

Student's Guide

# A GUIDE TO CHRISTIAN BELIEFS



Explore Christian doctrine

I. HOWARD MARSHALL

A Guide to Christian Beliefs  
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# Overview

Title: A Guide to Christian Beliefs

Speaker: Dr. I. Howard Marshall.

Every Christian ought to have a working knowledge of what they believe and how it impacts their lives. We all have a theology, we all have a set of core beliefs that control how we think and how we behave. But do you know what you believe? Do you know what is driving your thought and actions? Professor Marshall wrote this book when he was 27 years old as a way to collect his thoughts and make up his mind on the basics of his faith, and we are thankful that he has shared his work with us. The chapters were read by Gary Leonard and Bill Mounce; Professor Marshall passed away a few years ago. Prof. Marshall is Scottish, and hence you will hear and see Britishisms in both grammar and spelling.

## REQUIREMENTS

1. 8 sessions
2. 5 hours 10 minutes

## PREREQUISITES

None

## FORMAT

Video and audio

# BiblicalTraining.org

BiblicalTraining.org is not-for-profit ministry that gives all people access to a world-class Christian education at no cost. Our classes range from new believers to biblical literacy (“Foundations”), deeper Bible study (“Academy”), and seminary-level training (“Institute”).

We are a 501(c)3 not-for-profit and rely solely on the donations of our users. All donations are tax deductible according to the current US tax codes.

## DISTINCTIVES

**World class.** All Bible classes are taught by world-class professors from major seminaries.

**Holistic.** We want to see students move through content to deep reflection and application.

**Configurable.** Ministries can use BT lectures as well as their own to design their educational program.

**Accessible.** BiblicalTraining is a web-based ministry whose content is provided at no cost.

**Community-based.** We encourage people to learn together, in mentor/apprentice relationships.

**Broadly evangelical.** Our materials are broadly evangelical, governed by our Statement of Faith, and are not tied to any one church, denomination or tradition.

**Partners.** We provide the content and delivery mechanisms, and our partner organizations provide the community and mentoring.

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# Your Speaker

Ian Howard Marshall (born 1934) is Professor Emeritus of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He was formerly the chair of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical and Theological Research; he was also president of the British New Testament Society and chair of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians. Marshall identifies as an Evangelical Methodist. He is the author of numerous publications, including 2005 Gold Medallion Book Award winner *New Testament Theology*.

Marshall's main interests in research have been the Gospel of Luke and Acts, the Pastoral Epistles, and aspects of New Testament theology. He has been particularly concerned with the work of Luke as both historian and theologian. He contributed to a New Testament introduction for students and edited a revision and updating of Moulton and Geden's *Concordance to the Greek New Testament* so that it can be used with the current major editions of the Greek New Testament as well as with older editions.

# Student's Guide

We are pleased that you have chosen to use materials from BiblicalTraining.org. We trust that you will find them to be of the highest quality and truly helpful in your own spiritual growth and that of your church. Please read through the following guidelines; they will help you make the best use of this guide.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

**Listen or watch the lesson.** The lesson for each chapter is designed to be listened to outside of your meeting. Each lesson lasts for an hour. This is a crucial step. If the meeting time with your fellow students is going to be productive and encouraging, everyone in the group needs to have listened to and wrestled with the lesson.

**Take notes.** This guide has the outline for each lesson with a summary of the teaching for each major point. If you are unable to take notes while listening to the lesson, please work through the guide at some point before your meeting.

**Questions.** Each chapter closes with a series of questions. Some of the questions are data based, confirming that you understand the information. Other questions are more reflective, helping you move beyond the important accumulation of knowledge to challenging you to think through what you are learning about God, yourself and others, and finally to application. Our encouragement is to think through your answers before your meeting and then use the meeting to share your thoughts and interact with others.

**Meeting.** Meet together with your group.

## **MEETING TOGETHER**

While some people may have to study on their own, we strongly recommend finding a group with which you can study.

A group provides encouragement to finish the class.

Interacting with others, their understanding and insight, is the most effective way to sharpen your own thoughts and beliefs.

Just as you will need the help of others from time to time, so also they will need your help.

# Mentor's Guide

If you are leading the group or mentoring an individual, here are some suggestions that should help you.

**Your role is to facilitate.** This is not an opportunity for you to teach. In fact, the less visible role you take, the better. Your role is to listen and bring out the best in the other people.

**Preparation.** Be sure to have done your homework thoroughly. Have listened to the lesson and think carefully through the questions. Have an answer for each question that will get the conversation going. A great question is, "What is the Lord teaching you this week?"

**Creativity.** What works to help one person understand may not help another. So listen to the conversation and pray that the Lord help you bring out the greatest interaction among all the people.

**Correct error.** This is difficult. If someone says something that isn't right, you don't want to come down on them, telling them they are wrong and shutting down their participation. On the other hand, if you let an obvious error pass, the rest of the group may think you agree and what was said was correct. So look for gracious ways to suggest that perhaps the person's comment was incorrect.

**Focus.** Stay focused on Jesus and the Bible, not on church or religious traditions.

**Lead the discussion.** People don't want to listen to a sharing of common ignorance. Lead by asking questions that will prompt others to think.

**Silence.** Don't be afraid of silence. It may mean nothing more than people are thinking. But if the conversation lags, then ask thought-provoking questions to get the discussion started, and then step out of the way.

**Discipleship.** Be acutely aware of how you can mentor the

people in the group. Meet with them for coffee. Share some life with them. Jesus' Great Commission is to teach people to obey, and the only way this happens is in relationship.

**Different perspectives.** People process information and express themselves in different ways based on their background, previous experience, culture, religion and other factors. Encourage an atmosphere that allows people to share honestly and respectfully.

**Privacy.** All discussions are private, not to be shared outside the group unless otherwise specified.

**Goal.** The goal of this study is not just increased knowledge; it is transformation. Don't be content with people getting the "right" answers. The Pharisees got the "right" answer, and many of them never made it to heaven (Matt 5:20).

**Relationships.** Share everyone's name, email and phone number so people can communicate during the week and follow up on prayer requests. You may want to set up a way to share throughout the week using Slack or WhatsApp.

**Finish well.** Encourage the people to make the necessary commitment to do the work, think reflectively over the questions, and complete the class.

**Prayer.** Begin and end every meeting with prayer. Please don't do the quick "one-prayer-covers-all" approach. Manage the time so all of you can pray over what you have learned and with what you have been challenged. Pray regularly for each individual in the meeting.

# 1

## Why Study Christian Doctrine

### Lesson Overview

I. Howard Marshall introduces the topic of Christian theology by explaining the difference between the study of theology and religious studies.

#### WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

Christian theology is what Christians believe about God.

The Bible is the basic and normative source for Christian doctrine. Thus, Christian theology expresses what Christians *ought* to believe on the basis of God's revelation.

## **CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND BIBLE STUDY**

The Bible is a doctrinal book, and it cannot be studied without some reference to that fact.

In order to understand what the Bible says on any topic, it is necessary to assemble all the relevant passages, compare them with one another and so arrive at a comprehensive statement of the teaching of the Bible.

A systematic discussion of Christian theology will take the student to many sources of knowledge and areas of thinking.

## THE USE OF THE BIBLE IN THEOLOGY

How is the Bible to be used in the study of Christian doctrine?

### **1. The Bible is the principal source for the theologian.**

Consequently, all other sources of knowledge about God must be tested by the Bible.

### **2. We need to study the message of the Bible as a whole.**

We must interpret the various individual parts of the Bible in their contexts.

### **3. We should not despise the many helps to the study of the Bible that exist.**

There is a vast secondary literature in which the collective wisdom of God's people is to be found.

#### **4. We need the guidance of the Spirit.**

A willingness to learn humbly from the Spirit of God is indispensable to the theologian, lest he be led astray by the pride and self-sufficiency of the human mind.

### **THE USES OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

#### **1. Keeps us from falling into error.**

Groups have been led astray because they did not take the study of doctrine seriously.

#### **2. Enables us to grow in faith and understanding.**

Although the study of Christian doctrine can be merely a matter of the mind, the mind can be the route by which the Word of God reaches the heart and influences the life.







# 2

## Our Knowledge of God

### Lesson Overview

Christian doctrine tells us what Christians believe about God. But before we can discuss what we believe about God , we must tackle the preliminary question of how we come to know about God.

#### **REVELATION IN NATURE (ISAIAH 40)**

In almost every age and culture people have been led to believe in some power or powers greater than themselves through considering the nature of the world around them (cf. Psalm 19).

The every fact that there is a world at all has led people to ask whether it came into existence by itself or does it not suggest the activity of a creator.

The fact that although the universe is material in composition, there is nevertheless mental and spiritual activity in it; does this not point to the existence of a moral and spiritual being as the creator of the universe?

Even though Paul believed that creation reveals God, he recognized that human minds were blind to its significance (Romans 1:18-23). Clearly we must look for the possibility of other evidence.

## **REVELATION IN HISTORY (PSALM 78)**

We have a revelation of God that demonstrates his concern for people and displays his moral judgment on the world; this takes us a lot further than revelation in nature.

## **REVELATION IN JESUS CHRIST (JOHN 5:19-47)**

The coming of Jesus was the supreme manifestation and fulfillment of the revelation that God had begun to make in the life of Israel.

In Jesus Christ revelation took a personal form. It was no longer a case of merely seeing the effects of God's activity in nature or history.

## **REVELATION IN THE BIBLE (REVELATION 1)**

Our understanding of biblical events depends on the interpretation of these events by people who were inspired by God to recognize and comment on their significance.

Revelation took place both in the events and in the communication of the significance of those events to the biblical writers.

The Bible is historical record and explanatory commentary woven into one; and it is because of this dual character that it constitutes God's revelation to us.

## **THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE (1 TIMOTHY 3:14-17)**

The Bible consists of two parts:

- 1. God's dealings with Israel**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. God's revelation in Jesus and the life of the church**

The process of forming the Bible did not take place all at once, but over a long period of time. Although the task was

complete in principle by the end of the second century, it is not until 367 that we find the first authoritative list of the 27 books of the New Testament as we have them in our Bibles today.

The process of forming the “canon” (or authoritative list) of the books of the Bible was not so much a *conferring* of authority by the church upon these books as a *recognition* of the authority that they inherently possessed.

Although the Bible is a set of human books, nevertheless its several writings claim to be divine in origin. Later writers looking back on earlier writings could describe them as “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16) and state that their authors were people moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20f.).

When the church accepted the canon of Scripture, it was expressly denying the inspiration of other books that dealt with the history of Israel and the early church, but it was equally strongly affirming its conviction that all the book that were accepted were inspired by the Spirit.

## **THE RELIABILITY AND INFALLIBILITY OF THE BIBLE (LUKE 1:1-4)**

The claim that the Bible is fully reliable is based on the attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament and on the witness of the Bible to its own character.

### **1. The Bible is a full and reliable revelation of God.**

It is not meant to be a detailed encyclopedia of factual information on all subjects.

### **2. The Bible is written in popular language.**

Not with twentieth-century scientific terminology.

### **3. The Bible records a developing revelation of God over many centuries to many different people.**

4. The basic outline of biblical history can be shown to be dependable.

5. Many of the alleged difficulties in the Bible are due to our failure to interpret it correctly.

## QUESTIONS

1. How do you balance experience, reason, and God's self-revelation?





# 3

## What Can We Know about God?

### Lesson Overview

In this lesson, Marshall discusses the doctrine of the Trinity and explains some of the characteristics of God.

#### **GOD IN THREE PERSONS (EPHESIANS 1:3-14)**

The Bible reveals God is us in three ways.

#### **1. God the Creator and Lord**

## 2. Jesus

## 3. Spirit God

To speak of God as the Trinity is to affirm that he exists as one God and yet in three Persons, all equally divine.

### **GOD IS SPIRIT (JOHN 4:24)**

The idea that God is free from physical limitations, and so is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present, is bound up with the thought that he is spirit.

God's love for the world is then an extension of this eternal loving relationship within the Trinity so as to include the world, and human love is meant to be a copy of this love (1 John 4:11).

### **GOD IS LIGHT (1 JOHN 1:5)**

God's character as light can express his separateness from us (1 Timothy 6:16), but it can also signify that he gives guidance and direction to us in the darkness of this world (1 John 2:8-11). Above all the symbolism in its purity speaks of the holiness of God.

It is because of our sin that we exclude ourselves from him, for no sinner can stand in the presence of God (Malachi 3:1f.).





# 4

## God and the Universe

### Lesson Overview

In this lesson, Marshall discusses the creation of the universe and then, more closely, at nature of mankind and how they fell into sin.

#### **GOD THE CREATOR (GENESIS 1)**

The biblical account gives us a poetic description of the fact that God created the universe; it lists what can be seen in the world and asserts that everything owes its origin to God.

The biblical doctrine of creation rules out the view that God is to be wholly or partly identified with the universe.

When we turn to the New Testament we find that Jesus Christ is closely linked with God the Father in the work of creation.

## **GOD THE LORD (PSALM 107:148)**

If God created the universe, he must be greater than it.

### **1. Omnipotent**

### **1. Omniscient**

## 2. Omnipresent

The effect of speaking of God in terms of these three rather abstract concepts is thus to bring out the greatness and wisdom of his care for his people, which is available to them at all times and everywhere.

### **THE NATURE OF MANKIND (PSALM 8)**

Humans are the climax and crown of God's creation, for, unlike other creatures, they are the image of God (Genesis 1:26f.).

The chief purpose of mankind's creation has been expressed briefly and memorably in the Westminster Shorter Catechism as "to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

## **THE PROBLEM OF EVIL (GENESIS 3; JOB 24)**

Evil is an irrational quantity in the universe, a surd which cannot be either explained or explained away.

What the Bible does say is, first, that God is implacably opposed to evil so that he is not to be regarded as its origin; second, that God is active to overcome evil and that he has demonstrated this supremely by himself submitting to its effects in the death of Jesus; third, that God is mightier than evil, a fact which he showed in raising Jesus from the dead and which will be shown in his final victory.

## **THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF SIN (ROMANS 1:18-2:16)**

Humans are the climax and crown of God's creation, for, unlike other creatures, they are the image of God (Genesis 1:26f.).

### **1. Rebellion**

## **2. Immorality, injustice, and lack of love**

## **3. Pride, self-sufficiency, and self-centeredness**

The Bible never suggests that sin leads to the loss of a person's essential nature and destiny. Rather, we cease to reflect the character of God as fully as we should.

It should not be forgotten that the existence of evil has "cosmic" effects.

### **A. Sin leads to suffering.**

**B. Sin enslaves**

**C. Sin leads to guilt.**

**D. Sin leads to punishment.**

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Marshall states that the Bible does not contain a scientific cosmology since we would not be able to understand it. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?







# 5

## The Person and Work of Jesus

### LESSON OVERVIEW

The central theme of Christian theology, that which gives it its *Christian* character, is the coming of Jesus into the world as its Savior from sin.

### JESUS CHRIST AS GOD AND MAN (JOHN 1:1-18; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11)

It was necessary for Jesus to be both God and man. Otherwise his work would have been incomplete and unable to meet the deepest needs of the sinner.

We cannot put into words how a person can be both fully divine and fully human; we have no analogies by which to explain it.

If Jesus was the Son of God, we need not be surprised if both his entry into the world and his departure from it were not like those of other people.

## **THE MINISTRY OF JESUS (MARK 1:14-45; LUKE 4:14-30)**

We can sum up the presentation of Jesus in the Gospels in some five aspects.

### **1. Jesus came to proclaim the *Kingship of God*.**

2. Jesus was the *Messiah*.

3. Jesus understood his task as the *Suffering Servant*.

4. Jesus saw his task as the *Deliverer*.

5. Jesus is the *Revelation of God*.

## **THE NEED FOR THE CROSS (EPHESIANS 2:1-16)**

In a very real sense, God has the difficulty that he cannot condone sin and yet he longs to restore sinful people to his favor. It is at the cross that all the barriers between God and mankind are broken down.

## **THE CROSS SHOWS GOD'S LOVE (1 JOHN 4:7-12)**

The cross shows us love in action, God actually doing something to provide our salvation, and only because it is that kind of love has it the power to win us back to God.

## **THE CROSS AS A SACRIFICIAL OFFERING (HEBREWS 9)**

A sacrifice can be regarded as a gift to God to make up for a fault, but, at a deeper level, it is the bearing of penalty due to sin to save the sinner from bearing the penalty himself.





# 6

## The Life of the Christian

### LESSON OVERVIEW

In this section, Marshall begins by looking at two general words which are used to describe our experience as Christians; then discusses four different aspects of Christian life; and finally considers the nature of our response to God's gift of salvation and eternal life.

### SALVATION (1 PETER 1:3-12)

The verb "to be saved" is used in all three tenses.

#### 1. Have been saved

## 2. Being saved

## 3. Will be saved

Negatively, it is salvation *from* sin and the wrath of God: to “save” is in effect to “rescue” or “deliver” people from an unpleasant fate. Positively, salvation brings us *into* a knowledge of God (1 Timothy 2:4).

### **ETERNAL LIFE (JOHN 6:27-71)**

Eternal life can in fact be defined as the experience of knowing God (John 17:3).

Our present life as Christians is a foretaste of the life of heaven. Here and now we can know God and experience his love (John 11:25f.; 1 Timothy 4:8; 1 John 3:14; 5:11).

## **PEACE WITH GOD (EPHESIANS 2:11-18)**

Because of what God has done, sinners no longer need to try to do good works as a means of pleasing God and winning salvation (Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-10).

### **1. Justification**

Justification is the technical term for the gracious act of God in pardoning sinners and restoring them to a right relationship with himself.

## 2. Forgiveness

Forgiveness occurs when someone whom we have offended agrees to not hold it against us.

## 3. Reconciliation

Those who have been justified by faith enjoy peace with God. (Romans 5:1).

## SONS OF GOD (MATTHEW 6:24-34)

The act whereby people enter into peace with God and become his children is such a decisive one that it can be described as a *conversion* (Matthew 18:1-4).

## 1. New Birth

New birth is the work of God himself who implants the seed of a new, divine life within us through his Word and his Spirit (John 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23).

## 2. Adoption

We cannot find our way into God's family, but only if the Father is willing to adopt us as his children. When he does this, we have exactly the same privileges as if we had been born into the family.

## **UNION WITH CHRIST (JOHN 15:1-11; ROMANS 6)**

Paul speaks of Christ being in the believer (Romans 8:10; Colossians 1:27). They can say that in effect their own self has died and now Christ lives in them (Galatians 2:20).

## **POSSESSION OF THE SPIRIT (ROMANS 8:1-27)**

The Spirit who takes possession of a person when they become a Christian and who continually strengthens them to live the Christian life (Ephesians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:7) communicates to our hearts the assurance that we truly belong to God and can call him Father.

## **THE HUMAN RESPONSE (COLOSSIANS 3:1-17)**

Faith is essentially an act of acceptance of what God offers to us.

Negatively, it is *repentance*, a turning away from sin and evil.

Positively, faith is characterized by total *submission* to God.

It follows that both repentance and consecration to God cannot be regarded simply as once-for-all acts by which we become Christians, but as ever-new and continual acts of believers.

## QUESTIONS

1. How should the thought of “eternal life” being a present reality affect the way we live today?





8. Faith includes both acceptance of what God offers, and also repentance from sin and submission to God in Christ. What do you think of this definition? What would be some of the implications if we really believed this?

# 7

## The Christian Community

### Lesson Overview

We must now explore what is meant by the church and what are its functions.

#### **THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH (MATTHEW 16:13-28)**

It is the members of the “invisible” church who have accepted the kingship of God and entered into the blessings of his rule. At the same time, the church is the means by which God extends his rule.

The establishment of the church was the climax of God’s plan for mankind.

The church can also be said to take over the functions of the temple in the Old Testament.

## **THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH (ACTS 11:19-30)**

### **1. Teaching**

This is clearly not evangelistic preaching, but rather the instruction of the members of the church in their faith and its practical consequences

### **2. Fellowship**

This word means the sharing of several people in a common possession, and it expresses the fundamental idea in the common life of Christians.

### 3. Prayer

Prayer has various aspects. In the New Testament we find the church and its members offering praise to God for all that he has done for them (Acts 2:47), seeking power and guidance (Acts 4:23-31; 13:1-3), and confessing sin and claiming forgiveness (Acts 8:24; Luke 18:13f.).

### 4. Worship

It must be insisted that the church's primary task is not to *worship* God, but to *serve* God, and this it does by carrying out the activities of witness and the building up of Christians in their faith.

## THE MEANS OF GRACE (ACTS 2:37-47)

The sacraments are outward signs through which God makes known his love to us and we pledge ourselves to be his people.

## 1. Baptism

Baptism by water is the outward reception of the grace of God, through which a person is united by faith to Jesus Christ as his Savior and becomes a member of God's people.

The three methods of baptism have been practiced in the Christian church: total immersion in water, affusion, i.e., the pouring of water over a person standing in a pool, and sprinkling, which is a development from affusion.

The practice of baptizing infants grew up early in the church. The analogies of the covenant (cf. Acts 2:39) and circumcision (Colossians 2:11f.) in the Old Testament, the strong sense of family kinship in the New Testament, and the place allotted by Jesus to children in the kingdom of God (Luke 18:15-17), have all combined to suggest to many Christians that the baptism of infants is in line with New Testament teaching, even if it is not explicitly taught.

## **2. The Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper means five things.

**A. The Supper reminds us of Christ's death and its meaning to us.**

**B. The Supper reminds us to be thankful for the gift of salvation.**

**C. The Supper is a foretaste of a heavenly banquet.**

**D. The Supper is a sign that Christians are spiritually nourished by him (John 6:51-58).**

**E. The Supper is a symbol of the unity of God's people.**

### **THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH (EPHESIANS 4:1-16)**

If all Christians are priests, they may also all be regarded as having some task of ministry to perform in the church for its benefit as a whole (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24).

The most important task of ministry in the church is the *preaching of the Word of God* (2 Timothy 4:1-5).







# 8

## The Last Things

In order to understand what is going to happen in the future, we need to recapitulate some of the biblical story so as to put the future into perspective.

### **THE FINAL MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S KINGLY RULE (LUKE 1:69-79)-16)**

God's promises concerning the End began to come to fulfillment in Jesus, and the powers of the future are already at work. The coming of Jesus is proof that God will one day bring the old era to a full end, and it is on the basis of what God has already done that Christians look forward with confidence to the completion of his purpose.

## THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS (LUKE 17:20-37)

The second coming of Jesus in one sense brings nothing new. It merely consummates what has already been begun.

Although the coming of Jesus cannot be calculated in advance, there is nevertheless fairly clear teaching that it will be preceded by the final effort of evil to overcome God.

### 1. Pre-millennialism

This is the view that the second coming of Jesus precedes his reign with his people on the earth for a thousand years, after which will follow the general resurrection of the dead, the day of judgment, and the life of heaven.

### 2. Post-millennialism

This is the view that the second coming follows the ultimate triumph of the gospel in the world, this period of triumph being the millennium.

### 3. A-millennialism

This is the view that the description in Revelation 20 is symbolic and refers to the entire period of the Christ's rule beginning with his ascension and exaltation.

#### **RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD (1 CORINTHIANS 15)**

At the second coming of Christ, believers are raised from the dead and join his triumphal entourage (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 1 Corinthians 15:23, 51-57) and those believers who are still alive at his coming are brought into his presence to meet him as he comes (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

There are some grounds for holding that those whose way of life was such that they would have accepted Christ if they had had the opportunity to do so will be saved at the last day, because the sacrifice of Christ avails for them also (Matthew 25:31ff.; Romans 2:12-16).



