tried everything, but this product is the only one that solved my problem...” “All those other products say they can do the same thing, but only this one actually did it...” Look in magazine and newspaper ads, or try the reviews for various products on Amazon.com. If you can’t find any, make up your own; or provide three similar products to a couple of the kids in class, and have them make up a testimonial themselves. See if you can find a company acknowledging the value of their competitor’s product, but how they are better and/or cheaper: “Brand X is great. We’re just like Brand X, but cheaper.”

(2) What Christ’s friends said about him: they have a unique perspective. Through the questions we’re asking, try to expose how “inside information” can both color our perceptions of someone (a bias in favor of someone), and also give us a better perspective than others may have (because we’re privy to the truth). Try to get them to talk about some personal experience where someone said something about a friend of theirs that they absolutely knew was a lie or inaccurate because they were eye-witnesses.

(3) What Christ’s enemies said about him: they didn’t deny his words or actions (*including his miracles*), but they claimed that he was violating the law by them, not upholding it – that’s because they had their own view of what the law required. Those who were not Christ’s followers and who were respected judges among men (and so we may assume they were reasonably objective about him), found no fault in him. The questions asked here are intended to elicit from the students the acknowledgment that our enemies rarely tell the truth about us, and those who are objective tend to get it right, at least if they’re given all the facts. How easy is it to find someone who will listen objectively? If that’s hard for us now, it was hard in Christ’s time too. So if his enemies are willing to acknowledge his miracles, we can at least conclude that the miracles actually happened, and that Christ actually said what we read in the Bible.

(4) What the Bible says about Jesus: just from the bare facts and descriptions, the Bible describes someone who is like us in every way, experiencing exactly what we experience, but not responding to his circumstances or experiences the same way we do. He was completely open, accepting all those who came to him, even those rejected by everyone else. *How often do you make friends with the friendless?* He was completely sacrificial in his service to others, and completely denied his own needs in order to meet the needs of others. *How often do you serve when it’s costly and inconvenient?* This behavior of Christ’s wasn’t occasional, but **continual**. *How consistent are you or anyone you know in such things?* And so, ***what does that say about the uniqueness of Christ?*** Hmmm.

## Chapter 4 – The Resurrection of Christ

*Principle* – **Christ’s resurrection made him unique among men, and the Bible is its evidence.**

*Activity* – John Stott presumes the accuracy of biblical testimony, and proceeds to shoot down five common objections to the resurrection. So we want to likewise offer a hypothesis about how something might have happened, and then disprove some other alternatives that might account for it. Welcome to Science Class. Don’t use anything like ghosts, flying saucers, or conspiracy theories.

**Suggestion 1:** Force a hard-boiled egg into a bottle by throwing in a lit match, and then putting the egg on top of the bottle-neck. The neck should be smaller than the egg, but large enough to squeeze the egg through. Then ask the students for theories as to how the egg was forced into the bottle. Test each theory. (the lit match removed all the air in the bottle which was sealed with the egg; this created a vacuum that sucked in the egg because it was pliable enough to conform to the narrower shape of the neck)

**Suggestion 2:** Blow up a balloon and let it go shooting around the room. Ask the students for theories as to why the balloon was “jet-propelled” (Newton’s theory of equal and opposite reactions); if that’s too easy, then why didn’t it travel in a straight line? (air is a fluid that reacts to its surface contours – the balloon didn’t stretch evenly because some areas of its surface were thinner than others, and so when it shrunk, it likewise shrunk unevenly, forcing more air down one side of the opening than the other thus changing the balloon’s direction)

The primary thrust of this lesson is the necessity and the fact of the resurrection. If there was no resurrection then of all people we are most to be pitied (1Cor 15:19) because we’ve been preaching a lie (1Cor 15:15). But what proof do we have of the resurrection? Obviously the Bible is our source. It is eye-witness testimony. Yet that means the resurrection is based on the veracity and authenticity of the Bible itself. Stott treats this as a given. Some of the students may not have his level of confidence. We want them to have more than blind faith, and be able to offer non-believers more than a blanket statement like, “because the Bible says so.” They should have reasonable proof for the hope that is within them (1Pet 3:15). So be prepared to make a defense of the reliability of Scripture itself.

If you can get past that initial hurdle, take the students to the actual verses that support Stott’s counter-arguments, and let the Bible speak for itself, as reliable evidence. We’re not trying to replace faith with proof and reason. Rather we’re showing that our faith is not misplaced, imaginary, or superstitious. The book of John presents a series of signs and miracles intended to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, so as to instill faith in his disciples. In 1John, test after test is given with which to assess our faith and conduct. And then John writes, “I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” The proofs and tests given do not undermine our faith; they undergird it. Testing is what helps our faith grow from a firm assertion into a certain conviction.

Coming full circle, when the question is asked at the end as to what other objections the students might have, the answer to them will be, “The Bible says...”

## ***Session 2 - Other Evidence of the Resurrection***

*Principle* – eye-witness testimony is more reliable when the witness has nothing to gain and everything to lose by what they say. Christ appeared to those who most needed to see him, for *his* purposes.

*Activity* – Choose one of the students who will not exist in your eyes. Give the student a five dollar bill and have him or her go to another room or go outside. You want your money back but you're convinced the student has made off with it. You will deny seeing or hearing that student; as far as you're concerned, that student is not present, and is a thief. Have the other students go see that student as a group and then come back to class and confirm that the student has the money. Ask them for their eye-witness testimony about the absent student: clothing, hair, what was said, and other details to try to establish the student's whereabouts, and the fact that the student has the money. Compare notes as to what each student said.

Why did Christ appear only to his believers? Why not to the Sanhedrin, or to Pilate, or to Herod? You can offer the three "C's" here: *comfort*, *confirmation*, and *commission*. If we were to die and wanted to show ourselves to those we love, we'd do it to comfort them – to show them that WE are OK. But Christ did it to show them that THEY would be OK, to confirm that his promises would be fulfilled, and to assure them that everything he said was true and trustworthy. He did it to comfort those who had abandoned him and were woefully guilt-ridden, like Peter (Mk 16:7). He commissioned Paul, tangibly demonstrating what it means to love our enemies (1Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13); they may turn out to be our brothers and sisters in Christ – even our elders. We need to keep in mind that we were ALL Christ's enemies until he went to the cross to reconcile us to God (2Cor 5:18; Eph 2:16; Heb 2:17). That's a corollary to the Lord's Prayer: We must forgive others as God forgave us through Christ (Mat 6:12; Luke 7:47). Consider that just like Paul, Christ has commissioned each one of us, leaving us behind in the world as his witnesses. He reveals himself to us so that we may testify of his goodness and mercy on the cross.

Explain the circumstances of the times, the torture and execution of believers, the threat to their lives and to the lives of those they loved. They are probably not at all familiar with Roman methods, or the brutality of the times, so it gives you an opportunity to put them in the moment, and to understand the dangers.

It might be rare for young men and women, but you might want to ask the students at the end whether they have ever had an experience that they believe has changed them forever. It may turn out to be the death of someone very close to them, or the attack on the World Trade Center, or some other major event. Draw the correlation between those types of life-changing events and the resurrection of Christ. Christ's death was a life-changing event for the disciples – but his resurrection was far more so. It motivated everything they did for the rest of their lives, and it changed their very character forever. That wouldn't have happened if they didn't believe the resurrection actually happened. THAT's why their testimony is trustworthy.

## Chapter 5 – The Fact and Nature of Sin

*Principle* – It's not our sinful actions that need to be stopped, but our sinful heart that needs to be changed: our actions flow from our heart.

*Activity* – Anything that shows we need to stop trying to fix symptoms, and get to the root cause of it will be helpful here. A bowl, a sponge, a bucket, and a pitcher filled with water may do. Invite one of the students to use the sponge and keep the bowl dry. Pour some water out of the pitcher into the bowl. As the student begins to wipe it dry with the sponge, pour more water into the bowl. Chastise the student for not keeping the bowl dry; keep pouring water (the bucket is there to squeeze the sponge into). Tell the student to *move faster*; keep pouring water. Ask the student what would make it possible to dry the bowl? And obviously the answer is to stop pouring water into it. That's how it is with sin, except that there is no end to the water pouring out of the pitcher. It is more like a fountain gushing up from the depths.

Of course, God's grace is like that too. It has no end. His mercies are new every morning. The question is how we change the source of the water from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, from death to mercy. And the answer is that GOD must do it. We are incapable of doing it ourselves.

**Defining sin** – It is part of our sinful nature to deny that we are sinning. We like to redefine sin so that it sounds like righteousness; we want to justify our actions, or show how we have no choice in the matter, or recharacterize what we're as something good and beneficial. But the truth is that sin is not doing bad things to other people, or even to ourselves. *Sin is an offense against God*. It is breaking *any* of His laws, in whole or in part. Breaking the least of His laws is the same as breaking all of them (Mat 5:19; James 2:10); and each violation carries the same penalty: death.

What every student should be able to grasp is his or her own personal sin. And that's where you should point the discussion. Without a sense of our own sinfulness, without understanding and acknowledging the depth of our own depravity, we cannot see the great need we have of Christ to redeem us from the pit; and we don't really appreciate the love of God that drove Christ to the cross for us.

***Look at the last two questions:***

1. How do you feel when you do what's right, but you know you're only doing it because you have to?
2. How do you think God feels about what you did?

These questions are designed to get at the issue of doing what's right *even if we don't feel like it*. That doesn't mean it's insincere, or unacceptable in God's sight. It's actually commendable. And it's far better than not doing what's right because we fear we might be insincere. We must not use our feelings as an excuse for disobedience. Truth is what dictates our actions, not our feelings.

## ***Session 2 – The Ten Commandments***

*Principle* – The Ten Commandments impose an active obligation to do what’s right, and not just a passive obligation to avoid doing what’s wrong. These commandments were given by God to identify His people as belonging to Him (Ex 20:5; Lev 20:26).

*Activity* – This session’s activity is actually in the lesson. Students should state the Ten Commandments positively in their own words in the first table; and then they are to identify which of the commandments is violated by each thought, word, or deed listed in the right column of the second table.

For the discussion, center on the fact that God’s laws were given to us for our good, not as a burden. They identify sin (Rom 7:7), but only so that we may learn to love and care for one another. Unless we know what sin is, how are we to know what is acceptable to God? And when we sin, God has provided us a way out, so that we may stand up under it: we may confess our sins, turn from them, and be forgiven *because* of what Jesus Christ has done on the cross. His blood is sufficient to cover all our sins. But we must ask God that the payment of Christ’s blood be applied to those sins, and we do that through confession and repentance.

Here is a stanza from an old hymn that gloriously describes this liberation from sin’s penalty:

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

## Chapter 6 – The Consequences of Sin

*Principle* – Sin, even hidden sin, always has lasting consequences – even though we are forgiven.

*Activity* – We want an illustration that some choices we make will lock us into something we don't want, or put us some place we don't really want to be. Tattoos are that sort of permanent remnant of choices we made in the past. Scars are permanent reminders of some trauma that we experienced, like a car accident – or a more decision we made, like using a saw without eye-protection. Quitting a job or being fired can affect the finances of a home for years to come. But broken relationships are perhaps the hardest to deal with, such as the loss of a friend because of something we said or did. Divorce traps the children of the marriage between two relationships and between two households. The parents' choices, and their behavior, didn't just affect them – it badly damaged those around them, those they loved. Statistically, divorce is likely to affect half the students in your class, so treat this topic sensitively.

What we want to discuss here is the progression of sin. It tends to follow the same path, with the same temptations, the same responses, and the same outcomes – and yet we don't seem to learn.

Have the students analyze and describe the actual steps of falling into some sin they committed during the past year (first question). You don't need to know the specifics. You're after the methodology. How did it happen? What happened first? What was it that caught their attention, and made them think they had to have it, or do it? What was the outcome of it? Who got hurt? How bad was the guilt and shame? How likely is it that they could fall into that trap again? So what can they do to avoid the trap next time? How will they recognize the trap for what it is BEFORE they act fall into it?

Then have a look at the Scripture passages listed in the second question. Read them together. Work through why our sin separates us from God: it's because of his holiness. His nature is holy. It is pure. It is unblemished. We cannot enter into His presence if we are blemished – we are entering onto holy ground. We must be perfectly holy to come before Him. ONLY Christ is perfectly holy. ONLY Christ makes it possible for us to boldly come before God, because we are IN Christ: *his* holiness is *our* holiness.

Consider that being united to Christ, we are supposed to BE holy ourselves, and not just rely on Christ's holiness for salvation. That should affect how we think about ourselves. We are representatives of Christ. As HE is, so are WE in this world (1John 4:17). God is holy in all things; therefore we should be holy in all things. It's not because being holy will save us; it's because it better reflects who God is. He lives in us, and we live in him (1John 3:24). Christ came to represent the Father to us, to make Him known to us (John 17:26). And we now represent Him in Christ's name. We're Christ's ambassadors (2Cor 5:20).

***The worksheet is for next time: classroom work.***

## ***Session 2 – Worksheet on Knowing God***

*Principle* – Our whole purpose for existing is to come to know God, for this is eternal life (John 17:3)

How do we do that? Where does God reveal Himself to us, specifically and not generally? The answer is that He reveals Himself to us in His Word. So if we are to fulfill our purpose for being, we must study the Word of God. The more we come to know God, the better we understand our relationship with Him.

*Activity* – The worksheet is designed to take the students into the word of God to derive a few very basic principles about every Christian’s relationship to God. It begins with their actual practice of reading the Bible, meditating on it, praying about it, and applying it (using the truth of God’s Word to govern their thoughts, words, and deeds).

By filling out the worksheet, they are beginning to practice these steps: reading, thinking about what they have read, asking questions about what they’ve read, chewing it over, considering their life and how what they just read applies to their own actions, responding to it with prayer and worship – even when it’s silent prayer, and inner worship. To think about God, and to wonder about His word, and to consider His ways, and to measure ourselves against His expectations, and to determine how we might adjust our daily life to get in step with the Holy Spirit, and to resolve to make that adjustment – this in large measure is the Christian walk; this in large measure is how we are conformed to the image of Christ.

So don’t look at the worksheet as if it were just a list of verses with questions and fill-ins. To borrow a quote, *it’s not about the destination – it’s about the journey*. This is teaching them how to use God’s Word to answer some pretty fundamental questions about God, life, the church, and eternity.

***The final question is a summary question.*** Knowing who God is, and what God is like, and His great love for his children, and how we should respond to Him, how does this holy God look upon our sin? Is He forgiving? Is He understanding? Is He accepting? Is He merciful? Is He still loving? Then how should WE look upon our sin, if we WANT to have a vital and loving relationship with God?

**Be careful here.** It’s entirely possible that a student might say, “I don’t know God, and I don’t think He knows me. If I don’t have a relationship with Him, it’s no loss to me. I’ve never heard Him speak to me; he’s never held me; he’s never shown me any love.”

If that happens, try to lead the student back through the verses like 1John 4:10. Or use Rom. 5:8, “God HAS demonstrated his own love for us in this: that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” As for never experiencing God’s love, John 13:34-35 and Eph. 4:32 point to the Church as the place where we may physically experience God’s loving embrace, His comfort and counsel, His exhortations and His acceptance. If this child has NOT experienced that, then it may be that *you* will be his only experience of Christ. The body life of the local church needs to be vibrant and responsive to every believer’s needs. If it is not, or if this child sincerely believes the church is failing him, bring it to the attention of the elders immediately. It must not be permitted to continue.

### ***Session 3 – The Effect of Sin on You and Others***

*Principle* – Sin is never private; it always affects the people around us.

*Activity* – Bring a small paper bag to class. Have two students try to have conversation with each other about something interesting. Meanwhile, you play with the bag, wrinkling and crunching it, snapping and folding it. If they stop talking to watch you, tell them to keep talking. Then while they're talking, blow up the paper bag with air and POP it! The bag is like sin; it really can't be ignored. It disrupts everyone around you. It interferes with your relationships, it starts and stops conversations, and it draws attention to us for all the wrong reasons. By definition, it is unloving, uncaring, inconsiderate, and it can be harmful: imagine popping the bag next to a bus-driver's ear while he's driving. What about drunk-drivers? What about train engineers who smoke pot and miss the signal? What about gossip? What about under-age sex? What about angry outbursts that lead to pushing and shoving, and then something more violent?

These activities begin in the heart. They don't happen out of the blue. There is an attitude of selfishness and rebellion long before the person's actions become obvious to everyone.

A baseball player who takes illegal drugs to enhance his performance isn't just violating the law. In his heart, if he's honest, he wants to cheat the other players. He wants to steal honor from them by using illegal drugs to make it look like he's a better player. It's selfish; it's hurtful to other players; and it can physically harm the player himself – that's why the drugs are outlawed. Such a player wants what he wants so badly, that he doesn't care what others think, or about the long-term consequences, as long as he gets what he wants *now*. That decision, made in private, then affects his reputation, his family, his team, his children, his fans, the sport itself, and thousands of young players around the world.

EVERY sin is like that. EVERY sin has consequences. Even private sin, like pride, affects how we look at ourselves and others. And worst of all, it breaks our fellowship with God; it impacts our worship, often making worship impossible.

Worship and sin are mutually exclusive. We cannot sin and properly worship at the same time. That's both bad news and good news. If we sin, we cannot properly worship. On the other hand, if we properly worship, we cannot sin. One way to deal with temptation, then, is to begin to worship God – it precludes acting on the temptation. One way to deal with selfishness is to seek opportunities to serve others. One way to deal with bitterness is to forgive those we believe have offended us. One way to learn patience is to actively search for God's hand at work in the circumstances. One way to learn contentment is to count our blessings. One way to deal with pride is to be brutally honest with others about our own weaknesses.

All of these “opposing” activities help us to get at the root of our sin, which is a self-centered heart. We are striving to become other-centered, but the only way to achieve that is to become Christ-centered. HE must be the one we serve. HE must be the one we find comfort in. HE must be the one we thank. HE must be the one we worship, and not ourselves, or our possessions, or anything other than Christ. Whatever keeps us from being Christ-centered in all things, is sin. And that will have an effect, on all things.

## **Chapter 7 – The Death of Christ**

*Principle –*

*Activity –*

***Session 2 - The Meaning of the Cross***

*Principle –*

*Activity –*

## **Chapter 8 – The Salvation of Christ**

*Principle –*

*Activity –*

***Session 2 – We are “Being” Sanctified***

*Principle –*

*Activity –*

## **Chapter 9 – Counting the Cost**

*Principle –*

*Activity –*

***Session 2 – Giving Up Sin***

*Principle –*

*Activity –*

***Session 3 – Giving Up Self***

*Principle –*

*Activity –*

## **Chapter 10 – Reaching a Decision**

*Principle –*

*Activity –*

## **Chapter 11 – Being a Christian**

*Principle –*

*Activity –*

***Session 2 – Our Responsibilities as Children of God***

*Principle –*

*Activity –*