

Christianity Explained

share the Christian message
one to one from
the Gospel of Mark



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Christianity Explained Ministry

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The Good Book Company

Elm House, 37 Elm Road
New Malden, Surrey KT3 3HB
United Kingdom

Tel: 0333 123 0880

International: +44 (0) 208 942 0880

Email: admin@thegoodbook.co.uk

Websites:

USA & Canada: www.thegoodbook.com

UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

Australia: www.thegoodbook.com.au

New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz



Christianity Explained Ministry

85 Ferndale Street
Annerley 4103, Australia

Tel: 07-3892-3668

International: +61 (0) 7 3892 3668

Website: www.christianityexplained.com

Email: mbennett@powerup.com.au



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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

No Christian work is completely original, but is a mixture of creative thought and borrowed ideas, materials and illustrations. There is nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1 v 9)!

Acknowledgement is made in the following areas: Study 1 is adapted from a talk by a colleague. The book illustration in Study 2 and the motivational questions used in Study 4 are used by kind permission of Dr. D. James Kennedy. In the 1960s, the Lay Institute for Evangelism, was one of the early pioneers of on-the-job training through apprenticeship, especially in the area of church-based evangelism. Many of the other illustrations used are of unknown origin.

"Evangelism today is a challenging task. As western society becomes increasingly secular, many evangelistic programs simply do not work because so few people know even the basic facts of Christianity. Many are ignorant and the greatest need is to have Christianity simply explained. Others think they have made a decision for Christ, but do not know what faith is.

The *Christianity Explained* program directly addresses these critical problems. *Christianity Explained* is a six-session course based on the Gospel of Mark, which helps people understand the foundations of faith in a clear and non-threatening fashion. Each lesson allows participants to openly and honestly discuss their thoughts and concerns in a way that respects a non-Christian's fears and lack of biblical knowledge.

I believe that *Christianity Explained* will enable any serious Christian to effectively present the message of Christ to an unchurched friend, neighbour or loved one. This course has provided the church with a very effective tool for evangelism. I'm glad to have this tool and to recommend its use as widely as possible."

Leighton Ford

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What Christianity Explained has meant to me...

“Christianity Explained answered many of the questions, some angry, that I had about religion. It gave me a basic understanding of what Christianity is all about, and made me want to go on learning and exploring the Bible. I’ve come to understand that Christ was not just an historical figure that some obscure Roman governor caused to be crucified, but the Son of God, who really did give his life for me, and I treasure this gift.”

A MOTHER

“The Christianity Explained course was my introduction to any sort of Bible-study group. When I first attended the course, I knew only of God and that he may exist. By the time the course was completed, I was firmly assured in my belief of God and his word. I have since become a Christian who knows what it was like not to have God in my life. I compare this to life now with God and the known fact that Jesus died for me on the cross, and I am now trying to spread God’s word to other people.”

A YOUNG MAN

“Before I began this course, I would have described myself as agnostic. I believed that there must be a God, but how was I to know who that God is, or which God I should follow? Doing this course made it easy for me to understand Christianity. I now know that I have eternal life. I know God accepts me by his grace, and that my sins are forgiven through the death of Jesus, in whom I now believe.”

A DOCTOR

The
principles
behind
Christianity
Explained

Preparing yourself for evangelism

1. Spiritual self-preparedness is everything

In John chapter 4, Jesus speaks to the woman at the well. Now there were many good reasons that Jesus could have found for not talking to her:

1. He was tired, hot, thirsty and hungry (4 v 6).
2. It was socially not done for men and women to converse in public (4 v 27).
3. Jews normally had no dealings with Samaritans (4 v 9).
4. Jesus knew that the woman had a bad reputation – he ran the risk of tarnishing his own image (4 v 17).

Yet Jesus did speak to her. He was spiritually prepared and alert to grasp the opportunity, no matter what the obstacles.

The spiritual preparation of yourself is everything in personal witnessing. As individual believers, we need several types of preparedness:

- Praying for opportunities
- Looking for opportunities
- Equipped to take opportunities

Christianity Explained can help with the third aspect – being equipped to share the gospel. However, the first and second are a matter of personal spiritual discipline. If you are not **praying** and **looking**, then, by and large, the opportunities will pass you by.

2. Capitalizing on casual opportunities

Quite often, concerned Christians have good opportunities to speak personally to their friends on spiritual matters. But these opportunities often wither on the vine: they do not lead on to an extended presentation of the gospel.

Note how Jesus capitalizes on his passing conversation with the woman:

1. The initial discussion over “physical water” (4 v 7) provides Jesus with a bridgehead to speak of “living [spiritual] water” (4 v 10).
2. The woman’s aroused interest provides Jesus with a bridgehead to the people of the town of Sychar. “Come and see...”, she says (4 v 29).
3. His ministry to the townspeople provides a bridgehead for an unscheduled stay of two days (4 v 40). The *casual* conversation becomes an extended *teaching* opportunity.

As stated before, if you are spiritually prepared and aware, quite often you will find yourself in a “spiritual” conversation.

Christianity Explained provides you with a simple tool for capitalizing on that opportunity.

Remember, in personal witnessing *spiritual self-preparedness is everything*.

For discussion

Read John 4 v 31-42

1. Verses 31-34

What is the food Jesus says he has to eat in this passage?

(Hint: remember the context!)

2. Verses 35-38

Do you consider that there is a ripe harvest in your area? What must be done to bring it in?

3. Verses 39-42

Why did Jesus stay an unscheduled two extra days with the Samaritans?

Does this tie in with the “proceed slowly” concept (see page 11)?

4. Compare verses 19, 29 and 42

How had their assessment of Jesus grown?

Principle 1

Assume nothing!

Many traditionally Christian countries, particularly in the western world, have experienced a significant decline in church attendance in the last 20 years. This decrease in attendance has led to a corresponding rise in the number of those who would nominally call themselves Christian but have little understanding of the Christian gospel.

This may be illustrated from the situation in the USA, where only 40 per cent of the population say they are in church on an average Sunday, although 80 per cent would claim to be Christian. Although this looks good on the outside, many view these bald figures with suspicion, suspecting that a good proportion of those who say they are in church on Sunday are intermittent or occasional church attenders at best.

And, of course, being in church does not guarantee that they are hearing good teaching, or that they are people with a genuine understanding of the Christian gospel.

Compared with other western countries, like the UK, Canada and Australia, these church attendance figures are encouraging. But they mask a change that is going on in the culture which has an enormous impact on the way we think about and practice evangelism.

We make the assumption that, because people grow up knowing the language of Christianity, they have a real grasp on what the gospel actually is. That is, they may know the words God, Jesus, faith and repentance, but they have a clouded or mistaken view of what they actually mean, and how they connect with the Christian message.

So it is fatal to imagine that everybody knows quite well what Christianity is and needs only a little encouragement to practice it. The brutal fact is that, in this “Christian country”, perhaps fewer than twenty people in a hundred have the faintest notion what the Bible teaches about God or man or society or the person of Jesus Christ.

A Christian minister was talking to a group of students from a large college when he was interrupted by a female student who said: “Excuse me, you keep on using a word I don’t understand.” He replied: “What word is that?” (wondering if he was using theological jargon again). She replied in all seriousness, “God”.

As one writer has commented, “It is no longer the case of the shepherd leaving the ninety nine sheep safely in the fold while he looks for the one out on the hills. The ninety nine are scattered, lost on the hills!”

The author recently took a husband and wife through this course *Christianity Explained*. As they read the New Testament they asked questions like “Who is Peter?”, “Who is this David?” and “These Pharisees – are they goodies or baddies?” They are typical modern western people, affluent, well educated but almost totally biblically illiterate.

What does this mean for evangelism?

In the past, we could often assume that people had, in their minds, a basic understanding of Jesus Christ and Bible stories. The job of the evangelist was to build on this platform of knowledge.

This is no longer true. It is our contention that, in evangelism today, **we must begin from the presupposition that the person you are addressing knows virtually nothing about Jesus, the Bible or the gospel.** In the majority of cases, this presupposition will be correct.

As a result of this diminishing knowledge of God in our culture, “crusade” style evangelism has become less and less effective with the passing of time. Not only is it harder to get people to come out to such events, but even those who do make commitments seem to have little idea of what they have done, or why they have taken this step.

Christianity Explained

In this course, the basic assumption is that the person you are taking through has little or no knowledge of Jesus Christ in any meaningful way. You should assume that he or she has never even opened the New Testament.

This does not mean, of course, that you are going to treat the enquirer in a childish or patronising way. It just means that you should not assume any prior knowledge.

In one particular area, this biblical ignorance is chronic, both inside and outside the church. This is the area of “salvation by grace alone” or “justification by faith”. Recently, in a group of eleven adults, all regular members of a reasonably vigorous church, all eleven said that “a Christian is a person who tries to live a good life according to the Ten Commandments”, or some associated answer. Between them they collectively had hundreds of years of church attendance and had listened to thousands of sermons and Bible readings!

Yet such an answer is not just a slight deviation from the truth of say, five degrees. It is 180° off course!

A good rule of thumb is this:

Assume the person you are talking to understands nothing of the gospel until they can tell you, out of their own mouth, what it is.

This course is based on the assumption that the person you are addressing is completely ignorant of Jesus, the Bible and the gospel – even if that person holds a responsible position in your church! In the course of your discussion, you may discover that the person knows a bit more than nothing, and you can adjust your presentation accordingly. But you must not assume it.

A wider application

Although this course has been designed for a traditional, yet declining, Christian culture, it is our belief that it also has a wider use.

Because this course assumes no prior knowledge of the Christian gospel, it is a useful tool for evangelism in other situations as well – for people who have not been traditionally Christian or where first-time evangelism is being undertaken.

We would welcome guidance from evangelists, pastors and missionaries who are working in these situations. Our hope is that the course could be field-tested in a variety of cultures and then constructive suggestions fed back to us. This is already taking place in some countries with good results.

Principle 2

Proceed slowly

The dominance of “quick one-off” evangelism

Since World War II one basic model has often dominated our thinking on this subject of evangelism, particularly in the traditionally Christian countries. We could call this model the “Quick One-off” approach to evangelism, or as one person whimsically calls it, “one-dump” evangelism.

The quick one-off model comes in various forms, but it usually follows this pattern:

1. A summary presentation of the gospel:

A simplified summary of the message of the gospel will be presented to the enquirer(s). This may take the form of an address, as at an evangelistic rally, or a memorized summary of the gospel may be presented to an individual, or the enquirer may be taken through a short tract which highlights the main points of the message.

2. A call to commitment: At the end of this presentation, lasting anywhere from a few minutes to a couple of hours, the enquirer is asked to respond to the gospel in some overt manner, ie: put up a hand, come down to the front, etc. The enquirer is then asked to pray...

3. A prayer of commitment: This prayer expresses a decision to follow Christ. So, quite often after an evangelistic rally, one will hear statements like: “35 people prayed the prayer.”

4. An assumption: Because the enquirer has “prayed the prayer”, it is usually assumed that (a) the person has become a Christian

and (b) the person now understands the Christian gospel. So this leads into...

5. A follow-up nurture course: The new convert is encouraged to participate in a nurture program in which topics like these will be taught: Bible reading, prayer, assurance, church attendance, witnessing, giving, etc.

What’s wrong with the “quick one-off” approach?

In many counties the quick one-off approach has served well in the past, and we need to praise God for those who have come to Christ through its use, and those who continue to do so. But it is our contention here that this model has become less and less effective with the passing of time. The reason for this appears to have been the growing secularization of many societies, as outlined in the chapter “Assume Nothing”.

In many countries less than 5% of the population even have a Sunday School understanding of the gospel, Jesus or Bible stories.

Even those who have made decisions at evangelistic meetings seem to be ignorant of even basic gospel truths. The assumptions made at point (4) above are often erroneous.

During an evangelistic crusade, a colleague was able to speak to many of those who had made “salvation decisions”. He asked them all the well-known question:

Suppose you were to die tonight, and God said to you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?” What would you say?

In not one case over fourteen nights was the enquirer able to give a reasonable, biblical answer to this question, however simply. In fact, any concept of trusting in the completed work of Christ as the only basis for acceptance with God was totally absent from their understanding. This was not the fault of the evangelist, whose addresses were usually powerful and Biblically based. The “fault” lay in the inability of the hearer to absorb the gospel in one quick presentation. It is not surprising that the fall-off rate from such approaches is so high.

The simple gospel is not simple

Why is it that many people cannot understand even a simplified one-off presentation of the gospel? Let us try to understand the reason.

Recently, a group of Christians was asked:

Imagine you were to write a simple, short presentation of the Christian gospel; what biblical or theological concepts would you expect to be in it?

The answers came back something like this:

1. The character of God (creator, love)
2. Sin
3. God sent Jesus
4. His death for our sins
5. Resurrection
6. Repentance
7. Faith
8. Salvation by grace

The “simple gospel” will usually contain most or all of these concepts. But remember, many today have virtually no understanding of the Christian message. So, using the

“quick one-off” approach, we are giving a person who knows nothing at least eight brand new theological concepts to hear, understand, absorb and respond to – all in one brief presentation!

It is rather like taking an eight-course meal, heaping it all onto one plate and saying to the person, “Digest that!” After one or two concepts, people get spiritual indigestion, and begin to make vague statements of assent, like “Yes, that’s right.”

Learning to teach the gospel

It is our contention here that we need to move away from the “quick one-off” approach as our primary thrust in evangelism. There will be occasions when it will be appropriate, but in general it is becoming increasingly ineffective. We need to learn to teach enquirers the gospel and give them time to digest the content.

Christianity Explained seeks to provide one tool for teaching enquirers the gospel over an extended period of time.

Evangelism in the New Testament

The evangelists in the New Testament appear to have been opportunistic, adapting their methods and, to a limited extent, their message, to each different situation. So, there are examples which are like the quick one-off model, as in the case of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16 v 25-34).

However, the evidence in general points to a more extended approach to evangelism. For example:

On three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead... Some of the Jews were persuaded...

Acts 17 v 2-4

So these words seem to explain the general pattern of evangelism in the New Testament: reasoned, explained, proved, persuaded, argued, contended. Generally, the apostles and other evangelists do not seem to have practised “one-dump” evangelism, calling for quick decisions. Quite often, it seems that they did not even ask for decisions. Those convicted asked the preacher!

What is Christianity Explained?

Christianity Explained is a six-unit presentation of the gospel, which aims to fulfil this objective of teaching the fundamentals of the Christian faith. This course is based around the Gospel of Mark, which is chosen for its simplicity. The underlying assumption is that the enquirer knows virtually nothing about Jesus and the Bible.

It’s an evangelistic course in that it seeks to lead the person to genuine faith and repentance by the end of the six sessions. It is a low-key approach in that there is no attempt to pressure or manipulate people into a commitment, though the need for a genuine faith-response is clearly and regularly presented.

Each study in the series aims to teach only *one point*, that is, to hit only one target per lesson. Each unit is also evangelistic in its own right, so that at the end of each unit there is a call to respond to Jesus.

In the first three studies, the course builds into the hearer’s mind some basic knowledge about Jesus Christ and his finished work – that he is the Son of God, his death for our sins, and his physical resurrection. During the first three studies, the enquirer is encouraged to read progressively through the Gospel of Mark. (From experience, most adults will do this “homework”.)

In the remaining three studies we address the question:

• How does the finished work of Jesus apply to me now?

Again, each study elucidates only one main teaching target per unit.

A word of balance

It should not be thought that this is to imply that we should give up all evangelistic enterprises which might be called quick one-off. We need a variety of approaches, as the apostle Paul says: “*that by all possible means we might save some*” (1 Cor 9 v 22). Rather, this is a plea for a general trend or movement in evangelism away from the quick approach, to a model in which we learn to *teach* the gospel.

The two models can actually go well together. For example, at a large World Expo in Brisbane, Australia, the two approaches were used in tandem. The “Pavilion of Promise”, a Christian pavilion at the Expo, presented crowds with a quick (45-minute) visual portrayal of the gospel. Those who responded after the presentation were followed up with *Christianity Explained*. That is, the follow-up was also **EVANGELISM** and not just **NURTURE**.

Several evangelists are using this course as a second phase to their outreach. In this way, the quick initial presentation plus the extended follow-up are regarded as a whole. This has proved to be a fruitful combination.

A practical example

Recently, a well-known evangelist held an evangelistic outreach service at a large suburban church. Instead of the traditional evangelistic services, a creative approach was used:

- The church arranged as many small home meetings as possible. Christians were allowed to come only if they brought a friend from outside the church. The evangelist spoke at each meeting, giving a condensed gospel presentation.

- At the end of each meeting there was no call for decisions, but people filled in a card similar to that shown on p.37 of this manual. Those who indicated a response were invited to do a six-week *Christianity Explained* course. By the end of the event over 100 non-Christians were doing *Christianity Explained*.

The quick one-off presentation and the teaching model were thus coupled together, and the two constituted the evangelistic enterprise. The immediate follow-up was again **EVANGELISM** and not just **NURTURE**.

As one involved person commented later:
“it was very effective...”

Principle 3

Limited time-commitment

Let us suppose you have a friend or relative that you wish to influence for the gospel. One approach you could take is to invite the person to attend a Bible-study group, where perhaps they will hear God's truth being taught. But there are a couple of problems with this approach.

1. The content

The section of the Bible which is being taught in the Bible-study group may not be appropriate for a person who is not yet committed to Christ. For instance, your group may be studying the book of Job, which may be ideal for the level of maturity of the believers present. But a newcomer could sit through many studies on the life of Job, still without understanding the gospel. If the enquirer has the tenacity to stay in the group for a year or two, he or she will possibly work it out in the long run. But most people will have dropped out before that time is up.

2. The commitment

Most Bible studies may go on for months, even years. Now many people are not willing to make that kind of commitment to a "religious" group, at least not in the initial stage.

When people are invited to do a *Christianity Explained* course, they are told that the course goes for just six weeks. If people agree to such an invitation, they know they are making a limited time-commitment. They know that if they do not enjoy the course, they will only have to endure it for six weeks!

It has been found from experience that a person who is not a convinced Christian is

far more likely initially to agree to such a short-term commitment. After the course is finished, we hope that he or she will be more willing to continue in a regular nurture group, or similar program.

A six-week follow-up course is available for use after *Christianity Explained*, which the enquirers are invited to attend. Many times these groups have turned into ongoing Bible study and support cells.

We recommend using the six-week follow-up course *Discipleship Explained*.

In a recent case, six people did the *Christianity Explained* course, and three of them became genuine believers. They are now in an on-going nurture group in which they regularly pray together, read the Bible and share personal details of their spiritual life. But at the beginning, they would have been incapable of doing these things, and would have been frightened off by the very suggestion. The group has since grown to seven members.

The three fears

Imagine that you are not a Christian and a friend asks you to do a *Christianity Explained* course, or to join a Bible-study group. What fears do you think you may feel about participating in such a group? There are at least three which we need to consider:

Fear No 1: ANSWERING QUESTIONS

The greatest of all fears is that of being made to appear foolish in front of the rest of the group. People fear that they will be asked questions about the Bible or the Christian faith, and their ignorance will be exposed to ridicule. When they are being invited, they need to be assured that this will not happen.

Fear No 2: PRAYING ALOUD

People are very apprehensive that the group leader will say to them, “Will you open the session with a prayer?” Again, when inviting people to attend, tell them also, that they will not be asked to pray aloud.

In fact it is strongly recommended that, when you are conducting the *Christianity Explained* sessions, you do not either open or close with prayers. The classes are a fact-finding exercise for non-Christians, and as such, public prayer seems inappropriate. You, of course, should pray for the group members at home, and encourage other Christians to support you in prayer.

Fear No 3: READING ALOUD

Many people cannot, or do not wish to, read the Bible aloud. Assure the person being invited that they will not be asked to do so.

The invitation

When you are inviting a person to do the *Christianity Explained* course with you, assure him or her like this:

*You will not be asked to pray or answer questions from the Bible, or to read aloud.
There will, however, be ample opportunity for discussion.*

It is important this point is made with the invitation, not later on.

The most
effective way
to use
Christianity
Explained

The most effective way to use Christianity Explained

One to one

During the last decade or so there has been a general move in world evangelism away from large crusade-style outreach in the direction of small-group outreach meetings. However, there are problems.

In the second half of the twentieth century, large-scale crusade evangelism was effectively used by the Lord to bring many to Christ. As the century progressed, however, the effectiveness of this approach seemed to diminish, particularly in parts of the western world which have become increasingly biblically illiterate. There were various reasons for this decline in effectiveness:

- As mentioned before, Sunday School attendance dropped off dramatically during this period in many parts. It seemed to become harder to bring un-churched non-Christians to these crusade events, and harder to follow them up afterwards.
- The gospel presentation was of the “quick one-off” model, with the attendant problems described in *Proceed slowly* on page 11.
- Also, of course, this form of outreach was dominated by one extremely gifted man who has proved difficult to replace.
- The other problem with large-scale meetings was, and is, that they are rather impersonal. The speaker communicates through a microphone to the audience. Those who come have almost no personal interaction with the evangelist.

Then, small home groups

Consequently, as time went by, there has

been a move in the direction of small-group outreach. There arose a particular interest in small home-based Bible-study groups. Most Bible-centred churches these days will advertise a range of small-group options.

It was hoped that non-Christians would find this model to be more personal and friendly than either the large outreach meeting, or, for that matter, coming to church.

However, there were some defects in this approach, which seem to have limited its effectiveness:

- Firstly, a home Bible-study group is open-ended. That is, the average group often goes on for years. Non-Christians seem reluctant to make such an open-ended commitment.
- Then, the topics or Bible portions being studied by the group may not be very useful for the newcomer, who may be largely biblically literate, and may feel it!
- The sharing of personal prayer which often takes place in small groups sometimes proves threatening to those who are not believers at this stage.

A personal example. Years ago the author was running a small, home Bible-study group, and a close relative asked if he could come along, with his wife. This was exciting, for he had never shown much interest in Christian things up to that point, and so, of course, they were welcomed enthusiastically.

Can you guess what book of the Bible we were studying at the time? *The book of Revelation!!* Now this may have been very

interesting and stimulating for the regular group members, but was almost useless for the newcomers. They needed milk and all we were serving was thick, juicy steak. Needless to say, they lasted a few weeks, then dropped out, and so far have never returned. We were dumb!!

The small-group material must, of course, be specifically designed with the enquirers' needs in mind.

So, anyone for dinner?

So, Christian leaders began to see that there was a need for a specific type of group. First, it needed to be limited in time, so that the outsider could agree to come without making a long-term commitment they might have later regretted. (See the section *Limited time commitment* on page 15).

Also, the course material needed to present the gospel at the level of those beginning to enquire into the Christian faith.

Then also, the course needed to make no assumptions about the level of biblical knowledge of those attending. Many people today, even in so-called "Christian countries", do not have a basic knowledge of even the most fundamental Bible stories.

Also, the gospel needed to be presented in small, digestible, appetizing servings.

Many today, particularly in the west, are like blank whiteboards as far as Bible understanding is concerned. In fact the situation can be described as worse than that. Other people have been writing on those whiteboards. Media attention which is harmful to the Christian cause is often being written on those whiteboards. Obvious examples would be sexual lapses by church leaders; books like *The Da Vinci Code*; pedophilia convictions of priests; films like *The last temptation of Christ*, etc.

So it was seen that an outreach group must involve two-way communication, and not be just a series of lectures. Yes, the gospel must be presented with clarity, but there must be opportunity for enquirers to ask questions, discuss and even object to what is being presented. There is a need for teaching the truth of the gospel and un-teaching unhelpful impressions that may have been gleaned over time.

Consequently, since about the 1980s, there has been a small flood of such courses onto the Christian market. In your local Christian bookstore, shelves and shelves of similar materials may be found. These courses are usually from about six to twelve weeks in length.

Many of these courses are based around a dinner-party model. Enquirers are invited to dinner, in a home or at the church; after dinner a Christian leader gives a presentation of some aspect of the Christian gospel; following the verbal presentation, fairly open-ended discussion is led by church members assigned to each dinner table. The author has attended several such gatherings and found them to be warm, friendly and effective in terms of communication.

One can only enthusiastically welcome this new direction, particularly as these courses tend to be more focused on building personal relationships. One hears of many people who have come to Christ through such events, and have been able to develop long-standing friendships with their leaders and other group members. This often results in them beginning to attend church, and in joining regular home Bible-study groups. For this we can only praise God for his grace.

"...We have a problem!"

However, one significant problem remains largely unresolved with this small-group and dinner-party approach, and it is this:

In our increasingly complex society, it seems to be almost impossible to have people attend a Christian event for six weeks in a row, let alone twelve! All sorts of extra demands cause people to begin to miss sessions. Sickness is a regular problem; employment commitments may demand that a person work late, or fly off to some distant meeting; unscheduled family needs often take attenders away; and, dare we say, a favorite TV program or sporting event brings on a short-lived bout of the flu!

Now this may not matter much if it is just six lessons in ten-pin bowling or the latest craft. But because the lessons are about the sacred gospel, the lessons missed may be vital!

Suppose a person does not turn up for the session on the cross of Jesus, in which the central issue of the atonement is being explained. They have missed the central issue which gives meaning to the other lessons in the course. Or suppose a person misses the lesson which is describing the central Christian teaching that salvation is by divine grace and not by human effort or moral striving. This is the distinctive mark of Christianity, which sets it apart from every other religion known to the human race.

To miss this lesson is to miss the whole point of the course.

This writer attended a dinner-party style outreach event some time ago. It was conducted in a large well-known church, over a ten-week period. Because it was a well-attended church with good facilities, on the initial night about 100 attended. We estimate that there were about 25 members of the church assigned to the twelve or so tables, so about 75 of the group were guests. We were only able to attend for the first three weeks, but even in that time the number of those attending had declined to a total of about 75 people. Since we reasoned the church members attending the tables must have remained

about the same, the decline must have been from among the ranks of the invited guests. During this time the cross of Jesus was well presented, but a sizable number of the guests missed it. Even if they came back for the following sessions, a vital piece (or should we say, *the* vital piece) of the course had been missed.

This is the functional problem with all small groups. The group must go on week by week. If people have missed sessions, special individual catch-up meetings can be arranged, but this complicates the model and is time consuming.

One to one or one to couple

Christianity Explained started life some decades ago as a small-group evangelistic model, and some people still use it in that way today.

However, over the years, as it has been extensively used in the country of origin (Australia) by a wide diversity of Christian denominations and para-church groups, it has evolved into a one-to-one tool. Almost universally, and largely unplanned, believers have found it to be most effective in the one-to-one format.

For a start this approach completely overcomes the problem of non-attendance outlined previously. If the enquirers ring up and say they are unwell, or cannot meet with you for some reason, there is no problem with continuity. The next time they are available, you simply pick up the course from where you left off. No session is missed.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that the *Christianity Explained* course depends for its maximum effectiveness on continuity. Each study is linked to the one which preceded it and in logical sequence to the following study. The enquirers are requested to read systematically through the Gospel of Mark

as the course progresses. One of our goals is to have them read one of the Gospels (Mark) from beginning to end, which they have probably never done before. If this is all we could succeed in doing, that represents great gain, regardless of whatever other fruit comes from the course. Nothing beats reading the Bible firsthand for oneself!

We heard of one case recently in which the six-week course took twelve weeks to complete, because of a series of unexpected interruptions. However, the outcome was still positive. This method has been found to be particularly effective with couples, and some personal examples are given at the end of this section.

One advantage of this approach is that you will often develop friendships that continue long after the course is finished.

Their place, not yours

This is a practical tip. We would strongly recommend that, if possible, you hold the meetings at the enquirers' home, rather than at your home or at the church. Why do we emphasize this?

- Most importantly, it means the turning up is up to you, not up to the enquirers. There is nothing worse than sitting at home waiting for someone to turn up who, for some reason, has opted out. It can also make future contact embarrassing.
- Secondly, the meetings are on their own familiar territory, where they may feel more secure.
- It also overcomes the problem of baby-sitters. If the enquirers have children, and have not been able to get a baby-sitter, it means only one of a couple will turn up if it is at your home or the church. And often it will be the man who gallantly volunteers to stay home! Meeting at "their place" removes this problem.

- Paul says it was his desire to make the gospel "free of charge" and so we should be prepared to go out of our way rather than expecting them to pay that cost. The apostle again testifies that his ministry was in "public" and "house to house" (Acts 20 v 20).

It may not always be possible to hold the course at the enquirer's home. In such cases you will need to opt for the next best available venue. But "their place" should always be the first option tried.

Costly

You will have appreciated by now that this way of sharing the gospel is costly in terms of time.

To take someone through *Christianity Explained* will cost you at least six time-slots, probably evenings, away from the comfort of your own home, and possibly away from your favorite television program. If God works by his Spirit and there is a positive response, you will need to spend more time then, helping them with an initial follow-up course like *Discipleship Explained* or *The Bible Explained*.

The author, who loves football, recently spent almost every Friday night for 20 weeks with just one couple who responded to the gospel. (Friday night is live football night on the local TV!)

But there is no greater thrill in the Christian life than seeing a person come out of eternal darkness into the light of Christ's kingdom. The tragedy is that most "lay" Christians have never experienced this joy.

Although it is true that not all are given the gift of being an evangelist, it is often assumed that only the pastor or minister has the gift. We believe from experience that 10% of Christians in any reasonably well-taught congregation would be capable of sharing the *Christianity Explained* course.

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, we are told that he was tired (he sat down), hungry (the disciples had gone to buy food), thirsty (he asked for a drink) and in a hurry (Jews only went through Samaria as a shortcut to Galilee when in a hurry – it saved a day's walk). There was a cultural problem (she was from the hated Samaritans) and an ethical one (it was not usually done for a man to speak to a woman in a public place). Jesus was loaded with good excuses for not taking time to share the “living water” with her. But he did, and he found time to stay for two more days. (John 4 v 40)

That by all means...

What has been written above is not in any way meant to imply that we ought not to hold large evangelistic events or attempt dinner-party evangelism. In this area we should as Christians be pragmatists, seeking to do what is most effective, limited only in these strategic areas:

- **We must be faithful to the gospel.** Paul speaks about the “offence of the gospel”. The gospel is offensive to proud human hearts, and there is nothing we can do about that, nor would we wish to. We must not water down the cross, future judgement, the lordship of Christ or anything that goes against the spirit of this age.
- **However, it is said rightly: “Do not add your offence to the offence of the gospel.”** The gospel is offensive enough, without doing unnecessary things that will turn people off. That is why, for instance, it is suggested not to open or close *Christianity Explained* studies with prayer. Some enquirers may think that they have to learn to pray aloud in public as you do in order to become a Christian. Also if the enquirer is not a believing Christian, you have no basis for joint prayer. Effective prayer can only be

offered in the name of Jesus, in whom they apparently do not yet believe.

- **The apostle says, “We have renounced secret and shameful ways.** We do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience.” (2 Corinthians 4 v 2) Some evangelists seem willing to employ almost any method, some dubious, that will get people to make decisions. God is sovereign in this work of outreach. We of ourselves can never convert a single person. Yes, God has chosen to use our words, but if the Spirit of God is not active in the work of new birth, nothing of eternal value will happen. It has been rightly said:

*A man convinced against his will
Is of the same opinion still.*

Again, this is not in any way written against crusade-style evangelism, dinner-party outreach, or any model which will effectively communicate the gospel of Christ. As the apostle again says:

So that by all possible means we might save some.

Personal experiences of Christianity Explained used one to one

It is our experience that about one person in three or four who go through the Christianity Explained course comes to Christ and goes on in the Christian faith. The following are mostly drawn from the more positive side. Some names have been changed:

Situation: church "altar call"

John is a minister in a local evangelical church. At the conclusion of one sermon, in which the gospel had been presented clearly, he invited members of the congregation who desired to follow Christ to indicate by raising their hand. A number of the congregation responded, including one couple with three small children. As John was not well at the time, he asked other members of the church to follow them up.

The result was that the couple completed *Christianity Explained*, followed by *the Bible Explained* and then *Discipleship Explained*. Through this experience the couple have clearly come to commitment to Christ, and the husband is now a leading member of the congregation.

Situation: retirement village

"We write to commend *Christianity Explained* as a wonderful evangelistic tool. It is a low key, easy to understand course that is non-threatening to those attending.

"My wife and I live in an over 50's community and after getting to know our neighbors invited them to do *Christianity Explained* with us. We had a group of 6 and at the end of the course 3 were converted and gave their lives to Christ, all 6 are continuing on in Bible study.

"One of those converted was Eileen, 89 years old, and her life was completely changed. I

asked her what it was like now. She said that before the course she was afraid to die but now that fear had gone and she had peace about dying. She also said that it was like she had gone through her wardrobe and thrown out all of the old clothes. At 89 years she had a new life in Christ. It has made me realize that the elderly need Jesus in their lives as much as anyone.

"Thank you Lord for your goodness to all you call."

Shane & Wendy

Situation: English class

"I have learned more in three weeks of *Christianity Explained* than five years at church!"

Lee is a university lecturer from Mainland China. He studied for his qualification for five years in the West, and attended church spasmodically during that time.

His wife started attending English improvement classes, and somehow knew that one of the teachers was a believing Christian. She asked the teacher, "Could you please teach the Bible to us?" The teacher had often used *Christianity Explained*, and it seemed an ideal course for their situation. Half way through the course, Lee said "I have learned more in these three weeks than in the last five years."

At the end of the course they were asked, "How do you feel you stand now in relation to Jesus Christ?" They both replied: "We are close and very interested, but we do not feel we are there yet."

They expressed a desire to know more about the Old Testament, so have now begun *The Bible Explained* course.

Situation: work conflict

Brian works for a music company in his city. There are two employees in his department and he held the senior position. However, the junior employee coveted Brian's position and began to bad-mouth him around the office, with the result that Brian was finally demoted and the other took his place. They had to continue to work side by side.

This, coupled with the break-up of a long-term relationship with a girl, devastated Brian, and caused him to begin to seek again the firm faith of his godly parents. Since coming to Christ he has completed *The Bible Explained*, *Discipleship Explained*, and is being trained to share *Christianity Explained* with others.

Situation: pre-marriage

Brad is a young man who was seeking to marry a girl from a Christian home. He requested to do the *Christianity Explained* course, and professed to have come to faith in Jesus. However since marrying the girl, there has been no real evidence of ongoing Christian faith or desire to join with God's people.

Situation: personal problems

"After growing up un-churched I had the gospel explained to me when I was 17. At the time my life was spiraling down into alcohol abuse, but what my friends would think of me was more important.

"At age 22 I sought help for my alcohol problem. This put me in contact with some people who had recently become Christians. I had been spiritually searching for some time, exploring New Age practices and beliefs. Finding these fruitless and empty, what these Christians had begun to look very attractive. One of these new friends, Rob, invited me to come to his place for six Wednesdays in a row. Another friend of his, Mick, was going to come over and explain

about Jesus and what it means to be a Christian. (I found out later it was *Christianity Explained*.)

"For the first three weeks I tried every excuse not to go. Then, somewhere between weeks 3 and 4 something changed inside me, and I couldn't wait to get there to learn more, starting to devour the things of God. By the end I was asking myself, "Why haven't I become a Christian yet?" As C.S. Lewis said, it seemed the only reasonable thing to do.

"God has led me on an amazing path, and I am now in full-time Christian ministry. Mick has gone to be with the Lord now, but the legacy he has left on my life, through *Christianity Explained*, continues on."

Murray

Situation: missionary

"A number of years ago I wrote when I was serving at a church in Manila, Philippines. I want to let you know what a powerful tool *Christianity Explained* became in that situation and that the Lord has used it to help bring many into a personal relationship with Himself.

I and others found it to be effective across cultural and religious divides. Seekers from Buddhist, Spiritualist, New Age, Shintoist and Taoist backgrounds have found a living faith and gone on in their discipleship journey."

Christianity Explained is available in a number of non-English languages. Visit www.christianityexplained.com for further details

Situation: ridicule turned

"Some years ago I was working for a production house that edited film to be used in TV news and commercials. One of our on-camera presenters, Chris, we knew to be a practicing Christian. I used to mock him

for “doing Christian things”, and called him words to the effect “you Bible basher!”

“About five years later I shifted to the coast, needing a job, and a lady turned up at the door with a meal for myself and my children, and an invitation to attend church next day. At church there was a plea for someone to do fill-in work at the local school for the next six weeks. Monday morning saw me on the job!

“Also during that time I began the course *Christianity Explained*, and by the end of 12 weeks... (yep, it took me that long with all the questions I asked...) I was born again, baptized, and proud to be a “Bible-bashing” Christian. But wait, there’s more! (Starting to sound like an ad don’t you think?). In my walk with Christ, he provided me with a wonderful husband.

“While we were watching the video of *Christianity Explained*, to my surprise and astonishment, who should come out to haunt me but Chris, the man I had teased and taunted so many years ago! (An earlier version of the CE video was introduced by Chris.)

“Now my husband and I are taking seekers through *Christianity Explained*. I praise and thank God for all He has done in my years, that He has been faithful and used this course to bring myself and my husband into Eternal Life.”

Popi

Situation: the school gate

“My son was attending our local kindergarten a few days a week. He made good friends with another boy and would tell me all about him. This made me curious to wonder what was so remarkable about this kid. It took some time before I finally got to meet him and his mother – we were always missing each other at pick up time. When we eventually did get to meet, the conversation of God came up as a general comment about current world crises. She asked me if I was inter-

ested in Christianity. “This was really strange because I had been looking and calling and thinking about God. She invited me over to her house for a workshop entitled *Christianity Explained*. She assured me that there was only one other person who would be there, and I wouldn’t have to do anything. I said yes immediately because I had finally met someone who wanted to talk about God on a personal level.

“I was excited inside and couldn’t wait. I loved the first lesson instantly. It was my first time of really reading a Bible. I connected straight away with what was being presented. Each week got harder for me, as I know now there began a tremendous war in my head, and it hurt like mad. Scriptures were being put into my heart which were tearing down years of a belief system I learned as a child. By the time we had reached the last session, I knew I had to choose between religion or the Jesus of the Bible.

“I chose Jesus and although at times it has not been easy, I still rejoice to this day. My life has never been the same since I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

“My friend gave me a copy of *Christianity Explained*, because she knew it had made such an impact on me. I began to share and do the course with others in my town. God seems to place people in my path to witness to, just as he did with me. I love it and pray for it.”

Situation: hippie commune

A young minister was assistant pastor to a church in a large country town. He regularly went to a small out-centre to take church services, and nearby there was a hippie commune. One day the leader of the group was fixing his car, and the jack collapsed, killing his young son who had wandered under the car.

The young minister was asked to lead the funeral service, and he reported that it was bedlam. The mourners were high on drugs before the service began; they fought the undertakers for the tiny coffin; there was a constant din of crying and calling out.

During one short time of silence, the minister was able to say, "Jesus said, let the little children come to me- you must remember that you need to come to him like little children too."

The next time the minister was in the area, the boy's father called to him, "Hey, I found that verse in the Bible." He had been reading a New Testament he had been given and came across the "little children" verse. Out of this small beginning, the minister was able to take members of the group through *Christianity Explained*, and some became believers.

A training course in *Christianity Explained* was held in the main town some time later, and there was a whole row of hippies in the front seats, complete with tattoos, body piercing etc. One of them we have since heard has gone into full-time Christian ministry.

Situation: wedding preparation

A young couple came to a local church seeking a place in which to be married.. They were from different denominational backgrounds, so they decided to come to another church that was neutral for them both. It was suggested they might like to do a Bible course as part of their marriage preparation, to which they agreed. They ended up doing *the Bible Explained* course first, followed by *Christianity Explained*. (The courses can be reversed sometimes according to perceived need or the invitation more likely to succeed).

The girl had had some upbringing in an evangelical church; he was from a very different denominational background.

He wrote later:

"These courses definitely opened my eyes to the content of the Bible and also my own faith.

"A week in-between each session was a good time for reflection. The morning after the sessions I often spent the whole 25 minute walk to work reflecting on the previous night's session and how it applied to my life.

"The courses raised many questions for me. These included how the creation fits in with the life of Jesus, the meaning of grace and God's plan for me. While these questions were answered in the sessions, they led me to further explore these issues and my faith at church and with other Christians."

She (his now-wife) also responded:

"The invitation to progress through the course seemed a timely prompt from God, which was offered in a non-threatening and supportive manner.

"I feel I have a more personal relationship with Christ. I pray more openly, and with knowledge that I am on a journey.

"I would recommend the courses to people in all walks of life; for those who are searching, and for Christians from all denominations."

Where next?

Follow up

At the end of the *Christianity Explained* course, the last thing you will ask the enquirers to do is to fill in the Course Assessment sheet (see page 80). You will find a copy of this at the back of this manual, after the six studies section. This assessment sheet is included for two reasons:

- It will help you to gauge if the enquirers have come to genuine faith in Christ.
- One of the last questions on the sheet will ask the enquirers if they want to do more study into the Christian faith. We would like to suggest two further courses you could use at this point:
 - *Discipleship Explained*
 - *The Bible Explained*

However, the order in which you do these courses will vary according to the kind of response you have had. (By the way, by the time you have spent six weeks with a person, you will know fairly exactly where they stand spiritually, and especially in regard to commitment to Christ.)

If they indicate that they have come to faith in Christ

We would suggest offering *Discipleship Explained*. It is specifically designed for new Christians, to help them in the initial spiritual growth stage. It is a six week course, based around the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew Chapters 5-7) The topics covered are:

Discipleship Explained	
Belonging	Assurance of salvation
Sharing	Beginning to share my new faith
Listening	Listen to God speak in his Word
Relating	Personal relationships and church
Asking	Prayer
Having	Money, its use and dangers

The enquirer is asked to complete each of the six studies by themselves during the week, and to bring their completed study along to the weekly meeting for discussion.

You will see that these six studies are written in an interactive format. The studies are based for good reason on the Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew.

On that occasion Jesus gathered together the new disciples he had recently called, took them, Moses-like, up a mountain, and said to them in effect: “Friends, I do not want you to be under any illusions. Following me will be hard, like someone going through a narrow gate to walk a hard and rough road. Let me tell you in some detail what it will mean to follow me, to be my disciple. I do not want you to say later: ‘If I had known what it would be like, I would never have signed on.’”

In our opinion, there is nothing better in the New Testament than the Sermon on the Mount for helping to disciple new believers.

If they have not yet come to Christ, but express an interest in doing more

In this case, *Discipleship Explained* would

not be appropriate, as it is really for new Christians. We would suggest offering *The Bible Explained* for those who have not yet come to faith. Many non-Christians are looking for something in life, and want to get a handle on the Bible as a whole, but are usually put off by the length and complexity of the book.

If fact, many do not even know that there is a coherent and systematic plan which God has been working out over thousands of years, especially from the call of Abraham onwards. They often feel that the Bible is just a disjointed collection of “wonder-stories”, and have a vague suspicion that there are two different gods in Scripture, one in the Old Testament and another in the New!

The Bible Explained simply presents an overview of the Bible as “Seven Great Journeys”. There is an introductory study called “From Creation to New Creation.” It covers the Creation and Fall in Genesis Chapters 1-3, then looks briefly at the “New Creation” coming, described in Revelation 21 v 1. (We do not delve into Second Coming theology.) A summary of the Bible’s message in one sentence? “From Creation to New Creation.”

The rest of the Bible, we teach, can easily be remembered as Seven Great Journeys, which are:

The Bible Explained: 7 journeys	
Noah	Journey in the ark
Abraham	From Ur to Canaan
The Exodus	From Egypt to Canaan
The Exile	To Babylon and back
Jesus	From heaven to earth and back
Paul	The good news spreads by the power of the Holy Spirit
Us	Our journey to heaven: the Christian hope

The Bible Explained offers several opportunities for going over the central Gospel, and as such is more suitable for those who have not yet come to Christian faith.

The materials available with *The Bible Explained* course are:

- A leader’s manual
- A workbook for each enquirer
- A DVD series. The author presents *The Bible Explained* course to a live audience over eight evenings. (Not essential)

Or, do all three!

As mentioned previously, the author has, on occasions, ended up doing all three courses, particularly with those who have come to new faith, and are hungry for spiritual food.

On-the-job training

Always seek to take another hand-picked believer with you for on-the-job training. Christians love going to training courses on evangelism, but the skills they are taught rarely result in any real evangelism. In our opinion, classroom training in evangelism is a very ineffective method of training and enthusing others to attempt this vital work. I developed my own passion for this work because a senior minister in my early years as a Christian took me with him, and showed me how.

I contact the enquirers beforehand and say something like this, “I am looking forward to meeting with you soon. I have a friend from the church who would like to learn this course. Would it be alright if he/she sat in with us?” Usually there is no problem.

If the person you are training is of the opposite gender, ask the trainee to come to, and leave from the venue in his or her own vehicle, so as to give no appearance of impropriety.

Where do I get the contacts?

I have a saying, moulded over 30+ years of ministry and church experience: “Evangelicals do not evangelize.” Over the years, I have worked in a number of strong, Bible based, well-taught congregations. Yet in every case, without exception, the evangelistic productivity of the congregation has been almost nil.

I have seen many people come to Christ through the paid ministry team, and I have seen people converted through the church organizations such as the youth groups, but it is extremely rare to hear of a congregational member actually leading a non-Christian to faith in Jesus. If you asked me how many times a person has come to me saying something like “Minister, I would like you to meet Bob. I have been helping Bob in the Christian faith, and now he says he wants to follow Jesus” – in 30+ years, how many times do you think a church member has said that to me? I could count them on one hand with some fingers missing.

I ask myself, why? We are so keen to attend mission conferences and Bible talks, but we seem to have little concern for the lost under our noses. If they live in Africa, we are concerned. If they live five minutes from our door, we seem to lose our evangelistic zeal. Why?

I must try to give some answers to this question, which may sound a bit hard. Some of the answers, it appears to me are:

- “I am lazy. I cannot be bothered paying the cost.”
- “I really do not care if other people go to hell, so long as I’ve got my personal salvation.”
- “We have a ministry team we pay to do the job for us.”
- “I believe God will give them a second chance.” (*He won’t. Not in my Bible.*)

- “I hope they will make a death-bed repentance.” (*Extremely rare. It hardly ever happens.*)
- “I go to church, I am on a church committee and I go to Bible study. I simply cannot afford any more time.” (*Consider dropping the Bible study. Many Bible study groups can be an excuse for not doing any ministry.*)
- “I must spend more time with my family.” (*The family is central, but can be used as a cop-out.*)
- “When I get home from work, I feel too tired to go out.” (*Work shorter hours. Accept a lower standard of living.*)
- “I do not have the gift.” (*Peter says to the whole church, “Always be prepared...” 1 Peter 3 v 15*)
- “I do not know what to say. I am afraid I would muck it up.” (*We all do. Christianity Explained can help.*)
- “I do not know any non-Christians” (*Join a social or sporting group.*)

When Jesus met the woman at the well, he was tired, hot, thirsty and hungry, and in a hurry. Jews did not normally speak to women in public, especially not to Samaritan women. He probably did not feel like taking an evangelistic opportunity. Yet by the end of the story he found two extra days to spend with the despised Samaritans. Evangelism is costly!

Contacts can be gleaned from a variety of sources:

- Fringe people in church
- Christians who are unsure or untaught
- Contacts provided by the ministry team
- Relatives

- Neighbors
- Work colleagues
- Friends
- Contacts through leisure

Laymen, you have contacts with hundreds of people whom your minister or pastor will never meet. If we leave outreach up to the professional ministry team, the job will never get done. Can I suggest how you can get started right now?

1. Begin by setting aside one night a week for this work.
2. Begin by praying that God will give you just one person with whom you can share the gospel.

Jesus said: "I tell you, open YOUR eyes and look at the harvest fields! They are ripe for harvest." **John 4 v 35**

"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."
Luke 10 v 2

Other ways
to use
Christianity
Explained

Other ways to use Christianity Explained

Small groups

A number of churches and individuals are preferring to use a small-group approach to *Christianity Explained*. That is, people are invited to join a small group of enquirers to investigate Christianity over a six-week period.

This approach has certain advantages over the one-to-one method, particularly for shy people who may feel more secure in the larger group.

1. Advertising the group

If you want to use a small-group approach, it is suggested that a simple advertising leaflet could be distributed – a sample of such a leaflet may be found on page 35 of this book. Versions of other designs and sizes can be found at www.thegoodbook.com.

For such a course, people could be recruited from sources like this:

- Church members may be encouraged to invite or bring along non-Christian friends and relatives.
- Churchgoers, whom the minister or pastor feel do not understand the gospel clearly, could be personally encouraged to join.
- Referrals may be gleaned from people who have done a previous course and who have relatives or friends who would profit from *Christianity Explained*.
- The hosts, (the Christian couple who provide the home for the series) often invite their friends and relatives.
- Word of mouth.

2. Advertising in church

If you are going to verbally advertise such a course in the church, you need to present the idea in the right way. For instance, suppose you stood up in church and announced:

We are running this course for pagan non-Christians and you would be very welcome to come!

You can imagine the sort of response you would get! Nil! A better approach would be:

This course is designed to go over the fundamental building blocks of the Christian faith. It will not be heavy or deep theology, but it is designed to allow you to check out the simple fundamentals of what Christians believe.

You would be welcome to come, or you may know someone who would be interested. Let me assure you that you will not be required to answer questions, or to pray or read the Bible aloud. There will, however, be ample opportunity for discussion.

Such an approach is inoffensive, and has encouraged many to do the six-week course.

3. Group size

It is suggested that each group be kept as small as possible. The larger the group, the more difficult it is to deal with people's individual needs. With increasing size, there is a law of diminishing returns that sets in!

About five or six enquirers should be the maximum. If the group goes over this size, then it is suggested that the group be split.

4. A regular program

Most churches approach evangelism as a series of stop-start, one-off evangelistic thrusts: an outreach; an evangelistic service; a Vacation Bible School; a coffee morning, and so on. These are good, but...

We wish to encourage churches to set up regular and systematic programs of evangelism so that outreach is continuous and not spasmodic.

A simple program can be set up to follow the academic year. The year is divided into two semesters. A *Christianity Explained* group, or groups, can be run in each semester, and after each major holiday event. This would ensure that at least three or four times a year people have an opportunity to be introduced to the gospel.

5. Christians out of groups

Try to keep known believers out of the group as far as possible, except for those involved in leading it. Some well-meaning Christians can't help answering all the questions, while the guests go more and more into their shells.

The only exception to this principle should be where believers wish to bring along an enquiring friend. In such a case, where the enquirer may not be prepared to come alone, an exception should be made, but in no other case. You should tell the Christian in this case to take a low profile in the group, and not to say too much!

6. Follow-up

At the end of the course, all members of the group should complete the *Course Assessment sheet* (see page 80), and be invited to do the follow-up course.

From experience, about one-half to two-thirds of those who have finished the *Christianity Explained* course have expressed a desire to do the follow-up course, including

many who have not yet become believers. Some have come to genuine faith in the second course!

Other ways to use Christianity Explained

Area visitation

The small-group approach may also be tied into a door-to-door area visitation scheme. One such scheme which the writer has used productively is described here.

1. Program

- A Christian home is selected in a suburban area and the program is focused on about 200 homes near the host home. This usually means about four large blocks.
- A mailbox drop is then done to these 200 homes, inviting people to a six-week course entitled *Christianity Explained*. People may be given a variety of choices, such as a daytime women's group, a Friday evening mixed group or a Sunday morning mixed group. (A sample leaflet is shown opposite. Customizable color versions are available for free download from www.thegoodbook.com)
- These 200 homes are then visited to see if there are any people who will respond. On average, six or seven people have come to the groups as a result of the visitation, though this number has varied from area to area. Where there is some interest expressed, the host or study leader revisits these people so they know someone in the group and will not be coming in as total strangers.

As well as the contacts made in this way, others are recruited from these sources mentioned before:

- Church members' friends or relatives
- Churchgoers, who may not understand the gospel

- Referrals from people who have done a previous course
- Friends of the hosts
- Word-of-mouth

On average, twenty people have been recruited for each course, and these are broken up into a number of groups. Many of those who have attended profess to have become Christians through this course.

2. Follow-up

All who do the *Christianity Explained* course are invited to join the follow-up course. We recommend the *Discipleship Explained* follow-up course available through the websites listed on page 2 of this manual.

3. Future development

By doing one area of 200 homes three or four times a year, a local area of about 5,000 plus homes could be covered once every 8 years. However, the basic concept could be expanded to run two areas simultaneously, which would reduce this time to once every four years, which is a better goal.

4. Personnel

To run one *Christianity Explained* course for one term, the following personnel would be required:

- Course co-ordinator
- Visitation co-ordinator
- Study leader
- Hosts (their home is where meetings are held)
- Ideally a team of ten visitors

5. A year-round plan

Many churches have a stop-start approach to evangelism. They make a big effort for a special event or outreach week, but then, feeling they have “done it”, relax into maintenance mode again. Evangelism should be part of the daily, weekly and annual routine of church life. *Christianity Explained* can be a major asset in making this work for your church.

a. Organize regular small groups running *Christianity Explained*, which start soon after regular opportunities to invite outsiders. These might be a number of **guest services** spread throughout the year, or special services at Christmas, Easter or New Years.

Give an invitation at the church service something like this:

You may be someone who is new to the Christian faith, or who wants to go back to basics and think through what it really means to be a Christian. We're running a six-week course where you can ask any question you want, and not be put on the spot or embarrassed in any way.

At the end of the service people would be asked if they wish to fill in a small card like the one opposite.

b. *Christianity Explained* can also be run as specialized small groups in the various

departments of your church, or as mixed or general groups at different times, which may suit different kinds of people. Eg:

- Youth groups
- Women's groups (during the day)
- Men-only groups
- Seniors
- Before or after church

c. These groups could also be advertised through:

- Leaflets distributed to church members
- Members inviting friends and relatives
- Special services
- Mailbox drop
- Home visitation following a mailbox drop
- Other advertising (eg: local papers, etc.)

4. Your church should also set an achievable goal for the year such as: aim to have 20/50/200 enquirers do the course in the next 12 months!

Christianity Explained

I am interested in finding out about more about Christianity in more detail, and would like to do the six-week course *Christianity Explained*. Please contact me with details.

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Christianity Explained

You are invited to a series of six talks, plus discussion

*Is there any hope for the world?
Can I find purpose and happiness?
Where do we go when we die?*

- You do not need to know anything about the Bible
- You won't be asked to read, pray or answer questions
 - You will be given every chance to discuss

You need only have an open mind!

Other ways to use Christianity Explained

Evangelistic services

Evangelism in our culture has often centred on the time-honored tradition of evangelistic services or outreaches.

In this model, a well-known speaker is invited to come and preach the gospel, and some form of invitation is given at the end for the people to respond to Christ.

Now let me affirm right away the importance of the prophetic declaration of the word of God. All great spiritual awakenings have contained this element of the preaching of the gospel by people of God, full of the Holy Spirit. Although, no doubt, God has used evangelistic services to great benefit in many lives, such enterprises seem to have been decreasing in effectiveness in recent years.

Any attempt to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom must be commended and encouraged. However, such outreach services seem to suffer from the same problems and limitations previously outlined in this course.

For example, it is felt that, in such services, there are three main problems.

1. Too much is assumed

Those present are invited to make a “decision for Jesus” or a “salvation decision”. When they do so, it is assumed that they have understood the gospel and are now “saved”.

Because we make these assumptions, the person responding is then invited to do a “follow-up” course that covers Christian growth in topics such as prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, witnessing, etc. But there appears to be a fundamental error in such reasoning. Let me illustrate.

A Christian colleague was a senior advisor at a recent evangelistic event. When people responded to the evangelist’s invitation, they were then spoken to by trained counselors. The counselor then took the person to a senior advisor, whose job it was to ascertain that the responder had adequately understood the gospel. This advisor asked those who were brought to him the question found in Study 4 of this course: *Suppose you were to die tonight, and God said to you “Why should I let you into my heaven?” What would you reply?*

In not one case, spread over 14 nights, was the person being counseled able to give any reasonable answer to this question! Not one could simply and clearly outline the gospel!

Now the fault for this did not lie with the evangelist, whose addresses were consistently good and powerful. The fault, if any, lay with the assumption that the average person would be able to understand the gospel in a single presentation.

2. The presentation is too quick

Do not think that this is written against such evangelistic preaching – it is not, but the average person simply cannot absorb the gospel in one quick presentation, however good that presentation may be.

How much better if the evangelist were to say, at the end of the address, something like this:

If your interest has been aroused by the message tonight, we want to invite you to join a six-week study group which will look in greater detail at the things I have been saying. Or if you prefer to meet one-to-one, that can be arranged.

That is, the aim of follow-up is not Christian growth but evangelism. In this six-week follow-up course, the people who have responded will be taught the gospel.

The leaders of these groups will then become co-evangelists with the main speaker in the proclamation of the gospel. Then, after they have understood the basic gospel, the person can go on to look at the growth subjects of prayer, Bible reading, and so on.

We keep making the fundamental mistake of assuming that when people respond, they understand the gospel, and they are “saved”. It is a contention here that neither of these is usually true at this stage. They may become true as the gospel is consolidated in the follow-up phase.

3. The appeal is too narrow

Most evangelistic services are aimed at a narrow group – those who are “right now” ready to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour or rededicate themselves to him. It is right that our appeal should be addressed to this group. However, there is usually a second, and often larger group who may wish to say something like this:

Yes, I am interested in what you said tonight – it strikes a responsive chord with me. However, I am not yet ready to take such a step – but I would be interested in investigating these things further.

Usually, however, we make little provision for this second group. So I wish to offer a practical suggestion which is now being used by some evangelists. At the end of the evangelistic address, each person is given an envelope which contains a pencil and a small questionnaire.

The speaker then asks people to respond voluntarily to the message preached by marking one or more of the boxes which apply to them. At the end of the service the offertory plates or bags are sent around, perhaps dur-

ing a hymn, and these questionnaires are collected. The people are assured that they will be dealt with confidentially. Those who have responded, especially to the first two boxes, are subsequently invited to join a *Christianity Explained* class for six weeks.

In a recent evangelistic service, about 100 people were present and this method was used. Two people ticked the first box, indicating they had received Christ. But about twelve ticked the second box, asking to join such a six-week course.

Note that it is vital to have your follow-up program in place before the evangelistic service is held, so that the follow-up takes place efficiently and without delay.

Such a method could also be used for special services such as Christmas and Easter.

The questionnaire card could be worded like this:

- ☐ I have decided, for the first time, to surrender my life to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.
- ☐ I would like to join a six-week discussion group to investigate Christianity further.
- ☐ I have not yet accepted Jesus Christ, but I would like to receive some literature to help me in this decision.
- ☐ I have a special need which is affecting my relationship with God and other people. I would like to discuss it confidentially.
- ☐ None of these are applicable at the moment.

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Other practical methods

1. Bible distribution program

One church has used the *Christianity Explained* course in conjunction with a home Bible-distribution campaign. Visitors go door-to-door offering people a free copy of a modern translation of the New Testament.

When people accept, they are also asked if they would like to do a six-week course called *Christianity Explained*, either in their home, or by coming to a group. A leaflet is given explaining the details for the course.

For this type of program, inexpensive New Testaments are available from the Bible Society or similar organizations.

2. Camp studies

A number of people have successfully modified this course as camp studies, either for a youth camp, or for an evangelistic adult camp.

3. Baptism preparation

In churches where infant baptism is practiced, many ministers are using *Christianity Explained* as a way of preparing the parents for this service. So when the parents ring up requesting the baptism, the minister may respond with something like this:

Thank you for your call. We would be pleased to help you. However, you need to understand that this service is for you, the parents, as well as the child, since you are making covenant promises to bring this child up in respect and love of God. Before I would be willing to proceed with this service, I would require/strongly suggest that you do a six-week Baptismal Preparation Course.

The *Christianity Explained* course, given a baptismal flavor, could be used for this preparation. Several ministers have trained teams of lay workers to help them in this work.

4. Believers' baptism or confirmation

Again, several churches are using *Christianity Explained* as the first six weeks of their preparation course either for believers' baptism or for confirmation. It may also be used for wedding preparation.

5. Adult education classes

One person offered *Christianity Explained* as an option through local adult-education classes. To her surprise eight people came, and after the classes wanted to continue as an on-going Bible-study group. This, of course, had to be done on a non-denominational basis. See page 23 for some stories from other churches.

6. Fraternal co-operative

In a country town, the ministers' fraternal decided to visit half the town and invite people to a *Christianity Explained* course on a co-operative basis. They prayed for fifteen people to come, and on the night 75 showed up! The next year they did the other half of the town and another 35 came.

7. Christmas and Easter

Christmas and Easter services are great opportunities for evangelism – what better topics! People often make an effort to attend on these occasions.

Christmas and Easter are excellent opportunities to use the questionnaire card and envelope approach as outlined in *Evangelistic Services* on page 36.

Christianity Explained

The six studies

Introduction to the six studies

This course proceeds from the assumption that some will know nothing about the Christian faith. Some will not even know the basic Sunday school stories, or where to find the books of the Bible, or the difference between the Old and New Testaments.

We are saying we will explain Christianity in only six one-hour sessions. A big claim! Obviously our course structure must be simple and selective. We must not try to confuse people with a complete course of biblical theology.

The course is split into two halves of three studies each.

- **Studies 1, 2 and 3**
The life, teachings and claims of Jesus (Based on the Gospel of Mark).
- **Studies 4, 5 and 6**
How this applies to me.

1. JESUS: SON OF GOD
Homework: *Read Mark 1-5*

2. JESUS: HIS CRUCIFIXION
Homework: *Read Mark 6-10*

3. JESUS: HIS RESURRECTION
Homework: *Read Mark 11-16*

4. SALVATION: GRACE NOT WORKS

Homework: *Read booklet*

5. SALVATION: WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

(i) Repentance

6. SALVATION: WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

(ii) Faith

The Gospel of Mark is used because:

- it is the shortest
- its vocabulary is the simplest
- the opening chapters lack the genealogy of Matthew chapter 1, Luke chapters 1-3, and the difficult “word” concepts of John chapter 1.

Practical tips for leading a course

1. Opening

Before beginning the first study, it is important to make the enquirers feel relaxed and to overcome their fears and apprehension. As we have already pointed out, people have three main fears:

- They will be asked to answer questions and their ignorance will embarrass them.
- They will be asked to pray.
- They will be asked to read aloud.

Your opening remarks should be used to remove these fears (see page 16).

2. Christians out of the groups

If you are using the group approach, try to keep known believers out of the group as far as possible, except for those involved. Some well-meaning Christians can't help answering all the questions while the visitors retreat more and more into their shells.

3. Seating

Sit in a rough circle. The leader should sit in a position in which to be seen easily by all. The enquirer should look, naturally, at the person who is speaking, which will usually be the leader.

4. The leader's role

We are trying to impart knowledge about the Christian faith, so this is more a teaching session than a dialogue meeting. However, all groups function better and people stay more alert and awake if there is a healthy interplay of questions and discussion. The leader should promote this, but at the same time be aware that there is a certain content to get across. Remember, you only have six sessions!

5. Time for each session

Allow one hour to 75 minutes for each session. Each study would take about thirty minutes to give, if there were no discussion. However, discussion is to be encouraged, and should occupy about half the time allotted.

6. Answering questions and "red herrings"

As you proceed through the course, your hearers may ask a variety of questions. The golden rule is: Always take every question seriously, and try to answer it. Never give the hearer the impression you think the question is silly or trivial. If you do, they will probably never ask another one. These studies work better if there is conversation and dialogue. Your hearers will stay more awake and alert if there is interaction between you and them, so welcome any question.

The amount of time you spend on your answer will vary according to how important you consider the question to be.

These may fall into three main categories:

- **Questions from the Gospel of Mark.** See pages 63-68 of this manual.
- **Apologetic questions.** "Why does God allow suffering?" "What about those who have never had a chance to hear the gospel?" "Hasn't the Bible been corrupted as it has been passed down over 2000 years?" At this stage we do not include suggested answers to these in this manual. Your pastor or Christian bookshop will be able to supply you with materials to help answer these difficult questions.
- **Red herrings.** From time to time your hearers may throw in a question totally unrelated to the course. It may even be a silly question. We were asked once: "Do you think Jesus is a man from outer space, maybe from Mars?" Using the golden rule, we did not belittle the question or the questioner, but since the issue was, in effect, trivial, our answer was simply: "No. I don't know of any evidence for that."

The great thing about using a course like *Christianity Explained* is that you can deal with the question, then come back to the point from which you left off. The red herring will not side-track you from the main content you are trying to impart.

If a question really stumps you, what do you say?

"I'm sorry, I am not sure of the answer to your question. I will do some research and try to give you an answer next time."

7. Bible references

Where Bible references are mentioned in the main text, they should be looked up and

read by the leader, or the leader's assistant (if any). Remember, we promised the hearer that he or she would not be asked to pray or read aloud, or to answer difficult questions from the Bible.

When guiding people to a Bible quotation, use the page number if you are using matching Bibles. Otherwise, help them find the reference.

Variations to this course

No Christian has a perfect understanding of God's word, and no gospel presentation will be totally acceptable to every person who uses it.

If you sense a weakness in any part of this gospel presentation, you are free to vary the wording to suit your particular emphasis, provided that such alteration does not seriously change the overall structure and thrust of the course.

- Minor variations are allowable.
- Major structural and content alterations are not.

In any case, use the course as written the first time through – you may find that your “objections” on a first reading are overcome by how it works out in practice! This course has been extensively used and revised, taking into account a lot of experience. Even though, at first sight, you can't see the logic in the way we suggest you do things, try it first rather than adapting it straight away.

Use of this manual

When you are taking a group through *Christianity Explained*, do not have this manual open in front of you. Rather, summarize each study on small sheets of paper which can fit in your Bible. Do not try to hide these notes. You are not expected to memorize the course! You are strongly urged, however, to practice each study beforehand.

Study 1

Jesus – the Son of God

Object

The object of this study is to introduce people to Jesus, especially his early ministry. We look at his authority and miracles, and see that they point to his status as the divine Son of God.

At the beginning

- You will need inexpensive New Testaments to hand out where indicated below.
- Warm introduction to welcome everyone.
- Explain that although the course is being organized by “Church X”, you are not wanting to push any particular denominational line. Rather, you will be looking at those facts on which there is general agreement among mainstream churches.
- Assure them, “You won’t be asked to pray, or read the Bible out loud or asked to answer questions – there will, however, be ample opportunity for discussion”.
- Encourage them to do the whole six weeks as each study leads on to the next.
- Ask if there are any questions about how the group is to operate.

The first study

1. Four opening statements

- The title of this course is *Christianity Explained*.
- Christianity, as the name implies, is all about Jesus Christ.
- The only records we have of Jesus are the four “biographies” – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- Over the next few weeks we will be looking at one of these, the Gospel of Mark. (Give out New Testaments and help enquirers to find Mark.)

2. Study

Begin by looking at Mark 1 v 1. “*The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God*”.

What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Son of God? We will see today that it means that Jesus is a person with authority – all the authority of God his Father. In order, look up these passages, making brief comments on each. Create some flash cards and then put them out on the floor or table as you go through as outlined opposite.

(a) Jesus’ authority as a teacher

Mark 1 v 21-28

The people were surprised at the method of Jesus’ teaching. He did not quote the thoughts of other Rabbis or teachers. His characteristic way of teaching was, “I say to you...”

(b) Jesus’ authority over sickness

Mark 2 v 1-12

At just a word this man was instantly healed. The Bible contains over 30 such incidents – the sick, blind, lame and leprous were healed. You might ask the group if they have had an experience of spiritual healing – if nothing else the question might be a good “ice-breaker”.

The Gospel of Mark contains many such examples of Jesus’ extraordinary authority.

- In a violent storm, he stood up in a boat and commanded the wind and waves to die down, and they obeyed (see Mark 4 v 35-41).
- He healed demon-possessed people with a word.
- On three recorded occasions he raised up dead people – even Lazarus, who had been dead for four days.

(c) Jesus' authority to forgive sins

Mark 2 v 1-12

Jesus said to the man: "Your sins are forgiven". The religious leaders rightly saw this as a claim to be equal with God. The rest of the New Testament tells us that Jesus is indeed equal with God as God's Son – more than that, he is both God and man in the one person. (Emphasize this point.)

So this is the picture we are building up. Jesus has come into God's creation, God's world, with the full authority of God. There is no part of the creation – animate, inanimate, human or spiritual – over which Jesus does not rule. As God in human form, he also forgives sins. However, there is one more area of Jesus' authority we need to consider.

(d) Jesus' authority over people

Mark 1 v 16-20

Jesus went to almost complete strangers and commanded them to leave their jobs and families and to follow him.

As the Son of God, Jesus makes the same claim over your life and mine. He calls ordinary people like us to follow him. These four men did. Some whom Jesus called later refused to follow him. In the whole of creation Jesus' authority is never resisted, except by the wills of human beings! God, however, commands us to submit to the authority of his Son. Emphasize that we are not advocating that they should leave their family or spouse.



3. Summary

We have seen in this study:

- Jesus' great authority as God's Son. He is the supreme Master in God's world.
- His claim to be divine.
- The need to come to a decision about him. Someone called Jesus "the man you can't ignore". You can ignore him as a liar, dismiss him as a lunatic or serve him as the Lord.

Introduce the idea of the three-legged stool – illustrating the three fundamental concepts which are at the heart of the Christian message.

4. Homework

At home, read Mark chapters 1 to 5. People should note any passages which they do not understand or which they would like to discuss. There will be a time for discussing these questions at the beginning of next week's study. Distribute handout summary sheet No.1. A clear master for photocopying purposes is supplied on pages 71-72 of this book, or can be downloaded from www.thegoodbook.com.

FLASH CARD LAYOUT

Lay these out on the carpet or coffee table as the study proceeds.

Jesus' authority...

...as a teacher

...over sickness

...over nature

...over evil spirits

...over death

...to forgive sins

...OVER PEOPLE
(you and me!)

Study 2

Jesus – his death on the cross

Object

The object of this study is to build upon the previous talk, and to show that Jesus did not come only as the greatest healer-teacher. His death and subsequent resurrection are crucial to a basic understanding of the Christian faith.

The second study

1. Homework review

Members were asked to read Mark chapters 1-5. Ask if they have any questions arising out of this, or any other questions about some aspect of the Christian faith that the passage raises. Allow some time for the discussion on the passages of Mark. This can often account for half the time spent together. If lots of other questions are raised, write them down, and deal with them one by one, even putting some off until future sessions, so that they can be dealt with adequately.

2. First study review

Give a two-minute review of the first study, “Jesus – the Son of God”, to refresh people’s memories.

3. The facts of the cross

• Read Mark 15 v 33-39

Explain that the cross is recognized as the central fact of Christianity. The cross has become the symbol of the Christian church.

But what actually happened during the six hours in which Jesus was on the cross? What does his death mean? Mark’s account gives us the answer to this important question.

4. The meaning of the cross

(a) The darkness

Mark 15 v 33

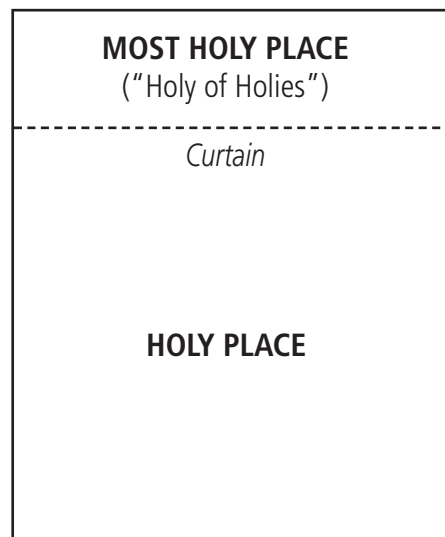
This supernatural darkness indicated a supernatural act was taking place. It could not have been an eclipse as it was full moon during Passover.

(b) The cry

Mark 15 v 34-37

Some people feel that this cry, “Why have you forsaken me?” expressed some loss of faith by Jesus in his heavenly Father. But we must face the reality of this cry, that at least to some extent God had forsaken Jesus on the cross.

Explain the concept of substitution using *The Book illustration* (see following pages). Explain that Jesus took both our guilt and our punishment (that is, God’s wrath) totally in his body on the cross. Add the comment that the resurrection demonstrated God’s satisfaction with the work Jesus had completed on the cross.



(c) The curtain

Mark 15 v 38-39

Describe briefly the layout of the Temple, a smaller and a larger room. The smaller symbolized the dwelling place of God; the larger was for the priests as representatives of the people. Explain the concept of reconciliation in the tearing of the curtain. The good news is that God and people are restored to friendship.

(d) Ransom

Mark 10 v 45

Explain the concept of ransom. This is the payment of a costly price to buy back a lost person or thing. We can think of examples of ransom payments in the release of soldiers captured in battle, the release of slaves and the redeeming of possessions in a pawn broker's shop. See page 49.

Use the terms "substitution", "reconciliation" and "ransom" only if you feel that they can be understood.

5. Conclusion

Point out that Jesus' death is sufficient for the sins of any person. However, God's forgiveness is not automatically conferred on everyone. If a person does not accept what Jesus has done, he or she is, in effect, saying to God: "I don't want anyone to bear my sins – I'll bear them myself." And so they will, on the last day. We must individually accept by faith the Jesus of the cross.

6. Stool Illustration

Point out that we have now seen two fundamental concepts which are at the heart of Christianity.

7. Homework

At home, have the group read Mark chapters 6-10. They should note any passages which they do not understand or which they would like to discuss. There will be a time for discussing these questions at the beginning of next week's study.

Distribute handout summary sheet No.2. A clear master for photocopying is on pages 73-74, or can be downloaded from www.thegoodbook.com.



Illustrations for study 2

THE BOOK

A useful illustration of Jesus' death, which can be used in the second study. The object of this illustration is to show visually the meaning of the crucifixion, especially in terms of substitution.

You will need a large, thick book, preferably not a Bible. Tell your enquirers that this book represents the life story of any person present – from birth (page 1) until the day of his or her death (last page).

In this book is written every time we have broken any of God's laws – every wrong deed, every wrong word, every evil thought. For example, Jesus says to hate another person is as bad as murder, according to God's outlook. To lust after another person is to commit adultery in the heart.

Tell the group that there are many dark pages in your own book which you would not like them to read, and, if they are honest, the same will be true for all present.

Hold out your left hand, palm facing up, and say:

Now suppose this hand represents you, and let us say that the ceiling represents God. Now the Bible says that between us and God is what the Bible calls "the unfavorable record of our debts" (Colossians 2 v 14, GNB).

Place the book on the upturned palm of your left hand and keep it there throughout the following explanation.

So our sins separate us from God. In fact the Scriptures say that God is so pure that even if only one line was written in this book – that would be enough to separate you from God.

But sin is more than doing, saying or thinking wrong things. It is an attitude of rebellion against God, whereby we ignore Him and run our lives our own way. This is what the Bible

means by SIN. This attitude of rebellion is the motive or reason for our many SINS.

Let me make the picture even blacker. The Bible says that, although God is love, he is also a just judge. God hates all evil and must punish our sin. One prophet in the Bible describes God in this way: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong." (Habakkuk 1 v 13).

So we have two problems. First, we all have much evil written in our books. Second, God must punish all our evil.

Now let me try to illustrate what happened during that time Jesus was hanging on the cross.

Suppose now that this hand represents Jesus.

Hold out your right hand, palm facing up. The left hand with the book on it should still be held out.

Again, the ceiling represents God. Now there was no "book" between Jesus and God. He always perfectly obeyed the will of God. He always pleased his Father.

Now while Jesus was on the cross, God took the sins of people in every age and placed them on Jesus.

Now transfer the book from the left hand on to the upturned palm of the right hand.

Peter put it this way: "Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross" (1 Peter 2 v 24) and Paul says, "Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin..." (2 Corinthians 5 v 21, GNB).

You could say that on the cross Jesus became the most sinful man the world has ever seen, as the sins of millions and millions of believers

in every age were poured into his body. Then an amazing thing happened. Remember, God must punish all evil. Well, at this moment, God poured upon his own Son on the cross all the wrath and anger and punishment that should fall on you and me. You could say God executed his own Son! Jesus died of the punishment of God. To show that he had completely dealt with our sins and punishment, three days later God brought him back to life!

Now refer people back to the left hand, now empty, still with the palm facing up.

Well now we must ask – how much sin remains between the person who believes in Jesus, and God?

Press the point until someone answers “**none**”.

So then, when a person believes in Jesus Christ, God counts him or her as absolutely sinless and perfect in his eyes – in fact, as perfect as Jesus Christ Himself.

Go on to stress that this forgiveness is not automatically conferred on everyone, but only on those who accept God’s grace by receiving the giver, Jesus Christ.

THE RANSOM

Useful illustrations of Jesus’ death as a ransom, which can also be used in the second study. The idea is that a ransom is the payment of a costly price to buy back something or someone who has been lost, captured or enslaved.

Use one of these illustrations of the concept of “ransom”:

1. In Roman times, important soldiers who had been captured by the enemy in battle could be ransomed, that is, bought back by paying the price demanded by the enemy.
2. Slaves, in Roman times, could ransom themselves. If they could save enough money, they could purchase their own freedom from their master.
3. Pawn brokers have been known in all ages. A person can redeem his pledge by paying the sum demanded by the pawnbroker.

Study 3

Jesus – his resurrection

Object

The object of this study is to complete this brief survey of the ministry and resurrection of Jesus, and to point out the three facts which a person must believe in order to be a Christian:

- His divine sonship
- His atoning death
- His physical resurrection

The third study

1. Homework review

Members were asked to read Mark chapters 6-10. Ask if they have any questions arising out of this, or any other questions about some aspect of the Christian faith. Allow some time for this.

2. Review of first and second studies

Give a two-minute review of the first two studies to refresh people's memories.

3. The resurrection: *predicted*

Begin by pointing out that Jesus, on many occasions, foretold his own death and rising again.

- Read Mark 10 v 32-34.

4. The resurrection: *the facts*

- Read Mark 16 v 1-8.

Mark's account of the resurrection is the briefest of all the Gospel accounts. Point out that there are at least ten separate occasions on which Jesus subsequently appeared to his disciples. He invited his disciples to handle him. "A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have," he said. He also ate a meal in front of them.

5. The resurrection: *its central meaning*

Ask: *As a child did you ever try to imagine what the world would be like without you? (ie: If you died)?*

Comment that the question of death and life after death has haunted people in all ages. What happens after death? Is there a heaven, a hell, or nothingness? As one writer expressed it:

*Death itself is nothing,
But this we fear:
To be
We know not what
We know not where*

In the Bible the answers to these questions are found in the resurrection of Jesus.

- Read Acts 10 v 39-43.

Point out that Peter has been speaking to Cornelius, a non-Christian man. Notice what Peter is saying. These are the things Jesus has commanded to be taught (verse 42). Five things to note in this story. (Have these points printed on flash cards. Produce them one at a time.)

a. All people will be raised

Verse 42 refers to "the living and the dead". The Bible looks to a day when all people living and dead from all ages will be raised. This sounds good, but it may not be.

b. All people will then be judged

Jesus has been appointed to be "judge of the living and the dead" (verse 42). We are not free agents. We all must give account one day – on the Day of Judgement – to the God who gave us life.

c. The risen Jesus will be the judge on that day

Jesus is "the one whom God appointed judge of the living and the dead" (verse 42).

That is why the resurrection of Jesus is so vital. It not only guarantees our resurrection, it also guarantees our judgement. It is to Jesus we are accountable!

d. All people will be divided into two groups

THE POSITIVE SIDE
Read Acts 10 v 43 Those who believe in Jesus <i>now</i> are forgiven <i>now</i> and are accepted by Jesus <i>then</i> on Judgement day (heaven)
THE NEGATIVE SIDE
Read Mark 8 v 38 Those who reject Jesus <i>now</i> will be rejected by Jesus <i>then</i> on Judgement Day (hell).

Many of Jesus' parables speak of this division. He talked simply about the division between wheat and weeds, sheep and goats, good and worthless fish.

e. This division is forever

In the Bible there is no concept of a second chance after death. This life, now, is our one and only opportunity.

Sum up by saying:

Your attitude to Jesus in this life is the same as *his* attitude to you in the next.

- If you accept him *now*, he will accept you *then*.
- If you reject him *now*, he will reject you *then*.

(See also 2 Thessalonians 1 v 9-10.)

All people will be raised

All people will then be judged

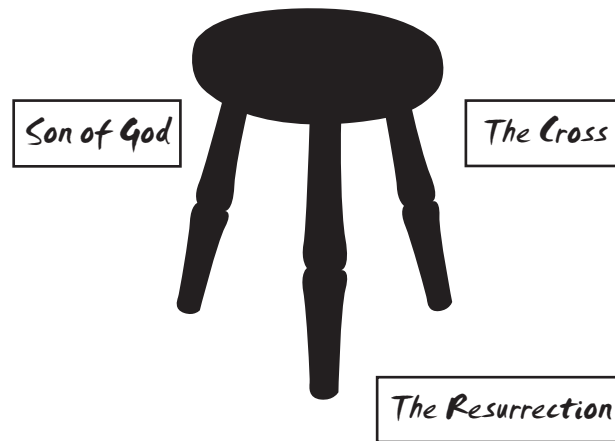
The risen Jesus will be
the Judge on that day

All people will be divided
into two groups

The division is for ever

6. Stool illustration

Explain that we have now seen the three fundamental concepts which are at the heart of Christianity.



7. Homework

At home read Mark chapters 11-16.

Members should note any passages which they do not understand or would like to discuss. There will be a time for discussing these questions at the beginning of next week's study.

Distribute handout summary sheet No.3. A clear master for photocopying is on pages 75-76 or can be downloaded from www.thegoodbook.com.

Study 4

Grace – not works!

Object

The object of this study is to teach the difficult concept (difficult because it is absolutely foreign to proud, sinful human nature) that we are saved by the grace of God in Christ, not by our own efforts or works.

The fourth study

1. Homework review

Members were asked to read Mark chapters 11-16. Ask if they have any questions arising out of this, or any other questions about some aspect of the Christian faith. Allow some time for this.

2. Review of first three studies

A person cannot be a Christian in any biblical sense of that word without accepting three fundamental beliefs.

- Jesus, his sonship (his divine nature)
- Jesus, his cross (his atoning death)
- Jesus, his physical resurrection (his lordship)

3. Introduction to the study

Give out paper and pencils and ask members to write down their answers to two questions. Explain that no one else will see their answers. Begin by asking this question:

Do you know for certain that you have eternal life – that is, if you died right now you would go to heaven?

Most people will have answered, “No” or “I’m not sure.” Then say: “Well, in the next few minutes I’d like to share with you how you can know this for certain. Before I explain this, may I ask you another question that will help clarify the situation?”

Then ask:

“Suppose you were to die tonight and you stood before God in heaven and he asked, “Why should I let you into my heaven?”, What would you reply?”

After they have written down their answers, produce two large envelopes. (See diagram on p. 54.)

Envelope No.1 has a large X on the back, and the words **SALVATION BY WORKS** on the front, in bold print. Inside this envelope is another smaller envelope.

This envelope has the words **WHAT I HAVE DONE** printed on the front in bold letters, with the word “I” emphasized. Inside this envelope are a number of cards with the following words, or words like them, each on a different card. (They may need to be adapted for people from different cultural and religious backgrounds.)

My good works: Keeping the Ten Commandments; (not killing, lying or stealing); Giving to charity; Being a good citizen; Bringing up my family; Bible reading and prayer; Church-going; Baptism; Confirmation; Holy Communion.

Envelope No. 2 has a large tick (check) on the back and the words **SALVATION BY GRACE** on the front, in bold print.

Inside this envelope is a smaller envelope as before, with the words **WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE** printed on the front in bold letters, with the word “CHRIST” emphasized. Inside this envelope is the completed diagram of the stool we have used in studies 1, 2 and 3. (See diagram on p. 51.)

Explain that there are only two answers to the question they were asked. One is wrong and the other is right.

4. The wrong answer: *What I have done*

We are going to look at the wrong answer first. Show the envelope with the cross on the back. Then show the words on the front. Explain that **SALVATION BY WORKS** emphasizes **WHAT I HAVE DONE**. Open this smaller envelope and show the cards inside, one at a time.

Explain that this is how people try to get right with God. But not one of these good works individually, nor all of them collectively, can qualify us for heaven.

Ask the rhetorical question: *Why can good works never get us into heaven?*

• Read Mark 7 v 20-23

Explain first that God's standard is 100 percent perfection and by this standard we all fail. This is why no one can be saved by good works.

Secondly, sin is not just a matter of doing, or saying, or even thinking wrong things. Jesus says here that from within, out of the heart, come all the evil things that he lists.

Suppose you go to the doctor with red spots all over your body, and he diagnoses measles. Imagine he then tried to cure you by putting band-aids over all the spots! You would say, "Hold on, the spots are only the symptoms – the real disease is inside me, in my blood-stream!"

So it is with sin. When we do, say or think wrong things, these are only the symptoms of sin. The real problem is that from within, out of the heart come these evil symptoms. In our hearts, the Bible says we are in rebellion against God, actively or passively, and doing a few good works cannot cure this rebellion! Doing a few good works is like putting spiritual band-aids on the problem. The central problem is that we each want to run our lives our own way. We want to live apart from God and push him out. This is sin.

5. The right answer: *What Christ has done*

Show the tick on the back of the other envelope, then show the words **SALVATION BY GRACE** on the front.

Ask: *What do we mean by grace?* Explain that this means an undeserved free gift. Take out the smaller envelope to show the words **WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE**. Open the smaller envelope to show the stool diagram. This shows what Christ has done on our behalf.

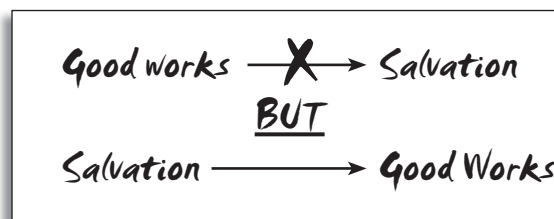
• Read Ephesians 2 v 8-10.

Explain that it is grace through faith alone that saves us. This salvation is the gift of God. Lay side by side the two smaller envelopes, contrasting **WHAT I HAVE DONE** with **WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE**. Explain that it is the finished work of Christ alone that saves us. We must respond to his finished work by faith.

At this point you may get an objection that could come in a variety of forms, but which will go something like this:

"If salvation is a free gift, doesn't this mean that I can live any kind of life I like – and then so long as I believe, God will forgive me? Does this mean good works are not important?"

Explain from Ephesians 2 v 10 that God wants us to lead a life of good works, but this is to be the fruit of salvation. Sketching this diagram may be helpful:



Notice carefully that good works do not produce salvation (Eph 2 v 8-9), but salvation produces a life of good works (Eph 2 v 10).

Look up Mark 10 v 15 where Jesus says that the kingdom of God must be received like a little child.

6. Conclusion

Recall that you promised to show how they could know for certain that they have eternal life. We have seen that we do not have to earn salvation – indeed we cannot. It is the gift of God.

Finish by saying that any gift must be received. So it is with God's grace.

Next week we will be discussing how to receive the free gift of eternal life.

7. Homework

Give each person a copy of an evangelistic booklet – one with which you are familiar. The tract used must contain a prayer of commitment that emphasizes the lordship of Christ. Some examples can be found at www.thegoodbook.com. Ask members to

read it carefully by next week, marking any sections they do not understand or would like to discuss.

Also invite members to read these passages in the Gospel of Mark for next week and answer the question: *"What does it mean to follow Jesus?"*

- Mark 1 v 15
- Mark 8 v 34-38
- Mark 9 v 43-48
- Mark 10 v 29-31

Distribute handout summary sheet No.4. A clear master for photocopying can be found on pages 77-78 or can be downloaded from www.thegoodbook.com.

THE ENVELOPES

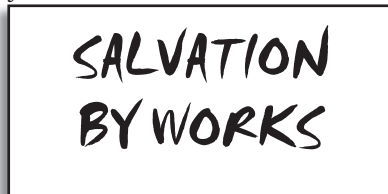
A powerful illustration to explain salvation by grace, for use in the fourth study.

THE WRONG ANSWER

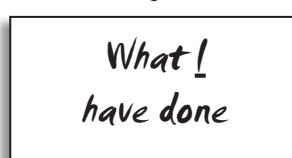
back



front



Smaller envelope



cards

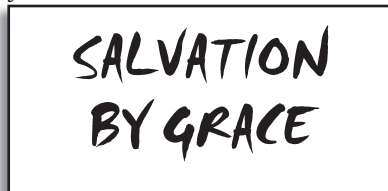


THE RIGHT ANSWER

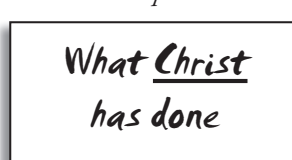
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front



Smaller envelope



Son of God

The Cross



The Resurrection

Study 5

What is a Christian?

1. Repenting

The object

The object of this study is to answer the question: *What is a Christian?* Begin with a quick overview of studies 1-4.

Homework review

Members were asked to read the little book you gave to them, plus some passages from the Gospel of Mark. Ask if they have any questions about the tract, and their answers to the question: *“What does it mean to follow Jesus?”*

The fifth study

1. Opening

Suppose we decide to go to the shopping centre for a survey. We have only one question: *“In your opinion, what is a Christian?”* What kind of answers would we get?

The group members may give such answers as: a good person... goes to church... keeps the golden rule... lives in a Christian country... and so on.

Explain that in this session you will deal with this one question: *What really is a Christian?*

2. Key verse: Mark 1 v 15

In one sentence, a Christian is someone who belongs to the kingdom of God. That is, when Jesus becomes the King and Master of your life.

In Mark 1 v 15 Jesus says there are two things a person must do to belong to the kingdom of God. What are these?

- REPENT
- BELIEVE

Today we look at repentance.

3. What is repentance?

You become a Christian when you make Jesus Christ the King or Master of your life. In other words:

*I am willing for Jesus to
be first in my life...*

(Show these words on a flashcard.)

- Read Mark 8 v 34-38.

*Ask: What does it mean, in practical terms, to repent?
It means I put Jesus first in these things:*

...before my will

(Add this flashcard.)

Jesus says a person must forget (or deny) self, carry his cross and lose his life. Now the cross was an instrument of death. Jesus tells me that if I am to follow him, I must go through a kind of death experience. I must die to the right to run my own life (which is sin). I am to surrender to the God-given right of Jesus to be my King.

Use *The House* illustration which follows to help explain what this means.

...before my ambitions

(Add this flashcard)

- Focus on Mark 8 v 36-37

People everywhere are trying to “gain the whole world.” To a greater or lesser degree, their aim is to accumulate power, money, popularity, pleasure, prestige, business success, or just keep ahead of the neighbors.

Now these things may not be wrong in themselves, but they are sin if they are things we live for above everything else. When Jesus is Number One, these things fall into their right perspective.

You could quote Jesus’ words:

Seek first God’s kingdom ... and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6 v 33

...before my popularity

(Add this flashcard.)

- **Focus on Mark 8 v 38.**

It is not popular to follow Jesus sincerely today. Friends or family members may regard me as strange – some may not want to associate with me any more. But if I’m ashamed of Jesus in this life, then he will reject me on Judgment Day! I must follow Jesus openly. He is not interested in secret disciples.

The most obvious way to start doing this is to belong to a church. People who avoid church may claim that it is boring, but often they are just ashamed to be associated openly with Christ and his people.

Emphasize that members of the group may have a spouse, relative or friend who disapproves of their faith. But you must put Jesus first (politely) even if it means ridicule. (Again we are not suggesting a person should leave his/her spouse!)

...before my...???

(Add this flashcard.)

- **Read Mark 9 v 43-48.**

Jesus does not literally mean that I am to cut off body parts. He means that if anything or anyone is stopping me from entering God’s kingdom, then radical surgery may be necessary.

Point out that pride is often the cause of this.

- Am I too proud to accept salvation as a gift?
- Am I too proud to submit to Jesus as King?

4. Too hard?

- **Read, lastly, Mark 10 v 29-31.**

It may sound hard to follow Jesus, but he makes two promises when we do:

1. In this life, he will repay us “a hundred times” for any cost we suffer.
2. In the next life, he will give us eternal life.

5. Conclusion

Draw the group’s attention to the prayer of commitment in the little booklet. Suggest that they could use this prayer, privately at home, to indicate real and genuine repentance towards God. We will look at this prayer again next week.

You could finish with the summary:

*Turn
Trust
Travel*

6. Homework

Re-read the tract provided.

On the handout sheet, answer the questions from Mark: What gifts does God promise to those who repent and believe?

Distribute handout summary sheet No. 5. A clear master for photocopying can be found on pages 79-80 or can be downloaded from www.thegood-book.com.

Illustrations for study 5

THE HOUSE

A helpful illustration of the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives, for use in the fifth study.

It illustrates that when I become a Christian, Jesus comes to live in me spiritually, by his Holy Spirit. Then, over the days and years ahead, the Holy Spirit wants to change me from the inside out, to make me more like Jesus. You will need a plan diagram of a house as shown here.

Point out that when you buy a house, there are two stages:

- MOVING-IN DAY
(*This happens only once.*)
- RENOVATION AND REDECORATION
(*This goes on progressively for a long time.*)

The same is true of the Christian life – there are two stages:

1. Becoming a Christian

This occurs when God gives me the grace to repent and surrender to Jesus Christ, when he “opens the door” and, by the Holy Spirit, comes to live with

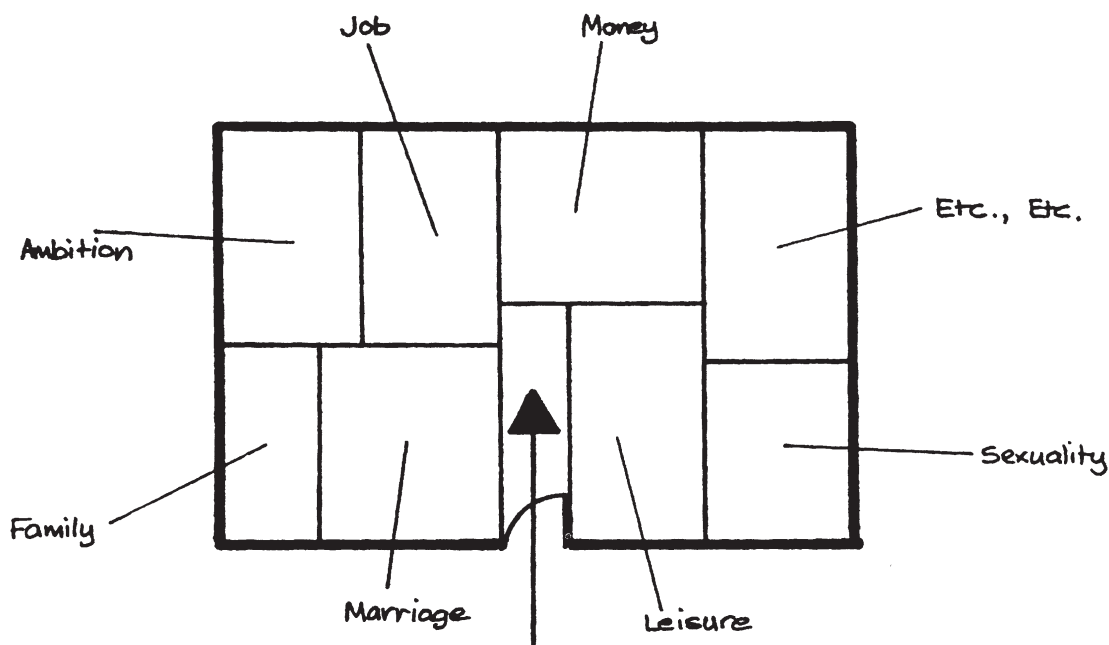
me. This happens genuinely only once, although many Christians cannot specify the exact day on which it took place. We call this new birth, when the believer is justified.

2. Being a Christian

Point out that the various rooms in the illustration represent all the aspects of my life: MARRIAGE; FAMILY; MONEY; AMBITION; STUDY; LEISURE; SEXUALITY; TIME; etc.

The Holy Spirit is not content to remain in the entrance hall. Once he has entered my life, he will want to change me into his image of what I should be like. This does not happen all at once – this is a progressive or gradual work, like renovating a house. We call this new life or progressive sanctification.

The point is clear. When I become a Christian, I must be willing for Jesus to become Lord of all. This willingness is the beginning of repentance. What this means in practice will be worked out progressively as I grow in this new life, by his Spirit.



STRANDED IN SPACE

This is a graphic illustration for explaining what the Bible means by “sin”. You can use this illustration wherever you think is appropriate in the *Christianity Explained* course.

This experiment was shot in a space station and shown on a TV documentary.

One of the astronauts was floating at rest inside the space vehicle, wearing just a T-shirt and shorts. When he stretched out his hand, he was a metre from the wall. He was then commanded to move himself to the wall.

Being in a weightless condition, he had full freedom to move. He moved, spun, jack-knifed etc, but every time he was able to stretch out his hand, he was still exactly a metre from the wall!

The TV commentary explained: “We all have a physical centre of gravity. He can spin freely around his centre of gravity, but he cannot move it! If we left him there, he

would eventually die, still a metre from the wall of the space station. One of the others must reach out and pull him to safety.”

What a perfect illustration of “sin”. We appear to have free will to do what we like. Every day we make free-will choices and decisions.

But spiritually, the Bible says we are in the most terrible form of bondage. We are all, by nature, slaves to selfishness, self-centeredness and pride. I am in bondage to my own spiritual centre of gravity. This is what the Bible means by sin. I want to run my own life, with myself as the controlling centre of my world.

I cannot save myself, but if I remain in this condition I will die, spiritually, and without hope.

Another person from outside myself must step in and bring me to safety. This is what Jesus has done for us by his life, death and resurrection.

Study 6

What is a Christian?

2. Believing

Object

The object of this study follows on from study 5 and answers the question: *How do I become a Christian?* At the end of this study, members are requested to complete the Course Assessment Sheet (see page 80).

The sixth study

1. Homework review

Members were asked to look at three passages in the Gospel of Mark. What did they discover about the gifts God gives to those who come to Christ? Discuss.

2. Introduction

Last week in exploring the question “*What is a Christian?*” we saw:

- A Christian is a person who belongs to the Kingdom of God (Mark 1 v 15), that is, has Jesus Christ as King.
- To belong to this kingdom I must REPENT (last time).
- To belong to this kingdom I must BELIEVE (today’s study).

3. What is faith, or believing?

Explain that we are going to look at three incidents from the Gospel of Mark which illustrate faith.

- Read Mark 5 v 21-24; 5 v 35-43

Display these flash cards:

Faith is...

...taking Jesus at his word

How would Jairus have felt when the message came that his daughter was dead? Faith here is trust in Jesus’ word despite all the evidence to the contrary. It is based, not on how we feel, but on the facts of what Jesus says:

“Don’t be afraid; just believe” (v 36).

Use the FACTS/FAITH/FEELINGS illustration (page 61).

- Read Mark 5 v 25-34.

Add this flash card:

...reaching out to Jesus

The woman’s faith was small – a secret touch of his garment. Jesus said: “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain ‘Move!’, and it will move” (Matthew 17 v 20) A mustard seed is extremely small. The vital thing is not the quantity, but the direction of faith!

Jesus does not allow the woman to remain hidden in the crowd. She was required to show herself publicly. If I am to follow him, I must do so openly, and not be ashamed of him.

- Read Mark 10 v 13-16.

Add this flash card:

...having child-like trust

Note that this is not *childish* faith that Jesus speaks about. This is more than giving mere assent with my mind. It means trust, such as a child places in its parents. Use the BLONDIN illustration (p. 62).

- Read John 5 v 24.

Add this flash card:

...knowing God accepts me

This tells the believer something about the present and something about the future.

(a) Present

Jesus says a Christian has eternal life. Point out the present tense, *has*. It is not boasting to say, "I know I have eternal life." It is just taking God at his word, ie: it is faith.

Nor is it saying, "I am good". It is saying that what Jesus has done, not what I have done, makes me acceptable to God.

(b) Future

Jesus says a Christian will not be condemned. He is talking here about the judgement which determines our eternal future, heaven or hell. The believer will not face that judgement, as no charge can be brought against him/her.

Add this flash card:

*...receiving Jesus
as your King*

Recall Jesus' words:

Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. Mark 10 v 15

We have seen that, to receive the kingdom of God, a person must receive Jesus Christ as their Lord or King, and their Saviour from sin. This is a personal step. No one can take it for you.

4. Conclusion

At this point you can conclude the course in one of two ways: You can take the low key option or the more direct option.

Many Christians have great difficulty in actually leading a person to a commitment to Christ. If this is true of you, the leader, then use the low-key option – this is quite legitimate, and is not being cowardly or anything like that.

(a) A low-key option

- Say something like this:

During this course, God may have been speaking to you spiritually. You may feel ready to take the step of receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. I would like to help you to take this step.

- Ask them to turn to the prayer of commitment in the booklet you gave them to read.
- Read the prayer to them.
- Suggest that, in the quietness of their own home, they could pray this prayer as a way of saying "yes" to God.
- Ask them to tell you if they do take this step, so that you can help in the future.

(b) A more direct option

- If you are certain in your mind that they are ready to take this step of commitment, conclude like this:

During this course God may have been speaking to you spiritually and you may feel that you are ready to take the step of receiving Jesus Christ as your King and Saviour.

- Ask them to turn to the prayer of commitment in the tract you have used.
- Read the prayer aloud. Then add this comment:
I am going to pray this prayer again slowly. If you

wish to take this step, I invite you to pray this prayer with me.

- Pray the prayer again aloud, slowly, together.

A word of caution

The Holy Spirit is sovereign in evangelism. Only he can truly convert the heart and mind of a person. It brings no honor to God if we trick or manipulate people into making decisions they are not ready to make, merely to gratify our own egos. If you are in any doubt as to whether any person is ready to take this step of commitment, then use the low-key option.

5. Course assessment

Give each person a copy of the Course Assessment Sheet and a pen (see photocopy master on page 80).

- Point out that there is no obligation to answer any or all of the questions.
- Collect the sheets at the end.

6. Follow-up course on discipleship

Draw particular attention to Question 6 when you are going through the Course Assessment Sheet. If they have agreed to do the follow-up course, make arrangements to begin this with them.

Illustrations for study 6

FACTS, FAITH AND FEELINGS

A helpful illustration on faith to be used in the sixth study.

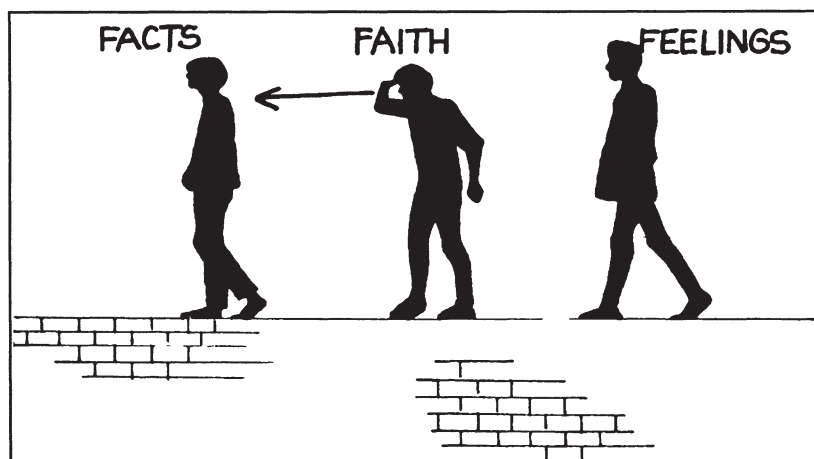
The object of this old illustration is to demonstrate that Christian faith does not depend upon our feelings, which are always changing, but upon the facts of what God has done through Jesus, as recorded in the Bible. These facts never change.

You can use this illustration verbally, but a drawing like this may be helpful.

Three men are walking along the top of a narrow wall. The first man is called Facts, the second Faith and the last Feelings.

As long as the middle man, Faith, keeps his eyes on Facts, he can walk securely and steadily on the wall. If he turns around and looks over his shoulder at Feelings, he starts to wobble and feel insecure.

Similarly, in the Christian life, solid faith is based on the facts about Jesus as learned in the Bible. If we go by feelings, our faith will always be unsteady and weak.



A STORY OF BLONDIN

A helpful illustration to explain faith, for use in the sixth study.

The purpose is to show that it is possible to believe the gospel academically and theoretically without being committed to Jesus Christ personally.

Blondin was a famous trick-stunt high-wire artist in America. Some years ago he stretched a wire rope across the top of Niagara Falls and walked across it.

Then he took his stunt a step further, and pushed a wheelbarrow backwards and forwards along the wire over the falls.

Next he announced that he was going to

wheel a man in the wheelbarrow across the wire.

A newspaper reporter came to interview Blondin about this proposed stunt: "Do you think I can do this great feat?" Blondin asked the reporter.

"I really believe you can," replied the reporter. "I think you are the greatest stunt artist of all time!"

"You believe I can do it?" asked Blondin, "Well then, you get in the wheelbarrow!"

There is a great difference between believing something or in someone theoretically, and being willing to commit your life into his or her hands by faith.

The Gospel of Mark

The twenty most asked questions

1. What are demons, or evil spirits?

Mark 1 v 23-27

The Bible takes seriously the reality of an unseen spiritual world. This spiritual world has both a good side and an evil or malignant side.

The devil, or Satan, is not just some impersonal evil force at work in the world. The Bible depicts Satan as personal and powerful. His work is totally opposed to God and directed against God's people.

Evil spirits and demons mentioned in the Gospels are the devil's agents in this work. Although Satan and his angels are immensely powerful, the New Testament shows Jesus to be Lord over Satan, and to have defeated him through his death and resurrection.

2. Why did Jesus tell healed people not to tell anyone?

Mark 1 v 34; 7 v 36

Jesus did not want to become like a side-show with people coming just to see signs and wonders. He rejected such people (Mark 8 v 11-13, John 4 v 48). If people would not respond to the preaching of the kingdom of God calling for repentance and faith (Mark 1 v 15), miracles alone would not convince them.

Miracles attract people, and it is possible that Jesus saw that the curious crowds would hamper his ministry, which is just what happened (Mark 1 v 45).

3. Why did Jesus call himself the Son of Man?

Mark 2 v 10

Jesus wanted to identify with mankind, so he preferred to be called Son of Man rather

than being called Son of God. Son of Man is a Jewish term meaning simply "a man". The prophet Ezekiel was often called "son of man" in this sense (Ezekiel 33 v 1).

Son of Man is also a well known title used in the Old Testament for the Messiah. See Daniel 7 v 13-14. In this vision Daniel saw "one like a son of man" (ie: like a human being). God then gives to this son of man an eternal kingship over all the nations of the earth.

The religious leaders in Jesus' day would have interpreted Jesus' use of Son of Man as a veiled claim to be the coming Messiah, the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy.

4. New cloth, old coat; new wine, old skins.

Mark 2 v 21-22

People were complaining that Jesus was not observing the religious rules and traditions of his day (Mark 2 v 18). The Pharisees had literally thousands of laws and religious regulations, and they taught that a person had to observe these rigorously in order to please God.

Jesus was saying that the faith he had come to bring was totally incompatible with the Pharisees' system. Jesus could not be "fitted into" their legalistic religion. He came to bring a living relationship with God, not rules; grace, love and peace, not religious formulas.

Christianity is not a religion. "Religion" is from the Latin word meaning "rules". Christianity is not a set of rules, but a personal relationship with the living God.

5. What is the “eternal sin”?

Mark 3 v 29

The context here is the key. The religious leaders had observed Jesus’ miracles and heard his teaching at first hand. However, their assessment of Jesus was: “He is possessed by Beelzebub” (Mark 3 v 22) – an old name for the devil.

They had hardened their hearts against the work of God’s Spirit through the ministry of Jesus. This unrepentant, continuous attitude is the “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” (Mark 3 v 29). This has nothing to do with swearing at the Holy Spirit – in simple terms it means to continuously reject Jesus’ claim upon a person’s heart and life.

For this there can be no forgiveness, for they have refused the only way of forgiveness that God has provided.

Of course, it is only unforgivable for as long as a person goes on doing it. Many of the religious leaders did repent later on, and so were forgiven (Acts 6 v 7).

This is a vital personal concept. If I reject Jesus, I can never be forgiven!

6. Why did Jesus teach in parables?

Mark 4 v 10-12

Many people have trouble with this passage. On the surface it sounds as if Jesus taught in parables so that people would not understand, which would be very strange indeed.

However, we need to see that there are two groups mentioned here: the disciples and “those on the outside”. The disciples were spiritually intrigued by the parables and drawn nearer to Jesus to hear the explanation. There is a spiritual principle here – “to everyone who has more will be given”.

However, to “those outside” the band of disciples, the parables just remained baffling stories. Their spiritual interest was not aroused. They “hear, but do not understand”.

All people are either like moths or bats. They are either attracted to the light of Jesus’ teaching, or repelled by it. Jesus’ words, including his parables, always act in this two-fold way. See also Mark 4 v 33-34.

7. Did Jesus have brothers and sisters?

Mark 6 v 3

This passage mentions four brothers by name and at least two sisters. These were presumably the natural children of Joseph and Mary conceived after the birth of Jesus. See also Mark 3 v 32.

Some Christians hold that Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus, and that the brothers and sisters mentioned here are really cousins. The Greek word *adelphoi* can also mean “cousins”. However, Matthew 1 v 25 seems to imply that Joseph and Mary entered into a normal sexual relationship after Jesus’ birth.

8. Throwing the children’s food to the dogs?

Mark 7 v 24-30

The key to this difficult passage lies in the fact that the woman was not a Jewess – she was a Gentile, from near the pagan city of Tyre (verses 24, 26).

Jesus’ ministry at this stage was exclusively to the Jews, the chosen descendants of Abraham. He forbade his disciples, at this period, to preach to the Gentiles or Samaritans (Matthew 10 v 5).

Jesus says to her: “First let the children eat all they want... for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs”.

The term “children” here refers to the Jews, and “dogs” was a common, unflattering expression for any Gentile person. So Jesus is saying, in fact: “It isn’t right to take what belongs to the Jews and give it to you Gentiles.”

In her reply in verse 28 the woman is, in effect, saying; “Yes Lord – I acknowledge that as a Gentile woman I have no claim upon you, the Jewish Messiah. But at least give me a few moments of your time to deal with a problem I have!”

Jesus is impressed by her faith and her persistence and grants her request (Matthew 15 v 28).

The term “dogs” seems hard from the lips of Jesus. One writer says, “The Lord’s use of the conventional Jewish term ‘dogs’ for Gentiles does not mean that he recognized this description as accurate, or desirable. He desired to see whether the woman was ready to take such a lowly position in order to win healing.”

9. What is the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod?

Mark 8 v 15

“Yeast” means influence. Just as a tiny amount of yeast has a large effect on the whole batch of dough, so Jesus warns against the “yeast” of the Pharisees and Herod.

The Pharisees were the most influential religious party in Jesus’ day, though they were few in number. They taught that rigorous law-keeping was the path to God. Jesus called them “hypocrites”, which means “play-actors”, for their public displays of religion and self-righteousness.

On the yeast of Herod, one writer says, “The yeast of Herod is adultery, murder, hastiness in swearing, affectation in piety and hatred of Christ and his forerunner (John the Baptist)”.

So, Jesus is warning against outward religious show (the Pharisees), and crass worldliness (Herod).

10. “Do you still not understand?”

Mark 8 v 17-21

Twice Jesus had fed large crowds of Jewish people in a desert place where no food was available. Surely, as Jews, they would have been reminded of the way God fed the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses, and gave them the manna in the desert.

Surely, too, they would have remembered Moses’ prophecy towards the end of his life, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers” (Deuteronomy 18 v 15). Could the disciples not yet understand that Jesus was the predicted Moses-like prophet – the prophesied Messiah?

It is perhaps no accident that in the very next section Peter declared: “You are the Christ” (Mark 8 v 29). He has understood, at last!

11. What is “The kingdom of God come with power”?

Mark 9 v 1

This is probably a reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. After his resurrection Jesus said to his disciples: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1 v 8).

The kingdom of God came with the entry of Jesus into the world. It came with power at the pouring out of God the Holy Spirit.

12. Who is Elijah?

Mark 9 v 11-13

In the last statement of the Old Testament, God promised that he would send again Elijah the prophet before the day of the Lord! (Malachi 4 v 5-6). Elijah was a prophet in the 8th century BC, and he dressed in a distinctive way, wearing animal skins and a leather belt (2 Kings 1 v 8).

When John the Baptist appeared he was dressed in a similar manner (Matthew 3 v 4).

Jesus makes it clear that John was the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning Elijah.

Does this mean that John was a prophet like Elijah, or that John was Elijah actually come back to life again? Undoubtedly the former. Although it is not made clear in the Gospels, the Bible gives no indication that a person can return to this world to live another life. In fact, the opposite – after death we must meet God (Hebrews 9 v 27).

13. What does it mean to cut off your hand, etc?

Mark 9 v 43-48

Jesus obviously did not intend that a Christian should physically cut off a hand or foot, or pluck out an eye!

In this dramatic way, Jesus says: “If anything is stopping you from entering the kingdom of God, it is better to take drastic and perhaps sacrificial action to rid yourself of that impediment, whatever it is, than to end up in hell forever.”

The logic is obvious: temporary pain is better than eternal punishment!

14. Divorce – what does Jesus say?

Mark 10 v 1-12

Jesus is making it clear that divorce is always against the perfect purpose of God. God’s plan, since creation, is that married people should live together for the whole of their lives (verses 6-9). This is God’s perfect plan.

Jesus also emphasized that if people institute divorce because they have found a nicer partner, such action is adultery (verses 11-12).

However, because people’s hearts are still hard (verse 5), divorce has always taken place. The danger is that we treat divorce as the unforgivable sin, where a divorced person can never again be acceptable to God.

Christ came to die for all sin, including the sin of divorce. In talking to the Samaritan

woman in John chapter 4, Jesus knew that she had already been divorced five times and was now living with a sixth man. No doubt in some of these divorces the woman had been in the wrong. But even knowing these facts, Jesus still freely offered acceptance and forgiveness to her. “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (John 4 v 10).

It is not our role to be moral policemen. Like Jesus, we must freely hold out the water of forgiveness, cleansing and eternal life.

If the subject of divorce becomes a major issue in your *Christianity Explained* group, it may be advisable to arrange an extra session, and involve a minister or counsellor who can explain the biblical position lovingly.

15. Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?

Mark 11 v 12-14, 20-25

This action has perplexed many Christians, as it was Jesus’ only destructive miracle. Two suggestions can be made.

(a) Jesus was teaching his disciples about the power of prayer. Certainly that was the interpretation that he himself gave in the following verses (verses 22-24). Jesus was saying in effect, “This power is available to you too. If anyone says to this mountain...”

(b) Many commentators have suggested that we have here what is called an acted parable or a parable without words! Many such acted parables were used by the Old Testament prophets. In verse 11 Jesus went to the Temple, which should have been the most spiritual place on earth. He looked around at everything and saw, in fact, spiritual bankruptcy – a commercial racket going on.

The next day he cleansed the Temple (verses 15-19). Wedged between these two incidents is the cursing of the fig tree.

Some suggest that the fig tree represents

Israel and the Temple worship. Instead of finding spiritual fruitfulness in the Temple, he found barrenness, like the fig tree. Just as the fig tree was cursed, so too Israel would come under God's curse and condemnation for her spiritual emptiness.

This idea of the coming destruction of the temple is taken up more fully in Mark chapter 13.

The Temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed by the Roman armies in AD 70, about 37 years later.

16. One bride for seven brothers?

Mark 12 v 18-27

What is the point of this trick question? In Jesus' day there were two major religious parties: the Pharisees, who believed in life after death, and the Sadducees, who said that death was the end – there was no hope of life or resurrection beyond the grave (verse 18).

So the Sadducees came up with this question (verses 18-23). In his answer to them in verses 24-27, Jesus says two things.

First, there *is* life beyond the grave, but no marriage relationship as such. This does not mean that married couples will not know each other in heaven – just that sexual relationships will have ended.

Second, God did not say: "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob..." but, "I am the God of Abraham.... I am still their God, because they live on!" The hope of the resurrection is the central Christian hope.

17. What is the "abomination that causes desolation"?

Mark 13 v 14

Fortunately, this is one case where the parallel passage in another Gospel, in this case Luke, gives us the key. Luke chapter 21 is the parallel passage to Mark chapter 13. Luke has a tendency in his Gospel to explain difficult words or expressions.

In the place of Mark 13 v 14, Luke has these words: "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Luke 21 v 20-21).

So in the place of "abomination that causes desolation", Luke has "Jerusalem being surrounded by armies."

In AD 65 the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem after a political uprising. After a terrible five-year war, the Roman armies entered the city, desecrated the Holy of Holies in the Temple, then proceeded to pull down and burn both the Temple and the city. Jesus' words in Mark chapter 13 came to pass.

18. Why did Jesus not know the date of his own return?

Mark 13 v 32

Some people have suggested that, because Jesus did not know the date of his own return, this means that he is less than perfect, less than divine. Since God is omniscient (knows everything), Jesus cannot be God.

Two comments need to be made.

First, there is a great mystery here. When "the Word became flesh" (John 1 v 14), Jesus "made himself nothing" or as other translations put it "emptied himself" (Philippians 2 v 7). As a baby and child, Jesus had to grow in wisdom, just as all human children do. He was not born with complete knowledge built in. It is probably fair to say that Jesus would have known nothing about computers or internal combustion engines.

Second, it is not sinful to lack knowledge. It is sinful to make dogmatic statements on the basis of little or no real knowledge. Jesus freely acknowledged that he did not know the date of his return. If *he* did not know, we should never speculate!

This is one of those little touches which verifies the truth of the Bible. If someone was

making up the story of Jesus Christ, they would never have left in Mark 13 v 32!

19. Was the darkness an eclipse?

Mark 15 v 33

It has been suggested that the darkness over the cross of Jesus was caused by a daytime eclipse of the sun.

However, this idea is not possible. Jesus was crucified at the time of the Jewish Passover, which is always at full moon. At full moon, the heavenly bodies are in an almost straight line like this: Sun – Earth – Moon.

To have a daytime eclipse of the sun, the bodies must be in an exact straight line like this: Sun – Moon – Earth.

Physically we cannot explain this account of darkness adequately. Sufficient to say that it was in keeping with mankind's darkest deed!

20. Why are there strange endings to the Gospel of Mark?

Mark chapter 16

Most scholars agree that the Gospel of Mark ends abruptly at verse 8 in a rather unsatisfactory manner. The women have seen the empty tomb and been informed of the resurrection of Jesus, but there is no account of Jesus himself appearing, as there is in the other three Gospels.

The longer version of the ending of the Gospel of Mark appear to be an attempt by well-meaning scribes to add some resurrection appearances to Mark. However, even the style of the Greek original changes after verse 8.

This does not mean that what is contained in verses 9 to the end is wrong or fictional, and many of the details here can be double-checked from the other Gospels. It just means that they were probably not in Mark's original.

Copying masters for handout sheets

The sheets on the next six pages are summaries of each study. Permission is given to photocopy these sheets.

They are designed to be folded as shown.

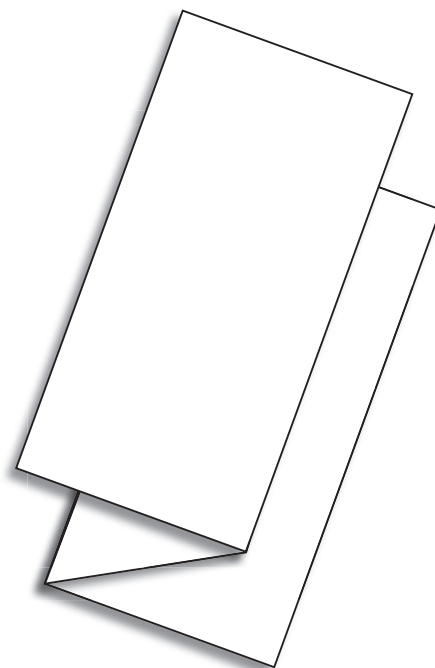
At the conclusion of each study, one copy should be given to each person doing the course.

The reading plans may be copied onto the back, if appropriate. At the end of each study, one sheet should be given to each member of the group.

You can download a PDF version of these sheets for printing from your computer from:

North America: www.thegoodbook.com/evangelism/courses/christianity-explained

UK & Europe: www.thegoodbook.co.uk/Christianity-Explained-cex_28/



Session 1



Christianity Explained

Jesus – Son of God

“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”
Mark 1 v 1

This is God’s world, and we have seen that Jesus comes into the world with all the authority of God himself. We have seen:

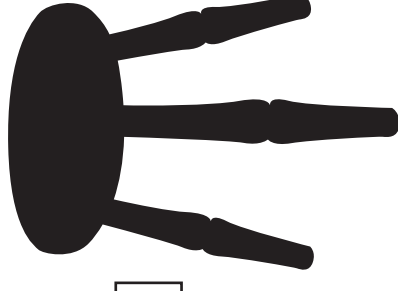
1. **Jesus’ authority as a teacher**
Mark 1 v 21-22
 2. **Jesus’ authority over evil spirits**
Mark 1 v 23-28
 3. **Jesus’ authority over sickness**
Mark 1 v 29-31
 4. **Jesus’ authority to forgive sins**
(this shows him to be equal with God)
Mark 2 v 1-12
 5. **Jesus’ authority over nature**
Mark 4 v 35-41
 6. **Jesus’ authority over life and death**
Mark 5 v 35-42
- But most importantly, as far as we are concerned today, we have seen:
7. **Jesus’ authority over people**
Mark 1 v 16-20

Conclusion:

We have seen in this study:

- Jesus’ great authority as the Son of God
- Jesus’ claim to be divine, that is, God.
- The call for us to follow him

Someone has called Jesus “*The man you can’t ignore.*” He is either a *liar*, a *lunatic*, or the *Lord*. There are three concepts that you need to believe to be a Christian. We have seen the first of these:



Son of God

At Home

Read Mark chapters 1 – 5. Note anything that you do not understand, or would like to discuss. There will be a time for discussing these things at the start of next week’s session.

Week 1


Mark Chapters 1 – 5

Suggested reading plan

Try to write down what you think are the main points the passage is making. Also list any things you have questions about **2** and any things that strike you as interesting **1**. We will discuss them at the start of the next session.

1. Mark 1 v 1-28

Main Points



2. Mark 1 v 29 – 2 v 12

Main Points



3. Mark 2 v 13 – 3 v 6

Main Points

QUESTION



4. Mark 3 v 7-34

Main Points



5. Mark 4 v 1-41

Main Points

115

6. Mark 5 v 1-20

Main Points

—

7. Mark 5 v 21-43

Main Points



Any thoughts on Mark chapters 1 – 5 as a whole

[illegible]

Session 2



Christianity Explained

Jesus – his death on the cross

1. The facts of the cross

Read Mark 15 v 21-39

2. The meaning of the cross

a. The darkness (15 v :33)

Indicates that, in the death of Jesus, God was doing a special, supernatural act.

b. The cry (15 v 34-37)

“Why have you forsaken me?” We see that, at least to some extent, God had forsaken or abandoned his Son when he was on the cross. Remember the book, which we imagined was a record of every time we have lived our way instead of God’s way. Jesus, who always lived his Father’s way, “bore our sins in his body on the cross,” and our sins formed a barrier between him and his Father. Jesus dealt with our sins and their guilt and punishment, and his resurrection showed that God was satisfied with the sin-bearing that Jesus had completed on the cross.

c. The curtain (15 v 38)

The tearing of the curtain indicated that people come back into relationship with God only through Jesus’ death.

d. The ransom (10 v 45)

This is the price Jesus paid to buy us back to God – that price was the giving of his life, that is, his death.

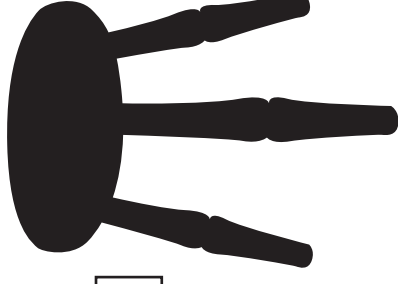
Conclusion:

Jesus’ death is sufficient for the sins of anyone, but God’s forgiveness is not automatically given to everybody. Each of us must individually accept by what Jesus did on the cross.

There are three basic concepts which you must believe to be a Christian. We have now seen two of these:

Son of God

The Cross



At Home

Read Mark chapters 6 – 10. Note anything you do not understand or would like to discuss. There will be a time for discussing these things at the beginning of next week’s session.

Week 2

Mark Chapters 6 – 10

Suggested reading plan

Try to write down what you think are the main points the passage is making. Also list any things you have questions about **2** and any things that strike you as interesting **1**. We will discuss them at the start of the next session.

1. Mark 6 v 1-29

Main Points _____

2 _____

1 _____

2. Mark 6 v 30-56

Main Points _____

2 _____

1 _____

3. Mark 7 v 1-37

Main Points _____

2 _____

1 _____

4. Mark 8 v 1-38

Main Points _____

2 _____

1 _____

5. Mark 9 v 1-32

Main Points _____

2 _____

1 _____

6. Mark 9 v 33 – 10 v 16

Main Points _____

2 _____

1 _____

7. Mark 10 v 17-52

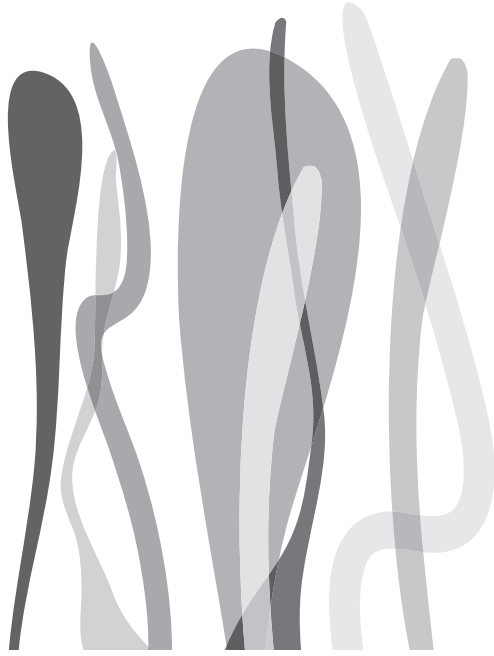
Main Points _____

2 _____

1 _____

Any thoughts on Mark chapters 6 – 10 as a whole

Session 3



Christianity Explained

**Jesus –
his resurrection**

1. The resurrection predicted

Read Mark 10 v 32-34

2. The facts of the resurrection

In the Bible at least ten occasions are recorded when the risen Jesus appeared to his followers. He spoke to them, ate with them and was touched by them (eg: Luke 24 v 36-43)

3. The meaning of the resurrection

Read Acts 10 v 39-43

- All people will be raised
“the living and the dead”
- All people will be judged
“judge of the living and the dead”
- The risen Jesus will be the judge
“he is the one whom God appointed judge”
- All will be divided into two groups
“Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
(Acts 10 v 43)
“If anyone is ashamed of me... the Son of Man will be ashamed of him.”
(Mark 8 v 38)
- This division is forever

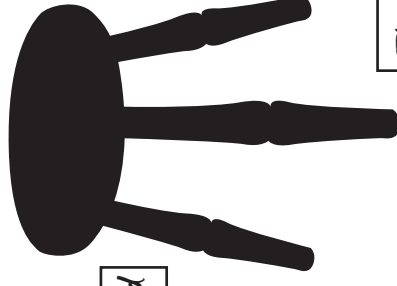
Conclusion:

Jesus’ attitude to me on the Day of Judgement is the same as my attitude to him now, in this life.

If I accept him now, he will accept me then.

If I reject him now, he will reject me then.

There are three basic concepts which you must believe to be a Christian. These are:



Son of God

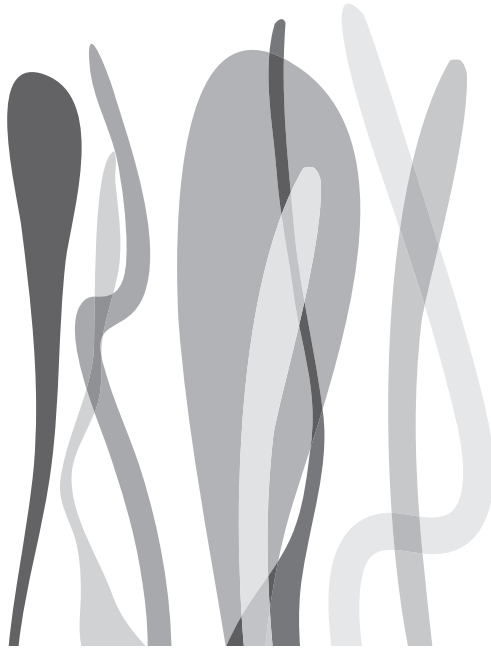
The Cross

The Resurrection

At Home

Read Mark chapters 11 – 16. Note anything you do not understand, or would like to discuss. There will be a time for discussing these things at the beginning of next week’s session.

Session 4



Christianity Explained

Grace –
not our works

Imagine that you have just died, and that God is judging your life. God says to you: *“Give me one good reason why I should accept you into heaven with me?”*

What would you reply?

The wrong answer: What I have done

God should accept me because I have:

- lived a good life
- kept the Ten Commandments
- given to charities
- been a good citizen
- been a good parent
- prayed and read the Bible
- been to church
- been baptised... etc.

Mark 7 v 20-23

The right answer: What Christ has done

*“God, you should accept me because of what **Christ** has done for me, and that alone.”*

Good works do not produce salvation

BUT

Salvation produces good works.

Read Ephesians 2 v 8-10

Conclusion:

We have seen that eternal life, forgiveness of sins and a place in God’s kingdom cannot be earned or deserved by us. They have been earned for people by the Son of God, through his death and rising again.

NOT

What

I

have done

BUT

What

CHRIST

has done

So forgiveness and eternal life are the free gifts of God to all who will receive the giver – that is, Jesus Christ.

Next week, we will discuss how we do this. This is the vital question: *What is a Christian?*

At Home

Read the booklet you have been given. Note anything you do not understand, and would like to discuss. Also re-read these passages from the Gospel of Mark, and underline what you think are the most significant words for you:

- Mark 1 v 15
- Mark 8 v 34-48
- Mark 9 v 43-48
- Mark 10 v 29-31

Session 5



Christianity Explained

What is a Christian?

1. Repenting

“The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” Mark 1 v 15

Review

Q: What is a Christian?

A: Someone who belongs to the kingdom of God.

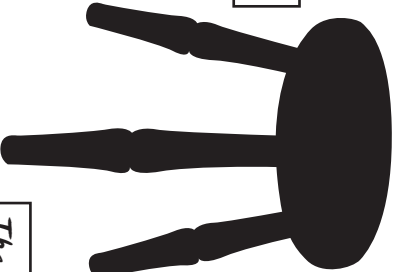
Q: How can I belong to the kingdom of God?

A: Repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

We have seen that a Christian believes certain facts about Jesus Christ:

Son of God

The Cross



The Resurrection

But being a Christian is more than just believing these facts.

Repentance means:

I am willing for Jesus to be first in my life...

...before my will

...before my ambitions

...before my popularity

...before anyone/anything else

See Mark 8 v 34-38 and Mark 9 v 43-48

At Home

Re-read the booklet you have been given.

What gifts does God promise to those who repent and believe?

Mark 1 v 8 H _ _ _ _ S _ _ _ _ _

Mark 2 v 10 F _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Mark 10 v 30 E _ _ _ _ _ _ _ L _ _ _ _

Session 6



Christianity Explained

What is a Christian?

2. Believing

“The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news.” Mark 1 v 15

Review

Q: What is a Christian?

A: someone who belongs to the kingdom of God.

Q: How can I belong to the kingdom of God?

A: repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

We have seen that a Christian believes certain facts about Jesus Christ:

But being a Christian is more than just believing these facts.

“Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it”

Mark 10 v 15

So believing is more than just accepting facts about Jesus. I must personally receive him as my King and Savior, and by so doing I receive the kingdom of God.

What gifts does God give to those who accept Christ?

1. The Holy Spirit

Mark 1 v 8

Jesus Christ comes to live in me by his Spirit, and begins to change me from the inside out.

2. The forgiveness of sins

Mark 2 v 10

Do I know for certain that my sins are totally forgiven? Was Jesus’ death sufficient to pay for my sins?

3. Eternal life

Mark 10 v 29-30

Do I know I have eternal life? Do I trust in what **JESUS** has done, and not in what I do?

Am I a Christian?

Test yourself – you are a Christian if you can genuinely say **YES** to these two statements.

1. I trust in Jesus’ death for the forgiveness of my sins. (I do not trust my own good works.)
2. I trust in the risen Jesus to be Lord of my life. (I am willing for him to be first in all parts of my life.)

Christianity Explained Course assessment sheet

*Mark the appropriate answers. Please be honest and frank.
Please feel free not to answer any of these questions.*

Name: _____

1. Before you began this course, how would you have described yourself?

- ☐ I didn't believe in God.
☐ I didn't know if there was a God or not.
☐ I believed in God, but not in Jesus Christ.
☐ I thought I was a Christian, but now I know I was not.
☐ A Christian (ie: a personal commitment to Jesus Christ).
☐ Something else _____

2. How would you assess your position now in relation to Jesus Christ?

- ☐ I have genuinely repented and come to believe in Jesus, and I have received him as my Lord and Savior.
☐ I'm interested in learning more, but as yet, I have not committed my life to Jesus.
☐ Other _____

3. If you have not yet become a Christian, what is stopping you?

4. Have you reached the place in your spiritual life where you know for certain that you have eternal life? If you died tonight, would you go to heaven?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. Suppose you were to die tonight and you stood before God in heaven and he asked: "Why should I let you into heaven?" – what would you reply?

"You should let me in because _____

6. Quite often, people who have finished this course want to go on and discover more about the Christian faith. To cater for this need, we offer a further six-week course which looks at what it means to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ. Would you be interested in doing this course?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Yes, but later

7. You and your church:

- ☐ I am satisfied with the church I go to.
☐ I do not regularly attend church, but would like to be introduced to a church where there is warm fellowship and good teaching.
☐ I do not wish to attend church at this stage.

8. What comments would you like to make about the course – either positive or negative?

Please write these comments on the reverse.