



Searching Issues
Part 2

A Granville Chapel Study Guide
Spring/Summer 1999

Study Schedule

The studies in this Curriculum should be done in the Home Groups before the Sunday sermon on the same topic. The schedule of studies for this Curriculum is as follows:

Week of

May 24	Study #1	Why Does God Allow Suffering?
May 31	Study #2	What About Other Religions?
June 7	Study #3	What is the Christian Attitude Toward Homosexuality?
June 14	Study #4	Is There Anything Wrong with Sex Before Marriage?
June 21	Study #5	How Does the New Age Movement Relate to Christianity?
June 28	Study #6	Is There a Conflict Between Science and Christianity?
July 5	Study #7	Is the Trinity Unbiblical, Unbelievable, and Irrelevant?

Special thanks to

Richard Bowler, Ken Castor, Stan Cummings, Mary Gordon, Tim MacIntosh, Scott Vermillion, and Steve Williams who put much time, effort and prayer into the writing of these studies.



Study #1

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Introduction

This is a very difficult and painful (!) subject, and books have been written about it. We all experience suffering to some degree. We don't claim to have the answers in this study, but rather trust that the lines of thought suggested will be helpful.

- ⇒ **The aim of this study is to get some understanding of the role of suffering in the world and the believer's life and to suggest some ways of reacting to it.**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) This is a very real and very hard issue. Share stories (from your own experience or the newspapers or your friends' lives) that show how difficult this question is. How did people (you or others) respond to God in the midst of suffering?

- (2) Where does pain/suffering come from? How did it originate? Read Genesis 3:15-18. What kinds of pain/suffering are predicted here? What is the result? See Micah 7:2-3, 1 John 5:19.

- (3) Does my pain/suffering result from some sin or mistake in my past? Read the passages below and discuss.

Job 34:11, Hosea 9:7, Romans 1:27,
Exodus 20:5-6, Matthew 13:27-28a, John 9:2-4.

- (4) Is suffering harder or easier for the Christian? Why or why not?

See Romans 8:17, Psalm 73:13-14
Psalm 73:23-24, Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 43:2.

- (5) Read Isaiah 53:3-5. What difference does this make in understanding suffering and living through it?
- (6) "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). What good can come from suffering? Consider Hebrews 12:7, 11, James 1:2-4, Psalm 119:67-68, 2 Corinthians 1:4, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 2 Corinthians 4:17.

Can you remember a period of suffering in your life which at the time seemed absolutely meaningless but which afterward (perhaps much later) you realized contributed to your growth or maturity as a Christian?

- (7) Read Revelation 21:3-4. What hope does this give? How does this put suffering into context?
- (8) Now that you've considered some of these issues, what help could you give someone who asks: "If God is all-powerful and all-loving, why does he allow suffering?"

Notes

- (1) When God made man, He made him in his own image, with intelligence and will. God desires man's love, obedience and worship. See Deuteronomy 6:4-6, John 4:23. For this to be meaningful, man must be free to obey or disobey. Disobedience brings suffering to oneself and/or to others. In order to stop all suffering, God would have to override man's free will, making him a puppet or automaton. If He were to do this just for some people or some situations, where would the line be drawn?
- (2) A case in point: Pain. Most doctors try to relieve the pain of their patients. Dr. Paul Brand spent years trying to help his patients feel pain or at least to gain the benefits of pain. In his practice with leprosy patients he found that most if not all

of their deformities were caused by loss of pain. For example, because it didn't hurt they would put the usual pressure on an injured foot while walking, thus adding to the injury. Similarly, he learned that diabetic ulcers deteriorate not from lack of blood supply as had been thought but because they do not hurt and so the patients do not pay attention to them. There are also (rarely) people who are born without the ability to feel pain and so develop similar injuries.

Dr. Brand worked with the Louisiana State University electrical engineering department to develop a substitute for pain – a sensor on the skin which would trigger an electric current resulting in a warning signal when a foot or hand, etc., was harmed by inappropriate actions. They found that unless the pain signal was unpleasant, the patient would ignore it or disconnect the system.

Pain is an “early warning signal” that something is wrong. It keeps us from destroying ourselves. To be effective, it must be unpleasant. Do you see any parallel in other forms of suffering?

Prayer



Study #2

What About Other Religions?

Introduction

The current cultural climate in North America includes much diversity, religion included. One only has to drive the streets of Vancouver to see the many faces of religious belief - Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Islam, Bahai, Buddhist, Hindu, Native spiritualities, etc.

What are we to make of this vast range of belief and spiritual expression? Are these all simply alternate routes to the same God?

Or, was Jesus right when he claimed to be the only way to God? Who Jesus Christ is determines whether Christianity is just another religion, a human story, or a radical revelation of God's truth.

We have already looked at the uniqueness of Christ in answer to the question "**Who is Jesus?**" We now need to take that uniqueness seriously as we encounter the religions of the world.

Nickey Gumbel writes:

"He is the standard by which all truth claims must be examined. By putting other religions alongside God's revelation in Jesus Christ, we see that they contain both truth and error ... This is not arrogant or narrow-minded, as some would suggest. As C.S. Lewis wrote:

If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all the other religions are simply wrong all through. If you are an atheist you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake. If you are a Christian, you are free to think that all those religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of the truth. When I was an atheist I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian I was able to take a more liberal view. But, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from others religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong. As in arithmetic - there is only one right answer to a sum, and all other answers are wrong; but some of the wrong answers are much nearer being right than others."

⇒ **The aim of this study is to affirm the saving uniqueness of Christ and at the same time further develop our sensitivity to others**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) Have you had opportunity to interact with those of other faiths? Did you feel comfortable or uncomfortable? Confident or unconfident? Knowledgeable or ignorant? Share your experiences and what you learned.

- (2) Read Psalm 19:1-4. Anthropologists speak of the human sense, common in all religions, of the “numinous awe” - an understanding that there is something larger than self. How does nature (as defined in Psalm 19) help us see what lies beyond ourselves?

Think of a time when you looked into the night sky and saw the vast number of stars before you? Did the experience fill you with wonder and hope, or a feeling of hopeless insignificance, or what? Did it draw you closer to God?

- (3) Read Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-15 and Ecclesiastes 3:11. What do these passages tell us about the amount of religious truth available to us through nature and human conscience?

How does all of this tie in with the development of the world’s religions?

- (4) Read John 14:6 and Acts 4:10-12. Who Jesus Christ is defines whether Christianity is just another story or a radical revelation of truth. What do these passages of scripture have to say about the uniqueness of Christ? (Draw into this discussion anything that stood out to you 5 weeks ago when discussing the question, “*Who is Jesus?*”)

How contrary is this to the current “politically correct” viewpoint on world religions? How could you answer the charge that this biblical perspective is unfair?

- (5) In dealing with those of other faiths (or no faith), how can we deal with the potential for spiritual arrogance on our part? What bearing does Luke 12:47-48 have on this issue?

- (6) How can you effectively give an answer to those around you who are concerned with the very questions that occupy all human beings (and all religions):
Can I know the truth? Does anyone care about what happens to me? Does my life have any significance? What will happen to me when I die?

Prayer

Take time to thank God for His grace to all human beings and his desire to reach out to them so that they may know the joy of his presence.

Pray for each other as you have opportunity to share the saving uniqueness of Christ.



Study #3

What is the Christian Attitude Toward Homosexuality?

Introduction

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found
was blind, but now I see*

Our Christian vocabulary is full of contrasting words: dark/light, lost/found, blind/sight, old/new, death/life, and we understand that these demark two realms in which people find themselves and that the transition is all important and all of grace. The love of our holy God does not leave us within the first realm, by its very nature it cannot. God's love is a refining love: it makes the unlovely loveable. It demands that we die to ourselves, the part of ourselves that has been oriented to the limitations and lies of the first realm. Instead we become new creations, born again, putting off the old man as we assume our new identity as children of God. This is the radical transformation that all Christians are undergoing, with its final realization still in the future.

Because of this we have reason to question assertions about a person's self-definition when it fails to account for the ultimately transforming work capable by the Creator. What may seem like a set-in-stone identity might, by the grace of God, suddenly experience a tremendous upheaval, making impossibilities possible. This is the language of hope and of liberty. It is the language of the Gospel, as creatures in isolation are made fit for their Creator to indwell.

⇒ **The aim of this study is to shed Gospel light on the issue of homosexuality and to not let evil be spoken of as good**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) This is a tender topic. As you feel free, relate your observations, frustrations or apprehensions about "the homosexual issue".

- (2) Nicky Gumbel of Alpha fame begins his chapter on this topic by reminding us that "the Bible is the story of God's love to all humanity. God loves all people, irrespective of race, color, background, or sexual orientation...Jesus came not to condemn us, but to save (John 3:17)". From what do we all need to be saved and why?

- (3) Some have wanted to argue that the Bible only condemns homosexual practice associated with idol worship and prostitution (1 Kings 14:24; 1 Cor. 6:9); that Sodom's sin was to do with being inhospitable (Ez. 16:49); and that the term "homosexual offender" in 1 Cor. 6:9 has to do with a non-consensual act of sex without love. Does this interpretation "hold water"?

See Lev. 18:22; Genesis 19:4-7; Eze. 16:49-50; Jude 7-8; Rom. 1:24-27. Does this categorically rule out homosexual acts? If so, does it seem fair?

- (4) In Study #4 we will explore God's design for sex: it is a powerful gift for pleasure, procreation, and for forging and expressing loving intimacy. But this gift demands a context; marriage between a man and a woman. Sex outside of this context, including homosexual sex, is deemed "immoral". Why do those who persist in such behaviour have reason to fear? Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-6. Rev. 21:18, Eph 5:5-6.

- (5) Nicky Gumbel tells of a "gay" couple of which both partners received a remarkable vision of Jesus, as a result of prayer. Their immediate response was not to affirm their relationship but to dissolve it. One of the men spoke of the experience in terms of healing, freedom and wholeness. "For the first time I really knew love", he said. These two men were set free from homosexuality. This goes against current "wisdom" yet there are thousands of others with similar testimonies. Read Col. 3:7; 1 Cor. 6:11. Paul is addressing *former* homosexuals. What implications does this non-fixity of orientation have for our dialogue with homosexual colleagues, friends and family members?

How does Paul's understanding of transformation undermine arguments for legislation concerning "gay rights"?

- (6) There are many Christians who feel homosexually-oriented but do not live out this behaviour. For them it is a grievous trial with which they battle. What comfort or counsel could you give such a one from scripture? John 14:15; Gal. 2:20; 1 John 3:1-3; 2 Peter 1:3-8; 1 Cor. 13:6, 13; Titus 2:11-14.

- (7) In Romans, Paul interprets the homosexual urge as symptomatic of a society gone wrong. By not acknowledging the truth about the Creator a culture descends into folly and idolatry, upon which God gives them over to shameful lusts. After reading Romans 1:18-32, how does our modern western world also set people up to be susceptible to homosexuality?

Is there hope? Read Romans 1:16-17.

Prayer

Notes

(These points are not meant to be inflammatory or sensational. They are printed here to show that something evil is being spoken of as good in our society and that there is an urgent need to speak the truth in love).

- a 1981 study showed that only 2 % of homosexuals were monogamous.
- a 1978 study showed that 43% of homosexuals estimated having had 500+ partners, 28% estimated having 1000+ partners.
- only 1-4% of male population is exclusively homosexual, .5 - 2% of females.
- 75% of the people who have died from AIDS have likely contracted it from homosexual intercourse.
- ratio of AIDS in 20-30 year old male homosexuals vs. heterosexuals - 430:1
- 30% of all 20 year old gay men will be HIV positive or dead of AIDS by the time they are age 30.
- this "lifestyle" is prone to reduce one's life span by up to 25-30 years.
- besides AIDS, male homosexuals are much more likely to suffer from sexually transmitted diseases (eg. Gonorrhoea), enteric diseases (eg. Hepatitis B), and bodily trauma (eg. Fecal incontinence).
- there is no gay gene, most research favours environmental factors.
- Studies reveal a greater incidence of childhood sexual abuse amongst homosexuals.

- homosexuals are more prone to alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide.
- secular psychiatric treatments have had a success rate of over 50%.
- Christian treatments (Living Waters, Homosexuals Anonymous, Redeemed Life, Pastoral Care Ministries, etc.) often have an even better success rate.

Sources: *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*, by Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, and *Searching Issues* by Nicky Gumbel. For further reading see Leanne Payne's *The Healing of the Homosexual* also.



Study #4

Is There Anything Wrong with Sex Before Marriage?

Introduction

Our culture is saturated with sex. Sex is public in the sense that it is used as a method for selling products such as razors, cars, chips, soap, movies, television shows, newspapers, magazines, etc. But sex is also a taboo subject in our culture. When it comes to our own lives, sex suddenly becomes a forbidden topic. People are no longer comfortable with speaking about sex. As a result, our culture is confused about sexuality and the expression of it in healthy ways.

For Christians, the topic has also been a source of confusion. For centuries the church has had a difficult time handling the subject of sex. It seems that the most pervasive word people hear from the church about sex is a resounding “No!” Yet, the Bible itself is full of stories in which sex plays a major role. Abraham and Sarah, David and Bathsheba, Joseph and Mary all have stories that revolve around sexual conduct. In fact, the Song of Songs is a whole book in the Bible that describes a man and a woman’s love for each other. So, the first word concerning sex is that it is God’s gift to man and woman. The second word should concern the proper use of such a gift.

This study is based on giving a response to one of the questions concerning sex: “Is there anything wrong with sex before marriage?” One of the fascinating things about God’s word is that it is complete, but not exhaustive. It is complete in that we have all we need to know to come to faith and move to maturity in Christ, but its not exhaustive in answering all of our questions. Such is the case with this question. The Bible never addresses this question per se, but it does address the issue of sexual misconduct. The phrase “sex before marriage” was not a phrase that first century people used. Instead they spoke of sexual immorality. It is helpful to know what this phrase means before we enter into the study because it sheds light on the author’s intentions. The definition is: Sexual immorality (Greek = *porneia*) to engage in sexual immorality of any kind, often with the implication of prostitution – ‘to engage in illicit sex, to commit fornication, sexual immorality, fornication, prostitution.’

⇒ **The aim of this study is to give a Biblical foundation for addressing the question of sex before marriage.**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) Name all of the ways you have seen sex portrayed this week. Out of all of these which ones portrayed a healthy sexual relationship within marriage? What does this say about our culture? Discuss your findings.

1 Corinthians 6:9 -20

Outline of section

1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20 is a section dealing with moral issues.

- (1) 5:1-8 - a case of immorality and the Church’s responsibility of discipline.
- (2) 5:9-13 - The Church’s sphere of judgement

- (3) 6:1-8 - Lawsuits between believers
- (4) 6:9-20 - Sexual Immorality and the Christian Response against license.
 - (a) 9-11 - Putting the Issue into perspective
 - (b) 12-17 - Countering the philosophy of the Day and dealing with God's Intent for sexuality.
 - (c) 18-20 - Conclusion: End all Sexual Immorality, because the Body is connected to the Spirit

Read 6:9-20 in one sitting. Pray by asking God to lead your discussion. Suggestions for prayer: ask to (a) hear and understand God's word; (b) Respond in faith to God's word.

- (2) Read 6:9-11 again. What do we know about the importance of sexuality from these verses? How can sex be both wicked and good?

What is at stake for Paul concerning sexual immorality? How does Paul understand the transformation from being wicked to inheriting the kingdom of God?

- (3) Read vv. 12-17 again. What are some of the philosophies in our culture that promote sex before marriage?
- (4) In this section Paul deals with the philosophies concerning sexuality in his day and age. The following are the two common sayings of Paul's culture: (1) "Everything is permissible for me" (i.e. it is legal to engage in sexual practices, even prostitution) and (2) "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food" (i.e. sex is for the body and the body for sex). How does Paul counter these philosophies? In what ways can we use his arguments to counter the philosophies of our day?
- (5) With a twist to one of the common beliefs of the first century concerning sexual practices, Paul states in v. 13, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." In vv. 13-17 how does Paul understand the role of our bodies?

How then does Paul understand the significance of sex?

- (6) Read vv. 18-20. What is Paul's advice to the Corinthian church concerning sexual expression? How is the body connected to God? Given this connection, explain how it is evil to connect to someone else sexually without making a marriage commitment to them?

Application: In light of this study, how would you counsel someone who is seeking to know Christ, but is engaging in sex outside of marriage?

Prayer

Pray that you would put away all sexual immorality yourselves. Pray that God would use you in your conversations with others who might be asking the question, "What's wrong with sex before marriage?"



Study #5

How Does the New Age Movement Relate to Christianity?

Introduction

A primer on New Age (excerpts from Nicky Gumbel, Searching Issues, pp. 58-64):

New Age is a mixture of Eastern mysticism and occult practices that have been given a Western materialistic flavor. On the surface, parts are either good or harmless. It often

comes in the guise of self-improvement programs, holistic health, a concern for world peace, ecology, and spiritual enlightenment ... However, often under the sugarcoating there is a dangerous pill ...

First, many of the New Age teachings are derived from Eastern mysticism. Hindu and Buddhist doctrines have been adapted for the Western world ...

Second, there is the influence of nature religions from around the world, including druidism, the folk beliefs of American Indians, and Wicca witchcraft.

Third, a number of practices in the movement are overtly occult. Astrology, horoscopes, fortune-telling, clairvoyance, consulting the dead, spiritism, mediums, channeling, spirit guides, and tarot cards are all widely used in the movement. All practices such as these are condemned in the Bible ...

The New Age movement is so disparate that it is hard to summarize its beliefs. John Stott describes them in what he calls "three pithy sayings": "All is God," "All is one," and "All is well."

"All is God"

The first, "All is God," is generally known as pantheism. God is in everything. He is depersonified. He is an impersonal energy, a creative force ... The earth is divine, as are the stars and planets. This leads to a return to the pagan worship of Mother Earth and to the belief that the stars, the planets, and even crystals have power and influence.

In the New Age movement, there is no God outside His creation. God lies within each of us, and we are each a part of God. As Shirley Maclaine, a prominent New Age advocate, puts it, "Everyone is God. Everyone." ...

"All is one"

Second, "All is one" - for which the technical term is monism. The New Age movement is essentially syncretistic. It attempts to reconcile opposites and bring about a synthesis of all religions ... The movement rejects moral absolutes ... Our problem is not sin, but ignorance of our true self and potential. This is solved by enlightenment, spiritual revelation, and education. For some, there is no objective standard of right and wrong ... Guidance comes from within ...

Since our problem is not sin but ignorance, there can be no judgment ... reincarnation is taught almost universally throughout the movement ... everyone is eventually making progress onwards and upwards towards complete spiritual enlightenment and perfection ...

Monism ("All is one") goes to further extremes in some parts of the New Age movement and makes no distinction between God and Satan. Since all is one, some worship the devil, Lucifer himself.

“All is well”

... An optimism runs through it all. We are making evolutionary progress towards Utopia. Many believe we will see the establishment of a new world order and a new world religion. Some even believe there will also be a new world government, and that this new Utopia will be ushered in by a world teacher who will bring economic and religious unity ...

This gives some common background to what is loosely called the New Age Movement. Some will have more familiarity with the movement and its concepts, and others less. Our intent now, though, is to take these issues to the Scriptures and find the Lord's perspective.

⇒ **The aim of this study is to highlight the truth God has revealed to us so that we will not be seduced by error**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) What encounters have you had with New Age teachings and practices? What did you think about it? What did you feel about it?

- (2) Read Deuteronomy 18:10-13. The New Age promotes many avenues of being in touch with the supernatural. Many of these are commonplace in our culture (horoscopes in the newspaper, psychics on the TV). What is God's perspective? What New Age or occult practices would be included? Why are we forbidden to take part in such things?

- (3) The New Age movement misunderstands the reality of God the Father. He is not an impersonal force. He is separate from creation. The New Age perspective is “All is God” - the Scriptures disagree. Read the following Scriptures: Isaiah

40:18-28; 42:5, 8; 43:11-15; 46:8-10. At what points does the Scriptural perspective contrast with that of the New Age?

Is it easier to deal with a personal God or with an impersonal cosmic force? Why?

- (4) The New Age also misunderstands the nature of the Son. Jesus is often viewed as one of many “Ascended Masters” or prophets or as someone who fully experienced “Christ-consciousness”. He is seen, therefore, as a helpful guide to others seeking enlightenment. How does the Scriptural view contrast with this? Read Colossians 1:15-20, John 14:6, and Acts 4:12.

One New Age text, A Course in Miracles, has a section titled “My Salvation Comes From Me” - readers are urged to repeat: “*My salvation comes from me. It cannot come from anywhere else.*” Discuss. What makes such a perspective attractive?

- (5) The New Age also has an inadequate perspective of the Holy Spirit. There is a yearning for spiritual power, enlightenment and growth - but fulfillment for this is sought in sources apart from the Spirit. Look at some of the following Scriptures. How does the Spirit meet many of these valid longings? 2 Corinthians 3:18, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Galatians 5:2-23, John 14:26-27, 16:13.
- (6) The New Age movement taps into real, unmet spiritual needs. How have we as Christians and as a church failed to let the world see the true source of fulfillment for spiritual reality? At what points do we need to repent and change?

Prayer

In response to Question #6 you may want to spend some time in prayers of repentance and in asking the Lord to use us as his lights in a dark world. It may also be that some in the group need to repent of past involvements in New Age practices that they now see to be wrong. Help one another deal with these issues in prayer.



Study #6

Is There a Conflict between Science and Christianity?

Genesis 1:1; Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-23

Introduction

A common perception is that science and Christianity are in conflict. Some people handle this by putting science and religion into two separate compartments; some by denying there is a conflict, and some by simply ignoring them. This study will attempt to provide an alternative approach - i.e. to show that such conflict is apparent, not real.

The conflict only arises when science is seen as end in itself. Science's task is to discover things about the world. The Bible tells us that God is Lord over the world. Therefore scientific discoveries reveal to us more of God's glory and work and therefore informs our worship.

Further, scientific research is only one route to understanding. Theologians have always spoken of what can be understood from the natural world as "general revelation". When it comes to knowing about God's character and purposes we require "specific revelation", God speaking directly to us – this is what we have in the Bible.

⇒ **The aim of this study is to look at God's specific revelation and see his lordship of the world.**

Group Study

Community Building

(1) What has had the greatest influence on your thinking about the subject before us: school, university, church, books, friends, movies, TV etc. What are your views now?

(2) The issue of origins is beyond the scope of scientific experimentation. The bible teaches that God created all things. What is your understanding of the creation story in Genesis?

What does Genesis 1 tell us about God's involvement in the origin of the world?

(3) Read Psalm 19:1-6. What can scientific discovery tell us about God?

- (4) Read Romans 1:18-23. What do you discover from this scripture about why there is often so much conflict between the scientific community and the Christian community?
- (5) One reason given for saying that science and Christian belief are in conflict is that the theory of evolution asserts that all life began by itself. Hence scientists who hold to this theory claim there is no need for a Creator and that the Bible is in error, thus raising a conflict between science and Christian belief. Here are some questions and implications for discussion:
- (a) How did life (and the universe) begin?
 - (b) Some things (the human ear, for example) require all their parts to be in place to work at all. How could they evolve?
 - (c) If the theory of survival of the fittest is accepted, it means that the weakest must die out, and only the strong survive. How then did the idea arise that the weak must be protected?
 - (d) Evolution teaches that all life originates from matter. Where and how did non-material concepts like morality, beauty, intelligence etc. come from?
 - (e) If evolution is ongoing, what rudimentary forms now exist in humans which will be part of humans in the future?
- (6) Many scientists say that the vast size of the universe implies that man is a very insignificant part of it – too small for God to be interested in. Also that with billions of galaxies there must be other presumably superior beings elsewhere. Are these ideas in conflict with scripture?

Prayer

Notes

- a distinction must be made between macro and micro evolution; the former implies that all species derived from a common source, while the latter recognizes that there are changes only within species (as for example the many varieties of dogs), which agrees with the biblical principle that life “followed after its kind (Gen. 1:21,24,25). Over 900 generations of fruit flies have been bred under every conceivable condition, and while some developed strange forms, in the end they were fruit flies, and not house flies or other species. When an attempt is made to mix species the

offspring is sterile. For example, a mule is a cross between a horse and a donkey – it cannot reproduce mules.

- If evolution is true then there must be millions of fossils of intermediate stages. The British Museum has one of the largest collections in the world, but no intermediate stage fossils can be found.
- The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that order tends to disorder. In other words, if there is no outside interference, development goes from complex to simple and not the other way around.
- The Anthropic Principle is a study of the four sources of energy – gravitation, electromagnetism, the weak nuclear force (which governs atomic stability) and the strong nuclear force (which binds the protons and neutrons in the atom). It states that the interrelationship of these forces is so sensitive, that a change of infinitely less than one percent would either make the earth totally uninhabitable, or could mean that no universe would exist in the first place. This seems to point to an intelligent designer.
- As another example, one of the reasons the earth is suitable for habitation is that its axis is tilted at twenty three and a half degrees. If it varied in either direction by as little as one degree the sun would alternately burn or freeze the earth.
- The Bible was not written as a scientific book; nevertheless it accurately records observable facts. This is in contrast, for example, with the Hindu concept of the earth, which states that it is carried on the backs of four elephants standing on a huge turtle which is swimming in a timeless sea.
- Scientists have done an excellent job of classifying and describing a myriad of species. However, describing is not explaining. For example, the emergence of a butterfly from a caterpillar cocoon can be described in great detail so that one knows what happens, but not why it happens. Another way of putting it is to imagine a magnificent cake which is first examined by a chemist; he can analyze it and provide a list of ingredients. A physicist will describe the effect of heat on the cake mix, while a mathematician might predict the size of the cake based on the ratio of ingredients. However, only the baker can tell why the cake was made and who will enjoy it. Similarly, science can contribute to our knowledge of the universe, but only God can tell why it was created, why we are here, who we are, and how we can know Him.
- Throughout the world there are associations of thousands of Christians who are also respected scientists. From the middle ages on many of the primary scientific discoveries have been made by Christians. They include such well known ones as Johannes Kepler, Sir Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday, Robert Boyle, Joseph Lister, Louis Pasteur, Gregor Mendel, James Simpson, Lord Kelvin, James Maxwell and a host of others.



Study #7

Is The Trinity Unbiblical, Unbelievable, and Irrelevant?

Introduction

Consider this:

The word "Trinity" does not exist in the Bible.
So does this mean it is **unbiblical**?

Consider this:

The Trinity is the Christian belief that God is ONE God and yet THREE distinct beings.
So, is this **unbelievable**?

Consider this:

The Trinity is a deep theological concept that very learned people have been debating for almost 2,000 years.

*So is it **irrelevant** to our normal, everyday life?*

One of the reasons we struggle to understand the Trinity is that we have limited language to explain something beyond our limited intellect. However, the relevance of the Trinity to our everyday lives is simply understood: God is Trinity, and when we worship God, we should worship him as such.

⇒ **The aim of this study is to explore the reality of the Trinity.**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) Have you ever heard any good (or even really poor) analogies or illustrations to try to explain the Trinity? Do they do an adequate job making the Trinity understandable?

(Optional: split up into small groups to discuss and then come back together to offer ideas)

- (2) Look at the following Scripture verses and comment on what each might contribute to a discussion on the trinity.

The term "Trinity" is not used in the Scriptures. But is the idea biblical? Do you find the concept clearly revealed in the following verses? Discuss.

One God?

Deuteronomy 6:4

Romans 3:30

1 Timothy 1:17

James 2:19

Worshipping Jesus?

John 20:28

Revelation 5:9-14

Revelation 1:17-18

Three Distinct persons?

John 1:1 John 1:14 John 14:16-18

Trinity in the Old Testament?

Genesis 1:1-3a

*Trinity Formulas ***

Matthew 28:19

2 Corinthians 13:14

Ephesians 2:18

Ephesians 4:4-6

Ephesians 5:18-20

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

2 Thessalonians 2:13,14 1 Peter 1:1,2

*** The early church used many of these statements to recognize all three persons of the Trinity before the word "Trinity" was officially used in the early 4th century*

- (3) Having looked at the Scriptures, is the Trinity believable to you? Why or why not? Can you devise any further illustrations or analogies which could help here?

- (4) What relevance does this have to your life of worship and prayer? Do you relate more to one member of the Trinity than others? How could a deeper understanding of the Trinity enrich your experience of God?

Prayer

Notes

Early Church:

The early church "simply experienced the reality of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Only later did she define a coherent and systematic doctrine in response to the

heretical views that were being expounded.” - Nicky Gumbel, *Searching Issues*, p. 109.

Heresies:

Arius (250-336 A.D.) - Argued that Jesus was only partially divine and that his partial divinity was derived from God the Father. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all distinct, but they are not equal nor of the same essence.

Sabellius – Believed Trinity was one entity with three modes of expression. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are merely different names for the one God who was doing the different activities.

Trinitarian Church Councils:

325 A.D. - Nicaea - One God, three substances

381 A.D. - Constantinople - Athanasian Creed:

“We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Divine Being. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit: but the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost is all one.”

For further reading:

Alister McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity* (Zondervan Publishing, 1990).