

CHRISTIAN FAITH SERIES

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Study One

THE LIVING GOD AND HIS PEOPLE

KNOWING THE LIVING GOD

People who believe in God do not need to prove that he lives. They believe because God has been God to them—much as children believe in parents because their parents bear them and care for them.

[Acts 17:23–31](#)

In saying that God is the living God, we mean that he does things. He is the Creator of the whole earth and the Creator of his people. He also speaks so as to reveal himself and he imparts his life to his creatures. On the other hand, he lets it be seen that nothing else is God.

[Deuteronomy 5:24–27; Jeremiah 10:1–16; 17:5–13.](#)

To say that God lives is to say that he loves. There is no living of God which is not love. Song writers expressed Israel's longing for fellowship with the living God.

[Psalms 42:2; 84:2.](#)

KNOWING GOD THROUGH HIS SAVING ACTS

God has created humanity in his image to be like him and to be with him in bringing about his purpose for the whole creation. The rebellion of the race has not changed his purpose. Rather, it is through his suffering over us and saving of us that he brings everything to its goal.

[Genesis 1:26–28; Ephesians 1:5–10.](#)

God shows that he is the living God, not so much by condemning what is wrong as in reconciling the world to himself. He has done this in sending his Son—Jesus Christ. He is the Son and revealer of the Living God. It is through the discovery of God's mercy to us that we discover God.

[Matthew 16:15–16; II Corinthians 5:17–21.](#)

Because God is living, every one must ultimately acknowledge him. He is the Judge and has wrath towards those who do not reverence him.

[Romans 14:11–12; Hebrews 3:12; Revelation 15:6–8.](#)

THE LIVING PEOPLE OF GOD

What God is he is to the whole creation. He lives and acts for all, but he reveals himself to some for the benefit of all. Therefore, the people of God are called to do the works of God in the creation. They live, not in this world's story, but in God's which is for the world.

[II Corinthians 5:17–21.](#)

In fact, as God's chosen Leader, Jesus Christ takes the place of God's people. He suffers and dies the death they deserve—and God raises him up to live forever. Through Christ, God's people not only know that God is alive but they are alive to God and they live for him.

[Romans 6:10–13; I Thessalonians 1:8–10.](#)

Believers have their hope in the living God. Because they know he is living, they rely on him to do something about everything. He has promised to do this; he has sent us his Son and raised him from death; he has given us his Spirit as a foretaste of what is to come.

[I Timothy 4:10; 6:17.](#)

GOD AND HIS PEOPLE IN THE END

In the end, Jesus Christ will have conquered every enemy of God and humanity. When he has done this, he will give everything over to the Father so that the Father can be everything to everyone. This is the goal of creation—God being everything to his people. God has always given himself to his people, but in the end, every obstacle to this will have been overcome—there will be no false fountains—and we will worship him as those who know that we have, and will, receive everything from him.

[I Corinthians 15:24–28.](#)

Study Two

JESUS CHRIST — GOD'S SON AND OUR SAVIOUR

THE MESSENGERS

Four Gospels were written so that we may have an orderly account of Christ's life and so that believing in him we may have eternal life.

[Luke 1:1–4; John 20:30–31.](#)

The apostles could tell us who Jesus is because they not only saw the power of God in his earthly life, and in his being raised from the dead, but because they received that power in their own lives by the Holy Spirit and were appointed as apostles by Christ.

[Acts 1:21–26; 2:22–24, 32–36; Romans 1:1–6; II Peter 1:16–18.](#)

THE PROPHECIES

Jesus did not appear without prior announcement. God had made many promises to Israel and told them that an anointed One (Messiah or Christ) would come to fulfil them.

The anointed One would be a king and deliver God's people from their enemies, lead them in righteousness and establish peace on earth. In this way, God himself would save his people and be present amongst them. They would be forgiven and truly know their God.

[Isaiah 9:6–7; Jeremiah 31:31–34](#)

So Jesus came to a nation prepared. When the time came for this child to be born, those involved were shown that the prophecies were about to be fulfilled.

[Matthew 1:21–23; Luke 1:30–35](#)

When it was time for Jesus to begin his ministry, the prophet, John the Baptist, announced him. He said Jesus was God's Son, and that he was the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

[John 1:29–34](#)

THE LIFE OF JESUS

So began the miracles and the teaching of Jesus. So began, also, the hatred of him for being so transparently one with God in all that he did and said. Israel learned how ready God was to bless them. They also learned how unwilling they were to have God so near to them.

[John 10:24–38](#)

When disciples realised and confessed that Jesus was the Christ, he said he would have to die and rise again. This was his Father's purpose for him and absolutely necessary for us. These things happened—just as Jesus had said they would. When he rose from the dead, Jesus showed how these things had to happen to fulfil all the prophecies.

[Matthew 16:15–21; Luke 24:13–32](#)

WHAT THE APOSTLES SAY ABOUT JESUS

The apostle Peter, in a talk to a Roman officer and his household, has given us a review of the message of Jesus Christ. Through Christ, peace can come to all people because he is Lord over all people. This began with his healings, but it culminated in his being killed and then being raised from the dead by God. He is raised to the right hand of God with both power to judge and power to save.

[Acts 3:22–26; 10:36–43.](#) (Peter's summary follows the content of the Gospel of Mark.)

In Jesus' name the forgiveness of sins was announced. Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit for the renewal of God's people. Jesus would judge the world, and Jesus had come with salvation for the world. All of these things were the proper task of God alone but the apostles clearly attributed them to Jesus Christ. They knew, from Jesus' own lips and by the witness of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was at the right hand of God doing the things they saw happening amongst them.

[Matthew 26:63–64; Acts 2:17, 33, 36, 38.](#)

People called Jesus Lord when he was among them, but after the Resurrection they called him Lord in the same way they would call God Lord. He had received the name which was above every name. The Church freely confesses that Jesus is Lord and together with the Father worships him.

[Acts 2:36; Philippians 2:9–11; Revelation 5:6–14](#)

The mystery of our faith is great. He whom we worship as God has been revealed in our flesh, believed on in the world and been taken into glory. Therefore we need have no doubt that we have encountered the mercy of God in the forgiveness of our sins and that we are joined forever to the eternal God in covenant relationship.

[I Timothy 3:16; I John 4:9](#)

Calling Jesus the Son of God now means, not only that he is Messiah but that he is the only Son of the Father eternally. The world was made through the Son but he came from the bosom of the Father so that we may participate in all the grace of the Father.

[John 1:1–4, 9–18](#)

Study Three

THE CROSS AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Through the death of Jesus, God's Son, God has revealed his love for us. He raised his Son from death to proclaim forgiveness to us. Until this occurred, there was a shadow over the human race which nothing could erase.

[Acts 2:36–38; 3:13–19; 13:39](#)

THE NECESSITY OF CHRIST'S DEATH

From the beginning we have attempted to excuse ourselves for our sinning. But from the beginning, the penalty for our sins has been death.

[Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23](#)

Jesus said it was necessary that he be killed and on the third day rise again—as prophesied in the Scripture. Paul said that only the Cross could bring us to God.

[Luke 9:20–22; 24:25–27, 46–47; I Corinthians 1:17–21](#)

SACRIFICE TO MAKE ATONEMENT

Sacrifices for sin have been part of our history from earliest times. For Israel, God prescribed offerings as a witness to something greater to come. In these ceremonies the sins of the offender were transferred to the victim so that the animal died in the place of the offender. This was called the making of atonement.

[Leviticus 4:13–21](#)

The true people of God always knew that this forgiveness was given, not because they offered the offering but because of the grace and mercy of God to them in that offering which he prescribed and provided.

[Psalm 50:7–15; 51:16–19](#)

John the Baptist introduced Christ by saying that he was the Son of God and that he was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. His words probably recall the prophecy that a servant of God would come and bear the sins of many. He would suffer patiently—like a lamb being killed.

[Isaiah 53:4–8, 11–12; John 1:29](#)

Jesus knew (what we wish to be ignorant of) God's holy love—which goes out to destroy all that destroys his creation. This holiness had been illustrated throughout Israel's history. But now, Jesus made himself an offering for sin. He did this in obedience to his Father who had appointed him, in love for us, to bear our sins in his own body.

[John 17:11, 17–19; I Peter 1:18–21; 2:24–25](#)

The healing needed for us to live before God could only come through what the Bible calls a propitiation or an atoning sacrifice. This means that the wrath directed against us fell on him in our place. Jesus has born our sins or been made sin. Our vileness passed to him, God's curse fell on him, the taunts and bitterness of hell were directed against him, the accusations of God's law stood against him, he was abandoned by the Father. His humanity was fully expended in this giving up of himself on our behalf. In other words, Jesus laid down his life for his sheep.

[Romans 3:23–26](#); [II Corinthians 5:18–21](#); [Galatians 3:13–14](#)

RESURRECTION

Christ could not be held by death—as prophesied in the Scripture. His offering for us was accepted by God and we are assured of this by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He has been vindicated or justified; and, because he died for us, God has justified us in raising Christ from the dead.

[Acts 2:24–32](#); [I Timothy 3:16](#); [Romans 4:18–22](#)

This 'weakness' of God is stronger than our strength and his 'foolishness' is wiser than our wisdom. It brings us to God.

[I Corinthians 1:17–25](#)

Christ has offered up a true humanity to God, fully pleasing to him in every respect. No sin of ours has been passed over, and therefore, no accusation of God remains against us and no taunt made by our Accuser is valid. No requirement of God's law remains unfulfilled; no powers of darkness retain any hold over our fallenness.

[Colossians 2:9–10, 13–15](#)

Christ was raised up by the glory of the Father and taken up to sit at his right hand. Christ has already reached humanity's goal on our behalf. We are reckoned to be raised with him and ascended with him. We must reckon ourselves in the same way.

[Romans 6:4–11](#); [Ephesians 2:4–7](#)

TRUST IN GOD FOR JUSTIFICATION

God calls us to trust in Jesus Christ for our life and not to trust in ourselves and our own works. God also calls us to live in hope of the final day in which we will hear the word that we are acquitted of all our sins. Death has lost its sting. Therefore, we live in the freedom of those who have been justified by God.

Study Four

FINDING GOD THROUGH HIS FORGIVENESS

FORGIVENESS IN JESUS NAME

When Jesus Christ was crucified, he called out: ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing’. He did not excuse their actions or say that they did not matter, but recognised that they were deceived by their sins. He asked his Father, God, to cancel the moral debt they had incurred by this transgression of God’s law. If this sin—murder of God’s Son—is the most serious of sins, it is clear that Jesus is announcing a whole new order.

[Luke 23:34](#); cf. [Acts 7:60](#)

The nature of God’s rule in the creation is that he does not charge our sins against us but calls us to believe in his Son for the forgiveness of them. In not holding us accountable for our sins, he has held his Son accountable for them. Christ has joined himself to us in love to this end. Forgiveness is not a forgetting of our sins or a denying of the situation caused by them; rather, it is his breaking into the continuing outworking of the act, bringing it to an end.

[Acts 17:30–31](#); [Romans 3:24–26](#); [II Corinthians 5:19–21](#)

WHAT SIN DOES

Sin deceives the person who commits it; they cannot see what is true. It pollutes the person who does the deed; he or she does not have the moral power of innocence. Sin alienates; a person has established a place of their own over against God and their neighbour.

[Mark 7:20–23](#); [Romans 1:19–32](#)

Sin incurs a debt; what was due to God has not been rendered to him and there is no means to make reparation. It makes the person liable to judgement; the indignation of God is aroused. Sin plays into the hands of Satan; he is the accuser who manipulates people through their guilt to be about his work rather than the work of God.

[Ephesians 2:1–3](#); [II Timothy 2:22–26](#)

ACKNOWLEDGING SIN

Sin is primarily against God. That is, if we have offended another human being we have offended their Maker and broken his law. Chiefly, we have not wanted to have God in our thinking. When sin is unacknowledged, it begins to destroy us.

[Proverbs 14:31](#); [Psalm 51](#); [Psalm 32](#)

When we see that God has brought sin out into the light—at the Cross—we can recognise it and turn from it to Jesus Christ.

[I John 1:6–10](#)

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Given the strong power that conscience has over us, can we be sure that our sins are forgiven? Christ has commanded his church to announce the forgiveness of sins in his name. He has offered his blood as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. God has authenticated this man by raising him from the dead and he announces to us the forgiveness of sins. By Christ's offering of his blood, our conscience is cleansed and we are delivered from the accusations of Satan.

[Luke 24:46–48; Acts 5:30–31; Romans 4:25; Hebrews 9:14](#)

God commands that we trust in this man Christ whom God has raised from the dead. In him is the forgiveness of sins—not in us. Through faith in him we may have assurance of forgiveness. If we remain partly trusting in our own merit or reparations, or do not desire to come under his gracious rule, we will lack assurance.

[Hebrews 10:19–23](#)

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND WITH ONE ANOTHER

The longing for human oneness and intimacy is enormous. The need for human oneness with God is irreplaceable. The lack of it causes great human distress and disorientation.

[Ephesians 2:12](#)

Now, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are reconciled to God and—with Jesus Christ—call him Father. We have 'come home' and know God personally. We know he is the God of grace and mercy. Our fear of him is no longer the fear of punishment but of awe—that our Judge is of such a character. God has brought us great joy and pleasure. We also know that, in receiving his gift, we have brought him great pleasure and continue to please him while we respond gratefully to his kindness.

[Romans 5:1–2; Ephesians 2:13–19](#)

We also have fellowship or partnership with one another. We have peace, or oneness. The sins that kept us from God and from one another, the blood of Christ goes on cleansing, so the fellowship is enduring. In his grace, we are called to forgive one another and be tender hearted to one another.

[I John 1:7](#)

Study Five

LIFE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now that Christ has born our sins on the Cross and been raised from the dead, the Holy Spirit has been poured out. The effect of this is that the victory and the life which Christ has won passes over to us, or into us. We live in the good of and the delight of things which Christ has gained for us—even though we have not come to receive all of them yet.

[John 15:26; 16:12–15; cf. Matthew 12:43–45; cf. I Peter 1:2–12](#)

THE PROMISE

God had promised Israel he would send his Spirit, together with a new heart so that his people could truly be his people, love him freely and do his will in the world.

[Ezekiel 36:25–32](#)

BEING BORN OF THE SPIRIT

Receiving the Spirit is being baptized in the Spirit. It is how we become Christians, or are born again. Being born of the Spirit and being born of God are the same thing. (We could compare Jesus being born by the Holy Spirit coming to Mary, and her child then being called the Son of God.) The coming of the Spirit is the coming of God. We are his children.

[Acts 1:4–5; 2:38; John 3:3–8; Romans 8:5–9; Luke 1:35](#)

We could neither recognise Jesus as Lord or God as our Father without the enabling of the Spirit. The Spirit works in us before we recognise him to enable us to recognise Christ as he is, and to turn to our Father who has called us.

[I Peter 1:2; I Corinthians 12:3; Galatians 4:6–7](#)

THE SPIRIT JOINS US TO CHRIST BEFORE THE FATHER

The Spirit comes to show us the things of Christ and to join us to Christ in an unending relationship. Just as Jesus had his physical body and his Messiah's calling and enabling by the Spirit, so that same Spirit is now the Spirit of Jesus (while still the Spirit of God) so that we may participate in all that Christ now is before the Father.

[John 14:16–17; 20:21–23; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 12:11](#)

THE SPIRIT UNITES US WITH CHRIST'S VICTORY

The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ sent by God so that the same power by which Christ lived and gained his victory resides in us. This victory is the end of all condemnation—the past cannot rise up to haunt and pollute and frustrate the present. This victory has secured the renewal of our bodies beyond death—our future is as secure as Christ's Resurrection. In the

present, we have a vital relationship with God as Father by which we can live for him rather than for the flesh. All this, we know because of the Spirit of God within us.

[Romans 8:1–16](#)

THE SPIRIT SETS US FREE

We may have lived by the spirit of this age, giving ourselves over to its principles and practices and to the satanic powers that manipulate it for their own ends. But now, we have received the Holy Spirit of God. We are free from the necessity of self justification and free in our being to serve God and our neighbour.

[Galatians 5:13–25](#); [II Corinthians 3:17–18](#)

Therefore, we should be careful not to resist or grieve or quench the Spirit, but rather, be continually filled with him.

[Acts 7:51](#); [Ephesians 4:30](#); [5:18](#); [I Thessalonians 5:19](#)

Study Six

LIVING IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Faith, hope and love are a summary of the way a Christian is to live. Letters from the apostles to churches usually mention these three things in their greetings.

Faith, hope and love are not generated by persons but by the gospel. We are commanded to believe and to hope and to love, but they are also given to us by God. This is not surprising or confusing if we understand that we are creatures of God and that the proper context for our willing and doing is that God is being God to us. A human being only functions truly in God.

BELIEVE IN GOD!

God calls us to believe in him and in his Son and in the promises he has made. This means believing that he exists and that he will reward those who seek him. If we will not believe, we will not be established, but will rather perish in our sins.

[Isaiah 7:9](#); [Hebrews 2:1–4](#); [3:12–14](#); [4:1–2](#); [11:1–3](#), 6

We should believe in Christ to be justified or forgiven. We should trust God our Father for all things and not be anxious.

[Romans 4:3–8](#); [Matthew 6:25–34](#)

But faith is a gift of God. ‘The grace of our Lord filled me with faith and with the love that is in Christ Jesus’. Jesus Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith.

[Ephesians 2:8–10](#); [I Timothy 1:14 \(JB\)](#); [Hebrews 12:1](#)

‘In your faith you are more conscious and sure of Him than you are of your faith. For your faith, you well know, may fail Him, but you know still better that He will not fail your faith. And you are more conscious and sure of Him, as the source and cause of your experience, than you are of the experience itself, which you forget to think of’ (Forsyth, *Positive Preaching*, p. 46).

HOPE IN GOD!

The future is unseen, but what we expect to happen has great power over what we do now. The ‘god’ of science and technology has begun to falter because it is now apparent that it cannot produce a better world. This is not because science is deficient but because God has shown the limits of something in which we had hoped. The same is true for all false hopes.

[Psalm 31:1–8](#); [Ephesians 2:12](#); [I John 3:1–3](#)

God calls us to hope in him—for the renewal and unity of all things and our own participation in that through his Son. In particular, Christ has promised that he will return to raise the dead, gather his own and establish all God’s purpose.

[Psalm 42:9–10](#); [Ephesians 1:9–14](#); [Philippians 3:17–21](#)

This hope is not dependent on our capacity to imagine things. It is confidence in Christ who has loved us, and in the God who raised him from the dead. If this has demonstrated the quality of God's love and power, shall he not freely give us all things necessary to life and godliness?

[John 14: 1–3](#); [Romans 8:31–32](#); [II Peter 1:3](#)

Again, hope is a gift. It comes with Christ who is our hope.

[II Thessalonians 2:16–17](#); [I Timothy 1:1](#); [I Peter 1:3](#)

Beloved, let us love!

From the beginning, the command of God has been to love. God is love, and we are creatures made in his image; so, to love is to be human—to be alive.

[Deuteronomy 6:5](#); [I John 2:9–11](#); [3:16–19](#)

But love is not of us; it is of God. If we live in God, we do love. That is, we live in the actions whereby the living God has brought us to life—the death and Resurrection of his Son and the pouring out of the Spirit.

[I John 4:7–13](#)

Christ described this to us before his death and Resurrection. He knew what love was because he was loved by his Father. He has made this Father known to us so that we, with him, may know the love of the Father. It is this love, revealed in Christ, and the unity of being together in the Father and Son, that proclaims to the world that the Father has truly sent his Son.

[John 17:20–26](#)