



*BASIC
CHRISTIANITY*

BIBLE  *STUDY*

JOHN STOTT

WITH DALE LARSEN AND SANDY LARSEN

6 STUDIES FOR INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS



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SESSION ONE

ARE YOU READY TO MEET CHRIST?

MARK 10:17-31

I REMEMBER A YOUNG MAN coming to see me when he had just left school and begun work in London. He had given up going to church, he said, because he could not say the Creed without being a hypocrite. He no longer believed it. When he had finished his explanations, I said to him, “If I were to answer your problems to your complete intellectual satisfaction, would you be willing to alter your manner of life?” He smiled slightly and blushed. The answer was clearly “No.” His real problem was not intellectual but moral. This, then, is the spirit in which our search must be conducted. We must cast aside apathy, pride, prejudice, and sin, and seek God—no matter what the consequences.

SESSION GOAL

Respond to God’s initiative toward us by seeking him with an open mind.

READ

Chapter one of *Basic Christianity*

 REFLECT 

- * What are two or three of your biggest questions about Jesus Christ?

- * When you think of total commitment to Christ, what is most unsettling about the idea?

 STUDY 

READ MARK 10:17-31.

¹⁷As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁸“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

²⁰“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

²¹Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²²At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

²⁴The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

²⁸Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

²⁹“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

1. What admirable qualities did the wealthy man display?

The conversation with Jesus clarifies for the wealthy man that “it was not works of charity that would gain for him eternal life; it was becoming identified with Christ.”*

2. How did Jesus reveal the area of unwillingness in the man's heart?

3. When Jesus told the man to sell everything and give away the proceeds, the man responded immediately—by getting up off his knees and walking away. What do you think he had decided that made him do that?

4. Fear is the greatest enemy of truth and can paralyze anyone who searches for truth. How do you see fear—or apathy, pride, prejudice, and sin—working in the rich man's life?

5. Where do you see those hindrances in your own life?

The Gospel of Luke reveals that the man was also a “ruler” (Luke 18:18), no doubt a ruler in the synagogue. This means he would have considered himself learned in the teachings of God.

6. Jesus looked at the man and “loved him.” What encouragement do you draw from Jesus’ attitude toward this seeker?

7. Christ is very open about the cost of following him. What benefits does he promise for those willing to pay that price?

Some Christians give up close relationships and physical security for the sake of telling the good news of Jesus, and they testify to the fact that God provides alternate “home” and “family.” Though persecutions will come too, God has a place and people everywhere for those who follow him.

 **RESPOND** 

- * The rich man asked Jesus a theological question but was not satisfied with the answer. How willing are you to hear and obey the answers Jesus gives to your questions about him?

- * Jesus went right to the point of the wealthy man's greatest obstacle to faith: he asked the man to give away his wealth. If you were that man, what do you think Jesus would ask you to do?

 **PRAY** 

Open your mind and heart to God in Jesus Christ. Tell him that you are ready to be confronted by him no matter how unsettling or inconvenient it is.

*Donald W. Burdick in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Nashville: Southwestern Company, 1962), 1010.

SESSION TWO

THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

JOHN 8:51-59

JESUS CLAIMED an intimate relationship to God—Son to Father. That Jesus claimed this is confirmed by the indignation that he aroused in the religious leaders who opposed him. He “claimed to be the Son of God,” they said. His identification with God was so close that it was natural for him to equate the attitude people had to him with the attitude they had to God. In short,

- * to know him was to know God.
- * to see him was to see God.
- * to believe in him was to believe in God.
- * to receive him was to receive God.
- * to hate him was to hate God.
- * to honor him was to honor God.

SESSION GOAL

Consider the implications of Jesus’ claim to equality with God.

READ

Chapter two of *Basic Christianity*

 REFLECT 

- * Compare and contrast your mental images of God and Jesus.

- * To what extent do you associate your attitude toward Jesus with your attitude toward God?

 STUDY 

READ JOHN 8:51-59.

⁵¹“Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.”

⁵²At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. ⁵³Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

⁵⁴Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

⁵⁷“You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

⁵⁸“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”⁵⁹At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

1. Jesus had a unique claim to special intimacy with God. What examples of his claim do you find in this passage?
2. Why do you think Jesus could say, “Whoever obeys my word will never see death”?
3. How does this claim about power over death show Jesus’ understanding of his own equality with God?

The person “who accepts Jesus has entered into a relationship with God which neither time nor eternity can sever.”*

4. To claim that he existed before Abraham, Jesus could have said, “Before Abraham was born, I *was*.” Instead he said, “I *am*.” To understand the effect of those words on the Jewish

religious leaders, look at how God answered Moses' question about God's name: "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'" (Exodus 3:14). In that light, what does Jesus' use of the present tense say about who he claimed to be?

5. Imagine yourself today hearing a person say the things Jesus said in this passage. What conclusions could you draw about that person? (Think of several alternate conclusions.)

6. What further evidence would you look for in order to evaluate the person's claims?

Jesus "is not simply a courier of revelation like Moses. He *is* revelation."[†]

7. If everything Jesus said here is true, what difference does it make—to the world at large?

To you personally?

 **RESPOND** 

- ✱ If you are not sure you believe what Jesus said about himself, commit yourself to further investigation.

- ✱ If what you have read today has raised some new ideas, trust God to clarify what he wants you to know.

 **PRAY** 

Ask God to show you what to think of Jesus Christ.

*William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 38.

†G. M. Burge, “I Am’ Sayings,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 356 (emphasis added).

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