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Third Edition

WHAT WE BELIEVE

LEADER'S GUIDE

LEW VANDER MEER


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LEW VANDER MEER


**FAITH
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Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the leader's guide to Part Two (sessions 13-24) of a twenty-four session video course titled *What We Believe*.

When we first produced *What We Believe* back in 1988, we thought it would serve the churches well for perhaps five years or so. To our delight, demand for the course far surpassed our predictions and remains strong today. Thousands of students and many leaders have watched the videos and used these materials to learn or review the basics of our Reformed faith.

For the third edition of *What We Believe*, we have decided to retain the classic video lessons filmed with Rev. Lew Vander Meer in 2000. We feel that these lessons continue to effectively capture both the session material and Pastor Lew's endearing teaching style, two aspects of the course that have made the series so popular over the past twenty-five years.

We have, however, done a few things to help move Pastor Lew along into the second decade of the 21st century. The teaching sessions have received a digital makeover as we made the transition from VHS format to DVD. On-screen graphics, as well as the leader and session guides, now reflect the 2011 Reformed confessions translations. Some of the content of the leader and session guides has received a slight makeover to bring it up-to-date, but we have left most things as they were after finding the discussion and review these resources supply to be a proven source for reflection on Pastor Lew's teaching.

FORMAT AND AUDIENCE

This twenty-four-session course teaches students in grades nine through twelve the basics of the

Christian faith according to the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition. Although this is not a course on the Belgic Confession, the sessions basically follow its sequence and frequently refer to its articles. If the Belgic is not part of your confessional tradition, you can omit referring to it during the discussion part of the course.

Each session in this course features a twenty-minute video presentation by Rev. Lew Vander Meer, a veteran high school Bible teacher and pastor. After each video presentation, students use a handout to review key facts, discuss issues raised by the video, and apply the teachings to their lives.

What We Believe may be adapted to various patterns of use. For example, some groups might want to use all twenty-four sessions in sequence in a single year; other groups may prefer to use twelve sessions one year and twelve the following year; still others might take a breather after a dozen sessions, study some other nondoctrinal material for a few weeks, and then return to study the remaining twelve sessions. Feel free to adjust your own use of these materials to your schedule and to the reactions you hear from your students.

GOALS OF THE COURSE

What We Believe is designed to

- encourage young people to make a commitment to Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.
- help young people understand the systematic structure of Reformed doctrine and enable them to acquire and use a basic "faith vocabulary" common to the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition.

- help young people appreciate the Reformed/ Presbyterian tradition of Christianity in comparison with other traditions.
- enable teens to see a clear connection between doctrine and life and to respond positively to the teachings of the church.

SESSION GUIDES

For each of the two parts of *What We Believe*, we've written a companion session guide for your students to use. Entire session guides can be handed out to your group or you can choose to tear individual session worksheets from the perforated booklet and distribute them to the students at the beginning of each session before the video segment is shown. After each session, encourage your students to save their session guides as a summary of the main teachings of the church (you may want to provide a two-pocket folder as something of an incentive for doing so). No homework is required or suggested for this course.

Beginning with session 14, each session guide includes a review quiz designed to help students recall key ideas from previous sessions. The quizzes focus primarily on the previous week's video but also include questions on earlier sessions (in Part Two only). Answers to these review quizzes are given in this leader's guide.

Session guides also include a space for answers to the Bible Trivia questions Pastor Lew asks on the video (evaluations of the original course show that students really enjoyed these questions). Your students can check their own answers against those given by Pastor Lew at the end of each video presentation.

The section called "Video Discussion Guide" offers questions and other activities that review key facts from the video, raise issues for discussion, and draw practical applications. You will need to determine how many of these questions you can handle in your allotted time. We encourage you to supplement (or

occasionally replace) our questions with your own or those of your students. We wanted to provide leaders with plenty of options based on their own individual group dynamics, so feel free to adjust and use whatever is most useful from the guides for your particular situation.

You may want to provide copies of the Belgic Confession for your group; the video refers to and quotes from specific articles of this confession. You should be aware that while the text on-screen and in the leader and session guides has been updated to reflect the 2011 translation of the Reformed confessions, Pastor Lew still quotes from a previously approved version. If you plan to incorporate these references into your discussion of the video, it would be helpful to have at least one copy of the latest translation for every two students. You can find copies available for free download at http://www.crcna.org/pages/belgic_confess_main.cfm. It is also available in booklet form from Faith Alive Christian Resources.

If your denomination does not use the Belgic Confession, you may, of course, choose not to discuss it during your class sessions. Most of the print references in the leader's guide to the Belgic Confession are by way of options that you may decide not to use.

LEADER'S MATERIALS

To lead Part Two of this course, you will need the *What We Believe*, Third Edition Part 2 DVD. For each session you also may want to have a chalk- or whiteboard available for use during your discussions. Some of the suggested student activities will require a supply of pens and paper or markers and newsprint/posterboard. Make sure as you prepare for your session that you make note of any optional materials you may need based on what activities you choose to do.

One of the advantages of a video course is that a trained teacher and theologian comes into your classroom each week. Pastor Lew presents Christian

doctrine in a way that's both clear and appealing to young people. Despite the fact that over a decade has passed since we filmed these sessions, we think Pastor Lew's unique personality and style resonates and entertains as much today as it has in the past.

Each video presentation is about twenty minutes long (if at all possible, watch the video presentations at home before viewing them with your class).

After the video, we suggest allowing at least another thirty minutes for the review quiz and discussion of the topics covered in video. An hour for the entire session would be ideal.

Discussing the video is a crucial part of this course. It gives the students a chance to interact with a knowledgeable leader, to clarify information, to discuss issues, to ask their own questions, and to draw personal applications. You don't need to be a theologian or a professional teacher to lead the discussion, but you do need to be a committed Christian who enjoys young people and who understands what the Bible and the church teach. You may find yourself learning from and reacting to Pastor Lew's teaching right along with the students, which is great!

This leader's guide will help you through the class sessions by providing Scripture and Belgic Confession references, as well as a statement of purpose that summarizes the video and gives you general and specific goals for that particular session.

Included for each lesson is a Perspective section offering additional biblical, historical, and theological insights into the content of the session. Dr. M. Eugene Osterhaven, a retired professor of systematic theology at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan, wrote these excellent backgrounds for the original course, and we have retained them here for your use (Robert DeMoor wrote the background for session 16). We suggest you read and reflect on this section in your preparations. Don't feel like you have to be prepared to recite this information back to the students word-for-word; it is merely a source

of information to help give you a bit of theological background for use in your discussions.

The Procedure section provides step-by-step directions for achieving the session's purpose. In it you will find answers to the review quizzes, a guide to presenting each video (we suggest stopping some videos at various points for discussion), and answers to the questions asked in the student session guides. Suggestions for group work, discussion of case studies, personal application, and other learning activities are included as well. The Closing section of each session presents a variety of group and personal worship options.

VARIETY

Perhaps you're wondering if twelve (or more) video presentations and discussions will have enough variety to hold the interest of active young people.

As we mentioned earlier, you needn't go through all twenty-four sessions in sequence. Any format gets boring if overworked. And, of course, some students and some entire groups may simply tune out of the video for a variety of reasons. However, our experience with previous editions of *What We Believe* strongly suggests that the course not only works, but works well.

Remember that the videos are only about twenty minutes long, feature a gifted communicator, and are directed especially to young people. Following the video, your own discussion time can be lively and varied. Notice too that the questions go beyond facts. We've provided lots of options for case studies, group work, and a variety of opportunities for personal application that should help hold the group's interest. We've also included creative activities that take you beyond the basic questions in the session guide.

As a leader you can use your own creative approaches to inject still more variety into the sessions, if needed. Here are a few ideas:

- Prepare and give your own lecture to the class to help the students discover the main idea directly from Scripture and the Belgic Confession.
- Have students compete in teams on the review quiz and the Bible Trivia. Use small groups to work on the questions.
- Ask a pair of students to prepare for and lead the class discussion for a session.
- Appoint pairs of students to design the concluding worship activities.
- Invite a guest speaker into your classroom.
- Take a field trip to a neighboring church that's markedly different from your own congregation.

HOME CLASSROOMS

If it's practical, try meeting with your students in your home. Young people are more likely to be relaxed and open when gathered around a television set in your family room than seated in rows of folding chairs in church. You can ask students to take turns bringing refreshments.

Teaching in your home does cut down class size to perhaps a dozen or less, but a small group is great for interacting and really getting to know each other.

We welcome your comments on this course. Please contact us at 1-800-333-8300 or email us at editors@faithaliveresources.org. Thank you!

WHAT WE BELIEVE SESSION 13

JESUS CHRIST (1)

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:1-2; Matthew 1:20-23; 28:18; John 1:1, 14; 14:6-7; 20:31; Philippians 2:5-11

BELGIC CONFESSION

Article 18

PURPOSE

Today's video marks the beginning of Part Two of this course (your class should have already taken Part One, sessions 1-12). Today's session looks at the person of Christ; next week's session focuses on the atoning work of Christ. Pastor Lew begins by discussing the incarnation and the virgin birth. Citing John 1:1, 14 and Article 18, he defines the incarnation as God taking on human flesh. Just as the world was originally formed by the action of God, so Jesus was formed by the action of God in the womb of Mary. As a result, Jesus is both real God and real man, of the same essence with the Father, yet human like us. The names of our Lord (Jesus, Immanuel, Messiah, Christ, "bread of life") help us understand who he is. Pastor Lew then goes off the set into a bakery to explain how Jesus is the bread of life. The video concludes with comments on how Jesus is our link to God.

After today's session, your students should be able to evaluate their own relationship with Jesus Christ, the God-man who loves them. They should be able to describe the incarnation, the virgin birth, and the various names given to Christ (see above). They should be able to explain how Christ is the bread of life and how he is our link to God.

PERSPECTIVE

In our study of Jesus Christ, we touch the heart of our faith, that to which the Old Testament leads and from which the New Testament flows. Jesus Christ is indeed the center of God's special revelation, the key to a proper understanding of both testaments (Luke 24:44; John 5:39; Acts 3:24; Heb. 1). In him God became one of us. Previously, God had sent his word in one form or another; now the Word himself—not itself—appeared. What is the Word of God? A verbal symbol, a prophetic message, paper and ink? In its highest form it is a person, the Word incarnate, or "the Person of the speaking God," as John Calvin calls that Word (Institutes, 1, 7, 4). "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9). This is the good news; this is the heart of Christianity.

It is little wonder, then, that the Belgic Confession devotes five full articles (10, 18-21) and parts of others to the person and work of Christ. In this session we deal with his incarnation and identity as God and man; in the next, we'll look closely at his two natures and at his atoning work. Article 18 begins with the fulfillment of prophecy in Christ, reminding us of the messianic expectation. This expectation, based on scores of Old Testament passages and their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus, is one of the greatest phenomena in history, second only to the fact of his coming.

The New Testament indicates that from the beginning there were those who denied that Jesus Christ was divine, and we know from other sources that before the end of the first century some were claiming that his humanity was unreal. A Jewish sect on the fringe of the church said that Jesus was the natural son of both Joseph and Mary, who was rewarded for piety by God's Spirit at his baptism. Thus qualified for messiahship, he was put to death; but he arose, ascended, and some day will return to reign on earth. Another early group believed in the virgin birth and messianic mission of Jesus but denied his eternity with the Father.

These were harbingers of a more serious error embraced by Paul of Samosata, the bishop of Antioch in the mid-third century. He held that Mary bore a "mere man" who was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, was kept from sin, "advanced" to Godhead as the Father endowed him with divine attributes, and was made the Savior of mankind: "From man he became God."

Thoughtful people in the church asked: Can Godhead be conferred or begin in time? If so, have we more than one god, like the heathen?

Before these ideas rocked the church, opposite opinions had appeared, denying Christ's true humanity. Those influenced by Greek dualism, which held that matter is evil and is opposed to spirit, claimed that Jesus had a phantom body and that his suffering too was unreal. This latter idea was based on the Greek notion that suffering is imposed from without; since no one can impose anything on the gods, the gods cannot suffer. Later, some Reformed theologians also held this idea, claiming that our Lord suffered only in his human nature.

The denial of the incarnation was refuted by the church already in the writings of the apostle John (1 John 4:11ff.; 2:22; 2 John 7; John 1:14). Throughout the second century, proclaiming the true humanity of the Savior continued to be a major concern of the church. The reason for its insistence that Christ is both God and man is the teaching of

the Bible and the confession (Article 19) that he had to be both in order to make atonement and to conquer death as our representative (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 16, 17).

Serious challenges to the church's official teaching on the nature of Christ continued into the fifth century. Arius was typical of those who believed that God is too aloof to enter creation and, in so doing, make himself subject to change. He dwells "alone ingenerate, alone eternal, alone without beginning, alone true, alone possessing immutability, alone wise, alone good, alone sovereign, alone judge of all." Who then is Jesus? A creature who could not comprehend the mind of the Father, since there is distance between creation, including Jesus, and God.

It believed that it was not God who came into our world but another creature, like us and yet unlike us. Jesus' soul was unlike ours. Hence he was neither God nor man.

The church responded that if Arius was right, God, whom we worship, is not eternal; baptism is in the name of a creature; the Father was not always Father (for there was a time when he had no son); we worship a creature, Christ; we lose our Savior; and Christianity admits polytheism, the addition of gods.

Other heresies confronting the church concerned the relation of the two natures to each other and the one person of Jesus Christ (Pastor Lew goes into some of these next time). Are the two natures alongside each other without real union in one person? Is Christ's humanity lost in his divinity like a drop of honey in the ocean? Are the two natures mixed so that we have "a third something," as some have said? Who was Mary's son, a mere man or God? These were the questions facing the church. It is instructive and comforting to know that they were considered at Nicea, Ephesus, Chalcedon, and in the minds of thousands of believers, for the same questions are being asked today, and, as then, they must be answered.

PROCEDURE

Review Quiz

Normally we suggest opening each session with a review quiz; however, since your group, like many others, may have taken a fairly long break between Part One (sessions 1-12) and Part Two (sessions 13-24), no review quiz is included in today's session (your students won't mind!). The review quizzes start again next time. As in sessions 1-12, the quizzes are cumulative; that is, the review quiz for session 16 will include several questions from sessions 13-15 (but nothing from Part One).

Video Presentation

Before showing today's video, take a couple of minutes to ask students to do some thinking about the person of Jesus Christ. Ask them to give a descriptive word or title that comes to mind when they think of Christ. Go around your group two or three times so that you'll end up with a large list of words (on your board or newsprint). More than likely at least some of the words the students mentioned will be included in this or next week's session.

Explain that today's session focuses on the person of Jesus Christ. We are going to look at who Jesus is. Next week we'll focus more on what Jesus does for us and how he is able to do that. Show the video through without stopping.

Video Discussion Guide

1. What does the word *incarnation* mean as it applies to Jesus (see John 1:1, 14)? Why is the incarnation so important to Christians?

The word incarnation means "in the flesh." It refers to the way God came in the flesh to this world and lived for a brief time among us.

When you talk about the importance of this term for Christians, have students read John 1:1,14. John first establishes that the Word (that is, Jesus) was God. Then, says John, this Word, this God "became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

This is the basis for the key Christian teaching that Jesus is at once truly God and truly human. Next week we'll look at why this teaching is so basic to Christ's atoning work for us.

OPTION

Jesus Christ has been the subject of artists throughout the centuries. Search online for some examples of both classical and contemporary portraits of Christ. Other good sources are the articles about Jesus that occasionally appear in national newsmagazines like *Time* and *Macleans*. When you've obtained, say, half a dozen or so portraits, show them to your students and talk about the way various artists see Christ (for example, some may emphasize his divinity, his holiness, his piety; others may show more of his humanity, his compassion, his suffering). Use the portraits (and perhaps some comments from recent magazine articles) to raise the question of who Jesus really is.

OPTION

Distribute and read Article 18 of the Belgic Confession (quoted in part on the video) as a summary of the first two discussion questions.

TIP

Students who aren't familiar with the Bible often make the assumption that Christ is simply Jesus' last name: Jesus *Christ*. You may want to mention this when talking about the distinct meanings of the names *Jesus* and *Christ*.

OPTION

Talk about some of the other names or titles for Jesus that your students listed at the beginning of today's session.

2. Read Genesis 1:1-2 and Matthew 1:20. How is the work of the Spirit at creation similar to the work of the Spirit in the incarnation? Why is believing in the virgin birth of Jesus important?

As Pastor Lew says in today's video, in both Genesis and Matthew the creative power of God—expressed through the Spirit—is at work, making things out of nothing. The “emptiness” of earth at creation can be compared with the “emptiness” of Mary's womb. In the beginning the creative work of God filled the earth with life. In the incarnation, the creative work of God in Mary's womb created a God-man called Jesus.

This “virgin birth” is very important to Christians. In fact, you may want to mention that every time we say the Apostles' Creed we confess this doctrine (“conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary”). Why is this important to Christians? Because the virgin birth means that Jesus retained his divine nature while taking on our human nature. He is at once truly God and truly human. Had Jesus been born of a natural, human father, he would not have been truly God but would have inherited Mary's sinful human nature. The Spirit's creative work in Mary's womb makes Jesus an extension of God the Father—that is, real God, of the same essence as God. At the same time, his being born of a woman makes Jesus truly human. Next week we'll look at why Christ had to be both human and divine in order to atone for our sins.

3. Tell what the following names mean:

- **Jesus (see Matthew 1:21):** Jesus means Savior: “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”
- **Immanuel (see Matthew 1:23):** Immanuel means “God with us.”
- **Christ (see John 20:31):** Christ means “anointed one.” To be anointed is to be set apart by God for a unique work. The Old Testament word for “anointed one” is Messiah.

Recall how Christ functions as our prophet (tells us the will of God), as our priest (offers himself as the sacrifice for our sins), and as our King (rules over all). You may also want to add that another common name for Jesus, not mentioned on the video, is “Lord”; that is, the one to whom all authority on heaven and earth has been given (see Matthew 28:18).

4. In what general way is Jesus “the bread of life”? Also, recall the specific symbolism that Pastor Lew sees in the water, flour, sugar, oil, salt, and yeast that go into a loaf of bread.

Bread is everything we need to stay alive. Christ is our bread of life because he gives us everything necessary for life. As bread is broken to feed and nourish us, so Christ's broken body gives us life. That's the main symbolism of the bread that we break every time we take communion.

More specifically, Pastor Lew sees the water in bread as a symbol of the way Jesus cleanses us from our sin. Like seeds of wheat, Jesus dies and rises again to give us life. Like sugar, Jesus brings flavor and joy into our lives. Like oil, Jesus heals us through his Spirit. Following Jesus' example, we are to be the salt (preservative) of the world. Like yeast, we are to penetrate every part of the world and give it life through Jesus Christ.

5. What does Pastor Lew mean when he says, “Jesus is the way we see God”? See also John 14:6-7. What qualities of Jesus help you understand—and draw closer to—God the Father?

Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father” (John 14:6-7). Because Jesus is God in the flesh, we can see God most clearly in him, someone who was much like us in so many ways.

On the second half of the question, give students a moment to think of a response. Then go around the circle and invite them to tell which qualities

of Jesus (for example, his compassion for people, his humility, his power, his love) help them understand and draw closer to God the Father.

- 6. Reflect for a minute or two on who Jesus is to you (reading Philippians 2:5-11 may be helpful). Then complete this statement: “Jesus, to me you are . . .”**

You may want to read the Philippians passage aloud to the class, but tell the group that they need not restrict themselves to that passage when completing the statement.

Closing

Invite those students who wish to do so to read their statements about Jesus aloud as prayers to Jesus.

TIP

Encourage students to use their own words to complete the statement. More important, ask them to be honest as to where they are in their personal relationship with Jesus. If Jesus is someone they are just getting to know, or someone who asks hard things of them, or someone who they don't really understand, they should say so, rather than simply writing something they think they should say.

OPTION

Divide into two groups and read Philippians 2:5-11 responsively. Then close with a time of silent prayer in which each student can thank God for the gift of his Son.

Available for the first time on DVD, this popular high school course covers key aspects of the Reformed faith and worldview in an easy-to-lead format. Based on the Belgic Confession, each session features a classic twenty-minute video lesson by pastor and teacher Lew Vander Meer. After watching the video, students use session guides to review, discuss, and apply the teachings to their lives. Leader guides provide helpful backgrounds and offer options and tips for leading student activities.

Updated to include the 2011 translations of the Reformed confessions, this course will help teens

- make or renew a commitment to Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.
- understand the structure and distinctiveness of Reformed doctrine.
- acquire and use a basic “faith vocabulary” common to the Reformed tradition.
- see a clear connection between doctrine and life.
- respond positively to the teachings of the church.

Rev. Lew Vander Meer is a gifted communicator who knows how to teach doctrine to teens in a way they find interesting and memorable. He is a veteran Bible teacher, and he also serves as senior pastor of a congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



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