

2010 Alpha Pop Culture Schedule

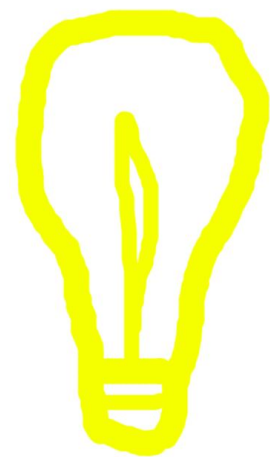
Date	Lesson Title	Instructor
Feb. 1	Who is Jesus and Why Did He Die?	Adam
Feb. 8	Is There Absolute Truth?	Ryan
Feb. 15	What About Other Religions?	Josh
Feb. 22	Why Does God Allow Suffering?	Gavin
Mar. 1	If Jesus is About Grace, Why All the Rules?	Greg
Mar. 6	Is the Trinity Unbiblical, Unbelievable, Irrelevant? – Holy Spirit Saturday	Adam & Will
Mar. 8	Is There a Conflict Between Science and Christianity?	Adam
Mar. 15	Do I Have to Go to Church to Be a Christian?	Will
Mar. 22	How Do I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life?	Will

Alpha Lay Leader Job Description

- Recruits table leaders, set-up, and kitchen help
- Prepares articles for the Encourager and u|news to publicize the class
- Keeps inventory up-to-date and in-stock
- Conducts table leader training
- Meets with table leaders before each session to address questions and discuss upcoming lesson
- Opens each session with prayer and an introduction to the speaker
- Monitors time allotment for group discussions and assists if needed
- Closes each session with prayer
- Responsible for turning in the money to staff this is received for the “love offering” and book sales
- Holy Spirit Saturday – Coordinates breakfast to be provided by table leaders and picks up lunch that was pre-ordered by staff
- At the end of each course a debriefing is held with the Discipleship team to discuss celebrations and growing edges

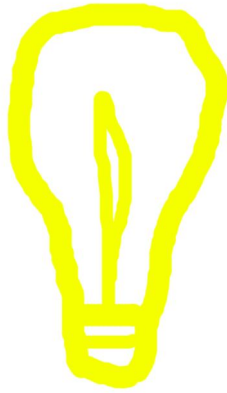


Alpha: Pop Culture



Alpha: Pop Culture is a combination of material taken from Nicky Gumbel's The Alpha Course and Searching Issues: The Seven Most Common Questions Raised on The Alpha Course. Though some of the chapters do not perfectly align with all material from one or the other of those sources, it is still primarily material from them.

For more information on either The Alpha Course or Searching Issues please visit www.alphausa.org.



Alpha Pop Culture
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Who is Jesus and Why did He Die?

Who Is Jesus?

The whole weight of Jesus' teaching, his words, his character, his fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and his conquest of death lend the strongest possible support to Jesus' own consciousness of being a man whose identity was God.

“Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ ‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ ”

Mark 14:61-62

We know Jesus existed

Evidence outside New Testament about Jesus

Roman historians

Tacitus

Suetonius

Jewish historian

Josephus

Evidence within the New Testament

Question?

How do we know that we now have what they originally wrote?

Textual criticism

<u>Author</u>	<u>When Written</u>	<u>Earliest Copy</u>	<u>Time Lapse</u>	<u># of Copies</u>
Herodotus	488-428B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300	8
Thucydides	460-400B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300	8
Tacitus	A.D. 100	1100	1,000	20
Caesar's Gaelic War	58-50 B.C.	A.D. 900	950	9-10
Livy's Roman History	59B.C.-A.D. 17	A.D. 900	900	20

New Testament A.D. 40-100 A.D. 130 30-310 24,000+

Jesus was fully human

He had a human body

-Fatigue

-Hunger

He had human emotions

-Anger

-Love

-Sadness

He had human experiences

-Temptation

-Learning

-Work

Two questions arise:

•Is it possible that Jesus was just a wonderful man?

•Is it possible that he was just a great moral teacher?

What did he say about himself?

His teaching centered on Himself

“I am.”

“I am the bread of life.”

John 6:35

“I am the light of the world”

John 8:12

“I am the resurrection and the life.”

John 11:25

“I am the way and the truth and the life.”

John 14:6

“My kingdom”

Luke 22:30

“Come to Me”

Matthew 11:28-29

“Follow Me”

Mark 1:17

All of the “I am/me” statements are significant because to have seen Jesus is to have seen God.

“Jesus answered: ‘Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?’ “

John 14:9

Jesus claims to be...

...Messiah

Mark 14:61-62

...the Son of God

Mark 14:61-62

...God

John 8:58

John 20:28

John 10:33

What evidence is there to support what He said?

His teaching

His Works

His character

His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy

His conquest of death

Evidence for the Resurrection

His absence from the tomb

Argument: Jesus did not die?

Argument: Perhaps the disciples stole his body?

Argument: Authorities stole body?

His appearances to the disciples

Argument: Jesus post-resurrection appearances were wishful thinking – or hallucinations?

After effects:

-Birth of the Christian church

-Growth of Christian church (Martyrs)

-Effect down the ages

Two questions arise:

Is it possible that Jesus was just a wonderful man?

–If he wasn't who he said he was, he wasn't a wonderful man – he was a lunatic and liar.

Is it possible that he was just a great moral teacher?

–If he wasn't who he said he was, he wasn't a great moral teacher – he was a fiend leading people astray.

Conclusion

“We are faced then with a frightening alternative. The man we are talking about was (and is) just what He said or else a lunatic or something worse. Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend; and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God. God has landed on this enemy occupied world in human form.”

C. S. Lewis in *Surprised by Joy*

Why Did Jesus Die?

The Cross lies at the heart of the Christian faith.

1 Corinthians 1:23-24

1 Corinthians 2:2

What did Jesus' death achieve?

The Problem

- Pollution of sin (Mark 7:20-23)
- Power of sin (John 8:34)
- Penalty of sin (Romans 6:23)
- Partition of sin (Isaiah 59:1-2)

The Solution

1 Peter 2:24

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.”

-The “self-substitution of God” – J.W.R. Stott (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13)

-Agony of the Cross (Isaiah 53:6)

The Result

Romans 3:21-26

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

Four Images

The Temple (Romans 3:25)

Pollution of sin removed

The Marketplace (vs. 24)

Power of sin broken

The Law Court (vs. 24)

Penalty of sin paid

The Home (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Partition of sin destroyed

Conclusion

-Righteousness for God

“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

Romans 3:22

-He died for you and me

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 2:20



Is There Absolute Truth?

Our world is filled with many different beliefs and many different beliefs about beliefs.

“We live in an age that is the most religious for several generations. It is an age of religious pluralism.... It emphasizes experience and values spirituality, but it goes further than this.”

Nicky Gumble; Searching Issues, pg. 55

Religious Pluralism – Diversities of thought, cultures, values, religions, etc., in a society.

Donald McKim, Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms

Today this diversity of ideas are not mutually exclusive – one can hold to any or all.

History of “Truth”

Pre-Enlightenment – reason as a tool of understanding, but subordinate to revealed truth of Christianity.

Post-Enlightenment – reason celebrated as power by which we can understand the universe and now Christian revelation is made subordinate to reason.

History of “Truth”

Result:

-Church

-reacted with dogmatism and rigidity

-Culture

-“Pick and Choose” religious culture

-No leader, no organization, no structure, no headquarters

-Church is not immune

New Religion

“All is God”

-Pantheism: God is in everything; an impersonal energy, and a creative force.

“All is One”

-Monism: All religions are really the same thing – good and evil are relative.

“All is Well”

-We are making evolutionary progress towards Utopia.

Christianity's Response

This new religion does not get near the truth of God the Father (Romans 1:25)

-God is a transcendent, personal creator desiring to be in relationship with us.

This new religion does not get near the truth about God the Son – Jesus (John 14:6)

-Jesus does not give the option to be one of many prophets or enlightened folks. He claims to be messiah and offer salvation – something that you have to figure out yourself in the new religion.

This new religion does not get near the truth about God the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)

-Transformation in the new religion is often through altered consciousness or self actualization. The Holy Spirit comes to offer transformation into Christ-likeness, holiness.

What are we to do?

Ask for forgiveness

-Individually if we have fallen into some kind of new age practice.

-As a church for not recognizing true spiritual hunger and searching and becoming dogmatic.

Immerse ourselves in the truth of God

Colossians 2:8

Conclusion

It is a philosophical impossibility for there to be no absolute truth; because to suggest this is to make a statement of absolute truth.

Jesus stands over and above other god's/prophets in his sacrificial death and offer of salvation through his work rather than ours.



What About Other Religions?

Public vs. Private Truth

-*Private Truth*: What is true for me may or may not be true for you.

-*Public Truth*: If it is true for one, it is true for all.

Christianity is a public truth.

-If it is true for anyone – it is true for everyone. If it isn't true for everyone – it isn't true for anyone.

Is Jesus the only Way to God?

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 14:6-7

The witness of the apostles agrees

After healing a crippled man, the apostle Peter “filled with the Holy Spirit” said that the man was healed, “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” and that “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:12

Issue:

What do we say about other religions?

What does Christianity have to do with life today?

What do we say about other religions?

“The fact that Jesus is the only way to God does not mean we right off all other religions as misguided and demonic.”

Nicky Gumbel, Searching Issues, pg. 28

-God has partially revealed himself in creation.

-God has given human beings a conscience to distinguish right from wrong.

-Every heart hungers for God.

What do we say about other religions?

The catechism of the Roman Catholic church states:

“The church considers all goodness and truth found in other religions as a preparation for the gospel and given by him who enlightens all [people] that they may at length have life.”

Searching Issues, pg. 30-31

What Does Christianity have to do with life today?

Direction for a lost world: Hunger for meaning and purpose

- What am I doing on Earth?
- What is the point of life?
- Where am I heading?

Reality in a confused world: Does it matter what we believe?

- Truth understood
- Truth experienced

Life in a dark world

- Created in God’s image
- Fallen into sin
- Forgiven in Christ

Conclusion

God has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the truth. It is illogical to assert that all religions are equally true, or that all religions lead to God.

“A religion can hardly lead to God if it explicitly denies of a god or any gods”

Allister McGrath

“Equally, it is absurd to suggest that a religion that asserts that there is a God and one that asserts there is no God are both equally true.”

Nicky Gumbel; Searching Issues, pg. 31



Why Does God Allow Suffering?

“The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair.”

John Stott; The Cross of Christ (InterVarsity, 1986), pg. 311.

Three Overlapping Insights regarding Suffering

1. Suffering is not part of God’s original created order. It is a result of sin entering the world due to Human Freedom.

- Suffering as a result of our own sin (Psalm 51:1-4)
- Suffering as a result of others sin (1 Corinthians 15:3)
- Suffering as a result of a fallen world (Romans 8:20)

2. Suffering is never good in itself, but God is able to use it for good in a number of different ways.

- Suffering is used to draw us to Christ.
- God uses suffering to bring us to Christian maturity (2 Corinthians 11:24-29; 12:10)
- God uses suffering to bring about His good purposes (Roman 8:28)

3. God is involved in our suffering; He is a God that suffers alongside of us.

- Philippians 2:5-8

John Stott says, “I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross.” God is not a God who is immune from suffering. He is not looking on as an impassive observer, far removed from the suffering world.

Searching Issues, pg. 19

**So, if human freedom is a primary cause of suffering in the world, then we must ask the question:
How Can I Resist Sin that causes suffering?**

The Bible gives examples of resisting sin

-Jesus resisted the devil by constantly thinking about being obedient to God
(Matthew 4:1-6)

-Peter says to be alert and watch out for the devil
(1 Peter 5:8-11)

-Paul encourages us to protect ourselves with God's armor
(Ephesians 6:11-12)

What are the devil's tactics?

Aims to destroy (John 10:10)

Blinds eyes (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Sows doubt (Matthew 4:3,6)

Sends temptation (Genesis 3:1-6)

Satan was defeated on the cross

"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."
Colossians 2:15

Jesus gave His disciples authority over demons

"The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'
Luke 10:17-20

Conclusion

-Suffering is not the will of God, it is something to be redeemed by God.

-We have been given freedom and power over sin that causes suffering.

"The knowledge of His suffering removes what Jurgen Moltmann has called the "suffering in suffering." We are not alone in our pain. When we suffer, He suffers with us."

Searching Issues, pg. 21



Is the Trinity Unbiblical, Unbelievable, Irrelevant?

The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible; therefore, it is sometimes suggested, particularly by members of cults, that the idea of the Trinity is unbiblical.

Searching Issues, pg. 101

What or Who is the Trinity?

The Trinity is how Christians have always understood the person of God.

- Three persons - God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit
- One God – all three persons are of the same essence and nature

God the Father

- The creator and sustainer of the universe

God the Son, Jesus Christ

- The son of God, sent to earth to end the separation of humanity from God due to sin

God the Holy Spirit

- Sent after Jesus’ resurrection to be a guide and counselor for humanity; God’s presence with us

Is the Trinity Biblical?

The Gospels bear witness to the Trinity

- Jesus say’s that he has been sent by the Father and is one with the Father
- John 5:17-18*

-Jesus says that once He is gone He will send the counselor, or Holy Spirit to be with His disciples

-*John 16:7,13*

-*Acts 1:4b-5; 8a*

-Jesus instructs the disciples to baptize people in the name of the Trinity

-*Matthew 28:19*

Heresies regarding the Trinity

Arius (A.D. 250-336) argued that Jesus divinity was partial and derivative. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were three distinct beings.

Philoponus of Alexandria said that there are three gods of the same sort, but distinct and separate from each other.

Sabellius said that God was a unity with three different modes of expression. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were just names for one God in His different activities.
Searching Issues, pg. 105

The Trinity is believable but we must be able to think differently than we are used to. Scientific method will not get us there.

There are 3 limiting factors in understanding the Trinity

-*Limited language*

-*Limited intellects*: In describing the Trinity we must resort to the language of paradox.

-*Limited minds*: Our world and our minds are finite and God is infinite.

“If you can understand it, it’s not God.”

-Augustine of Hippo

Searching Issues, pg. 109-110

Is the Trinity Relevant?

The doctrine of the Trinity is very relevant because it continues to reveal to humanity the nature of God and God’s interaction with the world.

-The Trinity shows that God is self-sufficient

-The Trinity tells us that there are three essential models needed to understand the depth of the Christian faith and life

-A transcendent God who lies beyond the world as its source and creator

-The human face of God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ

-The immanent God who is present and active throughout His creation

The Triune God meets our most fundamental psychological needs as human beings.

-Point of reference

-Role model

-Facilitator

A Trinitarian Study of Ephesians 3:14-19

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians 3:14-19

- The Fullness of the Spirit is an experience of the fatherhood of God (Rom. 8:14-16).
- It is an experience of the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:17-19).
- It is an experience of the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8).

God is not meant only to be understood in our minds but also experienced in our hearts and lives. To be filled with the Spirit is to experience God as Trinity.

Searching Issues, pg. 114-115

Conclusion

- The Trinity is Biblical, Jesus speaks about the Triune nature of God in the gospels.
- The Trinity is believable. We must train our minds to be ok with mystery.
- The Trinity is relevant, as we gain insight into the nature of God and humankind through the Trinity.



How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?

Introduction

- Some Christians seem to have only the “pilot light” of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
- Others have the full power of the Spirit.

Issue:

How can I experience the full power of the Spirit?

Outpouring of the Spirit in Acts

- Pentecost
- Samaria
- Paul
- Ephesus
- Gentiles

What did they experience?

Acts 10 relates the experience of a centurion named Cornelius and his family and friends when they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

I. They experienced the power of the Holy Spirit.

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.”

Acts 10:44-45

- Filling with the Spirit rarely happens imperceptibly.
- It will be obvious to others

II. They were released in praise.

“For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.”
Acts 10:46

- Spontaneous praise, not self-conscience, but God-conscience.

III. They received a new language.

“For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.”

Acts 10:46

-The gift of tongues is one of many spiritual gifts. It is not the only gift or even the most important. It is possible to be filled with the Spirit and not speak in tongues. Many today are puzzled by this gift.

What is the gift of tongues?

- Form of prayer
- Transcends language barrier

Why is it helpful?

- Helpful in praise and worship
- Helpful when praying under pressure.
- Helpful when praying for other (intercession)

Does the New Testament approve of speaking in tongues?

1 Corinthians 14:39

1 Corinthians 14:5

1 Corinthians 14:18

1 Corinthians 14:6

How do we receive this gift?

- Ask God
- Cooperate with the Spirit
- Believe
- Persevere

What are the common hindrances to being filled with the Spirit?

Three barriers

1. Doubt
2. Fear
3. Inadequacy

Conclusion

Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-time experience.

We are to be continuously filled.



If Jesus is About Grace, Why All the Rules?

- God, in His Love, has given us a good plan.
- God's created order and plan were good.
- God, in His love, warns against human distortions
- Tragically, God's plan has been distorted by human sin.
- The Result

God gave His people the law not to burden them, but to teach them how to relate to God and one another.

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Exodus 19:3-6

An Example: sex before marriage

- God made us and our sexuality and deemed it good. (Genesis 2: 18-25)
- Sin entered the picture and took something meant to be enjoyed as a spiritual connection with one other person in a covenantal relationship and turned it into something selfish.
- Our sinful nature leads us to go against God's design for life and relationship.

In doing so:

- We risk hurting ourselves
- We risk hurting others
- We risk hurting society
- We hurt God

David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11)

- King David hurt himself when he gave into temptation and went against God's design and intent for sex.
- King David's decision hurt others because he caused Bathsheba to sin against her husband and eventually made decisions that led to Uriah's death.

-King David hurt his society because he caused a family to dissolve and the people's King had sinned against the people's God.

-King David hurt God because he put himself over and above God in deciding to break his rules.
The Good News

The good news is that there is forgiveness for sin – that is what grace is all about.

“The remedy for sin is not to make excuses or to do things to make up for it. Rather it is confession and repentance. However far we have fallen, we can make a new start in Christ.”

Searching Issues, pg. 49

God's rules *ARE* grace; in order to guide us in relationship with God and others along life's journey.

How Does God Guide Us?

John 15:10

Psalm 32:8

God's law is not meant to hide God or his will for us, he longs for us to discover His will.

-Ephesians 2:10

God has a good plan for our lives.

-Jeremiah 29:11

Jesus is the supreme example

-Luke 4:1

Our attitude needs to be one of humility and fear of the Lord.

-Psalm 25:9

-Psalm 25:14

We Need to Use Common Sense

-Psalm 32:9

-2 Timothy 2:7

We Need to Use the Counsel of the Saints (Christians)

-Proverbs 12:15

-Proverbs 15:22

-Proverbs 20:18

Decisions are our Responsibility.

-Consult godly Christians

-Not chosen on basis of agreement.

-Chosen on basis of spiritual authority.

Conclusion

God's law is not there to burden us, but to free us, and to guide us in relationship with God and with others.

We all make mistakes, but God forgives and restores.



Is There a Conflict Between Science and Scripture?

Why the Bible?

“The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me.”

-Martin Luther

“...Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

-Matthew 4:4

“If we delight in the law of God or the Word and meditate on it day and night, we will be blessed and prosper.”

-Psalms 1:1-3

The Bible Is:

The most popular book

The most powerful book

The most precious book

What is so important about the Bible?

God has spoken: Revelation

The Scriptures reveal the person of God in Jesus Christ and His creation.

-Hebrews 1:2

-Psalm 19:7

All Scripture is inspired

-2 Timothy 3:16-17

God Speaks: Relationship

The Bible is God's love letter to us and its purpose is to bring us into relationship with Him – “salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”

-2 Timothy 3:15

God speaks today what He spoke in the past.

To non-Christians He brings faith.

To Christians He:

- Enables them to become more like Him
- Brings Joy and Peace in the midst of a storm.
- Gives Guidance

Is There Conflict Between Science and the Bible?

Many believe that science and Christian belief are in direct conflict. There are two main reasons for this:

1. There have been times in history when the church has opposed the results of scientific study.
2. There is a thought that modern scientific study explains everything that was once explained by belief in God.

The Christian worldview provided the right environment for modern science to emerge.

- The Christian faith is monotheistic which led people to expect uniformity in nature.
- The Christian doctrine of creation by a rational God of order led scientists to expect a world that was both ordered and intelligible.
- The Christian belief in a transcendent God, separate from nature, meant that experimentation was justified.

Science and Scripture do not contradict each other

One of the alleged conflicts is in the area of miracles.

- Argument: The laws of nature can not be interrupted.
- Real Issue: Is there a God?

The second area of alleged conflict is the theory of evolution and the biblical account of creation.

- Much of the theory of evolution is still theory.
- Sincere Christians hold many different interpretations of Genesis 1.
 - Literal six days
 - Day age theory

The main point of Genesis 1 is not to answer the questions “How?” and “When?” (the scientific questions), but the questions “Why?” and “Who?” (the theological questions). The Bible is not primarily a scientific book, but a theological one.

Searching Issues, pg. 94

Science and Scripture Complement Each Other

Science is the study of God's general revelation in creation. Biblical Theology is the study of God's "special" revelation in Jesus and the Scriptures.
Searching Issues, pg. 95

Psalm 19:1-4
Romans 1:20

How do we hear God speak through the Bible?

Time: Plan ahead and develop a regular pattern.

Place: "A solitary place"/Community

Method

- Ask God to speak through the passage.
- Read the passage.
- Ask yourself:
 - What does it say?
 - What does it mean?
 - How does it apply?
- Respond in prayer.
- Put it into practice.

Conclusion

Science does not have to be in conflict with Scripture

Results of delighting in God's Word

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

Psalm 1:1-3



Do I Have To Go To church To Be A Christian?

The Church is made up of the people belonging to God, who are bound together in love as family, representing Christ to the world.

Popular misconceptions

1. Church = services
2. Church = clergy
3. Church = a particular denomination
4. Church = the building

ISSUE:

- Who/What is the church?
- What does God have to say about His relationship to the church?
- Do Christians have to go to church?

The People of God

The Greek word *ekklesia* means an assembly or gathering of people.

Baptism: mark of entry

-Cleansing from sin
1 Corinthians 6:11

-Incorporation into Christ's death and resurrection.
Romans 6:3-5

-Sealing of the Spirit
1 Corinthians 12:13

Universal church

As of 1989, the Encyclopedia Britannica claimed there were 1.7 billion Christians in the world.

Persecuted church – underground church.

Third world – growing church
Free world – declining church
Local Church – congregation of believers

Exercise the gifts of the Spirit
1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Family of God
John 1:12
John 17:11
Ephesians 4:3

Brothers and sisters to each other
1 John 4:19-21

Characteristics of the Church

Forgiveness
Matthew 18:15, 35

Fellowship
Acts 2:42-47

Fellowship with God
1 John 1:3

Fellowship with one another
Hebrews 10:24-25

Unity of the Spirit
1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Mutual dependence
1 Corinthians 12:14-26

Christ loves His Church
Christ has a purpose for His Church
Our response to Christ's love and purpose for us
Holiness
Worship
Witness

Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?

-Wrong question: This question assumes a “check list” kind of faith.

-Right question: “What kind of Christian would/could I be without the church?”

This question drives at the need for Christian community in walking the road of faith in Jesus Christ.

Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?

Philippians 2:12-13

Conclusion

-The church is the family of God – the community of faith, worshipping God and doing life together.

-We can not become mature followers of Jesus Christ in isolation, we need the support of the body of Christ in the world – the church.



How Do I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life?

There are no dress rehearsals for life; we are on stage straight-away. Even if we have made mistakes in the past, it is possible with God's help to make something of what is left.

"Brothers and sisters, God has shown you his mercy. So I am asking you to offer up your bodies to him while you are still alive. Your bodies are a holy sacrifice that is pleasing to God. When you offer your bodies to God, you are worshiping him." Romans 12:1

Issue:

- What impact will becoming a Christian have on my life?
- How do I let God be the author of my life?

What should we do?

-Break with the past.
Romans 12:2

-Make a new start
Romans 12:2

How do we do it?

As an act of your will, with all that you have:

Ears
Eyes
Mouth
Hands
Sexuality
Time
Ambitions

Money

"Do not put away riches for yourselves on earth. Moths and rust can destroy them. Thieves can break in and steal them. Instead, put away riches for yourselves in heaven. There, moths and rust do not destroy them. There, thieves do not break in and steal them. Your heart will be where your riches are. "The eye is like a lamp for the body. Suppose your eyes are good. Then your whole body will be full of light. But

suppose your eyes are bad. Then your whole body will be full of darkness. If the light inside you is darkness, then it is very dark! "No one can serve two masters at the same time. He will hate one of them and love the other. Or he will be faithful to one and dislike the other. You can't serve God and Money at the same time."

-Matthew 6:19-24

We give ourselves to God

"...As living sacrifices" Romans 12:1

It will involve sacrifice.

It might involve suffering.

Why should we do it?

- What God has planned for our future
- God has plans for our future
- God knows best how to run our lives.
- What God has done for us

Conclusion

- Focus on Christ
- Persevere

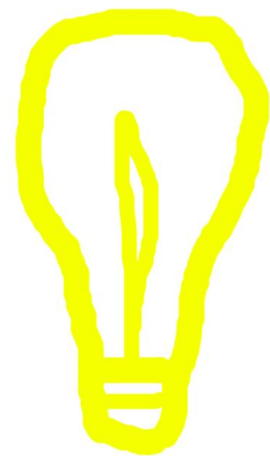
"A huge cloud of witnesses is all around us. So let us throw off everything that stands in our way. Let us throw off any sin that holds on to us so tightly. Let us keep on running the race marked out for us. Let us keep looking to Jesus. He is the author of faith. He also makes it perfect. He paid no attention to the shame of the cross. He suffered there because of the joy he was looking forward to. Then he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Hebrews 12:1-2



Alpha: Pop Culture

“Leaders Guide”



Alpha: Pop Culture is a combination of material taken from Nicky Gumbel's The Alpha Course and Searching Issues: The Seven Most Common Questions Raised on The Alpha Course. Though some of the chapters do not perfectly align with all material from one or the other of those sources, it is still primarily material from them.

For more information on either The Alpha Course or Searching Issues please visit www.alphausa.org.

Alpha: Pop Culture Leaders Guide

Session 1 – “Who is Jesus and Why Did He Die?”

Issues:

- Was Jesus just a wonderful man?
- Was He just a great moral teacher?
- What exactly did Jesus death achieve?

Themes re: “Who is Jesus?”

Jesus did exist, there is a great deal of historical evidence to support this. Scripture testifies that Jesus was human and had all of the same attributes and experiences as other humans. In the scripture, Jesus give witness about himself – testifying that he is the divine son of God and there is evidence to support Jesus’ claim in his ministry, teaching, and works while on earth. His resurrection is also affirmed in Scripture and history through different evidences that we can still look at.

Questions for discussion:

1. *What made you decide to come to Alpha?*
2. *What are your feelings about Jesus?*
3. *If you could meet Jesus, how would you feel? What would you say? What would you ask?*
4. *Before you heard the talk tonight, what was your concept of Jesus? How has this concept been strengthened or changed?*

Themes re: “Why did Jesus Die?”

Jesus came for a very specific reason – namely to make a way for humanity to be reconciled with God. The problem is that sin creates a barrier between humans and God. Because God is a just God, there needed to be an atonement for sin and so Jesus came to be that atonement so that men and women could be in relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. The result is that we now can be reconciled to God and there are four different images to explain this reconciliation: 1. The Temple, 2. The Market Place, 3. The Law Court, 4. The Home.

Questions for discussion:

1. *What is your reaction to the crucifixion?*
2. *Do you feel that sin is an outdated concept or is it something that you think about?*
3. *How do you respond to the words “sin” and “forgiveness”?*

Session 2 – “What About Other Religions?”

Issues:

- What do we say about other religions?
- What does Christianity have to do with life today?

Themes:

God has revealed himself in many different parts of creation – the physical created order, the human conscience, and the fact that humans hunger for something greater than themselves. The ultimate revelation of God, however, was in Jesus Christ – all other revelations are secondary to Jesus. Other religions might contain elements of truth (all truth is God’s truth) and we would consider that God’s prevenient grace, preparing them to connect with God, the father of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christianity holds itself up to the world as a public truth – true for all persons. Christianity offers hope and direction to humanity.

Questions for discussion:

- 1. How do you feel about religions claiming to be public truths vs. private truths? Why do you feel this way?*
- 2. Given what we learned last week about Jesus, would it make sense for Christianity to be a private truth?*
- 3. Do you ever feel “lost” in the world?*
- 4. How do you think Christianity is/could be relevant in your life today?*
- 5. After tonight, when you talk to your spouse/family/friends/co-workers about this, what will you tell them about what you learned tonight?*

Session 3 – “Why Does God Allow Suffering?”

Issues:

- How can God be loving, but still allow people to suffer?
- How can I resist sin that causes others to suffer?

Themes:

God has offered his people free will and once sin came on the scene and these two (sin and free will) mixed it was not long before human suffering was here. We suffer because of our own sin, the sin of others, and sometimes simply through the effects sin has had on the natural order. It is important to remember that God does not cause our suffering, he redeems our suffering. God brings a redemptive newness to life through our suffering moments. And in the midst of those moments, God suffers along with us. In asking the question, how can I avoid sin that might cause suffering we can find many answers in scripture – from Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others. We must stand firm in our faith in order to resist the temptations of the devil that might lead us to sin and thus cause ourselves and others to suffer needlessly.

Questions for discussion:

- 1. How do you feel about the idea of God using or redeeming our suffering?*
- 2. Can you think of an example when someone else's sin caused you to suffer? How do you think God redeemed that instance?*
- 3. Is it comforting to know that when we suffer, God suffers along with us? Why or why not?*
- 4. Do you think a power of evil exists? Why or why not?*
- 5. Do you see the problems in the world as a result of people's actions, an evil power, or something else? If something else, what?*

Session 4 – “Is the Trinity Unbiblical, Unbelievable, Irrelevant?”

This Session will also include “How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?”

Issues:

- Is the Trinity something that is still important in the Christianity today?
- If the Holy Spirit's guidance is necessary in experiencing the triune God, how are we to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Themes re: The Trinity

The Trinity is revealed in Scripture through the Jesus own words about his relationship with “the Father” and through his words about sending the counselor, the Holy Spirit, to be with his disciples once he is gone. We have a harder time understanding the Trinity because there is quite a bit of mystery involved so we must learn to think differently. The Trinity shows us the relational nature of God and gives us a model of living in relationship with others.

Questions for discussion:

- 1. In order to believe something, do you need it to make perfect sense, or can there be room for mystery?*
- 2. What do you think about the idea of a triune God – three persons, one God?*
- 3. Does the Trinity help your faith, or does it make things harder to believe? Why did you answer the way you did?*
- 4. What questions do you still have about the Trinity?*

Themes re: Being filled with the Holy Spirit

Once we have become a Christian and asked that Jesus be the Lord of our lives, God lights a pilot light in our hearts. This pilot light is God's presence through the Holy Spirit living within us. At times in our life this pilot light begins to burn at 10,000 BTU's and we experience the filling of the Holy Spirit. This filling gives us strength and power to accomplish what God is/has called us to do. Being filled with the Spirit is not a one time thing – it continues to happen throughout our Christian lives.

Following this talk there is an invitation and a time for ministry, thus there are no questions for discussion following this talk.

Session 5 – “If Jesus is About Grace, Why All the Rules?”

Issues:

- If we are to believe that Jesus is primarily about grace, why does Christianity have so many rules to follow?
- If the “rules” are there to help us know what to do and how to relate to God, how is it that God is guiding us?

Themes:

God had a good set up for the world, but because of sin entering the scene through Adam and Eve things got dicey. When God led his people (Hebrews) out of slavery in Egypt, afterward, he gave them rules for living called “the law”. The law was not meant to be a burden to the people, it was meant to show them the best way to live in community and relationship with each other and with God. The law became oppressive, and just a bunch of rules when the people made it a good person/bad person check list. A good example of how this works out is in the issue of sex outside of/before marriage. King David saw how detrimental this could be after he stepped outside the law and slept with Bathsheba. So, if the rules are there as a relational guide how does it all work now? Remember that Jesus said he had not come to abolish the law at all, but to fulfill it. Thus, we can rest assured that the law *IS* grace to us, and God is still guiding us through his word and “rules” from the past.

Questions for discussion:

- 1. Do you think Christianity is burdensome with “rules”? Why or why not?*
- 2. How do you think something meant to be helpful became a stumbling block to relationship with God?*
- 3. What do you think of the statement, “God’s rules ARE grace...”? Have you ever thought of grace in this way before? Does it change anything for you?*
- 4. How have you experienced God’s guidance in the past?*
- 5. What could you do to be more intentional about seeking God’s guidance in your life?*

Session 6 – “Is There a Conflict Between Science and Scripture?”

Issues:

- What makes the Bible so special and authoritative in life?
- Does science contradict the information in the Bible?

Themes:

The Bible is one of the most popular and controversial books of all time. The problems between the Bible and Science can really be traced back to one issue: the Bible is not a science book, it is a theological book. The Bible is God’s primary revelation of God’s self to humanity. It is inspired by the Holy Spirit and tells the story of redemption (how God is redeeming humanity from sin) and it shows us how to live in relationship with God. It is possible to get hung up on certain apparent scientific inconsistencies however, this usually occurs when we are reading through the lens of science, rather than theology.

There really is no conflict between the two, and when we make time to read the Bible we will find blessing upon blessing from learning the story of God.

Questions for Discussion:

1. *Has this issue (Science vs. Christianity) been an issue in your spiritual journey? Why or why not? How have you dealt with it?*
2. *Have you ever read anything in the Bible that has corrected an aspect of your beliefs or behavior?*
3. *What intimidates you most about reading the Bible?*
4. *Which has more authority in the world today – science or scripture?*
5. *Which has more authority in your life today – science or scripture?*

Session 7 – “Do I Have to Go to Church to Be a Christian?”

Issues:

- Who/What is the Church?
- What does God say about his relationship to the church?
- Do Christians have to go to church?

Themes:

The church is the body of Christ in the world. It is the fellowship of believers and a place for people to “work out their salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). The church is a place of forgiveness, fellowship with God and with others, and a place where the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to individual are made effective. The purpose of the church is to bring glory to God and to fulfill Christ’s mission. The question about having to go to church is really the wrong question. A more appropriate question is, “What kind of Christian can/will I be without the church?” This question understands the need for the support and guidance of community in living a life of faith. The church, though flawed, is certainly still a necessary part of the story of redemption.

Questions for Discussion:

1. *If someone says the word “church” to you, what do you think of?*
2. *Has your view of the church changed during the Alpha Course?*
3. *Do you feel like going to church is an obligation?*
4. *What is it that drew you to this church?*
5. *What do you think keeps others from being a part of the church?*

Session 7 – “How Do I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life?”

Issues:

- What impact will being a Christian have on my life?
- How do I let God be the author of my life?

Themes:

It is common for people to wish they could have a “do over” in life however, it is true that we only get one life. The good news of the gospel is that God can still make something of this life – nothing is beyond his redemptive power. We are called to make a clean break with our past and start fresh with the new life that Christ offers us. This new life is marked by a sincere love and passion for God and for following in the way of Jesus. It calls for us to offer to God every aspect of our lives (every aspect) and to do so because Jesus Christ offered everything for us. We trust in God and know that God will guide our steps and shape us into the people that God desires for us to be.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1. Have you made the changes in your life that were just spoken of (clean break from the past, turning every aspect of your life over to God)?*
- 2. If so, what has the experience been like so far? If not, what is holding you back?*
- 3. What has been most helpful to your faith during the Alpha Course?*
- 4. What one question will you continue to wrestle with?*
- 5. What is next for you on this journey of faith with University Church?*



Pathway to Discipleship – Outreach

Our table would like to participate with:

_____ *Greeting* on a Sunday morning.

_____ *Operation Restoration* - basic construction ministry for elderly and others who can not afford to have the work done.

_____ *Church Connections* – help improve facilities of smaller Methodist Churches.

_____ *Christian Assistance Ministry (Day center)* – Take a Saturday morning to work with homeless and those in crisis.

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Table leader: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Date we would like to work: _____

Please return to Rich Holt or Amber Faw in the Outreach office.



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