

# Foundations

## Bible Studies

James Russell Noyes

In any course of study, it is recommended to consult information generated nearest to the origins of the subject. As opposed to wading through myriad levels of interpretation, one can often gain clarity by going straight to these “primary sources.” These five short Bible studies rely heavily on the foundations of Christianity, which include:

- Judaism – the religious tradition of Jesus;
- Greek texts – the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament; and
- Unedited sentence structure with original syntax.

For many of us brought up in the Christian tradition, what we know about our religion comes largely from what we’ve been told, which comes largely from other Christians who are repeating what they’ve been told. This has been going on for thousands of years. However, with today’s historical and language resources (and, of course, with guidance from the Holy Spirit), we no longer need to rely exclusively on the explanations of others to better understand this intensely personal human experience of interpreting the word of God for ourselves.

Peace be with you.

# Foundations of Forgiveness

Bible Study by James Russell Noyes

Forgiveness is the central theme of the Lord's Prayer: we ask forgiveness of God "in heaven," as we grant forgiveness to others "on earth." The origins of this idea can be traced to Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai. Upon his return from the mountain the second time, the High Holiday of *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), with its themes of repentance and forgiveness, was established. Jews consider this the holiest day of the year.

As stated in Leviticus 16:30, on *Yom Kippur*, God may forgive all sins committed "before [and against] God." To be cleansed of sin, one must engage in a day of fasting and heartfelt prayer. However, God does not forgive sins committed "before [and against] one another." Only another person can do that. (Customarily, the time for asking for forgiveness begins on *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year, and ends with the arrival of *Yom Kippur*.) Asking forgiveness is paramount, as some interpretations suggest one cannot even earn atonement for sins committed against God if a person is not first forgiven by those whom he or she had wronged.

According to Jewish Law (Orah Haim 606:1, from the *Shulchan Aruch* [literally: "Set Table"], a compilation of over 1500 years of Rabbinic commentary), if, upon asking forgiveness, the individual refuses to forgive, one should then return to him or her with three people, as many as three more times, to request forgiveness. If the individual whom you have wronged has since passed away, take a *minyán* [ten people, a quorum for Jewish communal prayer service] to the gravesite and ask for forgiveness.

After exhausting all efforts, and an individual still refuses to forgive, one needn't do more. It is, however, proper for the victim to grant the offender forgiveness, and any person who willingly grants forgiveness to others will earn God's forgiveness (if the person comes before God on *Yom Kippur*) for whatever sins he or she may have committed.

Following the same line of thought, Jesus gives similar instructions to members of the church. In Matthew 18:15-18, He states:

**15**“If your brother sins [against you], go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. **16**But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. **17**If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. **18**Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

And, after instructions on how to pray, Jesus states in Matthew 6:

**14**For if, indeed, you forgive other people their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15**However, if you do not forgive others their trespasses, your Father will not forgive your trespasses.

Study questions:

1. If Jesus died for our sins (see 1 Corinthians 15:3), what effect (if any) does this have on his instructions in Matthew? See also 1 Peter 2:24.
2. Discuss the Lord’s Prayer as a *quid pro quo* (this for that). Perhaps Matthew 5:23-24 offers clues to this? Or, Matthew 18:21-35?
3. What role does forgiving one’s self play “on earth as in heaven”?
4. Share circumstances in which someone forgave you, or a time when you forgave someone.
5. What function does compassion [literally: *com* = together + *passionem* = to suffer] serve in forgiveness?

Resources:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom\\_Kippur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur)

<https://avivwithinsidewithoutside.wordpress.com/2014/09/11/how-to-ask-for-forgiveness/>

[http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template\\_cdo/aid/989859/jewish/Asking-Forgiveness.htm](http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/989859/jewish/Asking-Forgiveness.htm)

<http://parshapreview.blogspot.ca/2010/09/awesome-holiness-of-yom-kippur.html>

<http://www.dailyhalacha.com/m/halacha.aspx?id=679>

# Foundations of Baptism

Bible Study by James Russell Noyes

Christian baptism in water is a sacrament where new members of the faith are welcomed into the body of Christ. Witnesses to baptism agree to guide the new initiate in the ways of Christ. According to the Gospels, this ritual had its beginnings with John “the Baptist,” who baptized [immersed] many in the River Jordan, including Jesus. However, most Christians are unaware that immersion in a *mikvah* [body of “living water” = river, spring, rainwater] has “offered a gateway to purity” for Jews throughout history. Most famously, before the revelation at Mount Sinai, all Jews were commanded to immerse themselves in preparation for coming face to face with God. Traditionally, there are many Jewish rituals involving *mikvah*, including conversion to Judaism, where immersion plays an integral part.

According to Jewish Law, the construction of a *mikvah* [pool] takes precedence even over building a house of worship, thus indicating the spiritual power associated with such “living water.” In many ways, *mikvah* is the threshold separating the unholy from the holy, where immersion signals a change, an *elevation in status*. Its unparalleled function lies in its power of transformation, its ability to effect metamorphosis.

Regarding conversion, rabbinic literature refers to the *mikvah* as the “womb of the world,” and as a convert emerges, their status changes to that of a son or daughter “just born” or “a child of one day [old]” (Yebamoth [from Talmudic Law] 22a; 48b; 97b). Regarding Jesus’ baptism, according to Luke 3:

**21**When all the people were being baptized [by John in the River Jordan], Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened **22**and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

Jesus’ most famous teaching regarding baptism comes from John 3, where, speaking to Nicodemus, a Pharisee on the Jewish ruling council:

**3**Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." [The Greek for *again* also means *from above*.] **4**"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" **5**Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. [The Greek for *spirit* also means *wind*.] **6**Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit.

Baptizing with water and Spirit continues in the Acts of the Apostles 8:

**38**[...] Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. **39**When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Study questions:

1. When Jesus was baptized, the voice from heaven says, "You are my son." Was this a transformation, an "elevation of status"? Does the dove signify being "born again [from above]"?
2. In Matthew 18:3, Jesus said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Might he have been speaking of *mikvah*?
3. In John 4:1-26, Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman about "living water." Is he again speaking of *mikvah*?
4. Share circumstances where you were born "again" or "of the spirit."
5. According to John 4:2, "although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples." Why would John [the author of the Gospel] go out of his way to make this distinction?

Resources:

[http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article\\_cdo/aid/1541/jewish/The-Mikvah.htm](http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/1541/jewish/The-Mikvah.htm)  
<http://jesus-messiah.com/html/mikveh.html>:

# Foundations of Holy Communion

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The sacrament of the Eucharist is central to all of Christianity. Mystically, we all become One in Christ at the moment we partake of the bread and wine (Christ's body and blood) during Holy Communion. The earliest account (which later became known as the "Words of Institution") comes from the Apostle Paul (in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25):

**23**For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, **24**and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "[Take, eat;]\* this is my body, which is [given]\* for you; do this in remembrance of me." **25**In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "[Drink from it, all of you;]\* This cup is the new covenant in my blood, [which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins]\*; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

\*From Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, and Luke 22:19-20.

On face value, it would appear that Jesus merely asks us to be aware of and reconnect with His presence every time we share in the Eucharist. However, Paul's account states: "do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." What then, exactly, is the "this" in "do this"? If we say, "drink this wine," then the sentence becomes nonsensical: "drink this wine, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." And, if we say, "think about Jesus," then the sentence becomes redundant: "think about Jesus, whenever your drink it, in remembrance of [Jesus]."

Earlier in his letter (1 Corinthians 11:1), Paul is unequivocal, "You are to imitate me, just as I imitate Christ." With bread and wine, Jesus refers to himself as "given for you" and "poured out for you." Therefore, when we receive Jesus' words and gestures as an invitation to imitation, we are called upon to be Christ-like: "This is Christ's body, given for you. Do this [*give of yourself, in the Way of Christ,*] in remembrance of Christ." When we say, "Do this [*pour out your heart in love and forgiveness to others, in the Way of Christ,*] whenever you drink it [*the new covenant,*] in remembrance of Christ," we are invited into powerful, active participation.

Centuries later, Roman Catholics changed “which is given” and “which is poured out” to “which will be given up” and “which will be poured out.” This significantly changes the meaning, from a metaphorical call of equal participation among all members of Christ (including Jesus and all of his followers) to a metaphysical and quite literal sacrifice of one man. Luther goes even further, indicating Jesus’ blood was not “poured out,” but in fact “shed,” making it abundantly clear that as an act of God’s grace, by merely drinking the wine [spilled blood], one’s sins are forgiven.

Study questions:

1. What does it literally mean to “re - member”? Is this different from “re - mind”? At the Eucharist, are we to remind, remember, or both?
2. In Romans 5:5, Paul states “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit,” and in Acts 2:33 and 10:45, Peter and “Luke” (the author of Acts), also speak of the gifts of the Holy Spirit “poured out.” How, then, are we to understand the “new covenant [‘of the Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:6)] in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins”? What is being poured out – blood or spirit?
3. In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus says, “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” Why is nothing said about drinking His blood?
4. Regarding the wine, Jesus says in Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25, and Luke 22:18: “I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.” What does he mean?
5. Is Eucharist always literal, or can one partake from the “cup of the New Covenant” at times other than Holy Communion?

Resource:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Words\\_of\\_Institution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Words_of_Institution)

# Foundations of God's Commandments

Bible Study by James Russell Noyes

The whole of Christianity includes widely divergent views on laws governing church administration and activity. However, when it comes to God's laws, Christian communities are in agreement: one must follow God's Commandments. Of course, the most famous of these are the Ten Commandments, part of God's Covenant given to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. The Christian focus is on two additional Commandments as presented in the following exchange, from Matthew 22:

**34**Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. **35**One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: **36**"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" **37**Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul [and with all your strength (Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27)] and with all your mind.' **38**This is the first and greatest commandment. **39**And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' **40**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Christianity tends to hold the view that while the Ten Commandments were an important step in the development of mankind, it is these Two, mentioned by Christ Jesus on numerous occasions that represent a quantum leap in spiritual awareness. However, in both cases, Jesus is quoting directly from the [written] Torah. From Deuteronomy 6:5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." And, from Leviticus 19:18, " 'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among [the sons of] your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.'

In Luke 10, an expert in [Mosaic] law challenges Jesus:

**29**But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" **30**In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. **31**A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. **32**So

too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33**But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. **34**He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35**The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' **36**"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" **37**The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

In John 13:34, Jesus tells his disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Study questions:

1. Earlier in Luke 10, the same man asks, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Referring to the greatest commandments, Jesus says, "Do this and you will live." Might eternal life be here and now?
2. "Go and do likewise." Is this a commandment?
3. In addition to heart, soul, and strength, Jesus says to love God with "all your mind." Why the distinction? How is this done?
4. Share examples of neighborly love and of self-love.
5. Is the commandment from John 13 altogether "new" (as it pertains to Leviticus 19)? Perhaps a more accurate interpretation would be to say this commandment is "updated"?

# Foundations of the Lord's Prayer

Bible Study by James Russell Noyes

Within the diversity of Christian worship, there is perhaps only one ritual that remains constant: all services include a unison recitation of the prayer Jesus taught his followers in Matthew 6:9-13 (and a shorter version in Luke 11:2-4), which later became known as "The Lord's Prayer." In both passages below, the translations and syntax are from the original Greek.

## Matthew

- 9** "Therefore, pray this way:  
" 'Our Father, who [is] in the heavens,  
hallowed be your name.  
**10** Let your kingdom come,  
let your will be done,  
as in heaven, [so] also upon earth.  
**11** Give us today our daily bread.  
**12** And forgive us our debts,  
as we also forgive our debtors.  
**13** And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil [one]."

## Luke

- 2** When you pray, say:  
" 'Father, who [is] in heaven  
hallowed be your name,  
Let your kingdom come.  
**3** Give us each day our daily bread.  
**4** And forgive us our sins, as we also forgive  
everyone who is indebted to us.  
And lead us not into temptation.' "

Many are familiar with "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" from the King James Bible. While this word is not in the original prayer, it is used in the passage immediately following (Matthew 6:14-15), where Jesus reiterates and clarifies the central theme of forgiveness:

**14** If, indeed, you forgive others for their trespasses,  
your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** If,  
however, you do not forgive others for their trespasses,  
then your Father will not forgive your trespasses."

A non-biblical passage is sometimes added to the end of the prayer, "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen." This material, first inserted into the Tyndale Bible from 1525 (which was the basis for Luther in 1545 and King James in 1611), originates in the Didache, a brief, anonymous teaching treatise from the first century. In 1988, the English

Language Liturgical Consultation departed from the original manuscripts and changed “lead us not into temptation,” to “save us from the time of trial.”

Study questions:

1. What are the implications of “Let your kingdom come, let your will be done,” as compared to the nearly universally used “Your kingdom come, your will be done” found in most translations?
2. For what purpose would the phrase “As in heaven, [so] also upon earth,” be changed to “on earth as it is in heaven”? In this case, do exact words and syntax matter?
3. Taking Matthew 6:14-15 into account, does the meaning of “forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors” imply a *quid pro quo* [this for that], meaning: only as we forgive on earth, will our Father in heaven grant us forgiveness?
4. Luke leaves off the consequent phrases, “let your will be done, as in heaven, [so] also on earth,” as well as “deliver us from the evil [one].” Does this fundamentally change the meaning of the prayer, or are these missing segments somehow redundant?
5. For what purpose would editors and committees include words not spoken by Jesus? Is altering the word of God ever justified, or is it merely self-serving?

Resources:

[www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%27s\\_Prayer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%27s_Prayer)

<http://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/9417/did-protestants-get-thine-is-the-kingdom-etc-from-the-didache>