

BASIC CHRISTIANITY BY JOHN STOTT
A STUDY GUIDE

PREFACE & CHAPTER 1 – THE RIGHT APPROACH

Meeting agenda: To self-reflect on what assumptions we bring to the table; and to devote ourselves to an honest investigation of the claims of Christianity.

Suggested questions and texts for discussion:

1. What conceptions, impressions, and opinions about Christianity do you currently bring to the table?

Why? What experiences have influenced your opinions?

2. What is your opinion about Jesus?

What do you make of his (and the Christian) claim that he is God who entered into this world in order to save men and women?

3. What is Christianity (according to Christianity)? How does Stott define it (“basic Christianity”)?

“Our starting-point is the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth,” Stott says. And this Jesus claimed to be God himself. Not only that, but after he died, it is claimed that he rose again.

“Is basic Christianity merely an acceptance of this fact?” Stott asks. “No.” Christianity is about more than the claim that Jesus as God and that he rose from the dead. Christianity is a religion of salvation – about rescue. Christianity believes that Jesus was God and that he died and rose again *for our salvation*.

“Jesus of Nazareth is the heaven-sent Savior we sinners need. We need to be forgiven and restored to fellowship with the all-holy God, from who our sins have separated us. We need to be set free from our selfishness and given strength to live up to our ideals. We need to learn to love one another, friend and foe alike. This is the meaning of ‘salvation’. This is what Christ came to win for us by his death and resurrection.” (Stott)

But “basic Christianity” is more than even this. “To assent to his divine person, to acknowledge man’s need of salvation, and to believe in Christ’s saving work are not enough. . . . [W]e have to translate our beliefs into deed.”

“What must we do, then? We must commit ourselves, heart and mind, soul and will, home and life, personally and unreservedly to Jesus Christ. We must humble ourselves before him. We must trust in him as *our* Savior and submit to him as *our* Lord. . . .”

“Such is basic Christianity.”

4. We are severely limited creatures (i.e., we have limited perspective, limited knowledge, etc.). And God is – by definition of being God – altogether beyond our comprehension. How then are we ever to understand things of God, or matters of ultimate importance (e.g., the meaning of life)?

The Christian claim is that we need God to reveal these things to us. And that is precisely what he has done in Christ and the testimony of scripture. He has showed us the way – salvation.

Challenge: If we reject the Bible, what else will serve as a reliable source? Are they reliable considering our severe limitations? Can they answer life's ultimate questions (e.g., the meaning of life)?

5. Do you accept Stott's challenge to seek God diligently, humbly, honestly, and obediently? (Consider the way Stott describes each of these.)

PART 1 – CHRIST’S PERSON

CHAPTERS 2 & 3 – THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST; THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

Meeting agenda: To consider the evidence for Christ, on whom the claims of Christianity rise and fall.

Stott breaks down this evidence into three areas. The first two we will deal with here. The third we will deal with in the next section.

- Chapter 2 – The evidence of Christ’s claims about him.
- Chapter 3 – The evidence of Christ’s character to back those claims.

Suggested questions and texts for discussion:

1. Can Christianity exist without Christ (e.g., if Christ had never lived)?

No.

We might think of Christianity as a system of morals, ethics, or values – something like a philosophy or way of life. In this case, it would seem that Christianity could exist irrespective of Jesus himself. “You don’t need Jesus for Christianity to exist,” it may be thought. “You just need his teaching. That’s the essence of Christianity. Christianity is a life-philosophy or ideal. Jesus may have been the supreme example of that ideal. But the ideal still stands on its own apart from him.”

This, however, is a misunderstanding of Christianity.

First of all, the authority of Jesus’ teaching is bound up with his person and the fact that he is God. Take away the person of Jesus, and you take away the authority of his teachings.

But more importantly Christianity is not a “life-philosophy.” It is not about living a certain way or following a certain set of teachings (although it certainly involves that). Rather, Christianity is a “recue religion,” as Stott has said. It’s about the fact that we need saving, we can’t save ourselves, but that Jesus has done it for us in his death and resurrection.

In other words, if Jesus never lived, died, and rose again, than Christianity does not exist.

The point: If we are to consider the claims of Christianity, we need to consider the person of Christ on whom it is all based.

2. If Jesus is who he says he is (i.e., God become man), what then are the consequences for how we must think about Christianity?

It is true and we are compelled to believe.

As Stott says, “[I]f Jesus Christ can be shown to have been a uniquely divine person, many other problems begin naturally to be solved. The

existence of God is proved and the character of God is revealed if Jesus was divine. Again questions about man's duty and destiny, life after death, the purpose and authority of the Old Testament and the meaning of the cross begin to be answered because Jesus taught about these things, and his teaching must be true if his person is divine."

The point: This is why we begin our inquiry of Christianity with Jesus. It is on him and his claims that Christianity rises and falls.

3. What sort of claims did Jesus make about himself?

Stott breaks down his claims into four types:

- (1) Self-centered teaching – E.g., Jesus taught that God was inaugurating God's kingdom through him, and that people's entrance into that kingdom was based on their response to him; he taught himself as the fulfillment of the scriptures; he called men to follow *him*; he claimed those things for himself that belonged to God alone (e.g., obedience, faith, worship).

Note: Added to this this, as Stott points out, "The most remarkable feature of all this self-centered teaching is that it was uttered by one who insisted on humility in others."

In other words, this wasn't born out of pride. Jesus taught against pride. This was born out of the fact that these claims were true and right.

- (2) Direct claims of being God – Jesus made claims that implied or stated quite clearly that he was God.
- (3) Indirect claims of being God – He did things that belonged only for God to do (e.g., claim forgive sins, give life, teach with absolute authority and truthfulness, to judge the world).
- (4) Dramatized claims – i.e., his miracles. These (a) testify to his divine power. But also (b) Jesus designed many of these as signs that pointed to himself and his uniqueness as God.

4. How would you describe Jesus' character based on the Bible's witness and Stott's comments?

Sinless; and in a category by himself.

Note: "The importance of this claim [i.e., Christ's sinlessness] should be clear. Sin is a congenital disease among men. We are born with its infection in our nature. It is a universal complaint. Therefore if Jesus of Nazareth was

without sin, he was not just man as we know men. If he was sinless, he was distinct from us. He was supernatural.

Stott breaks down the evidence for Christ's impeccable character into four areas:

- (1) That Christ thought of himself as sinless, which is more remarkable when you consider how seriously he took sin and hypocrisy.
- (2) What his closest friends said of him, those who knew him best.
- (3) What even Christ's enemies conceded about Jesus in that their accusations couldn't hold water.
- (4) What we can see for ourselves about Jesus.

5. What do we make of Jesus' claims about himself in light of his impeccable character?

As Stott says, neither claim by itself is conclusive. But when you hold the two claims together, it is hard to escape the weight of their conclusion – Jesus is who he said he was.

Jesus claimed to be God. As C.S. Lewis famously said in his book *Mere Christianity*, there are only three explanations for this:

- (1) Jesus was lying. If this is the case, then Jesus was a bad man. But we find this hard to believe, because his character seems so trustworthy and admirable.
- (2) Jesus was insane. But we find this hard to believe because Jesus does not demonstrate the attributes of an insane person. He seems very reasonable and sane.
- (3) Jesus is who he said he was – God.

The one thing Jesus cannot be is just a plain-old good teacher. Good teachers are not insane about thinking they are divine when they are not. Good teachers do not lie about being divine when they are not.

As Stott says, "The claims [of Jesus about himself] are there. They do not in themselves constitute evidence of deity. The claims may have been false. But some explanation of them must be found. We cannot any longer regard Jesus as simply a great teacher if he was completely mistaken in one of the chief subjects of his teaching – himself."

CHAPTERS 4 – THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Meeting agenda: To consider the evidence for Christ, on whom the claims of Christianity rise and fall.

In chapters 2 and 3 we consider the first two areas of evidence for Christ. Here in chapter 4 we will consider the third area of evidence: Christ's resurrection.

Suggested questions and texts for discussion:

1. What are the objections and evidence for the resurrection of Christ?
 - Appearances & eyewitnesses: Jesus made appearances after his resurrection. And there were hundreds of eyewitnesses. And reminder: many of these eyewitnesses were alive when the Bible wrote about them. If it wasn't true, people could have objected.
 - The body is gone: If Jesus was still dead, why didn't someone produce a body to prove it?
 - Early preaching: No one would have believed the early Christians preaching about Jesus' resurrection if his body was still in the tomb. His body was definitely gone. The question is, What's the proper explanation?
 - Stolen? Some argue that this is because Jesus' body was stolen. But how would they have gotten past the Roman guards and into a tomb secured by large stone?
 - Wrong tomb? If the women or disciples had gone to the wrong tomb initially, certainly someone would have pointed out the correct one at some point.
 - The authorities: Christianity was causing quite a social disruption (see the book of Acts). All the authorities needed to do was produce Jesus' dead body to put an end to it all. If his body existed somewhere, presumably they will have found it (even if it had been stolen) and put an end to it all.
 - Didn't really die? Some argue that Jesus didn't really die. However, the Romans were experts in execution. Furthermore, a Roman soldier pierced Jesus through with a spear to check if he was dead. Besides, Jesus had been through too much for any reasonable person to think he could survive and then escape the guarded and sealed tomb unnoticed.

- Fooled? Deceived? Some argue that the disciples basically fooled themselves into believing Jesus was rose from the dead (like: having hallucinations) because they were so hopeful that he would be resurrected.

However, this is not the picture of the disciples that we find. Rather, they are despairing and distraught. They seem to have a hard time catching on and are even doubtful. Nor would they have expected a crucified and resurrected messiah, given the Jewish beliefs at that time.

Furthermore, sometimes folks suppose that people around that time were more inclined to believe in the resurrection (but we know better today). But this just isn't true. People at that time knew that people didn't come back to life. In other words, this would have been as unexpected then as it is now. And yet the disciples came to believe it.
- The disciples' change: A huge argument in favor of Jesus' resurrection is the otherwise unexplainable change in his disciples from a scared and intimidated band (e.g., Thomas even doubted!) to a group of sold-out followers who were willing to die. What would cause this sort of change except for seeing the resurrected Christ?
- Trustworthy accounts: The Biblical records of Christ's resurrection appear to be honest, not fabricated. For example, they include details one might otherwise remove. E.g., ...
 - The gospel accounts aren't neatly syncretized.
 - The disciples are presented in a poor light, as despairing, unbelieving, doubtful.
 - Women were the first eyewitnesses to the resurrection at a time where men's testimony was worth more. In other words, you wouldn't include this unless it was actually true.

2. If Jesus rose from the dead, how does this change how we must think of Christ and the claims of Christianity?

As Stott says, "Clearly, if it is true, the resurrection has great significance. If Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, then he was beyond dispute a unique figure."

"The argument is not that his resurrection establishes his deity, but that it is consistent with it." And when we couple this with his claims and character, the argument in favor that Jesus is who he said he was only becomes more compelling.

And if Jesus is who he said he was, we are compelled to believe him.

PART 2: MAN'S NEED

CHAPTERS 5 & 6 – THE FACT AND NATURE OF SIN; THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

Meeting agenda: To consider our need to be saved due to our sin.

We have considered the person of Christ. We are now in a position to consider his work of dying and rising to save us.

But before we do that, we must consider the question, Do we *need* saving? And, if so, why?

The Christian conviction is that we need saving because of our sin. It is to this reality that we now turn.

Suggested questions and texts for discussion:

1. According to Christian scriptures, what is sin?

Sin is violating God's law. It is rebelling against God's authority.

It is passively not giving God the worship and reverence he deserves (sin of omission). And it is actively disobeying his will (sin of commission).

Texts: 1 John 3:4; James 4:17.

2. What do you make of the Christian claim that all are infected with sin?

Many of us will push against this idea because we like to think that we and the rest of humanity are generally good (see below). But deep down we know this is not the case. We know from experience that humanity is sinful, and is so seemingly by nature.

E.g., Human history is riddled with war and massacre. We are racist. We exploit. We commit genocide. And afterwards we ask, Who could do something like this? How could this happen? Yet we are naïve, for it's not like these are isolated incidences by which we should be surprised.

Even beyond these sort of severe evils, we know ourselves, that we are inclined to lie and cheat. We are selfish and hurt others. And our children – they do not need to be taught how to behave this way; it comes natural to them.

Texts: 1 Kings 8:46; Ecc 7:20; Rom 3:9-20, 23.

3. How does Christianity challenge the common idea that most of us are generally good people?

Texts: Gen 8:21; Jer 17:9; Eph 2:1-3.

It says that we are by nature sinners, broken and rebellious against God.

Note: We tend to think that we are much better than we are because we use the wrong standard against which to measure ourselves. We consider “being good” to mean, “At least I haven’t done ____.” We create our own standard, which tends to be quite low, and by which we always (coincidentally) meet the mark of “being good.” Or, again, we compare ourselves to others. And since we can always find folks who are worse than use, we feel good about ourselves.

But the Bible holds us to the standard of God. God created us to worship, serve, and obey him perfectly. Nor can God tolerate sin. As such, that is the actual standard by which we are to be judged.

4. What are the consequences of sin?

Stott breaks down these consequences into three categories:

(1) Broken relationship with God – God, who is our perfect and righteous judge, cannot tolerate sin. Thus, as sinners, our original relationship with God has been severed and we are no objects of just judgment.
See Exodus 34:7; Habakkuk 1:13.

(2) Broken relationship with ourselves – Sin is not just something we do. It’s something that infects our nature. We are *sinful*. As such, we are entrapped in our sin. We are broken and pursue self-destructive behaviors.
See Romans 6:20-21.

(3) Broken relationship with others – Our sin affects how we interact with others. As a result of our sin we harm others and are harmed by them. We have strife with others as our sinful selfishness competes with theirs.
See James 4:1-3.

Point: “This exposure of our sin has only one purpose. It is to convince us of our need of Jesus Christ, and to prepare us for an understanding and an acceptance of what he offers. Faith is born of need. We shall never put our trust in Christ until we have first despaired of ourselves.”

PART 3: CHRIST'S WORK

CHAPTERS 7 & 8 – THE DEATH OF CHRIST; THE SALVATION OF CHRIST

Meeting agenda: To consider how God has provided salvation in Christ.

- The subject matter of chapter 7 is Christ's work of dealing with our sin on the Christ that we might be at peace with God. As he introduces the chapter, "Through Jesus Christ the Saviour we can be ... reconciled to God ... made possible by his [Christ's] suffering death."
- In chapter 8 Stott considers two dimensions of the salvation won by Christ – our rescue from the power of sin through the presence of the Holy Spirit; and reconciliation with our fellow humans, as found in the loving church community.

Suggested questions and texts for discussion:

1. According to Christianity, what has Christ's death achieved? (Stott calls this "reconciliation.") What does "reconciliation" mean?

Reconciliation – God is our judge and he is perfect. Due to our sin, then, we were at odds with God – his enemies – and subject to his judgment. To be reconciled to God is to have this broken relationship with God restored, and to be at peace with him.

See Rom 5:1 ("we have peace with God" = reconciliation); Rom 5:11; Col 1:20-22; 2 Cor 5:19.

2. How has Christ achieved this (according to Christianity)?

Through his death.

What exactly has his death achieved?

As Stott observes, "the apostles ... regularly associate Christ's ... death with our *sins*... linking his death with our sins."

What does Jesus' death have to do with our sins?

Jesus takes our sin upon himself, suffering the consequences for our sin, bearing the penalty for our sin, so that we might stand before God as forgiven – guiltless.

In this way, Christ becomes the saving substitute for sinners.

Note: Stott points out a variety of things that hint that Jesus' death was no ordinary death:

- Jesus' great agony before death, seemingly demonstrating that he anticipated facing something great than mere death itself.

- The darkness that surrounded Jesus' death.
- The tearing of the temple veil.
- Jesus' cry to God, "Why have you abandoned me?" seeming to indicate that something deeper was going on beneath the surface, so to say.
- (Or even his resurrection, we might add.)

3. Why was the cross necessary?

In order for us to be made right with God, and thus saved, our sin needed to be dealt with.

4. Consider the following Bible passages. According to each, what did the death of Christ accomplish?

- Isaiah 52:13-53:12 – In suffering, Christ bore our sin in our place.
- 1 Peter 3:18 – Christ suffered for sins. But, seeing he was righteous (sinless), he clearly did not suffer for his own sins, but on behalf of the unrighteous (sinners). He did this in order to "bring those sinners to God" (= reconciliation).
- 2 Cor 5:21 – Christ became associated with our sin (in *our* place); that we might (in *his* place) receive his righteousness.
- Galatians 3:13 – "The righteous curse of the broken law which rests on transgressors was transferred to Jesus on the cross" (Stott; cf. Deut 21:23).

5. Is the cross of Christ compatible with the idea that we can gain acceptance with God through "being a good person"? Can they both be true?

"We must not miss the implication of this. It means that no religious observance or good deeds of ours could ever earn our forgiveness. ...

[T]here is no possibility of reconciling this notion with the cross of Christ. He died to atone for our sins for the simple reason that we cannot atone for them ourselves. If we could, his atoning death would be redundant. Indeed, to claim that we can secure God's favour by our own efforts is an insult to Jesus Christ."

See Gal 2:21.

6. Stott says, "There is no Christianity without the cross?" Do you agree? Why or why not?

Yes, this is true.

This is because Christianity is fundamentally about rescue. As Stott opens chapter 7, "Christianity is a rescue religion."

Christianity is not about self-help. It's not foundationally about ethics or moral improvement. Christianity is not that we "fix" ourselves by just trying harder, implementing certain techniques, or following certain rules. It's that we are broken and can't mend ourselves. We need outside intervention – God.

As we've said, nor can we just take Jesus to be a good, helpful teacher. He claims much more for himself. He sees his mission as centered in the cross. As such, his teaching cannot be separated from the cross. His teaching is actually only rightly understood in light of the cross, as attached to the cross, as something we are enabled to do because of what he does for us on the cross.

On this note, we might consider Stott's point that, although Jesus is an example to us in our death, he must also be more than an example:

"The death of Jesus is more than an inspiring example.... There is no redemption in an example. A pattern cannot secure our pardon. ...

[I]f Christ's death were purely an example, ... our human need would remain unsatisfied. We need more than an example; we need a Saviour. An example can stir our imagination, kindle our idealism and strengthen our resolve, but it cannot cleanse the defilement of our past sins, bring peace to our troubled conscience or reconcile us to God."

7. In chapter 8, Stott talks about the Christian life that Jesus saves us into. What does that Christian life involve?

Stott identifies and discusses two dimensions:

- (a) Our rescue from the power of sin through the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- (b) Our reconciliation with our fellow humans, as found in the loving church community.

PART 4: MAN'S RESPONSE

CHAPTERS 9 & 10 – COUNTING THE COST; REACHING A DECISION

Meeting agenda: To grapple with the question, “What will be my response to Jesus?”

- In chapter 9 Stott considers the implications (i.e., the cost) of deciding to trust in Christ.
- In chapter 10 Stott considers the nature of what it means to trust in Christ.

Suggested questions and texts for discussion:

1. We have examined the Bible's claim that Christ accomplished salvation. Salvation can now be found in him, through what he has done.
But the Bible also teaches that not all will be saved, not all received the salvation that Jesus accomplished.
So what distinguishes those who are saved by Jesus from those who aren't? In other words, what must one do to receive this salvation personally?

Personally trusting in Christ as savior.

Note: Stott makes the point that each of us must personally come to this place of trusting in Christ. There is no such thing as someone who is “automatically” a Christian because we were “raised Christian,” or because we attend church services. The Bible teaches that we are “automatically” – i.e., by nature – at odds with God. Being a Christian is, thus, something we *become*.

2. The Bible describes this response of accepting salvation as faith and repentance.

See Acts 11:18 (repentance); 16:31 (faith or belief); 20:21 (both).

What is faith?

Trusting (relying) solely in Christ and his work on the cross to save you.

Note: And this is more than merely believing certain things to be true about Jesus – believing that he is God and savior. This is to actually *trust* in Jesus as savior, to trust in him to save you personally.

What is repentance?

“Repentance is a definite turn from every thought, word, deed and habit which is known to be wrong. ... It is an inward change of mind and attitude towards sin which leads to a change of behavior.” (Stott)

“A determination to forsake evil and follow Christ.” (Stott)

As Stott says elsewhere, “[T]here can be no following [Christ] without a previous forsaking. To follow Christ is to renounce all lesser loyalties.”

Note: As Stott says, “Not that we make ourselves better before we invite him. On the contrary, it is because we cannot forgive or improve ourselves that we need him to come to us. But we must be willing for him to do whatever rearranging he likes when he has come in.” And this attitude-change is repentance.

Note: Stott uses Rev 3:20 to unpack what it means to receive Christ as one’s personal savior. Some may disagree with his interpretation and use of this verse. But that is not something to get hung up on here. The conclusions and point he draws still stand regardless.

3. What is the cost of choosing to trust in Christ for salvation? (Chapter 9)

Answers our vast. But several of the things Stott mentions are as follows:

- Total allegiance to Christ. Following him as master. Obeying him as Lord. Absolute surrender to Christ.
- Self-denial – “Taking up one’s cross,” being crucified, death to self.
- Renunciation of sin.
- Publicly associating oneself with Christ. Associating oneself with his community (the church).
- Baptism
- Impacted relationships with others as a consequence of being a Christian.
- Restitution of past wrongs.
- A life of ministry and service.
- Sacrifice.
- Lifestyle (e.g., sexual integrity/purity, abstaining from the party scene, etc.)
- Use of our money and time.
- Evangelism.
- Etc.

Quote: “Jesus never concealed the fact that his religion included a demands as well as an offer. Indeed, the demand was total as the offer was free. If he offered men his salvation, he also demanded their submission.” (Stott)

4. What does Mark 8:34-37 mean?

Those who follow Christ and give their allegiance to him must forsake all other allegiances. This forsaking is a sort of dying (“taking up one’s cross” = crucifixion = death); it is to lose who we, as sinful people, are and what we cherish. But it is done in order to gain something of so much more value –

eternal life. Thus, it's paradoxical: our sinful selves die; but this death is life – we gain eternal life.

This is what it means to follow Christ, for Christ to become our savior.

5. Why does the Bible teach this costliness?

The salvation we are talking about is not something that comes in a makes a few, slight, barely-noticeable modifications, meanwhile our life is – generally speaking – unaffected. No, our sin has totally consumed us. As such, Christ's salvation matches the extent of our corruption. This is to be a total overhaul.

We were held under the sway of the dominion of sin. Sinfulness is our norm. Selfishness is our bent. In salvation, Christ disturbs and disrupts this.

Sin was our master. Now Christ's say, "I am your master." We were created to serve the Lord God. And now that is restored in salvation as we are called serving Jesus the Lord God.

This salvation is not something that one can accept from a distance. It's someone one *experiences*. And, where it is genuinely experienced, it will disturb and disrupt us. Our sinful, selfish-selves will be uncomfortable.

This salvation is absolutely free. We do not earn it. It is solely by God's grace. By this salvation also demands everything of us. It will overtake us.

The reason that the Bible teaches this about salvation is because the Bible is honest about salvation.

Jesus' mission was and is to save sinners. And this is the sort of salvation he brings – total, consuming, demanding. He is not interested in anything else. He is not after a false parody of this salvation. As such, he is not interested in entertaining half-hearted, fake, disingenuous followers.

Note: If you claim to be a Christian, and your Christianity does not make you uncomfortable, if it does not disrupt or disturb you, than I'm afraid your Christianity is not Christ's Christianity. You've fashioned a Jesus after your own image. And any Jesus, other than the Biblical Jesus, is not a saving Jesus.

Note: And this isn't to say that there aren't incentives to follow Christ, despite the consequences. As Mark 8 says, "³⁶ ... whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul?"

As Stott says, "Of course it costs to be a Christian; but it costs more not to be."

6. Challenge: What is *your* decision with respect to Jesus?

CHAPTER 11 – BEING A CHRISTIAN

Meeting agenda: To consider what the Christian life looks like after one becomes a Christian.

Suggested questions and texts for discussion:

1. What happens to someone when they trust in Christ?

They are saved. That is, they move from being subject to God's judgment to being forgiven. They are made new. They become a child of God.

See 2 Cor 5:17.

2. What are the unique privileges or benefits of being saved, of being a child of God?

- Being a unique child of God – He is our Father; we are his child.
- Family (church) – Being made a part of his spiritual family.
- Granted new life – We are not who we were; we are new.
- Justification – Being pronounced guiltless and righteous before God's judgment.
- Assurance – Having cross-based confidence that we are saved.
- Discipline – Receiving God's Fatherly correction when we need it.
- The Holy Spirit – The empowering, convicting, assuring, transforming presence of God's very Spirit.
- Etc.

3. If we trust in Christ, is our salvation something that is sure, or is it uncertain? Why or why not?

If we trust in Christ, than our salvation is certain.

This certainty is not based on anything found in us. If that case, if our salvation was dependent on us in anyway, our salvation would be more than questionable. Rather, the certainty of salvation is based solely on the work of Christ.

The cross proves that our salvation is not dependent on us. And any of our failings have already by covered by Christ.

Faith itself is relying on Christ for salvation. So built into the very nature of faith is an assurance that Christ is trustable to save.

See 1 John 1:9; 5:13; Rom 8:31-38.

Note: At the same time, it should be noted, the Bible tells us that this sort of saving trust in Christ *will* have evidence in the way we live our lives. We are not saved by this life. But this life gives evidence to salvation and the legitimacy of our faith. (See James 2:14-26)

4. What does growth in the Christian life look like? What does it involve?

Stott breaks down this growth in terms of (1) growth in our understanding of God and (2) growth in holiness (or dedication to God). This growth in holiness involves love for others and becoming more and more like Christ.

5. What habits or disciplines should we practice as Christians? And why?

- Prayer – We communicate to God, seek his aid, recognize his “Godness,” and acknowledge our dependence.
- Scripture reading – Being conformed further and further according to God’s will as we encounter it in his words.
- Community – Being sharpened and encouraged by fellow Christians who can support us.
- Etc.

6. What is baptism? And why is it important?

In baptism, believers are immersed in water and then lifted up. This is a picture of sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection. As Christ was buried and raised for our salvation, so believers are buried in water and raised out of it in order to express their participation in this salvation found in Jesus’ death and resurrection. They are bound up with his. What he has achieved is theirs.

As such, baptism is a symbol in which God says to the new Christian, “You are associated with Christ; and the salvation that is found in him is yours. His death to sin is yours. His resurrection is life for you.”

See Rom 6:3-4.

As such, baptism is for those who are saved – believers. Baptism has a way of marking out believers. And believers identify themselves as such by being baptized and joining the baptized, believing community – the church.

See Acts 2:42.

7. Why is inclusion and involvement in the local church a necessary component of the Christian life?

Although our salvation is personal, it is not individual (i.e., we are not saved as islands). God is saving us as part of a much larger people – the Church (universal).

But, as Stott says, “It is not good supposing that membership of the universal church of Christ is enough; we must belong to some local branch of it.” In other words, it’s quite meaningless to claim to be a part of the universal community of believers if one does not tangibly belong to that community

in any local expression. As Stott said in chapter 8, “It is nonsense of course to claim membership of a great world-wide body, the church universal [i.e., the community of believers], without in practice sharing in one of its local manifestations.”

We need the church because we need encouragement in the Christian life. We need the support of others. We need their gift. We need their accountability.

See Heb 10:23-25.