

What We Believe

An overview of Christian Doctrine

Study 1—**Revelation**

Study 2—**God**

Study 3—**Creation**

Study 4—**Mankind**

Study 5—**Sin & Suffering**

Study 6—**The Person of Jesus**

Study 7—**The Work of Jesus**

Study 8—**The Holy Spirit**

Study 9—**The Church**

Study 10—**Last Things**

These studies are designed to look at what it is that we believe as Christians ... the basics of the Christian faith.

Each study will follow the same basic pattern:

1. *The Bible* - looking at passages from the Bible to be read and summarised in point form.
2. *Doctrine* - combining your summaries into a single statement of belief.
3. *Church History* - looking at some of the Church's historical Statements.
 - The Athanasian Creed (approx 500 AD)
 - The Apostles Creed (approx 700 AD)
 - The 39 Articles - statement of faith of the Anglican Church (1563)
 - The Westminster Confession of faith (1647)
4. *Our World and what We Believe* - looking at ways our world embraces/rejects what we believe
5. *Engagong Our World* - critiquing our culture and seeking to engage it with what we believe.
6. *Living What We Believe* - working at ways to live this truth out well.

The Bible

Look up the following verses and write down what they say about revelation.

Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 1:18-23, 1 Cor 1:19-21

Is 66:1-2, James 1:21-22, Deuteronomy 4:10-16, Deut 6:4-8

Hebrews 1:1-3, 2 Cor 1:20

2 Tim 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21, Ps 33:4

Study 1

Revelation

Doctrine

Try to summarise into one paragraph what those verse say about how God has revealed himself.

What did other members in your group have that you missed?

Read the statements on the right & underline what matches your statement of faith. What other biblical ideas did they have?

Church History

1. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.
9. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.
10. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

(Westminster Confession – Chapter 1 Section I, IX & X)

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

(39 Articles – Article VI)

Our World and What We Believe

According to Romans 1:21-23 how do people avoid God's revelation? Where do we see this in action in the world today?

How can we avoid God's revelation via:

- The media, TV.
- Superstition/astrology
- Materialism
- Laziness
- Busy-ness
- Disobedience

Study 1

Revelation

Engaging Our World

When answering the following, try to be creative and engaging in your answer, not dismissive. Try to look at the assumptions behind the statement, and answer with a question.

What might you say when someone says:

"You can believe what you like, if it's true for you, then it's true for you."

"The bible has lots of different interpretations, you can interpret it how you want"

How can you demonstrate to people around you your dependence on God's word?

Living What We Believe

... Individually

How has the bible shaped/influenced

... my work life?

... my marriage?

... my relationships with family or friends?

What parts of the Bible do I most enjoy reading? Why?

What parts of the Bible do I find most challenging? Why?

... as a Church

How can I encourage others to listen to and obey God?

The Bible

With such a vast subject matter as God, this study will limit itself to five attributes of God.

God is holy Leviticus 20:26 and Isaiah 6:1-3

God is trinity Genesis 1:1, 2, 26 and Matthew 3:16, 17

God is love Exodus 34:6 and 1 John 4:16

God is just Deuteronomy 32:4 and 1 John 1:9

God is sovereign Acts 17:24-28 and Ephesians 1:11, 12

Study 2

God

Our World and What We Believe

List common ways people think about God

In what ways do people have trouble with the God of the Bible?

Study 2

God

Doctrine

Write a creed describing who God is.

What differences and similarities did you have with the Westminster Confession?

Church History

1. There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

3. In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

(Westminster Confession – Chapter 2 Section I & III)

Engaging Our World

How would you relate the five attributes of God to someone facing...

Severe illness

Personal moral failure

Grief

Doubts about their faith

Living What We Believe

Discuss the following:

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us” AW Tozer

In what ways can the Trinity be an encouragement to our daily lives?

The Bible

What do these passages tell us about creation?

Genesis 1:1-2:1

Psalms 19

Psalms 96

John 1:1-5

Colossians 1:15-20

Hebrews 11:2

In what ways does the Bible have a detailed and imprecise explanation of creation?

Study 3

Creation

Our World and What We Believe

List common ways people think about the world eg Mother Nature, etc

Why do some mock the Biblical view of creation?

Study 3

Creation

Engaging Our World

How much do you know about the theories of Evolution, Intelligent Design and Creationism?

How much of these theories do you think ordinary people know?

What is your view of creation? Is it one of or a mix of all three views above?

Are views of creation a disputable matter?

Should we begin our evangelism by speaking of a Creator or with the Cross?

Living What We Believe

Knowing God as Creator can at times be just head knowledge. How can we make it "heart" knowledge?

List some ways you can marvel in God's creation. How can we as a Church do the same?

Doctrine

Write your own creed of creation.

In what ways did it match up or differ from the creeds above?

Church History

1. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good.
2. After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

(Westminster Confession – Chapter 4)

I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth.

(Apostles Creed)

The Bible

Look up the following passages and write down what they say about mankind and our relationship to God, the creation and each other.

Genesis 1:26-31

Genesis 2:4-25

Psalm 8

Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6-7

Mt 6:25-30

Col 3:9-10

1 Cor 11:7-12

2 Cor 3:18

Study 4

Mankind

Our World and What We Believe

In response to the horrors of animal cruelty, people speak of animals being treated 'inhumanely'. What does such language say about the relationship between humans and the creation?

Being created in the image of God is at the heart of our very being, and is shared by all humans from conception to death – whether male/female, disabled/able-bodied. How is the confusion about what makes someone valuable, reflected in the way we view abortion and euthanasia?

Study 4

Mankind

Engaging Our World

What are some unhelpful ways of engaging with people on matters of valuing human life when they don't share our view of God?

What are some helpful ways of engaging with people on matters of valuing human life when they don't share our view of God?

Living What We Believe

Some people use our dominion of the world as an excuse for exploitation. How is this driven from an incorrect view of God?

Why did God create two sexes? How do we reflect our equality in our different roles as men and women?

How can we communicate the value of human life?

What is the purpose/goal of mankind?

Doctrine

Summarise this together into a one paragraph statement.

What did other members in your group have that you missed?

Read the statements on the right and underline what matches your statement of faith. What other biblical ideas did they have?

Church History

2. After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

(Westminster Confession – Chapter 4)

Q. 17. How did God create man?

A. After God had made all other creatures, he created man male and female; formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground, and the woman of the rib of the man, endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal souls; made them after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts and power to fulfill it, and dominion over the creatures; yet subject to fall.

Q. 20. What was the providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created?

A. The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created, was the placing him in paradise, appointing him to dress it, giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth; putting the creatures under his dominion, and ordaining marriage for his help; affording him communion with himself; instituting the sabbath; entering into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, of which the tree of life was a pledge; and forbidding to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.

(Westminster Larger Catechism)

The Bible

Look up the following verses and note what they say about the person of Jesus.

John 1:1-18

Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:15

Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 1:3

John 20:28, Titus 2:13

Study 6

The Person of Jesus

Doctrine

Write your own summary paragraph on 'the person of Christ' from the passages above.

What did other members in your group have that you would like to include?

Read the Statements from the creeds and note what matches your statement. Are there any differences?

Church History

2. The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

(Westminster Confession of Faith—Chapter VIII)

That we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and human, equally. He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is human from the essence of his mother, born in time; completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity. Although he is God and human, yet Christ is not two, but one. He is one, however, not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself. He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human.

(Athanasian Creed)

Our World and What We Believe

What ideas have you come across that make Jesus out to be other than Fully God and Fully man?

Do you think it's harder for people to accept the humanity or the divinity of Jesus? Why?

What do you think we lose if we reduce either aspect of who Jesus is?

Study 6

The Person of Jesus

Engaging Our World

Many pseudo-Christian groups teach that Jesus is the 'son of God' but not actually God (Jehovah's witnesses, Christadelphians, Mormons). How would you try to persuade someone about true nature of Jesus and why it matters?

Living What We Believe

How might this doctrine help you at times of intense suffering?

How might this doctrine help you at times of temptation?

What is the greatest comfort for you personally about Jesus' humanity?

The Bible

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Colossians 2:9-15

John 10:7-21

1 Peter 2:21-25

Romans 3:21-31

Hebrews 9:11-15

Study 7

The Work

Doctrine

Summarise this together into a one paragraph statement

What did the other members in your group have?

Read the statements on the right & underline matches to your statement. What other biblical ideas did they have?

Church History

- This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that He might discharge, He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it; endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world.
- The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father has given unto Him.
- Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein He was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever.

(Westminster Confession of Faith—Chapter VIII)

Our World and What We Believe

This piece of 1st Century graffiti, mocking Jesus' crucifixion has the caption 'Alexamenos worships his God' What are some modern day examples of public ridicule of the cross?



How does our society mock other aspects of Christianity? What are we most tempted to be ashamed of? When?

Engaging Our World

Think of some modern stories or events that could be used to illustrate the following biblical ideas:

Redemption

Atonement

Sacrifice

Substitution

A cross-centred, cross-exalting, cross-saturated life is a God-glorifying life—the *only* God-glorifying life. All others are wasted. (John Piper – Don't waste your life p60) Do you agree? Why / why not?

Why is it so important to keep the cross at the centre when we're talking to people about Jesus? Why do you think we're tempted to talk about other aspects instead?

Living What We Believe

... Individually

What practical impact has the cross had on your life?

How do you daily show that you rely on Jesus' death?

What does it mean to boast in the cross? What other things do you boast in? How do you boast in the cross?

... as a Church

If God's power is displayed in the "weakness" of the cross (1 Cor 1:27), what implications does this have for our church? How can we be a weak church in this sense?

"Self justification and judging others go together, as justification by grace and serving others go together" (Bonhoeffer) How can we live out justification by grace?

What should we do as a church rather than individually?

Study 7

The Work of Jesus

The Bible

Look up the following verses and write down what they say about the Holy Spirit.

Joel 2:28-29

Ezekiel 36:26-27

Acts 1:4-5,8

Acts 2:38

John 7:38-39

John 14:15-24

John 14:26

John 15:26-27

John 16:5-15

Titus 3:4-6

Study 8

The Holy Spirit

Doctrine

If you had to write a brief doctrinal statement about the person and work of the Holy Spirit what would be the important things to include.

What did other members in your group have that you missed?

Read the statements on the right and underline what matches your statement of faith. What other biblical ideas did they have? What things did they not mention?

Church History

God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.

(Westminster Confession – Chapter 11 Section 4)

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

(39 Articles – Article 1)

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

(39 Articles – Article V)

Our World and What We Believe

In what ways can you see that our world has a belief in a “spiritual dimension”?

Engaging Our World

What might you say when someone says: “You’re not one of those ‘spirit-filled’ Christians, are you?”

Some churches place a greater emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Others seem to make little or no reference to the work of the Spirit. How would you try to correct each of these extremes? Which Bible passages would you use?

Living What We Believe

How should we hope and expect to see the Holy Spirit at work in our lives:

In our relationship with God

In our growth and maturity as Christians

In our service of others

In the unity of our church

Study 8

The Holy Spirit

The Bible

What do these passages teach us about 'the church', think about both its nature and purpose.
(NB: the word 'church' simply means 'assembly' or 'gathering')

Matthew 28:18-20

1 Corinthians 3:9, 16

1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 26-27

Ephesians 2:19-22

Ephesians 3:4-10, 5:23-30

Hebrews 10:19-25

Romans 12:4-5, 10

Rev 21:1-4

Study 9

The Church

Doctrine

Write your own summary paragraph on 'the church' from the passages above.

What did other members in your group have that you think is important to include?

Read the Statement from the Westminster Confession and take note of what matches your statement. Are there any differences?

39 articles - Article XIX Of the Church

Church History

1. The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all.
2. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.
3. Unto this catholic visible Church Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and does, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto.

(Westminster Confession – Chapter 25)

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same. As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred: so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.

(39 Articles – Article 19)

Our World and What We Believe

What different ideas have you come across (especially among Christians) regarding what 'church' is? You might like to discuss the more important ones.

From your experience, how does a person's view of what the church is affect how they live their Christian life?

Study 9

The Church

Engaging Our World

Churches are often portrayed as out-dated, corrupted, even oppressive institutions who do more harm than good? Where can you start with someone who has that perception or has had a negative experience with a church?

Our world would prefer it if the church stuck to 'helping people' and went quiet on Jesus? What's the problem with that?

A friend explains to you that while they don't attend a church consider themselves to be a part of a church because of a family or previous connection (e.g. 'I was baptised a ...'). If it was appropriate to respond, what would you want to say?

Living What We Believe

How does knowing you are a part of God's 'church' affect your relationship with your own local 'church'?

What's the best thing and the hardest thing about belonging to a church?

Think of a couple of ways that you could be a more helpful part of your church?

The Bible

What do these passages say about the return of Jesus and the judgement of the earth?

Acts 17:29-31

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

2 Peter 3:8-14

Study 10

Last Things

Doctrine

Confining yourself to the issues of the return of Jesus and the judgement, write a brief doctrinal statement about the 2nd coming and judgment.

What did other members in your group have that you missed?

Read the statements on the right and underline what matches your statement of faith. What other biblical ideas did they have? What things did they not mention?

Church History

1. God has appointed a day, wherein He will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.
2. The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of His justice, in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and refreshing, which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.
3. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come Lord Jesus, come quickly, Amen.

(Westminster Confession – Chapter 33)

Our World and What We Believe

Can you think of any movies that deal with the idea of the world coming to an end? How/why does the world come to an end? Where does "salvation" come from?

What positive and negative attitudes does our world have about the idea of judgement?

Can you think of people who say that it is unfair for God to judge? Why do they say that?

Study 10

Last Things

Engaging Our World

56% of Australians say they believe in heaven but only 37% say that they believe in hell (*SMH – Good Weekend, 15.1.11*). What would you want to say to someone who said they believed in heaven, but not hell.

How would you respond to someone who said:

"Why is it that innocent people suffer like the people in Haiti with the earthquake but other people who deserve to be punished get away with it."

"The World is just going to keep on turning. It has always been here and it always will."

"How could a loving God send billions of people to hell?"

Living What We Believe

Do you give much thought to the return of Jesus or the judgement that will take place? When are you most likely to think about it. What emotions does the thought of Jesus' return and judgement evoke in you?

How should the idea of the return of Jesus motivate and shape our lives? Think of some practical differences that it would make in your life and in the life of our church.