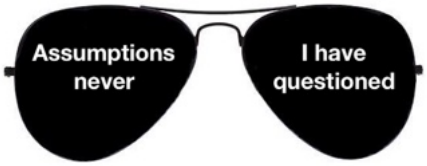
Preparing for the First Century

Our Lenses

We have each learned the Bible and its language through a particular set of lenses. These lenses both *create*, and are *created by*, our belief structures. They are constantly organizing and building upon our previous understandings, whether they are correct or not.



Confirmation Bias
The tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories.

This study is an effort to remove our religious lenses, and contemplate the Bible from a first century perspective. Here we will strive to get underneath today's religious constructs and unearth the original foundations of "Christ," and what that meant to those first believers. While this will at times be critical of today's practices, ultimately I want it to be an encouragement to contemplate the "following of Christ" that was taught by those first messengers.

Paul's Answer to Everything

What if we took off our religious lenses and endeavored to understand Paul's purpose for his letters? What if we strove to understand the time and perspective of those first century recipients? What if we allowed Paul and the other New Testament writers to define the words they used? What if our solutions really were, as Paul stated, "in Christ"?

Years ago I decided to filter everything through one verse:

> For I determined to know nothing, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.—1 Corinthians 2:2 NASB

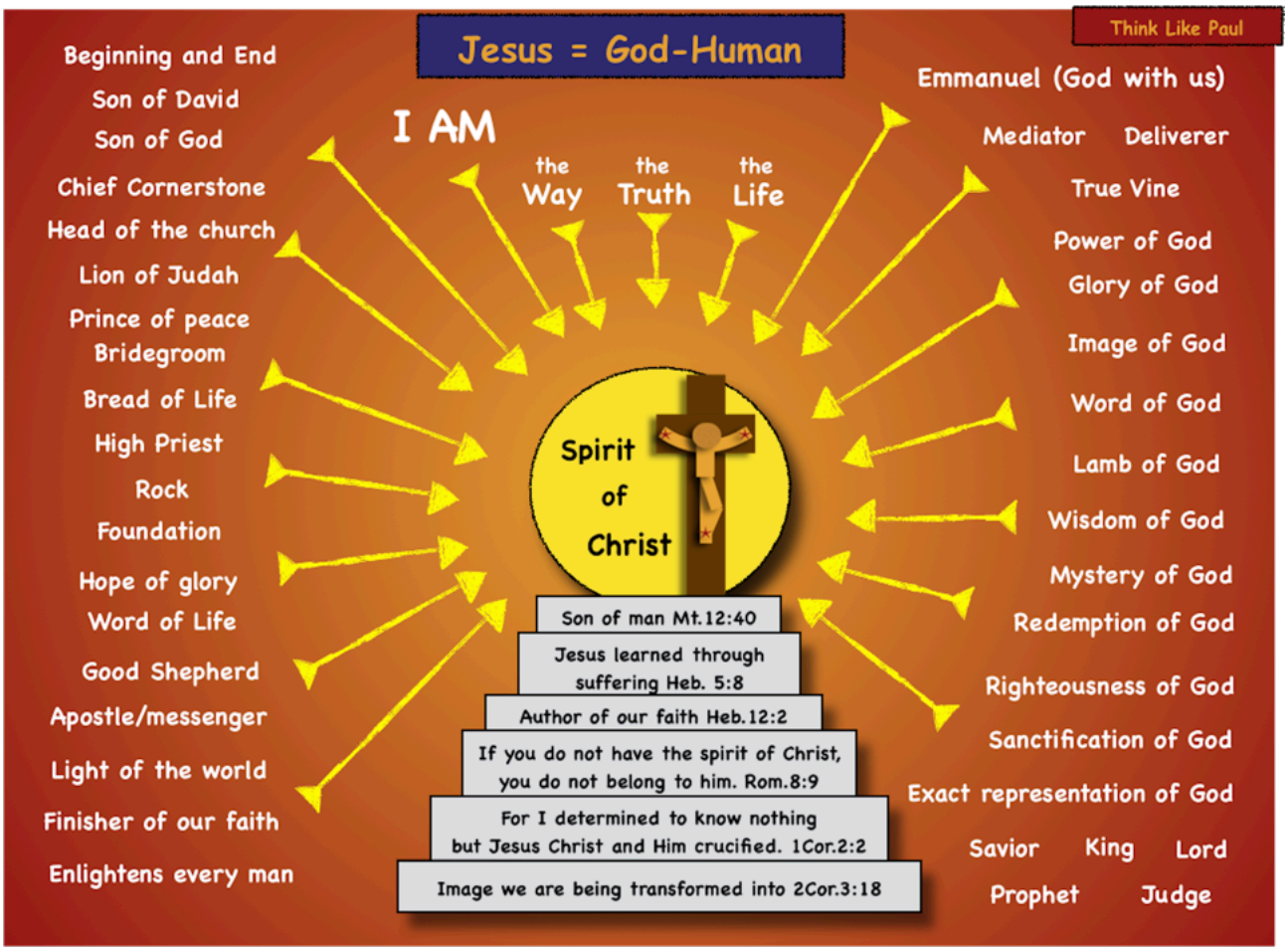


For I determined to know nothing, except for Jesus Christ and Him crucified. —1Corinthians 2:2

Consider the three statements Paul makes in this verse:

(1) He is determined to know Jesus Christ.
(2) He is determined to know Christ crucified.
(3) He has determined to know nothing else.

Paul writes this statement to a very divisive and broken church. The Corinthians were arrogant, boastful, jealous, fleshly, and spiritually immature. But Paul knows the Truth, and repeatedly offers Christ as the solution. He believes that *Christ is the answer to everything*. These studies are built on this premise.



Role of the Bible

The first century letters (the New Testament) are our most significant and trusted record of the first century Christian perspective. We will trust their authenticity and accuracy as those first followers did, but will also not be afraid to challenge some of *today's* thinking. Again, **we are not challenging the Bible, but rather are challenging some of our traditional thoughts and approaches *regarding* the Bible**… So be prepared, for at times, we may need to reevaluate today's teachings that are not aligned with the thoughts and perspectives of what the Apostles taught.

The Purpose of These Studies

These studies are designed to allow the New Testament to speak for itself, so that we may understand the faith, psychology, and mindset of the Apostles. And ultimately, their mindset will help

What Are Your Purposes for these Studies?

Are you looking for *the Truth*?
Are you looking to grow?
Are you looking for tools to help others? Or grow the church?

_____

_____

_____

us better understand the nature and *superiority* of Christ, and what it meant to follow Him.

My purposes for these studies are:

1. to find the Truth
2. to understand the first-century perspective
3. to encourage a Christlike spirit
4. and to encourage you to think

The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge.

—Thomas Berger

The structure of these studies are:

- a series of contextual passages
- questions
- commentary (to tie the ideas together)
- homework (in the back of book)

So Many Questions

At some point you will probably ask yourself "Why are there so many questions?" Well, I'm not really interested in your ability to repeat my thoughts. I want your faith to be *your* faith, and not a recording of mine. And the questions are going to be the key to opening the door to some new answers. I will tell you some of my theories, but I'd rather you understand it through your ability to think exegetically (also, we have too many people teaching their theories without understanding basic exegetical principles). Your growth and your faith need to come from answers that *you* find. My hope is that these studies will stimulate both your mind and heart.

Searching for Their Purpose

There are a few key words that can help us understand their purpose for a particular set of instructions. Noticing the key words of: ***Therefore***, ***so that***, ***in order that***, and ***that***— will help us understand the purpose of their lessons. This will ultimately help us comprehend the role of specific instructions and the spiritual likeness the author wants us to adopt.

Language vs. Meaning

Differences in opinions are never truly reconciled when we are defining our terms differently. We may say 'baptism', 'word', or 'Holy Spirit', but if I define them differently than you, then we may only agree in the verbiage, and not in what they actually represent. Much of today's difficulties are the result of clinging to terminology rather than trying to understand the original meanings of the passages.

This is one of the chief reasons that new Bible translations appear: language is never static, but fluid, alive, and changeable. What makes sense in one time may not make sense in another; usage of a particular word may disappear, or a word's meaning may change entirely…
–Charles Spurgeoun

This study is an effort to get clarity around *their meanings*. It is about understanding the message of "Christ" and what that really meant to those first followers. We want to understand more than their terminology. We want to understand what that terminology

represented to them. We want *their* internal constructs. In these studies we will strive to remedy these linguistic hurdles with a constant questioning of their meanings and purposes.

The message of Paul was a message of God-likeness. It was a message of God's Spirit in humanity.

Christos = Messiah = God in Man

In the New Testament, Christ not only refers to the person/spirit that is in Jesus, but it is also a reference to the spirit that lives in His followers. Christ is found to be active in men prior to the physical existence of Jesus (1Cor. 10:4–5;1Pet. 1:10-11), and is consistently used in contexts where the Spirit is working in man.

Also, the Greek word *Christos* may be translated to either Christ or Christlikeness. So depending upon the context or the need for clarification, I may refer to Christ as "Christlikeness" or the "Spirit of God in man."

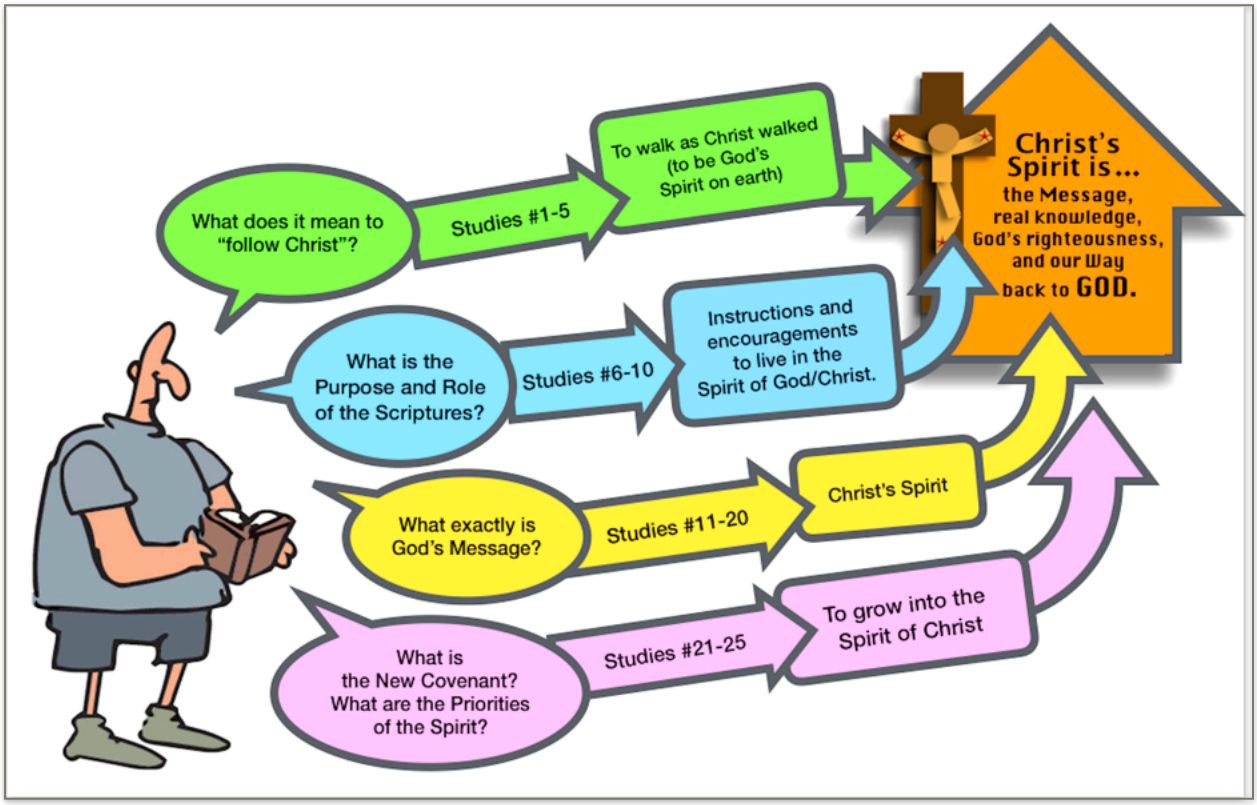
The Greek word "Christos" can mean
Christ (or Christlikeness)
Messiah (or messiah-ness)
Anointed (or anointed-ness)

The Holy Spirit

What if the Holy Spirit was more simple and yet more powerful than anything we have been taught? What if we could recognize this Spirit within ourselves or others? Today, there is much confusion and mystery regarding the Holy Spirit. Some teach it as an internal "knowing" or "feeling," while others teach it as *a following of certain rules or examples*. These studies will not delve into the Holy Spirit until we define their terms and understand their purposes. Once we understand their basic notions and what it meant to *follow Christ*... then we will have a solid foundation for understanding the Holy Spirit.

For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him?
But we have the mind of Christ.
—1 Cor. 2:16 NASB

When we do arrive at the subject of the Holy Spirit and its purposes (Studies #24-25), we will not rely upon opinions or feelings. We will rely upon the emphasis of the Bible —the Alpha and Omega—the person of Christ—the one who has *revealed* and *poured out* the Spirit of God.


What does it mean to "follow Christ"?
Studies #1-5
To walk as Christ walked (to be God's Spirit on earth)
What is the Purpose and Role of the Scriptures?
Studies #6-10
Instructions and encouragements to live in the Spirit of God/Christ.
What exactly is God's Message?
Studies #11-20
Christ's Spirit
What is the New Covenant? What are the Priorities of the Spirit?
Studies #21-25
To grow into the Spirit of Christ
Christ's Spirit is...
the Message, real knowledge, God's righteousness, and our Way back to GOD.

Part 1: How Would Paul Explain “Christianity”?

How is Jesus “the Way”?

Study #1: How Would Jesus Explain “Being Perfect”?
What did they call “perfect”? In what manner was Jesus perfect?

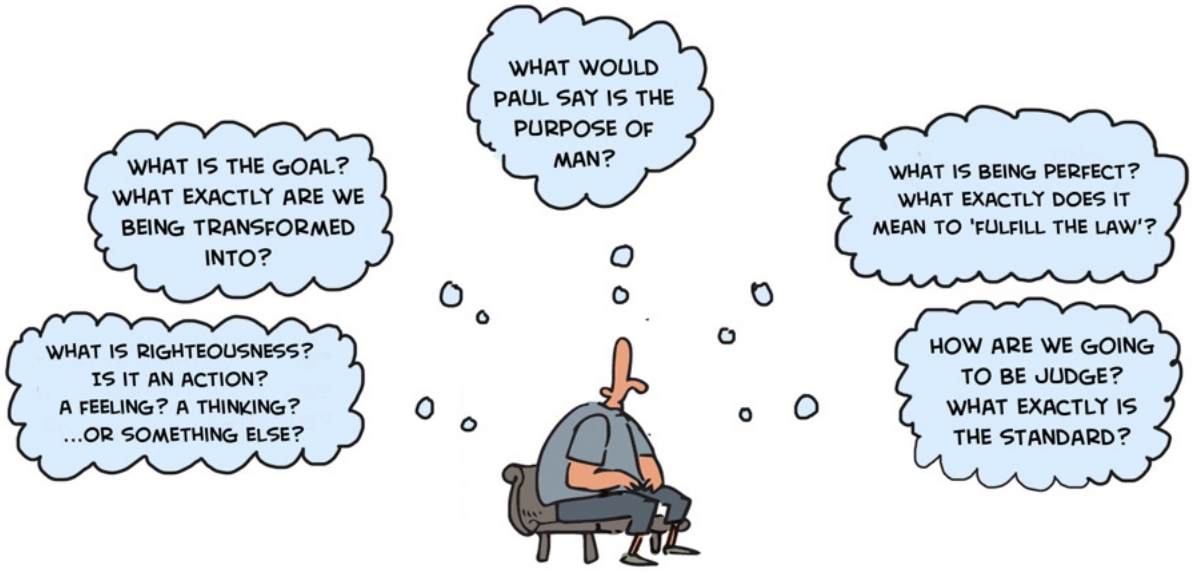
Study #2: How Would Paul Explain “Fulfilling the Law"?
Is it possible to fulfill the Law? If so, how?

Study #3: How Would Paul Explain “Avoiding Judgment”?
What is our standard? What protects us from judgement?

Study #4: How Would Paul Explain “Becoming Righteous”?
What exactly is righteousness? Can we be righteous? If so, how?

Study #5: How Would Paul Explain the “Goal of the Church”?
Why are we here? What is the purpose of man?

Conclusion: Christianity is Following Christ’s Spirit



How is Jesus "the Way"?

When Jesus says "I am the Way," what exactly does He mean? How can a person be a "way"? Is it confessing that He is the Son of God? Is it attendance to a particular church? Is it obedience to a specific set of rules or traditions? What precisely does that mean? How would we know if we are in the "Way"?

> **I am the way,** and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. —John 14:6 ESV

> But this I confess to you, that according to **the Way**, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.
> Acts 24:14-15 ESV

The other day I saw the side of a container truck with the words "Christ is the answer" painted on the side. We Christians confess statements like these regularly… But what do we mean by a statement like that? How would we explain this "Christ is the answer" statement to someone who is suffering with drug addiction, lust, greed, or depression? Or more importantly, how would Jesus or Paul have explained this "Christ as the answer" notion?

Literally "Christ" means "Messiah" or "Anointed One," which certainly describes their thoughts of Jesus … But what does Paul mean when he says: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"? How can the Messiah (or Anointed One) live in him? What does that really mean? One of the breakthroughs that really helped me understand the nature of Christ and what it means to "follow Him," came when I decided to chart the names and descriptions of Christ, and what that may have meant to those who walked with Him.

> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
>
> James 1:22 ESV

I started to see that Paul was referring to something internal—not just internal in himself, but also, in the likeness of Jesus. There was an alignment of priorities and values that they had in common.[3] There was an internal framework that Paul had applied to himself. And it was this framework (set of priorities) that was the force that guided his decisions.

But one of the ideas that became clear was that Jesus was *more* than God. He was also a *very human* being. Not a "human" in a sinful or negative sense, but a human in his heart's capacities, a human in the manner for which God designed us, and maybe even a human in the Garden of Eden sense.

This helped me understand one particular question I've always struggled with: "How can the person of Jesus be 'the way'?"… What does that really mean? Every church claims that "He is

[3] We will look into deeper into this framework in the "Priorities of Christ" and "Testing the Spirits." (studies #21 and #25)

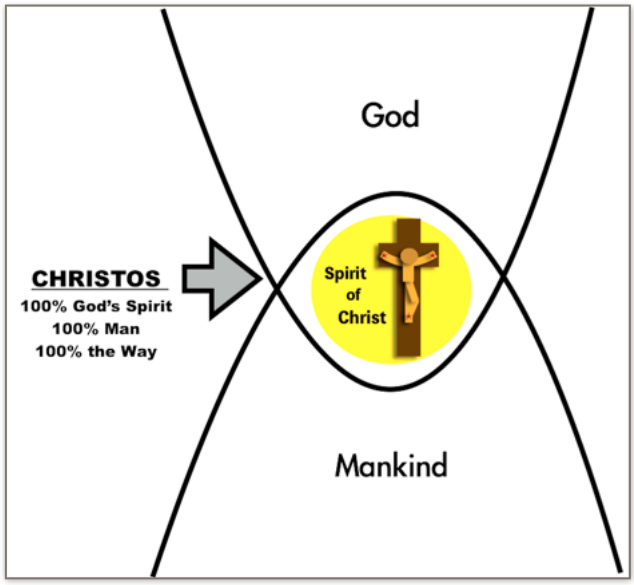
the way," but again, what do they mean by that? Do they mean attendance to their church? Do they mean believing that Jesus came from God? What specifically does that mean? Or more importantly, What did it mean to those in the first century? Is it thinking certain thoughts? If so, which ones? Is it doing certain things? If so, which ones? What does it really mean to "follow Christ"?

From this place I started to see more clearly that Christ represented three notions simultaneously:

1) **100% the likeness of God** (exact representation of God)

2) **100% human** (flesh and blood, learned obedience, suffered, bled, and died)

3) **100% the Way** (our path back to alignment/intimacy with God)



From this notion, "Christ" was/is a spiritual being that we can intimately know, where His likeness *is* "the way." [4]

Today, we tend to place Him as an unknowable being and a likeness that cannot be attained. But these notions seem to demean God's mission of bringing His Spirit to earth:

> I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." —John 17:26 ESV

If God sent His Son to pour out His Spirit upon mankind, then doesn't that imply that, on some significant level, we can know God's Spirit? Doesn't that suggest that in some powerful manner we are just like Jesus? In what manner are we, or can we be, like Him?

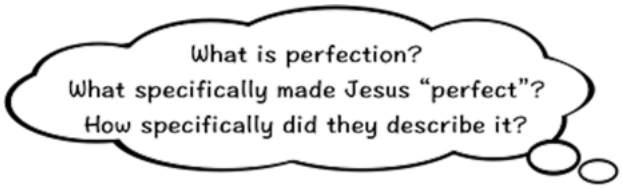
[4] Okay… Then what does that mean? … At the time, my best guess was that it was developing His priorities and values (love, joy, forgiveness…). And though this didn't make Christianity any easier for me, it did seem to make sense with the style and nature of their letters … And pretty much everything else I'd come to understand. In the final studies (21-25), we will contemplate how this Christ-Spirit is more than a set of virtues.



Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.
—Martin Luther King Jr.

Study #1: How Would Jesus Explain "Being Perfect"?

Would you want to hang out with someone who was "perfect"? Would you want to play chess or *Call of Duty* with someone who was perfect? Is this what we mean when we say Jesus was "perfect"?



Today we may describe a meal or a baseball game as "perfect". The dictionary defines it as flawless or free from defect. But is that the manner in which Jesus or the Apostles considered it? Does our definition carry the same meaning as the original Greek?

Strong's Concordance states that perfect (Gr. teleios) means: complete in all its parts; full grown; of age; especially of the completeness of Christian character.

As far as the New Testament records, Jesus only used the word "perfect" (*teleioi*) twice. In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus teaches that we should be perfect as God is perfect.

> You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, **love your enemies** and **pray for those who persecute you**, so that you may be **sons of your Father** who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **therefore be perfect**, **as your heavenly Father is perfect**. NASB

Questions:

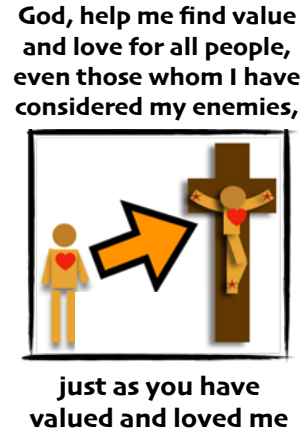
1. "And" and "so that" connects what three ideas?

2. What does Jesus equate with the perfection of the Heavenly Father?

3. How was Jesus perfect?

4. How is the modern notion of perfection different than Jesus'?

5. Is perfection a "doing," or a way of the Spirit?



Here Jesus is clearly equating "perfection" to loving your enemies as God does. Jesus also uses "perfect" (*teleios*) when talking to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22.

> And behold, a man came up to him, saying, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.' He said to him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'All these I have kept. What do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you would be **perfect** (*teleios*), go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. —Matthew 19:16-22 ESV

Questions:

6. In Matthew 19, what actions does Jesus connect with "being perfect"?

7. Is this consistent with the Matthew 5:43-48?

8. Jesus demonstrated another level of love by dying on the cross for his enemies. Why would He love humanity so much?

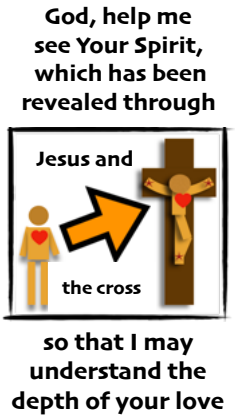
10. How did Christ handle suffering?

> Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, **arm yourselves also with the same purpose**, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. —1 Peter 4:1–2 NASB

11. What purpose was Peter referring to? What was Jesus' purpose? Could His purpose be "be perfect as God is perfect"? (Or "love as God loves"?)

12. How can we "arm ourselves with the same purpose" of Christ?

What would Jesus say?
Perfection is loving your enemies as God does. As it is seen in Jesus, it is a commitment to love regardless of circumstances.



Study #2: How Would Paul Explain "Fulfilling the Law"?

> Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. —Matthew 5:17 NIV

What Jesus declares in regard to the Old Testament laws:

> Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question,* testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang **all** the Law and the Prophets." —Matthew 22:35-40 NKJV

Questions:

1. What verb does He use in these commandments?

2. Which law(s) is Jesus talking about?

Paul and James are the only New Testament writers who use the terminology of "fulfilling the law" in the following references:

> **Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law**. For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law.** —Romans13:8–10 NASB

> For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For **the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself**.' —Galatians 5:13–14 NASB

> Bare one another's burdens, and **thus fulfill the law of Christ**. —Galatians 6:2 ESV

> If you really **fulfill *the* royal law**[5] according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well. —James 2:8 NKJV

[5] (note: 'royal law' literally means 'law of the king' in the original Greek)

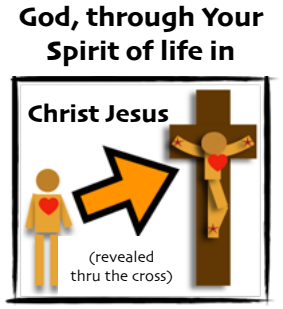
3. What is the theme for "fulfilling the law"?

4. Which of the following is probably the way that Jesus fulfilled the law?
   a) Studying the law, then making sure He lived within its regulations
   b) Striving to not sin
   c) Following all the ordinances of Leviticus
   d) Loving all people, even enemies, despite experiencing humiliation, beatings, scourging, and crucifixion

5. Does fulfilling the law conflict with Jesus' definition of being perfect in Matthew 5:44–48? (Study #1)

Consider some of Paul's thoughts on "law" in relation to the Spirit:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. —Galatians 5:22 NASB
>
> All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.—1 Corinthians. 6:12 NASB
>
> All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own *good,* but that of his neighbor.
> —1 Corinthians 10:23 NASB
>
> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. —Galatians 5:18 NASB



6. According to these passages, what types of activities are lawful for Paul?

7. What do you think is the mindset Paul wants the Galatians and the Corinthians to have?

> Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the **law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free** from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did:* sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, **so that the requirement of the Law might be**

fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
—Romans 8:1–4 NASB

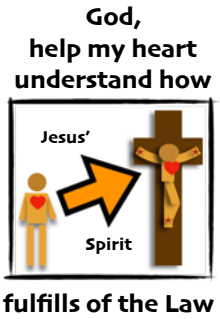
Let's review how Paul connects some of these ideas:

so that - connects a concept with its purpose
might be - declares a potentiality

8. What is the law that sets us free?

9. How does he describe this "law of sin and death"?

10. According to this passage "the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in_____."
    c) Paul
    d) Jesus
    e) us



11. How can the requirement of the Law be fulfilled in us?
    a) by following the examples of the New Testament
    b) by believing that Jesus is the Son of God
    c) by walking according to the Spirit of Christ

What would Paul say?
Jesus "fulfilled the Law" by fully loving God and His neighbor (despite torture and death).

Oh, I don't reject Christ. I love Christ.
It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ…
If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ,
as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today.
—Mahatma Gandhi