

FAITH REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY SCHOOL

CURRICULUM PROJECT ©

**** Grades 9-12, Year II ****

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GOD, CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

by Robert C. Walton

**Grades 9-12
Year 2
Quarter 1**

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Lesson Aim

To acquaint students with different ways in which people view God and show them that God's existence is not a proposition to be defended, but a necessary presupposition for a Christian view of the world.

Memory Verse

Hebrews 11:6 - "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

Lesson Background

In this quarter we take up the study of the doctrine of God. Having established in our first series of doctrinal studies the reliability of God's revelation, we now turn to examine the God who reveals Himself in His Word. We are biting off an enormous chunk of material here, so we will be unable to do more than scratch the surface in survey form.

The thirteen lessons of this quarter break down into five lessons each on God and Christ and three on the Holy Spirit. As with any doctrinal study, the greatest struggle we face is to include practical application. The Bible, of course, doesn't have this problem - it knows nothing of doctrine without application. But as soon as we impose our own logical structure on the teachings of Scripture, they tend to become theoretical. Thus it is important that I as a writer and you as a teacher be particularly conscious of the importance of making this study practical.

Today's lesson deals with the existence of God. As we saw earlier with the inspiration of Scripture, this is a key issue that cannot be proved to the satisfaction of an unbeliever, but that must be presupposed for the Christian. The lesson has two basic parts - one dealing with views of God's existence, the other with arguments for God's existence. The first section is important in helping your students to see that one's view of God has wide-ranging implications for one's view of himself and the world. The second part, which will be intellectually challenging for most of your students, has the largely negative function of showing the futility of trying to prove God's existence through logic. The application should be made by contrasting what I've called practical atheism with the presupposition of God's existence as the foundation for a Christian worldview. If one believes in God, it will make a difference in every area of his understanding and behavior.

Lesson Procedure

Most of your students have, I'm sure, heard someone say that everyone in the world worships the same God in different ways. Such a rose-colored view of the religions of man is in strong contrast to the biblical view of anything other than true worship of the true God (cf. Romans 1). We want to begin our new unit today by looking at different views of God that are held by people around the world.

1. Views of God's Existence

A. Atheism

The word means "no god" and involves the denial of the existence of any kind of supreme being. Philosophical atheism is rather rare, since an atheist, maintaining that human experience is the only valid test of truth, would have to have gone through every possible experience in order to state categorically that God does not exist (cf. the obvious folly of Yuri Gagarin, the Soviet cosmonaut who insisted that he had proved the validity of atheism because he had not seen God while traveling in space!). Practical atheism is much more common. A practical atheist may profess belief in God, but lives as if He didn't exist. His profession simply has no effect on his life. God calls an atheist a fool (Psalm 14:1).

B. Agnosticism

This means "no knowledge," and is simply a more honest form of atheism. The agnostic maintains that we cannot know whether or not God exists. His profession of ignorance leads him, too, to live as if God did not exist.

C. Deism

This position was popular in the eighteenth century and was used as a means of espousing humanism while continuing to sound religious. Deists believed that God created the world but does not sustain it, that He initiated but does not intervene. The universe is seen as a great self-sustaining machine with man as its master. Ask your students what doctrines of Christianity Deism would contradict. Help them to see that it rules out miracles, the Incarnation, and the inspiration of Scripture, among others.

D. Pantheism

This is the belief that God is everything and everything is God, and is associated with Eastern religions, most notably Hinduism. It denies the personality of God, and ultimately that of man as well.

E. Polytheism

This is the belief in many gods, and is often associated with the idol-worship of primitive cultures, often connected with the worship of objects in nature. Occasionally one finds examples of henotheism, which is the belief in many gods, but the worship of one. This is the sort of tribal deity view that is sometimes seen in the Old Testament, in which, for instance, the Philistines see their victory over Israel as a triumph of Dagon over Yahweh.

F. Dualism

This is the belief in two equally ultimate and opposing forces, and is most frequently seen in the Orient (e.g., the idea of yin and yang), although this view was also held in slightly different form in ancient Greece, where matter and spirit were contrasted). Such a view completely undermines the sovereignty of God because when one worships opposing deities or forces, neither one is supreme.

G. Monotheism

Three of the world's great religions are monotheistic, believing in one god - Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The Bible, however, indicates that mere monotheism is insufficient - the demons are monotheists, but it doesn't do them any good (James 2:19)! Only belief in the Trinitarian God - one God existing eternally in three Persons - corresponds to the truth.

2. Arguments for God's Existence

For many centuries, scholars have sought to devise logical proofs for God's existence. Obviously, a detailed treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of this lesson. The following points may, however, be briefly noted.

A. Examples of Arguments for God's Existence

- All men everywhere worship gods. This universal consciousness of a Supreme Being must be based on some external reality, therefore God exists.
- Man is different from all other beings. His intellectual and moral qualities must come from somewhere, therefore there must be a God.
- It is possible for the mind of man to conceive of a being that is in every way great and perfect. Suppose there were two such beings, differing only in that one existed only in the imagination, while the second existed in reality. Clearly the latter would be the greater of the two. But then the first would not be the greatest possible being. Therefore the greatest possible being, whom we call God, must exist. (This argument, known as the Ontological Argument, was devised by medieval theologian Anselm. If you need to understand it better before explaining it to the class, you may want to look up the original, which may easily be found online.)
- Every event has a cause, which in turn has a cause, which in turn has a cause. This chain of causality must have started somewhere, and this First Cause is what we call God.
- The order present in the universe speaks of an intelligent Designer, therefore God must exist.

B. Weaknesses of the Arguments for God's Existence

If you have time (you may not - this is a long lesson), ask your students whether they think the arguments given above are good ones. They should be able to pick out some of the flaws.

- Most make God responsible for evil. By arguing for God's existence from the present state of man and the world, they produce a God who is a mixture of good and evil, or at best a little confused.
- Several result in a deistic God, who started things off but no longer intervenes.
- The evidence cited in several of the arguments would be interpreted differently by unbelievers. For instance, they could just as easily argue that the prominence of chance in the universe proves its evolutionary origin.
- The God produced by some of these arguments is a contentless, least-common-denominator deity. Even if the premises of the arguments were granted, they would not produce the God of the Scriptures.

C. Values of the Arguments for God's Existence

Like the arguments for the inspiration of Scripture considered last year, these have value largely in undergirding and bolstering the faith of those who already believe. (This, by the way, was the intention both of Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, who devised the fourth and fifth arguments listed above.)

D. The Bible's Approach to God's Existence

The key here is that the Bible never tries to prove the existence of God, but always assumes it. From the Bible's first verse to today's memory verse, God's existence is presupposed. Only a fool would deny it.

Conclusion

Close by reminding the students that this is no mere intellectual exercise. The fool of Psalm 14 is one who lives as if God did not exist. The church has in its midst numerous practical atheists. As today's memory verse implies, one who truly believes that God exists will not ignore Him, but will seek Him earnestly.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1. Make a point this week to speak to several of your non-religious friends or acquaintances about their views of God. Be sure to approach this in a non-threatening way (“My Sunday School class was talking about different ideas people have of God this week. What do you think . . .”), since many people get defensive when asked to talk about their personal beliefs.

2. If you did not believe in God, how would your view of man and the world differ from what it is now?

3. If you did not believe in God, how would your life differ from what it is now? Why is the answer to this question vitally important?

THE NAMES OF GOD

Lesson Aim

To teach students the significance of names in Scripture and help them discover what the names of God reveal about His character.

Memory Verse

Exodus 3:13-14 - “Moses said to God, ‘Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they ask me, “What is his name?” Then what shall I tell them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: “I AM has sent me to you.”’”

Lesson Background

In our society, names are generally given because parents like their sound, or to honor someone in the family or some famous person. In Bible times, however, names were given because of what they meant. One who gave a name to another both defined that person’s character and indicated his authority over that person.

When we consider the names of God, then, we should expect those names to define His character. Consequently, a study of the names of God tells us much about God Himself and is a good place to begin our study of who God is. Today’s lesson is divided into four parts. The first deals with the general concept of names and how they are used in Scripture, the second reviews the three major names of God, the third examines some of the compound names of God, and the fourth introduces the idea of image-names, which is the basis for the student homework.

The application of the lesson should focus on the difference between what God is to His people and what He is to the world. The promises implicit in the names of God apply only to those who acknowledge Him as Lord.

Lesson Procedure

Begin by asking your students what their names mean. A few may know, but most probably will not. Ask why parents give names to their children; the responses will probably be those indicated in the background section. Move then into a discussion of the significance of names in the Bible.

1. The Importance of Names

As indicated in the Lesson Background, the giver of a name both exercised authority over and defined the character of the one to whom the name was given.

A. Defining Character

This is perhaps most readily seen in the name changes in Scripture. Abram means “exalted father,” while Abraham means “father of many (nations).” Jacob means “supplanter,” while Israel means “prince with God.” Other examples (see if your students can think of some): Isaac means “laughter,” Joseph means “add” (Rachel said, “May God add to me more sons”), Benjamin means “son of my right hand” (oddly enough, his descendants were predominantly left-handed - see Judges 3:12-30; 20:16; I Chronicles 12:2), Moses means “drawn from the water” (in Egyptian), David means “beloved,” Joshua means “the Lord delivers,” etc.

B. Exercising Authority

Obviously, one who defines another person’s character exercises authority over that person. Adam exercised the dominion given him by God when he named the animals. Nebuchadnezzar renamed the captives he trained for government service in order to integrate them into Babylonian life (the names Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah all speak of God; the names Belshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego all glorify Babylonian deities). Finally, God gives new names to all who come to Him (Revelation 2:17).

In preparing to look at the names of God, then, we should note two things. First of all, these names reveal God’s character. We can learn about Him by studying what His names mean. Secondly, all of God’s names are revealed to man by God. No one has the right to give a name to God. As the ultimate authority, He names Himself.

2. The Three Major Names of God

A. Elohim - The Generic Name

This name means “the mighty one” and may be applied to idols and angels as well as the true God. In fact, the name Allah, which Muslims use for God, is simply the Arabic equivalent of Elohim (except that Allah is singular and Elohim is plural). In the same way that generic foods in the supermarket give no more than a basic description of the contents (a can of beans is marked “Beans”), this name speaks of one who has

power. This is the name of God used in the Creation accounts of Genesis 1, and is used in God's dealings with unbelievers.

B. Yahweh - The Covenant Name

This is the name revealed to Moses at the burning bush and, though it is generally translated "I Am," it is an unknown form of the Hebrew verb "to be." It signifies that God is "the self-existent One," who draws His life from no one and gives life to all. This name of God was considered so holy by the Jews of Jesus' day that they would not speak it, but used the name Adonai instead. The name is used in Scripture exclusively in the context of God's covenant relationship with His people.

C. Adonai - The Relational Name

This name means "lord" or "master," was a form of address conveying respect, and was used by subjects to kings, by slaves to masters, and even by wives to husbands. The name thus speaks of God's authority. We should also note that human relationships are to be modeled on our relationship to God and should display that relationship to the world.

3. The Compound Names of God

At various times in Scripture, God reveals Himself by names that are compounds of the major names we've already seen. At this point in the lesson, divide the class into small groups (even pairs or individuals, depending on the size of the class), and have them look up one of the following compound names:

- El Elyon - Genesis 14:19
- El Roi - Genesis 16:13
- El Shaddai - Genesis 17:1
- Jehovah Jireh - Genesis 22:13-14
- Jehovah Rapha - Exodus 15:26
- Jehovah Nissi - Exodus 17:15
- Jehovah Tsidkenu - Jeremiah 23:6

Have each group or individual answer the following questions:

- What does the name mean?
- How does the name grow out of the context?
- What does the name teach us about God?

After the groups have done their research, come back together and discuss your results. The following should be brought out:

A. God Most High

Abram was given victory over the Confederacy of Kings, and gave tithes to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High.

B. God Who Sees Me

God saw Hagar when she ran away from Sarai. He promised to protect her and bless her. He watches over those who are His.

C. God Almighty

This name literally means “the Many-Breasted One,” thus “the Nourisher.” In this passage, God changes Abram’s name to Abraham and promises to make him the father of many nations. God here reveals His power and provision.

D. The Lord Will Provide

Abraham was told to sacrifice his son Isaac, but God provided a substitute. This alludes, of course, to that greater substitute provided for sinners, Christ Himself.

E. The Lord Who Heals You

God had just “healed” the bitter water at Marah and told the Israelites that He would preserve them from the plagues He had brought on the Egyptians as long as they obeyed Him.

F. The Lord is My Banner

God had just fought for the Israelites against Amalek, giving them victory as Moses lifted his hands to heaven.

G. The Lord Our Righteousness

Referring to the final fulfillment of His covenant, God indicates that His people will live in peace, with their righteousness having its source in Him.

4. The Image Names of God

God also reveals Himself through images, or word pictures. At the end of the class, ask the students to list as many of these as they can, with references, and write them down on the take-home sheet. You should be able to come up with images such as shepherd (Psalm 23:1; John 10:11), rock (Deuteronomy 32:4; I Corinthians 10:4), vine (John 15:1), bread (John 6:35), water (John 7:37-39), word (John 1:1), light (John 8:12), door (John 10:9), alpha and omega (Revelation 1:8), etc. This will be the basis for the students’ homework assignment.

Conclusion

Remind the students that the marvelous promises implied by the names of God are only for His people and cannot be claimed by those who do not acknowledge His Lordship.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE NAMES OF GOD

Fill in the following chart on the image-names of God.

NAME	REFERENCE	RELATIONSHIP TO CONTEXT	WHAT THIS IMAGE TELLS US ABOUT GOD

THE NATURE OF GOD

Lesson Aim

To demonstrate to students from Scripture that God is knowable, spiritual, and personal, and to convey some of the implications of these basic truths.

Memory Verse

John 4:24 - "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Lesson Background

Today we are dealing with three very basic truths concerning the nature of God, truths that will seem self-evident to anyone raised in the church. Your students may therefore wonder why they are spending time dealing with things that are obvious. They should be made to realize, however, that these basic concepts are far from obvious, and are in fact denied by many. Once students understand the nature of the contrasting views, the implications of the two positions may then be brought out.

Today's lesson is designed to stimulate the intellect, of course, but should also produce a sense of wonder in the minds of the students. The marvelous fact that God is personal and makes Himself known to His creatures should be cause for boundless praise. Like so many other fundamental truths, those we examine today have tended to lose impact through familiarity. Perhaps the implications brought out by today's lesson will stimulate your students to fresh thinking. In addition, the section on the knowability of God can serve to bring out another distinction between believers and unbelievers, thus challenging those who don't know God with their willful disobedience and fostering humility in those who know God by demonstrating the limits of their knowledge.

Lesson Procedure

Start by asking your students why they think we covered the unit on the doctrine of Scripture before covering the material on the doctrine of God. They should be able to figure out that we study Scripture first because it is through Scripture that we know God. As we saw two weeks ago, however, not everyone believes knowledge of God to be possible (e.g., agnostics). We must thus begin our study of the nature of God this week by discussing the knowability of God.

1. The Knowability of God

Several aspects of the knowability of God should be brought out.

A. The Knowledge of God is Universal (Romans 1:18-23, 32)

Paul tells us in Romans 1 that everyone knows God. Have your students read over these verses and ask them of what this universal knowledge of God consists (His eternal power and divine nature, His judgment of sin). From where does this knowledge come (the creation)? How, then, can there be atheists and agnostics? Because men deliberately suppress this knowledge of God. Is the knowledge of God found in the creation sufficient to save anyone? No, because everyone sinfully rejects it - it is enough to condemn, but not enough to save. (The teacher should anticipate some questions at this point about pagans who sincerely worship the only gods they know - nature gods. Insist what Paul affirms - that there is no one who does not reject and pervert the knowledge of God to be found in nature.)

B. The Knowledge of God is Limited (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-34)

The fact that God is infinite and we are finite, that He is the Creator and we are creatures, means that exhaustive knowledge of God is impossible. Neither in this world nor in heaven should we ever expect to gain a total comprehension of what God is. (This, by the way, is one of the reasons why the logical proofs for God's existence fail. Finite logic cannot encompass an infinite deity.)

C. The Knowledge of God is True (John 1:18; 5:39)

If man has perverted the knowledge of God and has no way to comprehend God with his finite mind, the only way man can know God is if God reveals Himself graciously to man. He has done this in the Scriptures and in His Son. Thus we may have true knowledge of God despite our sin and finiteness.

D. The Knowledge of God is Personal (John 17:3)

When the Bible speaks of knowing God, it is not just referring to knowing about God. The knowledge of God involves a personal relationship established by God through the atoning death of His Son and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Apart from this saving relationship, no one can claim to know God, for the perversion seen in Romans 1 remains unchanged apart from God's grace.

2. The Spirituality of God

When we talk about God being a spiritual being, we do not mean that He is pious or religious, but rather that He is a Spirit (John 4:24). Several questions arise:

A. What does it mean when we say that God is a spirit?

First of all, and most obviously, it means that God does not have a body - He is not a material being. As such, He cannot be weighed, measured, located in space, or scientifically tested.

B. How does God differ from other spirits?

Angels and demons are spirits along with God, but they are created and finite. There is reason to believe that they are subject to both time and space (Daniel 10:13), while God is the Creator of both and thus subject to neither. Angels, demons, and man will all live forever (no matter what their eternal destiny), but, unlike God, they have not always existed.

C. What about the visible appearances of God?

These appearances, known as theophanies, appear whenever God chooses to take on visible form (ask your students for examples - they are abundant throughout the Old Testament). These appearances are not always human (e.g., burning bush). The incarnation of Christ differs somewhat from these theophanies because Christ took on a body permanently - He ascended bodily into heaven and will return the same way.

Angels, though not physical beings (Hebrews 1:14), are able to take on bodily form (the men of Sodom certainly thought they were human in Genesis 19). Presumably, demons, who are after all fallen angels, can do the same (Does this explain “ghosts”? Don’t get sidetracked on this issue!).

3. The Personality of God

Here again we are using a word in a way different from its normal usage. We are not referring here to vivacity, introversion, or such characteristics normally associated with personality. What we mean by this is that God is a person, though He is not physical or human - that He is personal as opposed to being some sort of impersonal force. The personhood of God may be seen in several ways:

A. By His Names

Review some of the names of God discussed last week. How do they demonstrate that God is not some impersonal force?

B. By His Actions

What are some of the things God does that reveal Him to be personal? Among many things that could be said here: He creates, sustains, loves, hates, grieves, chooses, etc.

C. By His Image

It is impossible for an impersonal God to create a personal man. One who denies the personality of God also must deny the personality of man. It is the fact that man is created in the image of God that sets him apart from all other creatures - that makes him a person.

D. By Contrast With Other Gods (Isaiah 44:9-20; Jeremiah 10:10-16; I Kings. 18:16-39)

When contrasted with dead and impotent idols, the Living God shows Himself to be truly personal.

Conclusion

For the unbelievers in your class, stress that the blindness of those who deny the infinite-personal God who has revealed Himself can only be lifted by the mercy of that same God. For the believers in your class, end the session in a time of prayer, praising God for who He is.

In each of the following situations, how would you respond? What verses would you use?

1. How could you be so arrogant as to believe that you can know what God is like? He is completely different from man, “wholly other.” You have done no more than fashion a god in your own image, or in the image of those men who wrote the Bible. [NOTE: Many liberal theologians teach this.]

2. God once was a man like us. In fact, he is the one the Bible calls Adam. He obeyed his god and became a god himself. If we obey him, we may some day become gods ourselves. If God didn’t have a body, he never would have been able to procreate the fathers of the human race. [NOTE: This is the teaching of the Mormons.]

3. Everything that is real is God. That which is not God is illusion. We all come from God and go to God. In Him there is no personality or individuality, only everlasting oneness with all things. It is our clinging to the notion of our own separateness that is our greatest illusion. [NOTE: Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism share this notion.]

THE TRINITY

Lesson Aim

To give to the students a firmer understanding of and a biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity.

Memory Verse

II Corinthians 13:14 - “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Lesson Background

The doctrine of the Trinity is unique to Christianity. There are monotheistic religions and polytheistic religions, but no other religion worships a God who is three in one, both distinct and united in one Being. The paradox implicit in this teaching has been the source of great philosophical struggles within the church over the centuries. The early church in particular grappled with it, and after debating issues such as whether Christ was of the same substance or of similar substance with the Father, produced the familiar formula stating that we worship one God in three Persons.

On a more mundane level, many have sought to devise illustrations to help teach the doctrine of the Trinity. While these may have some value, they also have serious limitations, and because they tend to be remembered by students, can actually produce serious misunderstandings. For example, the illustration of the egg (the egg has a shell, a white part, and a yolk, yet it is still one egg) adequately illustrates the unity and the distinctness of the members of the Godhead, but the fact remains that the shell is not the egg, while each member of the Trinity is the fullness of God. The illustration of water (ice, water, and steam are all

water in different forms) is even worse, and smacks of the Modalistic heresy that said that one God manifested Himself in different ways at different times.

Rather than using these illustrations, we must gain our understanding of the Trinity from Scripture. This is made more difficult, of course, by the fact that the Bible never uses the word, nor does it teach the doctrine explicitly in any single passage (assuming that I John 5:7 is a late insertion, which most scholars, except for those who hold to the *Textus Receptus*, will readily do). Consequently, this lesson approaches the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of five propositions, all of which are demonstrably biblical. It is not necessary for us to understand how these propositions can be true simultaneously. We must not demand of God that He fit within the confines of human reason. Yet it is important to realize that the doctrine has areas of concrete application, providing the foundation for our relationship to God in several crucial ways.

Lesson Procedure

1. The Statement of the Doctrine of the Trinity

Begin class by asking your students to state the doctrine of the Trinity. They will probably come up with some variation of the “one God in three Persons” idea, which is fine. Then begin to probe a little, trying to get them to explain how God can be both one and three. If they come up with one of the familiar illustrations, show them where it fails. The point of this exercise is to demonstrate to the students that the doctrine of the Trinity transcends human reason and cannot be “explained.”

Having shown the weakness of their understanding, suggest another approach. Write on the board the following five propositions:

- God is one.
- The Father is God.
- The Son is God.
- The Spirit is God.
- The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct.

Ask if these, taken together, summarize the doctrine of the Trinity. Then state that, if these five propositions can be shown to be biblical, we will have proved that the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity. Note that this will not produce complete understanding, but should produce complete faith.

2. The Demonstration of the Doctrine of the Trinity

Let’s go through the propositions one at a time, demonstrating that each is biblical.

A. God is One (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6-8; 45:5; I Corinthians 8:4; I Timothy 2:5)

Note particularly here that the unity of God has ethical implications. Deuteronomy 6:5 indicates that because God is One, there can be no divided allegiance.

B. The Father is God (Matthew 6:9)

This point is not really at issue. Those who attack the doctrine of the Trinity direct their assaults elsewhere.

C. The Son is God (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; John 1:1; 5:17-23; 14:9-11; 20:28)

This is the part of the doctrine that is most blatantly attacked. One must discount the clear teaching of Scripture in order to deny it, however.

D. The Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4; I Corinthians 2:10-11; II Corinthians 3:17-18)

The personality of the Spirit is disputed far more frequently than is His deity.

E. The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct (Psalm 45:6-7; 110:1; Isaiah 63:7-14; Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19-20; II Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 1:8-9)

How does each of these passages demonstrate that the persons of the Trinity are distinct one from the other?

3. The Applications of the Doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity produces some very practical conclusions when thought through carefully.

A. Love

I John 4:16 tells us that God is love. Love must have an object, and if God's love were directed only toward His creatures, He could not be said to be love in Himself, for His love would have begun when the object of that love came into existence. However, if we realize that the persons of the Trinity have loved one another from all eternity, the idea that God is love takes on new meaning (cf. John 17:24). Go back now to I John 4 and see what practical application John draws from this truth.

B. Communication

Many today teach that communication is a chance phenomenon, evolved from the grunts of beasts. On the contrary, we must see that it is part of what it means to be in the image of God, and thus part of what differentiates man from the rest of Creation. I am not suggesting that animals do not communicate with each

other, but that they do not communicate with God. Yet how could this capacity to communicate be part of the image of God if it did not characterize God from all eternity? Thus, communication among members of the Trinity from all eternity lays the foundation for our communication with God, and His with us. If God were not what He is, we could not be what we are.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE TRINITY

1. List the five propositions that make up the doctrine of the Trinity and find at least three verses to support each one.
2. The following cults all deny the doctrine of the Trinity: Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science, and the Unification Church ("Moonies"). Look up each of these in a good book on the cults and find out how each denies the doctrine.
3. What verses might you use in discussing the doctrine of the Trinity with members of each of the cults listed above?
4. Why is it important to believe the doctrine of the Trinity?

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson Aim

To give students an overview of the attributes of God.

Memory Verse

I Timothy 1:17 - “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Lesson Background

We cannot speak or even think of God apart from His attributes. We do not worship a contentless deity, but rather a God who has told us in His Word what He is like. On the other hand, the attributes that characterize God are not abstract perfections against which He is measured, but rather are standards defined by what God is. For instance, we do not define love and then ask whether God measures up. We look at God’s self-revelation to determine what love really is, and then shape our definition on that basis.

To attempt to cover the attributes of God in one lesson is absurd (almost as absurd as trying to cover 2,000 years of church history in one quarter - see next unit). Depth of any kind here is impossible. The best we can hope for is a broad overview. There are several benefits that should be derived from the lesson, however.

1. Students should become aware of the different classes of divine attributes. Knowledge of these should underscore the chasm between Creator and creature as well as the bridge formed when God placed His image in man.
2. Students should be taught to see God as the standard by which all virtues are measured. Only a fool creates his own standards and applies them to God.

3. Students should be motivated to praise God for His greatness. A knowledge of God's attributes equips a person for more intelligent praise in prayer.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by asking the students to list characteristics of God. Write them on the blackboard as they name them. It should not be difficult to get a fairly lengthy list within a few minutes. Once a list has been compiled, ask the students two questions about the characteristics on the list: Is this characteristic one that has always been true of God from eternity past, or may it only be said of Him since He created the universe? Could this characteristic in any way be applied to man, though in a lesser degree? If the answer to the first question is that the characteristic is only true since the creation came into being, put an "R" next to that attribute. Then, for the remaining characteristics, ask the second question. If the attribute belongs to God alone, mark it with a "G"; if it is shared in some sense by man, mark it with an "M." Your list is now divided into three categories - those attributes that belong to God alone (G), those that characterize the image of God in man, and thus are in some way shared (M), and those that speak of how God relates to His creatures (R).

We will now briefly examine each of these categories in turn. (How close was the class' list to the one in the lesson?) For the sake of symmetry, I've included six examples in each category.

1. Attributes That Belong to God Alone

A. Omnipotence

God is all-powerful. He exerts His power over nature, both in sustaining its normal operations and in breaking into those normal operations with what we call miracles; over men, both in the incidents of their daily lives and in their eternal destiny; over angels, demons, and Satan; even over death itself. (As an aside that you probably will not want to get into in class, the famous dilemma, "Can God make a rock so large He can't lift it?" is a pseudo-problem. One who asks the question is assuming there can be such a thing as a rock too big for God to lift, and thus is presupposing that God is not omnipotent.)

B. Omniscience

God knows everything. He knows everything about what He has created. He knows the acts, words, feelings, and thoughts of every person. He knows the past, present, and future. How foolish it is to try to deceive God or hide from Him!

C. Omnipresence

God is everywhere at once. This is not pantheism, which says that God is everything. God is present in the room, but He is not the room! How, then, can heaven be called the dwelling place of God, and hell be characterized as eternal separation from Him? Simply because God is present in different places in different ways. In heaven, God's glory is revealed in a way it can nowhere else be seen; in hell, God is present only in implacable wrath and judgment.

D. Eternality

God always was and always will be. This indicates that God is outside the realm of time, which is a created entity by which He is not restricted, in the same way that omnipresence means that God is not subject to the restrictions of space.

E. Immutability

God does not change. He is perfect and can never improve, nor would He ever become less than what He is. Thus we may trust His Word and place utter confidence in Him.

F. Infinity

God is not limited. This really sums up the attributes in this first section. The only limitation that may be placed on God is that He cannot deny Himself. He cannot be other than what He is, which is absolute perfection.

2. Attributes That God Shares With Man

A. Love

God is love, as we noted last week. He has given human beings the capacity to love Him and to love one another.

B. Truth

God's character and God's Word are the standard for what is true. He *is* truth. The truth or falsehood of any statement or action is to be determined by measuring it against God and His Word. To measure God against some man-made standard (science? philosophy? logic?) is presumption and folly.

C. Wisdom

God puts His knowledge into practice perfectly. Both His ends and His means are wise.

D. Holiness

God is separate from sin in the same way that light is separate from darkness. The two are mutually exclusive. He again is the standard for distinguishing between right and wrong.

E. Justice

When God judges, His judgment is just, whether He is justifying His people through His Son or condemning the wicked for their sin. No one can accuse God of being unfair.

F. Goodness

God is good in Himself, good toward His creation, and is the standard by which goodness is measured.

3. Attributes by Which God Relates to His Creation

A. Creator

God made everything that has ever existed.

B. Sustainer

God is not the Deist deity who made the world and then stood back and let it go. Were it not for His sustaining power, the universe would not run itself for an instant.

C. Redeemer

God works to deliver both His people and the entire created universe from sin.

D. Faithfulness

God keeps both His promises and His people.

E. Common Grace

God provides for all His creatures, sending rain on the just and the unjust alike. He also displays His grace to unbelievers by His patience and longsuffering, refraining from raining down immediate destruction on sinners.

F. Saving Grace

God does for His people what they cannot do for themselves. He changes their hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit and brings them to Himself.

Conclusion

Bring out the three applications listed in the Lesson Background section.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

During the week, find a good concordance and fill in this chart, doing three attributes each day. Then meditate on those attributes and incorporate them into your prayer time that day.

ATTRIBUTES	SCRIPTURE PASSAGES	WHAT THIS ATTRIBUTE MEANS TO ME
<p><u>ATTRIBUTES BELONGING TO GOD ALONE</u></p> <p>Omnipotence Omniscience Omnipresence Eternality Immutability Infinity</p>		
<p><u>ATTRIBUTES GOD SHARES WITH MAN</u></p> <p>Love Truth Wisdom Holiness Justice Goodness</p>		
<p><u>ATTRIBUTES BY WHICH GOD RELATES TO MAN</u></p> <p>Creator Sustainer Redeemer Faithfulness Common Grace Saving Grace</p>		

VIRGIN BIRTH AND HUMANITY OF CHRIST

Lesson Aim

To help students understand the miracle of the Incarnation and why it is important to them that God became man.

Memory Verse

Philippians 2:5-6 - “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped . . .”

Lesson Background

Jesus Christ was both like and unlike every other person who has been born into this world. All that man is, He is, and yet He is so much more! In this week’s lesson, we will examine both how the Second Person of the Trinity became man and what it meant for Him to become man. The means by which Christ became man - the Virgin Birth - sets Him apart from all others. Yet the man He became was like all others, save in His sinlessness.

The Virgin Birth is a difficult subject to tackle. While the fact of it is clearly taught in Scripture, several mysteries remain. One concerns the prophecy of the Virgin Birth in Isaiah - the context clouds the issue rather than shedding light on the Messiah’s birth. The second involves the reason for the Virgin Birth. The Bible simply does not give one. Theologians have speculated over the years, and we will examine some of these speculations, but the fact remains that we cannot know for certain why God chose to have His Son come into the world in such a unique way.

The humanity of Christ is important because it is essential for His saving work. Christ could not have been a substitute for man unless He became man. It should also be emphasized that, because Christ became man, He is able to sympathize and identify with the needs and problems of those who come before Him.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by dividing your students into two groups. Give each group a sheet of paper, and have one group spend a few minutes listing ways in which Jesus was like us, while the other group lists ways in which Jesus was not like us. After sufficient time has elapsed, have the groups read their lists. Then tell them that, in order for Christ to be the Savior, both of these were necessary. He had to be like us to take our place, yet unlike us to accomplish salvation. Today we will be talking about the humanity of Christ. The lesson is divided into two parts - the first deals with how Christ became man, while the second considers the significance of His humanity.

1. How the Son of God Became Man

Jesus' entrance into the human race was different from that made by anyone else in history. That difference stems from two facts. The first of these is that Christ existed prior to His conception. His preexistence sets Him apart from all other men. The second is the fact that He was born of a virgin. It is with this fact of the Virgin Birth that our lesson today begins.

A. The Prophecy of the Virgin Birth (Isaiah 7:14)

Have the students read Isaiah 7:1-17 and discuss what is happening in the chapter. Ahaz, king of Judah, is afraid because he is about to be invaded by Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria. God assures him that the invasion will not succeed and that the invaders will be destroyed by the Assyrians. Despite the fact that the wicked Ahaz piously refuses to ask God for a sign, God gives him one anyway, indicating that a young woman would become pregnant (the word "virgin" in verse 14 may simply mean "young woman"), and that before her child was old enough to know right from wrong, Israel and Syria would be conquered. In fact, 8:1-4 seems to point toward Isaiah's son Mahershalalhashbaz as being the fulfillment of the prophecy.

B. The Event of the Virgin Birth (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-27)

Though questions exist concerning the prophecy, there can be no doubt about the event. Mahershalalhashbaz may have been the partial and immediate fulfillment of the prophecy, but the complete and final fulfillment was in Christ. Though the term "virgin" in Isaiah may be ambiguous, the descriptions in Matthew and Luke are not - they make it clear that Mary had never engaged in sexual activity prior to the birth of Jesus. In addition, Jesus was Immanuel ("God with us") literally, while Mahershalalhashbaz was merely a sign of God's care for His people.

C. The Significance of the Virgin Birth

The problem here is that the Bible doesn't give us a single clue as to why Jesus was born of a virgin. Any answers we give are pure speculation, and thus without authority. Ask your students why they think God chose to do it that way. The following are several suggestions that have been made by theologians over the years:

- The Virgin Birth assured that Christ would be born without sin (this is probably the one your students came up with). It rests on the dubious assumption that sin is transmitted by the father, but not by the mother. The Catholic Church, of course, gets around this problem by teaching the Immaculate Conception - that Mary was born sinless, and thus had no sin to transmit to her Son (but wouldn't her parents then have had to be sinless, and their parents, etc.?). A much better version of this reasoning suggests that Christ's sinless conception was due, not to the absence of Joseph, but to the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- Christ was a unique Person, and it was fitting that He be conceived in a unique way. No argument here - the numerous supernatural occurrences surrounding the birth of Christ show that God wanted it to be something special.
- Christ was the Son of God before He was conceived. It was appropriate that the paternity of Joseph yield to the prior claim of God.
- The birth accounts make clear that Christ came to save, to do for man what he could not do for himself. Thus it was appropriate that Christ's entrance into the world be totally a matter of divine initiative, not dependent in any way on human activity.

2. Why the Son of God Became Man

The Gospel writers go to great pains to demonstrate the full humanity of Christ. Both Matthew and Luke give lengthy genealogies, Matthew tying Christ to the kingly line of the Jewish nation and Luke relating Christ back to Adam, the progenitor of the human race. Obviously, they considered Christ's humanity to be important.

Furthermore, Luke gives us a glimpse of Christ's boyhood (Luke 2:41-52), placing emphasis in verse 52 on Jesus' development as a young man. We also have many indications that Jesus' body experienced the same hunger, thirst, fatigue, and pain that ours do (ask your students for specific examples). Why are these things vital for us to know? At least two reasons can be given. First of all, Romans 5:12-21 indicates that Christ is the Second Adam, the head of a redeemed race. Christ had to become man in order to save men. Secondly, Hebrews 4:14-16 notes that Christ's humanity enables Him to sympathize with and intercede for His people. He knows what it is like to be a human being, and thus can identify with the weaknesses of those who pray to Him. In addition, because He overcame every temptation we face, He is able to give help to His people as they strive against sin.

Conclusion

These last two points serve as a good closing application. Be sure to point out that unbelievers have no access to Christ's intercession, but will find Him merciful if they turn to Him in faith.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

VIRGIN BIRTH AND HUMANITY OF CHRIST

1. What are some ways in which Jesus was like other people? What are some ways in which He was different from all others?
2. What are some of the possible reasons why Jesus was born of a virgin?
3. Why was it necessary for the Son of God to become a man? What benefits does the Christian gain from the fact that Christ took on human flesh?

DEITY OF CHRIST

Lesson Aim

To demonstrate to students from Scripture the truth and importance of the deity of Christ and prepare them to respond to those who would deny it.

Memory Verse

Philippians 2:7 - “But made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

Lesson Background

In the early church, there were many who had difficulty accepting the full humanity of Christ. Heresies abounded in the minds of those for whom God could not become man. Today, the shoe is on the other foot, so to speak. The miracle of the Incarnation, which we examined last week, is still denied, but now it is usually the deity of Christ, rather than His humanity, that comes under question. Instead of assuming that Christ is God, and consequently doubting that He could become man in the full sense of the word, people today assume that Christ was a man, and consequently doubt that He could be God. This heresy is prevalent even among those who call themselves Christians, whether they be liberal religionists who have departed from Scripture or cultists such as Jehovah’s Witnesses who twist it.

The deity of Christ is a complex issue only because of those who deny it. That doesn’t mean, of course, that it is easy to understand. What it does mean is that the Bible teaches clearly that Jesus is God, in a way that a child can understand and accept. The complexities arise from the need to counter the arguments of false teachers.

In today's lesson we will begin by showing from Scripture that Christ is God, and in the process responding to various arguments against Jesus' deity. There will then be some opportunity at the end of the class for role-playing to get your students to apply what they have learned.

Lesson Procedure

Start the class by asking your students which doctrine they think is more foundational to the Christian faith, the inspiration of Scripture or the deity of Christ. Actually, the question can be answered either way. The doctrine of inspiration may be said to be more foundational because, without an inspired Bible, we have no way of knowing of the deity of Christ. On the other hand, while one may be saved while knowing nothing of the inspiration of Scripture, one cannot be saved apart from confessing Christ as "my Lord and my God" (cf. John 20:28).

Because of the first line of reasoning given above, it is futile to attempt to demonstrate the deity of Christ apart from Scripture. Consequently, today's lesson will attempt to show in numerous ways from Scripture that Christ is God. The importance of such an endeavor lies in the fact that many claim to use Scripture to support a denial of Christ's deity. Christians must, therefore, be convinced themselves and know how to convince others from Scripture that Jesus is God. We will pursue five lines of argumentation to accomplish this. [NOTE: Please be sure that every student in the class has a Bible.]

1. The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be God

Psalm 110:1 - David here refers to the Messiah as "my Lord." Jesus used this against the Pharisees in Matthew 22:41-46 to prove His deity when they accused Him of blasphemy, and they had no answer.

Isaiah 7:14 - The Messiah was to be Immanuel, "God with us."

Isaiah 9:6 - The Messiah is called "Mighty God, Everlasting Father."

Micah 5:2 - The Messiah is one whose origins are "from days of eternity." As we saw two weeks ago, only God has always existed.

2. The Bible uses names for Jesus that show that He is God

A. God (John 1:1; 20:28; Hebrews 1:8; I John 5:20)

The first of these is perhaps the clearest statement of the deity of Christ in Scripture, and thus is the focal point for the attack on the doctrine mounted by groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

B. Son of God (Mark 14:61-62; John 5:25; 10:36; 11:4)

Is this a title of deity or does it indicate something less than deity? The contexts in John 5 and John 10 clearly show that Jesus' listeners thought He was claiming deity - that's why they wanted to stone Him. But what about John 1:12, where all Christians are called sons of God? We must affirm that Christ's Sonship is unique. He is the only-begotten (a phrase denoting positional uniqueness, not a temporal origin) - see John

1:14,18; 3:16,18; 5:18; I John 4:9. His Sonship is eternal, ours is temporal; His is inherent, while ours is bestowed through adoption.

C. Son of Man (e.g., Luke 9:58; 19:10)

This is the title Jesus most often uses for Himself. It is often thought to refer to His humanity, but it is really a reference to His deity, as it is drawn from the description of the Messiah in Daniel 7:13-14.

D. Lord (John 13:13; Revelation 19:16)

This was a common title of respect, but is used of Christ in a unique way. In addition, quotations from the Old Testament that refer to Christ as Lord (for example: Matthew 3:3; Romans 10:13; Hebrews 1:10-12) thus identify Him as Yahweh, the self-existent God of the Covenant.

3. The Bible indicates that Jesus is to be worshiped

Matthew 2:2,11; 14:33; Luke 24:52; John 5:23; 20:28; Acts 7:59; I Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 2:10; Hebrews 1:6 all demonstrate that Jesus may appropriately be worshiped, and indeed must be. Men (Acts 10:25-26; 14:14-15) and angels rightly refuse all worship. The fact that Jesus accepts it as His right, and is said by the Bible to deserve it, shows that He is God.

4. The Bible indicates that Christ possesses the attributes of God

Use the list we went through two weeks ago and see if your students can come up with examples of how Christ possesses the divine attributes. Concentrate on the first and third categories, since the second involved characteristics in some sense shared with man. Depending on the time available, it might be wise to select a few key attributes from each category, which should be sufficient to get the point across.

5. The Bible indicates that Jesus knew He was God

The incidents in Matthew 3:13-17; 4:1-11; Luke 2:41-52; 4:16-21 all show that Jesus knew who He was. It is absurd to maintain that Jesus was a simple man who was later deified by His foolish followers.

6. Why Is The Deity Of Christ Important?

As with the humanity of Christ, if Jesus were not God, He could not save. He needed to be not only a sinless man, but also the omnipotent God, in order to be the sufficient substitute for the sins of His people.

7. Role Play

Try to leave enough time at the end of class for a brief role play. You yourself should prepare a presentation against the deity of Christ. Pretend to be someone your class meets on the street, or someone who was invited to speak to them on this topic. See how well they are able to respond to your arguments on the basis of what they've studied today. After the role play, show them ways in which they could have responded more effectively.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

DEITY OF CHRIST

1. Using a concordance, look up all the passages in the Gospels where people tried to stone Jesus. How do these serve to show that Jesus claimed to be God?
2. Though there have been many attempts, the church has never been able to explain satisfactorily how Jesus could be God and man at the same time. What it boils down to is that we believe it because the Bible teaches it. Why was it necessary that Jesus be fully God and fully man?
3. Romans 10:9-10 indicates that confessing Jesus as Lord is necessary for salvation, but Matthew 7:21 indicates that calling Jesus “Lord” is not enough. One who really believes in the deity of Christ is influenced in the way he lives by that belief. How?

WORK OF CHRIST - PROPHET

Lesson Aim

To familiarize students with the role of a prophet and show how Christ fulfilled that role in His public ministry.

Memory Verse

Philippians 2:8 - “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!”

Lesson Background

People today tend to get the wrong idea about prophets. Particularly because of the emphasis on eschatology that exists in some parts of the American church, most people think of a prophet as one who foretells future events. Consequently, if we are to examine the prophetic work of Christ, it is necessary first to clear up some misconceptions about what the role of a prophet involves. What we will find is that a prophet was more a “forth-teller” than a foreteller. His task was to speak to the people of God the words God had given him to speak. Some of these words communicated insight into the future, but many dealt with the present.

This lesson begins a series of three lessons on the work of Christ. In these lessons we will be seeing Christ as a mediator - one who bridges the gap between God and man. The three Old Testament theocratic offices - prophet, priest, and king - were all mediatorial in nature. The prophet spoke to the people for God, the priest spoke to God for the people, and the king ruled the people under God. Christ was the perfect fulfillment of all three mediatorial roles. Generally, though not exclusively, we may say that His prophetic work was done largely in His earthly ministry, His priestly work largely in His death, and His kingly work largely since His resurrection and ascension.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by asking your students what they think a prophet is. If your class is like most, they will tell you that a prophet is someone who foretells the future. Though this is involved in a prophet's work, it does not form an adequate definition of what a prophet is to do. Before you go on to develop a biblical definition of what a prophet does, however, pause a minute to put the discussion in a broader context.

Ask your students to define the word "mediator." This one they should get - the term is used frequently enough in labor negotiations and such that students should know that it refers to a "go-between." Then explain that, in Old Testament times, God designated three kinds of mediators between Himself and His people. These types of mediators were prophets, priests, and kings. Explain how each was a mediator, and why mediators were needed (because of the people's sinfulness, they could not speak directly to God, and they feared to have Him speak directly to them). Note also that these mediators were imperfect, but that God sent a final and perfect Mediator - His Son. In the next three weeks, we will be examining how Christ fulfilled each of the mediatorial offices. Now, back to the prophet . . .

1. The Role of the Prophet

To find out what a prophet was supposed to do, we will examine three key Old Testament passages:

- **Exodus 7:1-2** - God here tells Moses that, for Pharaoh, He is God and Aaron is His prophet. A prophet thus was a relayer of someone else's words. What he spoke was not his own thoughts, but those of God. Note that what Aaron is told to speak doesn't involve future events, but is a command - that Pharaoh should let Israel go.
- **Deuteronomy 13:1-5** - Just because someone foretells the future does not make him a prophet. A true prophet has as the goal of his message to turn people to God, not away from Him.
- **Deuteronomy 18:15-22** - Moses is speaking here, so the "like me" in verse 15 refers to Moses. A prophet, especially the great prophet mentioned in this passage, is to be not only one who speaks the word of God, but also one who exercises the power of God for deliverance. Verse 15 also indicates that the prophet is to come from and speak to God's chosen people. The nineteenth verse notes the seriousness of the prophet's message - the people ignore it at their peril. As we saw in Deuteronomy 13, the prophet who speaks in the name of another god is to be executed, but so is the one who speaks his own words as though they were the words of God. Finally, the prophet must, in baseball parlance, "bat 1.000" - his word must always come to pass.

Before moving on, then, summarize the work of the prophet. He speaks

- God's words
- in God's name
- to God's people
- with complete accuracy

2. Christ as a Prophet

Acts 3:22-23 indicates that Christ is the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15-22 - He is the great Prophet who was promised. Note, point by point, how He fulfilled the prophet's task.

A. He Spoke God's Words

- **John 8:28** - Jesus spoke exactly what the Father told Him to speak.
- **John 1:14** - He not only spoke God's words, He was God's Word - the Word made flesh. In both what He said and what He did, He was God's perfect communication to man.
- **Hebrews 1:1-2** - Christ completed and perfected what the Old Testament prophets had begun.

B. He Spoke in God's Name

As we saw above, Jesus claimed to get His authority directly from God.

C. He Spoke to God's People

John 10:1-16 - Have the students read this passage and pick out the places where Jesus makes this point (see verses 3-5, 14-16).

D. He Spoke With Complete Accuracy

John 14:6 - Not only did Jesus speak the truth, He was the Truth. The disciples acknowledged this when they said (through Peter), "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Conclusion

Conclude the session by drawing applications for unbelievers and believers. For the former, Christ's words are God's words, and whoever ignores them will be destroyed. For the latter, He has the words of eternal life. Who would possibly turn to seek anything else?

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

WORK OF CHRIST PROPHET

1. What is a prophet? How does the biblical definition of a prophet differ from that commonly held today?
2. What is a mediator? How is a prophet a mediator?
3. In what ways could Jesus be called a prophet? How was He different from other prophets?

WORK OF CHRIST - PRIEST

Lesson Aim

To communicate to students the duty of a priest, and how Christ fulfilled that function through His death and continues to fulfill it today.

Memory Verse

Philippians 2:9 - “Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name . . .”

Lesson Background

The role of a priest is one given great emphasis in Scripture. The priest comes before God on behalf of the people, offering sacrifice for sin. Christ, of course, offered the final and perfect sacrifice - Himself. Today’s lesson looks first at what a priest was to be and do, then examines how Christ fulfilled that role in His death and continues to fulfill it in heaven today.

The theocratic offices are in many ways foreign to your students. God no longer speaks through prophets. The priesthood has been abolished, as Hebrews indicates, although it is unnecessarily perpetuated in the Catholic Church. Even though there are kings in the world, monarchy is fast becoming obsolete, and we in America haven’t had a king in almost two hundred fifty years. Because these offices are not a part of your students’ experience, they may seem somehow unreal to them. Consequently, it is important to make the students feel the urgent need of a priest, and the only way to do that is to make clear the holiness of God. (Jonathan Edwards, in *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, which some of your students may have read

as an example of Puritan literature at school, had the right idea - only one who sees God as He is will become aware of his great need of a Savior.)

This is a full lesson. Be sure to monitor your time carefully.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by creating verbally for your students a picture of the Temple in Jerusalem shortly before Passover. Thousands of priests are working overtime, slaughtering greater thousands of animals. Blood is everywhere, as is the stench of burning flesh. To modern sensibilities, this is an ugly picture, one of great carnage and, in the world's eyes, great waste. Why did God command His people to practice such a seemingly barbaric ritual? Hebrews 9:22 puts it succinctly - "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." God is holy and sin is serious. No sinner may enter God's presence. Yet if all are sinners, who is to bring the sacrifice? It is for this purpose that God set aside men to be priests. They became priests, not through inherent qualifications, but simply because God had chosen them for that task. What was the task?

1. The Role of the Priest

Leviticus 1-9, 16, 21-22 detail what a priest was responsible to do. Even a quick glance over this section of text shows that the main job of the priest was to offer sacrifices to God. He must follow an elaborate procedure to prepare himself for sacrifice and adhere strictly to the designated process when actually making the sacrifice. Both the preparation and the sacrifice itself served to underscore God's holiness. What was being done was no human invention, no alterable expedient, but the designated path for gaining forgiveness from a perfect God who had been terribly offended by human sin. Sin merited death, but God in His mercy had provided for a substitute - the lamb was to die in place of the sinner. But if the lamb was to be acceptable, both the priest and the sacrifice had to be holy. Thus the priest underwent rituals of purification, while the sacrifice had to be unblemished and spotless.

2. Christ as Priest in His Death

Here we must deal with four basic questions (altogether too briefly, I fear).

A. In what way was Christ a priest?

Hebrews 4:14-10:39 goes into great detail answering this question. We should note that Christ was a priest in His death because He offered up to God a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of others. He, of course, was the sacrifice as well as the priest. The sacrifice was pure, and the priest needed no purification. In fact, Christ was the only priest who did not have to offer sacrifice for His own sins before entering God's presence on behalf of others.

B. Did Christ have to die to obtain salvation?

Theologians have debated this one for a long time, but I think we must conclude that He did. God demanded the shedding of blood as the just penalty for sin. Only the God-man could be an infinite substitute. Besides, if some lesser act would have served as well, would God have sent His Son to the cross?

C. What did Christ's death accomplish?

Here we examine three key biblical terms:

i. Propitiation (Romans 3:25; I John 2:2)

This is the removal of wrath. As an illustration, look up the story of Agamemnon and Iphigenia in *Bulfinch's Mythology*. The propitiation accomplished by Christ differs, of course, in that, instead of man acting to propitiate the gods, God acted to propitiate Himself when man could in no way have turned aside His wrath.

ii. Reconciliation (Romans 5:8-11; II Corinthians 5:18-21)

This term refers to the removal of alienation. Christ by His death broke down the barrier between God and man that man had built but could not destroy. This is the real meaning of the angels' announcement to the shepherds (Luke 2:14) - Christ came to make peace between God and man. Reconciliation is also one of the things implied by the tearing of the veil in the Temple (Matthew 27:51).

iii. Redemption (Mark 10:45; Titus 2:14; I Peter 1:18-19)

This term refers to setting free by payment of a price. It was often used of slaves who were emancipated by others, or even by themselves. Both Ruth 4 and Hosea 1-3 give good illustrations of the concept. Christ's blood was the payment that set His people free from bondage to Satan, sin, and death. We could never have paid the price to free ourselves - only Christ was able to ransom us.

D. For whom did Christ die?

One of the five points of Reformed doctrine is particular redemption - the idea that Christ died for specific individuals who had been chosen by God and subsequently would be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Christ's accomplishment of salvation is not isolated from either the Father's ordaining of it or the Spirit's application of it. See, for instance, John 6:37-40; 10:15,26; Ephesians 5:25-27.

3. Christ as Priest Today

Though His accomplishment of salvation was completed on the cross, Christ's priestly work is not finished. He sits today at the right hand of God, interceding for the ones for whom He died. Thus, He continues as a mediator (Hebrews 7:25; 9:24) for His people.

Conclusion

Close the lesson by stressing for your students that we all need a priest, and that we cannot hope to come to God except through the atoning death and priestly intercession of Christ.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

WORK OF CHRIST PRIEST

1. Why are priests necessary? What is their main function?
2. Why does the church not have priests today?
3. How could Jesus be both priest and sacrifice?
4. Define the words *propitiation*, *reconciliation*, and *redemption*. What do these words tell us about the death of Christ?
5. In what sense is Jesus serving as a priest now?
6. Find some information about Roman Catholic priests, either from a book on Catholicism or from a Catholic friend or acquaintance. Do Catholics believe their priests offer sacrifices? Do they see them as mediators?

WORK OF CHRIST - KING

Lesson Aim

To show students that Christ is reigning now and that one day all will bow before Him, and to exhort them to acknowledge Him as Lord.

Memory Verse

Philippians 2:10-11 - “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Lesson Background

When Jesus came into the world, the Jews were expecting a king. In the popular thinking of the first century, the Messiah was to be a political liberator who would cast aside the Roman yoke. When Jesus made it clear that He came to rule the hearts of men and that His kingdom was not of this world, many who had placed their hope in their own vision of the Messiah turned against Him.

In the same way that many in Jesus’ day wanted to restrict His kingship to the political realm of this world, many today would restrict it to a future earthly reign. Either approach is truncated because it refuses to acknowledge the kingship of Christ in the present. It is this present Lordship of Christ that must be made plain to the students in today’s lesson. Though we will briefly mention Jesus as the Rejected King (past) and the Recognized King (future), it is on Jesus as the Reigning King (present) that we will concentrate, looking at how His resurrection, ascension, and heavenly session are all involved in this present rule.

The application here is important. If Christ is King, He must be served, or destruction will result (cf. Luke 14:31-33). It is folly to exhort others to “make Christ Lord of their lives.” He already is Lord -

what they must do is acknowledge that Lordship. One day all will confess that Christ is Lord - but how much better is willing submission than forceful destruction!

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by having the students turn to Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Read together God's description of what a king was to be. Make note of the following points:

- The king was to be a theocratic monarch. He was chosen by God and would rule under God.
- The king was to be a constitutional monarch. He enforced God's law rather than making his own. He was subject to the law, not free to break it with impunity.
- The king was to be a servant. He ruled for the people's good, not his own.

Next, ask the students in what sense the king was a mediator. They should be able to recognize that, as one who ruled the people in God's behalf by enforcing God's laws, his work was mediatorial in nature.

We are now ready to apply this concept to Christ. He was, is, and will be King. He was chosen by God and given authority by God, He kept God's law perfectly and administered it with justice, and came "not to be served, but to serve." In examining Christ's kingship in more detail, we will divide it up into three phases - the Rejected King, the Reigning King, and the Recognized King.

1. The Rejected King

When the wise men came to see Jesus, they sought the one who was born King of the Jews. Jesus announced the nature of His kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount and openly fulfilled the prophecy of the Messiah-King when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Most of those who responded to the new king did so out of a fundamental misunderstanding, or out of false motives (cf. John 6:15). But the vast majority flatly stated, "We don't want this man to be our king" (Luke 19:14). Thus when Jesus told the members of the Sanhedrin at His trial that He was the King, they crucified Him instead of submitting to His rightful authority.

2. The Reigning King

Christ's coronation as King in a sense occurred upon the completion of His saving work. Because He had accomplished what He had come to do, God raised Him from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and sat down on the right hand of God. From that vantage point He rules over all. We will now look at the significance of each of the three events associated with Jesus' "coronation" as King.

A. The Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus was the focal point of the preaching done by the apostles (e.g., Acts 2:24-36). They saw it as God's seal of approval on His work and the beginning of Christ's exaltation. Take some time to look at I Corinthians 15:20-28. Paul here talks about Christ's resurrection and its importance. How does the resurrection relate to Christ's kingship?

- Verses 20-23 - The same power by which Christ overcame death will be exercised in behalf of His subjects. Those who belong to His kingdom will be raised even as He was raised.
- Verses 24-28 - Christ's present rule has as its object the spread of His kingdom and the destruction of His enemies (remember these themes from Jesus' parables?). How is His kingdom now spreading? How are His enemies being destroyed?

B. The Ascension

This event is described in Acts 1:3-11. The key point to note here is that the ascension indicated to the disciples, once and for all, the nature of Christ's rule. After the resurrection, they were still expecting an immediate earthly kingdom (verse 6). When Jesus ascended, He did not abdicate His throne, He assumed it. The writers of Scripture see the ascension as having significance for Christ's reign as King in at least four areas:

i. The coming of the Spirit (John 16:7)

The ascended Christ sent His Spirit into the world to indwell His people so He could rule in their hearts.

ii. The giving of spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:8-11)

It is the ascended Christ who gives gifts to His church. This is a part of His beneficent rule.

iii. Preparation for believers to dwell in His presence (John 14:1-3)

Christ's kingdom is everlasting, and He is preparing for His people to live under His glorious rule in His presence forever.

iv. Promise of the Second Coming (Acts 1:11)

The King will one day return to earth in the same way He left, to impose His rule on all, whether they want it or not.

C. Sitting Down at God's Right Hand

When Christ sat down in heaven, it signaled that His work of salvation was complete (Hebrews 10:12) and that His reign had begun. Again, Scripture draws significance from this event in several areas:

i. Headship over the church (Ephesians 1:20-23)

The head-body imagery used by Paul in Ephesians and I Corinthians denotes rule - Christ has dominion over His church.

ii. Intercession for believers (Hebrews 7:25; 9:24; I John 2:1-2)

Christ is a merciful ruler. As the Old Testament kings were mediators, so is Jesus, interceding before God on behalf of His subjects.

iii. Citizenship for believers (Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20; II Corinthians 5:20)

Because Christ is in heaven, in a sense so are His people. Paul pictures Christians as being seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. Because we are citizens of His heavenly kingdom, this world is not our home. We are here as aliens and as ambassadors. (This is a good area of application for believers. Be sure to emphasize it.)

3. The Recognized King (Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 19:11-21)

Jesus' kingship will some day be fully realized when He returns in power and glory. His enemies will be crushed, and all will acknowledge Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. For the unbelievers in the class, remind them that it is far better to submit to Christ's Lordship now than to be forced to do it later.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

WORK OF CHRIST KING

1. Think of some of the kings you have learned about from studying history. How does Christ's kingship differ from theirs?
2. Why did the Jews reject Jesus as their king?
3. What do the resurrection and ascension of Christ have to do with His kingship? What about the fact that He is seated on the right hand of God?
4. How will Christ's kingship be different after His Second Coming than it is now?
5. What does the fact that Christ is King mean for believers today? For unbelievers?

PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Lesson Aim

To show students from Scripture that the Holy Spirit is a personal being, not an impersonal force as some would maintain, and that He is thus able to give help to Christians, whom He indwells.

Memory Verse

John 16:8 - "When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment."

Lesson Background

In bringing to a close our study of the members of the Trinity, we arrive at the Third Person, the Holy Spirit. In our study of Christ, we found that, while few doubted that Jesus was a real person, many denied His deity. With the Holy Spirit, the situation is quite different. Those who acknowledge Him at all have no question about His deity - if He were not God, then what would He be? The debate centers more on the issue of His personality - His personhood, if you will. Several ancient heresies, as well as a number of modern cults (most notoriously the Jehovah's Witnesses), claim that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force, an extension of God's power. It is our purpose today to demonstrate that this is not the case.

This may seem like an academic sort of argument, but it is foundational for the remaining two weeks of the quarter. Our examination of the work of the Holy Spirit means little if the Spirit is incapable of intelligent, purposeful activity. Unlike the Force of the *Star Wars* movies, the Spirit is not a power source into which one plugs, to be used for good or evil. He is a constant companion, guide, and helper to every

Christian, and it is His presence that ultimately distinguishes between those who are Christians and those who are not.

Lesson Procedure

Suppose you were to come into a room and see two identical “people” sitting on two identical chairs. You have been told that one of these creatures is a human being, while the other is a mechanical robot, a state-of-the-art machine built to resemble the person in every way possible. Do you think you could tell the difference between the person and the robot? How would you go about doing so? After allowing this discussion to go on for a while, point out that the conversation really was about personhood - what makes a real person different from a machine, no matter how sophisticated that machine may be. Such a consideration is an appropriate place to begin our study of the third person of the Trinity. In the same way that Christ’s place in the Godhead is undermined by those who deny His deity, the Holy Spirit’s place in the Trinity is undermined by those who deny His personality. There have been many, both ancient and modern, who have preferred to think of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force, an extension of God’s power. But the Bible clearly indicates that He is a person. Some of the ways in which that may be demonstrated may be similar to those brought up by the class in discussing the robot.

1. The Holy Spirit is Given Personal Names

The manner in which the Spirit is addressed or spoken of shows that He is personal.

A. God (Acts 5:4)

It would be wrong to address as God that which is impersonal.

B. Lord (II Corinthians 3:17-18)

This title is given to one who wields authority.

C. Paraclete (John 14:16; 16:7)

This is a legal term used to describe a defense attorney. It is translated “comforter” (KJV), “advocate” (NASB), or “counselor” (NIV), with the last probably being the best rendering since it continues to carry legal connotations in modern English. That it implies personality may be seen in that it is also used of Jesus (I John 2:1).

D. Personal pronouns

The noun translated “Spirit” (*pneuma*) is a neuter noun in Greek, and should according to normal grammatical usage be replaced by a neuter pronoun (e.g., “it”). When the Bible uses pronouns to refer to the Holy Spirit, however, it invariably used the third person masculine singular (“he”). The emphasis on the personality of the Spirit is thus thought sufficiently important for the writers to violate the canons of Greek grammar.

2. The Holy Spirit Exhibits Personal Characteristics

A. Intelligence (I Corinthians 2:10-11; 12:8; Isaiah 11:2-3)

There is no such thing as impersonal thought.

B. Will (I Corinthians 12:11)

The Spirit gives gifts to members of Christ's body according to His own sovereign will. Decision-making implies personality.

C. Emotion (Romans 15:30; Ephesians 4:30; Isaiah 63:10)

These verses speak of the Spirit as feeling love and grief. Such emotions are not possible beyond the realm of personality.

3. The Holy Spirit Performs Personal Actions

Many of the things done by the Spirit in Scripture clearly distinguish Him from some impersonal force. Assign various verses to the members of your class, then have each one tell what action indicative of personality is being carried out by the Spirit in the verse assigned to him. The following verses may be used, among others: Genesis 1:1-2; John 3:3-8; Romans 8:11,26; I Corinthians 6:11; Acts 13:2; 16:6-7; 20:28; Revelation 3:22; John 14:26; 16:13.

4. The Holy Spirit May Be Sinned Against or Blasphemed

Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:29-30; and Acts 5:3-4 speak of such things. This is not the time to get into a detailed discussion of the unpardonable sin, but one thing should be clear - the Holy Spirit may be offended and insulted. Such offense may not be felt by an impersonal force.

Conclusion

This may be a difficult lesson for your students to apply. In drawing it out, the *Star Wars* analogy may be useful. In the movies, the Force could be used for good or evil - it was ethically neutral. It provided a source of power, but was not capable of lifting a person beyond his own moral limitations. What this implies is that, if the Holy Spirit were merely a force, He could make those who avail themselves of Him more effective, but not better. They would have more power, but not more wisdom, than they were capable of in themselves. Several specific points may be made in conclusion:

- The Christian is indwelt by a Person, not a Power. He has within him a companion, a guide, a teacher - one who can do for him what he cannot possibly do for himself.
- When a Christian sins he offends a real Person, one who is always present within him. Though we all claim to believe in the omnipresence of God and the indwelling of the Spirit, how many of us really live as if it were true?

- The presence of the Holy Spirit is what ultimately marks the difference between Christians and non-Christians (Romans 8:9). If today's discussion has been totally foreign to your experience, perhaps self-examination is in order.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. Why is it important that the Holy Spirit be viewed as a Person rather than an impersonal force?
2. Name at least five things done by the Holy Spirit that indicate His personhood.
3. What is a paraclete? How does the Holy Spirit fulfill the function of a paraclete?
4. How should an awareness of the fact that the Holy Spirit is a Person cause you to live your life differently?

WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE WORLD

Lesson Aim

To familiarize students with the workings of the Holy Spirit in the world at large.

Memory Verse

John 16:9-10 - “In regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer.”

Lesson Background

As stated last week, the Holy Spirit’s presence in a person’s life is what ultimately distinguishes between believers and unbelievers. Yet the Spirit, being God, is omnipresent. It is not only in the lives of believers that the Spirit works. Though we normally think of the work of the Holy Spirit as relating specifically to Christians, either through regenerating God’s elect or through indwelling them after their conversion, the Bible also indicates that the Spirit does a work in the world at large. The passage that deals with this work most explicitly is John 16:8-11, which the students are memorizing while we study the Holy Spirit. In this passage, the Holy Spirit is pictured as a prosecuting attorney (remember, He was pictured as a defense attorney for Christians) who secures the conviction of the unbelieving world. This should not be seen as merely forensic. In the same way that the Spirit as Paraclete produces subjective change in those with whom He works, so the Spirit as Prosecutor touches the consciences of those whom He convicts. It must be recognized that different people respond differently to this convicting work. As in the world some are reformed by prison and some are hardened by it, so in the spiritual realm some are convicted and moved to repentance, while others only harden their hearts further and are ultimately cut off. In applying this lesson, we may encourage Christians with the knowledge that the Spirit of God is challenging the sinful course of

this world, and that God is not just letting things go. For unbelievers, the exhortation must be to avoid searing the conscience against the Spirit's work.

Lesson Procedure

Begin class with the courtroom skit included in the lesson material. Have students read the parts and act it out before the rest of the class (if you need your whole class to act it out, or even if some people have to take more than one part, it should still be a helpful introduction). The skit is based on the first three chapters of Romans.

After reading the skit, ask the students whom the various characters were intended to represent. God, of course, is the Judge, and the defendants are fairly obvious. The identity of the Prosecutor may be more difficult to discern, however. If the class is unsuccessful, have them turn to John 16:8-11 and ask the question again. They now should be able to identify the Prosecutor as the Holy Spirit.

We're now ready to examine this passage in some detail to see what it tells us of the Spirit's work in the world. In the same way that the Spirit is a defense attorney for Christians, He is a prosecuting attorney for the world. According to the passage, He convicts the world in three areas - sin, righteousness, and judgment.

1. "In regard to sin, because men do not believe in Me"

The world has many definitions of sin, as the skit should have demonstrated. It is the task of the Holy Spirit to show men that at the root of all sin is unbelief. The essence of sin is failing to acknowledge Christ as Lord and living your life as if it belonged to you. This is why no one can be neutral about Christ. Those who do not believe in Him must discredit Him - their consciences, prodded by the Holy Spirit, will give them no rest unless they are silenced by the skeptical logic of the mind. The best example of this in Scripture is the Apostle Paul himself. His uneasy conscience drove him to persecute the church until God finally broke through the hardness of his finely-tuned mind.

2. "In regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see Me no longer"

In the same way that the world has a warped view of sin, it has a warped view of righteousness. It is incredible that the only perfectly righteous man who ever walked this earth was executed as a criminal, but it shows clearly that, not only does the world not know what evil is, it doesn't recognize good, either. The Holy Spirit demonstrates the bankruptcy of human values by showing the world that God's verdict concerning Jesus was completely different from its own. The resurrection and ascension of Christ are God's seal of approval on His life and work. A good example of this activity is found in the life of Pontius Pilate. His experience with the death and resurrection of Jesus left him a changed man. Traditions about his later life differ. Whether he later became a believer, as some assert, or whether he went mad and committed suicide, as others insist, is irrelevant. In either case, the Holy Spirit had clearly demonstrated to him the inadequacy of his own values.

3. “In regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned”

Satan seeks to hide from his slaves the ultimate consequences of their slavery. He continually points to the immediate rewards of following him, but says nothing of the final doom to which it leads. The Holy Spirit combats this deception by opening the eyes of the world to the judgment to come by demonstrating that Satan was defeated by the work of Christ on the cross. The Pharisees in Matthew 12 saw this judgment as Christ cast out a demon, but their response was to reject the evidence before them and accuse Jesus of casting out demons in the power of Beelzebub. Jesus told them they had committed the unpardonable sin, passing beyond the point of no return. By rejecting the Spirit’s witness, they had blasphemed the Spirit.

The case of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8 is similar. His eyes were opened to the defeat of Satan by the greater power of Christ as displayed by the work of the Holy Spirit. While his response was outwardly positive, his false motives showed he did not take that judgment seriously, and ultimately, according to ancient tradition, he became one of the leading teachers of the Gnostic heresy.

Conclusion

If time remains, you may want to do question #1 from the take-home paper as a class. If not, draw the applications indicated in the Lesson Background, being sure to relate them to the skit with which the lesson opened.

SKIT

“THE WORLD ON TRIAL” (Based on Romans 1-3)

Characters: Judge
Prosecutor
Mr./Miss Ignorant
Mr./Miss Moral
Mr./Miss Religious

JUDGE: This court is now in session. Will the Prosecutor please read the charges against the defendants.

PROSECUTOR: Your Honor, the defendants are charged with willful rebellion against the Lord of the Universe. Let it be known that the prosecution intends to seek the death penalty.

JUDGE: Very well. The defendants will be permitted to speak in their own behalf. The first witness may take the stand. [*Mr./Miss Ignorant rises and comes to the witness stand*] Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

IGNORANT: I'll tell the truth, but I can't very well swear by God if I don't know who He is, can I? I thought that was the whole point of this trial.

JUDGE: Hardly. You're on trial here, not God. But I suppose we should hear your testimony anyway. Prosecutor, you may ask your questions.

PROSECUTOR: You have been charged with a serious capital offense. Do you or do you not admit to rebellion against God?

IGNORANT: I don't even know who God is. I suppose I might have done something to offend Him at some time, but you can't hold me accountable for breaking a law I know nothing about.

PROSECUTOR: You claim to know nothing of God. Is it not true that you practice worship?

IGNORANT: Of course I do, but . . .

PROSECUTOR: Just answer yes or no, please. Do you worship?

IGNORANT: Yes.

PROSECUTOR: I maintain, Your Honor, that the very fact that Mr./Miss Ignorant engages in worship is sufficient to show that his/her claim to ignorance of God is a lie. In fact, it makes his/her guilt greater, since he/she obviously has perverted the truth of the true God into something far less. His/Her sin is therefore deliberate, and worthy of death.

JUDGE: You may step down. The next witness may now take the stand. [*Mr./Miss Moral takes a seat in the witness stand*] Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

MORAL: Of course. I always tell the truth.

JUDGE: You may question the witness.

PROSECUTOR: I notice that you, like Mr./Miss Ignorant, have pled “not guilty” to the charge against you. Do you, too, think you can convince this court that you have no knowledge of God?

MORAL: No, I’ve heard of God, but that’s really beside the point. The fact of the matter is that I can’t see why God would be upset with me. I’ve always lived a good life. It’s ridiculous to charge me with something as serious as rebellion. I demand that my case be thrown out of court.

JUDGE: I’m afraid that’s not an option.

PROSECUTOR: Do you mean to tell me you’ve never sinned?

MORAL: I suppose that depends on what you mean by sin. I’ve never done anything really bad. Of course I make mistakes occasionally, but everybody does. Surely God wouldn’t demand the impossible. He wouldn’t expect more from me than I could give. And I’ve always done my best.

PROSECUTOR: Let me ask you another question. Do you have a conscience?

MORAL: Of course. Doesn’t everyone?

PROSECUTOR: Does your conscience ever bother you? Ever tell you that you’ve done something wrong?

MORAL: Sometimes.

PROSECUTOR: Does your conscience ever tell you not to do something you are about to do?

MORAL: Yes.

PROSECUTOR: Do you sometimes go ahead and do it anyway?

MORAL: (*Uncomfortably*) Once in a while.

PROSECUTOR: Your Honor, I maintain that the defendant has condemned himself/herself out of his/her own mouth. One who violates his own conscience cannot claim always to have done his best. I assert that this defendant is guilty of willful rebellion against God.

JUDGE: You may step down. Next witness, please. [*Mr./Miss Religious takes the stand*]
Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you
God?

RELIGIOUS: Yes, sir/ma'am. I'll have you know I've been a God-fearing man/woman all my
life.

JUDGE: You may question the witness.

PROSECUTOR: Like the others, you have pled "not guilty" to the charge against you. You know the
Bible. Do you claim you have never sinned against God?

RELIGIOUS: Of course not. I've sinned many times. It's the charge of rebellion I'm not guilty
of.

PROSECUTOR: There's a difference between sin and rebellion?

RELIGIOUS: Sure. The second is serious, while the first isn't. Rebellion keeps you out of
heaven, but sin doesn't.

PROSECUTOR: Why do you think God would let a sinner into heaven?

RELIGIOUS: Why, because of the good things I've done, of course. I go to church, give money
to good causes, pay my taxes, and I'm a reasonably nice person. A few paltry sins
can't possibly outweigh all the good I've done for God.

PROSECUTOR: But was it really done for God? I maintain that those things weren't done for God
at all, but for yourself. You did them to earn your way to heaven, not out of love
for God. Good things done for wrong reasons are in themselves sin. Your Honor,
this defendant is the most guilty of all. Imagine the presumption of a person who
thinks he/she can earn God's blessing!

JUDGE: Thank you. You may step down. [*Mr./Miss Religious returns to seat*] The
defendants will now rise for sentencing. I have considered your testimonies
carefully, and am prepared to render my verdict. It is as follows: "All are alike
under sin. There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who
understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together
become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are
open graves, their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips.
Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood,
ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is
no fear of God before their eyes...The whole world is held accountable to God..., for
all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This court stands adjourned.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE WORLD

1. Read through Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:22-36. How does Peter incorporate the three ways in which the Holy Spirit is said to convict the world in John 16:8-11 into his sermon?
2. John 16:14 indicates that the role of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ, not Himself. How do the three areas examined in John 16:8-11 contribute to this role? How does the Spirit convict the world as He glorifies the Son?
3. Read Romans 1:18-3:23. This passage provided the basis for the skit used in class this week. Of what three kinds of people does the passage speak, and how does the Holy Spirit convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment?

WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

Lesson Aim

To show students the variety of ministries carried on by the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Memory Verse

John 16:11 - “And in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”

Lesson Background

Last week we spent time looking at the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. We saw that the Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and that some respond to that conviction with denial and further hardening, while others are moved to repentance by the Spirit’s work.

It is with the latter group of people that today’s lesson is concerned. We will be looking at the work of the Spirit in God’s children, both individually and as a body. Obviously, this is a subject with which the Scriptures deal at much greater length than the one considered last week. As a result, the lesson, much like the one on the attributes of God or that covering the priestly work of Christ, can only survey the ground of a very complex subject.

Though many of the issues raised will involve individual applications of various kinds, the major application of the lesson lies in the area of assurance. Those who are believers should be able to derive considerable comfort from a description of the Spirit’s work, for they will be able to recognize many things that are occurring in their own lives. But the lesson should also be helpful in undermining false professions of faith. It should be made clear to the students that “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does

not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9), and that one who does not see the work of the Spirit in his life can have no assurance of the Spirit’s presence. Presumption is a great stumblingblock to many, and must be undermined.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by asking your students this question: “How can a person tell if the Holy Spirit is living within him?” This should generate some interesting answers, especially if you probe a bit to force the students to defend the uniqueness of their answers. (Examples: If a student says, “The Holy Spirit makes you live a better life,” ask how that life differs from that of a moral Jew or even an atheist; if a student says, “He gives you a feeling of inner peace,” ask how that peace differs from that achieved through Transcendental Meditation or yoga.) Most of the answers you get will probably be feeling-oriented (NOTE: You may get better participation, depending on your group, if you have the students write their answers initially before sharing them with the class), and most of the students will be hard-pressed to defend the uniqueness of their answers in relationship to the Spirit of God. Explain that today’s lesson involves finding an answer to that question from Scripture. It should be noted that the work of the Spirit in believers has both individual and corporate manifestations.

1. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Individual Believers

Here we will be looking at a series of key words used in Scripture to describe the Spirit’s work.

A. Regeneration (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; II Corinthians 5:17)

The New Birth is the work of the Spirit. Students should note from the passages that regeneration is a sovereign work, not a cooperative one; that the Spirit, like the wind, is invisible but produces results that are very visible; and that the change made by the work of the Spirit is of a radical nature - not an improvement of what was already there, but a total renovation.

B. Baptism (I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:5)

The baptism of the Spirit occurs at conversion. It involves being initiated into the realm of spiritual things. Contrary to what some would teach, this has nothing to do with speaking in tongues (see Romans 8:9, cf. I Corinthians 12:30).

C. Indwelling (John 7:37-39; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 6:19)

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers is permanent. It results, not from our labor or faithfulness, but from the saving work of Christ on the cross.

D. Sealing (II Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30; II Timothy 2:19)

This term refers to the ancient practice of sealing official documents with wax bearing the royal imprint. The idea connotes several things:

i. Ownership

The seal on a document showed to whom it belonged. Only documents bearing the king's official seal bore his authority. Similarly, the Spirit is God's mark of ownership placed upon His people.

ii. Security

Something sealed with the king's seal could not lawfully be opened without his permission (thus the Sanhedrin used Pilate's seal for Jesus' tomb). In the same way, one who possesses the Spirit may not be tampered with apart from God's permission (cf. Job 1).

iii. Genuineness

The royal seal distinguished official documents from forgeries. It is the presence of the Spirit of God that distinguishes between a true believer and a false professor.

iv. Finality

A sealed document, like the law of the Medes and the Persians, could not be altered. When God places His Spirit in a person, such a decision is irrevocable.

E. Providing a Deposit (II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14)

In the first century, when a transaction was made involving gradual payment, the transaction would be established by the exchange of a portion of what was to be given, symbolic of the whole (a clump of dirt, a pouch of grain, etc.). By picturing the Spirit as such a deposit, Scripture indicates that Christians now have a foretaste of what they will later experience fully in heaven. This image also speaks of security, since if a person were to break such a contract, his deposit would be forfeited.

F. Filling (Acts 2:4; 4:31; Ephesians 5:18)

The filling of the Spirit is not an experience coextensive with the Spirit's indwelling, nor is it permanent, or it would not be commanded by Paul of those who are saved. The key to understanding this term is the matter of control. In the same way a drunken man is "under the influence" of alcohol, so a Spirit-filled person is under the Spirit's control. The need for yielding to this control is continuous, as indicated by the verb tense in Ephesians 5:18.

G. Producing Fruit (Ephesians 5:22-23)

The Spirit does this work in believers. These graces are no more a result of human labor than are the fruits on a tree the product of the tree's concerted effort. One who has the Spirit will always produce this fruit, though in varying degrees.

H. Leading (Romans 8:14)

The Spirit guides God's people, not through some indefinable "feeling of peace" or direction, but through the Word of God.

2. The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church

We don't have time to examine this area with any degree of thoroughness, but the following should be noted.

A. Building (I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:2)

The Holy Spirit incorporates those whom He regenerates into the Church and arranges the component parts according to His sovereign will. Everyone who is saved belongs to the Church. (Point out to students that not all may belong to a local church, although they should.)

B. Administering (Acts 13:2; 20:28; Ephesians 4:11-12)

It is the Spirit of God who appoints leaders in the church, and then directs those leaders as they oversee the work.

C. Giving Gifts (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4)

Though spiritual gifts are given to each individual Christian, they are given for the benefit of the Body of Christ. Spiritual gifts involve capacities for service and allow the members of the Church to build up and complement one another.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by challenging students to examine themselves with regard to the presence of the Spirit's work, deriving comfort where it is present and warning where no evidence exists.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

1. How does the work of the Holy Spirit in the church build upon the work He carries out in the world (which we examined last Sunday)?
2. How does the Spirit deal differently with Christians than He does with non-Christians?
3. Based on what you learned this week about the work of the Spirit, how may a person discern whether or not he is truly a Christian? In what ways may the Holy Spirit be a source of assurance to Christians?
4. What does I Corinthians 12 indicate to you about what your relationship to your local church should be?