



EXPLORE

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The
GWC
GEORGE WHITEFIELD COLLEGE
Correspondence Course

The George Whitefield College
Explore Correspondence Course

is an eighteen subject programme.
The completion of the first nine subjects leads to the award of the *Explore Certificate*, and the completion of another nine to the *Advanced Explore Certificate*.

Explore the Christian Life

is the ninth subject. It looks at the path of the Christian Life from the counsels of God in eternity; leading to the new birth, to its consummation in glorification.

GEORGE WHITEFIELD BOOKS

Welcome to *Explore*, the George Whitefield College Correspondence Course.

Explore the Christian Life is part of the Explore Certificate programme. The 9 foundational courses in the Explore Certificate are followed by a choice of a further 9 subjects leading to the Advanced Explore Certificate. The Explore programme concentrates on helping you to discover the message of the Bible and how it affects, belief, action and ministry.

The benefit you derive from this course will be directly related to the work you put into it. It will be even more beneficial if you are able to discuss the material within a group context, or even with one other person. Your minister or someone senior in your church may be glad to form a group, or to work just with you. If you need to work on your own, the course will still be of immense value.

It is our prayer at George Whitefield College that your studies will strengthen your life in Christ, empower your ministry and witness and bring you much joy.

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WELCOME TO EXPLORE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Chances are, having persevered thus far with the Explore course, that you are a real Christian, living the Christian life. But what exactly is the Christian life? Does the expression conjure up images of prim, colourless and uninteresting church-going people; or maybe very colourful, even fanatical, people spouting 'religion' at every opportunity?

And in any case, assuming you don't fit either of those two not very attractive pictures, how would you identify the key factors that made you a Christian, and the particular qualities that you associate with living for God? And then, what sort of future are you looking forward to when your Christian life moves into eternity?

This module, *Explore the Christian Life*, answers some of the questions that relate to the beginning, blessings, development and consummation of the Christian life. We begin at the beginning, the very beginning, and we close with a glimpse at the end, the very end. Oh, yes, we also spend most of this module looking at the "in between" part of the Christian life.

In this module, you may come across some specifically Christian vocabulary. That's to be expected - every subject has its technical words - but take heart, we don't leave the words unexplained!

So then, let's begin our new journey of exploration into this rich territory - the Christian life.

FURTHER STUDY

Basic:

Concise Theology (Part Three) by J.I.Packer Tyndale House

Advanced:

Saved by Grace by A.A.Hoekema Eerdmans Press

UNIT 1

THE CHRISTIAN - FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY

(A Survey of the Whole Module)

WHAT THIS UNIT IS ABOUT

What is the Christian life? When did it begin - for me, and in the purpose of God? How did I become a Christian? How can I be sure I am a Christian - and how can I be sure that I will remain one? These are some of the questions we ask about the Christian life. In this unit we want to survey the whole territory of what we call "the Christian life", and thus give you direction for the rest of the course.

1. The Christian Life And God's Plan

One of the marks of wisdom in life is to plan ahead. Now, so far as human plans are concerned, Robbie Burns had it right when he wrote:

“The best laid schemes o’ mice and men,
Gang aft a-gley” (Roughly translated - “often go wrong!”)

However, because our God is all-wise, and all-powerful, His plans never miscarry; on the contrary, as the writer of Proverbs reminds us, “It is the LORD’S purpose that prevails” (Proverbs 19:21), and the apostle Paul tells us emphatically that “(God) works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11). This overall plan of God includes the salvation of every human being whom “he chose in him (Christ) before the creation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). So the Christian life begins, in one sense, long before the world began!

Over the centuries, this truth has perplexed many of God’s people, so *Unit 2* is devoted to expounding just what is involved in God’s eternal choice, what we call theologically (and biblically), ***Election***.

2. The Christian Life - God's Effectual Call And Regeneration

As we know, the gospel meets with a variety of responses. Jesus, in His most famous parable, told how the seed falls into different kinds of ground, and only where there is “good ground”, is there a harvest (Matthew 13:3-9 & 13:18-23). The difference is in the soil - but why is some soil suitable, and other soil unproductive? The answer lies in God’s preparation, and changing of the heart, ***regeneration***, and His empowerment of His word - this is the subject of *Unit 3*.

3. The Christian Life And Conversion

Although, ultimately, we owe our salvation to the sovereign gracious activity of Almighty God, we, by grace, are active in the great change of spiritual direction that we call conversion. The great elements in conversion are faith and repentance, two sides of the conversion coin, so to speak. But ***faith and repentance*** are themselves mighty works of grace, and not just any easy “believism” and feeling sorry for our sins. In *Unit 4* we examine what we mean when we speak about repenting and believing.

4. The Christian Life And Justification

Perhaps there is no theological word that has been bandied about so freely as **justification**, yet many Christians have only the vaguest idea as to the precise meaning of this great word. Multitudes of professing Christians confuse it with conversion; others seem to see it as something that happens in them. The fact is that justification is a declaration made by God in heaven, concerning a human being, that that particular individual stands legally righteous in the sight of God. We are not merely pardoned, we are acquitted! Strictly speaking, it has nothing to do with an experience, much less feeling! In *Unit 5* we will be looking at this great doctrine - a teaching absolutely central to a proper understanding of the Christian faith.

5. The Christian Life - Adoption And Assurance

One of the great blessings that accompanies our acceptance by God is the amazing fact that he does not merely forgive us and accept us as righteous for Christ's sake; he adopts us into His family as sons and daughters! Using the biblical term for this, we speak of the truth of **adoption**. How God does this, and what it means for us is the subject of *Unit 6*.

Also in *Unit 6*, we look at an issue, related to adoption, that has puzzled Christians throughout the history of the Church. How can we be sure that we are adopted into God's family, that we are really Christians, and not just self-deceived professors of the Christian faith who do not really belong to the Lord? This controversial doctrine of **assurance** is often not truly grasped, with the result that true Christians cause themselves needless sorrow and anxiety, while others, who are really strangers to the grace of God deceive themselves into thinking they are Christians when they are not. In *Unit 6* we bring what we believe is a balanced presentation of this great truth, which has important practical consequences for the Christian.

6. The Christian Life And Sanctification

Early in our Christian life we find ourselves confronted with one of the most painful problems of Christian experience - how to be a better Christian! Our faith in Christ as Saviour, and our desire to please Him as Lord seem to be strong; our living out the life of a Christian seems woefully weak! We know that it is God's will for us is to be sanctified (1 Thessalonians 4:3), but we seem to be making so little progress. When we enquire of other, more experienced Christians we seem to get such contradictory explanations! In

Unit 7 we address this issue so that you may have a clear idea of what **sanctification** is, and how we are to pursue that “...sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14 [RV]). It is always important to remember that a sanctified life is not an optional extra in the Christian life – it *is* the Christian life, and unless we are following hard after sanctification, we are not Christians at all!

Sanctification is, of course, more than a doctrine, it is a life, lived for the glory of God. So, as well as setting out the principles, we are concerned to explain how this sanctified life is to be lived in practical terms.

We therefore look at matters such as personal communion with God through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit; putting to death the old life and feeding the new life; loving God and our neighbour (and what that means in terms of human relationships).

7. The Christian Life And The Church

The Christian life has to be lived by us as individuals - “...each of us will give an account of himself to God” Romans 14:12), but it is not meant to be lived in isolation. God has brought into existence a community called **the Church**. We are to live as members of that community, and that membership is to be as close as the way the various limbs of the human body live in fellowship with one another! (See 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 - yes, look it up, now!) *Unit 8* helps us to see what our privileges and responsibilities are as part of the redeemed community, and how we may best fulfil them.

8. The Christian Life - Suffering And Glory

Not long after coming to know Christ as Saviour and Lord, we soon discover that being a Christian does not exempt us from the trials of life, trials that we can describe in the inclusive term **suffering**. These sufferings assail us as fallen human beings living in a broken fallen world. What is the role of suffering in our experience as believers? Is suffering a direct result of personal and particular sins? Can we avoid suffering, by exercising greater faith?

However, though our sufferings in this world may be extremely painful, we need to remind ourselves that they are not the final word. The saga of the Christian life has a happy ending! While we all face the certainty of death

(except for those Christians still alive when the Lord Jesus returns - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17), as followers of the One who has conquered death, for us the last enemy should not hold any terrors. (That is not to say that the experience of dying is not unpleasant, but it is to say that we may, and should, face death in the certainty of our immediate translation to Christ's presence, and ultimately of our resurrection to eternal life.) The blessed state of believers after this mortal life, we call **glorification**. *Unit 9* is designed to answer some of our questions about what the Bible calls "the sufferings and the glory that should follow". (We say "some of our questions", because many of our questions cannot be answered until that glorious day when we stand in the Lord's presence!) Do we go straight to heaven at death? What about purgatory? What about "soul sleep"?

Will we recognize one another in heaven? What will we look like? What will we do in heaven? The Bible tells us something about all of these questions! Because glorification belongs to the unseen future, only God's answers to our questions are valid!

9. The Christian Life - From Eternity To Eternity

This panoramic treatment of the study-material in this course reminds us that, as the early Puritan, William Perkins, explained, the Christian life forms a "golden chain", born in eternity and consummated in eternity. As Paul expresses it:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Romans 8:28-30)

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- “The Christian Life from Eternity to Eternity” - why should we use such a title?
- Why does the gospel meet with different responses, and what makes the difference?
- What is justification?
- Why is our sanctification important?
- “I can be a Christian on my own!” Why would you disagree with this statement?
- What is the only source for knowledge of the future after death?