

HERESIES: CULTS AND SECTS

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“And now, O Lord God, if in this book I have said anything which is Thine,
Thine own will recognize it; and if I have said anything which is mine,
do Thou and Thine forgive it.”

–St. Athanasius

PREFACE

Although this book is a warning to look out for cults of any stripe, the emphasis will be on those cults or sects (quasi-cults—orthodox for the most part with cultic tendencies) which are most influential today.

In pointing out the faults of others, one should never feel too comfortable since orthodox Christianity has failed to live up to what it claims to embrace. Cults and sects have risen out of the soil of a Christianity that has lost much of her original message and practice. This must be recognized as true whether the church is viewed from the traditionalist wing or the charismatic/Pentecostal wing of Christendom.

Many Christians claim that there is no place for a book such as this, since the primary task of the Christian church is to proclaim the gospel, not to fight the cults. Although it is true that we are called foremost to be agents of reconciliation as we are urged to proclaim the gospel, it is also true that the very word gospel means "good news" which implies that there is also "bad news." The bad news is, of course, the human condition—man's fallenness—his sinfulness. But any teaching that confuses or minimizes such bad news and distorts the good news must be challenged or the truth of Christianity will eventually be lost.

In people's fascination with what is novel, many have ended up with religious groups which hold outlandish views?

You will find this book steeped in Scripture to ensure that what is being written is sound. The numerous scriptural references makes it possible for the reader to continually check and see if what is written is biblical.

The purpose of this book is threefold. First and foremost, the purpose is to **present truth accurately** with the hope that this will lead to a more solid foundation of theology, a richer worship of the one true God, and a deeper devotion to Him who alone is worthy of our worship and service.

It is also the purpose of this book to **unmask** and thus **expose falsehood** "craftily decked out in an attractive dress." Only then will the inexperienced realize that pseudo-Christianity is not "more true than truth itself," but in fact heresy.

Finally it is the purpose of this book to **equip the faithful** in their apologetic task. The typical church member is under-informed, not only in what other religions, cults and sects believe, but also in biblical truth. A thorough knowledge of God's Word is essential if Christians are to "**contend for the faith** that was once for all **entrusted to the saints**" (Jude 3). This also means that we as believers must "**always be prepared** to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give **the reason** for the hope we have" (1 Pe 3:15).

We dare not sit back and give up the fight! Even though it looks as if this religious and theological aberration has won the day, the battle is not over. That is, unless we roll over and give in.

INTRODUCTION

There is a vicious battle going on for our minds! This should not surprise us since the Bible states that

"What a man **thinks**, so **is** he" (Pr 23:7).

This battle for the mind, and thus the heart of man, is coming from all directions. It is obvious everywhere:

- **Secular humanism** with its *agnostic mindset* and emphasis on man and his achievements (i.e. science and technology) has left a spiritual vacuum in our society.
- **Religious liberalism** (modern theology) has undermined the authority of the Bible as the Word of God and thus left people with nothing more than the *shifting sand of human opinion* in which one's authority for truth is the latest "discovery" (theory) of truth.
- **Deconstructionism** which holds that there is no objective truth, therefore past events or writings have little, if any, *intrinsic meaning*. What matters is not what authors intended in literature but what we think of what they wrote. Thus the past is freely revised to fit current politically and religiously correct values.
- **Religious pluralism** with its assumption that all religions are works of human interpretation and that *no one religion* has "the truth" has undermined the claim of Jesus who categorically stated, "**I am the way and the truth and the life**. No one comes to the Father [God] **except through Me**" (Jn 14:6).
- The great idol **entertainment** which has *captivated the hearts* of a people who are, as sociologist Neil Postman entitled his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.
- Four thousand **cults** with millions of adherents, many of which are zealously and fervently promulgating their narrow, authoritarian dogma.
- **The New Age** movement, which is *old Hinduism in new clothes* and which reeks of the occult, is outpacing all other cults in its rate of growth as it increasingly dominates the "spiritual consciousness" of our society.
- The realm of the **occult** has ensnared millions in its satanic bondage.

It is the aim of this book to show that historic orthodox Christianity is the only viable alternative.

What we think about Jesus Christ is basic to everything in Christianity. If our thinking is defective we are in danger of heresy, whether in the liberal camp of Christendom, or in the innumerable cults that are taking over the religious landscape of America.

The Faith Movement (the Gospel of Health, Wealth, and Prosperity) whose roots are deeply embedded in evangelical, conservative theology, is weakened by a *defective Christology*. The divine edge of Jesus has been blunted. The qualitative difference—the One who is Wholly Other—has in many cases been reduced to a quantitative difference. This means that Jesus Christ, and those who believe in Him, are viewed as having the same nature, with Jesus being merely more advanced in His spiritual attainment. Such teaching is nothing less than heresy. It is *the ancient Arian heresy in which Jesus is like or similar to God*.

All of the heresies either distort or deny the biblical teaching concerning the Person of Jesus Christ!

Today in America there are **more than 30 million adherents of cults**, representing a missionfield on our doorsteps. Our society and culture have also become fascinated with the occult. This is seen most pronouncedly in the rapid pace of growth of the New Age movement. There are millions of Americans practicing some aspect of the occult with many of checking their horoscope every morning to see what their Zodiac sign says about how to live that day.

1. EARLY CHURCH HERESIES AND CREEDS

"Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than truth itself."¹

--Irenaeus, Early Church Father (ca. A. D. 130-200)

Many of us have gotten a knock on the door. When we have answered, we have been met by two Jehovah's Witnesses or two Mormons who politely introduced themselves to us. A lot of what they said at first may have seemed to make sense and sound Christian. But as we began to ask them specific questions about their faith it became obvious that the teachings of their religion (cult) is very different from ours.

But it takes knowledge about my faith—what I believe—to be able to come to that conclusion.

Two thousand years ago Paul warned the Christians living around Ephesus:

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which **He bought with his own blood**. I know that **after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth** in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that **for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears**” (Ac 20:28-31).

Savage wolves who appear as sheep. That's the history of cults. Using mostly truth with a little bit of falsehood “to draw away disciples after them.”

An older woman once said:

“When I work, I work hard, when I rest, I rest hard. When I thinks, I falls asleep.”

Many of us associate church with sleeping or the place where you place your brains outside the doors before you come in. A place of faith, and often, a place of mindless faith, where no thinking is required.

We live in perilous times and we cannot afford to be asleep.

The Great Commandment says that we are to **love God with all our minds** as well as hearts. What does that mean? Does it not mean to use our minds to our best ability?

Jesus warned His early followers:

“Watch out for false prophets, they come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them” (Mt 7:15-16).

Fanatics come in every stripe and color. Some of them are extremely difficult to recognize. Often many good things are found among their excesses. If every religious quack was obviously fake, no one would be deceived. Therefore, we are warned to be on our guard:

“For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible” (Mk 13:22).

Here we see the extreme deceptiveness of the false prophets where they are almost able to deceive the very “elect.” False prophets can look like the real thing. This should not surprise us in light of Paul’s warning:

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerades as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Co 11:14-15).

All the heresies either distort or deny the biblical teaching concerning the Person of Jesus Christ!

Every false teaching denies either the humanity or the deity of Jesus Christ. This is nothing new for the apostles John and Paul addressed this issue in their day as insipient Gnosticism with its various strands of heretical teachings (i.e. the worship of angels) threatened the early church.

"What do you think of Christ?" is the **test of orthodoxy** of any group or movement calling itself Christian. This is foundational. The attitude of any and every cult is "We need Jesus, **but . . .**" The attitude of theological and religious liberalism is: "Jesus who?"

The Person of Jesus Christ is the crucial issue also because our salvation, our eternal destiny, is dependent on who we believe Jesus to be. Jesus made this crystal clear when He challenged the Pharisees:

"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (Jn 8:24).

The issue as to the nature of the Person of Jesus of Nazareth engendered all kinds of philosophical and theological speculation throughout church history. This was also true of the early development of the Christian religion.

The Early Church's teaching that Jesus Christ is both God and man created a problem as to the nature of the union of the two natures. Many errors crept in probably because there was a failure to make a clear distinction between His two natures and to emphasize the unity of His person.

Several early positions were branded "heretical" by the Early Church. The word "heresy" (Greek *hairesis*) means literally a "choice." The word has three primary meanings in the New Testament:

1. A chosen course of thought and action. This means a party or sect such as the Sadducees (Ac 24:5,14; 28:22).
2. Dissensions arising from diverse opinions and aims (1 Co 11:19; Gal 5:20).
3. Doctrinal departures from revealed truth (Titus 3:10).

It was heresy of this third type against which the apostles vigorously warned the church. (Ac 20:29; Php 3:2)

GNOSTICISM

Gnosticism was one of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church. Its primary feature is that *redemption is found through mystical knowledge* rather than faith. It was a diverse and complex movement, not dissimilar to the modern New Age phenomenon. When combined with certain elements from Christianity, Gnosticism proved extremely attractive. In fact, it became so widespread that by the beginning of the third century A.D. most of the intellectual Christian congregations (where a significant number of parishioners had a basic education) throughout the Roman Empire were to some degree affected by it. One historian referred to its growth in the second century as "the swiftness of an epidemic over the Church from Syria to Gaul."²

Because Gnosticism appeared very similar to Christianity at many points, it was viewed as a major challenge by many early Christian writers, especially Irenaeus. The Gnostic interpretations of Scripture prompted questions about the correct way to interpret Scripture (hermeneutics—the science of interpretation). In his vigorous defense of Christian orthodoxy in the face of the challenge from Gnosticism, he wrote his most significant work, *Against all Heresies (Adversus omnes Haereses)*, which represents a major defense of the Christian understanding of salvation, and especially of the role of tradition in remaining faithful to the apostolic witness in the face of non-Christian interpretations. He argued that “a traditional

interpretation of Scripture” was faithfully preserved by the apostolic church, and that it had found its expression in the canonical books of Scripture. Furthermore, it is reflected in the creeds of the church and its public doctrinal pronouncements.

Since Gnosticism came from without, it was not originally considered a heresy. Only as it worked its way into the Christian Church did it become a perversion of Christian truth and thus heretical.³

This anti-Christian influence was not a homogeneous system of either religion or philosophy. Rather it was **highly syncretistic**. It was an attempt to found a **universal religion** which would take advantage of contributions from many sources and thus to acclimatize Christianity in a popular religious trend of the day and to show it to be consistent with it and a fulfillment of it.

Gnosticism embraced many widely diversified sects holding opinions drawn from a great variety of sources such as Greek, Jewish, Parsic (Persia), Indian (India); philosophies (especially Plato and Philo), religions, theosophies and mysteries. These number of schools of philosophy were oriental in general character.

Basic Teachings

There were two primary features to the teachings of Gnosticism. One is that there is redemption through Christ, but it was a redemption from matter rather than a redemption of mankind from sin. This was so because their teaching of a **dualism** between the world of the **spirit** and the world of **matter**. The world of the spirit was entirely good and consisted of the heavenly realm which would include the mind—the psychic and spiritual aspects of man. The world of matter, however, was entirely evil because it consisted of the earthly, that which belongs to the flesh, the body, etc.

The other primary feature was that this redemption was accomplished primarily through **knowledge**, as the name denotes (Gnosticism comes from the Greek root *gnosis* which means "knowledge"), rather than through faith. This knowledge which was essential to "salvation" was of a kind of which the ordinary believer was incapable of achieving. Only the "enlightened" could achieve it. Thus Gnosticism belonged to the intellectually and spiritually elite. As someone put it, "The intellectual pride of the Gnostics *changed the gospel into a philosophy.*"³

The unbiblical dualism engendered eight main errors:

1. **Man's body is evil since it is made of matter** (earthly). This is in contrast to God, who is purely spirit and therefore good.

2. **Salvation or redemption is through the escape from the flesh, the body--from physical evil.** The human race is essentially akin to the divine, being a spark of heavenly light imprisoned in a material body. This escape is made through a special knowledge rather than faith in Christ. Thus redemption is simply each person's efforts to secure emancipation from the flesh.

3. **Jesus Christ's was not truly human.** His true humanity was denied for two reasons:

- (1) The **Docetists** (from the Greek *dokeo* which means "to seem") taught that Christ only seemed to have a body, and
- (2) The **Cerinthianists** (named after its most prominent spokesman, Cerinthus) taught that Christ (the Anointed One) came upon or joined the man Jesus at baptism and left Him just before He died.

Thus the Christ was neither born as a man nor suffered as a man. While the man Jesus suffered and rose again, the Christ remained impassible as a spiritual being.

In this way they solved the difficulty of the connection between the highest spiritual agency (the Christ) and sinful corporeal matter (the human Jesus with a body), which was involved in the doctrine of the Incarnation and Passion. This view is the background of much of 1 John (1:1; 2:22; 4:2-3).

4. **Since the body was considered evil, it was to be either gratified (libertinism) or ignored or treated harshly (asceticism).** Since there was no moral or ethical relationship between the body and the soul, what was done to the body was irrelevant to the health and vitality of the soul. Therefore the body was to be either ignored, punished or gratified. The ascetic form of Gnosticism is the background of part of the letter to the Colossians 2:21-23.

5. **Cosmological Dualism.** *There is a dualism of spirit, which is good and matter, which is evil.* This paradoxically led to licentiousness (libertinism) as well as asceticism. The reasoning was that, since matter was considered evil, the breaking of God's law was of no moral and spiritual consequence. The locus of sin was found in matter rather than in the breaking of God's holy law (1 Jn 3:4).⁴

6. **A denial of the personality of the Supreme God.** The Supreme God is so far beyond man's comprehension that He is to be viewed abstractly and philosophically rather than personally.

7. **Ascription of Yahweh of the Old Testament to the demiurge or inferior creator of the world.** The unknown transcendent God of Gnosticism was beyond contact with matter, which makes up this sinful world.

Gnosticism also taught that the Old Testament and New Testament were revelations of two different deities. They regarded the God of the Jews as far inferior to the Supreme Being, called by them the Abyss. The God of the Old Testament was the creator of the world, often referred to as the Demiurge. Many Gnostics (especially Marcion and his followers—"Marcionites") considered the God of the Old Testament as merely great, harsh, and rigorous, and the God of the New Testament to be wholly good—a God of love. Some Gnostic sects considered the God of the Old Testament as being totally alien from and opposed to the supreme God; others considered Him merely as a subordinate power, inferior but not hostile to the supreme God and acting as His unconscious organ or agent.⁵

8. **A syncretistic approach to truth** that combines misunderstood or distorted Christian doctrines and various elements from Asian, Jewish, Greek and other sources.

In Christianity matter is not evil, but is God's good creation, and the "new earth" exists in the age to come alongside the "new heaven." The body, likewise, is not evil, and salvation is not an escape from it. There is a resurrection body, as eternal as the soul.

The Gnostics justified their beliefs by appealing to Christian and Jewish writings which were allegorically interpreted. Gnosticism also claimed to have authoritative gospels and epistles of their own. These were based on the supposed teachings of Jesus which had not been committed to writing, but which had been handed down secretly through oral tradition.

This provided a powerful impetus for the formation of a New Testament canon of Scripture to distinguish between spurious and genuine Scriptures.

Jesus Christ is not the God-Man, wholly God and fully man, but an eon, an angelic being, though the highest in order of all generations of angelic beings (there were at least 30 orders of eons according to Valentius, the most influential of all Gnostics). This makes Jesus Christ a very special person, but hardly the God-Man of the New Testament.

Gnosticism as a Movement

Gnosticism did not have a well knit, unified organization. They were too divided and too varied to be brought together. Some remained within the existing churches, teaching their doctrines, until they were expelled as heretics. Others formed themselves into separate congregations. These congregations had special rites which resembled the mystery cults which were widespread in the Roman Empire of that time.

Gnosticism strikes at the very root of Christianity. The Person of God—the Godhead, the Trinity, the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament as Holy Scripture, the personality and free will of human beings, the existence of moral evil, salvation by grace through faith alone, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the redemption of Christ, His resurrection—the whole significance of His Person and work—all this is denied. Such is the spirit of Gnosticism.

The Gnosticism addressed in the New Testament was an early form of heresy. The intricately developed system of Gnosticism took place in the second and third centuries.

In addition to 1 John and Colossians there also seems to be allusions to early Gnosticism in 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy (6:20) and 2 Timothy, Titus and 2 Peter.

Most of the heresies in the Early Church revolved not around Christ's deity, but His humanity. Most people believed that He was God, while some questioned whether He truly became man. The apostle John wrote his first letter to refute arguments against Jesus' humanity, not His deity:

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God, because **many false prophets** have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that **Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the **spirit of the antichrist**, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world" (1 Jn 4:1-3).

ARIANISM

Not until A.D. 318 did a recognized church leader deny Christ's deity. Arius (A.D. 250-336), a presbyter in the church of Alexandria, taught the most subtle and damaging teaching of the third and fourth centuries.

Arius' teaching began from the position that God the Father is unique and distinct. He alone is ingenerate, everlasting, uncreated, true, immortal, wise, good, sovereign. God the Father, therefore, could not possibly have communicated His essence to any other, for that would remove the great gulf between Creator and creature, and thus would in effect be a reversion to polytheism. This means that Arius' Supreme Being was God the Father, not the triune God (Trinity).

The Son of God, by contrast, was a being created by the will and power of God the Father. This is in contrast to what Christianity teaches which is that the Son was always as God the Father was and that He co-exists with God, unbegotten. This means He is ever-begotten and not born by begetting and therefore there is no moment of time in which God precede the Son.

Arius claimed that Christ was simply the first of created beings, and through Him all other things are made. Christ was not actually God. Since He was created He could not be God. The fact that He was created, says Arius, made Him subordinate to the Father. In anticipation of the glory that He was to receive, finally He is called the *Logos*, the Son, only begotten.

Arius argued that the scriptural titles for Christ, which appeared to point to His being of equal status with God, were merely courtesy titles.

Jesus as the Son of God was treated as a special creature in the sense that the Father created Him first and for the specific function of undertaking the rest of the creation. His major role was that of being **God's servant** in the work of creation and (to a lesser extent) in revelation.

Arius' teachings raised a furor in the church—largely because it had not been the church's commonly held view. The Council of Nicea met seven years later (A.D. 325) to refute this view and eventually expelled Arius as a heretic. As a result Arianism went underground for a period of thirty years. It enjoyed a resurgence between A.D. 353 to 378. After this Arianism splintered into more radical groups (also more vocal in their opposition to orthodox Christianity) such as the Anomoeans or Eunomians with Aetius (A.D. 370) as its leader and later Eunomius (A.D. 395) as his successor.⁶

CREEDS AND DOGMAS

Because of sects the Early Church set up councils which developed creeds to counteract the false teachings that were disseminated. **All of the first seven councils were called to clarify issues about the person of Christ.** The shift in the church from the historical language of Hebrew thought to the metaphysical language of Greek thought threatened belief in the humanity of Jesus. **Arianism claimed that Jesus was neither God nor man but an intermediate creature between God and man.** The Hebrew idea of the firstborn who inherited the authority of the father was interpreted to mean that Jesus was the first creature of God, much as in the Christology of the Jehovah's Witnesses today. **The Council of Nicaea of 325** declared that in the incarnation Jesus was both truly God and truly man.

In the effort to explain how Jesus could be both God and man, **Apollinarianism** denied the integrity of the human nature by saying that the eternal Son or *Logos*, supplied the place of human intelligence. This meant that **Jesus had a human body and soul but not a human mind.** This was condemned as heresy at **the Council of Constantinople in 381.**

The **Nestorians** went so far in defense of the humanity of Jesus that they denied the unity of His person by separating the two natures into two personalities. Therefore they were charged with the heresy that **Jesus was two persons**, and were condemned at **the Council of Ephesus in 431.**

The logic of the Council of Ephesus really led to **Eutychianism**, which denied the essential integrity of both natures by confusing them, that is, running them together, so as to make a third nature separate and different from either the human or divine nature. This meant they **denied the true humanity of Jesus, so the Council of Chalcedon of 451** was necessary to check this trend. The last three councils of the East were efforts to defend the humanity of Jesus against the mythological trends that tended to make Mary a Greek goddess whose son Jesus was like a Greek god.

Monophysitism, the belief in **one nature of Christ** was addressed by the **Third Council of Constantinople of 680-81**. The Second Council of Constantinople reaffirmed the two natures and the two wills, of God and of Jesus. Even **the Second Council of Nicaea of 787**, the seventh ecumenical council in the East, was concerned with **the humanity of Jesus**.

Opposition to the use of icons, iconoclasm, was promoted by the monophysites, who took a dim view of any emphasis on the human Jesus, but the Second Council Nicaea in 787 defined the use of icons. The iconoclastic controversy put Pope and Emperor on opposite sides and further prepared the way for schism between East and West.

The creeds and dogmas of the church are not a set of arbitrary regulations invented *a priori* by a committee of theologians enjoying an intellectual endeavor. Most of them were **hammered out under pressure of urgent practical necessity to provide an answer to heresy**. The development of the creeds was an essential element in the attempt to achieve doctrinal consensus with the Early Church.

A “creed” is a statement of faith which summarizes the main points of Christian belief, which is common to all Christians. It has come to be recognized as a concise, formal and universally accepted and authorized statement of the main points of Christian faith.

The area of doctrine which witnessed the greatest controversy was related to the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore the church gave considerable attention to the development of such a doctrine. This is clearly seen in the several early creeds of the church.

The creed of **Nicaea** states:

"I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

"And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds; God of God; Light of Light; very God of Very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven.

And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; And ascended into heaven; And sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost; The Lord and Giver of Life; Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; Who spake by the prophets. And I believe one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the Resurrection of the dead; and the Life of the world to come. Amen."

The key phrase—that Christ was of **one substance** (*homoousios*) with the Father--stood solidly opposed to the Arian belief that the Son (as well as any other creature) was alien to the Father's substance.

Modern Errors

The old dictum that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it is certainly true when it comes to church history and heresy. The diagram below illustrates the fact that present-day heresies emanate from heresies that were disputed long ago.

GNOSTIC PROTOTYPE	ARIAN PROTOTYPE
Christian Science and Unity School of Christianity Mind & Healing Sciences Transcendental Meditation (TM) New Age Movement	Jehovah's Witnesses Mormonism Unification Church The Way International

Modern errors regarding the natures in Christ center mostly in denying that Christ is actually God. Liberal theologians and others who deny the deity of Christ are only reviving the old Arian heresy of the third and fourth centuries.

Orthodox Doctrine

The orthodox doctrine concerning the natures of Jesus Christ was drawn up at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.

"Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance [*omoousios*] with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; (2) as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer [*theotokos*]; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized IN TWO NATURES, WITHOUT CONFUSION, WITHOUT CHANGE, WITHOUT DIVISION, WITHOUT SEPARATION; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence [*hupostasis*], not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us."

This creed is a refutation of both Arianism and Apollinarianism. The reference to Jesus as "complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly Man" is the basic affirmation of Chalcedon, but the reference to "a reasonable soul and body" is a refutation of Apollinarianism which denied that Jesus had a human mind.

The word "substance" in the affirmation that "our Lord Jesus Christ is of **one substance** (*omoousios*) with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of **one substance** with us as regards his manhood" as it is used here, does not mean "stuff," as we are inclined to understand it. In fact, it meant virtually the opposite when it was written into this credal statement. The "substance" of something was its **essence**, or what makes it what it is—apart from its varying appearances to us.

This Chalcedonian definition of who Jesus is tells us that He has **two natures** but that He is **one Person**—fully God, fully man, one Person.

The Formula of Concord states:

"We believe, teach, and confess that the Son of God, although from eternity He has been a particular, distinct, entire divine person, and thus, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, true, essential, perfect God, nevertheless, in the fullness of time assumed also human nature into the unity of His person, not in such a way that there are now two persons or two Christs, but that Christ Jesus is now in one person at the same time true, eternal God, born of the Father from eternity, and a true man, born of the most blessed Virgin Mary, as it is written Rom. 9:5: 'Of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever.' Hence Christ is not two distinct persons, but one single person, notwithstanding that two distinct natures are found in Him."

The Westminster Confession, now more than three centuries old states:

"The Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature. . . ."

In the **one person** Jesus Christ, therefore, there are **two natures**: a human nature and a divine nature. Each is found in its completeness and integrity, and these two natures are organically and indissolubly united, yet so that no third nature is formed thereby.

Summary of Creeds

- The Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) produced the Nicene Creed, affirming **the essential oneness** between the Father and the Son.
- The Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) confirmed the Nicene Creed and clarified **the relationship of the Holy Spirit** to the Father and to the Son.
- The Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) defined **the unity of the two natures of Christ**.
- The Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) produced the Chalcedonian Creed that defended **the integrity of the two natures of Christ** against teachings that would have minimized the human nature.

The Two Natures of Christ

The union of the two natures in Christ is unique and incomparable. It is both personal (or "*hypostatic*") and an ontological union (union at the level of being or essence—at the deepest level). The Angelic Doctor, Thomas Aquinas, rightly observed that this union is neither accidental nor essential. This is true in the sense that it is not essential as we find between the persons of the Trinity. After all, the Trinity was a reality before the incarnation, before the joining of the two natures into one person.

This union, however, is profoundly personal since the two natures coexist in **one Person**. It does not signify a union whereby humanity is mingled with deity so that a third entity results; instead it entails the intimate and perpetual conjunction of two natures into unity with one person, with each nature retaining its distinctive properties. This hypostatic union represents an ontological union since human being at the very deepest level of humanity participates in, and is directed by, divine being. Yet the humanity of Jesus Christ is never dislodged or displaced by His divinity; both natures remain intact without any confusion or conversion of one into the other.

John Calvin compared the two natures of Christ to the two eyes of man. While each eye can have its vision separately, yet when we are looking at anything our vision, though in itself divided, joins up and unites in order to give itself as a whole to the object that is put before it.

Throughout the centuries there has been an unbroken chain of creedal testimony to the Godhead of Jesus Christ.

This form of the doctrine is generally accepted among orthodox theologians. The questions arise, however, from the mystery of the union of the two natures. How can a person with two separate natures still be one person? How are they joined? How do they function? Does each nature have a will and consciousness of its own?

Jesus Christ was just **One Person**

- All attributes and powers were ascribed to just one person. Whatever He did, whether from the human nature (e. g. "Jesus wept"), or from the divine nature (e. g. Jesus multiplying the loaves and fish), was ascribed to just one person.

When John says that "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" he was asserting that the One who had His being eternally within the unity of the Godhead became man at a point in time, without relinquishing His oneness with God.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism put it,

“He continueth to be God and man, in two distinct natures and one person for ever.”⁷

Similarly, the Belgic Confession states,

“We confess that he is Very God and Very Man;
Very God by His power to conquer death and
Very Man that He might die for us.”⁸

- Christ continually refers to Himself as a single person; He always speaks of Himself as "I".
- We can understand salvation only when we understand that Jesus Christ was and is the God-Man, not just the Man of God.
- Christian consciousness recognizes Jesus Christ as a single undivided personality.
- Both human and divine qualities and acts may be ascribed to the God-Man under either of His names.
 - "The Blood of God (Ac 20:28).
 - "They crucified the Lord of Glory" (1 Co 2:9).
 - "The virgin shall bring forth a son . . . He shall be called the Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:31-32).
 - "Even as the Son of Man, who is in heaven" (Jn 3:13).

With regard to Christ having **two wills** there were times when Jesus expressed the will of unfallen humanity; and other times when He expressed the will of deity (e.g., Jesus said, "Nevertheless not My will but Yours be done"—Lk 22:42). This obviously expresses human will. Again He said, "Your sins be forgiven" (Mt 9:2, 5)—a statement that could never be attributed to man as only God can forgive sins. It seems that every single decision stemmed from either the "will" of His human nature or the "will" of His divine nature or a blending of both. Therefore it is correct to think of Jesus having two wills.

With regard to Christ having **two consciousnesses**, it is clear that there were times when Jesus was conscious humanly speaking (e.g., Jesus said, "I thirst"—Jn 19:28). On the other hand, Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30). Inasmuch as the Father was not human, He could have been referring to His deity.

With regard to the exact nature of the union of the two natures. Human nature found its personality only in union with the divine nature. The human nature did not have a personality of its own before Christ took it for Himself. In other words, **the logos** did not take on an already developed personality. The two natures thus joined, constitute one personal subsistence.

Furthermore it was God in the person of Christ who took upon Himself the nature of a man; the union of the natures is thus *theanthropic*, God-Man. He had divine intelligence and human intelligence. He had a divine will and a human will. He had a divine consciousness and human consciousness.

SUMMARY

It is not surprising that Gnosticism is on the rise in United States in a day and age when the belief that one knows the truth is tantamount to breeding terrorism. When **the belief in absolute truth is considered the unpardonable sin, the eighth deadly sin**, it is predictable that a religion or philosophy that feeds such suspicion will be warmly embraced. With its endless diversity and syncretistic tendencies, it is not surprising that Gnosticism is attractive to the North American mind, which embraces **a faith that is tailored to the individual**. Since Gnosticism attempts to find a universal religion that combines many religious and philosophical traditions and ideas, it can easily fit in with the popular religious trend of the day. By rejecting the cardinal teachings of Christianity, it presents **a Gospel of tolerance** that is freed from the constraints of dogmatism and that requires no commitment.

Unlike Christianity which focuses on God's kingdom, Gnosticism focuses on **knowledge of the self** and is therefore *inward*. It is an attempt to explore and understand the spiritual secrets known only to the enlightened. The unique spark of divinity is to be fanned into a flame that can bring liberation from the flesh and the material world and "rejoined with all the other sparks to reconstitute the true God."⁹ Gnosticism brings attention to **the god in the human self** and thus feeds "the egoism of the American temperament."¹⁰ As New Testament scholar N. T. Wright has pointed out, Neo-Gnosticism is a repackaged Gnosticism that "declares that the only real moral imperative is that you should then be true to what you find when you engage in that deep inward search."¹¹ This appeals to the pride in man which says, "I'm really quite an exciting person, deep down, whatever I may look like outwardly."¹²

Because knowledge was the supreme end and purpose of life in Gnosticism it was distinguished by an unethical, loveless intellectualism. It was a knowledge devoid of love and compassion.

Although the ancient form of Gnosticism came to an end in the 5th century, its spirit has reappeared from time to time in church history. Since Gnosticism is not just one aspect of thought, but many, it surfaces again and again in one form or another. Aspects of Gnostic teaching are reproduced in forms of religious doctrine that deny an objective atonement and in modern pantheistic philosophies, such as encouraged by the philosophy that permeates *The Da Vinci Code*.

2. FALSE PROPHETS AND CULTS AND SECTS

“But there were also **false prophets** among the people, just as there will be **false teachers** among you. They will **secretly introduce** destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord **who bought them**—bringing swift destruction on themselves” (2 Pe 2:1-2).

Fanatics come in every stripe and color. Some of them are extremely difficult to recognize. Often many good things are found among their excesses. If every religious quack was obviously fake, no one would be deceived. Therefore, we are warned to be on our guard:

“For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to **deceive the elect—if that were possible**” (Mk 13:22).

Here we see the extreme deceptiveness of the false prophets where they are almost able to deceive the very “elect.” False prophets can look like the real thing. This should not surprise us in light of Paul’s warning:

“And no wonder, for **Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light**. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerades as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Co 11:14-15).

BE ALERT!

Be alert! There are more than two kinds of people in the world—believers and unbelievers. There is a third group as Peter and Paul point out:

“But there were also **false prophets** among the people, just as there will be **false teachers** among you. They will **secretly introduce** destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves” (2 Pe 2:1-2).

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow **deceiving spirits and things taught by demons**. Such teachings come from **hypocritical liars**, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”
(1 Ti 4:1-2)

A FEAR TO JUDGE

Many Christians have come to believe that it is wrong to judge. For many this is based on Jesus’ warning:

“**Do not judge**, or you too will be judged. For in the same way You judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”
(Mt 7:1-2)

This, however, does not mean that it is always wrong to judge people under any circumstances. If so, then why did Jesus tell us five versus later not to give sacred things to dogs and pearls to swine? How can you decide who is a dog or who is a swine unless you judge?

What Jesus is saying is that when you judge others—as everyone must—be aware that the same measuring stick you use for others will be used for you.

It is not wrong to listen carefully to what is being said behind the pulpit. Paul encouraged this:

“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should **weigh carefully** what is said” (1 Co 14:29).

To those who would argue that this only applies in the case of prophecy, Luke replies:

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with **great eagerness and examined the Scriptures** every day to see *if* what Paul said was true” (Ac 17:11).

God loves truth seekers—people who so love the truth that they will not automatically receive something as truth just because someone says it, no matter what the reputation of the speaker. (By this time, Paul was considered a solid leader and teacher).

From these passages we see that even prophets, apostles and teachers make mistakes or go beyond the revelation God has given them. Here is where the community of believers is so important. God has given us the responsibility to **test everything**:

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but **test** the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn 4:1).

“**Test everything**. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil” (1 Th 5:20).

Fakes know how to use religious terminology. They have all the right phrases and clichés and thus sound so pious. They use such words as salvation, resurrection, judgment, prayer, etc. When they depart from historic Christianity, they seem to find a way to convince others that their “interpretation” is right. The believers of Galatia evidently were seduced for Paul said:

“I am astonished that you are so **quickly deserting** the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are **turning to a *different gospel***—which is really **no gospel at all**” (Gal 1:6-7).

No Gospel at all!

HOW TO SPOT RELIGIOUS FAKES

How do you spot religious charlatans? This question was a serious issue during the end of the first century for many Christians. By this time the apostles were gone and all kinds of fakes appeared. Many were gifted and exciting “preacher” who used Scripture to support heresy. Therefore a test was needed.

What kind of test? According to Jesus, **lifestyle or behavior** is one way we can spot a fake:

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are **ferocious wolves. By their fruit** you will recognize them” (Mt 7:15-16).

The early Christians examined the lives of the prophets to see if they behaved like the One they claimed to follow—Jesus. While false teachers may say all kinds of soothing things, just below the surface lurks their true nature. Eventually that nature will manifest its corruption.

QUESTIONABLE LIFESTYLE

The ability to detect a false prophet doesn’t require that you be a biblical scholar. Keep your eye out for four areas.

GREED

Paul claimed:

“**Unlike so many, we do not *peddle the Word of God for profit***. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.”
(2 Co 2:17)

“Many,” Paul claimed, were engaged in preaching for monetary benefit. The late A. A. Allen counseled a young evangelist:

“Son, do you know when a revival meeting is over? When you turn people on their heads and shake them and no money falls out, then you know God’s saying, “Move on to the next town, son.”

The Church Fathers of the Early Church dealt with the greedy by not giving them any money and by not letting them stay longer than three days.

IMMORALITY

In describing Jezebel, the false prophetess, John says:

“You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into **sexual immorality** and the eating of foods sacrificed to idols” (Rev 2:20).

Immorality and false prophets go hand in hand. Since they consider themselves to be special, they receive direct revelation from God Himself, and so, they are above the dictates of the Bible. The admonitions against sexual immorality in the Bible apply only to lesser mortals.

EGOMANIA

Egomania is another trait common among false prophets. One aspect of egomania is that these leaders are extremely intolerant of any interpretation of Scripture or life in general, other than their own. Like the Oracle, they know all and see all. If their teaching or lifestyle is questioned in any way, they deflect such accusations by appealing to the “deeper” or “hidden” truth that God has revealed to them.

The more obvious form of egomania is where these leaders put themselves in the forefront of anything and everything. Their names and pictures are promoted in every conceivable way. Schools, camps, churches, etc. are named after them. And they are not hesitant in sharing how much they sacrifice for the Lord and for their followers. Paul, on the other hand, was able to testify:

“For we **do not preach ourselves**, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Co 4:5).

CHARISMA

The final mark characteristic of religious fakes is charisma. Paul claimed:

“I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘superapostles.’ **I may not be a trained speaker**, but I do have knowledge” (2 Co 11:5).

In referring to the “super-apostles,” Paul was being sarcastic. These were false apostles who had infiltrated the Corinthian church. They were in reality not apostles at all, except in their own arrogantly inflated opinion of themselves (1 Co 10:12). In Paul’s admission, “I may not be a

trained speaker” (1 Co 11:5), he was referring to using the skills, references and flourishes of professional rhetoric. Paul is admitting here that he was not an orator or a refined, accomplished speaker, as we’re these superapostles. They used a professional type of oratory as their stock in trade, designed to deceive the people and, thus, extract money from them.

By their professional skills as orators and by their winning personalities, these, like so many false prophets today, were able to play on the gullibility of the audiences. We should not be surprised that Satan, who appears as an angel of light, would use gifted, intelligent, refined people to do his bidding. As the Deceiver, it is only natural that he would use the best this world can offer in attracting as many as possible to his side. Satan is too smart to use the mediocre.

Be alert! Watch out for these traits in false prophets and cults. Be discerning. Don’t be duped by appearances. Underneath the sheep’s clothing, you will find “ferocious wolves” and behind the religious terminology, you will find heresy.

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are **ferocious wolves**. **By their fruit** you will recognize them” (Mt 7:15-16).

False prophets are those who have not been sent by God but who claim that they have (Mt 24:24; Jer 23:16; Rev 19:20). They are like preachers of a “different Gospel” (Gal 1:6-9).

CULTS AND SECTS

Closely tied to false prophets are cults that they have founded. Religious cults differ from denominations in that they are **heretical schisms** from orthodox belief and practice.

MARKS

What are the marks or characteristics of cults? Most non-Christian cults owe their very existence to the fact that they have used the terminology of historic Christianity and have borrowed liberally from the Bible, almost always out of context. They have also used evangelical cliches and terms wherever advantageous to their cause. Such gross perversions and redefinitions of historical, biblical terminology has caused confusion to many.

1. EXTRA-BIBLICAL REVELATION. To the Bible is added the authority of some book or teacher. Their view is “We have a special message from God.” They thrive on biblical illiterates and religious newcomers who become enamored with special revelation, deeper truth, and better methods. Cult members profess to have a corner on God’s revelation. As a rule they claim to have a book or letter that is the “key” to understanding the Bible. Some say that only their translation of the Bible is inspired. Others believe their leader alone has God’s final message for the world in these last days. Their attitude is “Yes, we need the Bible, but . . .”

2. EXCLUSIVE SALVATION. Because of their belief in a leader who alone has God's final message, they come to believe that God can accomplish His ultimate purpose only through them—"our group." They alone are God's people and understand His message. They truly believe that they alone are saved while all others are lost. If their movement fails, then they reason, God also has failed. If they let God down then His work will never be accomplished.

3. PRESUMPTUOUS MESSIANIC LEADERSHIP. The leaders of cults are frequently men and women who claim that they in some unique way represent God to their disciples. Some claim to be a "messiah," if not outright "the Messiah." Others claim to be *the interpreter* of God's mind and Word. Their attitude is "I know what's best for you." Such arrogant and confident claims attract confused and uncertain people who are looking for certainty in a world of uncertainty.

4. BLIND ALLEGIANCE TO LEADERSHIP. Followers are taught that any kind of questioning is seen as disloyalty to the Leader and to the group. All disagreement is looked upon as a threat to the "purity" of the movement. Uncritical allegiance to leadership is the result. Allegiance to the leader and the cult becomes so pronounced that followers are ready to die to show their loyalty as in the case of Jim Jones' followers. This blind allegiance is seen also in that decades and even centuries after a leader has died. The devoted followers still try to prove that their founder was true or that his long-past date for the Second Coming of Christ still is legitimate.

5. DEFECTIVE CHRISTOLOGY. Cults either distort or deny the biblical teaching concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ. John warned:

"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has **come in the flesh** is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard is coming and even now is already in the world" (1 Jn 4:2-3).

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is **the Christ** is born of God" (1 Jn 5:1).

Every cult denies either the humanity or the deity of Jesus Christ. This is nothing new for the apostle John who addressed this issue in his day as heretical Gnosticism threatened the Early Church.

"What do you think of Christ?" is the test of orthodoxy of any group or movement calling itself Christian. This is foundational. The attitude of a cult is "We need Jesus, **but . . .**"

6. A FALSE BASIS OF SALVATION. Instead of accepting “the finished work” of Jesus Christ who died to obtain man’s salvation, cults add to that work. This is in the form of meritorious work—rules and regulations that are closely adhered to. Often certain religious observances are added that take on crucial importance. When any kind of human activity is added to the work accomplished by Jesus on the cross, the gospel of grace is perverted. Their attitude is “Jesus died for our sins, **but** . . .” They also believe in an exclusive salvation which says: “We **alone** are saved. All others are lost.”

7. UNCERTAIN HOPE. Even with a view toward salvation that is exclusive, the real truth is that cultist never has the full assurance of salvation. When pressed, he will admit that he is not sure that he will enter heaven, but hopes so as he presses on to work a little harder to make that hope more certain. With meritorious work as the basis of salvation it is no wonder that the cultist is tragically and understandably left in a limbo of uncertainty.

8. DOCTRINAL AMBIGUITY. Cults are constantly changing their views to fit with the changing values and ideas of society. Changes are made to fit whatever is currently attracting followers. An example of this would be the position of the Mormons toward blacks. It was only a few years ago that they allowed blacks into the priesthood. Before that they were considered an inferior race.

9. SELECTIVE HERMENEUTICS (INTERPRETATION). The cultist is very selective in his treatment of the Bible. It is a cafeteria style of interpretation where he picks and chooses certain verses here and there without regard to their context. It is proof-texting where certain portions of Scripture are extracted from its context to prove a particular point of doctrine. He builds his beliefs out of bits and pieces of the Bible. This is why cult members are so extremely ignorant of biblical knowledge in general. They have focused all their learning on certain portions and are totally in the dark if asked about the rest of the Bible.

10. LIMITED ESCHATOLOGY. Because the cult members believe that they alone are the people of God and that they have the only true message of God, their view of Christ’s coming is “Christ is coming **only for us.**”

11. PERSECUTION COMPLEX. Their exclusivistic view of salvation whereby they think they are the only ones who have the truth and are therefore qualified to be God’s people has given rise to a persecution complex that feeds their paranoia. They tend to have a mentality that people hate them because they’re different. Their attitude is “The world is against us because we have the truth!”

12. DENUNCIATION OF OTHERS. This often takes the form of blacklisting all other churches and denominations as being apostate while claiming their cult to be the only true representation of the Church. Often they see themselves as the restoration of the primitive faith of Christianity. Their attitude is “All the churches are wrong but ours.”

13. CONTROLLING. Leaders typically micromanage the lives of their members. They intrude into the minutest details of their lives. People are told often what to eat, when to go to bed, who to marry (dating is often forbidden and considered “worldly”), how many children to have, how to discipline, where to live (if they are not a communal setting), what kind of work they should be employed with, etc. Followers are discouraged to think for themselves, and thereby, the cult keeps its uniformity or “purity.” Fear and guilt are ingeniously and forcefully used to totally dominate the lives of its followers.

14. ANTI-INTELLECTUAL. This does not mean that cult leaders or followers are not intelligent; it means that they have a general disdain for education as offered by our society and religious institutions. Often they will make fun of seminaries by arrogantly referring to them as “cemeteries.” For the most part, the leaders of cults are “self-taught” deciding for themselves what is important and what is not important to study. If they do have some formal or semi-formal education, it is often at a school that is not accredited by an accrediting association. Such lack of formal education easily leads to heresy since a person is not given the broad spectrum of education, whether secular or theological. I’m reminded of the young and enthusiastic evangelist who told John Wesley, “God doesn’t need your education.” Wesley replied, “Nor does God need your ignorance.” The cultist takes pride in his lack of formal education. To bypass the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of people throughout the ages by selecting a narrow path, if a path at all, of intellectual pursuit, is the height of intellectual and religious snobbery.

15. SIMPLISTIC ANSWERS. Cult members make a point that their religion is easy to understand. The leaders have a way of answering complex questions with a simple answer that is usually wrong. And the danger is that when you buy into something that seems to explain everything, you can soon be coaxed into doing almost anything.

16. SYNCRETISM. Often cults are a mixture of views and interpretations from various teachings or groups such as the British Israel theory of eschatological interpretation, Seventh Day Adventism, Jehovah Witnesses, etc. Various views are blended together to appeal to the naive and the uninformed.

17. FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION. As seen earlier, false prophets usually are motivated by greed. Their love of money, which is the root of all evil, makes them seek huge sums of money from their followers, so they can live in the lap of luxury. Luxurious living often is used as evidence of God's blessing in their life and ministry. Wealth is a sign of God's approval and the faith of the leader. The more faith one has the more money. All kinds of manipulative techniques are brought to bear on the gullible followers to extract their often hard-earned money.

3. IS THERE A PLACE FOR TESTING DOCTRINE?

"I am astonished that you are so **quickly deserting** the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to **a different gospel**—which is really **no gospel at all**. Evidently some people are throwing you into **confusion** and are trying to **pervert the gospel of Christ**. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal 1:6-9).

INFALLIBLE LEADERSHIP

Followers of cults and sects typically display an unwillingness to listen to anyone who criticizes their movement, especially their leadership. This is not surprising since their leaders threaten and attack those who criticize them. At the World Charismatic Conference on August 7, 1992 in Anaheim, California Benny Hinn made the following threats to the staff members and their families of the Christian Research Institute (CRI):

"Now I'm pointing my finger with the mighty power of God on me. . . . You hear this: There are men and women in southern California attacking me. I will tell you under the anointing now, you'll reap it in your children unless you stop. . . . And your children will suffer.

You're attacking me on the radio every night—you'll pay and your children will. Hear this from the lips of God's servant. You are in danger. Repent! Or God Almighty will move His hand. Touch not my Anointed. . . ." ¹

A few months later Hinn warned, "Those who attack confession are on the devil's side." ²

Paul Crouch has issued this warning to his critics:

"To hell with you! Get out of my life! Get out of the way! . . . I say get out of God's way. Quit blocking God's bridges, or God's gonna shoot you if I don't. . . . I don't even want to talk to you or hear you! I don't want to see your ugly face!" ³

Cults and sects show an unwillingness to discuss theology and to attempt to reason together from Scripture. On many occasions I have personally offered to sit down with people of cults and sects to examine theological issues but they have typically refused to do so. I have also provided literature with opposing viewpoints which they either did not read at all, or they read with little, if any, comprehension. This became evident when I would ask them about the

rationale of the argumentation of such literature. I have spoken with many other pastors in my own denomination (The Christian and Missionary Alliance) and other denominations who have had similar experiences with those involved in various cults and sects.

Not only are some faith teachers indifferent to their critics, they seem overly confident and unwilling to subject themselves to peer evaluation. References to traditional teaching often are made with disdain as they seem to attempt to recast the Christian tradition.

Paul Crouch says that instead of judging heresy we should let God "sort out all this doctrinal doo-doo."⁴ Then he added,

"'We can't have faith preaching.' 'You can't have confession stuff.' 'You can't do this, you can do that.' Who cares? Who cares? Let Jesus sort that all out at the judgment seat of Christ. We'll find out who was right and wrong doctrinally."⁵

He said of heresy hunters:

"I think they're damned and on their way to hell; and I don't think there's any redemption for them."⁶

While it may be unfair to understand some of these words literally, it does indicate the hostility of some in the Faith Movement toward their critics.

No one understands the things of God comprehensively. We all "see through a glass darkly" (1 Co 13:12). This may be less so at the center of our Christian faith, much more so at the outer reaches of faith's understanding. Yet, even at those peripheral edges, we find that many of the faith teachers are overly confident. At least when it comes to the peripheral elements of their practices, they should be willing to sit down and talk and try to come to a fair understanding, but often they are not willing.

The faith teachers manifest authoritarian leadership patterns where top leaders are viewed as inspired by the Spirit and beyond question. This Lone Ranger style is dangerous because it rules out any system of checks and balances that could provide accountability.

The following rhetorical questions are addressed throughout the remainder of this book:

- Are rank and file members of a particular cult or sect fervently following authoritarian, and often dictatorial leaders who pontificate a narrow and biblically unsound dogma?
- Do some leaders claim to be *the* interpreter of God's mind and Word?

- Does their attitude often seem to be, “I know what's best for you”?

Throughout history, confident and arrogant claims have attracted confused and perplexed people who are seeking certainty and some form of control in an uncertain world. Fear and guilt have always been used ingeniously and forcefully to dominate gullible followers. Sadly, allegiance to leaders and movements typically becomes so pronounced that followers are ready to do anything to please their leader (which to most of them equals pleasing God).

Scripture warns of false prophets and teachers:

"But there were also **false prophets** among the people, just as there will be **false teachers** among you. They will **secretly introduce destructive heresies**, even denying the sovereign Lord who brought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves" (2 Pe 2:1-2).

"The Spirit clearly says that in later times **some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits** and things taught by demons. Such teachings come from hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared with a hot iron."
(1 Ti 4:1-2)

DECEPTION

It is naive to think that just because the Holy Spirit will not deceive us, we as believers are therefore safe from deception and falsehood. The Bible is clear: Satan is a deceiver who blinds people:

"The god of this age has **blinded** the minds of unbelievers, so that they **cannot see the light of the gospel** of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."
(2 Co 4:4)

But unbelievers are not the only ones who can be deceived.

David recognized how liable he was to blindness when he prayed:

"**Search me**, O God, and know my heart; **Test me** and know my anxious thoughts. **See** if there is any offensive way in me, And **lead me** in the way everlasting" (Ps 139:23-24).

If "the man after God's own heart" saw his need for God's searching eye, how much more do we need to seek God's truth about Himself and about us, so we can receive forgiveness and walk in truth and the rich fellowship that is available in Him.

Since Satan himself "masquerades as **an angel of light**" (2 Co 11:14), he even uses visions to deceive and ensnare. As he will slowly draw us into sin and unbelief, we must judge any manifestation by its fruit (Mt 7:20). Expressions of emotion must be judged by their end result. Thus any manifestation that does not lead toward holiness and fruitfulness is suspect, no matter how impressive to the human imagination.

Satan is a master imitator. **His most effective methodology is not opposition but imitation.** While God uses imagery for good, Satan uses it to deceive and ensnare. Therefore visions and dreams can be messages from heaven or lures from hell. Such messages can release or bind. Since everyone uses imagery, we must be on guard!

None of us can even think without employing imagery since our brains function in such a way that we are dependent on visual, sensory and even auditory imagery. Such imagery often bombards our consciousness when we dream and colors our fantasies when we are awake. And memory is primarily a matter of imagery.

DANGERS IN TESTING DOCTRINE

Although the Bible is clear that there is a necessity to test doctrine, this is not to deny a place for **responsible dialogue**. There is nothing wrong with God's people taking different or opposing positions on theological issues as long as they do not contradict the "fundamentals" of the faith, the "faith that was **once for all entrusted** to the saints" (Jude 3).

Some object that we as believers should not occupy our time criticizing each other since our differences are peripheral. There is no doubt that an inordinate amount of time can be spent on fringe issues that drain our time and energy. After all, we do have many important responsibilities such as evangelism, missions, teaching on the deeper life, worship, healing, prayer, spiritual warfare, praise etc. This objection is valid if the teachings of the Faith Movement are merely peripheral. But are they?

The dangers of fundamentalism have been manifested in a **faultfinding, critical spirit** that has too often characterized the conservative wing of Christendom. A. W. Tozer had much to say about the dangers of fundamentalism as he saw in this movement more the spirit of Phariseism than the spirit of Jesus. Therefore, he had much more to say about such dangers than about the threat of liberalism.⁷ It was the Pharisees (the conservatives or fundamentalists), not the Sadducees (the liberals), who received the harshest rebukes from our Lord and Master (Mt 23).

It is a sad commentary on much of Christendom that we are often preoccupied with trivial squabbles. As denominations become older they also become more institutional and bureaucratic. When that happens "getting or keeping control" of what happens in the trenches gets increasing priority; in fact, it often takes on a life of its own.

One way this manifests itself is by the increasing number of "heresy hunters" or "religious bloodhounds" who come out of the woodwork. These "doctrinal detectives" with hot heads and cold hearts gnash their teeth at every sniff of what they deem heresy. A hard, censorious, critical, fault-finding, stern self-righteousness banishes the spirit of love. **Such strict orthodoxy costs too much when it bows before one's "biblical" opinion and theological precision at the price of love.**

Whenever we become aware of a movement that may seem suspect, we must guard against quickly jumping to the most damaging impression or judgment rather than thoughtfully weighing the evidence. Reckless haste violates Scripture which states that we must give people the benefit of the doubt ("[love] always trusts"—1 Co 13:7).

When spiritual vitality wanes people become increasingly "religious." They try to make up through externals, such as man-made rules and regulations ("the tradition of the elders"—legalism), what is missing internally in their communion with God. When spiritual declension takes place, the heart of spirituality is taken over by a critical, narrow spirit that boasts of its "concern for truth." Like the church at Ephesus which "[could] not tolerate wicked men" and tested false apostles, in the process "lost [their] first love," so some fundamentalists in their hot pursuit for "theological correctness" have lost their first love. They have sacrificed love at the shrine of what they consider "truth."

With two billion people on this planet who have not heard the name of Christ, who are lost, blind, deaf and on the road to a God-forsaken eternity in hell, what are we Christians doing that we think we have the luxury to spend precious time squabbling over fine details of doctrine (secondary matters)! What might happen if that same time and energy were devoted to prayer?

Many Christians tell us not to expend our energies in unprofitable debates with each other but instead to join minds and hearts in fighting **the real enemy!** As Paul warned:

"For **our struggle** is not against flesh and blood, but against the **rulers**, against **the authorities**, against **the powers of this dark world** and against **the spiritual forces of evil** in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12).

Such caution is legitimate. However, **if truth is at stake then part of our warfare is to point out its falsehood** since it is Satan who is "a liar and the Father of lies" (Jn 8:44). Falsehood, though expressed by human beings, must be confronted lest Satan spreads his venomous lies.

THE CALL TO FIGHT AND SEEK FOR THE TRUTH

In our desperate spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness, it is imperative that we arm ourselves for the battle. The apostle Paul warns us: "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Co 11:3).

With **spiritual confusion the norm**, Christians must raise the banner of truth above the humanistic philosophies and bizarre teachings that permeate society. Jesus promised:

"You will know **the truth** and **the truth will** make you **free**" (Jn 8:32).

When leaders make errors, do we not need to forgive them, correct them, pray for them, and restore them? Of course! If Jesus restored Peter, who denied Him, we should do no less. **There is no such thing as infallible leadership!** Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit in His fullness—did not confer infallibility upon God's leaders. Although Peter and the other apostles operated with much greater power after they were filled with the Spirit, this did not make them infallible. In fact, God had to use persecution (Ac 8:1) to get them to do their main job—spread the gospel.

Paul was forced to publicly oppose Peter, the leader of the Christian church, because he would not eat with the Gentiles (Gal 2:11-13). Peter and other Spirit-filled leaders were caught teaching that all who believed the gospel must live under Levitical law and adopt Jewish culture. Even though the New Testament presents a church that is filled with the Spirit to a much greater degree than we see in our own, her leaders were as fallible as ours.

THE BALANCE OF TRUTH

The **balance of truth** only comes when we listen to many leaders who are genuinely trying to proclaim "the **whole** counsel of God" (Ac 20:27; see also Pr 11:14; 15:22). In ignoring the counsel of church history and theology—its creeds, confessions, and writings—are not Faith Movement leaders courting danger? If church history teaches anything, it points to **the vital necessity of having every leader or movement come under scrutiny**. To teach otherwise is to fly in the face of historical awareness, common sense, and sacred Scripture.

IS IT WRONG TO JUDGE?

We have already seen from the previous chapter (p. 21 and 22) that it is not wrong to judge. The injunction not to judge (Mt 7:1-2) calls upon us to be discriminating and avoid hypocrisy. Jesus is warning us that **the measuring stick we use to judge others will be used for us.**

A little later in this same chapter Jesus states,

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. **By their fruit you will recognize them.**"
(Mt 7:16)

How can we "watch out" for false prophets if we are not to judge? These people come in "sheep's clothing" claiming to be Christians, knowing how to use Christian terminology, and behaving in loving and nice ways. But we must not be taken in by the mere veneer of such claims and behavior.

Jesus' statement, "By their **fruit** you will recognize them" (Mt 7:16) cannot be taken seriously if we are not to be discerning? It is true that we are never to judge in the sense of **condemning** someone, for only God knows all the facts and only He truly knows the motives and the heart of any person. While we can judge what people do and say, we cannot judge why they say what they say and do what they do. Paul reminds us: "God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus" (Ro 2:16).

Moreover, we are not to adopt and cultivate a censorious spirit. "Don't judge" or "Stop judging" is, in the Greek present tense, demanding that we stop making this a habit or practice of life. We are not to go around looking for the bad, magnifying the evil when we find it in the lives of others. We must not practice "fault-finding" and "flaw-picking."

Judging others was a common sin in Jesus' day. Remember Nathaniel's question? "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46). The question reflected a prejudice of orthodox Judaism that Nazareth lay outside the realm of God's blessings (compare Jn 7:52). The Pharisees considered themselves to be "righteous" and they "**scorned others**" (Lk 18:9). Their censorious judgment categorized Jesus as "the friend of publicans and sinners" (Lk 5:30).

Although we are not to be judgmental and condemning, we are to judge in the sense of being discerning or discriminating, and even then it must be done in humility (Gal 6:1-5). Without such discrimination there would be no church discipline (Mt 18:15-20; 1 Co 5:1-13; 2 Co 7:8-13; 2 Th 3:6-15) or any semblance of order in the body of Christ. A right use of judging will manifest itself in loving our brother enough to correct him and our God's truth enough to stand up for it and confess it before people.

It is not wrong to listen carefully to what is said from the pulpit. Paul encouraged this: "Two or three prophets should speak and others should **weigh carefully** what is said" (1 Co 14:29).

To those who argue that this principle only applies to prophecy, Luke replies:

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with **great eagerness and examined the Scriptures** every day to see **if** what Paul said was true" (Ac 17:11).

Truth seekers are considered "noble" by God. These are people who so love the truth that they will not automatically receive something as truth just because someone said it, no matter how good a reputation the person may have (Paul was considered a solid leader and teacher). These passages make clear that even prophets, apostles, and teachers err or go beyond God's revelation. This is why the community of believers is so important. God has made us responsible to **test everything**:

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:10).

"Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Th 5:21).

TESTING MANIFESTATIONS

Since many messages given in the Christian community are subjective by nature, it is vital that we continually test the messages we receive. We do this **subjectively by the Holy Spirit** who testifies to our spirit (Ro 8:14-16) and **objectively by God's Word** to see whether or not they are of God.

Philosopher, theologian, and revivalist Jonathan Edwards gave five signs to determine whether a work is or is not of the Holy Spirit. All the rules he gives (based upon an exposition of 1 Jn 4) have to do with the eventual effects of the work in the person's life:

- "1. Giving more honor to the historic Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior of the world;
2. Opposing Satan's kingdom by discouraging sin, lust and the world (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life);
3. Holding Scripture in high esteem;
4. Increasingly realizing that life is short, that there is another world, that they have immortal souls and must give an account of themselves to God, that they are sinful by nature and practice, and that they are helpless to overcome this without Christ; and

5. Expressing love for Christ and for others, especially toward fellow Christians which should not be characterized by hostility."⁸

Edwards also points out that we have greater assurance of the authenticity of a manifestation when it is observed in many people, of many different types of people, and in various places. The more widespread and varied a movement is, the more seriously it must be taken.

IS IT EVER LEGITIMATE TO NAME NAMES?

While false teaching is to be **identified and exposed** does that mean that it is ever legitimate to name names? Paul provides an example for us in that in some cases he chose not to mention the names of false teachers (1 Ti 1:3). In other cases, however, he gives their names. He warns Timothy of Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Ti 1:20) and mentions Hymenaeus again along with Philetus (2 Ti 2:17). John identifies Diotrephes "who loves to be first among them, [and] does not accept" (2 Jn 9) what John and his companions taught.

What benefit can there be in naming a person who is teaching erroneous doctrine? For one, if false doctrines are spoken of in generalities, which are often the case, people will often deny that their teachers are responsible for those doctrines. In many cases people refuse to believe that their favorite teachers are espousing false doctrine unless exact quotes are produced from their writings or sermons documenting the errors.

Another benefit to naming names is church discipline when such a person is unrepentant. Paul made this clear to Titus:

"Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being **self-condemned**" (Titus 3:10-11).

This may sound harsh, yet they are words inspired by God! Since people who create factions by teaching erroneous doctrine are to be disciplined (i.e. either restored or rejected by the church), if that rejection or excommunication is to be in effect throughout the church, false teachers need to be publicly exposed.

Counterfeiters know how to use religious terminology. They appropriate all the right phrases and cliches and thus sound very pious. They ply such words as faith, knowledge, revelation, salvation, resurrection, judgment, prayer, healing, etc. only to depart from historic Christianity, and dress up their deception to convince others that their "interpretation" is right. Paul indicated that the believers of Galatia were seduced:

"I am astonished that you are **so quickly deserting** the one who called you by the grace of Christ and **are turning to a different gospel**—which is really **not gospel at all**" (Gal 1:6-7).

The professing Christian Church at the beginning of the third millennium includes much sectarian error under its big tent. Part of evangelicalism is passively witnessing, to its shame, the tragic infection of right doctrine with counterfeit claims that amount to "another gospel." It is vital that we reclaim and restore the truth of God and expose and reject every error that is leading people astray. Only then can the cause of God and the hope of people prosper.

4. THE INSPIRATION AND INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

BE ALERT!

Be alert! There are more than two kinds of people in the world—believers and unbelievers. There is a third group as Peter and Paul point out:

“But there were also **false prophets** among the people, just as there will be **false teachers** among you. They will **secretly introduce** destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves” (2 Pe 2:1-2).

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow **deceiving spirits and things taught by demons**. Such teachings come from **hypocritical liars**, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”
(1 Ti 4:1-2)

Luke replies:

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with **great eagerness and examined the Scriptures** every day to see *if* what Paul said was true” (Ac 17:11).

God loves truth seekers—people who so love the truth that they will not automatically receive something as truth just because someone says it, not matter what the reputation of the speaker (By this time, Paul was considered a solid leader and teacher).

From these passages we see that even prophets, apostles and teachers make mistakes or go beyond the revelation God has given them. Here is where the community of believers is so important. God has given us the responsibility to **test everything**:

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but **test** the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn 4:1).

“**Test everything**. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil” (1 Th 5:20).

Fakes know how to use religious terminology. They have all the right phrases and cliches and thus sound so pious. They use such words as salvation, resurrection, judgment, prayer, etc. When they depart from historic Christianity, they seem to find a way to convince others that their “interpretation” is right. The believers of Galatia evidently were seduced for Paul said:

“I am astonished that you are so **quickly deserting** the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are **turning to a different gospel**—which is really no gospel at all.” (Gal 1:6-7).

In order that you may have a clear understanding of the criteria of a healthy church I am presenting the following points which summarize the teaching of Scripture on the subject:

A place where *Christ is regarded as the Head*, and where the members acknowledge this not only in their doctrinal statement, but also in the way in which they conduct the services of the church and its business affairs (Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:19).

The church is a **place of learning**. It is, or can be, a place of great learning, where we learn from each other, and where we can have a check and balance on our personal opinions and attitudes. The church must be a family of students gathering to inspire and teach each other God's truths. Just like any good school, part of a church's function is to provide the corporate discipline which helps us personally to learn God's truth.

A place where there is *solid teaching* in which the Bible, the Word of God, is taught in its fullness ("the whole counsel of God"—Acts 20:27). Truth is applied in practical ways to every area of daily life. The message of **the Gospel is seen as the totality of all that Jesus preached**, taught, and came to accomplish (Mt 28:20; Eph 1:7-12; Col 2:8-12).

The first thing you need to do is listen to God as He speaks to you through His Word, the Bible. The way you talk to God is through prayer.

The primary way God speaks to you is through the Bible. As you grow, you will become sensitive to other ways He communicates to you, such as through inner peace, through the counsel of others in the body of Christ, through circumstances, even through visions and dreams. However, **the most objective and clear way God communicates to you, is through the Bible**.

The Bible is a storehouse of knowledge and truth. It tells about God's character or nature, His commands, His love and concern, His will for your life, and His direction for your future. God wants the very best for you and He has communicated His thoughts through a Book, the Bible.

INSPIRATION

In Scripture we see **a unity of thought** indicating that one mind inspired the writing and compilation of the whole series of books (66) we call the Bible. It bears on its face the stamp of its Author. It is in a unique and distinctive sense the Word of God.

For the Christian the Bible is the most valuable Book in the world. This is because, to believers, Scripture is **the record of God revealing Himself to us**. What more important reason could there be for really studying it? The Bible is not a record of our attempts to find God, but of **God's divine self-disclosure** to us.

The Bible teaches that the Bible was "inspired" by the Holy Spirit:

"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but **men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**"

(2 Pe 1:20-21)

The word "inspired" then, is not to be confused with the common usage of the word where we may say Shakespeare was "inspired" to write great plays, or when we may refer to Beethoven as having to be "inspired" to be able to compose such great symphonies. Inspiration, in the biblical sense, is unique.

"Men spoke from God," says Peter, "as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." The Bible is the product of God Himself. Here are not mere human words and ideas, but God's divine character and will revealed through words.

The word "inspired" (*theopneustos*) comes from a Greek word meaning "breathed out by God" or "God-breathed." The origin of the words of Scripture is God Himself. John Stott explains:

"The meaning, then, is not that God breathed into the writers, nor that He somehow breathed into the writings to give them their special character, but that **what was written by men was *breathed out by God***. He spoke through them. They were His spokesmen."

This does not mean that the writers of Scripture were mere writing machines. God did not just dictate His words to them and they mindlessly wrote them down. It is obvious from the writings themselves that each writer's personality is involved. Each writer has a style of his own. Jeremiah does not write like Isaiah, and Peter hardly writes like Paul. Their educational and cultural backgrounds seep through in their writings. Thus the Bible is a very **human book**. But it is divine in that God worked through the instrumentality of human personality, but so guided and controlled people that **what they wrote is what He wanted written**.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

Obviously the Bible alone does not interpret itself. Anyone who has talked with a Jehovah's Witness has found how true this is! Therefore what guides us in our interpretation?

Our theology is supposed to be based upon **principles of biblical interpretation** (hermeneutics). Too often the reverse is true. Cultists (ca 4,000 in the U.S.) in particular read their deviant theologies into the biblical text rather than allowing the text to speak for itself. Knowing the **history of interpretation** is integral to knowing the principles of interpretation, in that it helps us in spotting deviant teachings. As the old maxim states: **There are no new heresies, only old ones in new wrappers.**

It is the purpose of hermeneutics (the science of biblical interpretation) to provide the student of Scripture with basic guidelines and rules for "**correctly handling** the word of truth" (2 Ti 2:15).

Difficult Texts

Some people argue that the reason they do not read and study the Bible is because it is **too difficult to understand**. They have a point. Peter referred to some of Paul's teaching as "hard to understand" (2 Pe 3:16). Yet he pointed out that the primary problem in **misunderstanding** was located in the **ignorance** and **unstable character** of the people who read Paul's teachings: "ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pe 3:16).

While it is true that certain parts of the Bible are difficult, most parts are quite simple. If you can read the newspaper, you can read the Bible. In fact, there are probably more difficult words and concepts expressed on the front pages of the newspaper than on most pages of the Bible.

General Approach

It is vital that the Scriptures are interpreted according to their **purpose and context in reverent obedience** to the God who speaks through them with power. The first assumption is that the Scriptures were written for, and in particular historical situations, they must be "interpreted according to their purpose and context." The second assumption is that since the Scriptures are God's Word to us, they communicate God's thoughts and feelings with power and thus are to be interpreted in "reverent obedience."

The Golden Rule of Interpretation

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart point out in their book, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*:

"The most important ingredient one brings to that task [of interpretation] is enlightened common sense. The test of good interpretation is that it **makes good sense** of the text."

The dictum: "**The plain thing is the main thing, and the main thing is the plain thing**" goes to the heart of the issue of interpretation. For it is the aim of interpretation to know the plain meaning of the text. What is obvious and straightforward in the text is the most significant point for the reader to grasp.

Therefore **The Golden Rule of Interpretation** is

"When the **plain sense** of Scripture makes **common sense**, seek no other sense. Therefore take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise."

This rule of interpretation is called the "literal-historical," "literary-historical" or "grammatical-historical" method. This rule is based on the premise that God, in revealing His Word, did not intend that the reader be confused. Rather, like any other teacher or parent, He uses the obvious meanings of words to convey His thoughts with the greatest clarity to His children. Otherwise the meaning of Scripture would only be available to the expert (biblical scholar).

Metaphysical cults, theosophical cults, divine science cults, pantheistic cults (New Age Movement) all base their interpretation of Holy Scripture on the theory that the meaning of Scripture is plural. The first meaning is the ordinary historical or grammatical one; and the second meaning is the one the cultist brings to Scripture from the particular metaphysical system or religious system which he is pushing.

The emphasis on the unity of the sense of Scripture puts an end to this cultic abuse of Scripture. Unless Scripture can be interpreted in a literal way there is no basis for control-- anyone can interpret it anyway one prefers. The literal method acknowledges the importance of the **basic meaning of words and follows regular rules of grammar**.

A Coherent and Unified Message

If the argument regarding canonicity and divine inspiration of the 66 books constituting the Bible is valid, a necessary corollary is that the Bible sets forth a **coherent** or **unified message**. God's spokesmen, who came later in history, not only provided new material, but they re-emphasized facets of earlier revelations as part of the whole counsel of God.

Paul, as one of the last revelatory spokesmen, regards anyone who teaches a message contrary to what has already been given, as worthy of hell (eternal damnation—Gal 1:8f.). Paul also considered the teaching which he gave as being so in line with the message of the earlier spokesmen that he used quotations from these earlier sources of revelation to affirm his point (Ro 3:9) that all the people of the earth are under sin (Ro 3:10-18).

Later revelatory spokesmen also viewed their interpretation of contemporary revelatory events to reflect so accurately God's moving of redemptive history toward its final climax, that they could view an event, whose occurrence and meaning they reported, to be a partial or typological fulfillment of prophecy uttered by an earlier revelatory spokesman (e.g. Ac 2:16-21; Joel 2:28-32 [Mt 3:1-5]).

In establishing the unity of the Bible, each literary unit of the Bible must be allowed to contribute its teaching to every other literary unit.

Thus it is only as we handle Scripture through the literary-historical method of interpretation that we come to a knowledge of divine revelation in the same way we come to knowledge about everything else in our experience, namely, by a process of trying out various possibilities until coherency or unity is attained.

We must grapple with difficult passages of Scripture until we find it fitting in with the rest of Scripture. If we are unable to do so, we must **humbly acknowledge our limited understanding and allow for mystery** as we recognize, as Paul did, that "we only see but a poor reflection as in a mirror . . . [that we] know in part" (1 Co 13:12). Instead of pressing Scripture to fit our own preconceived ideas or opinions, there are times when we must humbly bow before Him whose Word is much greater than our understanding of it. We dare not come to conclusions that contradict Scripture since God, who inspired Scripture, does not contradict Himself. We must allow **Scripture to interpret Scripture!**

The Role of the Holy Spirit as Interpreter

What, if any place, does the Holy Spirit play in this issue of interpretation? Since it is the Spirit of God who gave Scripture, He speaks in and through it. This is indispensable to sound understanding. The Spirit does not replace the task of interpretation. After all, He speaks through the text of Scripture. Knowledge of the text and its natural sense is thus demanded. Yet it is possible to have this and still miss understanding in the deeper sense. This is where the help and guidance of the Spirit are needed.

The Spirit is God's Spirit bearing witness to God's word and work in Jesus Christ. He takes the word of Scripture and makes it clear to the heart, the mind and the will—the whole man—in its total reach and dimension. **God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.**

Humble Response

A certain condition, therefore, is necessary in order to have an authentic, deep and fruitful experience with the Word of God. The condition is our **humble yielding** to the enlightening of the Holy Spirit. The Bible protects itself from presumption and scholarly unspirituality as its deeper truths are **luminous only to the illuminated** (1 Co 2:14-15), those intent to reverently obey.

The same Spirit who inspired its writers now waits to illumine its readers. This is a challenge to study it prayerfully in a spirit of teachableness which leads to Spirit-given enlightenment when we do (Jn 14:26; Eph 1:18).

We all need illumination from the Holy Spirit. Even the best-intentioned among us can slip easily into a prideful, self-sufficient attitude in our learning the Bible which results in **information and knowledge without wisdom and insight.**

Since we as human beings "see through a glass darkly" or as the New International Version puts it, "see but a poor reflection" (1 Co 13:12), **humility** is in order. It is to be aware of **human limitations** in interpreting the Bible. This means that we realize that the certainty with which we propose, debate, and even argue for our own interpretations, must be tempered with gentleness since our own interpretations are seen thorough our own sinful human nature. Sin distorts everything, including our understanding of God's pristine revelation.

Does this mean that we must lack conviction in our understanding of Scripture? No, but it means that while the church corporate must be bold about its faithful adherence to the Word of God, we as individual interpreters must understand the **provisional nature** of our own views. Unless our views square with the understanding of historic Christianity, we must hold them tentatively.

To achieve balance in our apprehension and application of God's Word it is vital to see the **marriage between the theoretical and the practical**. Devotional reading and academic study together form the heart, mind and will to hear and obey God's Word to us. Exegetical skill and spiritual discipline together provide the contexts out of which we are to interpret the Word. It is only as we diligently and prayerfully read and study and reverently obey the Bible that we grow in our knowledge and understanding of who God is and what His purpose and will is for our lives.

A MATTER OF PRIORITIES

You may want to object, "But I don't have time to read and study God's Word every day." If we take 30 minutes a day as an example this may seem like a lot of time from a busy schedule. If it is true that God is no person's debtor, then it really won't cost us anytime since He multiplies and gives it back to us. His promise still stands:

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt 6:33).

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured in you lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured to you" (Lk 6:38)

When we honor God with the "firstfruits" of our time through daily reading and study of His Word, He so blesses and makes productive the remaining moments of our day that we don't miss it. In fact, we actually gain time. This is so because 23 1/2 hours blessed by God because we spent 30 minutes in His Word will be more productive than 24 hours without His blessing. Similarly, 4 hours a week spent in reading, studying and memorizing God's Word will so affect the remaining 164 hours in your week that you will be far more productive and efficient than you are in the 168 hour weeks when you neglect spending time with God.

The same God who multiplied the lad's lunch and fed 5,000 men as well as women and children is equally able to multiply our time when we give Him the first portion of our time.

When a busy executive was asked how he could afford to spend 30 minutes a day in Bible study he replied, "I can't afford not to!" Neither can you!

The more we read and study the Bible the easier it gets. Yet learning what is in God's Word is a life-long process that will show us increasingly how deep and rich it is in truth and love.

REASONS TO STUDY

The Bible is a book about life, true life here and hereafter! Perhaps this is the reason we often use the Bible for comfort in the presence of death. It is also not a textbook of science, history, psychology or even ethics. It is not a textbook at all. When its message touches these subjects we have every right to expect it to be accurate since it is God's Word. But we must also be very careful not to read things into it, say, in the realm of science, which really are not there. It does not often speak in some of these areas because this is not its purpose.

Our need for food to nourish the physical body has been compared to our need to study the Bible for our **spiritual well-being**. In fact it has been said that if we starved our physical body like most of us starve our spiritual one we would not be alive very long. This is exactly the problem with the "faith" of most church members. Food, exercise, and rest are essential for the health of the body. Some have likened exercise to Christian service, rest (or renewal of energies) to prayer, and food to Scripture. These are very good analogies. Certainly people who love God, and want to be used by Him, must study His Word.

The Bible is not just God's self-disclosure. It is also the means by which sinful people may **know God's plan of salvation**. We may know that God forgives our sins and gives us eternal life through His Son, Jesus. "For the Son of man came to seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10). "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn 8:32).

Some have rightly called the Bible God's "Love Letter." Since it is written by the God who loves us beyond measure and in this book ("letter") He reveals His unconditional and sacrificial love to us. It is in Scripture that we find out not only **what** He did but also **why** He did it.

To properly understand the Scriptures we must look to the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds and hearts. Since the Holy Spirit "inspired" the Scriptures in the first place, it is He who enlightens our minds so we can understand what is written (1 Co 2:12-13).

One of the ways we grow in our relationship with God is by spending time reading the Bible and letting Him talk to us. Let me encourage you to spend time every day letting God speak to you through your reading of the Bible. As you do this day by day, you will find that you will be growing closer to the Lord Jesus and enjoying that higher quality of life that can be experienced only through a deepening relationship with Him.

I suggest you begin with the Gospel of John, and read a chapter a day.

As you read each day, you will probably have some questions about what a word may mean or how to apply God's truth to your life. Put a question mark in the margin and then discuss your questions with someone who knows Jesus Christ. It is what you understand and obey in God's Word that adds power and purpose to your life.

You will also find it helpful to begin to memorize God's Word. David the psalmist said;

"Your Word have I hidden in my heart, that I might **not sin against You**" (Ps 119:11).

As you begin your Bible reading and study you are embarking on a life long journey of learning. This learning will open the door to understanding your new life in Jesus Christ, a life that is meaningful, purposeful and joyous!

TOOLS FOR STUDY

Biblical reference books offer invaluable assistance in finding new and deeper insights into the Word of God. Everyone who studies the Bible can benefit from the spiritual and scholarly (academic) wisdom of Christians in the past and at present.

Six reference books are at the heart of any Bible reference library. These are "core" books because they are the types of reference books that will be used most often. They are:

- **Biblical Reference Book.** The following book is an excellent discussion of the whole range of biblical texts and reference tools. It is a guide to Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture, lexica, grammars, and concordances.

Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study (F. W. Danker, 1993).

- **Topical or Study Bible.** There are many excellent topical or study Bibles such as the *NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (1985), etc.

- **Bible Concordance.** This is an alphabetical list of words found in a specific Bible version (e.g. *KJV, NASB*), with a list of verses in which each word is found. Three of the best are *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nelson, 1984), *Young's Analytical Concordance of the Bible* (Nelson, 1982), and the *NIV Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Zondervan, 1981).

- **Bible Handbook.** This is a basic reference book that combines some of the functions of a Bible commentary, dictionary, concordance, and atlas. It usually is not directed toward one specific translation. Some of the best are *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Zondervan, 1962) and *Eerdmans Handbook of the Bible* (Eerdmans, 1973).

- **Bible Dictionary.** This tool lists alphabetically the names and terms in the Bible and explains them. It offers more thorough and detailed information on a variety of biblical topics than the handbook does. Many are designed with the reader of a particular translation in mind. Some good ones are *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Zondervan), *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, (Zondervan), etc.

- **Bible Commentary.** This is a reference work that interprets and explains the Bible as a whole, or a book or portion of the Bible. Commentaries on the entire Bible or on one particular book of the Bible can consist of one or more volumes. Some are devoted to the original Hebrew or Greek texts, others only to the English text.

There are basically three types of commentaries: (1) The **devotional commentary** written for the laity which is primarily concerned with spiritual *application* of the Bible, (2) The **expository commentary** which presents an *interpretation* and *explanation* of the Bible based on a thorough study of the original languages (Hebrew and Greek) and background, and (3) The **exegetical and critical commentary** which focuses primarily on *grammatical* and *textual* studies of the Hebrew or Greek and usually is not intended for laity.

One-volume commentaries on the entire Bible are quite useful for the general Bible reader. Some excellent ones are *The New Bible Commentary* (1989), *The International Bible Commentary* (Zondervan), and *Eerdmans Bible Commentary* (Eerdmans).

The following are multi-volume sets: *Word Bible Commentary* (Word—not for the laity), *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Eerdmans), *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* and *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Tyndale), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1980), *Keil-Delitzsch's Commentary on the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1982), *The Daily Bible Study Series* (Westminster, 1975), *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series* (Victor Press, 1978).

- **Expository Dictionary of Bible Words.** This tool is especially helpful for the advanced Bible reader. The expository dictionary has an alphabetical listing of English words found in the Bible, with an explanation of Hebrew and/or Greek words behind them.

Some that are easy to use would be the *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Zondervan), Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Broadman, 1931), *Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Bethany House), *Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Nelson, 1980).

For the more advanced student the following are most helpful: Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1979—10 Volume set and an Abridged in One Volume), the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan, 1967), and *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1990—only two volumes available so far). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (1974—with several volumes now having been revised).

- **Dictionary of Theology.** Whereas a Bible dictionary might make reference to Bible doctrines, these references of necessity would be brief.

Some excellent dictionaries of theology are *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 1984) and the *New Dictionary of Theology* (InterVarsity, 1988).

- **Bible Encyclopedia.** This tool is a comprehensive attempt to define, identify and explain terms and topics that are of interest for those who study the Bible. Every name of a person or place mentioned in the Bible is included.

There are articles on numerous terms in the Bible that have theological or ethical meaning. It summarizes the state of knowledge about each of its topics and the reader is led further to sources of information and insight.

One good volume encyclopedia is *New 20th-Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Baker) and the extensive *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans, 1979—4 volumes).

- **Bible Atlas.** This tool helps us in seeing and thereby understanding the world of the Bible. Some good ones are *The MacMillan Bible Atlas* (MacMillan, 1978) and the *Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Moody).

- **Bible Survey.** The purpose of a Bible Survey is to explore how the Scriptures originated and were transmitted through the centuries. It also deals with authorship, purpose and secular historical context of individual books of the Bible as well as dealing with interpretation problems. Surveys may cover the entire Bible, one testament or individual books.

Some of the better surveys are *Old Testament Survey* (Eerdmans, 1983), *Introduction of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1969), *The Old Testament Speaks* (Schultz) *Walk Thru the Old Testament* (Tyndale), *Walk Thru the New Testament* (Tyndale, 1981).

- **Hermeneutics.** The following are helpful volumes that have appeared on the topics of interpretation and application of the biblical text such as *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Fee & Stuart, Zondervan, 1993), *Hearing the New Testament: Biblical Interpretation Strategies for Interpretation* (Green, Eerdmans, 1995), and *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Klein, Blomberg, Word, 1993).

5. SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

The Seventh-day Adventist (commonly abbreviated SDA, officially abbreviated Adventist) Church is a Christian denomination or sect which is distinguished by its observance of Saturday as the Sabbath and its emphasis on the imminent second coming of Jesus Christ. The church is also known for its emphasis on a holistic understanding of the person with its promotion of physical health (e.g. vegetarianism) as well as spiritual vitality, its promotion of religious liberty and its conservative principles and lifestyle.

It is the eighth largest international body of Christians with a worldwide membership of over 16 million people, has a missionary presence in over 200 countries and territories and is ethnically and culturally diverse. The denomination grew out of the Millerite movement in the United States during the middle part of the 19th century and was formally established in 1863. Among its founders was Ellen G. White, whose extensive writings are still held in high regard by the church today.

Much of the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church corresponds to Protestant Christian teachings such as the trinity and the infallibility of Scripture. Distinctive teachings include the unconscious state of the dead and the doctrine of an investigative judgment.

The denomination is governed by a General Conference, with smaller regions administered by divisions, union conferences and local conferences. It operates numerous schools, hospitals and publishing houses worldwide, as well as a prominent humanitarian aid organization known as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

The following is how Seventh-Day Adventists describe their own denomination.

“As a Christian church, Seventh-day Adventists are a faith community rooted in the beliefs described by the Holy Scriptures. Adventists describe these beliefs in the following ways:

God's greatest desire is for you to see a clear picture of His character. When you see Him clearly, you will find His love irresistible.

For many, "seeing God clearly" requires that they see God's face. However, how He looks is not the issue. Seeing and understanding His character is what's most important. The more clearly we understand Him, the more we will find His love irresistible. As we begin to experience His love, our own lives will begin to make more sense.

God most clearly reveals His character in three great events. The first is His creation of man and woman—and His giving them the freedom of choice. He created humans with the ability to choose to love Him or to hate Him! The death of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, on the cross as our substitute is the second great event. In that act He paid the penalty we deserve for our hateful choices toward God and His ways. Jesus' death guarantees forgiveness for those choices and allows us to spend eternity with Him. The third event confirms the first two and fills every heart with hope: Christ's tomb is empty! He is alive, living to fill us with His love!

Jesus' disciple John wrote that if everyone wrote all the stories they knew about Jesus, the whole world could not contain them. Our knowledge of God helps us understand His love, character, and grace. Experiencing that love begins a lifelong adventure in growth and service. This knowledge and experience powers our mission to tell the world about His love and His offer of salvation.

Scripture is a road map. The Bible is God's voice, speaking His love personally to you today.

The Bible speaks the Creator's directions to us, like a detailed road map that clearly shows the exit ramp directly into heaven. It is also much like an owner's manual for a life ready to be lived on the cutting edge of liberty.

Sometimes His voice speaks through stories, such as those of David and Goliath, Ruth and Boaz, Naaman's little servant girl, Christ on the cross, and fisherman Peter learning how to tend sheep. Some of these stories teach us how to handle the troubles we face each day. Others fill us with hope and peace. Each of them is like a personal letter from God to you.

Portions of Scripture are direct instructions and laws from God such as the Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20. These tell us more about God and His expectations for us. When people asked Jesus to summarize these commands, He focused on the way God's love affects the way we live. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul," He said. "And love your neighbor as you love yourself."

On other pages the Bible gives God's practical advice and encouragement through parables, lists, promises, and warnings. Amazingly, though many different writers throughout thousands of years wrote the Bible, each page describes the same God in ways we can understand and apply in our lives today. This book is always His voice talking personally to anyone who is willing to read and hear.

God loves us even when we choose to reject His love. In those times He allows us to walk away into the life of our own choices. Yet He is still there, always ready to redeem us from the results of our decisions.

Jesus is the one who never changes in a universe that always does. Jesus is Creator, Sustainer, Saviour, Friend, God's Son, and God Himself!

Everything in this world is always changing, even our desires, interests, skills, and body shapes. But Jesus? He's consistent. He's always the same. Sure, He's always surprising us and touching our lives in thousands of new and different ways, but His character is unchanging. He's God's Son, the Creator, our Saviour, and Friend.

Jesus has promised to be all of that, and more, for each of us. We can trust His promises because He is God. When the words of Colossians say "in Him all things hold together" (1:17, NIV) that includes everything in our lives. He keeps us whole when the enemy is trying to make us fall apart.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Jesus is one of the three persons, called the Trinity, who make up our one God. The Bible describes Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit as each being committed to our growth as Christians and to our salvation as their children. They made this salvation possible when Jesus came to Bethlehem as a human baby. He lived a life perfectly in accord with God's will and then died innocently for all of our sins. He was placed in a borrowed tomb, but He came back to life three days later. Now he is in heaven interceding with the Father for us, preparing for our deliverance from sin and death.

When everything may be falling apart, when you feel totally alone in the universe, Jesus is right there in the center of it all, offering personal peace and hope. Allow Him into your life. He immediately begins "remodeling" who you are and how you live. Jesus, in fact, is busily transforming His followers into accurate representatives of God's character.

Look to Jesus, and you'll be looking into the understanding and loving face of God.

God's vision for you is life as He lives it! God loves you, and wants to give you the highest quality of life imaginable.

No, not a second-rate existence somewhere on earth, but the highest quality of life imaginable, here and in eternity with Him! That's what God wants us to have. The best!

This is why He provides church families where we can belong. This is why He gives each of us special gifts and talents, so we can live life fully. Amazingly, this is why He's concerned about what you're doing, when you're doing it, and how you relate to Him. God doesn't want anything to get in the way of our friendship. He especially doesn't want us to get involved in anything damaging or hurtful. He's like a loving father or a good big brother. He's someone who loves you so much that He's always looking out for you.

When God designed you, He included special talents and skills that will help you become a uniquely valuable individual. These may be your ability to teach, your love for others, or your leadership skills. Still, whatever special gifts you have received, God has also provided all of the energy and wisdom necessary for you to use them well.

By the way, how God feels about death is part of the quality life He offers. For followers of Christ, death holds no fear. Remember, Jesus defeated death on Calvary and has given us freedom from death. Cemeteries, then, are filled with followers of God who are in the "peaceful pause before the resurrection." Yes, they are dead, but that death holds no power over their future. Jesus is coming to take them (and those of us who are still living) HOME! Death is almost like a wintery promise of spring.

The Seventh-day Adventist faith in today and in the future comes from seeing this life "overflowing" with hope!

Because love is the key aspect of His character, God is also deeply into gratitude. Before we even finish saying thank you, He's already busy sending more blessings.

In the heart of God is a place you can experience as home. God loves you, and wants to spend time with you personally, one on one, as two close friends.

Because you and God are friends, you will spend time together as friends do. Each morning you'll share a hello and a hug and discuss how you can face the day's events together. Throughout the day you'll talk with Him about how you feel. You'll laugh with Him at funny things and ache with Him over sadness and hurts. It's pleasant being God's friend, able to snuggle comfortably into the safety of your relationship. You can always trust Him to treat you well, because He loves you.

The seventh day (Saturday) is an extra-special part of the relationship. The Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, describes the seventh day as the one day God has set aside for focused fellowship with His people. God has named that day "Sabbath" and asked us to spend it with Him. "Remember the Sabbath day," He says, "to keep it holy." The Sabbath is a whole day to deepen our friendship with the Creator of the universe!

There's another great truth about friendship with God. It doesn't end in a cemetery, for God is planning a homecoming better than anything we can dream. A homecoming filled with angels, trumpets, Jesus, and resurrections! He's promised to bring His followers, those who have accepted the offer of His life-changing love, from this earth to His home, a place He calls heaven. A place where our friendship can go on growing forever, endlessly, joyfully!

God keeps a family album-and your picture is in it. God loves you and has a plan for your life. God's love is about you. Personally.

God made you and has a very special plan for your life. It's a plan that will fill you with hope, love, peace, and activity. In fact, when Christ paid the penalty for sin on the cross, that gave Him the right to claim you as His own. As a result, you can experience His love and priceless salvation freely and fully without limit.

By the way, pictures of everyone fill that album: Nepalese, Brazilians, Nigerians, Yupiks, Germans, people of every nation, culture, background, gender, hair color, and foot size. In God's eyes all are equally "children of the King"!

Salvation? God cleans away all our sins and replaces them with His goodness. We don't have to be "good" for Him to accept us. Nevertheless, we must accept His promise and allow Him to clean out everything the enemy has left in us. Then we begin to experience the transforming power of His love. It's like a giant war: one side pulling us toward empty pleasure and destruction, and God urging us to accept His offer of peace and purpose.

Remember, Jesus has already won the war. He is victorious! We celebrate His victory in our lives when we participate in the Lord's Supper. This meal includes three symbols:

Foot washing (which symbolizes our commitment to love others as Jesus loves us), bread ("This bread is my flesh," Jesus said, "which I will give for the life of the world"— Jn 6:51, *NIV*), and wine or grape juice ("Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life"— Jn 6:54, *NIV*).

To help us understand how God can transform us into His children, Jesus modeled the process of baptism for us. Baptism symbolized dying to self and coming alive in Jesus. Seventh-day Adventists practice full immersion baptism because by being fully buried beneath the water we symbolize that God's grace fully fills us with His new life for the future. Through baptism we are truly born again in Jesus.

Eternal life, peace, purpose, forgiveness, transforming grace, hope: Everything He promises is ours, because He's offering it and He's shown we can trust Him to do exactly as He promises. Accept His gifts, and you immediately become an active part of His family, and He joyfully becomes part of yours.”¹

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.

1. Holy Scriptures:

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)

2. Trinity:

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:7.)

3. Father:

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also revelations of the Father. (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 4:11; 1 Cor. 15:28; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8; 1 Tim. 1:17; Ex. 34:6, 7; John 14:9.)

4. Son:

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things. (John 1:1-3, 14; Col. 1:15-19; John 10:30; 14:9; Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:17-19; John 5:22; Luke 1:35; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 2:9-18; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; Heb. 8:1, 2; John 14:1-3.)

5. Holy Spirit:

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth. (Gen. 1:1, 2; Luke 1:35; 4:18; Acts 10:38; 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:11, 12; Acts 1:8; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-13.)

6. Creation:

God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made "the heaven and the earth" and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the

image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was "very good," declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1; 2; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 11:3.)

7. Nature of Man:

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position under God. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7; Ps. 8:4-8; Acts 17:24-28; Gen. 3; Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Ps. 51:10; 1 John 4:7, 8, 11, 20; Gen. 2:15.)

8. Great Controversy:

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation. (Rev. 12:4-9; Isa. 14:12-14; Eze. 28:12-18; Gen. 3; Rom. 1:19-32; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; Gen. 6-8; 2 Peter 3:6; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14.)

9. Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ:

In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator. This perfect atonement vindicates the righteousness of God's law and the graciousness of His character; for it both condemns our sin and provides for our forgiveness. The death of Christ is substitutionary and expiatory, reconciling and transforming. The resurrection of Christ proclaims God's triumph over the forces of evil, and for those who accept the atonement assures their final victory over sin and death. It declares the Lordship of Jesus

Christ, before whom every knee in heaven and on earth will bow. (John 3:16; Isa. 53; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 20-22; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 19-21; Rom. 1:4; 3:25; 4:25; 8:3, 4; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Col. 2:15; Phil. 2:6-11.)

10. Experience of Salvation:

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, as Substitute and Example. This faith which receives salvation comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (2 Cor. 5:17-21; John 3:16; Gal. 1:4; 4:4-7; Titus 3:3-7; John 16:8; Gal. 3:13, 14; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; Rom. 10:17; Luke 17:5; Mark 9:23, 24; Eph. 2:5-10; Rom. 3:21-26; Col. 1:13, 14; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:26; John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:23; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 8:7-12; Eze. 36:25-27; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rom. 8:1-4; 5:6-10.)

11. Growing in Christ:

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit who transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (Ps 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Col 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; Luke 10:17-20; Eph 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Phil 3:7-14; 1 Thess 5:16-18; Matt 20:25-28; John 20:21; Gal 5:22-25; Rom 8:38, 39; 1 John 4:4; Heb 10:25.)

12. Church:

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to all mankind, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word, and from the Scriptures, which are the written Word. The church is God's family; adopted by Him as children, its

members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish. (Gen. 12:3; Acts 7:38; Eph. 4:11-15; 3:8-11; Matt. 28:19, 20; 16:13-20; 18:18; Eph. 2:19-22; 1:22, 23; 5:23-27; Col. 1:17, 18.)

13. Remnant and Its Mission:

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Rev. 21:1-14.)

14. Unity in the Body of Christ:

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children. (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; Matt. 28:19, 20; Ps. 133:1; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Acts 17:26, 27; Gal. 3:27, 29; Col. 3:10-15; Eph. 4:14-16; 4:1-6; John 17:20-23.)

15. Baptism:

By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings. (Rom. 6:1-6; Col. 2:12, 13; Acts 16:30-33; 22:16; 2:38; Matt. 28:19, 20.)

16. Lord's Supper:

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Saviour. In this experience of communion Christ is present to meet and strengthen His people. As we partake, we joyfully proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again. Preparation for the Supper includes self-examination, repentance, and confession. The Master ordained the service of foot washing to signify renewed cleansing, to

express a willingness to serve one another in Christlike humility, and to unite our hearts in love. The communion service is open to all believing Christians. (1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:23-30; Matt. 26:17-30; Rev. 3:20; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17.)

17. Spiritual Gifts and Ministries:

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, apostolic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God. When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love. (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:9-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)

18. The Gift of Prophecy:

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen. G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.)

19. Law of God:

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, but its fruitage is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is an evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow men. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness. (Ex. 20:1-17; Ps. 40:7, 8; Matt. 22:36-40; Deut. 28:1-14; Matt. 5:17-20; Heb. 8:8-10; John 15:7-10; Eph. 2:8-10; 1 John 5:3; Rom. 8:3, 4; Ps. 19:7-14.)

20. Sabbath:

The beneficent Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts. (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Luke 4:16; Isa. 56:5, 6; 58:13, 14; Matt. 12:1-12; Ex. 31:13-17; Eze. 20:12, 20; Deut. 5:12-15; Heb. 4:1-11; Lev. 23:32; Mark 1:32.)

21. Stewardship:

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow men, and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. The steward rejoices in the blessings that come to others as a result of his faithfulness. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Mal. 3:8-12; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; Matt. 23:23; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; Rom. 15:26, 27.)

22. Christian Behavior:

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with the principles of heaven. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things which will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness. (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 John 2:6; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 4:8; 2 Cor. 10:5; 6:14-7:1; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; Lev. 11:1-47; 3 John 2.)

23. Marriage and the Family:

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between partners who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship,

which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. (Gen. 2:18-25; Matt. 19:3-9; John 2:1-11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:21-33; Matt. 5:31, 32; Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-4; Deut. 6:5-9; Prov. 22:6; Mal. 4:5, 6.)

24. Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary:

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Heb. 8:1-5; 4:14-16; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; 1:3; 2:16, 17; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6; Lev. 16; Rev. 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:12.)

25. Second Coming of Christ:

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is imminent. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times. (Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:7; Matt. 24:43, 44; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; Rev. 14:14-20; 19:11-21; Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 Thess. 5:1-6.)

26. Death and Resurrection:

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later. (Rom. 6:23; 1 Tim. 6:15, 16; Eccl. 9:5, 6; Ps. 146:3, 4; John 11:11-14; Col. 3:4; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:1-10.)

27. Millennium and the End of Sin:

The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections. During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth. The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city; but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth. The universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever. (Rev. 20; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Jer. 4:23-26; Rev. 21:1-5; Mal. 4:1; Eze. 28:18, 19.)

28. New Earth:

On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love; and He shall reign forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:13; Isa. 35:65:17-25; Matt. 5:5; Rev. 21:1-7; 22:1-5; 11:15.)²

DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINES

In addition, there is a generally recognized set of "distinctive" doctrines which distinguish Adventism from the rest of the Christian world, although not all of these teachings are wholly unique to Adventism:

Jesus—Jesus is considered to be Michael the Archangel in the Old Testament. Unlike Jehovah's Witnesses, SDA does not teach that He was a created being and thus not divine. Instead, the SDA church interprets the appearance of Michael the Archangel as the pre-incarnate Christ.

Law (fundamental belief 19)—the Law of God is "embodied in the **Ten Commandments**," which continue to be binding upon Christians.

Second Coming and End times (fundamental beliefs 25-28)—**Jesus Christ** will return visibly to earth after a "time of trouble," during which the Sabbath will become a worldwide test. The **second coming** will be followed by a **millennial** reign of the saints in heaven. **Adventist eschatology** is based on the **historicist** method of prophetic interpretation.

Wholistic human nature (fundamental beliefs 7, 26)—Humans are an indivisible unity of body, mind and spirit. They do not possess an immortal **soul**, and death is an unconscious sleep (commonly known as "**soul sleep**").

Great Controversy (fundamental belief 8)—Humanity is involved in a "**great controversy**" between **Jesus Christ** and **Satan**. This is an elaboration on the common Christian theory that evil began in heaven when an angelic being (**Lucifer**) rebelled against the Law of God.

Heavenly sanctuary (fundamental belief 24)—At his ascension, Jesus Christ commenced an **atonement** ministry in the **heavenly sanctuary**. In 1844, he began to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary in fulfillment of the **Day of Atonement**.

Remnant (fundamental belief 13)—There will be an end-time **remnant** who keep the commandments of God and have "the testimony of Jesus" (**Rev 12:17**). This remnant proclaims the "**three angels' messages**" of **Revelation 14:6-12** to the world.

Spirit of Prophecy (fundamental belief 18)—The ministry of **Ellen G. White** is commonly referred to as the "**Spirit of Prophecy**" and her writings are considered "a continuing and authoritative source of truth," though ultimately and in absolute terms subject to the Bible; the highest authority of faith for the church.³

Investigative Judgment (fundamental belief 24)—A judgment of professed Christians began in 1844, in which the books of record are examined for the whole universe to see. The **investigative judgment** will affirm who will receive salvation and vindicate God as just in his dealings with mankind.

Since this teaching has caused so much controversy, including defrocking one of SDA's foremost theologians, Desmond Ford, we will examine it more closely. Kenneth Samples gives the following analysis:

“Perhaps the most distinctive of all Adventist beliefs is their doctrine of the sanctuary. This doctrine came about as an explanation for the failure of the Millerite movement in 1844. Baptist minister William Miller (1782-1849), using the day-year interpretation of Daniel 8:14, predicted that Jesus Christ would literally return to earth 2300 years after the beginning of Daniel's 70 weeks (Dan. 9:24-27), which he interpreted as being the time span of 457 B.C.-1843 A.D. When 1843 passed without seeing the Lord's return, the Millerite movement made a minor adjustment and declared that October 22, 1844, would be the date of Christ's second advent. When this prediction also failed the Millerite movement suffered what is known historically as the "Great Disappointment." For many this spelled an end to the Advent movement, but for a few it had just begun.

In the wake of the Great Disappointment, another individual, Hiram Edson, reexamined the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 after allegedly receiving an illuminating vision about this matter in a corn field. Edson, with help from O.R.L. Crosier, concluded that Miller's error rested in the nature of the event, rather than the calculation of time. Miller had interpreted the "cleansing of the sanctuary" (as referred to in Dan. 8:14) as a prophecy that Jesus Christ would return to the earthly "sanctuary", that is, to the earth itself. Edson, in light of his vision, came to believe that Christ, rather than returning to earth in 1844, actually entered for the first time into the second compartment of the heavenly sanctuary. Edson believed that there existed a heavenly sanctuary which had been the pattern for the Old Testament earthly sanctuary, complete with the dual compartments known as the holy place and the most holy place. 1844, according to Edson, marked the beginning of the second phase of Christ's atoning work.

The work which Jesus was to perform in the most holy place was later developed into the doctrine of the investigative judgment. Early Adventists understood Jesus' atoning work to be accomplished in two phases. This two-phase ministry of Christ could best be understood as an antitype of the work of the Old Testament priests.

Under the old covenant, they argued, the daily priestly duties were confined to offering sacrifices within the holy place (*forgiving* sin), but once a year on the day of atonement, the high priest entered the most holy place and cleansed the sanctuary by sprinkling the blood of a slain goat on the mercy seat (*blotting out* sin). After the cleansing of the sanctuary, the sins of the people were on the scapegoat who was banished into the wilderness.

According to Adventism, Jesus had been *forgiving* sin since His vicarious death on the cross; however, on October 22, 1844, Jesus began His work of *blotting out* sin. From His ascension until 1844, Jesus had been applying the forgiveness He purchased on the cross in the first compartment of the sanctuary, but in 1844, He entered the second compartment and began to investigate the lives of those who had received forgiveness to see if they were worthy of eternal life. Only those who passed this judgment could be assured of being translated at His coming.

This doctrine gave rise to what later became known as the sinless perfection teaching (perfect commandment-keeping in order to find acceptance in the judgment). Following the investigative judgment, Christ would come out of the heavenly sanctuary and return to earth bringing to every man his reward, and ushering in the great and terrible day of the Lord. It is 1844, and the events described above, which mark the beginning of SDA.”⁴

In her book, *The Great Controversy*, Ellen G. White claims that the investigative judgment was foretold in prophecy to take place at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844:

"Attended by heavenly angels, our great High Priest enters the holy of holies, and there appears in the presence of God, to engage in the last acts of His ministration in behalf of man - to perform the work of investigative judgment, and to make an atonement for all who are shown to be entitled to its benefits."⁵

". . . So in the great day of final atonement and investigative judgment, the only cases considered are those of the professed people of God. The judgment of the wicked is a distinct and separate work, at a later period."⁶

"As the books of record are opened in the judgment, the lives of all who have believed on Jesus come in review before God. Beginning with those who first lived upon the earth, our Advocate presents the cases of each successive generation, and closes with the living. Every name is mentioned, every case closely investigated. Names are accepted, names rejected."⁷

"At the time appointed for the judgment—the close of the 2300 days, in 1844—began the work of investigation and blotting out of sins. All who have ever taken upon themselves the name of Christ must pass Its searching scrutiny. Both the living and the dead are judged 'out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."⁸

"Though all nations are to pass in judgment before God, yet He will examine the cases of each individual with as close and searching scrutiny as if there were not another being upon the earth. Every one must be tested, and found without spot or wrinkle or any such thing."⁹

"The Judgment is now passing in the sanctuary above. Forty years has this work been in progress. Soon—none know how soon—it will pass to the cases of the living."¹⁰

According to Ellen White, this doctrine is essential:

"All need a knowledge of the position [in the Holy of Holies] and work [investigative judgment] of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time or to occupy the position which God designs for them to fill."¹¹

(Emphasis added)

What is the biblical basis for such an outlandish doctrine? As pointed out earlier, it is based upon a misinterpretation and misapplication of Daniel 8:14. The prophecy concerns the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes (215-164 B.C.) in reference to a restoration of "the holy place" after it had been trampled. Antiochus ordered his generals to seize Jerusalem on a Sabbath and erected an idol of Zeus and desecrated the altar by an offering of swine and sprinkling the pig's juices in the sanctuary. Sacrifice was ceased because the temple was desecrated (1 Macabes 1:29-32 and 1:52-61 describe how Antiochus persecuted the Jews. 1 Macabes 1:41-50 describes his blasphemies. By some estimates he is responsible for the murder of more than 100,000 Jews).¹² This trampling of the holy place occurred when Antiochus took Jerusalem in 167 B.C. and stopped the sacrifices in the Temple which led to the Maccabean revolt that succeeded in reconquering Jerusalem. In 164 B.C. the Jews cleansed and rededicated the Temple. Hanukkah is the eight day festival celebrating that historic event.

Scholars have debated whether the 2,300 "evenings and mornings" (Da 8:14) means 2,300 days or 1,150 days. Either interpretation is possible.

If it is interpreted to mean 2,300 days (almost seven years) and since the date when the temple was cleansed is well established as December 25, 165 B.C., by counting back 2,300 days from then, we come to the year when Antiochus Epiphanes began his persecution in earnest: 171 B.C.

However, if we interpret it to mean 1,150 days it can refer to the time the temple was actually desecrated a case made by Philip Newell:

"For a duration of time during which 2300 daily sacrifices would ordinarily have been offered, one at evening and one in the morning, as specified in Exodus 29:38-43. Since there are two of these daily, the actual time period involved is 1150 days, or slightly over three years. This, in fact, was the time of the Maccabean tribulation, 168-165 B.C., at the end of which the sanctuary was 'cleansed' by Judas Maccabeus in his restoration of the evening and morning sacrifices (2 Maccabees 10:1-5)."¹³

There were two daily sacrifices for the continual burn offering (Da 9:21; Ex 29:38-42), representing the atonement required for Israel as a whole. The 2,300 evenings and mornings probably refer to the number of sacrifices consecutively offered on 1,150 days, the interval between the desecration of the Lord's altar and its reconsecration by Judas Maccabeus on Kislev 25, 165 B.C. The pagan altar set up by Antiochus on Kislev 25, 168 B.C. (three years earlier), was apparently installed almost two months after the Lord's altar was removed, accounting for the difference between 1,095 days (exactly three years) and the 1,150 specified by Daniel here.

Applying this prophecy to the heavenly sanctuary is completely unjustified. It would mean that the Holy of Holies in heaven has been defiled or trampled down and would need to be restored.

The prophecy also refers to a time period during which the "holy place" will remain desecrated. That time period is "2,300 evenings and mornings." The King James Version translates this to read "2,300 days." William Miller converted these days into years. SDA teachers defend this conversion on the basis of Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6 where prophets were specifically told to interpret days in their prophecies as years. But what do such verses have to do with Daniel 8:14.

This passage was fulfilled long before the time of Jesus. After all, Jesus recognized that the temple was properly cleansed and rededicated when He attended the Feast of Lights (also called the Feast of Dedication and in Hebrew Hanukkah), commemorating the cleansing and rededication of the temple after the desecration brought by Antiochus Epiphanes (Jn 10:22), the last great deliverance the Jews had experienced. A prominent feature of the feast was the illuminations provided by the lighting of lamps in the Temple and in houses surrounding it.

Jesus entered the Holy of Holies in heaven immediately after His Ascension, and not in 1844 (Heb 1:3, 6:19-20, 8:1, 9:6-12, 24; 12:2). And there is no need for His atoning work to continue in heaven since it was finished on the Cross (Jn 19:30; Ro 3:24-26). Jesus is currently serving as our High Priest before the Father's throne interceding on behalf of His saints (Ro 8:34; Heb 7:25; 8:1-2) and preparing a place for them (Jn 14:2-4).

Further, the Bible teaches that a believer's sins are both forgiven and forgotten (Heb 8:12) and therefore believers will never be subjected to a judgment of their works to determine their salvation (Jn 5:24; Heb 9:28). There is no condemnation for the person who has placed his or her faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior (Ro 8:1). The believer can be assured of salvation (1 Jn 5:13). As they live in faith, they experience a continual cleansing of sin by the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

The concept of an "investigative judgment" seems to minimize the efficacy of the blood of Jesus because it implies that His death on the Cross was insufficient to guarantee a believer's salvation. Instead, Jesus must continue His atoning work by evaluating the works of each believer. This means that SDA members can never be sure of their salvation until the judgment work of Jesus is completed and he is certified as one whose works validate his salvation. Ellen White put it:

"Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their character must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort, they must be conquerors in the battle with evil."¹⁴

This seems to be a form of works/righteousness and the Bible is crystal clear that we are saved by grace through faith and not by works (Eph 2:8-9). It sounds as though Ellen White says that salvation is by grace plus our own "diligent effort" by the statement that Jesus will cease being a believer's mediator which clearly contradicts Scripture (Heb 7:25).

Martin, Barnhouse and other evangelicals were concerned whether this doctrine minimized Christ's atoning work or reduced it to an incomplete atonement. After a critical evaluation, they concluded that this doctrine of the investigative judgment "constitutes no real barrier to fellowship when it is understood in its symbolic meaning and not in the materialistic, and extreme literalistic sense in which some of the early Adventist writers set it forth."¹⁵ According to them, "in contemporary SDA thinking the doctrine did not imply a dual or partially-completed atonement, but rather that the once-for-all atonement is being applied by Christ as our High Priest in heaven."¹⁶

Could it be that the doctrine of the "investigative judgment" is a desperate attempt to salvage an inaccurate prophecy? William Miller was a Baptist preacher who misinterpreted a biblical passage and used it to set a date for the Lord's return. Although Miller took responsibility for his mistake, Ellen White spiritualized his prophecy and developed a doctrine that is foreign to the Word of God.

THE SABBATH OR SUNDAY?

Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:23-3:6

Another doctrine that is important to the Seventh-Day Adventism is the observance of the Sabbath (fundamental belief 20), which is to be observed on the seventh day of the week, specifically, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. Its importance is seen in the name chosen for this religious body.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Before we look specifically at the fourth commandment, let us look at the context of the Fourth Commandment which is **The Ten Commandments** or **The Decalogue** as **the Law** is sometimes called, as a whole. But what is the relevance of these commands given to Israel thousands of years ago for us today?

MORAL CONSTITUTION

God outlined **the moral constitution** of His universe in the Ten Commandments. This is why it is the basis for all other laws. By giving these commandments God provided **direction** in which our lives should move if we are to find fulfillment in life. And the Ten Commandments set forth not only **the holiness and righteousness of God**, but also **His requirements and demands**. In other words, God says to His people:

“This is how I want you to live!”

Jesus stated:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; **I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them**” (Mt. 5:17).

Notice Jesus ties the “Prophets,” that is, the prophetic writings, to the Law, which refers not only to The Ten Commandments, but to the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures called “The Pentateuch.” Jesus fulfilled the Law in the sense that He gave it its full meaning. Unlike the Pharisees who emphasized its mere external acknowledgment and obedience, He emphasized its deep, underlying principles and total commitment to it. He spoke of its internal dimension—its spirit or essence—as well as its external conformity.

As a Christian the only way we can fulfill the law is by the grace and power of God. It is only by complete dependence on the Lord who gave the Law that we can hope to be obedient to it and thus fulfill it not only by its letter, but more important, by its spirit.

Although there are many ceremonial laws in the Bible that we no longer follow because they are culturally conditioned, **the moral law is still in effect because it represents the perfection of God and His ways**. He never changes; His Law, that is, His moral Law, is absolute, and He will judge us by it. This is why our only hope is in Jesus Christ. Through Him our sins—our breaking of His commands—are forgiven.

FREEDOM

In the prologue to these commandments I find two concepts that stand out. The first is **freedom**. God said,

“I am the Lord your God, who **brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery**” (Ex. 20:2).

These commandments speak of **freedom**. When we live according to them we are liberated **from the things that destroy the human spirit**.

- Keeping the first three commandments will save us from idolatry, irreverence, bondage to cults or the occult and from pride and self-centeredness.
- Keeping the fourth commandment will save us from laziness or a frantic lifestyle that ends in a shallow, hollow life.
- Keeping the fifth commandment will save us from needless danger, alienation and bitterness.
- Keeping the sixth commandment will save us from hatred and imprisonment and even death.
- Keeping the seventh commandment will save us from a wounded spirit, a broken marriage and devastating family relationships.

- Keeping the eighth commandment will save us from dishonesty, duplicity and possibly jail.
- Keeping the ninth commandment will save us from lack of integrity and confusion where eventually we might not know the difference between truth and falsehood.
- Keeping the tenth commandment will save us from dishonesty, materialism and envy.

The second concept is **self-restraint**. The Ten Commandments remind us that we have **an enemy within as well as around us**. We are commanded not to do certain things because God knows that, even if we are not doing them, we have within us the tendency to do those things. Jesus taught that hatred without cause is murder since hatred is the seed that eventually causes a person to commit murder, and He taught that lustful thinking is adulterous since lust is the seed that eventually leads a person to commit adultery. God's Law, therefore, applies not only to our outward life, but to our inward life, and we need self-restraint.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT: KEEPING THE SABBATH

SABBATH OBSERVANCE

The term "Sabbath" derives from the Hebrew *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), "to cease." Sabbath is generally a weekly day of rest or break from work.

“By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done” (Ge 2:2-3).

Moses quotes the first half of verse 3, but substitutes “Sabbath” for “seventh,” clearly equating the two.

God rested on the seventh day, not because he was weary, but because nothing formless or empty remained. **His creative work was completed**—and it was totally effective, absolutely perfect (“very good”—Ge 1:3). It did not have to be repeated, repaired or revised and the Creator rested to commemorate it.

The first obligatory Sabbath observance is of Israel on her way from Egypt to Sinai (Ex 16), and according to Nehemiah 9:13-14 the Sabbath was not an official covenant until the giving of the law at Mount Sinai.

In the Old Testament, God says to His people:

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, either you nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day" (Ex 20:8-11).

Two reasons are given for the observance of the Sabbath:

1. Having completed His work of creation God “rested on the seventh day” (v. 11), and **the Israelites are to observe the same pattern in their service of God in the creation.**

2. **They must also cease all labor so that their servants can also participate in the Sabbath-rest**—just as God had delivered His people from the burden of slavery in Egypt (Dt 5:14-15). The Sabbath thus became a “sign” of the covenant between God and Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex 31:12-17).

A covenant sign was a visible seal and reminder of covenant commitments. Circumcision would become the sign of the covenant with Abraham (Ge 17:11), and the Sabbath would be the sign of the covenant with Israel at Sinai (Ex 31:16-17). Rain and the rainbow doubtless existed long before the time of Noah’s flood, but after the flood the rainbow took on new meaning as the sign of the Noahic covenant (Ge 9:8-17) in which God promised to Noah and his descendants and to all other living things (as a gracious reward to righteous Noah—Ge 6:6, the new father of the human race (Ge 6:18) never again to destroy man and the earth until His purposes for His creation are fully realized (“as long as the earth endures”—Ge 8:22).

Do Christians have to observe the Sabbath day?

NOT A COMMANDMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

If we are commanded to keep the Sabbath in the Old Testament and in the New Testament and we see Jews, Jesus and the apostles doing the same thing, then why do we worship on Sunday?

First of all, of the Ten Commandments listed in **Exodus 20:1-17**, **only nine of them were restated in the New Testament** (murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, honor parents, and worshiping God—Mt 19:18 and coveting—Ro 13:9). All but the Sabbath one, are repeated in the epistles (2 Co 3:7-11; Col 2:16; Lk 4:11; Ro 14:4-23). The idea of a particular day for worship may have been connected with the Sabbath, but the particular day was unrelated to the Sabbath. Worshiping God properly covers the first three commandments). The one that was not reaffirmed was the one about the Sabbath. Instead, Jesus said that **He is the Lord of the Sabbath** (Mt 12:8).

God established the Sabbath as **a rest for His people**:

"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27)

God instituted the Sabbath not because He needed a break, but because we are mortal and need a time of rest to focus on God. In this, our spirits and bodies are both renewed.

The Old Testament system of Law required keeping the Sabbath as part of the overall moral, legal and sacrificial system by which the Jewish people satisfied God's requirements for behavior, government, and forgiveness of sins. The Sabbath was part of the Law in that sense. In order to "remain" in favor with God, you had to also keep the Sabbath. If it was not kept, then the person was in sin and would often be punished (**Eze 18:4; Ro 6:23; Dt 13:1-9; Nu 35:31; Lev 20:2**, etc.).

But with Jesus' atonement, we no longer are required to keep the Law as a means for our justification. The requirements of the Law were fulfilled in Christ. We now have rest from the Law. We now have "Sabbath" continually.

It is often claimed that "God instituted the Sabbath in Eden" because of the connection between the Sabbath and creation in Exodus 20:11. Although God rested on the seventh day (Ge 2:3), there is no biblical record of the Sabbath before the children of Israel left the land of Egypt. Nowhere in Scripture is there any hint that Sabbath-keeping was practiced from Adam to Moses.

Scripture makes it quite clear that **Sabbath observance was a special sign between God and Israel**:

"The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be **a sign between Me and the Israelites forever**, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He abstained from work and rested" (Ex 31:16–17).

In Deuteronomy 5, Moses restates the Ten Commandments to the next generation of Israelites. After commanding Sabbath observance in verses 12–14, Moses gives the reason the Sabbath was given to the nation Israel:

"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (Dt 5:15).

SABBATH-KEEPING ABOLISHED BY THE CROSS

There is no obligation for the New Testament believer to keep the Sabbath.

The Jewish Sabbath was abolished at the Cross where Christ “*anceled the written code*, with its regulations” (Col 2:14). The term “written code,” a business term meaning a certificate of indebtedness in the debtor’s handwriting, is used by Paul as a designation for the Mosaic law, with all its regulations, under which everyone is a debtor to God. At the cross God cancelled the accusations of the law against the Christian.

This idea is repeated more than once in the New Testament:

“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. **Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.** He who regards one day as special, **does so to the Lord**” (Ro 14:5–6).

“But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those **weak and miserable principles**? Do you wish to be **enslaved by them all over again**? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years” (Gal 4:9–10).

The claim that Constantine mandated or changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday in A.D. 321 simply makes no sense since the Early Church already met on Sunday for worship. Historically then Sunday, not Saturday, was the normal meeting day for Christians, a practice which dates back to the first century.

The Sabbath was given to Israel, not the church. The Sabbath is still Saturday, not Sunday, and has never been changed. The Sabbath, however, is part of the Old Testament Law, and Christians are free from the bondage of the Law (Gal 4:1-26; Ro 6:14). Sunday—the Lord’s Day (Rev 1:10)—is a fitting day to worship and serve our Lord because it celebrates the New Creation, with Christ as our resurrected Head. Therefore, we are not obligated to follow the Mosaic Sabbath with its emphasis on physical resting, but are now free to follow the risen Christ with its emphasis on spiritual resting—worshiping and serving (Heb 4:1-11).

This does not mean that we are not to set aside a specific day to give our bodies physical rest and spiritual renewal. There is a time to work and there is a time to rest. The point is, we are not to be legalistic about rest. Some types of work requires different patterns of work and rest (e.g. the medical profession).

There is no need to sacrifice for our salvation on the part of believers. Such sacrifice has already been accomplished on the Cross by our Lord once-for-all (Heb 7:27).

A Holy, Royal Priesthood

In the Old Testament the Israelites **observed the Sabbath to become holy**. But the New Testament we have **become righteous through the righteousness of Christ**. This is why we are called a “holy priesthood” (1 Pe 2:5) and a “royal priesthood” (1 Pe 2:9). And **the priests of the Jewish temple did not obey the Sabbath**. In Christ, we are not only priests of God on earth but also in heaven. Why should we observe the Sabbath then? We are priests of God for every moment of our lives since we are born again and filled with the Holy Spirit. Apostle Peter put it”

“But you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (I Pe 2:9).

We are priests of God!

Christians are not only kings and priests in this world (Rev 1:6), but also in the world to come—in the millennial kingdom:

“You have made them to be **a kingdom and priests** to serve our God, and they will **reign** on the earth” (Rev 5:10).

“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be **priests of God and of Christ** and will **reign** with him for a thousand years” (Rev 20:6)!

Jesus declared:

“Or haven’t you read in the Law that on the Sabbath **the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?** I tell you that **One greater than the temple** is here. If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For **the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day**” (Mt 12:5-8).

When we became the priests of God, we no longer needed to observe the Sabbath.

Why did Saul (Paul) persecute the Early Church? It was because its members did not observe the Sabbath and did not follow the Old Testament and its traditional laws and customs.

It was the custom of the Jews to come together on the Sabbath, which is Saturday, to stop work and devote themselves to the worship of God. Jesus went to the synagogue on Saturday to teach (Mt 12:9; Jn 18:20) as did Apostle Paul (Ac 17:2; 18:4).

Are we free to worship on Sunday?

Within the New Testament is ample evidence that the seventh day Sabbath is no longer a requirement.

"One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God" (Ro 14:5-6).

What is clear in Romans 14:1-12 is that **individuals must be convinced in their own minds about which day they observe for the Lord.** If the seventh day Sabbath were a requirement, then the choice would not be man's, but God's.

Furthermore,

"Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."
(Col 2:16-17)

No one is to judge us in regard to a yearly festival, a monthly new moon or a weekly Sabbath. All these are defined as a **"shadow"** of the reality that is Jesus. Thus **Jesus is our Sabbath.** Therefore there is no legitimate place for judging anyone based on the day which they choose to worship Romans 14:5-6

THE LORD'S DAY

Is there any evidence in the New Testament that Christians met on Sunday?

"On the first day of the week we came gathered together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, he kept on talking until midnight" (Ac 20:7).

The first day of the week is Sunday and this is the day the people gathered. They gathered to break bread (communion) and to a message (preaching/teaching). This shows us that Luke included the Roman system as well as the Jewish system of counting days. The Jewish system was sundown to sundown. But Luke also embraced the Roman system: midnight to midnight (Lk 11:5; Ac 16:25; 20:7; 27:27). This is a subtle point that shows the Jewish Sabbath system was not exclusively used by Luke.

If the Sabbath was mandatory, why the use of the non-Jewish system?

"Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. **On the first day of every week**, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up so that when I come no collections will have to be made" (1 Co 16:1-2).

Paul tells the churches to meet on the first day of each week and put money aside.

This seems to indicate that Paul is encouraging tithing. Sunday, the first day of the week, seem to have been the preferable day for the early Christians to meet to set money aside for future collections. Although it would be reading too much into the text to say that Sunday was the official worship day set up by the church, it certainly was the day Paul and the early Christians chose.

Does this verse apply to Christians today?

"**On the Lord's Day** I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and to Laodicea," (Rev 1:10-11).

The New Bible Dictionary points out the following concerning the phrase, "The Lord's Day," in this passage:

"This is the first extant occurrence in Christian literature of (*te kuriake hemera*) The adjectival construction suggests that it was **a formal designation of the church's worship day**. As such it certainly appears early in the 2nd century."¹⁷
(Emphasis added)

The Early Church father, Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) said of this special day:

"A true Christian, according to the commands of the gospel, observes the Lord's Day by **casting out all bad thoughts, and cherishing all goodness, honoring the resurrection** of the Lord, which took place on that day."

It is not surprising then that in many churches today, the term "The Lord's Day" is used to designate Sunday, the same as it was in the second century.

The only explanation as to why the Early Church established a new day of worship unrelated to the Sabbath and the existing calendar was that **Sunday was the day of the Lord's resurrection**. Jesus not only arose on Sunday but six post-Resurrection appearances were also on Sunday and the Day of Pentecost when the body of Christ was formed fell on Sunday. Almost always the day is designated as the first day of the week (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2,9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1; Ac 20; 7; 1 Co 16:2). In Revelation 1:10 it is called "the Lord's Day," a term similar to the

Lord's Supper (1 Co 11:20) and used by the believers to protest and contrast the Emperor's or Augustus' Day. The Lord's Day, then, is the first day of the week, the day of His resurrection, and **the day used by believers to *celebrate that greatest event in history***.

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

This does not mean that the Bible requires that we worship on a specific day, whether Saturday or Sunday. What is clear is that we have the freedom (Ro 14:1-12) to worship on the day we believe is best in our situation. And no one has a right to judge us in regard to the day we keep. After all, we are free in Christ to worship and serve Him when and how we decide (Ro 6:14).

It is not wrong for The Seventh Day Adventists to worship on the Sabbath if they are convinced that is the right thing to do. However, it is unbiblical for any member of any church to use a particular day as a litmus test of spirituality. Our allegiance to Christ is not dependent on such a secondary matter. We are free!

The spirit or essence of the fourth commandment is relevant to us today whereas its ceremonial aspect, that is, the specific day is not. While we are not bound to its external dimension—keeping Saturday as the day of rest—we are obligated to keep the spirit of the Sabbath for it has its moral dimension.

What motivated the early Christians to meet on Sunday?

In all probability, the resurrection!

In contrast to the Jewish people who had rejected Jesus and who continued to worship on Saturday, the Sabbath, **the early Christians met together on Sunday in *celebration of Jesus' resurrection***.

RHYTHM

Seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, day and night, work and rest—**rhythm**—is God's design for His creation. And rhythm is God's design for our lives as human beings, as part of His creation. Keeping the Sabbath is not about legalistic rules and regulations but recognizing that there is a rhythm and pattern built into creation from the beginning and **proceeds from the very character of the Creator Himself**.

And so we are trapped by our own loopholes. Our lives continue to be frantic as we live in an age of stress and hurry leaving us lives without depth—hollow husks: rootless, tired and withered. **Most traps prevent us from moving; this one prevents us from pausing.**

It is estimated that between forty and sixty percent of the people in our hospitals and doctors' offices are there for stress-related illness. The list of symptoms is phenomenal: heart disease, high blood pressure, ulcers, nervous breakdowns, depression, insomnia, lowered disease resistance, migranes, asthma, allergies, skin diseases and more. For others the symptoms are more subtle: a lingering fatigue, a short temper, a dull headache, an uneasy stomach, a lack of patience, a persistent restlessness. **If stress is a disease, then the Western world is in the midst of a plague.**

This should come as no surprise to **a nation that has made *busyness a cardinal virtue***. How often in casual conversation do we hear "How are you doing?" answered with something like "Oh, keeping busy" or "Well, you know how it is, busy as ever." The marriage may be in trouble, the family in shambles, health on the skids, but as long as we're staying busy we're presumed to be doing all right.

Is there hope for people who are caught in fragmented lives characterized by erratic, pointless activity?

FOR OUR BENEFIT

Jesus points out to us that it was **for our sakes** that God gave the command to observe the Sabbath and to keep it holy (Mk 2:27). But that's the point, isn't it? In the Sabbath command God has said to us, "Here it is, I give it to you for your own health and happiness. Keep it and you will benefit. Violate it and you will lose its benefits."

If something is given for our sakes, and we refuse to receive it, then we **hurt ourselves**. The Pharisees, to whom Jesus directed that famous statement, were violating the Sabbath. They were piling up so many rules and regulations defining how one should keep the day holy that the day was lost under the pile. But they violate it no more than we do when we commit the equal and opposite error and set no rules at all. They are guilty of **legalism** where the laws, rules and regulations become an end instead of a means, we, on the other hand, are guilty of **antinomianism** where we have no laws, rules or regulations. We both violate the Sabbath, and in the process hurt ourselves, the violators.

We speak of "breaking the Ten Commandments" or of "breaking the laws of God" but actually we cannot break them. If you jump from the Empire State Building you don't break the law of gravity—you just break your neck! The Ten Commandments stand today, unchanged and unchangeable. When we violate them, we suffer. What we sow, we reap. God is not mocked. When we crash into the pillars of God's eternal principles, we are smashed but the pillars remain standing.

FOR OTHERS' BENEFIT

We are commanded not only not to work on the Sabbath, but also not to have **those who work for us**, including the animals and foreigners, to work on that day:

“On it you shall not do any work, neither you, **nor your manservant or maid-servant, nor your animals, nor the alien** within your gates” (Ex. 20:10).

We are to cease all labor so that our workers can also **participate in the Sabbath—rest**—just as God had delivered His people from the burden of slavery in Egypt (Dt. 5:14-15).

WHAT DO WE LOSE AS VIOLATORS?

What do we lose when we lose the Sabbath? We lose **grace**. This seems to lie behind the explanation for the Sabbath command given in Exodus 20:11:

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He **rested on the seventh day**. Therefore the Lord **blessed the Sabbath day** and made it **holy**.”

REST

Rhythm has to do with the fact that **God works and He rests**. Not even with God is there ceaseless production; there is also **rest from production**. He has left that stamp of Himself on His creation. And we are called—commanded—to imitate Him.

Work, this side of the Fall, has a way of pressing us all down and burying us under its weight.

But the Sabbath, even this side of the Fall, is **a word of grace spoken into the lives of driven, harassed workers**. It says to housewives and to accountants, to carpenters and to teachers, to lawyers and to doctors:

“You may stop now—no, you must stop now—at least for a day.”

Even to non-Christians it says,

“Your life is not all law and necessity. The Lord of creation who causes His sun to shine on both the good and the evil, has also given you this grace and this liberation from work.”

CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY

Conditional immortality (fundamental belief 27) is another teaching that differs from historic orthodox Christianity. This is the belief that the wicked will not suffer eternal torment in **hell**, but instead will be *permanently annihilated*.

Seventh-day Adventism teaches what they call "soul sleep," a period of unconsciousness for the soul while it awaits judgment. When Christ returns, they say, He will awaken the righteous dead. While most Christians believe that judgment for nonbelievers or the wicked takes the form of eternal punishment in hell, Adventists believe that hell for nonbelievers means being ceasing to exist, instead of suffering forever.

Do SDA people wonder what kind of God would consign people to hell? Do they believe that the idea of hell seems rather barbaric—unworthy of a loving God? Or is the doctrine of hell a dusty theological holdover from the unenlightened Middle Ages?

Many people view God as consigning the souls He has created in His own image to interminable torment. They picture hell as a frying pan or a torture chamber designed by a wrathful God who deliberately throws reluctant human beings there against their will just because they were bad or because they were not good enough for heaven.

Could this be the reason, at least partly, why so many reject hell as the worst falsehood, the foulest of all errors, the darkest defamation of God's character ever invented?

Is this what is pictured for us in the Bible?

GOD'S JUSTICE REQUIRES PUNISHMENT FOR EVIL

The Bible promises reward for goodness and punishment for evil (Dt 11:13-21). Yet the prophets, above all, persistently lament that in this world the evil prosper (Jer 12:1; Hab 1:2-4). If these observations are true some reward and punishment must occur in a world other than our own. Otherwise the belief in a **just God** becomes unsustainable.

Only in a random universe can the wicked get away with their wickedness. The argument that hell happens to the wicked not after death, but here on earth, does not make sense in light of what we experience in life. The extent of hell that some wicked people suffer here on earth is when their air-conditioner breaks down in their Palm Beach vacation home.

English philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell made the following scathing accusation:

“There is one very defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character, and that is that he believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment.”¹⁸

Not only did Jesus believe in hell, but He preached on it more than heaven. His parables on the stewardship of talents (Mt 25:14-30), the separation of sheep from goats (Mt 25:31-46), and the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) illustrate a dramatic consequence which follows this life.

HADES AND GEHENNA

Hell is called *Hades* in Greek and refers to the place of the departed spirits—the realm of the dead, the netherworld—generally equivalent to the Hebrew word *Sheol* (Ge 37:35). The Greek word *Gehenna* derives its name from a deep ravine south of Jerusalem, the “Valley of (the sons of) Hinnom” (Hebrew *ge hinnom*). During the reigns of the wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh, human sacrifices to the Ammonite god Molech were offered there. Josiah desecrated the valley because of the pagan worship there (2 Ki 23:10; see also Jer 7:31,32; 19:6). It became a sort of perpetually burning city dump and later a figure for the place of final punishment.

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* gives the following distinctions between Hades and Gehenna:

“This distinction [between Gehenna and Hades] is a). that Hades receives the ungodly only for the intervening period between death and resurrection, whereas Gehenna is their place of punishment in the last judgment; the judgment of the former is thus provisional but the torment of the latter eternal (Mk. 9:43 and par. 9:48). It is then b). that the souls of the ungodly are outside the body in Hades, whereas in Gehenna both body and soul, reunited at the resurrection, are destroyed by eternal fire (Mk. 9:43 and par., 45, 47 and par., 48; Mt. 10:28 and par.).”¹⁹

Hades then is where the ungodly go when they die to await the final judgment after the resurrection of the wicked whereas Gehenna, is their place of eternal punishment after the final judgment.

WHAT IS THE DURATION OF GOD’S PUNISHMENT?

The Old Testament says death and Hades are the interim place for the dead:

“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: **some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt**” (Da 12:2).

The same word for everlasting is used both in the case of life that is everlasting and shame and contempt that is everlasting. This is also the only place in the Old Testament that uses the phrase “everlasting life.”

The word hell is used 12 times in the New Testament, 11 of them by Jesus. He used it in this sense:

“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be **thrown into hell.**”
(Mt 5:30)

Jesus’ point was that it would be better to go through this life (which is temporary) maimed than to have a perfect body that is cast into hell (which is permanent).

Jesus said,

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, **be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell**” (Mt 10:28).

The gospels teach the importance of eternity and the relative unimportance of our status now other than in how it affects us in eternity.

We see continually in Scripture **the contrast between this life and eternity**. So what does eternity entail? Cessation or endlessness?

The Greek words used by Jesus when He warned,

“Then He will say to those on the left, ‘Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into **the eternal fire** prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Mt 25:41).

“Then they will go away to **eternal punishment**, but the righteous to **eternal life**” (Mt 25:46).

The Greek word used for “eternal” in each of these instances is *aionios* (used sixty-six times in the New Testament), not *ekmendenisis* or *ekmendenizw* which are used to describe annihilation. *Aionios* typically means eternal, endless or infinity. However, there are a few exceptions (Ro 16:25; 2 Ti 1:9; Titus 1:2) to such an absolutist meaning. In Romans 16:25, for instance, *NIV aionios* is translated “for long ages past” (*NIV*), “for ages past,” (*Williams*), “long ages” (*ESV*), “for ages and ages,” (*CEV*), “through times eternal,” (*ASV*), “since the world began” (*KJV*) in reference to the “mystery hidden” The idea is “from eternity past,” that is, the mystery of the Gospel had been hidden from the very beginning of time—the eternal past—but now revealed. This is a qualified understanding of eternity in that it means eternity only in reference to the past but not in reference to the future. Thus *aionios* has a qualitative as well as a quantitative force and must be interpreted in light of what it is referencing.

Aionios is used to describe **the fire** of punishment (Mt 18.8; 25.41; Jude 7), **punishment itself** (Mt 25.46), **judgment** (Heb 6.2), **destruction** (2 Th 1.9) and **the sin** which finally separates man from God (Mk 3.29). In Matthew 25:46 the same word (*aionios*) is used in reference to heaven as to hell, that is, eternal punishment lasts as long as eternal life.

W. E. Vine points out that

“The predominant meaning of *ainios*, that in which it is used everywhere in the N.T., save the places noted above [Rom. 16:25; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2], may be seen in 2 Cor. 4:18. Phil. 15, where only in the N.T. it is used without a noun. Moreover, **it is used of persons and things which are in their nature endless**, as, of God, Rom. 16:26; of His power, 1 Tim. 6:16, and of His glory, 1 Pe 5:10; of the Holy Spirit, Heb 9:14; of the redemption effected by Christ, Heb 9:12, and of the consequent salvation of men, 5:9, as well as of His future rule, 2 Pet. 1:11, which is elsewhere declared to be without end, Luke 1:33; of the life received by those who believe in Christ, John 3:16, concerning whom He said, ‘they shall never perish,’ 10:28, and of the resurrection body, 2 Cor. 5:1, elsewhere said to be ‘immortal,’ 1 Cor. 15:53, in which that life will be finally realized, Matt. 25:46; Tit. 1:2 . . . and of the fire, which is one of its instruments, Matt. 18:8; 25:41; Jude 7, and which is elsewhere said to be ‘unquenchable,’ Mark 9:43.”²⁰ (Emphasis added)

William Barclay provides this assessment of the word:

“Simply to take as meaning *lasting for ever* is not enough. In all these passages we must remember the essential meaning of *aionios*.

Aionios is the word of eternity as opposed to and contrasted with time. It is the word of deity as opposed to and contrasted with humanity. It is the word which can only really be applied to God.

If we remember that, we are left with one tremendous truth—both the blessings which the faithful shall inherit and the punishment which the unfaithful shall receive are *such as befits God to give and to inflict*.

Beyond that we cannot go.

Simply to take the word *aionios*, when it refers to blessings and punishment, to mean *lasting far ever* is to oversimplify, and indeed to misunderstand, the word altogether. It means far more than that.

It means that that which the faithful will receive and that which the unfaithful will suffer is that which it befits God's nature and character to bestow and to inflict—and beyond that we who are men cannot go, except to remember that **that nature and character are *holy love***.

We must now turn to the greatest of all uses of the word *aionios* in the NT, its use in connection with the phrase *eternal life*.

We must begin by reminding ourselves of the fact which we have so often stressed, that the word *aionios* is the word of eternity in contrast with time, of deity in contrast with humanity, and that therefore *eternal life is nothing less than the life of God himself*.²¹ (Emphasis added)

Those who embrace annihilationism attempt to explain “eternal punishment” in Matthew 25:46, where it is parallel to the phrase “eternal life,” as not necessarily carrying the implication of endlessness but that it refers to “the age to come.” The problem with this argument is that although it is true that *aionios* in the New Testament does mean the age to come, the New Testament writers expect the age to come to be unending. To argue, therefore, that in the age to come eternal life goes on forever while punishment ends, simply does not make sense.

Paul refers not to annihilation, but exclusion from the Lord's presence, in his warning to the people at Thessalonica:

”They will be **punished with everlasting destruction** and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power on the day He comes to be glorified in His holy people” (2 Th 1:9).

The Greek word used here for “everlasting destruction” is *olethros* which means destruction or complete ruin. Paul explains the meaning of “punished with everlasting destruction” by adding “and shut out from the presence of the Lord.” Extinction then is ruled out because only those who exist can be excluded. As we shall see, in Greek the natural meaning of words related to destruction (noun, *olethros* verb, *apollumi*) is ruining or wrecking in the sense of something being nonfunctional. How different from annihilating something so that it no longer exists in any form at all!

Vine says of the word *apollumi* which is also translated “destruction”:

“signifies to destroy utterly . . . to perish. The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being. This is clear from its use, as, e.g., of the marring of wine skins, Luke 5:37; of lost sheep, i.e., lost to the shepherd, metaphorical of spiritual destitution, Luke 15:4,6; the lost coin, 15:24; of the perishing of food, John 6:27; of gold, 1 Pet. 1:7. So of persons, Matt. 2:13, “destroy”; 8:25, “perish”; 22:7; Matt. 10:28; Luke 13:3,5; John 3:16; 10:28; 17:12; Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15, “are perishing”; 4:3; 2 Th 2:10; Jas 4:12; 2 Pet. 3:9.”²²

Similarly Thayer states:

"*ap-ollumi* and *apolluo* (*[apolluei* Jn. xii. 25 T TrWH], impv. *apollue* Ro. xiv. 15, [cf. B. 45 (39); WH App. p. 168 sq.]); fut. *apoleso* and (1 Co. i. 19 *apolu* fr. a pass. in the O. T., where often) *apolo* (cf. W. 83 (80); [B. 64 (56)]); 1 aor. *apolesa*; to destroy; Mid., pres. *apollumai*; [impf. 3 pers. plur. *apollunto* 1 Co. x. 9 T Tr WH]; fut. *apoloumai*; 2 aor. *apolomen*; (2 pf. act. ptc. *apololos*); [fr. Hom. down]; to perish. 1. to destroy i. e. to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to, ruin: Mk. i. 24; Lk. iv. 34; xvii. 27, 29; Jude 5; ten sophian render useless, cause its emptiness to be perceived, 1 Co. i. 19 (fr. Sept. of Is. xxix. 14); to kill: Mt. ii. 13; xii. 14; Mk. ix. 22; xi. 18; Jn. x. 10, etc.; contextually, to declare that one must be put to death: Mt. xxvii. 20; metaph. to devote or give over to eternal misery: Mt. x. 28; Jas. iv. 12, contextually, by one's conduct to cause another to lose eternal salvation: Ro. xiv. 15. Mid. to perish, to be lost, ruined, destroyed; a. of persons; a. properly: Mt. viii. 25; Lk. xiii. 3, 5, 33; Jn. xi. 50; 2 Pet. iii. 6; Jude 11, etc.; *apollumai* limo, Lk. xv. 17; *en machaira* Mt. xxvi. 52; *kataballomenoi* all *suk apollumenoi*, 2 Co. iv. 9. b. tropically, to incur the loss of true or eternal life; to be delivered up to eternal misery: Jn. iii. 15 [R L br.], 16; x. 28; xvii. 12, (it must be borne in mind, that acc. to John's conception eternal life begins on earth, just as soon as one becomes united to Christ by faith); Ro. ii. 12; 1 Co. viii. 11; xv. 18; 2 Pet. iii. 9. Hence *oi sozomenoi* they to whom it belongs to partake of salvation, and *oi apollumenoi* those to whom it belongs to perish or to be consigned to eternal misery, are contrasted by Paul: 1 Co. i. 18; 2 Co. ii. 15; iv. 3; 2 Th. ii. 10 . . ."23

Matthew 8:12 where Jesus spoke of sinners being 'thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' How can that be if they no longer exist? To claim that hell = non-existence makes no biblical sense. Of course, those who deny that there is a soul or spirit part to humans, that has conscious awareness after physical death, have no recourse but to dismiss all the Bible's warnings about a horrible fate after death for those who disbelieve God. The chilling thought is, will that apply to those who disbelieve God's warnings about this fate? Surely we have to warn them? If we cared not for them, we wouldn't bother. But we do care for them!

God's judgment is final, irreversible, unending.

IS HELL A LITERAL PLACE?

The question, "Is hell a literal place?" is often asked. The answer is both **yes and no** in that when people die, their soul leaves their body and therefore they are no longer physical. Since the Bible teaches that when people who are ultimately going to hell die before Christ's return, they are separated from the presence of God, but they are not in a physical place because they are

not physical. So it is not physical in the full sense of the term. Yet it is real. At the final judgment, our body will be raised and our soul will be reunited with it. At that point they will be “sent” or “thrown” into hell which most likely is a literal place.

IS THERE LITERAL FIRE AND GNASHING OF TEETH?

It is not likely that there is a literal fire and gnashing of teeth in hell because figures of speech are used throughout the Bible. When the Book of Revelation describes Jesus’ Second Coming to earth as Jesus returning and His “eyes were like blazing fire” (Rev 1:14) with a big sword coming out of His mouth (Rev 1:16) we do not interpret that to mean that His eyes will be literally on fire and that He will be choking on an actual sword. When Scripture points out that God is “a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29) we do not take that to mean that He is continually burning. Such interpretations belie common sense. Similarly, we have good reason to believe that flames, worms, and gnashing of teeth are all figurative.

To insist that the place (hell) which was created for spirit beings (Satan and his angels or demons—Mt 25:41) must have material and physical punishment does not make much sense since punishment is usually designed to fit the crime. How do we punish spirit beings physically? Wouldn’t spiritual punishment for spirit beings make more sense? If the fire that Jude refers to is material (Jude 7), how does this physical manifestation of light square with his following description of hell as a place of “blackest darkness” (Jude 13)? Although people will be bodily resurrected for the second death, this does not mean that there will be actual “gnashing of teeth,” “beatings,” and “worms” crawling in bodies. For though this is literally possible for human beings who will be resurrected bodily, how could this literally take place in the case of spirit beings (Satan and his demons) for whom hell was designed? These are just a few examples of problems the literal view poses to many Bible-believing Christians.

Much of the literature in Scripture which describes heaven and hell is found in the Book of Revelation. Apocalyptic literature (which is the literary style of the book of Revelation) simply does not make much sense if it is interpreted strictly literally, that is, without proper attention to its genre. To do so is to misunderstand the nature of such literature.

Those who argue that a metaphorical view diminishes the seriousness of hell do not properly understand the nature of language. **It is the nature of symbolic language to *understate*, not *overstate* reality.** Symbolic language is used by an author because the vehicle of literal language does not adequately describe or do justice either to the beauty and wonder of what is being described as in the case of heaven, or to the awfulness and horrific nature of the reality expressed as in the case of hell. To limit the descriptions of the beauty, splendor and glory of heaven to literal language is to do injustice to the magnificence of heaven. Likewise if symbolic language can be used in describing heaven, why can’t symbolic language be used in describing hell? By what hermeneutical (the science of interpretation) principle would one feel free to interpret heaven symbolically and hell literally?

Dante's *Inferno* has spurred many to imagine that God is continually torturing people in hell. But Dante merely expressed a Medieval mindset (imagination) that to a large degree became preoccupied and obsessed with the dark side.

But hell is an awful place. It is terrible primarily because it is **endless separation from God who not only loves, but who is love**. Hell is a place without the divine presence and thus a place of darkness, pride and hopelessness. Billy Graham testifies:

“The only thing I could say for sure is that hell means separation from God. We are separated from His light, from His fellowship. That is going to hell. When it comes to a literal fire, I don't preach it because I'm not sure about it. When the Scripture uses fire concerning hell that is possibly an illustration of how terrible it's going to be—not fire but something worse, a thirst for God that cannot be quenched.”²⁴

DOES GOD TAKE DELIGHT IN TORTURING PEOPLE?

It was never God's intention to create hell. It was the result of man's rebellion and sin in which man turned away from *the purpose for which he was created—to glorify God*. Thus man lost the purpose of his being.

The Bible is clear that God does not take delight in punishing people, much less punishing them in their final destination. In the Book of Ezekiel God was accused of this 600 years before the time of Christ (as Solomon put it long ago, “there is nothing new under the sun”) and so He says:

“Do **I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?** Declares the Sovereign Lord.”
(Eze 18:23)

Then He answers His own question:

“Rather, am I not **pleased when they turn from their ways and live?**” (Eze 18:23).

“As surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, **I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked**, but rather that they **turn** from their ways and live. **Turn! Turn** from your evil ways! **Why will you die**, O house of Israel?” (Eze 33:11).

God's basic intention for His creation is life, not death (Eze 16:6). Here we see **God pleading with Israel** not to continue in their wickedness and thereby find life. His call to “turn” here is God's third call for repentance (Eze 14:6; 18:30).

Nowhere in Scripture do we find a hint of God finding pleasure in giving punishment. Rather, God delights in mercy.

“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but **delight to show mercy**” (Mic 7:18).

“We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your **great mercy**” (Da 9:18).

“But because of His great love for us, God, who is **rich in mercy**, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:4).

WILL EVERYONE SUFFER EQUALLY?

The notion that everyone will suffer equally is false. The sentence is proportioned to the knowledge of God’s Word, work and will that was actually disregarded (Lk 12:42-48; Ro 1:18-20, 32; 2:4, 12-15). Hell, according to the Gospel, is **moral retribution**. The Bible is clear that “**what we sow, we reap**” (Gal 6:7). Jesus put it:

“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, **it will be more bearable** for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that **it will be more bearable** for Sodom on the Day of Judgment than for you” (Mt 11:20-24).

The phrase “it will be more bearable” obviously refers to different degrees of punishment (just as there will be different reward in heaven—1 Co 3:10-15; 2 Ti 4:8; 1 Pe 5:4). Jesus also made this clear in another passage where He warned:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is **answerable to the Sanhedrin**. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be **in danger of the fire of hell**” (Mt 5:21-22).

Although it is true that *sin is sin*, it is not true that *all sin is equally bad*. Here Jesus points out that to call another person “Raca” which means “empty-headed,” “ignoramous” or “stupid” subjects a person to a human court of law (“the Sanhedrin”), but to call someone “You fool!” which means “You, good-for-nothing” or “You, worthless human being” puts a person

“in danger of the fire of hell” (though this may be using hyperbole). The point is, one “crime” is more serious than another. The person who shows no respect for another human, who is thus bereft of basic decency, is heading for hell.

IS HELL MORALLY JUST?

As emotional human beings it is difficult to look at the subject of hell objectively. Yet the issue at stake is not how we may feel about the horror of hell, but whether hell is a **morally just** concept. Sentimentalism too often steers us in our reflection on such a heinous subject. As a result, we end up with all kinds of unbiblical notions.

How do we square our understanding of God with the concept of hell? After all, as philosopher and theologian J. P. Moreland put it, “God is the most generous, loving, wonderful, attractive being in the cosmos.”²⁵ He continues by pointing out that

“He has made us with free will and he has made us for a purpose: to relate lovingly to Him and to others. We are not accidents, we’re not modified monkeys, we’re not random mistakes. And if we fail over and over again to live for the purpose for which we were made—a purpose, by the way, which would allow us to flourish more than living any other way—then **God will have absolutely no choice but to give us what we’ve asked for all along in our lives, which is separation from Him.**”²⁶ (Emphasis added)

Although it is true that God casts people into hell, we also go there by **choice**. This means **no one ever goes to hell unwillingly** (and therefore unfairly). In fact, the only reason hell exists at all is because of free choice. Love requires freedom. God could have created robots and then there would be no hell because there would have been no real persons. Because God loved free persons into existence, hell became possible. Jesus warned:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be **in danger of the fire of hell**” (Mt 5:22).

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be **thrown into hell**. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to **go into hell**” (Mt 5:27-30).

“I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be **thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**”

(Mt 8:11; see also Mt 22:13; Mk 9:48 and Rev 14:1)

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of **the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**”

(Mt 10:2; see also Lk 12:5)

“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown **into the fire of hell**” (Mt 18:7-9).

It is clear that ultimately Jesus does “send,” “destroy,” or “throw” people into hell! This, of course, is only in response to man’s decision to refuse God’s offer of grace. God is not only compassionate and loving, but He is also just, moral and holy. This means He must deal with sin in a righteous way. Sin cannot be overlooked. It has to be dealt with. And Jesus dealt with it by offering His life as a sacrifice by becoming sin for mankind. Those who refuse such a sacrifice for sin are only left to pay for that sin by themselves. Either we pay for it or we allow God to pay for it. But someone has to pay for sin.

Jews who thought their Judaism was an inherited passport for entrance into the kingdom were warned by Jesus:

“I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be **thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**”

(Mt 8:11-12)

In addition to Matthew 8:11-12, Matthew 22:13; 25:30, Mark 9:48, Jude 6 and Revelation 14:1 we see here that **darkness signifies a state of deprivation and distress**, but not of destruction in the sense of ceasing to exist. After all, would it make any sense for those who cease to exist to weep and gnash their teeth? Nonexistence means nonfeeling and nonanything. Scriptural warnings become moot if the wicked cease to exist.

Death does not signify extinction anywhere in Scripture, rather, physical death is departure into another mode of being, called *sheol* or *hades*. Therefore there is no reason to interpret the “second death” of Revelation 2:11; 20:14; 21:8 to mean cessation of being.

Fire signifies **continual existence in pain** (Mt 13:42,50; Lk 16:22-24 Rev 14:10; 19:20; 20:10).

Is it possible that the continued distress refers only to the temporary experience of the lost before they are extinguished, as some contend? If so, would it not undermine the previous argument that the New Testament imagery of eternal loss naturally implies extinction?

It should be kept in mind that hell is primarily **separation**—separation from God and separation from God’s people. For hell has to do with **relationships**. Hell will be a place of realization, the realization of having rejected God and spurned His love which will bring regret, anguish and shame. **Conscience** will make hell a terrible place for it will be a place of realizing that we have failed to make things right with people. Part of the poignancy of hell is the memory of injuries to others, which we could have put right once, but which now we can never make right.

ONLY TWO ALTERNATIVES

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people; unbelievers are unprepared for heaven. In actuality every human being is preparing (passively or actively) to spend eternity either in God’s presence or His absence. Not necessarily consciously by actively choosing one place or the other, but by choosing the values that lead to the one place or the other.

FUTURE PROSPECT

Is there a heaven to gain and a hell to shun? Definitely! If there is no hell, salvation will seem ho-hum and entrance into heaven will seem as a matter of course. When we no longer feel the truth of hell, the gospel passes from good news to news. The intensity of joy is blunted and love is dried up for we do not fully understand and appreciate what we have been **saved from**, as well as saved to.

SHOULDN’T THE PUNISHMENT FIT THE CRIME?

Many object to hell because they feel that the punishment doesn’t fit the crime, that is, that the so-called “crime” of rejecting Christianity simply does not fit the punishment of everlasting torment in hell. How can a *finite* life of sin warrant an *infinite* punishment? On the surface this is a good point. Yet when we analyze what is being rejected we come to realize that the objection is not reasonable. The issue of length of time is spurious since the degree to which

a person warrants punishment has little, if anything, to do with the time it took to commit a crime. After all, committing murder can take a matter of seconds while stealing something rather insignificant can take many minutes. The issue is **the severity of the deed**.

Theologian D. A. Carson reasoned:

“Hell is not a place where people are consigned because they were pretty good blokes, but they just didn’t believe the right stuff. They’re consigned there, first and foremost, because they defy their maker and want to be at the center of the universe. Hell is not filled with people who have already repented, only God isn’t gentle enough or good enough to let them out. It’s filled with people who, for all eternity, **still want to be the center of the universe** and who **persist in their God-defying rebellion**.

What is God to do? If he says it doesn’t matter to him, then God is no longer a God to be admired. He’s either amoral or positively creepy. For him to act in any other way in the face of such **blatant defiance** would be to reduce God himself.”²⁷ (Emphasis added)

Similarly philosopher and theologian J. P. Moreland stated:

“You have to understand that God is infinitely greater in his goodness, holiness, kindness, and justice than anyone else. To think that a person could go through their whole life constantly ignoring him, constantly mocking him by the way they choose to live without him, saying, ‘I couldn’t care less about what you put me here to do. I couldn’t care less about your values or your Son’s death for me. I’m going to ignore all of that’—that’s the ultimate sin. And the only punishment worthy of that is the ultimate punishment, which is everlasting separation from God.”²⁸

The nature of the object against which the sin is committed, and the nature of the sin itself, must be taken into account when determining the degree of the heinousness of sin.²⁹ To reject an infinitely holy, just, and loving God is therefore **the ultimate rejection**.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He responded:

“**The most important one,**” answered Jesus, ‘is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, **the Lord is one**. Love the Lord your God with **all your heart** and with **all your soul** and with **all your mind** and with **all your strength**. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor **as yourself**.’ There is *no commandment greater* than these” (Mk 12:29-31).

Mark says here that there is “no commandment greater.” Matthew in his gospel puts it, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Mt 22:40). In other words, these two commandments **sum up** all the rest.

Since there is only one God, He is the One who should be loved. If the greatest commandment is to love God with our whole being and others as ourselves is not the worst sin not to do so? Definitely! Thus to live in violation of the greatest commandment is to spurn God’s love and live a life of idolatry with self on the throne.

Those who argue that God should force everyone to go to heaven miss the point altogether. Although it is true that God is grieved by anyone going to hell, His morality requires that people are allowed the freedom to choose for themselves. Forcing people to do something against their will strips people of their dignity, treats them as a means to an end and is thus *dehumanizing*.³⁰ Therefore to force people, who have no interest in spiritual things, to spend eternity in the worship and service of God in heaven would be worse than to spend eternity in hell separated from those things which they rejected in this life. This does not minimize the awfulness of hell, but it points to the awfulness of heaven for those who are unprepared.

The image of Jesus standing over the Holy City captures God’s love and holiness:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, **how often I have longed to gather your children together**, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, **but you were not willing!**” (Lk 13:34).

Because He is love, the invitation is always open: “Come to me!” But because He is love, it is possible that one can walk away from the light and wind up in outer darkness. Peter Kreeft put it:

“The national anthem of hell is, ‘I Did It My Way.’”³¹

People choose hell, as Milton pointed out in *Paradise Lost*, because it is

“Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.”

Nothing burns in hell but self-will!

If there were no self-will there would be no devil and no hell.

As C. S. Lewis says, there will be just two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God: “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says with tears: “Thy will be done.” This means that **all who are in hell, choose it**.³² The important question to ask is this: “With which of these groups am I to be found?”

Hell is a commentary then on the seriousness of rejecting Christ. This should motivate one to respond in faith to God's offer of salvation in Christ.

VEGETARIANISM

“. . . **food *does not* bring us near to God**, we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do” (1 Co 8:8).

A third position held by Seventh-Day Adventists that is not common among other denominations is vegetarianism.

Many religions in the world as well as cults and sects espouse vegetarianism as a form of religious devotion. Hinduism and Buddhism encourage vegetarianism with some groups within Buddhism which practice veganism, a more radical form which abstains from even the produce of animals such as milk, eggs and cheese.

The Position Statement on Vegetarian Diet by Seventh-Day Adventism reads as follows:

“For more than 130 years Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) have practiced a vegetarian dietary lifestyle because of their belief in the holistic nature of humankind. Whatever is done in eating or drinking should honor and glorify God and preserve the health of the body, mind and spirit.

The vegetarian diet recommended by Seventh-day Adventists includes the generous use of whole grain breads, cereals and pastas, a liberal use of fresh vegetables and fruits, a moderate use of legumes, nuts, seeds. It can also include low fat dairy products such as milk, yogurt and cheeses and eggs. It is best to avoid high saturated fat and cholesterol foods such as: beef, lamb, pork, chicken, fish and seafood. Coffee, tea and alcoholic beverages provide few nutrients and may interfere with the absorption of essential nutrients.”³³

Although this position statement sounds reasonable, my experience with scores of Seventh-Day Adventists is that they quickly make reference to vegetarianism and use its practice as a badge of pride.

Such spiritual pride is deadly to the soul! Even if the practice of vegetarianism were confirmed by Scripture, it should be done in a spirit of humility and thanksgiving.

But is vegetarianism scriptural?

Scripture is clear that **God originally created food as part of his “very good” creation** (Ge 1:31). **This involved the death of animal.**

Paul warned Timothy:

“The Spirit clearly says that **in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.** Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and **order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving**”(1 Ti 4:3-4).

Meat-denying ascetics are rejecting what God created good. These gifts are to be received with thanksgiving.

This food chain, however, will no longer exist in the new heavens and earth, when wild animals will be domesticated. Although Genesis 1 emphasizes the order, goodness and beauty of the natural world that God created, other Scriptures show that God created some food because of the death of animals. As the psalmist put it:

“The lions **roar for their prey** and seek their food from God” (Ps 104:21).

Similarly Job says:

“Do you **hunt the prey** for the lioness and **satisfy the hunger of the lions** when they **crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket**” (Job 38:39-40).

“Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high?
He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is his stronghold.
From there he seeks out his food; his eyes detect it from afar. **His young ones feast on blood, and where the slain are, there is he**” (Job 39:27-30).

Abel kept sheep, presumably to eat (Ge 4:2-4). And Abel’s offering was “**fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock**” (Ge 4:4). And “**the Lord looked with favor** on Abel and his offering” (Ge 4:4). Abel’s offering of the firstborn was indicative of the recognition that all the productivity of the flock is from the Lord and all of it belongs to Him.

The fact that God gave man every kind of tree and plant for consumption (Ge 1:29) does not mean man was originally vegetarian. Furthermore, nor does it mean that meat-eating reflects human fallenness. Genesis 9:3 is clear:

“Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.”

Meat would now supplement mankind’s diet, the confirmation of the legitimacy of meat-eating. Not that Genesis is interested in whether people were originally vegetarian or not, rather, the point is that God supplied them with food.

Noah distinguished between clean and unclean animals (Ge 7:2), which **assumes that meat was eaten prior to the flood.**

Moses gives a list of what is legitimate meat and what isn’t:

“Do not eat any detestable thing. These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope and the mountain sheep. You may eat any animal that has a split hoof divided in two and that chews the cud” (Dt 14:3-6).

The subject of clean and unclean food is discussed in greater detail in Leviticus 11.

The New Testament, however, declares that all foods are clean (Mk 7:19). Because “the earth is the Lord’s and all it contains” (Ps 24:1), even eating meat offered to idols that is sold in the marketplace could be eaten (1 Co 10:25). Why? Because

“ . . . food *does not* bring us near to God, we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do” (1 Co 8:8).

It is not legitimate to argue that Jesus was a vegetarian since He kept the Passover (Mt. 26:17-19; Mk 14:12-16; Lk 2:41; 22:8-15; Jn 2:13,23; 6:4; 11:55; 18:28,39; 19:14) which obviously involved the consumption of meat (Ex 12:11-13) and was Himself the Passover (Lk 22:11). He also encouraged fishing (Mt 17:27; Jn 21:9-10,13).

Jesus also drank alcoholic beverages or wine. This is why He was called a glutton and drunkard by the self-righteous ascetics of Judah (Mt 11:19) and criticized by the Pharisees for drinking with publicans (Lk 7:34).

The apostles kept the food laws and ate meat. This is obvious since we can assume that Paul practiced what he preached and because some of them were fishermen. Moreover, Paul encouraged timothy who had stomach problems, to drink some wine (1 Ti 5:23).

The writer to the Hebrews addressed legalistic Judaizers as did Paul in his first letter to Timothy. Some of the early believers continued to emphasize the need to follow the old and inferior Mosaic order.

LEGALISM

The writer of the book of Hebrews contradicts the legalistic Judaizers who were promulgating strange teachings:

“Do not be carried away by **all kinds of *strange teachings***. It is good for **our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by *ceremonial foods***, which are of ***no value to those who eat them***” (1 Ti 1:9).

The strange or foreign teachings or doctrines seem to deal with abandoning their new-found faith in Christ and return to Mosaic ceremonies and laws that were fulfilled in Jesus. This may have been an attempt to blend the law and the Gospel and bring in the Levitical sacrifices and institutions in order to perfect the Christian system. Remember the old covenant is abolished; the *new* alone is in force.

The expression “It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace” means that our hearts are to be fully satisfied with the truth and efficacy of the Gospel. The word grace is put in opposition to foods (*bromasin*) often translated meats, signifying here the Levitical institutions, and especially its sacrifices, these being emphatically termed “meats” because the offerers were permitted to feast upon them after the blood had been poured out before the Lord (Lev 7:15; Dt 12:6-7).

The old Mosaic order was done away with at the cross and must not be revived. The tendency of many Christians then and now is to seek approval or status from God by eating, or refraining from eating, certain special foods.

Legalistic Practices

When I was a teenager my Roman Catholic friends used to follow the practice of eating fish on Friday. In a similar way, there are many appeals made today for vegetarianism, special diets, and even the use of marijuana or hallucinogenic drugs, supposedly designed to enhance spiritual vitality. The author calls such practices “all kinds of strange teachings” and warns against becoming involved with such beliefs. Instead of focusing on the strengthening by grace

which trust in the living Christ, the ascetics follow religious practices “which are of no value to those who eat them” (1 Ti 1:9). Such religious practices lack value because they do not take away guilt, cleanse the heart or give power over sin.

The Appearance of Spirituality

Paul warned the Colossians:

"Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, **as though you still belonged to it**, do you submit to its rules: ‘**Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!**’ These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on **human commands and teachings**. Such regulations indeed have **an appearance of wisdom**, with their **self-imposed worship**, their **false humility** and their **harsh treatment of the body**, but they **lack any value in *restraining sensual indulgence***" (Col 2:23).

Churches should frequently alert their people against involvement in such useless practices.

In Evangelical churches we are quick to condemn the Roman Catholics for their legalistic practices, yet we are guilty of our own list of self-imposed “dos and don’ts.”

Accept and Do Not Condemn

Paul also addressed this in Romans:

“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on **disputable matters**. One man’s faith allows him to **eat everything**, but another man, whose faith is weak, **eats only vegetables**. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. **Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind**. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. **For none of us lives to himself alone**. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. so, **whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord**. . . .” (vv. 1-8).

The people Paul is addressing here in Rome were probably Jewish Christians who were unwilling to give up the observance of certain requirements of the law, such as dietary restrictions and the keeping of the Sabbath and other special days.

Fellowship among Christians is not to be based on everyone's agreement on disputable questions. As Christians we do not agree on all matters pertaining to the Christian life, nor do we need to (Ro 14:1-4).

All days are to be dedicated to God through holy living and selfless and sacrificial service (Ro 14:5).

The motivation behind the actions of both the strong and the weak is to be the same: both should want to **serve the Lord and give thanks for His provision** (Ro 14:6). Such provision **includes what we eat and drink** (1 Ti 4:4; Titus 1:15).

Paul makes the powerful point to keep in mind that **we do not live to please ourselves but the Lord**. Even in death the important thing is one's relationship to the Lord (Ro 14:7-8).

Act in Love by Refraining From Certain Practices

“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, **I am fully convinced that *no food is unclean in itself***. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are **no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.**

Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. **For the kingdom of God is not a matter of *eating and drinking*, but of *righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit***, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. **All food is clean**, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall”

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. **For even Christ *did not please Himself*** but, as it is written: ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on Me’” (Ro 14:13-21; 15:1-3).

Paul points out that now that he was a Christian, **the old food taboos no longer applied** (Ro 14:14; Mt 15:10-11,16-20; Mk 7:14-23).

Paul is not saying that sin is only a matter of subjective opinion or conscience since he is not here discussing conduct that is clear in the light of Scripture, but conduct concerning which Christians may legitimately differ (e. g. food regulation, etc.). **With regard to such matters, decisions should be *guided by conscience*** (Ro 14:14).

Love is to be the key to the proper settlements of disputes. Since Christ so valued all brothers, whether strong or weak, surely fellow believers ought to refrain from judging and willing to make adjustments in his own behavior for the sake of another brother (Ro 14:15).

God’s kingdom is not about such **trivial matters as observing certain days or eating and drinking**. God’s kingdom is about **moral, ethical and spiritual dimensions—righteous living** (Ro 14:17).

Paul recognizes a strong Christian’s **right to certain freedoms**, but qualifies it with the principle of **regard for a weak brother’s scruples** (Ro 14:20).

Do Not Violate the Conscience

“So whatever you believe about these things *keep between yourself and God.*

Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and **everything that does *not come from faith is sin***” (Ro14:21-23).

The strong Christian is not required to go against his convictions or change his standards. Yet he is **not to flaunt his Christian freedom** but keep it a private matter (Ro 14:22).

All Christians will be judged, and the judgment will be based on works (Ro 14:10; 2 Co 5:10; 1 Co 3:10-15).

Paul identifies himself with the strong Christians, those whose personal convictions allow them more freedom than the weak. But he keeps in mind that as a strong Christian he should never just please himself, doing what he wants without regard to the scruples of other believers (Ro 15:1).

This section on trivial or disputable matters ends with Paul's reminder that **Christ did not please Himself** (Ro 15:3). He came to do the will of the Father, not His own will. This involved suffering and even death (Mt. 20:28; Mk 10:45; 1 Co 10:33-11:1; 2 Co 8:9; Php 2:5-8). Instead of pleasing himself, Christ voluntarily bore man's hostility toward God (Ro 15:3). **Christ then, is our paradigm.**

THE CHRISTIAN ALTAR

Verse 10 seeks to direct faith to the person of Jesus, instead of some empty ritual:

“We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat” (Heb 13:10).

The expression “we have an altar” is the Christian sacrifice which is the cross of Christ, whereon His body was offered. The Lord's table represents this altar—the cross—as the bread and wine represent the sacrifice offered on it. Our meat, which we by faith spiritually eat, is the flesh of Christ, in contrast to the typical ceremonial meats. The two cannot be combined (**Ga 5:2**). That the writer meant a spiritual eating rather than a literal eating of the sacrifice of Christ in the Lord's Supper becomes obvious in comparing **Hebrews 13:9 with Hebrews 13:10**, "with grace, not with meats."

The cross centerpiece of the Christian Gospel (1 Co 1:18-24; 2:1-5), which marked the end of the whole Aaronic priesthood and its replacement by the order of Melchizedek, of which Christ is the unique and only priest. These privileges are not given to those who continued to offer the Levitical sacrifices and trusted in them for remission of sins.

This is made even clearer in the following verse where the writer refers to the sin offering of the Day of Atonement:

“The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp” (Heb 13:11).

In making covenants, and in some victims offered according to the law, the flesh of the sacrifice was eaten by those making the offering; yet the flesh of the sin offering was not allowed to be eaten. When the blood was sprinkled before the holy place to make an atonement for their souls, the skin, flesh, entrails, etc. were entirely consumed by fire. This was probably done to show that sin was not pardoned by such offerings. Because they were not allowed to eat of the sin offering, they had no benefit from it. This is why they needed to look to Christ through whose sacrifice they might receive real pardon for sin which the shedding of His blood could alone procure. By continuing to offer sacrifices and refusing to acknowledge the once for all sacrifice of Christ, they disqualified themselves for any of the blessings procured by our Lord.

The bodies of the sin offerings were burned outside the camp where Jesus was also taken when He was crucified:

“And so Jesus also **suffered *outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood***” (Heb 13:12; see also Jn 19:20).

The camp referred to is **institutional Judaism**, which had rejected Jesus and Christianity. Though these Christians from Jewish backgrounds had been raised to consider everything outside the camp as unclean and evil, they must follow Jesus there. This means the abolition of the Jewish sacrifices and the termination of the whole Levitical system of worship. Jesus left the city, denounced its final destruction, abandoned it to its fate and suffered outside the gate to bring the Gentiles to God.

These believers were then exhorted to leave this city and system, devoted to destruction, and take refuge in Jesus alone:

“Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, **bearing the disgrace He bore**” (v. 13).

We are not only to take refuge in Jesus, but to bear His reproach by our willingness to be disgraced—despised and rejected as He was.

In the previous chapter the writer pointed to Moses as a man of faith who chose to bear reproach for the sake of Christ (Heb 11:26). The camp is representative of any kind of religious establishment. Although going outside that camp does not necessarily mean a physical withdrawal, it does refer to the inner attitude which sees no value in religious ritual and dietary restrictions.

Impressive buildings, rituals, altars, vestments, etc. are not wrong in and of themselves and may, in fact, enhance our worship experience, they must never be considered the essence of our faith. To "Worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness" (Ps 29:2) means primarily that our worship is motivated by an inner commitment to Christ which is evidenced by a loving spirit, a humble attitude, a forgiving heart and a life of integrity.

A FUTURISTIC OUTLOOK

This emphasis on inner beauty is further underscored by the author in verse 14:

“For here we do not have an enduring city, but **we are looking for the city that is to come**” (Heb 13:14).

Here is an allusion to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. Whereas the Jerusalem that was below was about to be burned with fire and leveled to the ground, the Jerusalem that was from above was that alone which could be considered to be permanent. About seven or eight years after this, Jerusalem was wholly destroyed in A.D. 70.

Like Abraham, believers are pilgrims and strangers in the world, looking forward, as he did, to "the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). We have already attained to that "city that is to come" in our spirits (Heb 12:22) and we shall enter it bodily at the resurrection when Jesus returns (Rev 21:2-4). Therefore, we do not focus in the present world on ornate buildings, special ceremonies and elaborate rituals.

We must accept one another and not judge one another because the kingdom of God is not about rules and regulations but righteousness, peace and joy

SUMMARY

Who can argue that the Seventh-day Adventist vegetarian diet is not healthier than what typically passes for a "diet." Not only the statistics they can produce, but other statistics as well attest to the fact that the more vegetables and fruits that are in any diet, the better. Although, as Paul pointed out, ". . . **food does not bring us near to God**, we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do" (1 Co 8:8), a steady diet of certain kinds of food (e.g. a diet rich in meat) may speed up the process of coming into the very immediate presence of God.

While it is legitimate to argue for a vegetarian diet on physical grounds, we must beware that we do not do so on spiritual grounds.

IS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM A CULT?

Disputes have arisen among counter-cult authors over **whether Seventh-day Adventism is a cult**.

Some classify Seventh-Day Adventism as an unorthodox Christian denomination such as scholars John Whitcomb, Jr. and **Anthony Hoekema**. In analyzing Adventist teachings they came to the conclusion that the Adventist church is a cult. In fact, Hoekema grouped it together with **Mormonism** and **Jehovah's Witnesses** which he based on Adventist views concerning the remnant, the investigative judgment, the incomplete atonement, the scapegoat, the authoritative role of Ellen White and legalistic **soteriology**. Unlike Walter Martin, he did not believe that Adventists had truly broken away from the doctrine of Christ's sinful nature.³⁴

In the late 1950s, **Walter Martin**, considered by many the greatest expert on cults, and Donald Barnhouse classified Adventism as non-cult-like,³⁵ a reversal of his earlier 1955 classification of Adventism as a cult. He expanded his position in the 1960 book-length treatment, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*.

"In 1957 the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists released the first definitive and comprehensive explanation of their faith, an authoritative volume entitled *Questions on Doctrine*. This book truthfully presents the theology and doctrine which the leaders of Seventh-day Adventism affirm they have always held. . . . It is therefore unfair to quote any one Adventist writer or a group of writers as representing 'the position of our denomination in the area of church doctrine and prophetic interpretation . . .'"³⁶

Martin also admitted that there is confusion and there are "conflicting statements" among SDA publications:

"There can be no doubt of the fact that there are conflicting statements in Adventist publications and diverse opinions about certain areas of Adventist theology and interpretation, some of which is quite the opposite of classical orthodox Christianity"³⁷

Martin also comments on Ellen White's role:

"If Seventh-day Adventists did indeed claim for Mrs. White inspiration in every area of her writings, then we might well be cautious about having fellowship with them. However, this they do not do, as I have amply demonstrated from official sources."³⁸

Evangelical historian Richard Kyle in his book, *The Religious Fringe: A History Of Alternative Religions In America* correctly describes Seventh-day Adventism as a "sect."³⁹ A sect is considered an offshoot of an established religion or denomination. Although it holds most beliefs in common with its religion of origin, it has a number of novel concepts which differentiate them from that religion. Therefore many evangelicals have accepted Adventism as an orthodox Christian denomination, even though it holds a few doctrines that are seen as different from mainline Christian churches.

Although a brief examination into the nature and teachings of the Adventist church will give the impression that the differences among some of its members are minor, yet the treatment of a few scholars and ministers who have questioned some of their teachings by the church establishment has been rather radical. The church position from their websites and publications, such as the *Adventist Review* monthly and the writings and experience of church dissidents such as Desmond Ford, Walter Rea, Dale Ratzlaff, Ron Numbers and others reveal that the official church claim lacks credibility.⁴⁰

Ford maintains that Ellen White did have the spiritual gift of prophecy, stating in 1980, “. . . I found Christ through the writings of White and since she has influenced me more than any other writer since **John the Apostle** . . .”⁴¹ As an avid reader, he has described White's book *The Desire of Ages* as the most "beautiful" book he has ever read. Although he has often been said to have rejected the **prophetic ministry of White**, this is not fully accurate because he views her as a pastor rather than as a source of doctrine and thus fallible.

In 1979, while still at Pacific Union College, Desmond Ford was asked by the S.D.A. Forum (a network of Seventh-day Adventist professionals) to speak on the ramifications of Hebrews chapter 9 and their impact on the Adventist doctrine of 1844 and the Investigative Judgment. Although he was promised immunity, this talk led to Ford being summoned to the General Conference of S.D.A.s at Washington, D.C., where he was given six months to write up his position. This was eventually circulated in a 900-page manuscript called “Daniel 8:14, the Investigative Judgment, and the Kingdom of God.”⁴²

In 1980, 111 chief administrators and scholars of the Seventh-day Adventist Church met for a week to consider Ford's paper and decide his future. Although a consensus statement approved seven out of ten of his major positions, Ford's ministerial credentials were removed for moving away from traditional Adventist belief on this particular doctrine.⁴³

This extreme action created much controversy in Adventist circles because Ford had been a well-known speaker, teacher, scholar and evangelist for several decades. Articles about his disciplining appeared in *Newsweek*, *Time* and *Christianity Today*.

For twenty years since, Ford has worked independently through a nonprofit ministry called Good News Unlimited, in Auburn, California. He has had a daily and weekly radio program for twenty years, and a TV program on health and preventive medicine, called “Worth More Than a Million,” for ten years.

Ford's special preaching emphasis is the Pauline doctrine of Justification by Faith. It is the good news that "makes the heart to sing and the feet to dance," that Christ, by His life and death redeemed the world 2,000 years ago, so that now, "whosoever will may come" to God.⁴⁴

Dale Ratzlaff, a fourth generation SDA member, left SDA in 1981 when he concluded the investigative judgment teaching was incorrect. He manages LAM Publications, LLC and serves on the board of Life Assurance Ministries, Inc. He is also the founding editor of *Proclamation*, published bimonthly by Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.

Ratzlaff claims that since leaving the SDA has drawn "two profound conclusions:

1. "One cannot understand the Bible correctly when continuing to read the writings of Ellen White . . ."

2. "Where the Bible is clear we can and should be certain. Where the Bible is unclear or honestly open to several interpretations we must be tentative . . ."⁴⁵

He believes the *writings of Ellen White* is a mixture of good and bad:

". . . [I] can testify that there are many good things in the writings of Ellen White. However, having said that, there are also many places where there is subtle error or in her early writings, blatant error."⁴⁶

LAM Publications, LLC is described as following:

"We print, stock and sell books by former Seventh-day Adventist theologians and pastors providing accurate information on Seventh-day Adventist doctrine and practice for former Seventh-day Adventists, inquiring Adventists, and concerned evangelicals.

Our Mission: To proclaim the good news of the new covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

Our Motto: Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is discovered.

Our Mandate: Approximately 300,000 members leave the Seventh-day Adventist church every year. These transitioning Adventists have a unique set of needs that must be met if they are going to make a successful transition to a healthy evangelical Christian church. We have helped thousands make this transition and pray that God will continue to use this ministry to that end."⁴⁷

Ratzlaff is the author of the following books:

- *Sabbath in Christ* (revised and expanded version of the 1990 *Sabbath in Crisis*) ISBN 0962754617
- *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists* ISBN 0-9627546-9-2
- *Truth About Seventh-day Adventist "Truth"* ISBN 0962754633
- *Truth Led Me Out*, [webpage](#), (previously promoted as Adventist to Christian?)

In 2006, Ratzlaff became the editor for The Ellen White Research Project website ([EllenWhiteExposed.com](#), formerly [EllenWhite.org](#)), which claims to be the most comprehensive site critical of Ellen White and her writings on the internet. The site was founded in 1996 by Dirk Anderson ([bio](#)), who was initially a mainstream Adventist, then a historic Adventist, and then a member of the **Church of God (Seventh-Day)**. Jeff Barron ([bio](#)) is currently assistant editor, and all are former Seventh-day Adventists.⁴⁸

Kenneth Samples of the evangelical *Christian Research Institute Journal* gives the following assessment as to whether SDA is a cult or sect:

“With respect to the charge that Traditional Adventism is a non-Christian cult, it must be emphasized that the structure of Adventism is largely orthodox (accepting the Trinity, Christ's deity, virgin birth, bodily resurrection, etc.). Presently, however, it would appear that Traditional Adventism is at least aberrant, confusing or compromising biblical truth (e.g., their view of justification, the nature of Christ, appealing to an unbiblical authority). It must also be stated that if the traditional camp continues in its departure from QOD, and in promoting Ellen White as the church's infallible interpreter, then they could one day be fully deserving of the title "cult," as some Adventists recognize.

In the late 1970s, SDA was at the crossroads between becoming quite evangelical, or returning to the traditionalism of the past. The crisis of the 1980s makes it plain that many in Adventist leadership are attentive to the vocal traditionalist segment, and, unfortunately, have headed Adventism in the wrong direction. If those in Adventist leadership who love the Reformation gospel (and there are still many) do not speak up and stand for their convictions, Adventism has little hope,

because Traditional Adventism is theologically bankrupt. Its perverted gospel robs Adventist Christians of assurance and puts them on a treadmill of trying to measure up to God's holy law in order to be saved.

Our criticism of Adventism should not be interpreted as an attack from an enemy, but rather concerned words from a friend, who earnestly prays that the present leaders of SDA will honor Scripture and the gospel of grace above their own denominational distinctives.”⁴⁹

At the present time Seventh-Day Adventism fits the description of a sect more accurately than a cult. It is quasi-orthodox. Critics are often guilty of knee-jerk suspicions and pre-judgments about the teachings of this sect because it does hold some unorthodox views. However, such views are secondary. They are not part of what has been historically categorized as “The Fundamentals of the Faith.”

6. JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Jehovah's Witnesses has about **7.3 million members with 105,298 congregations worldwide.**

The group emerged from the **Bible Student movement**, founded in the late **19th century** by **Charles Taze Russell**, with the formation of **Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society**. Following a schism in the movement, the branch that maintained control of the Society underwent significant organizational changes by bringing its authority structure and methods of evangelism under centralized control.

Since its inception, the Watch Tower Society has taught that the present world order is in its **last days** and will soon be destroyed at **Armageddon**. In the years leading up to 1914, 1925 and 1975, the Watch Tower Society expected Armageddon or the establishment of Christ's kingdom over the earth to occur in those years.

Members commonly refer to their body of beliefs as "the Truth," and adherents consider themselves to be "in the Truth" while they regard secular **society** as a place of moral contamination under the influence of **Satan**. Therefore they limit their social interaction to those of like faith.

The movement's position regarding **conscientious objection** to military service and refusal to **salute** national **flags** has brought it into conflict with governments, particularly those that **conscript** citizens for military service. Consequently, activities of Jehovah's Witnesses have been banned or restricted in some countries. Persistent legal challenges by Jehovah's Witnesses have had considerable influence on related **legislation** and civil rights in the **United States** and other countries.

In 1870, **Charles Taze Russell** and others formed an independent group to study the Bible. In July 1879 he began publishing the magazine *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, highlighting his interpretations of biblical chronology, with particular attention to his belief that the world was in "the last days." In 1881, **Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society** was formed to disseminate tracts, papers, doctrinal treatises and Bibles. Three years later in 1884, Russell became president of the Society when it was legally incorporated in **Pennsylvania**.

Watch Tower supporters gathered as autonomous congregations to study the Bible and Russell's writings. Russell firmly rejected as "wholly unnecessary" the concept of a formal organization for his followers and declared that his group had no record of its members' names, no creeds and no sectarian name. In 1910 he announced that the group would identify itself as the International Bible Students Association. Russell died in 1916 and control of the Watch Tower magazine was temporarily passed to an editorial committee as outlined in Russell's will, with an executive committee in control of the society pending the election of a new president.

In 1917, the Watch Tower Society's legal representative, **Joseph Franklin Rutherford**, was elected as its next president. A power struggle developed between Rutherford and four of the Watch Tower Society's board of directors, who objected to his style of leadership. On July 17, 1917, Rutherford replaced four of the directors, claiming they had not been legally elected.

On the same day, he also announced the release of *The Finished Mystery* as the seventh volume of *Russell's Studies in the Scriptures* series. The book was widely advertised to the public as "a posthumous publication . . . of Charles Taze Russell," though much was actually written by two other Bible students under the direction of Joseph Rutherford. The book strongly criticized Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy and Christian involvement in war. Patriotic fervor during **World War I** and other animosities fueled persecution of the Bible students in America and Europe, including mob violence and **tarring and feathering**.

Citing this book, the United States federal government indicted Rutherford and the new board of directors for violation of the **Espionage Act** on May 7, 1918. They were found guilty and sentenced concurrently to 20 years' imprisonment. During their imprisonment, elections for the Watch Tower Society directors took place again and Rutherford was re-elected as president. In March 1919, the judgment against them was reversed, they were released from prison and the charges were later dropped.

Opposition to Rutherford among the Bible students increased, prompting a significant number of members to cut ties with the Watch Tower Society and to form new organizations. Rutherford continued to tighten and centralize organizational control of those who remained loyal to the Watch Tower Society, with the Brooklyn headquarters appointing a "director" in each congregation in 1919, and a year later instructing all members who participated in the preaching to report their activity weekly.

In 1925, following a dispute over a proposed article, Rutherford overruled the Watch Tower's editorial committee and took full control of the organization and of material published in the magazine. **On July 26, 1931, the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" was adopted** by resolution at a convention in **Columbus, Ohio**, based on Isaiah 43:10: "**Ye are my witnesses**, saith the Lord." In 1932, Rutherford eliminated the system of selecting elders by congregational vote. In 1938, he introduced a "theocratic" or "God-ruled" organizational system, under which all appointments in congregations worldwide were made from the Brooklyn headquarters.

SUMMARY OF DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES

Doctrines of Jehovah's Witnesses are established by the Governing Body, which assumes responsibility for **interpreting** and **applying Scripture**. The president of the **Watch Tower Society** publications used to decide matters of doctrine prior to the reorganization of the Governing Body in 1976. Doctrinal changes and refinements result from a process of progressive **revelation** in which God gradually reveals His will and purpose. Their literature has suggested

such enlightenment results from the application of **reason** and **study**, the guidance of the **holy spirit**, and direction from **Jesus Christ** and **angels**. However, the Governing Body does not claim to be infallible or claim divine inspiration.

1. **Scripture** is considered the **inspired, inerrant** word of God. The Witnesses accept the Bible as **scientifically** and **historically** accurate and reliable and interpret much of it **literally**, but accept parts of it as **symbolic**. They consider the Bible to be the source of truth and the basis for all their beliefs.¹

Sociologist Andrew Holden's **ethnographic** study of the religion concluded that pronouncements of the Governing Body, through Watch Tower Society publications, carry as much or more weight than the Bible. The leadership of Jehovah's Witnesses claims to be the sole visible channel of Jehovah and asserts that the Bible cannot be understood without associating with the Watch Tower Society.²

"Those with an earthly hope should therefore recognize Christ as their head and be submissive to the Faithful and Discreet Slave and its Governing Body and to the men appointed as overseers in the congregation."³

"Let us face the fact that no matter how much Bible reading we have done, we would never have learned the truth on our own. We would not have discovered the truth regarding Jehovah, His purposes and attributes, the meaning and importance of his name, the Kingdom, Jesus' ransom, the difference between God's organization and Satan's, nor why God has permitted wickedness."⁴

"Thus the Bible is an organizational book and belongs to the Christian congregation as an organization, not to individuals, regardless of how sincerely they may believe that they can interpret the Bible."⁵

Only its organization understands the Bible:

"Only this organization functions for Jehovah's purpose and to his praise. To it alone God's Sacred Word, the Bible, is not a sealed book."⁶

"All who want to understand the Bible should appreciate that the 'greatly diversified wisdom of God' can become known only through Jehovah's channel of communication, the faithful and discreet slave."⁷

The following section is presented by the Jehovah's Witnesses web site:

"What, can we say, is the basic principle underlying the movement of Jehovah's living organization? It can be expressed in one word: OBEDIENCE. Loving obedience from the heart is all. This is the basic formula upon which the organization rests and operates."⁸ (Emphasis in original)

The Watch Tower Society has been criticized for its refusal to reveal the names and academic credentials of the translators of its *New World Translation* of the Bible. The society has claimed members of the translation committee wished to remain anonymous in order to exalt only the name of God, while The Watchtower said the educational qualifications of the translators were unimportant and that "the translation itself testifies to their qualifications." Former Governing Body member Raymond Franz has claimed that only one member of the translation committee had sufficient qualifications for the task.

2. There is **one God** in one person.⁹ There is no Trinity.¹⁰ Jehovah's Witnesses emphasize use of God's biblical name, the **Tetragrammaton**, and in English they prefer to use the name, **Jehovah**.¹¹ They believe that Jehovah is the only true God, the creator of all things, and give Him the title "Universal Sovereign." They believe that all worship should be directed toward Him.¹²

3. The **Holy Spirit** is a force, not alive.¹³ It is God's impersonal "active force."¹⁴

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the following Bible accounts prove that the Holy Spirit is merely a force:

“1. When Mary, the mother of Jesus, visited her cousin Elizabeth, the Bible says that the unborn child in Elizabeth's womb leaped, 'and Elizabeth was filled with holy spirit.' (Luke 1:41) Is it reasonable that a person would be 'filled' with another person?

2. When John the Baptizer spoke to his disciples about Jesus as the one who would succeed him, John said: 'I, for my part, baptize you with water . . . , but the one coming after me is stronger than I am, whose sandals I am not fit to take off. That one will baptize you people with holy spirit.' (Matthew 3:11) John could hardly have been referring to the holy spirit as a person when he spoke of baptizing people with it.

3. While visiting a Roman army officer and his family, the apostle Peter spoke of Jesus as having been anointed by God 'with holy spirit and power.' (Acts 10:38) Shortly afterward, "the holy spirit fell upon" the army officer's household. The account says that many were amazed 'because the free gift of the holy spirit was being poured out also upon people of the nations.' (Acts 10:44, 45) Here again, the terms used are inconsistent with the idea of the holy spirit being a person.

It is not unusual for God's Word to personify things that are not a person. These include wisdom, discernment, sin, death, and undeserved kindness (**Proverbs 8:1–9:6; Romans 5:14, 17, 21; 6:12**). Jesus himself said that “wisdom is proved righteous by all its children,” or its good results (**Luke 7:35**). Clearly, wisdom is not a person that has literal children! Likewise, the holy spirit is not a person simply because in some instances it is personified?

In the Bible, God's holy spirit is identified as God's power *in action*. Hence, an accurate translation of the Bible's Hebrew text refers to God's spirit as “God's active force.” (**Genesis 1:2**) This concept is well supported throughout the Bible.—**Micah 3:8; Luke 1:35; Acts 10:38**. Contrary to popular belief, God is not present everywhere at all times. Rather, he dwells in the spirit realm, in an ‘established place of dwelling,’ or residence. (**1 Kings 8:39; 2 Chronicles 6:39**) The Scriptures also refer to a specific place where God lives and has his ‘throne’ (**1 Kings 22:19; Isaiah 6:1; Daniel 7:9; Revelation 4:1-3**). However, from his ‘established place of dwelling,’ he can use his active force to reach out into every corner of both the spirit realm and the physical realm.—**Psalm 139:7**.”¹⁵

4. **Jesus** is Jehovah's first creation was His 'only-begotten Son'. . . was used by Jehovah in creating all other things.”¹⁶

Jesus was Michael the archangel who became a man.¹⁷

Jesus was only a perfect man, not God in flesh.¹⁸

Jesus did not rise from the dead in His physical body.¹⁹ He was raised "not a human creature, but a spirit."²⁰

Jesus was born again.²¹

Jesus did not die on a cross but on a stake.²²

Jesus began His invisible rule over the earth in 1914.²³

Jesus' ransom sacrifice did not include Adam.²⁴

The following section is presented by the Jehovah's Witnesses web site:

“The Bible teaches that Jesus lived in heaven before he came to earth. Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and also said that His origin was ‘from early times’ (**Micah 5:2**). On many occasions, Jesus himself said that he lived in heaven before being born as a human (**John 3:13; 6:38, 62; 17:4, 5**). As a spirit creature in heaven, Jesus had a special relationship with Jehovah.

Jesus is Jehovah's most precious Son—and for good reason. He is called “the firstborn of all creation,” for He was God's first-born of all creation (**Colossians 1:15**). There is something else that makes this Son special. He is the “only-begotten Son” (**John 3:16**). This means that Jesus is the only one directly created by God. Jesus is also the only one whom God used when He created

all other things (**Colossians 1:16**). Then, too, Jesus is called ‘the Word’ (**John 1:14**). This tells us that he spoke for God, no doubt delivering messages and instructions to the Father’s other sons, both spirit and human.

Is the firstborn Son equal to God, as some believe? That is not what the Bible teaches. As we noted in the preceding paragraph, the Son was created. Obviously, then, he had a beginning, whereas Jehovah God has no beginning or end (**Psalms 90:2**). The only-begotten Son never even considered trying to be equal to his Father. The Bible clearly teaches that the Father is greater than the Son (**John 14:28; 1 Corinthians 11:3**). Jehovah alone is ‘God Almighty’ (**Genesis 17:1**). Therefore, he has no equal.

Jehovah and his firstborn Son enjoyed close association for billions of years—long before the starry heavens and the earth were created. How they must have loved each other! (**John 3:35; 14:31**) This dear Son was just like his Father. That is why the Bible refers to the Son as ‘the image of the invisible God’ (**Colossians 1:15**). Yes, even as a human son may closely resemble his father in various ways, this heavenly Son reflected his Father’s qualities and personality.

Jehovah’s only-begotten Son willingly left heaven and came down to earth to live as a human. But you may wonder, ‘How was it possible for a spirit creature to be born as a human?’ To accomplish this, Jehovah performed a miracle. He transferred the life of his firstborn Son from heaven to the womb of a Jewish virgin named Mary. No human father was involved. Mary thus gave birth to a perfect son and named him Jesus.—**Luke 1:30-35**.

What Jesus said and did while on earth helps us to get to know him well. More than that, through Jesus we come to know Jehovah better. Why is this the case? Recall that this Son is a perfect reflection of his Father. That is why Jesus told one of his disciples: “He that has seen me has seen the Father also” (**John 14:9**). The four Bible books known as the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—tell us much about the life, activity, and personal qualities of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was well-known as ‘Teacher’ (**John 1:38; 13:13**). What did he teach? Primarily, his message was “the good news of the kingdom”—that is, God’s Kingdom, the heavenly government that will rule over the entire earth and will bring endless blessings to obedient humans. (**Matthew 4:23**) Whose message was this? Jesus himself said: ‘What I teach is not mine, but belongs to him that sent me,’ namely, Jehovah (**John 7:16**). Jesus knew that his Father wants humans to hear about the good news of the Kingdom. In **Chapter 8**, we will learn more about God’s Kingdom and what it will accomplish.

Where did Jesus do his teaching? Everywhere he found people—in the countryside as well as in cities, in villages, in marketplaces, and in their homes. Jesus did not expect people to come to him. He went to them (**Mark 6:56; Luke 19:5, 6**). Why did Jesus go to such lengths and spend so much of his time preaching and teaching? Because doing so was God’s will for him. Jesus always did his Father’s will (**John 8:28, 29**). But there was another reason why he preached. He

felt compassion for the crowds of people who came out to see him ([Matthew 9:35, 36](#)). They were neglected by their religious leaders, who should have been teaching them the truth about God and his purposes. Jesus knew how much the people needed to hear the Kingdom message.

Jesus was a man of tender warmth and deep feelings. Others thus found him to be approachable and kind. Even children felt at ease with him. ([Mark 10:13-16](#)) Jesus was impartial. He hated corruption and injustice. ([Matthew 21:12, 13](#)) At a time when women received little respect and had few privileges, he treated them with dignity. ([John 4:9, 27](#)) Jesus was genuinely humble. On one occasion, he washed the feet of his apostles, a service usually performed by a lowly servant.

Jesus was sensitive to the needs of others. This was especially evident when, under the power of God's spirit, he performed miracles of healing ([Matthew 14:14](#)). For example, a man with leprosy came to Jesus and said: 'If you just want to, you can make me clean.' Jesus personally felt this man's pain and suffering. Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched the man, saying: 'I want to. Be made clean.' And the sick man was healed! ([Mark 1:40-42](#)) Can you imagine how that man must have felt?

Jesus set the finest example of loyal obedience to God. He remained faithful to his heavenly Father under all kinds of circumstances and despite all types of opposition and suffering. Jesus firmly and successfully resisted Satan's temptations ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)). At one time, some of Jesus' own relatives did not put faith in him, even saying that he was 'out of his mind' ([Mark 3:21](#)). But Jesus did not let them influence him; he kept right on doing God's work. Despite insults and abuse, Jesus maintained self-control, never trying to harm his opposers.—[1 Peter 2:21-23](#).

Jesus remained faithful until death—a cruel and painful death at the hands of his enemies. ([Philippians 2:8](#)) Consider what he endured on the last day of his life as a human. He was arrested, accused by false witnesses, convicted by corrupt judges, laughed at by mobs, and tortured by soldiers. Nailed to a stake, he took his last breath, crying out: 'It has been accomplished!' ([John 19:30](#)) However, on the third day after Jesus died, his heavenly Father resurrected him back to spirit life ([1 Peter 3:18](#)). A few weeks later, he returned to heaven. There, he 'sat down at the right hand of God' and waited to receive kingly power.—[Hebrews 10:12-13](#).

What did Jesus accomplish by remaining faithful until death? Jesus' death actually opens to us the opportunity for eternal life on a paradise earth, in harmony with Jehovah's original purpose."²⁵

5. Their **church** is the self-proclaimed prophet of God.²⁶ They claim to be the only channel of God's truth.²⁷ Only their church members will be saved.²⁸

6. The **soul**, which they consider to be the physical body that dies, ceases to exist after death, a state of nonexistence with no consciousness.²⁹ There is no hell of fire where the wicked are punished.³⁰ **Hades** and **Sheol** are understood to refer to the condition of death, termed “the common grave.”

Their hope for life after death involves being resurrected by God to a cleansed earth after Armageddon (an earthly paradise), or to heaven for the limited number of 144,000 who will rule with Jesus as kings and priests over earth (based on their understanding of Revelation 14).³¹ The ones remaining on earth are referred to as the "Great Crowd." They teach that only they meet scriptural requirements for surviving Armageddon, although God is the final judge. During the millennium, most other people who died since the time of **Abel** will be resurrected with the prospect of living forever; they will be taught the proper way to worship God in order for them to be ready for their final test before the end of the millennium.

7. Only the **144,000** Jehovah's Witness are born again.³² and thus may take communion.³³

8. **Blood transfusions** are a sin.³⁴ It is a violation of God's law based on their interpretation of Acts 15:28, 29 and other Scriptures.

Since 1961 the acceptance of a blood transfusion has been grounds for expulsion. Members are to refuse transfusions in all cases even if death may result. Jehovah's Witnesses do accept non-blood alternatives, and other life-saving measures, in lieu of blood transfusions. They do not accept **red cells**, **white cells**, **platelets** or **plasma**, though they may accept certain fractions made from these components at their own discretion. The Watch Tower Society provides members with **Power of Attorney** documents to indicate which optional fractions they accept, with pre-formatted wording prohibiting major components. If a fraction "makes up a significant portion of that component" or "carries out the key function of a primary component", it may be objectionable to some, but is permissible.

9. **The Cross** is a pagan symbol and should not be used.³⁵ They believe that Jesus died on a single upright **torture stake** rather than the traditional **cross**.³⁶

10. **Salvation** is by faith and what you do.³⁷ Good works are necessary for salvation.³⁸ Salvation requires four things:

1) **Study the Bible**—Jesus Christ identified a first requirement when He said in prayer to his Father: ‘This means everlasting life, their *taking in knowledge* of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ’ (**John 17:3**). Knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ includes knowledge of God's purposes regarding the earth and of Christ's role as earth's new King. Will you take in such knowledge by studying the Bible.³⁹

2) **Obey God's laws**—This means to conform one's life to the moral requirements set out in the Bible. This includes refraining from a debauched, immoral way of life (1 Co 6:9-10; 1 Pe 4:3-4).⁴⁰

3) **To be associated with God's channel, His organization**—God has always used an organization. For example, only those in the ark in Noah's day survived the Flood, and only those associated with the Christian congregation in the first century had God's favor (Ac 4:12) Similarly, Jehovah is using only one organization today to accomplish his will. To receive everlasting life in the earthly Paradise we must identify that organization and serve God as part of it.⁴¹

4) **Loyalty**—God requires that prospective subjects of his Kingdom support his government by *loyally advocating his Kingdom rule to others*. Jesus Christ explained: "This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth" (Mt 24:14). Will you meet this requirement by telling others about God's Kingdom?⁴²

11. **Satan** is the ruler of the world and was entrusted with the obligation and charged with the duty of overseeing the creation of the earth.⁴³

They believe that **Satan** is a spirit creature who developed feelings of self-importance and craved worship. He persuaded Adam and Eve to obey him rather than God, and humanity subsequently become participants in a battle for universal sovereignty between the competing claims of Jehovah and Satan. Other angels who sided with Satan became **demons** and were cast down to earth from heaven after October 1, 1914, at which point the **end times** began. They believe that the world is under the control of Satan and his demons who mislead people and are the cause of human suffering. However, they do not believe that individual rulers or governments are under Satan's direct control.⁴⁴

"In one sense, human governments serve as 'God's minister,' giving structure to human society, without which chaos would rule. And some leaders have protected fundamental human rights, including the right to engage in true worship—something that Satan does not want. Still, because of the Devil's influence, no human or human institution has ever been able to bring lasting peace and security to the people."⁴⁵

12. **The universe** is billions of years old.⁴⁶ Each of the 6 creative days of God in Genesis 1 was 7000 years long. Therefore, Man was created toward the end of 42,000 years of earth's preparation.⁴⁷

13. **Eschatology** plays a central role in their teaching. The current world era or "system of things" entered the "**last days**" in 1914 and faces imminent destruction through intervention by God and Jesus Christ, leading to deliverance for those who worship God acceptably. This

judgment will begin with the destruction by the **United Nations** of false religion, which they identify as "**Babylon the Great**" or the "harlot" of **Revelation 17**. This will mark the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Satan will subsequently attack Jehovah's Witnesses, which will prompt God to begin the war of **Armageddon**, during which all forms of government and all people not considered as Christ's "sheep" or true followers, will be destroyed. After Armageddon, God will extend His heavenly kingdom to include earth, which will be transformed into a paradise similar to the **Garden of Eden**. After Armageddon, most of those who had died prior to God's intervention will gradually be resurrected to a "day of judgment" lasting for a **thousand years**. This judgment will be based on their actions after resurrection, not on past deeds. At the end of the thousand years, a final test will take place when Satan is brought back to mislead perfect mankind. The end result will be a fully tested, glorified human race. Christ will then hand all authority back to God.⁴⁸

Jesus Christ returned invisibly and began to rule in heaven as king in October 1914 for an extended period. Satan was subsequently ousted from heaven to the earth, resulting in "woe" to mankind. They claim that the Greek word *parousia*—usually translated as "coming" when referring to Christ—is more accurately rendered "presence," with His return perceived only as a series of "signs."⁴⁹

14. They **reject allegiance to any nationalistic symbols and holidays**. They refuse to vote, salute the flag, sing the "Star Spangled Banner" or celebrate Christmas or birthdays. They are not allowed to serve in the armed forces.

15. They practice **aggressive evangelism** most notably by visiting people from *house to house*. Free Home Bible Studies are offered to people who show interest in their beliefs, which they present with the aid of their publications, such as *The Watchtower*. Literature is published in many languages through a wide variety of **books, magazines** and other publications, with a small selection available in over 440 languages. They are instructed to devote as much time as possible to preaching activities, and are required to provide a monthly report to their congregation on their 'witnessing' activity.⁵⁰

16. **Meetings for worship, fellowship, study and service** are held at **Kingdom Halls** which are functional in character and do not contain any religious symbols. Members are assigned to a congregation in whose "territory" they reside and are expected to attend weekly services they refer to as "meetings" as scheduled by congregation elders. The meetings are largely devoted to study of the Bible and Watch Tower Society literature. The form and content of the meetings is established by the headquarters in Brooklyn, with the content of most meetings being identical worldwide. Congregations meet for two sessions each week comprising five distinct meetings that total about three-and-a-half hours, typically gathering mid-week (three meetings) and on the weekend (two meetings). Meetings are opened and closed with songs and prayers delivered from the platform. Each year, Witnesses from a number of congregations form a "circuit" and gather

for one-day and two-day assemblies. Several circuits meet once a year for a three-day "district convention," usually at stadiums or auditoriums. Their most important and solemn event is the celebration of the "Lord's Evening Meal" or "Memorial of Christ's Death," which falls on the same date as the Jewish **Passover**.

17. Their view of **ethics and morality** reflects conservative Christian values. All sexual relations outside of marriage are grounds for expulsion if the accused is not considered to be repentant. Abortion is considered **murder**. Modesty in dress and grooming is frequently emphasized and **gambling**, drunkenness, illegal drugs and tobacco use are forbidden while drinking of **alcoholic beverages** is permitted in moderation.

18. The **family structure** is **patriarchal** with the husband being considered the final authority on family decisions, but is encouraged to solicit his wife's thoughts and feelings, as well as those of his children. Marriages are required to be **monogamous** and divorce is permissible only for adultery and is referred to as "a scriptural divorce." If a divorce is obtained for any other reason, remarriage is considered adultery while the previous spouse is still alive and has not begun another sexual relationship. Extreme physical abuse, willful non-support of one's family and what the religion terms "absolute endangerment of spirituality" are considered grounds for legal separation.

PUBLICATIONS

The Watch Tower Society engages in extensive publishing work by producing books, brochures and other media. Its most widely distributed publications are:

- *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1961, revised 1984), a translation of the **Bible**. It uses the name Jehovah, an English version of the Hebrew **Tetragrammaton**, also replacing the Greek word for "Lord" 237 times in the New Testament. It is available in 83 languages.
- *The Watchtower*, a bi-monthly 32-page magazine containing articles on Bible topics. A Public Edition is distributed in their public ministry, and a Study Edition is published for the Watchtower Study. It is available in 180 languages.
- *Awake!*, a monthly 32-page general-interest magazine, usually including articles on science, nature, and geography, with a religious slant.
- *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (2005), the textbook used to conduct Bible studies. It is available in 209 languages.
- *Keep Yourselves in God's Love* (2008), used for Bible studies with people who have completed *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

Three of the cardinal truths of historic orthodoxy that the Jehovah's Witnesses reject are **the personhood of the Holy Spirit, the divinity of Jesus Christ and His bodily resurrection.**

THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS PERSONHOOD

It is impossible to rightly understand the work of the Holy Spirit, or get into right relation with the Holy Spirit Himself and know His work in our lives without first coming to know the Holy Spirit as a Person.

In Relation to True Worship

"God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24). If the Holy Spirit is a divine person and a member of the Trinity, it is important that we as believers worship Him along with our worship of the Father and the Son. Theoretically we do worship the Holy Spirit every time we sing the Doxology or the Gloria Patri ("Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost"). We will not actually worship the Holy Spirit, however, until we think of Him as a divine person rather than a mere influence or power or as an "it."

In Relation to Holy Living

The Holy Spirit is a divine person of infinite majesty. When He comes into our souls to take full possession of the intellect, the emotions and the will (the entire personality of man), He leads us to self-renunciation, self-abnegation and self-humiliation. It is then that we are strengthened with power through God's Spirit in the inner being so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith (Eph 3:16-17).

In Relation to Christian Service

To think of the Holy Spirit as a mere influence leads us to ask, "How can I get more of the Holy Spirit" or "How can I get more spiritual power?" But when we realize that the Holy Spirit is a person, we are led to ask, "How can the Holy Spirit get more of me?"

While one attitude leads to self-confidence and self-exaltation, the other leads to humility and wholehearted **dependence** upon Him.

THE PROOF OF HIS PERSONHOOD

Personal Characteristics

Intellect—"The things of God no one **knows** but the Spirit of God" (1 Co 2:11; see also Jn 15:26; Ro 8:16).

Emotions—"The **love** of the Spirit" (Ro 15:30; see also Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30).

Will—"All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He **determines**" (1 Co 12:11; see also Ac 16:7; Ro 8:27; Heb 2:4).

Paul in his benediction includes all three aspects of personality as he talks about the "fellowship" of the Holy Spirit (2 Co 13:14). It is impossible to have fellowship with a thing. Fellowship is only possible with another person. Since we can have fellowship with the Holy Spirit this proves that He is a person.

Since the Holy Spirit is purely a "spirit being" He has no physical form. As an invisible person, He can identify Himself with the human personality so as to produce the Christlike personality in God's children. He is Christ's other self (Jn 14:16), and when He is allowed full control of the human intellect, emotions and will, the child of God is then ready to present his body as a living sacrifice (Ro 12:1-2).

Personal Names

He is called "Paraclete" (Comforter—Jn 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7).

He is called "Another Comforter" indicating that He is Christ's other self.

Personal Pronouns

The word for "spirit" is *pneuma*, a Greek neuter noun. When this word is the antecedent of the Greek pronoun, the latter is naturally neuter also. But this mere grammatical agreement of gender does not make the idea neuter. The proof of this is the use of the Greek **masculine pronoun** in other contexts to refer to the Holy Spirit:

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, **the Counselor** will not come to you; but if I go, I will send **him** to you. When **he** comes, **he** will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when **he, the Spirit of truth**, comes, **he** will guide you into all truth. **He** will not speak on **his** own; **he** will speak only what **he** hears, and **he** will tell you what is yet to come. **He** will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” (Jn 16:7-14; see also Jn 14:16-17).

"**The Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, **he** will teach you all things" (Jn 14:26).

"**the Spirit of truth**, who proceeds from the Father, **he** will bear witness to Me."
(Jn 15:26)

Another New Testament reference that depicts the Holy Spirit functioning as a person is Acts 13:2:

"**The Holy Spirit** said, 'Set apart for **me** Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Ac 13:2).

In addition to the fact that Jesus is called our "Helper" (1 Jn 2:1), He also refers to the Holy Spirit as "**another** (*allos*) helper." This clearly implies that there is a first "helper." Since the first helper is a person it is consistent to think of the other "Helper" as a person too.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit is "*allos*"—another helper—of the *same kind*. John could have written "*heteros*," another helper of a *different kind* (see similar use of "another" meaning "another Sabbath—Lk 6:6). While this does not prove the personhood of the Holy Spirit, the implication is that the Holy Spirit is either like Jesus or the same.

Personal Treatment

1. **Blasphemed**: "And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but **the blasphemy against the Spirit** will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who **speaks against the Holy Spirit** will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Mt 12:31-32).

2. **Resisted**: "You **stiff-necked** people, with **uncircumcised hearts and ears!** You are just like your fathers: You always **resist the Holy Spirit!**" (Ac 7:51; see also Ge 6:3 and Isa 63:10).

3. **Insulted**: ". . . **deliberately sinning** after we have received the knowledge of the truth. . . . **trampled the Son of God under foot**, who has **treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant** that sanctified him, and who has **insulted the Spirit of grace**" (Heb 10:26,29).

4. **Grieved**: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:29-30).

What are the implications of these treatments of the Holy Spirit?

The first implication is that the Holy Spirit has a **personality** and is therefore a **Person**. The Spirit of God is not merely an influence, a force, a power. He is a person with a personality.

When Paul says, "Do not **grieve the Holy Spirit**" he is clearly implying that the Holy Spirit is a person, for you cannot grieve an object or an impersonal force. This by definition would be ludicrous. You can only grieve a person.

The second point implied is the **intimacy** of the relationship between the believer and the Holy Spirit. After all it makes no sense whatsoever to talk about grieving an enemy. You may anger him, but you do not grieve him if he is really your enemy. You only grieve a friend. "Grieve" is a word of love. And the closer the friendship and the more intimate and meaningful the relationship, the more serious, the more devastating can the effects of grieving be for that person.

5. **Quenched:** "Do not **quench the Spirit**" (1 Th 5:19).

The *New International Version* puts it:

"Do not **put out** the Spirit's **fire**."

Throughout the Bible, the Holy Spirit is frequently alluded to under the symbol of fire. "Quench" carries the significance of "putting out a fire." The idea is of "suppressing" or "stifling" the divine flame of the Spirit. Isaiah calls Him a "**spirit of fire**" (Isa 4:4). Luke points out that on the Day of Pentecost He visibly manifested His empowering presence in the form of "**tongues of fire** that separated and came to rest on each of them"(Ac 2:3).

John the Baptist prophesied:

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after Me will come One who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will **baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire**" (Mt 3:11).

What is the meaning of the warning against "quenched the Spirit of God?"

From the context it seems to mean that "quenched" has to do with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the assembly of the saints. In writing to Christians at Thessalonica Paul warns:

"Do not **put out the Spirit's fire**; do not treat prophecies with **contempt**. **Test** everything. **Hold on** to the good. **Avoid** every kind of evil" (1 Th 5:19-22).

It is in the context of the exercise of spiritual gifts that Paul gives this warning. Instead of putting out the fire of the Holy Spirit for fear that there may be unbiblical words and practices, these believers are exhorted to test everything. To avoid that which is evil, they are to hang on to that which is good. They are warned not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

If the Spirit is simply an influence from God, it would be idolatrous to worship it, just as it would be idolatrous to worship any of the other attributes of God such as His omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, compassion, etc. since they are merely *things*. But Scripture is clear that the Holy Spirit is not simply an influence emanating from God—a power that God imparts to us—but a divine Being who is worthy of our love, our adoration and our faith. If the Spirit is a divine Person and we do not realize it, we are robbing Him of the love and adoration which are his due.

EVIDENCE FOR THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

The deity of Jesus Christ is one of the **cornerstones** of Christianity, and as such, has been attacked more vigorously throughout the ages than any other single doctrine of the Christian faith.

The lines of evidence are more indirect and inferential than forthright and declarative. Jesus did not parade His divine relationship nor bludgeon His hearers into submission by a display of His deity, nor make overt claims to deity.

Biblical Names and Titles in the Old and New Testaments

Some claim that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. This, however, is not true of biblical names and terms. Biblical names have to do with the nature or character of the person named. The names ascribed or applied to Jesus Christ give insight into His character—who He is.

- Almighty (Rev 1:8)
- Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8; 21:6)
- Immanuel (Mt 1:23)
- Express Image of God (Heb 1:3)
- God (Isa 9:6; Jn 1:1; 20:28; Ro 9:5; 1 Ti 3:16)
- I AM (Jn 8:58)
- Savior (Lk 1:47; 2:11; Jn 4:42)
- Son of God (Mt 4:3,6, 8:29, 14:33, 16:16, 27:54; Lk 1:35, 4:41; Jn 1:149; 9:35, 10:36, 11:17)
- Son of Man (Mt 8:20, 9:6; 12:40, 13:41; 16:27, 17:9,12,22, 18:11, 19:28, 20:28, 21:42, 24:30, 26:18)
- Truth (Jn 14:6)

- Word (Jn 1:1; Rev 19:13)

We will focus on just two of the names or terms used of Jesus and God the Father.

“I AM”

Yahweh (*Jehovah* is the transliteration (Jn 8:24,58; Ex 3:14; Jn 18:4-6). The magisterial "I Am" passages cited are Greek equivalents of the Hebrew word for Yahweh:

- "I **am** the bread of Life" (Jn 6:35)
- "I **am** the light of the world" (Jn 8:12; 9:5)
- "I **am** the door" (Jn 10:7,9)
- "I **am** the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11,14)
- "I **am** the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25)
- "I **am** the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6)
- "I **am** the true vine" (Jn 15:1,5)

"I am" is *ani hu* in Hebrew and *ego eimi* in Greek. The force of these words is often blunted in English translations because you can't just say, "I am." You need to say something like, "I am He" to capture the sense of the expression. "I am" is the most holy name of God Himself in the Old Testament. When Moses saw the bush burning without being destroyed in the desert of Sinai, he sensed God's presence in an overwhelming degree, and dared to ask His name. The answer was "I am"—*ani hu* (Ex 3:13-14; Dt 32:39; Isa 43:10). That name for God was not only revered in Israel, it was also used and formed part of the liturgy of the Feast of Tabernacles and of the Passover, where readings full of the "I am" formula were used such as the following:

"'You are My witnesses,' says the Lord, 'and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me and understand that **I am** He. Before Me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after Me. I, **I am** the Lord, and beside Me there is no Savior . . . Yes, and from ancient days **I am He**' (Isa 43:10-11,13).

That is exactly the claim Jesus is making—the divine "**I am**." Jesus used this title or name repeatedly in the New Testament:

After telling the Jews He was from above, Jesus continued by saying:

"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that **I am** the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (Jn 8:24).

In prophesying about His upcoming crucifixion, Jesus said:

"When you have lifted up **the Son of Man**, then you will know who **I am** and that I do nothing on My own but speak just what the Father has taught Me" (Jn 8:28).

In revealing His omniscience to His disciples, Jesus declared:

"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that **I am He**" (Jn 13:19).

When Jesus was arrested by the Roman soldiers, at the request of the Jewish officials who were also present, Jesus, who foreknew what was going to happen asked, "Who is it that you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. At that point Jesus said, "**I am [He]**."

When Jesus said, "**I am [He]**," they "drew back and fell to the ground" (Jn 18:6).

Why?

Was it because His reply was considered so blasphemous? Does that alone explain such a drastic response? Especially since among them were Roman soldiers (who were predominantly pagan) who would not be affected by such a claim, since they were commonly made by various radicals or false messiahs (Ac 5: 38-39; 1 Jn 1:18).

Also keep in mind that the Jews usually responded to His alleged blasphemy by tearing their tunics, trying to seize Him, stoning, etc. (Jn 7:30; 8:59; 10:31).

Jesus on many occasions prior to His triumphal entry requested that His miracles and identity be kept secret until their "proper time" (Mk 1:43-44; 3:12; 5:43; 8:30). Was this now the proper time?

Jesus veiled His identity on the road to Emmaus until He chose to reveal Himself with a sovereign act of will (Lk 24:13,39).

Could Jesus have been proclaiming His identity and messiahship to both the Jews (Pharisees) and Gentiles (Romans) with power and authority (Ac 9:5; Php 2:10)?

Since this incident takes place toward the end of Jesus' life and ministry, is Jesus thereby proclaiming His true identity more clearly and eloquently by revealing His resplendent authority and power? For such a title or name belonged only to Jehovah God.

In response to the question of the high priest, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus responded:

"I am. And you will see **the Son of Man** sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mk 14:62).

Jesus claimed that Abraham had rejoiced that he was to see the day of Christ, had seen it and was glad (Jn 8:56). The leaders of the people challenged Jesus' statement:

"You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham!"

Then Jesus replied by using His most solemn form of introducing a saying:

"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, **I am**" (Jn 8:58).

Jesus' statement so infuriated the leaders that they immediately "picked up stones to stone Him" (Jn 8:59).

Why would Jesus' particular saying provoke such a violent response?

Because His saying was blasphemous unless He really was and is God.

It is clear from the saying itself, ". . . before Abraham was born, **I am**" (Jn 8:58), that Jesus was claiming to have existed before Abraham was born. It is also obvious from the tense of the verb ("am") that He was claiming an eternal preexistence. Even such a claim would not be sufficient enough to warrant stoning. The real reason for their violent reaction is that when Jesus said "**I am**," He was using the divine name by which God had revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. When Moses had asked God what His name was, He responded:

"I am" or **"I am who I am"** (Ex 3:13).

Then He continues: "This is what you are to say to the Israelites:

"I am has sent me to you" (Ex 3:14).

The word "was" or "became" or "came into being" (*genesthai*) marks the historical point of time when Abraham came into existence as against the time before Abraham came into being. Since this word is in the aorist "tense" it sets a point of beginning for the existence of Abraham. Similarly the present tense of the word "am" (*eime*) predicates absolute existence for the person of Jesus, with no point of beginning at all. If Jesus wanted to only say that His existence

antedated the time of Abraham (which would leave open the question of whether Jesus also had a beginning like that of Abraham, only earlier), He would have used the imperfect "I was" (*eimein*).

The Jehovah's Witnesses try to get around this verse (Jn.8:58) by translating it ". . . before Abraham came into existence, I have been." By translating Jesus' words "**I am**" to "I have been" to obscure the fact that Jesus was making a direct claim to being God, the Jehovah's Witnesses break the very basic rules of Greek grammar. They claim that *ego eimi* ("**I am**") should be translated "I have been" because the verb *eimi* is in the "perfect indefinite tense." The problem is that there is no such tense in the Greek language. Rather *eimi* is the first person singular, present, active, indicative form of *einai*, the verb "to be." It must therefore be translated "**I am**," not "I have been." Since 1950, when this fallacious translation and interpretation was pointed out to the Jehovah's Witnesses, they have discontinued the use of this argument in their *New World Translation*.

The *New World Translation* of the Jehovah's Witnesses quotes professor A. T. Robertson as being authoritative in matters of the Greek language.¹ Yet Robertson states that *eimi* is "absolute." This means there is no predicate expressed with it. This usage occurs four other times in John (8:24,58; 13:19; 18:5). This term (the Hebrew phrase "**I (am) He**") is also the same that is used by the Septuagint in its rendering of Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 43:10; and Isaiah 46:4. This phrase then, is a claim to full and equal deity.

The Jehovah's Witnesses *Kingdom Interlinear* which shows the Greek words actually contradicts their own position since it correctly translates *ego eimi* with the words "**I am**" directly beneath. However, they perpetuate their faulty interpretation by placing "I have been" in the column to the right as another possible, even preferable, reading.

What Jesus declares is that, although His earthly life lasted less than fifty years, His existence as a person (*ego*) is constant and independent of any beginning in time. With this simple verb Jesus testifies to the divine, eternal preexistence of His person.

THE ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE FIRST AND LAST, THE BEGINNING AND END

"I am the Alpha and Omega," says the Lord God, **who is and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty"** (Rev 1:8).

The title "Alpha and Omega" is used several times in the Old Testament to refer to Jehovah God:

"I, the Lord—with the first of them and with the last—I am He. . . . Yes, and from ancient days I am He. . . . This is what the Lord says—Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty:

I am the first and I am the last; apart from Me there is no god."
(Isa 41:4; 43:12-13; 44:6)

God the Father is also called this name in the New Testament:

"**He who was seated on the throne** said, 'I am making everything new!' Then He said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. **I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.** To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his **God** and he will be My son.'" (Rev 21:5-7)

Yet Jesus Christ dares to claim this title for Himself as well. That the above reference from Revelation 1:8 refers to Jesus rather than God the Father is obvious when we look at the verses that precede His identification:

"Look, He is **coming with the clouds**, and every eye **will see Him**, even those Who **pierced Him**; and all the peoples of the earth **will mourn because of Him**. So shall it be!" (Rev 1:7).

That this description fits that of the coming Messiah, the Son of Man, is obvious when we compare it with Matthew's prophecy:

"At that time the signs of **the Son of Man** will **appear in the sky**, and all the nations of the earth **will mourn**. They **will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds** of the sky, with power and great glory" (Mt 24:30).

Jesus is also appropriately called Alpha and Omega in the last chapter of the Bible:

"Behold **I am coming soon!** My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. **I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End**" (Rev 22:12-13).

The whole context (Rev 22:7-20) describes Jesus as the One who is coming. He is unmistakably identified as the Alpha and Omega.

The extraordinary fact is that a title which is the title of God is given unhesitatingly and without qualification to Jesus Christ. As John saw it, the prerogatives of God are the prerogatives of Jesus Christ.

The word "beginning" (*arche*) can mean "beginning in point of time" while the word "end" (*telos*) can mean "end in point of time." While these meanings are certainly involved in these descriptions of God the Father and God the Son since they are the first and the last. This symbolizes the fact that God the Son was before the world began and will be when the world is ended. He, therefore, has neither beginning nor end in any human sense of the terms.

But *arche* can also mean "beginning" in the sense of "source" or "origin." This means that Jesus Christ is the source and origin from whom life began. The word *telos* can mean "end" in the sense of "goal" or "consummation." This means that Jesus Christ is the goal and end to which all life moves. He is not only the Creator of life, but He is also the one in whom life is consummated, completed, and perfected. Paul put it:

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen" (Ro 11:36).

There can be no title given to Jesus that is higher than Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, for the title is the title of God Himself.

SUMMARY OF NAMES AND TITLES

Theologian Charles Hodge presents the following summary of the scriptural evidence for the deity of Christ, that apart from God the Father and God the Spirit, the divine attributes are found in Christ alone:

"All divine names and titles are applied to Him. He is called God, the mighty God, the great God, God over all; Jehovah; Lord; the Lord of lords and King of kings. All divine attributes are ascribed to Him. He is declared to be omnipresent, omniscient, almighty, and immutable, the same yesterday, today and forever.

He is set forth as the Creator and upholder and Ruler of the universe. All things were created by Him and for Him; and by Him all things consist.

He is the object of worship to all intelligent creatures, even the highest; all the angels (i.e., all creatures between man and God) are commanded to prostrate themselves before Him.

He is the object of all the religious sentiments; of reverence, love, faith, and devotion.

To Him men and angels are responsible for their character and conduct. He required that man should honor Him as they honored the Father; that they should exercise the same faith in Him that they do in God.

He declares that He and the Father are one; that those who have seen Him have seen the Father also.

He calls all men unto Him; promises to forgive their sins; to send them the Holy Spirit; to give them rest and peace; to raise them up at the last day; and to give them eternal life.

God is not more, and cannot promise more, or do more than Christ is said to be, to promise, and to do. He has, therefore, been the Christian's God from the beginning, in all ages and in all places."²

He Possesses the Attributes of Deity

He is Eternal

Micah 5:2; John 1:15; 8:58; 17:5,24

The prophet Micah not only gives the birthplace of Jesus (which the Jews affirmed as being Bethlehem, the city of David), but he gives a clue as to His identity--God in human form:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, **whose origins are from of old, from ancient times**" (Mic 5:2).

The *King James Version* uses the term "goings forth" which means "origin." According to Old Testament scholars Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown the terms used "convey the strongest assertion of infinite duration of which the Hebrew language is capable" (Ps 90:2; Pr 8:22-23; Jn 1:1). The only one who fits this description, whose origin is "from everlasting" or "from ancient times" must be God Himself, since He alone is "the eternally existing One" (Isa 44:6,8; Ex 3:14).

Probably the clearest New Testament reference to the eternal nature of Christ's being is found in 1 John 1:2 where He is actually called "**the eternal life**":

". . . this we proclaim concerning the **Word of life. The life appeared**; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you **the eternal life.**"

That it is Jesus that is referred to as "the eternal life" is obvious by the description of this life: we have "heard, seen, looked at, touched" (1 Jn 1:1) and this life has "appeared" (1 Jn 1:2). Such concrete descriptions can only be applied to none other than Jesus.

He is Omnipresent

"And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who **fills everything in every way**" (Eph 1:23).

Jesus' **omnipresence** (literally "all-presence") does not refer to His physical presence since He is now at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus presently lives in a glorified body which He received when He rose from the dead. Although this body does not have the limitations of His previous body (which was very much a human body like ours—1 Co 15), it still is limited to space and time in the sense that it (and therefore He—Jesus) can only be at one place at one time. Jesus, therefore, is omnipresent in that He **dwells everywhere** by His Spirit—the Holy Spirit.

- He is Omniscient (all-knowing—Jn 2:24; 4:29)
- He knew where Nathanael was (Jn 1:48).
- He knew the plot of Judas (Jn 6:70; 13:11).
- He knew the hearts of the Pharisees (Mt 12:25; Lk 5:22; 6:8; 7:39-40).
- He knew the thoughts of the scribes (Mt 9:3-4).
- He knew the sincerity of one scribe (Mk 12:34).
- He knew the history of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:29).
- He knew the problems of His disciples (Lk 9:46-47).

There is no contradiction here between His omniscience and His being limited in knowledge (as a man). While He retained His deity on earth (thus His omniscience) He voluntarily abstained from using it, that He might be totally dependent upon God the Father through the operation of God the Spirit.

- He is Omnipotent (Mk 5:11-15; Mt 8:26; 9:25)
- Over disease (Mt 8:1-4; Lk 4:39)
- Over demons (Mt 8:16, 17, 28-32; Lk 4:35)
- Over people (Mt 9:9; Jn 17:2)
- Over nature (Mt 8:26)
- Over sin (Mt 9:1-8)
- Over traditions (Mt 9:10-17)
- Over death (Lk 7:14-15; 8:54, 56; Jn 11:4)
- He is Immutable (Heb 13:8)

The claim that Jesus is the same "yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8) is a powerful testimonial to the **eternality** of God the Son. The literal translation reads:

"Jesus Christ the **same yesterday, and today and into the everlasting.**"

The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the phrase in question is an "historical present" used in reference to Abraham and therefore permissible. The problem is that Jesus was not narrating but arguing, and according to any standard grammar, the "historical present" is used in narrative, not argument, form of literature.

Yet the Jehovah Witnesses have unknowingly affirmed Jesus' deity in their *New World Translation* (NWT—661) by pointing the reader to Revelation 1:17 as a cross reference to Hebrews 13:8 and thus irrevocably declare that the Jesus Christ of Hebrews 13:8 is the "First and the Last" of Revelation 1:17.

If Christ is the "First and Last" in Revelation 1:17, He has to be the "Alpha and Omega" of Revelation 1:8. By their own rendition it reads: "Jehovah God" (NWT). Either there are two "Firsts and Lasts" (Isa 48:12), or they are **identical**. Scripture is replete with examples to show that they are the latter (Isa 51:12; 52:6).

The letter of Hebrews closes as it began by reminding its readers of their **unchanging** Lord. He is always **the same**:

"They will perish, but You **remain** . . . like a garment they will be changed. But You **remain the same**, and **Your years will never end**" (Heb 1:11-12).

Jesus lives **for ever**, the Lord of history who will certainly return (Heb 10:37) for those ". . . who are eagerly waiting for Him" (Heb 9:28).

Divine Offices and Prerogatives Belong to Him

Source and Giver of Life and Power over Death

John 5:21; 11:25

By implication, direct statement, and deed—all indicate that Jesus has power over life and death. Hannah in her song of praise credits God with having the power to kill and to make alive (1 Sa 2:6). In Psalm 119, the psalmist acknowledges repeatedly (at least 12 times) that it is Jehovah who gives and preserves life. Yet Jesus Himself claims to have this same power:

"For as **the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life** to whom He desires" (Jn 5:21).

Other Scriptures give equally powerful evidence for Jesus' deity since He is the Source of life itself:

"I am the way and the truth and **the life**. . . . You have killed **the author of life** . . . this we proclaim concerning the Word of **life**. the **life** appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you **the eternal life**, which was with the Father and has **appeared** to us. . . . For **as the Father has life in Himself**, so He has **granted the Son** to have **life in Himself**. . . . For **just as the Father raised the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life** to whom He is pleased to give it. . . .
(Jn 14:6; Ac 3:15; 1 Jn 1:1-2; Jn 5:21,26)

The word "granted" in reference to the Father granting "the Son to have life in Himself" clearly refers to Jesus' birth when the second person of the Godhead, God the Word, became "flesh." Prior to His becoming the God-Man, God the Word already had life in Himself since He was and is God. This is so by definition. How could a person be God without having life in Himself? Because He had this life in Himself He was the agent in creating the world.

Therefore to argue that Jesus Christ is created and less than God since life was "granted" to Him by God the Father is fallacious. This passage is given in reference to Jesus Christ who is both God and **man**.

Probably the most emphatic statement made by Jesus in claiming the power of life and death is found in His words to Martha:

"I am the resurrection and the life; He who **believes in Me** will live, even though he dies; and whoever **believes in Me** will never die. Do you believe this?" (Jn 11:25)

He will Execute all Judgment

Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:22

Judgment in the Hebrew Scriptures is ascribed only to Almighty God. In Genesis 18:25 Abraham refers to God as "the **Judge** of all the earth." In Joel 3:12 Jehovah proclaims, ". . . there I will sit to **judge** all the nations on every side." Yet Jesus claimed that same prerogative:

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will **sit on His throne** in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered **before Him**, and **He will separate the people one from another** as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left" (Mt 25:31-33).

Paul confirms this stupendous claim as he points out on the one hand that judgment belongs to God (Ro 2:3), he also speaks of Christ as the one who is to "**judge** the living and the dead" (2 Ti 4:1) and of the "**judgment seat of Christ**" (2 Co 5:10).

He Forgives Sin

Matthew 9:2; Luke 7:47

In the Old Testament God alone has the right and power to forgive sins:

"For **I (Jehovah)** will **forgive** their wickedness, and their sin will **I** remember no more" (Jer 31:34).

The psalmist points out:

"For with **You** is **forgiveness** that **You** should be feared" (Ps 130:4).

Yet in the New Testament we find Jesus claiming this authority and power to forgive sins for Himself. But has not God Himself commanded us to forgive one another? Yes, but only for sins against ourselves. While we should forgive someone who has insulted us, for instance, suppose we forgave him for insulting someone else? That would be outrageous! Why? It was because of what it would be assuming. Whoever forgives assumes he has the **right** to forgive. And the only one who has a right to forgive an offender, is the one offended. Jesus' claim to forgive **all sins**, therefore, assumed that He was **the one offended in all sins**. Such a momentous claim can only be made by God who is the **author of the moral law**.

When Jesus claimed to forgive all sins, is it any wonder that it resulted in a charge of blasphemy against Him?

When the paralytic was lowered through the roof by his four friends, Jesus did not respond with a comment about the man's physical condition or his need of healing. Rather, His initial comment was, "My son, your sins are **forgiven**" (Mk 2:5). The reaction of the scribes indicates the meaning they attached to His words:

"Why does this fellow **talk like that?** He's **blaspheming!** Who can **forgive sins but God alone?**" (Mk 2:7)

Their reaction shows that they interpreted Jesus' comment as the exercise of a divine prerogative, the power to actually forgive sins.

Here was an excellent opportunity for Jesus to clarify the situation, to correct the scribes if they had misunderstood the import of His words. This He did not do, however. His response is highly instructive:

"Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your **sins are forgiven,**' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that **the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins**" (Mk 2:8-9).

The obvious answer is that it is easier to say: "Get up, take your mat and walk."

Why?

Because **only God can forgive sins!**

Then Peter proclaims Christ as the One whom

"God exalted . . . to His own right hand as **Prince and Savior** that he might **give repentance and forgiveness of sins** to Israel" (Ac 5:31).

His Work Testifies to His Divine Nature

"Do **not believe Me unless I do what My Father does.** But if I do it, even though you do not believe Me, **believe the miracles,** that you may learn and understand that **the Father is in Me, and I in the Father**" (Jn 10:37-38).

At the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem the Jews gathered around Jesus in the temple area of Solomon's Colonnade and impatiently asked Him:

"How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are **the Christ,** tell us plainly."
(Jn.10:24)

At this point **Jesus makes His work the issue of His identity.** He goes so far as to say that unless people see Him do the work of God they have no business believing in Him. After all, If He is divine, then He will evidence divine work (Jn 10:37-38).

To such a challenge the Jews "again tried to seize Him" (Jn 10:39). Why? Because He claimed to do the work of God Almighty!

The most pronounced declaration of the divine nature of His ministry is seen in His reading of the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (61:1-2) and His claim that the prophet was prophesying not only about God's ministry, but about His own ministry:

"He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom. And He stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because he has **anointed Me to preach good news** to the poor. He has **sent Me to proclaim freedom** for the prisoners and **recovery of sight** for the blind, **to release** the oppressed, **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"** (Lk 4:16-19).

Luke continues to tell us what happened:

"Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and He said to them, **"Today this Scripture is fulfilled** in your hearing" (Lk 4:20-21).

What was the response of the people of the synagogue who heard the stupendous claim that Jesus was the fulfillment of such a prophecy?

"All the people in the synagogue were **furious** when they heard this. They got up, **drove Him out of the town**, and took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order **to throw Him down the cliff"** (Lk 4:28-29).

Yet we see in Jesus' life and ministry this prophecy fulfilled as He spent His time and energy in **works of compassion**.

Jesus identified Himself with the common people. He entered into the sorrows of His generation. He reached out to those who were lonely, despised and forsaken. He was approachable. It did not matter whether it was a Hebrew scholar at midnight, disciples in a foundering boat at daybreak, a fallen woman by a well at noonday or a company of hungry unemployed in the afternoon—He was available to them all.

Jesus cared for people for whom nobody cared. He loved people whom nobody loved. And He saw hope for people for whom nobody saw hope. Who, but Jesus, would have picked such an unlikely bunch of followers as the Twelve apostles to start a new movement? Jesus saw what they would become by the grace of God.

Everywhere Jesus went He saw people in desperate need of help. Every opportunity He had He reached out in compassion. Is it any wonder Peter says about Him:

"You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached--how God **anointed** Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He **went around doing good and healing all** who were under the power of the devil, **because God was with Him."**

(Ac 10:37-38)

As much as possible Jesus met every human need He was personally in contact with. However we must remember that as a man, even God-Man, He was limited by space and time. He could only be in one place at one time. Yet it is remarkable the lives He touched.

Names of Deity are given to Him

The names given to Jesus by God the Father reveal His divine nature. Some have argued that if Jesus were divine there would be clearer evidence for this. It must be remembered, however, that the number of affirmations we do have that Jesus is "God" is astounding given the strong reluctance of New Testament writers to speak of Jesus as "God," because of their background in the strict monotheism of Israel.

Jesus is called the "**Son of God**"
Matthew 27:54; John 9:35-37

The title "Son of God" is probably the one that is used the most often in thinking and speaking about Jesus of Nazareth. Yet of all the titles this one is the least clearly defined and the most misunderstood in our minds.

The idea of Jesus as the "Son of God" was central to the thought of the early church. The gospel according to Mark opens with this affirmation:

"The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, **the Son of God**" (Mk 1:1).

John addresses his first letter to those who believe in Jesus as "the Son of God" that they may be assured of eternal life:

"I write these things **to you who believe in the name of the Son of God** so that you may **know that you have eternal life**" (1 Jn 5:13).

Our understanding of this designation is critical to our salvation:

"If anyone **acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God**" (1 Jn 4:15).

During Jesus' trial we get a picture of Jesus' self-understanding. According to John the charge leveled at Jesus was that "He has made Himself **the Son of God**" (Jn 19:7). Matthew points out in his gospel that the high priest said to Jesus during the trial:

"I charge You under oath by the living God:
Tell us if You are **the Christ, the Son of God**" (Mt 26:63).

Jesus replied:

"Yes, it is as you say. But I say to all of you:
In the future you will see **the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One** and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt 26:64).

This declaration is as clear an affirmation of Jesus' deity as any. Some have tried to deny this by speculating that Jesus was speaking satirically and thus saying in effect, "You said that, not I." This is unlikely since Jesus went on to speak of His power and of His second coming. Thus He affirmed, rather than contradicted, the statement. Jesus certainly had an ideal opportunity to correct any misconception which may have been involved. But this He refused to do. In fact, He could have avoided execution by denying the charge that He had claimed to be "the Son of God." He did not do that.

This means one of two things. Either He desired to die, even though His death would have been based on a false charge, or He did not respond because the charge brought against Him was true.

There is no middle ground. The Jews understood too well what was claimed by Jesus. The high priest responded:

"Then the high priest tore his clothes and said,
'He has spoken **blasphemy!** Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the **blasphemy.** What do you think?'" (Mt 26:66).

Then the people joined in:

"**He is worthy of death . . .** Then they spit in His face and struck Him with their fists. Others slapped Him and said, 'Prophesy to us, Christ. Who hit You?'"
(Mt 26:66-68)

The crime was that Jesus claimed what only God has a right to claim. By acquiescing to the charge of the high priest and the crowd, Jesus asserts His equality with God the Father.

Jesus is called "**the only begotten**"

"For God so loved the world that He gave His **only begotten** Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Jesus is not just one among the many sons of God. The New International Version translates the words "only begotten" with the phrase "one and only" Son to catch the correct sense of the Greek. The word "begotten" (*monogene*) means "one of a kind," "only," "unique."

And it modifies this word in a **qualitative** rather than quantitative sense according to Greek experts such as Moulton, Milligan, Cremer, and Thayer. The word "only" modifies the word "begotten" rather than "Son." If the author would have wanted to stress that Jesus was the "begotten Son," in the sense of the "only Son" he would have used the word *monogenetos*.

Cremer in his *Biblio-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* says, "In John it [*monogenes*] is used to denote the relation of Christ to the Father . . . the Pauline *idios huios* [own Son]"³ (Ro 8:32). The sense is that of the Son being God's private, unique, peculiar to Himself kind of Son. Thayer makes the comment that this "denotes the only Son of God or one who in the sense in which He Himself is the son of God has no brethren."⁴ Arndt and Gingrich say of *monogene*, "unique and alone . . . in the Johannine literature used only of Jesus."⁵ This fits well with Jesus' own claims that God was His "own" (*idios*) Father (Jn 5:18).

Moulton and Milligan then, speak of Jesus as **uniquely** begotten. Cremer, in his use of "own" (*idios*), emphasizes God's "own private possession, uniquely [His] own" and thus points to the **unique relationship** of the Son to the Father. Thayer similarly refers to the unique relationship which Jesus sustains to God as His Son. Arndt and Gingrich speak of Jesus' claim to a **unique sonship** to God the Father.

This sets Jesus apart when it comes to His sonship. He is not one among many sons, but **the Son, the only begotten Son**. This is another evidence that Jesus is divine—**God the Son**.

Jesus is called "**Immanuel**"
Isaiah 7:14; 8:8, 10; Matthew 1:23

Matthew points out that the name "Immanuel" means "God with us":

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him **Immanuel**—which means, 'God with us'" (Mt 1:23).

Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 7:14) was fulfilled by Jesus (Mt 1:22-23). Thus there can be no doubt that Jesus Christ is the "son of the virgin" so distinctly portrayed by the prophet Isaiah.

Since there is no other God but Jehovah, by His own declaration (Isa 43:10-11), therefore Jesus Christ and Jehovah God are of the same essence in power and eternity, and therefore **equal**. There is no way around this conclusion since the very term "Immanuel" means "God" or "Jehovah with us."

Jesus is called "**Son of Man**"

This term "Son of Man" (Hebrew *ben-adam* or Aramaic *bar nasha*) is used in three main contexts in the Hebrew Scriptures:

- As a form of address to the prophet Ezekiel;
- To refer to a future eschatological figure (Da 7:13-14), whose coming signals the end of history and the coming of divine judgment;
- To emphasize the contrast between the limitations and frailty of human nature and the elevated status or permanence of God and the angels (Nu 23:19; Ps 8:14).

This name was the most popular self-designation of Jesus by far. It appears more than 80 times in the gospels and always on the lips of Jesus Himself. The name "Son of Man" is often used by Jesus in reference to His own agony as He takes upon Himself the role of Isaiah's "suffering sin-bearer" and "suffering servant."

In Aramaic the title "Son of Man" could be merely another way of saying "I," as "one" can be used in English. But in some cases the claim is too explicit to be brushed aside as merely that.

At His trial Jesus said:

"But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the **Son of Man** sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken **blasphemy!** Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the **blasphemy**. What do you think?' 'He is **worthy of death,**' they answered" (Mt 26:64-66).

Blasphemy—unless it were true! The "Son of Man" is hardly a mere man, but a divine being who is coming in the Father's glory to judge the world and to bring all history to an end.

On a couple of occasions **this title** is used to refer to the present work of Jesus and His claim to be both **Lord of the Sabbath** and the **forgiver of sins** (Mk 2:23-28). Thus this designation is coupled to the ministry which only belongs to God Himself. Who but God has the right to define the Sabbath and to forgive sin?

Though in view of His explicit reference to Daniel's "abomination of desolation" in the Olivet Discourse (Mt 24:15; Mk 13:14) and His allusions to the imagery of Daniel 7:13 in that same discourse (Mk 13:26) and in His reply before the Sanhedrin (Mk 14:62), both with reference to the Son of Man, it becomes clear that Daniel 7 was the source upon which Jesus based His own understanding and to which He pointed in His use of the title.

By using this title Jesus showed Himself to be the one in whom this vision of Daniel was to proceed to its realization. And in so doing, He possessed a title which combined both suffering and glory—which pointed to both aspects of His redemptive ministry as the God-Man.

Jesus is called "**Lord**"
Luke 2:11; John 21:7

The title "Lord" (*kyrios*) is used of Christ with a great flexibility of meanings.

Lord the normal title of the Greek gods, prefaced before the god's name. *Kyrios Serapis* is Lord Serapis. This word had religious usage throughout the Middle East whereby in Judaism the title *Adonai* (Lord) became the substitute for the divine name in the reading of the Scriptures, and in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). *Kyrios* was used as the Greek equivalent.

In the Septuagint *kyrios* is the usual translation of the name (*Yehovah*) and of the reverential *Adonai* which was ordinarily substituted for it. Of the 9,000 times used in the Septuagint 6,156 of those times is used as a replacement for the proper name of God, the Tetragrammaton YHWH.

Several New Testament references to Jesus as "Lord" are used as quotations of the Hebrew Scriptures. Texts employing one of the Hebrew names for God (Ac 2:20-21 and Rom. 10:13 [Joel 2:31-32]; 1 Pe 3:15 [Isa 8:13]). These references make it clear that the apostles meant to give Jesus the title **Lord** in its highest sense.

Kyrios is used in the New Testament to designate both God the Father, the sovereign God (Mt 1:20; 9:38; 11:25; Ac 17:24; Rev 4:11) and Jesus (Lk 2:11; Jn 20:28; Ac 10:36; 1 Co 2:8; Php 2:11; Jas 2:1; Rev 19:16).

When Jesus "is addressed as the exalted Lord, He is so identified with God that there is ambiguity in some passages as to whether the Father or the Son is meant (Ac 1:24; 2:47; 8:39; 9:31; 11:21; 13:10-12; 16:14; 20:19; 21:14; 18:26; Ro 14:11). For the Jews particularly, the term *kyrios* suggested that Christ was equal with the Father.

Jesus is called "**God**" and ". . . **mighty God**"
Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah 9:6 is one of the most powerful verses in the Old Testament which incontestably declares that Jehovah Himself planned to appear in human form. The verse clearly states that all government will rest upon the "child born" and the "Son given," whose identity is revealed in the very terms used to describe His attributes:

"Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God**,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

The phrase "Everlasting Father" is literally "Father of the Everlasting. The term "mighty God" is in itself indicative of Jehovah, since not only is He the only God (Isa 43:10-11), but the term "mighty" is applied to Him alone in relation to His deity. Jehovah's Witnesses dodge this verse by claiming that Christ is "a mighty God," but not "the almighty God" (Jehovah). Since there is no article for "mighty" in the Hebrew text, Jehovah is not meant. If this were true, however, there would then be two "mighty Gods." While such logic is absurd, the Jehovah's Witnesses persist in the fallacy.

An example would be where Isaiah 10:21 states that "Jacob shall return" to the "mighty God" (which would mean "Jesus" since the word "mighty" is without the article), yet we already know that Jehovah is by His own word to Moses "the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6). Another instance is found in Jeremiah 32:18 where the prophet declares that He (Jehovah—since it has the article) is "the Great, the Mighty God." This is two forms of saying the same thing. If we are to accept this translation advocated by the Jehovah's Witnesses there must be two "mighty Gods" which is impossible since there is only one true and mighty God (Isa 45:22).

The "Jehovah" whom Isaiah and his people worshiped—and the reference to "the child born" and "the son given"—both are called "Mighty God" because they were the same Person.

"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is **Lord**. . . . For 'everyone who calls upon the name of the **Lord** will be saved" (Ro 10:9,13).

The question is, "Who is 'Lord'"? Verse 9 states that Jesus is Lord while verse 13 states that Jehovah (JHWH) is Lord. The same Greek word (*kyrios*) is used in both verses even though verse 13 is obviously a quotation from Joel 2:32 (Peter cited this same passage on the day of Pentecost—Ac 2:21). Therefore Paul identifies both Jesus and the Jehovah of the Old Testament as Lord (*kyrios*).

Jehovah's Witnesses make the futile attempt to do away with this identification by using the name "Jehovah" instead of "Lord" in Romans 10:13 and in all other Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. Everywhere else, however, the *New World Translation* uses the word "Lord." This is purely arbitrary and based upon wishful thinking rather than careful biblical exegesis.

In simplest terms Paul points out that God requires a belief in two things as outlined in Romans 10:9-10,13:

- Confession that "Jesus is Lord"
- Belief that God raised Jesus from the dead

The belief in the resurrection is key because we must not only believe that Jesus **lived**, but that He **lives**. It is not enough to know **about** Him, but we must **know Him**. It is not enough to know Jesus as merely a great historical figure; we must know Him as a **living presence**. The belief in the resurrection assures us that Jesus was not merely a **martyr**, but a **victor** as well. Because He rose from the grave on that Easter morning we have come to know Him as the **risen Lord** who was victorious over death, sin, the world, and Satan.

Jesus is called ". . . our **great God and Savior**, Jesus Christ"
Titus 2:13

The issue is whether Jesus Christ is our Savior only, or our God and Savior. According to Greek grammar (called the Granville Sharp law):

"When a copulative [connective] *kai* [Greek for 'and'] connects two nouns of the same case, if the article which precedes the first noun [articular] does not precede the second noun [anarthrous], the latter always refers to the same person expressed or described by the first noun and is a further description of it."⁶

When we apply this rule to the passage before us we see who is "great." It is "God and Savior" because the two names are in the genitive case with the absence of the article preceding "Savior." Who, then, is our "great God and Savior"? Jesus Christ!

Jehovah's Witnesses *New World Translation* has inserted the bracketed article "the" in order to "complete the sense in the English text. The verse therefore reads:

"While we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus."

In the appendix of their *Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* they state:

"We render 'the great God' as separate from 'our Savior Christ Jesus.'"

Biblical scholars have conclusively shown that in ancient times the phraseology "god and savior" was used of a ruling king and thus clearly showing that only one person was meant. In an exhaustive study, C. Kuehne found Sharp's rule to be "without demonstrable exception in the entire New Testament."⁷ Honest and unbiased scholarship requires that the words in these verses must be translated "our God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Bruce Metzger, an authority on the Greek language and professor at Princeton University, has stated:

"In support of this translation [that "our God and Savior" must refer to "Jesus Christ"] there may be quoted such as P. W. Schmiedel, J. H. Moulton, A. T. Robertson, and Blass-Debrunner. All of these scholars concur in the judgment that only one person is referred to in Titus 2:13 and that therefore, it must be rendered, "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."⁸

Greek scholars Dana and Mantey, in their *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, confirm Sharp's rule:

"Second Peter 1:1 . . . means that Jesus is our God and Savior. After the same manner Titus 2:13 . . . asserts that Jesus is the great God and Savior."⁹

Not only the grammar but also the context of Titus 2:3 leads to the interpretation that Jesus is God since verse 14 states:

"Who gave Himself [Jesus Christ] for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own."

The phrase, "to redeem us from all iniquity" is clearly referring to the Lord Jehovah of Psalm 130:7-8 and the phrase, "to purify for Himself a people of His own" is referring to the Lord God of Exodus 19:5 and Deuteronomy 14:2.

Jesus is called ". . . our **God** and **Savior** Jesus Christ"
2 Peter 1:1

The grammatical construction here is almost identical to that of Titus 2:13 that we have previously looked at. The *New World Translation* again has arbitrarily inserted the bracketed word "the" before "Savior" to differentiate between "God" and "Savior"--whom even they admit to be Jesus.

This violates Sharp's law since there is no Greek article before the words "Savior Jesus Christ." This absence of the Greek article before "Savior" is found elsewhere in the letter as Peter uses a similarly constructed phrase, "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pe 1:11; 3:18).

In other instances in 2 Peter where the word "Savior" appears it is clearly a reference to Jesus (2 Pet 1:11; 2:20; 3:2,18). Thus Peter is using the term "Savior," which is an Old Testament name for Jehovah, and is applying it to Jesus.

A. T. Robertson, considered by many to have been the greatest English-speaking Greek scholar insisted that "one person, **not** two, is in mind in 2 Peter 1:1."¹⁰

William Barclay believes that this verse is one of the strongest statements in the entire Bible that "Jesus is God."¹¹ He also points out that all the newer translations render the last phrase

". . . the righteousness of **God and our Savior Jesus Christ.**"

Other examples where Sharp's law applies: Lk 15:9; Ac 3:14; 17:18; Php 4:20; Jas 3:9; 1 Th 3:11; 2 Pe 2:20.

Jesus is called "He who is over all, **God** blessed forever"
Romans 9:5

The issue in this verse is whether the word "He" which is obviously a reference to Christ is to be identified with "God" or whether they are to be understood as two separate persons.

C. K. Barrett argues that the most logical interpretation is that they are one and the same person. He makes the point that to see these references as pointing to two different persons we are forced to see the doxology with which the paragraph concludes as independent of the preceding sentence.¹²

This is grammatically and stylistically improbable. Pauline doxologies are almost always connected with the context and do not stand (as recommended by the Jehovah's Witnesses) in complete asyndeton (omission of conjunctions). When Paul makes exception to this rule such as in Romans 1:25 and 2 Corinthians 11:31 where the doxologies are addressed to God the Father, they arise out of the preceding words. Furthermore, if Paul wished to say, "Blessed be God," he would have placed the word "blessed" first in the sentence, which he does not do.

The most natural reading of the passage is to unite the doxology with the preceding words as a relative clause referring to Christ. This is how the *New International Version* translates this passage. It reads:

"Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!"

Jesus is called "My **Lord** and my **God!**"
John. 20:28

This is the worshipful response of Thomas as he was personally confronted by Jesus. Jesus had appeared to the disciples when Thomas was absent. Thomas is portrayed initially as a thoroughgoing skeptic as he refused to believe that Jesus had risen and appeared physically in the same form in which He was crucified on the cross. When Thomas was told about the appearance, he had stubbornly replied,

"**Unless** I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in His side, **I will not believe**" (Jn 20:25).

Notice the plural "nails." This contradicts the claim by the Jehovah's Witnesses that Jesus was impaled on a torture stake whereby His hands and thus arms were stretched (crossed over with overlapping wrists) above His head. This would deny that Jesus was crucified on a cross. If He was impaled on a stake they would have used only one nail. Also the breaking of the legs would only expedite death. If His arms were outstretched (as depicted by the traditional, historic crossbeam) it would have put pressure on His diaphragm and thus hasten suffocation.

Then the Lord appeared to all the disciples once more and asked Thomas to make the test he had wanted to make. Jesus said:

"Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side" (Jn 20:27).

Overcome by Christ's presence, Thomas immediately fell to the ground and **worshiped Him**, saying,

"My **Lord** and my **God!**" (Jn 20:28).

Lord and God! *Adonai! Elohim!*
And Jesus accepted that designation. He did not deny it.

Jehovah's Witnesses have tried to circumvent the clear meaning of this text by arguing in their *Emphatic Diaglott* (Jn 20:28) that the literal translation is, "The God of me, or my God."¹³ Since it is in possession of the definite article ("the"), to use Jehovah's Witnesses' own argument, it must therefore mean "the only true God" (Jehovah), not "a god." The *New World Translation* states,

"So too John 1:1 uses *O THEOS* to distinguish Jehovah God from the Word (*logos*) as 'a god,' 'the only begotten God' as John 1:18 calls him."¹⁴

In John 1:1 the Greek uses the word *logos* but here John expressly means *logos* "the Word" is affirmed to be God not a god.

If Thomas called the risen Christ by the name "Jehovah" since it had a definite article in front of the word for God, and Christ did not deny it but confirmed it by saying, "Because you have **seen Me**, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn 20:29), then it is exegetically impossible to read this verse in the context it is set and conclude anything but that Jesus is here referred to as Jehovah God.

Jesus is addressed "Your throne, O **God** is forever"
Hebrews 1:8

It is obvious that God the Father addresses the Son as "**God**." The throne of God can only appropriately be claimed by God Himself. This is evident in the book of Revelation, especially in chapter 21 (vv. 1-5). Then God identifies Himself as "the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End" (v. 6). Since Jesus is also given this name of deity (Rev 22:13) He will also occupy the throne of God.

Christ is conspicuously associated in the visions of the seer of the book of Revelation (John) with the throne of God. In chapter 5 He appears as "a Lamb in the midst of the throne" (v. 6), which throne is itself called "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev 22:1). This Lamb is none other than "the one like a Son of Man" in the Christophany of Revelation 1:12-16, who says, "I overcame, and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev 3:21).

The symbolism of "a Lamb standing as though it had been slain" has an unmistakable reference to the redemptive work of the Savior of men, the Savior who "purchased to God with His blood" (Rev 5:9) all mankind.

This Lamb of the Apocalypse has seven horns, symbols of perfection and power, and seven eyes are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth (Rev 5:6). The seven Spirits (sevenfold) of God have been already described as so many "lamps of fire burning before the throne" (Rev 6:5), and being here identified with the seven eyes of the Lamb, it is reasonable to infer that the writer associated the thought of perfection of wisdom as well as perfection of power with the Lamb. The seven Spirits of God are the Spirit of the Lamb just as the throne of God is the throne of the Lamb.

This reference in Hebrews 1:8 is, therefore, probably the clearest, emphatic, and irrefutable proof of the deity of Christ from God the Father.

This testimony by the Father corresponds to the Son's testimony about Himself. Throughout His ministry Jesus claimed equality with God. He claimed—or other New Testament writers identified Him with—every major Old Testament name, title and attribute of God. Jesus' enemies

were aware of some of these claims. For example the Jews in John 10:33 tell Jesus they will stone Him—not for doing good deeds, "but for **blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God**" (See also Jn 5:18; 8:58-59; Mk 2:6-10; 14:60-64).

Jesus is called "the Word **was God**"
John 1:1

Jehovah Witnesses and other cults claim that John writes of two gods: one who is definite, with the article ("the God"), and one indefinite, without the article ("god" or "a god"). Thus their *New World Translation* of John 1:1 reads:

"In [the beginning] the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."

Such a translation is grammatically impossible. It does not take the syntax of the Greek seriously and thus is intellectually dishonest. According to Greek grammar (called "the Colwell's rule" which has been accepted for over half a century now as a genuine contribution to the field of biblical Greek scholarship):

". . . the definite predicate nominative does not have the article when it *precedes the verb*; it only has the article when it follows the verb. It is indefinite only when the context demands it."¹⁵

In the phrase, "God was the Word," the predicate nominative (God) comes before the verb (was) allowing for (God) to be definite. "Was" is an intransitive verb. Intransitives take no objects but instead predicate nominatives which refer back to the subject (in this case *logos* or "Word"). There are numerous examples (282 times) where definite predicate nouns precede the verb without an article (Mt 5:9; Lk 1:35,78; 2:40; Jn 1:6, 12-13,18; 3:2, 21; 8:54; 9:33; Ro 1:7, 17-18; 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 5:19; Php 2:11; Titus 1:1; etc.).

The shift from *ton theon* (the accusative form of *ho theos*) to the anarthrous *theos* in John 1:1 only indicates a **shift in nuance**, not a shift of substance. This means that *logos* (the Word) is called "God" in the fullest sense even though *logos* should not be identified with the person of God the Father. Such a shift from *ho theos* (the God) to *theos* (God) in a short space in Scripture normally does not indicate a major change of meaning. This is evident by the following examples:

- ". . . You as a teacher have come from God [*apo theou*] because no one can perform these signs that You perform unless God [*ho theos*] is with Him" (Jn 3:2).

- "[Jesus] knowing . . . that He came from God [*apo theou*] and was returning to God [*pros ton theon*] . . ." (Jn 13:3).
- ". . . although they knew God [*ton theon*], they did not glorify Him as God [*theon*] . . ." (Ro 1:21)
- ". . . how you turned to God [*pros ton theon*] from idols to serve the living and true God [*theon*]" (1 Th 1:9)
- ". . . how much more will the blood of Christ, who through an everlasting spirit offered Himself without blemish to God [*to theo*], cleanse our consciences from dead works that we may render sacred service to [the] living God [*theo*]?"
- "If anyone speaks, [let him speak] as it were [the] sacred pronouncements of God [*theou*]; if anyone ministers, [let him minister] as dependent on the strength which God [*ho theos*] supplies; so that in all things God [*ho theos*] may be glorified through Jesus Christ . . ." (1 Pe 4:11-12).

These examples, then, give evidence that a shift from *ho theos* to *theos* does not indicate a change in the meaning of the word.

Jehovah's Witnesses translators who render John 1:1 to read "a god" translate the exact same phrase as "God" in 94 percent of the other 281 instances. To be consistent, these should say "a god." This they fail to do in numerous passages (Mt 5:9; 6:24; Lk 1:35, 78; Jn 1:6,12-13,18; Ro 1:7,17). This construction occurs 20 times in the gospel of John alone. Should John 1:18, then, be translated, "No one has seen **a god** at any time"? If the verse were to be translated "a god" then we would be faced with polytheism which is totally foreign to anything of the Christian faith.

If Jesus is "a god," then there must be others. Calling Jesus "a god" among other gods would have been as unacceptable to the first-century reader as it is to the 20th century theist. John's contemporaries were thoroughly schooled in monotheism, and any departure from that well-established doctrine would have been rejected outright.

Because "God" is definite in this instance in John 1:1, the God who was **with** the Word is the God who **is** the Word.

The language and grammar of the gospel's opening statement are precise and incontrovertible. John could have used an extra article and have written, "The Word was **the** God," making "God" and "Word" completely identical and interchangeable. This is the case whenever two nouns with the article are connected by the verb "to be." In John 15:1 Jesus said,

"My Father is the vinedresser" (literally, "the Father of Me is the vinedresser"). Invert the statement and the meaning does not change. The same is true of John 6:51 where Jesus says, "The bread . . . is My flesh."

However, if John had written, "The Word was the God," the meaning would be, "All that Jesus is, God is, and all God is, Jesus is." This is the ancient heresy of Sabellianism which taught that there are **no distinctions between Jesus and the Father**, and held that the Father even suffered on the cross.

C. K. Barrett explained:

"The absence of the article indicates that the Word is God, but is not the only being of whom this is true; if *ho theos* had been written it would have implied that no divine being existed outside the second person of the Trinity."¹⁶

John could have said, "The Word was **divine**." *Theios* is the Greek word which means "godlike" or "godly." This would be in total harmony with Jehovah's Witnesses teaching. But it is not what John intended to say.

The Jehovah's Witnesses cite James Moffatt, Bible translator, for rendering John 1:1 as "the Word was divine." But they fail to understand what Moffatt meant by this. He explains:

"'The Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh,' simply means 'The Word was divine. . . . And the Word became human.' The Nicene faith, in the Chalcedon definition, was intended to conserve both of these truths against theories that failed to present Jesus as truly God and truly man. . . ."¹⁷

The Jehovah's Witnesses also defend their interpretation by citing from William Barclay's book, *Many Witnesses, One Lord*, where he argues that in John 1:1 *theos*, because it lacks the definite article, "becomes a description, and more of an adjective than a noun," and therefore concludes that John "does not say that Jesus was God."¹⁸ However the Jehovah's Witnesses failed to include Barclay's crucial remarks in this same section as he explained:

"The only modern translator who fairly and squarely faced this problem is Kenneth Wuest, who said: 'The Word was as to his essence essential deity.' But it is here that the NEB [*New English Bible*] has brilliantly solved the problem with the absolutely correct rendering: 'What God was the Word was.'"¹⁹

When Barclay found out that the Jehovah's Witnesses had used his partial statements to buttress their own interpretation, he responded:

"The Watchtower article has, by judicious cutting, made me say the opposite of what I meant to say. What I was meaning to say, as you well know, is that Jesus is not the same as God, to put it more crudely, that he is of the same stuff as God, that is of the same being as God, but the way the Watchtower has printed my stuff has simply left the conclusion that Jesus is not God in a way that suits themselves. If they missed from their answer the translation of Kenneth Wuest and the N.E.B., they missed the whole point."²⁰

When Barclay, therefore, states that John "does not say that Jesus was God" he is merely making the observation that by not saying "the Word as *the* God" John was avoiding identifying the Word as God the Father.

John could have said, "The Word was another god." If he had wanted us to believe the Word was a separate and distinct god from God the Father previously mentioned, he could have inserted the word for "another" (*allos*). Instead, John maintains the Jewish belief in one God (Dt 32:39; Isa 45:5-6).

It is interesting that the Hebrew Scriptures verse which mentions the "witnesses of Jehovah" also says, "Before Me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after Me" (Isa 43:10). The so-called "gods" mentioned elsewhere in Scripture are sometimes demonic spirits that rule in opposition to God's authority (1 Co 8:5-6). Sometimes the other gods are men or God's spokesmen (Ps 82:6).

John did say, "The Word **was God**." "God" not only is a definite predicate nominative, but also describes "the Word." The two nouns are not interchangeable. "God" and "the Word" are **one essence but two distinct persons**. "The Word" is different from "God," but definitely is not "a different god." John 1:14 identifies Jesus as the Word, and verse 1 describes the Word as God.

No verse in Scripture has come under as much attack as John 1:1. It has become a watershed in biblical exegesis (reading out of the text), and unfortunately, "biblical" *eisegesis* (reading into the text). Unless there is a way around the clear statement of Jesus deity in this verse, any theological superstructure that is not built upon Christ's divine nature comes crumbling down. This is why the Jehovah's Witnesses have so adamantly fought the orthodox and historic interpretation of this text.

The Watchtower Society has warned:

"God does not deal with persons who ignore His Word and go according to their own independent ideas."

The Jehovah's Witnesses further state that Jehovah is against those who "steal" or change words from His Bible to make wrong application.

Yet they have done that very thing by incorporating hundreds of mistranslations in their *New World Translation*. Their treatment of John 1:1 is probably the best example of the mockery of the Society's claims to have tried to publish an honest, unbiased, accurate translation of the Bible.

John 1:1 has been problematic for four presidents of Jehovah's Witnesses. Founder C. T. Russell in 1876 thought he had the problem solved when he was introduced to Wilson's *Emphatic Diaglott* by N. H. Barbour, an Adventist. Wilson was a follower of John Thomas, the founder of the heretical "Christadelphians." Even though Wilson has had no formal training in the Greek language he placed "a god" under *Theos* in the interlinear feature of his book. In his translation of *Theos*, however, he did write: "the *LOGOS* was God."²¹

F. W. Franz, the recent President of Jehovah's Witnesses, recognized the weakness of the *Emphatic Diaglott* and thus decided to translate his own Bible called, *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. He never received a Rhodes Scholarship as he claims, nor did he even graduate from any college. He never studied biblical or *koine* Greek in any formal sense. Yet he had the audacity to set himself up as an authority by translating his own Bible. It is no wonder that he translates the phrase, "the Word was a god" in John 1:1. In his *Kingdom Interlinear* he makes the translation, "god was the Word." Such a translation, as we have already seen, creates another god and thus Franz ends up with the teaching of polytheism (many gods). It is ironic that in trying to solve one problem (that Jesus was God and thus part of a trinity), he created another-polytheism.

The Watchtower publication, *All Scripture Is Inspired Of God & Beneficial* claims:

"Note what Hebrew and Greek scholar Alexander Thomson has to say in his review of the *New World Translation*: "The translation is evidently the work of skilled and clever scholars"²²

Such a claim is wholly fallacious since Frank Neil Pohorlak, his coeditor, has pointed out that Thomson, a layman who worked in a bank in Scotland, had never even studied Greek or Hebrew in any school. He hardly qualifies as a Greek and Hebrew scholar.

Johannes Greber is quoted in Watchtower publications²⁶ and his translation called, *The New Testament* (of which *Make Sure Of All Things* is a 1965 revision) agrees with Franz's interpretation. But who was Johannes Greber? He was an avowed spiritist who stated in his book, *Communication With The Spirit World Of God*:

"After I had convinced myself at the spiritist meetings that God's spirits speak to men through mediums, as they had spoken to the early Christian communities, my first thought was to beg for full enlightenment on these problems concerning Christ.

Who was Christ? My request was granted, to the smallest details, and that knowledge thenceforth constituted the most precious possession of my soul. In what follows, I shall repeat the truths regarding Christ. His life, and his work of Redemption, as they were imparted to me by the spirit which taught them. The spirit said, 'At that time you were told that Christ is the highest of the spirits created by God and the sole one to be created directly; Christ Himself was not God, but only the first of God's sons.'"²³

This, of course, is exactly what Franz teaches who also claims to get information from angels. John warned:

"Dear friends, do **not** believe **every spirit**, but **test the spirits** to see **whether they are from God**, because **many false prophets** have gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:1).

Russell, Barbour, Wilson, Franz, Thomson, and Greber have all shown themselves to be false prophets who teach doctrines that emanate from the spirit or demonic world.

Because this verse has been such a target of controversy, several of the foremost biblical and linguistic scholars will be cited.

It is ironic that B. F. Westcott, considered by most to be *the* textual scholar in the world, and whose Greek text the Jehovah's Witnesses *Kingdom Interlinear* use, forcefully contradicts the interpretation and thus translation of John 1:1 by the Watchtower Society:

"The predicate (God) stands emphatically first, as in 4:24. It is necessarily without the article . . . No idea of inferiority of nature is suggested by the form of expression, which simply affirms the true Deity of the Word . . . in the third clause 'the Word' is declared to be 'God' and so included in the unity of the Godhead."²⁴

Bruce Metzger, former professor of New Testament language and literature at Princeton Theological Seminary and author of *The Text of the New Testament* and many other scholarly works, observes,

"The Jehovah's Witnesses have incorporated in their translation of the New Testament several quite erroneous renderings of the Greek. . . . Far more pernicious in this same verse is the rendering, 'and the Word was a god,' with the following footnotes: 'A god,' in contrast with 'the God.' It must be stated quite frankly that, if the Jehovah's Witnesses take this translation seriously, they are polytheists. In view of the additional light which is available during this age of Grace, such a representation is even more

reprehensible than were the heathenish, polytheistic errors into which ancient Israel was so prone to fall. As a matter of solid fact, however, such a rendering is a frightful mistranslation."²⁵

Robert Countess wrote his Ph.D. dissertation in Greek on the *New World Translation*. He concluded:

". . . has been sharply unsuccessful in keeping doctrinal considerations from influencing the actual translation. . . . It must be viewed as a radically biased piece of work. At some points it is actually dishonest. At others it is neither modern nor scholarly. And interwoven throughout its fabric is inconsistent application of its own principles enunciated in the Foreword and Appendix."²⁶

British scholar H. H. Rowley asserts,

"From beginning to end this volume is a shining example of how the Bible should not be translated. . . it is an insult to the Word of God."²⁷

Julius Mantey, co-author with H. E. Dana of, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, calls the Watchtower translation of John 1:1:

"A grossly misleading translation. It is neither scholarly nor reasonable to translate John 1:1 'the Word was a god.' But of all the scholars in the world, so far as we know, none have translated this verse as Jehovah's Witnesses have done."²⁸

F. F. Bruce, who before his death was Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester, England, stated:

"Much is made by Arian amateur grammarians of the omission of the definite article with 'God' in the phrase 'And the Word was God'. Such an omission is common with nouns in a predicate construction. 'A god' would be totally indefensible."²⁹

Eugene Nida, head of the Translation Department of the American Bible Society Translators of the *GOOD NEWS BIBLE*, makes the serious accusation:

"With regard to John 1:1 there is, of course, a complication simply because the *New World Translation* was apparently done by persons who did not take seriously the syntax of the Greek."³⁰

William Barclay, who before his death was professor of divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University in Scotland, stated:

"The deliberate distortion of truth by this sect is seen in their New Testament translations. John 1:1 is translated: '. . . the Word was a god,' a translation which is grammatically impossible. It is abundantly clear that a sect which can translate the New Testament like that is intellectually dishonest."³¹

Ernest Colvell, professor of divinity at University of Chicago, claims:

"A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb . . . this statement cannot be regarded as strange in the prologue of the gospel which reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas, 'My Lord and my God!'"³²

Charles Feinberg, who before his death was professor of theology and biblical languages at Talbot Theological Seminary in California, boldly states:

"I can assure you that the rendering which the Jehovah's Witnesses give John 1:1 is not held by any reputable Greek scholar."³³

Harry Sturz, Chairman of the Language Department and professor of Greek at Biola University in California, claims:

"Therefore, the NWT rendering: 'the Word was a god' is not a 'literal' but an ungrammatical and tendential translation. A literal translation in English can be nothing other than: 'the Word was God.'³⁴

The Jehovah's Witnesses, then, show an abysmal ignorance of the basic tenets of Greek grammar in many of the treatments of biblical texts, especially in their mistranslation of John 1:1.

Jesus' Unique Relationship to God Proves His Deity

Jesus demands the **same trust** that God demands

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. **Trust in God; trust also in Me**" (Jn 14:1).

Who but Jesus would dare to demand that we put the same faith in Him that we put in God the Father. Who would dare claim that in such faith we will find a cure for all trouble and anxiety of heart. Jesus was certainly cognizant of Jeremiah's warning:

"**Cursed** is the one who **trusts in man**" (Jer 17:5).

Yet He had the boldness to demand absolute and unwavering trust in Himself. In Scripture, such trust only belongs to God. On another occasion He similarly stated:

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and **I will give you rest.**"
(Mt 11:28)

Only a lunatic, an impostor, or God Almighty would make such a promise. No one can give rest to all who are weary and burdened unless He is God, and yet Jesus makes that very offer. It is notable that in the same breath in which He speaks of Himself in these august terms, He says: "I am meek and **lowly** in heart." But where is His meekness and lowliness in making such a claim, if He were simply a man like ourselves, though better?

Jesus demands the **same devotion** as God the Father

". . . anyone who does not **carry his cross** and **follow Me** cannot be My disciple . . .
any of you who does not **give up everything** cannot be My disciple" (Lk. 14:27, 33).

Such **wholehearted devotion** and **radical sacrifice** is only demanded by God Himself in Scripture (e.g. The Rich Young Ruler—Mk 10:17-31). No angel or man dare make such a bold demand. Only Jesus could make it if He really were God. If not, His challenge proves ridiculous.

Jesus was to receive **equal love** as God the Father

"If anyone comes to Me and does not **hate** his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be **My disciple**" (Lk. 14:26).

Jesus demands **unrivaled love** from His followers. His statement is a Hebrew form of exaggeration to make a strong point. It is not that He is saying that His disciples are to literally hate everyone but Himself, if this were so, He would be contradicting the rest of Scripture, but that their love for Him must be so much greater than their love for anyone or anything else that by comparison it would seem as hatred. Throughout Scripture only God Himself demands such love (e.g. The Greatest Commandment—Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-31).

Jesus was to receive **equal honor and glory** as God the Father

". . . that all may **honor the Son just as they honor the Father**. He who does **not honor the Son does not honor the Father**, who sent Him" (Jn 5:22-23).

The equality of honor is expressed strongly with both a positive and negative statement. So little did the Jews misunderstand Jesus in regard to His claim to be equal with God (Jn 5:18), so little does He disavow claiming that equality (Jn 5:19), that here in the clause, "just as they honor the Father," He asserts that equality in the clearest possible way.

Jesus was not ignorant of the warning:

"I am the Lord; that is My name! I will **not give My glory to another** or My **praise** to idols" (Isa 42:8).

Yet Jesus claims such honor and glory for Himself. In fact such honor is constantly due the Son as evidenced by the Greek grammar (durative present *timosi*—"honor").

Similarly Jesus stated boldly:

"Father, the time has come. **Glorify Your Son**, that Your Son may glorify You.
 . . . And now, Father, **glorify Me** in Your presence **with the glory I had with You** before the world began" (Jn 17:1,5).

What audacity! Who but God could ask that God the Father would glorify Him? In fact, the request is that God the Father would glorify Him (Jesus) with the same glory that He (the Father) has: "with the glory I had with You before the world began." Jesus here asks the Father to return Him to His previous position of glory, to exchange humiliation for glorification. This occurred at Christ's resurrection and exaltation to God's right hand.

Some Jehovah's Witnesses have attempted to escape the obvious inference to Jesus' deity in John 17:5 by claiming that the word "with" (*para*) really means "through" and thus the "glory" that is referred to is not proof of Jesus' deity but merely a statement that the glory belongs to Jehovah and is only shining "through" the Son. It is, therefore, merely a manifestation of God's glory, rather than a glory which belongs to Him.

This is totally fallacious since *para* ("with") is used in the dative case. The Greek word for "through" is *dia*. Greek scholar Thayer uses this very verse to show that the word *para* should be translated "with" and not "through."

Para indicates a possessive quality which points to Jesus as the possessor of divine glory along with the Father and the Holy Spirit before the world was even formed. Jesus also states that He intends to appropriate that divine glory once again when God's plan and purpose for this earth is brought to its completion.

Jesus claimed the same honor and glory as God the Father. Since Jehovah has said that He will not give His inherent glory and honor to another (Isa 42:8), the unity of essence or substance—divinity—is undeniable between Jehovah and Jesus.

Jesus is the **divine Wisdom**

"He is **the image** of the invisible God, **the firstborn over all creation**. For **by Him all things were created**: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones of powers or rulers or authorities; **all things were created by Him and for Him**. **He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together**. And **He is the head of the body**, the church; **He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead**, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have **all His fullness dwell in Him** and **through Him to reconcile all things to Himself**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross" (Col 1:15-20).

This section takes the form of a poem as Paul envisions God's purpose in creation as being to sum up all things in the name of Jesus Christ. He is one who, though not yet a human being, was God's agent in the creation of the world. This was so because of His preexistence, because of His being "the image of the invisible God," because He is "the firstborn over all creation," because "all things were created by Him and for Him," because "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together," because He is the head of the body, the church, because He is "the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead," because "God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him," therefore He was perfectly fitted to become human and so to take the leading role in the unfolding drama of God's purpose for recreating the world.

In becoming the predestined human Lord of the world, Jesus has taken His rightful place, since from the beginning, as the true Wisdom of God, He was the Father's agent, God in the work of creation. The preexistent Lord of the world has become the human Lord of the world, and in so doing has reflected fully, for all to see, the God whose human image He has now come to bear.

Christ, as the divine Wisdom, is both to be identified with, and distinguished from, God the Father. As the divine Wisdom Jesus is none other than the one creator God who is active in creation and now in redemption. Yet this divine Wisdom is not to be identified with God the Father. Does this mean that there is a dualism whereby two gods are opposed? Or does it mean as in paganism that there are two gods who are distinguished and given different tasks? The answer is obviously "no" to both questions. Then what does it mean? It means that this divine Wisdom was of the same essence or being—God—yet was a different person. Even though the New Testament writers did not formulate the doctrine of the Trinity themselves, their way of speaking and writing about God necessitated such a formulation eventually.

In this poem there is an allusion to the Temple and the Shekinah glory (Col 1:19; see also Col 2:9 and Ecclesiasticus 24:3-12), where the "fullness" of God is "pleased to dwell" in Christ, as in Psalm 67:17 (*the Septuagint*) where God had been pleased to dwell on Mount Zion. Even though this allusion is expressed in language borrowed from the wisdom tradition, it goes beyond that tradition and uses a form of Jewish monotheism not before envisioned, in which **the Messiah Himself is the dwelling-place of the divine Wisdom**. Here is the picture of the immanent presence of the transcendent God, the visible image of the invisible God (Col 1:15).

This poem transfers to Jesus Christ, as the divine Wisdom, what belonged to Wisdom and Torah in Judaism. Paul astoundingly claims that "all that Judaism had hoped to gain by belief in one God, whose Wisdom was given to them in the form of Torah, was now to be gained through Christ. For Him, and not for Israel, all things were created."

Jesus is **the fullness of God** in Christ
Colossians 1:19; 2:9

Jesus alone is the **embodiment of all the fullness of the Godhead**:

"For God was pleased to have **all His fullness** to dwell in Him . . . For in Christ **all the fullness of the Deity** lives in **bodily form**" (Col. 1:19; 2:9).

The word "fullness" (*pleroma*) is found 17 times in the New Testament, but there are only three places in which the meaning is parallel to that of this passage (Eph 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). The word was used by false teachers to refer to the totality of supernatural powers ("aeons") which they believed were in control of people's lives.

These verses are very emphatic in Greek. The expression "in Him" stands first and is thereby emphasized. The word "dwells" (*katoikei*) means "permanently dwells." The phrase "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" is obviously intended to convey the thought that in Christ is **all that is in deity**. Here is a blanket endorsement of the divine attributes of Christ.

Biblical scholars such as C. F. D. Moule sees here a reference to deity and thus interprets this to mean "God in **all His fullness**,"³⁵ that is, "**all** that God is." J. B. Phillips in his New Testament paraphrase renders this, "the **full nature** of God." *The New English Bible* translates it, "the **complete being** of God." Lightfoot paraphrases it, "**the totality** of divine powers and attributes."³⁶

Since the word "dwell" suggests "permanent residence" as opposed to "temporary sojourn," Paul was probably refuting a teaching among the Colossians that the divine fullness had only a transient and temporary association with Christ. Paul's point is that God's fullness resides in Christ **permanently**.

Jesus is the "**radiance**" or "**effulgence**" and "**image**" of God
Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:15

The word "radiance" or "effulgence" (*apaugasma*) means "to send forth light," "to flash out" in the sense of **radiating** and it also means "to flash back" in the sense of **reflecting**. The word *apaugasma* can mean either a light that is emitted from some luminary in the sense of radiance or effulgence, or a light reflected from some luminary that is a refulgence or reflection. The essential meaning is very close. The idea is that Jesus is the **manifestation of God, who is light** (1 Jn 1:5).

As one in whom light is sent forth Jesus expresses God to us. Because no one will ever see God, the only radiance that reaches us from God is mediated to us through Jesus Christ. Just as the rays of the sun bring light and warmth to the earth, so the light of God shines through the Person of Jesus into the hearts of people.

Jesus is the **radiance or reflection of God's glory**. This means that Jesus is the radiance which streams from God or that Jesus is the reflection of God in whom infinity and eternity are made visible to humanity in time and space.

God sent His light in the Person of Jesus Christ that we might see, accept, and radiate that light.

Jesus is the "**exact representation**" of God
Hebrews 1:3

The word "representation" (*charakter*) means "the impress" or "stamp" of whatever it represents. It means an exact replica, copy or reproduction. The point of the author is that Jesus bears the very stamp of God, the impress of His being. Just as the image and superscription on a coin **exactly** and **perfectly** correspond to the device on the die, so the Son of God "bears the very stamp of God's nature" (*Revised Standard Version*). He is the **exact reproduction** of God. In Jesus there is a clear and accurate picture of what God is.

The *New International Version* translation adds the word "exact" to give the full sense of the meaning of this word. Therefore Christ is the **exact representation**—the perfect copy and embodiment of God. What God essentially is, is made manifest in Christ. To see Christ is to see what the Father is like.

Charakter also came to mean "a distinguishing mark," a mark by which a person or thing could be clearly distinguished from other persons or things. The mark of the seal brings about such a **distinction** and **identification**. This meaning is very close to the English word "character" or "characteristic." This is the distinguishing mark which makes a person the person he is.

Therefore, to call Jesus the *charakter* of God is to see in His person the character of God **reproduced**. As the *charakter* of God, Jesus is the one in whom the essential character of God is accurately and completely displayed and reproduced. In Jesus God makes Himself uniquely known to people in a form (physical) which all people can see and thus somewhat understand.

Jesus is very the "**form God**" and "**equal with God**"
Philippians 2:3

A key passage in which Paul reveals his understanding of Jesus is Philippians 2:5-11. Here Paul traces Christ's life from eternity past, when He was in the form of God and equal to God, through the events of His earthly life to eternity future, where He once again is glorified with the Father.

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very **form** God, did not consider **equality with God** something to be **grasped**, but made Himself nothing, taking the very **form** of a servant, being made in human **likeness**. And being found in **appearance** as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to **death**—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the **name of Jesus** every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that **Jesus is Christ the Lord**, to the glory of God the Father."

In referring to the position and status that Jesus enjoyed with God the Father in eternity past, Paul uses two words that are crucial to properly understanding the passage. The first is the Greek word *morphe* which is translated "form." In English the word "form" usually refers to the outward shape of an object, to that which is external. Paul uses the word in this sense when he talks about those who have "a form of religion" but who deny its power (2 Ti 3:5).

The more common use of the word in Scripture is in the case where both an external and internal aspect is meant. For instance, if you were to say, "I'm in good form or shape today" you would be referring not only to your external appearance but also to your internal fitness or health as well. This is what Paul has in mind primarily as he writes about Jesus in His preincarnate state. This means that Jesus **possessed inwardly** and **displayed outwardly** the very nature of God Himself.

We see the contrast when we compare the words "appearance" and "form." When Paul says that Jesus was found "in appearance as a man" he uses the word *schema*. Unlike the word "form" (*morphe*) which refers to the unchanging and unchangeable essential nature of a thing, the word *schema* means "the changing and altering external form of a person or thing."⁶ For instance, a man has always the unchanging *morphe* of manhood; that is what he essentially is; but he will have different *schemata*, different outward forms: in babyhood, childhood, youth,

maturity, old age. Flowers such as daffodils, tulips, and roses all have the same *morphe*—the same essential nature—for they are all flowers; but they have very different outward *schemata*—outward forms.

Paul carefully stated that Jesus was in the *morphe* of God; that is, the essential nature of Jesus is the same as the essential nature of God. But when Paul talks of Jesus becoming man he uses the word *schema* to point out that Jesus temporarily took the form of manhood upon him.

Another word that Paul uses is even more critical. It is the word *isos* which means "equal." This is the word from which we get such scientific words as "isomer," "isomorph," "isometric." An "isomer" is a molecule having a slightly different structure from another molecule (like a mirror image of it), yet it is **identical** to it in chemical composition. An "isomorph" is something that has the **same form** as something else. "Isometric" means "in equal measure." Paul's use of this word in reference to Jesus, therefore, teaches that Jesus is **equal** to God.

When Paul says that Christ Jesus "was in the form of God" he underlines the fact that Christ was in **full possession of the divine nature** by using, not the simple verb "to be," but a stronger verb (*hyparchein*) which in its characteristic usage has the force "to be really and truly," "to be characteristically," even "to be by nature." This is why the *New International Version* of the Bible translated the word *morphe* with the word "nature." In a passage like this present one, where it is plain that every word has been weighed and measured, the full meaning of the verb can be presumed or assumed: **He was really and truly, in His own personal and essential nature, God.**

On the following page is listed some definitions by foremost New Testament biblical scholars. Notice that their translations and meaning as to the **nature** of Jesus Christ confirms His divine personhood. But, being of the same essence as God, He "emptied Himself." The very notion of "emptying" inevitably suggests **deprivation** or **lessening, the loss of something that was possessed before**. When Jesus "emptied Himself," therefore, did He diminish Himself, and if so, in what way? The verb "to empty" (*kenoo*) in every other New Testament instance means "to deprive something of its proper place and use."³⁷

As John Calvin points out,

"Christ, indeed, could not divest Himself of Godhead; but He kept it concealed for a time . . . He laid aside His glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by concealing it."³⁸

He did this in voluntary subjection or subordination to God the Father.

God is of such a nature that acceptance of the limitations of a human life does not make Him unlike Himself. He is free to be our God without ceasing to be God the Lord. Jesus remained God in the voluntary deprivation of the exercise of Lordship. He willingly gave up the glory, majesty and honor that only belongs to absolute divinity.

By submitting Himself to the Father, Jesus did not become inferior to the Father since submission has to do with roles rather than substance or essence. Roles are essential in the ordering of society. Husbands, wives, children, employers, employees, presidents, vice-presidents, leaders, followers, etc.—all these designations of roles do not indicate inherent worth, but merely the identity of one's place in a given situation. Because parents have the role of providing leadership for their children, this in no way means that they have more inherent worth and dignity. Parents and children belong to the same class--humanity. No more, no less.

When John talks about God the Father being "greater" than Jesus (Jn 5:19; 14:28) he is referring to the submission of the Son to the Father and thus not in any way implying that the Son is inherently inferior to the Father. Biblical submission simply does not imply inferiority. It only points out the humble placing of people in the order of God's plan, purpose, and program.

When Paul refers to God as "head of Christ" (1 Co 11:3) and that Christ will be subject to God that God may be "all in all" (1 Co 15:28) he is not saying that Jesus is inferior. This merely has to do with **chains of authority**. Christ came to put down all rule, authority, and power not authorized by His Father (1 Co 15:23-26), and to demonstrate to the universe His absolute lordship (Php 2:8-11). But this lordship in a kingdom of service was not to be gained by the raw expression of divine power any more than rightful human leadership is to be established by violence. Rather it was granted by His moral and spiritual worthiness (Heb 2:9-18; 3:1-6; Rev 5).

Thus Christ, as a lawful and true **representative** of the Father, triumphed in the power of the Father, opening the way not only to salvation from sin and death, but to the rights and privileges of the kingdom of heaven for all who follow Him.

As a true representative of the human race and as a wholly obedient Son of God the Father, Jesus **never acted independently** during His earthly ministry. Everything He did He drew from His Father's power (Jn 5:19-20; 14:10-12), wisdom (Jn 7:16; 8:26-28,40), and in perfect harmony with His Father's will (Mk 14:35-39; Jn 6:38; 8:29; Heb 10:5-9). In this voluntary limitation of **dependence**, He lived (as His followers must live) by faith (Mt 3:14-15; Heb 2:9-18; 3:1-2), died in faith (Heb 5:7-9; Col 1:18-23; Php 2:8-11), and rose again by faith (Mt 16:21; Eph 1:17-23).

Just as no one can rightfully conclude that Jesus became less than man because He chose to become man's servant (Mk 10:45), so no one should conclude that Jesus was less than God because He subjected Himself to the Father while on earth.

The point of the passage is that Jesus did not treat His equality with God as an excuse for self-assertion or self-aggrandizement. Rather He treated it as an occasion for renouncing every right and advantage that was possessed by Him and saw it as an opportunity for **self-improvement** and **undeserved self-sacrifice**.

Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, interpret this passage to mean that Christ, because He was ever aware that He was not "almighty God," had a "form" of God in the sense that He was a spirit creature before He became a man, but that He would never dare even to think that He could "seize" the status of being a member of a Godhead from God the Father. Instead, Jesus humbly surrendered His life to be a **ransom sacrifice**—"a Lamb without blemish"—a perfect sacrifice—on our behalf.

This interpretation is clearly contradicted by the context of the passage. The overriding **theme** of Philippians 2:1-11 is **humility**. Paul admonishes the Christians at Philippi to be humble toward each other, even to the point of acting *as though* their brothers and sisters were better than themselves. After all, argues Paul, consider the supreme example of humility in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The point is that Jesus, although He was **exactly equal** to the Father as to His divine nature, humbled Himself to the Father's will. In the same way, although He was exactly equal to any other person as to His human nature, He humbled Himself to all humanity by enduring the cross on our behalf. It is *not humility to submit to one to whom you are intrinsically inferior*. That would be mere acknowledgement of fact. **True humility** comes from a voluntary submission which is *based on intrinsic equality*. A good translation that would clearly point this out would be:

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very **form** God, did not consider **equality with God** something to be **held onto**, but made Himself nothing . . ."

The word "being" (*hyparchon*) literally means "remaining" or "not ceasing to be."³⁹ This means that Jesus **never ceased to be** God. Rather He **remained** in His basic nature.

The phrase "held onto" or the word "detained" more clearly gives us the sense of the point Paul is making. The meaning of the words "grasped" or "seized" only become clear when we carefully look at the intent and flow of the passage.

Just as "form of a servant" (Php 2:7) means that Christ truly was a servant, so "form of God" (Php 2:6) means that Christ truly is God. These two parallels of *humility* between Christians and Jesus, and *of form* between Christ's deity and humanity, are undeniable. Far from denying the deity of Christ, this Philippian passage (Php 2:1-11) clearly and forcefully affirms the full and absolute deity of Christ who is our supreme model of humility in the face of equality.

This passage powerfully points us to the enormous contrast between Adam and Christ. Adam, who was made in the image of God, "snatched" at a false and illusory equality ("you will be like God, knowing good and evil"—Ge 3:5). Christ, on the other hand, who already enjoyed true equality with God, refused to derive any advantage from it in becoming man. Whereas Adam forfeited his lordship (over creation) through his "snatching," Christ achieved or reclaimed **universal lordship through His renunciation** of His divine prerogatives.

This interpretation is the most logical since it also follows the flow or movement of the whole passage. After having described how Jesus laid aside His former glory in order to become man and die for us, Paul goes on to show how He received that glory back as every creature in the universe will one day confess Him as "Lord."

In the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) this word (*kyrios*) is used, over and above its regular meanings, to represent the personal name of the God of Israel. This personal name, usually spelled *Yahweh*, had come to be regarded too sacred to be normally pronounced aloud, and so, when the Scriptures were read in public, it was replaced by another word, most often by the word meaning "Lord." This, then, is the name that God has bestowed on Jesus—the rarest of all honors, in view of His affirmation in Isaiah 42:8, "I am the LORD, that is My name." By this He meant, "Mine and no one else's."

This is the name that is "above every other name" (Php 2:9). By identifying the name of Jesus with "Lord" Paul alludes to Isaiah 45:23 in which God declares that He Himself will be the object of universal adoration: "To Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." Such adoring worship is only worthy of God Himself. Yet this is the very worship that Jesus will receive as His kingdom is brought to its fulfillment.

Phillips Brooks succinctly captures the meaning of this passage with the statement:

"Jesus Christ, the condescension of divinity, and the exaltation of humanity."⁴⁰

The confession, "**Jesus Christ is Lord**" (Php 2:11) is the quintessential Christian creed. In this creed Jesus is given the most august sense that it can bear. This is why Christians in later generations refused to say, "Caesar is Lord" because they knew that this was no mere courtesy title that Caesar claimed; it was a title that implied his right to receive divine honors, and in this sense they could give it to none but Jesus. There was "only one God, the Father . . . and . . . only one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Co 8:6). In the Septuagint Old Testament Gentile Christians read that *Yahweh* was denoted either by "God" (*theos*) or most often "Lord" (*kyrios*). They reserved *theos* regularly for "God the Father" and *kyrios* regularly for "Jesus."⁴¹

When divine honors are thus paid to the humiliated and exalted Jesus, "the glory of God the Father" (Php 2:11) is not diminished but enhanced. When the Son is honored, the Father is glorified; for none can bestow on the Son higher honors than the Father Himself has bestowed.

This passage is clear then, that the One who, before becoming human, possessed divine qualities and did not regard that status as something to take advantage of, something to exploit, but instead used it as an opportunity for obedient humiliation and death. God the Father acknowledged such an attitude by exalting Him so share His own divine glory.

Paul used this passage to fulfill the role of his developing argument that Jesus' example is one that Christians are to imitate. Just as God acknowledged Christ's self-emptying as the true self-expression of divine equality, so He will acknowledge Christian self-abnegation (Php 2:1-4, 12-18) in the same way (Php 3:2,11,21).

People Prayed to Jesus

Orthodox Jews would pray to no one less than God. In the New Testament, however, both God and Jesus were prayed to as "Lord":

"While they were stoning Him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus receive my spirit.'
Then He fell on His knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.'
(Ac 7:59-60)

Stephen not only prayed to Jesus, but also assumed that Jesus, as God, had the power to forgive sin, even murder. (Other passages where prayer is offered to Jesus: 1 Co 1:2; 2 Co 12:8-9; Ac 8:16, 24).

Divine Worship is Rendered and Accepted by Him

In Matthew 4:10 (quoting Dt 6:13) Jesus told Satan, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only." Yet later in Matthew the disciples "worshiped" Jesus after He walked on water (Mt 14:33) and after He rose from the dead (Jn 20:9; 28:9).

To worship any other as God—whether angel—man or man-made image is idolatry. In Colossians 2 we are warned, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in . . . the **worship of angels**" (Col. 2:18). We are not to worship angels and this is consistently demonstrated throughout the Bible. In Revelation 19:10 an angel refuses worship from John. In Revelation 22:8-9 an angel refuses John's worship a second time, saying, "Do not do that . . . **worship God.**"

Peter refused worship from Cornelius (Ac 10:25-26) and when Paul and Barnabas were worshiped, they immediately denounced it as blasphemous because they were mere "human beings" (Ac 14:11-18), yet when Jesus was worshiped He readily accepted it. It was the practice of the apostles and the early church to render worship to Christ (Ac 7:59; 1 Co 1:2; 2 Co 12:8-10). (Other passages attributing worship to Jesus: Jn 9:38; Heb 1:6; Rev 5:13-14).

Christians of all ages have not been satisfied with admiring Christ, they have adored and worshiped Him. They have approached His person in the attitude of self-sacrifice and worship as in the presence of and to God.

Accounts of people who worshiped Jesus:

- The wise men (Mt 2:2,11)
- The leper (Mt 8:2)
- A synagogue official (Mt 9:18)
- The people in the boat (Mt 14:33)

- The Canaanite woman (Mt 15:25)
- The mother of the sons of Zebedee (Mt 20:20)
- Men (Jn 9:38)
- The disciples (Mt 28:9,17)
- The saints in glory (Rev 4:1-14; 7:9-17; 19:4-10)
- The angels (Heb 1:6)
- One day everyone (Php 2:10-11)

The Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ is not based on any theory or speculation about the incarnation of what the Stoic philosophers called the *Logos* or Reason of God. Rather it was based upon the encounter with Christ as one who rightly claims man's worship. The worship of Christ was discovered to be inseparable from the worship of God—the God whom the Jewish remnant had for centuries worshiped and to whom they looked to for salvation.

Christian belief in Christ was based upon the recognition that in the Person of Jesus Christ this salvation had appeared. Thus the belief in Christ's divinity was founded upon the experience of the Early Church that the crucified and risen Lord, the Jesus whom the disciples had known and loved in the flesh, had led them forth out of the bondage of ignorance, superstition, fear, and sin into God's Kingdom of light, peace, truth and love.

In a letter to a lady who was dying Robert Browning quoted the words of Charles Lamb when he was asked how he would feel if the greatest of the dead were to appear suddenly in person once more and if Christ were to enter the room. It is said that Charles Lamb, as he contemplated the question, responded with great gravity:

"You see—if Shakespeare entered, we should all rise; if Christ appeared, we must **all kneel**." ⁴²

Similarly Napoleon stated:

"If Socrates should enter the room, we would all rise and do him honor. But if Jesus Christ came into the room, we would **all fall down and worship Him**." ⁴³

Jesus claimed He and the Father were "**one**"
John 10:30

When Jesus claimed, "I and My Father are **one**" (Jn 10:30) the Jews immediately wanted to stone Him. He asked them for which good work they wanted to kill Him. They replied,

"We are not stoning You for any of these but for blasphemy **because You, a mere man, claim to be God**" (Jn 10:30-33).

The Jews understood clearly what Jesus was affirming when He claimed that He and God the Father were "one." Nothing less than that He was and is "God."

The Jehovah's Witnesses explain this away by pointing to John 17:11 where Jesus also talks about being "one":

". . . Holy Father, protect them [the disciples] by the power of Your name—the name You gave Me—so that **they may be one as we are one.**"

The point the Jehovah's Witnesses make is that Jesus' "oneness" with the Father is no more significant than our (as human beings) oneness with each other. There is a sense in which this is true. Rather than disproving Jesus' deity, it affirms it. If this "oneness" of us human beings is the paradigm for God's oneness, then God's oneness means that Jesus is divine just as God the Father is divine. After all, as human beings our "oneness" means that we are of the same stuff, the same substance or essence—humanity. It is our **shared humanity** that makes oneness possible.

Jesus and God the Father are **Builders of God's House**:

"Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but **God is the builder** of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. **Christ is faithful as a son over God's house**" (Heb 3:3-6).

Great as Moses was, his status was inferior to Christ's. The old economy, inaugurated by Moses, is inferior to the new order introduced by Christ. Moses was a household servant exalted by virtue of His outstanding faithfulness to the post of chief administrator of God's household; but Christ, the Son of God, through whom the universe was made and to whom it has been given by His Father as His heritage, is **founder** and **inheritor** of the household.

Both Christ and God the Father are builders of the house. No distinction can be made between the Father and the Son in this regard: God the Father, the Maker of all things, is inevitably the founder of His own household, and it was through His Son that He brought into being all things in general and His own household in particular.

Jesus claimed God the Father as "**My**" **Father** John 5:17-18

The account of Jesus' "breaking" or "loosing" the Sabbath shows us the attitude He had toward His Father:

"So, because Jesus was **doing these things on the Sabbath**, the Jews persecuted Him. Jesus said to them, '**My Father** is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working.' For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He **breaking the Sabbath**, but He was **even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God**" (Jn 5:16-18).

The sacredness of the Sabbath had been established by God (Ex. 29:8-11) and thus **only God** could abrogate or modify its regulation. Yet we see Jesus doing that very thing. The Jews understood very clearly what Jesus claimed. This is why they reacted with such great hostility when, in defense of His having healed on the Sabbath, Jesus called God "**My Father**" and linked His work with that of God the Father. If Jesus did not mean what the Jews here understood Him to say, Jesus could have easily clarified His point by saying, "But this is **not** what I mean." Instead He accepts their interpretation as accurate of who He was and is. It is extremely difficult to escape the conclusion here that Jesus understood Himself as equal with the Father, and as possessing **the authority to do things only God has the right to do**.

No Jew ever spoke of God directly as "My Father." Yet that was the form of address Jesus used on several occasions, especially in His prayers. In fact, it was His only way of addressing God the Father. It referred to His **relationship** to the Father **exclusively**. He said to Mary Magdalene,

"Do not hold on to Me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to My brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to **My Father** and your Father, to **My God**, and your God" (Jn 20:17).

Jesus did not say "to **our Father**" or "to **our God**." He is in special relationship to the Father and thus shares in the triune Godhead.

Jesus equated a person's **attitude to Himself** with a person's **attitude to God**

- To know Him was to know God (Jn 8:19; 14:7)
- To see Him was to see God (Jn 12:45; 14:9)
- To believe in Him was to believe in God (Jn 12:44; 14:1)
- To receive Him was to receive God (Mk 9:37)
- To hate Him was to hate God (Jn 15:23)
- To honor Him was to honor God (Jn 5:23)

Problem Texts

There are several texts which the Jehovah's Witnesses resort to because they believe that these unequivocally prove that Jesus cannot be Almighty God, on equal footing with Jehovah.

- "No one is good—except God alone" (Mk 10:18).

One of the favorite passages used by the Jehovah's Witnesses to prove that Jesus is not deity, God Almighty, is the account of the Rich Young Ruler. Their point is:

"If Jesus and God the Father are "one," then how come Jesus denied being good?"

Jesus' so-called denial of goodness took place in His response to the Rich Young Ruler who was trying to find out how he could "inherit" eternal life:

"As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him and fell on his knees before Him. 'Good Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

'Why do you call Me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good—except God alone.'" (Mk 10:17-18)

It is crucial that we notice how this young man came to Jesus. He flung himself at Jesus' feet. Here is a young man who is a rich aristocrat falling at the feet of the penniless prophet from Nazareth. He addressed Jesus in an unusual manner by calling Him "Good Teacher"—a term never used for a rabbi. Jesus quickly answered back, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good—except God alone." This could be regarded as flattery giving a man a higher status than is His due, for true goodness is the prerogative of God. In essence Jesus was saying: "No flattery! Don't call Me good! Keep that description for God!"

Jesus' question was designed to **test whether the young enthusiast really knew what he was saying**. Jesus' reply, "Why do you call Me good?" was not meant to deny that title to Himself, but to sober the questioner. The man ran up with a flattering remark to gain Jesus' approval. Jesus asks him to calmly and carefully think about his remark. Does he really know what "goodness" is? After all, only one person is perfect goodness. And that person is God. Religious titles and religious terms are not to be used as ploys to ingratiate the speaker. Jesus was preparing him at the very outset of their conversation about eternal life—how he could gain it—to count the cost.

The young man's greeting probably implies that he is thinking with the traditional conceptions of much of ancient Judaism (which is also prevalent among "Christians") that there are the "good" and the "bad," the "deserving" and the "undeserving." This young man points later to his own morality as grounds why he thought he should be accepted by God. Jesus deflates his moral righteousness by zeroing in on his **god: materialism**. This is why He told him that he had to sell everything he had and give it to the poor. For God will not be worshiped and served among other gods. He demands undivided allegiance and unrivaled devotion. This young man's attitude is contrary to Jesus' whole standpoint that humans can only be in the position of the

undeserving who are dependent upon the good pleasure of a good God. All are undeserving. No one is good. Moral respectability ("I never in my life did anyone any harm") is not enough. Jesus was not impressed with his moral uprightness. Like everyone else, this young man needed the mercy of God. But this was impossible as long as he held onto his own god.

Jesus incisively asked him, "What good have you done?" The challenge put before the young man was: "With all your possessions, with your wealth, with all that you could give away, what positive good have you done to others? How much have you gone out of your way to help others?" While respectability may consist in not doing things, Christianity consists in doing things. And the young man failed the challenge because his possessions were his god—the one thing he was not willing to let go.

The context, then, of this whole story shows us that Jesus' reply to the Rich Young Ruler was not intended by Mark to cast any reflection upon the question of whether Jesus is divine. Instead, it is intended as a rejection of the idea implied in the man's address and question that one can acquire eternal life as one might acquire some other desired possession.

- "the Father is **greater than I**" (Jn 14:28).

Another Scripture often used by Jehovah's Witnesses and others to plead their cause is Jesus statement:

"You heard Me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, **for the Father is greater than I**" (Jn 14:28).

This text is part and parcel of the entire message concerning Jesus Christ as being **dependent** and **obedient** to **the Father**. In this chapter 14 Christ speaks about the coming of the Comforter and about His going to the Father. It is in this context that He states, "for **greater** is the Father than I" (Jn 14:28). This "superiority" (positionally) of the Father, therefore, is spoken in a very specific context. The context is the **humiliation** of the Son of Man who now proceeds **by way of suffering** to the Father who will glorify Him.

Those who use this text to argue against the coessentiality of Christ with the Father completely ignore this historical setting. Their focus is on the word "greater" (*meizon*) and so they simply infer the impossibility of Jesus being equal with the Father. By so doing they neglect to see that John is here contrasting Jesus' humiliation with His impending exaltation.

John makes the point that the disciples should have rejoiced because of the glory to which Jesus is going, that is, to the Father who is greater than He (Jn 14:28). Jesus' going to the Father is related to the greater things which are to come. This He also points out at other places:

"For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does. Yes, to your amazement He will show Him **even greater things than these**" (Jn 5:20).

Jesus also speaks to His disciples of these greater things to come:

"I tell you the truth, **anyone who has faith in Me** will do what I have been doing. He will do **even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.**"
(Jn 14:12)

Martin Luther throws light on the meaning of these verses:

"To go to the Father means to receive the kingdom of God in which he will be equal to the Father and acknowledged and honored in the same majesty. For this reason I go there, namely, to the Father, he says, because I will be greater than I am now. Hence of his current office, as he then carried on his work on earth, it was correctly said: the Father is greater than I, since I am now a servant; but when I return again to the Father, I shall be greater, namely, as great as the Father; that is: I shall rule with him in equal power and majesty."

There is a sense in which Jesus had ceased to be equal with the Father because of the humiliation of His present condition which involved entrance into a status which was lower than that which belonged to Him by nature.

The text of John 14, therefore, refers to the glory which will be Christ's when He goes to the Father. Although the Father is now (while Jesus is on His mission of humiliation--suffering and death) "greater" than Him, in the future He will again **equally share in the glory of the Father.**

- "You are **gods**" (Jn 10:35).

This bold statement must be seen in its larger context. The full text is:

"Jesus answered them [the Jews], 'Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said **you are gods,**' to whom the word of God came--and the Scripture cannot be broken—what about the One whom the Father set apart [sanctified] as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you **accuse Me of blasphemy** because I said, 'I am God's Son'? (Jn 10:34-36).

Jehovah's Witnesses and others claim that these verses identify Jesus as one human being among other human beings and shows that His claims to divinity are not to be taken seriously.

Admittedly the argument before us is a difficult one since it is a rabbinic form of argumentation which depends upon distinctions which were of great importance to the rabbis but which do not seem so important to people of our day. What is confusing at first is that Jesus heads in the opposite direction of what He has been saying up to now: that He claimed to be God in a unique and absolute sense. But in these verses He seems to be watering down this claim by pointing out that He meant no more by this than what the Hebrew Scriptures means when it uses the word "god" to apply to men.

What are we to make of such an argument? The point Jesus is making is that if there is any sense in which human beings can be spoken of as "gods," how much more may the term be used of Him whom the Father set apart and sent!

Jesus says here that the Bible calls "gods" those who were no more than men. They were themselves the recipients of "the word of God" as they were required to hear and obey the word of God, primarily, of course, in connection with their calling as judges. Yet these men were on this occasion called "gods".

In the light of such Scripture Jesus inquires whether these Jews can rightfully say that He blasphemes when He calls Himself "the son of God" (Jn 10:36).

But notice that His argument is not: "Psalm 82 speaks of men as gods; therefore I in common with other men may use the term to Myself." Rather the sense of the passage is: "If in any sense the Psalm may apply this term of men, then how much more may it apply to Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world."

This 82nd psalm that Jesus quotes is a psalm that warns unjust judges to stop their unscrupulous ways and defend the poor and the innocent. The psalmist concludes the warning with the words: "I say, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.'" (Ps. 82:6). The judge is called a "god" because there is a sense in which he acts as God since he has been entrusted with the oracles of God as part of a divine call or commission to judge Israel. After all, judgment is a prerogative that belongs to God. In a limited way, therefore, judges play the role of God.

This terminology has its roots in the narrative of Exodus 21:6 and 22:8-9, in which the judges (*elohim*) of Israel have authority to render decisions in civil law cases. Moses tells us how the Hebrew servant may go free in the seventh year. "Then his master shall bring him to the judges [literally 'gods' (*elohim*)]." This same form of expression is used in Exodus 22:28. Even Scripture aid of men who were specially commissioned to some specific task by God that they were gods. Jesus' point is: "If Scripture can speak like that about mere men, why should I not speak this way about Myself"?

This 82nd psalm expresses the failure of Israel's judges to wield their authority in keeping with God's standard of justice. They have been especially lax in one of God's greatest areas of concern: the welfare of the poor and needy. The rebuke is clear:

"How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Ps 82:2-4).

By their actions these judges have proven themselves to be only human after all. The rebuke they receive is well founded: "I said, 'You are gods; you are all sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mere men; you will fall like any other ruler" (Ps 82:6-7).

Instead of classifying Himself among men, Jesus calls Himself "Him, whom the Father set apart as His very own [sanctified] and sent into the world" (Jn 10:36). By so doing He was separating and distinguishing Himself from men. He uses comparative logic: "How much more."

This is the first time in the New Testament that Jesus identifies Himself as "the Son of God." Previously He has spoken of Himself as "the Son" and referred to God as His Father in such a way as to leave no doubt that He claims a special and unique relationship. This is His way of accepting the charge made against Him previously:

"We are not stoning You for any of these, but for **blasphemy, because You, a mere man, claim to be God**" (Jn 10:33).

While He does not deny the charge, He denies that the Jews are right in their understanding of the situation. They thought He was making Himself God. He was saying that He was not making Himself anything. He was what He was, and it was the Father, who in the first place, sent Him into the world, and secondly, who testified of Him (Jn 5:37).

In what sense then can we speak of human beings as being "gods". Certainly not in the sense that Jesus is—coequality, cosubstantiality—but only in the sense that man is a "partaker of the divine nature" (2 Pe 1:4). He is a "participant" of God's divine nature only as he is indwelt by the Spirit of God. And this indwelling is possible only because he was made in God's image and because he acknowledges by faith God's saving work in the Person of Jesus Christ on the cross.

When we become partakers of His divine nature we become "sons" or "children" of God. This is the sense in which Martin Luther and C. S. Lewis spoke of Christians as "little christs." After all, the word "Christian" means "Christ one" or "one of Christ's." But while we are "sons of God" Jesus, and He alone, is "**the** Son of God."

John, in his gospel, shows us that Jesus Christ, the Word (*logos*), became the Son of God in order that we might become "sons of God" (Jn 1:12-13, etc.). While we as human beings share in the divine nature by virtue of the fact that we are made in God's image and become participants of that "divine nature" as we are redeemed by God, it is Jesus who is God—the Redeemer—who saves us, who makes our sharing in the divine nature possible. While we **share** in God's nature, Jesus **possesses** that nature.

HIS IDENTITY

We have seen that **Jesus Christ made His identity the focal point of His teaching**. He said that the Father sent Him. He declared that He came down from God; that the words He spoke, God had actually given Him; and that everything He did, He did according to the commandment of God. He claimed that He would be the final Judge of the world. He said that to

know Him was to know the Father, and that to see Him was to see the Father. In fact, He said that He and God were one. He even claimed that no man could know God except as He, the Son, revealed the Father, and that no man could come to God except through Him.

Jesus was One who never put Himself in the attitude of a sinner before God; never shed a tear of repentance; never regretted a single thought, word or deed; never needed or asked divine pardon; was never concerned about the salvation of His own soul; and boldly faced all His present and future enemies in the absolute certainty of His spotless purity before God and man.

Jesus commanded His followers to believe in Him, love Him, obey Him, sacrifice for Him, worship Him, and, if need be, die for Him as they would for God.

Now in light of these assertions, what is one to think concerning Jesus Christ?

The critical question Jesus put to those who followed Him was,

"Who do you say I am?"

THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Most cults deny the "bodily" resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like Greek philosophy they affirm a spiritual resurrection. For instance, the Watchtower of the Jehovah's Witnesses states:

"The firstborn one from the dead was not raised out of the grave a human creature, but he was **raised a spirit**. . . . if, when he was resurrected, Jesus had taken back his human body of flesh and blood, which he had been given in sacrifice to pay the ransom price, what effect would that have had on the provision he was making to relieve faithful persons of the debt of sin?"⁴⁴

Instead, at physical death a person ceases to exist:

"For [bodily resurrection] to be possible, of course, humans would have to have an **immaterial soul** that could separate from the physical body. The Bible does not teach such a thing."⁴⁵

The Jehovah's Witnesses further believe Jehovah "recreated" the "spirit being" who had once been Michael the Archangel but who now has ceased being Michael to become Jesus. This Jesus is only a man, though the greatest man that ever lived, and He surrendered His **human** existence on the cross. This recreation "involves a reactivating of the life pattern of the individual, which life pattern God has retained in his memory."

This flies in the face of historic Christianity where the **bodily resurrection** of Jesus of Nazareth is *the pivot on which every other teaching rests*. Do away with the bodily resurrection of Jesus and you do destroy the very foundation and fabric of the Christian religion (1 Co 15:12-19).

Jesus of Nazareth, however, was raised bodily, victorious over death, sin, and Satan. He was raised in the same material body in which He had died, but now His body was resurrected and glorified.

Pointers to a *Bodily* Resurrection

The gospels go to great lengths to attest that the resurrection of Jesus was a **bodily resurrection**. Here lies the significance of the **empty tomb**. The empty tomb by itself was a puzzling fact that needed explanation. Mark records that the first reaction of the women to the empty tomb as well as to the message of the angels was not that of belief and excitement, but of fear and astonishment (Mk 16:1-5).

Luke tells us of two disciples who knew of the empty tomb but did not believe the resurrection until they were confronted by the risen Jesus (Lk. 24:22-35).

John relates that Mary could not conclude from the empty tomb that Jesus' body had been raised:

"So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we **don't know** where they have put Him'" (Jn 20:2).

It was not the empty tomb that aroused belief in John, the disciple, it was the **appearance of the grave clothes** (Jn 20:6-8). John adds an explanation,

"They [the disciples] still *did not understand* from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead" (Jn 20:9).

Apart from the appearances of Jesus, the empty tomb was an enigma. The empty tomb by itself does not guarantee the bodily resurrection of Jesus, on the other hand, the bodily resurrection of Jesus requires an empty tomb.

Physical Senses

The bodily character of Jesus' resurrection is also attested by the fact that His body made an impression on the **physical senses**:

"Suddenly Jesus met them [the disciples]. 'Greetings,' He said. They came to Him, clasped His **feet** and Jesus said, 'Do not **hold on to [detain]** Me, for I have not yet returned to the Father'" (Jn 20:17).

Jesus complied with Thomas' test to prove the resurrection in that he was to **touch the same body** with his own hands:

"Then He [Jesus] said to Thomas, '**put your finger** here; **see My hands**. Reach out your hand and **put it into My side**'" (Jn 20:27).

Thomas' response was literally, "My [the] Lord and my [the] God" which is translated, "My Lord and my God." This attests to Jesus' preeminence over death and thus His absolute deity.

Jesus' body was not only capable of being seen and felt, but His **voice** was capable of being heard. Jesus said to Thomas, "**see My hands**" (Jn 20:27). Jesus **addressed** Mary of Magdala, "Mary." The Bible states that Mary "turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!'" (which means "Teacher"—Jn 20:16). Could it be that Mary recognized Jesus by the tone of His voice when He pronounced her name?

Jesus was also capable of **eating**. This does not mean that He needed to eat, only that He could if He wished. He ate a piece of fish in the presence of His disciples (Lk 24:22-23). Jesus' presence was in tangible, visible, bodily form. The phrase "in their presence" suggests that Jesus ate for the disciples' benefit . . . as a further sign or proof that His risen body was a real **physical body**.

Like the Jehovah's Witnesses, the disciples on one occasion made the mistake of regarding the resurrected Christ as only a spirit-being. The Bible explains that when Jesus appeared they supposed they were seeing **a spirit** (Lk 24:37). But Jesus calmed their fears by showing them His hands and feet, announcing that "a spirit does not have **flesh and bones as you see I have**" (Lk 24:39).

Jesus specifically prophecies the nature of His resurrection:

"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy **this temple**, and I will raise it again in three days.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build **this temple**, and You are going to **raise it** in three days?' But **the temple** He had spoken of was **His body**. After He was **raised from the dead**, His disciples recalled what He had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (Jn 2:19-21).

This passage clearly establishes that Jesus' resurrection was physical, since the same temple (body) that His enemies would destroy is the one He promised to raise up.

The response of the Jehovah's Witnesses to the above passages is:

"Jesus evidently **materialized bodies** on these occasions as angels had done in the past when appearing to humans . . . to **strengthen the conviction of the disciples** that Jesus had **actually been raised**."⁴⁶

Nowhere in Scripture are there any references to angels having a "body." While they can manifest themselves in "bodily form," they do not possess bodies. Furthermore, to claim that Jesus "materialized bodies" on various occasions as angels had done makes no sense whatsoever since His resurrection, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses, was **not** supposed to be **bodily**.

Why would a physical body be proof of a predicted **immaterial** resurrection? Such an explanation makes Jesus out to be a deliberate deceiver by indulging, and even encouraging, His disciples to hold an erroneous idea of a material body proving an immaterial resurrection.

Paul makes it clear that Christ, now in heaven, still possesses a body since he stated concerning Jesus Christ:

". . . in Him the **whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily**" (Col 2:9).

It was at least twenty years after the resurrection that Paul was writing his epistle to the Christians at Colosse. Yet he uses the present tense of the word "dwell" indicating that deity "is dwelling" bodily in Jesus even then as he writes. If this is so, then deity is also dwelling in heaven now and forever. This is the clear meaning of the present tense.

While Paul says little about the nature of our life in the *Eschaton* (the Age to Come) when Christ has finally abolished all enemies, he does make it clear that **redemption** includes the **physical creation**:

"**Creation itself** will be **set free** from its **bondage to decay** and obtain the glorious **liberty** of the children of God" (Ro 8:21).

This new redeemed order of life lies "beyond history." It will embody a quality of life such as history has never seen, and which is difficult to imagine—life no longer determined by the so-called laws of nature, struggle for survival, and the rule of decay and death.

In addressing this immortal existence Paul says a great deal about individual existence. He describes this in terms of the resurrection of the body. His teaching about resurrection had been challenged in Corinth, and this leads him to devote considerable space (a whole chapter) to the nature of the resurrection.

One view that Paul may be opposing is represented by those who could not conceive of any kind of life after death. It is also possible that he was confronted by certain teachers who held that the resurrection had already occurred, in which case it would be a "spiritual" and not bodily resurrection (as in the case of those he was referring to in writing to Timothy—2 Ti 2:18). The most likely teaching that Paul was combating was that of Greek **dualism** which accepted the **immortality of the spirit** after the death of the body but rejecting any resurrection of the body.

The Resurrection of Jesus as a *Paradigm* of our Resurrection

Paul addresses such a false teaching by linking together inseparably the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers at the end of the age. The two primary points he makes about the resurrection of believers is that their resurrection is **bodily** and it is a resurrection of a **transformed body**. In facing the question, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" we should keep in mind that there were certain Jewish teachings which held either that the resurrection body will be **identical** to that of the mortal earthly body (II Macc 14:46) or that the **same** earthly body would be raised and only later transformed (Apoc Bar 50:2).

Paul's first point is that the resurrection will be a **resurrection of the body**. Although there are no perfect analogies for supernatural truth in the realm of nature, nevertheless Paul uses a metaphor of sowing a naked seed which dies but from which comes forth a new body (1 Co 15:35-38). The analogy is imperfect, in that, in the field of agriculture, the bare kernel planted in the ground carries within itself the power of germination so that death is not the final word, rather life is perpetuated. The resurrection, after all, is an **act of God**, not a process of nature.

To the observer, it is still a great mystery how a dried-up, dead-looking seed of corn is buried in the ground only to have a beautiful green blade spring forth. And Jesus used the parable of seeds of grain (Mk 26:29) to teach the contrast between the present and future aspects of the Kingdom which is entirely God's deed, not a process of nature. The point is that while **one body** is buried in the ground, **another body** springs forth:

"But God gives it a **body** as he has chosen, and to **each kind of seed its own body.**"
(1 Co 15:38)

Paul continues by saying that the resurrection body will be **different** from the mortal body. He begins by pointing out that not all flesh is alike:

"There is one kind of **flesh** for men, another for animals, another for birds, another for fish" (1 Co 15:39).

Paul is using the word "flesh" as synonymous with the word "body."

Later Paul states that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Co 15:50), that is, our present earthly, mortal, decaying, sinful bodies cannot inherit the glorious world of immortal life. The perishable cannot inherit the imperishable (1 Co 15:50). There is a **mortal body** and an **immortal body**.

Paul illustrates this further:

"There are also **heavenly bodies** and there are **earthly bodies**; but the splendor of the **heavenly bodies** is **one kind**, and the splendor of the **earthly bodies** is **another**. The sun has **one kind** of splendor, the moon **another**; and stars **differ** from star in splendor" (1 Co 15:40-41).

Although these illustrations from nature and astronomy do **not prove** the resurrection, they do throw light on the fact that there can be a **body** in the resurrection which is **different** yet **similar** from the mortal body that is buried.

Paul continues by describing the resurrection body. While he does not describe the composition or matter of the physical body, he does point out its characteristics. The *mortal body* is **perishable, dishonoring, and weak**; the *resurrection body* will be **imperishable, glorious, and powerful** (1 Co 15:42-43). What Paul says about the body is parallel to what he says about the deliverance of creation from its bondage and decay. Salvation means the salvation of the **whole man**, not merely of his soul or spirit.

Here Paul teaches the Hebrew (Old Testament) view of man. In biblical thought, **earthly bodily existence in itself is good**. It is an evil only because "creation was subjected to futility" (Ro 8:20) because of man's sin. Therefore when redemption is complete, the whole creation—the whole man will be redeemed. As biblical scholar George Ladd put it:

"The ultimate destiny of man is a redeemed, transfigured earth, dwelling in redeemed, transfigured bodies."⁴⁷

Paul summarizes his argument by saying, "It is sown a **physical body**, it is raised a **spiritual body**" (1 Co 15:44). When Paul uses the words "spiritual body" he does not mean spiritual in the sense of "noncorporeal." The translation "physical body" is not quite accurate since the Greek word has no equivalent term in English.

The Greek word is *psychikon*, from *psyche* which means "life" or "soul." The physical--the mortal body—is not made of psyche; it is a body animated by *psyche*.

In the same way the resurrection body will not be made of *pneuma*—spirit. It is true that some Greek philosophers did not consider *pneuma* to be nonmaterial as we do; they thought of *pneuma* as a very fine, invisible, celestial substance capable of interpenetrating all other forms of being. However such an understanding of "spirit" is totally foreign to Scripture. "Spirit" to Paul is God's spirit—the Holy Spirit. The resurrection body will be one which is completely animated and empowered by the Spirit of God.

Although Paul does conceive of God's spirit as dwelling in believers here and now, the *sphere* of the Spirit's work in this life is the **human spirit**, not the human body. When Paul tells the believers at Ephesus that they once were dead but now have been made alive, he refers to spiritual life. In spirit, we have been made alive with Christ. In spirit, we have been raised up with Him. In spirit, we have been exalted to heaven and seated at the right hand of God with Christ (Eph 2:5-6). Again Paul says:

"But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your **spirits** are alive because of righteousness" (Ro 8:10).

In the next verse, Paul makes it clear that to have Christ dwelling in a person is identical to having the Spirit indwell a person (Ro 8:11). This is why Paul can affirm that we have this treasure of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in "jars of clay" (2 Co 4:7) which are subject to all kinds of sufferings.

The "spiritual body" (*pneumatikon soma*), therefore, is a body transformed by the "life-giving Spirit" of God adapted for existence in the new redeemed order of the Age to Come. Such existence is "beyond history" not in the sense that it is unreal or nonexistent, but in that it is an order of existence in which the "laws of nature" and normal historical causality no longer apply.

Related to this order of existence we find Jesus saying:

"The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in **that age** [the Age to Come] and in the **resurrection from the dead** will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are **like the angels**. They are God's children since they are **children of the resurrection**. But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the **dead rise**, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the **God of the dead**, but of **the living**, for to Him **all are alive**" (Lk 20:34-36).

Historical existence in every culture is based in one way or another on the sex drive-- family, parents, children, husband and wives. The Age to Come is unimaginable because it is so difficult to imagine existence in which these basic sociological, emotional and physical realities will no longer prevail.

Paul adds:

"The first **man** Adam became a **living being**, the last Adam, a **life-giving spirit**."
(1 Co 15:45)

When Paul states that the first Adam "became" a "living being" and the last Adam (Jesus) "became" a "life-giving spirit" he is referring to the creation of Adam and **the birth of Jesus**. Only Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is the last Adam. God the Son, or the Word (*logos*), is still the second person of the Godhead, as found before the birth of Jesus was not the last Adam. This is so because previous to that first Christmas the second person of the trinity was only divine. At that time He was sharing in the glory and majesty of the heavens with God the Father and God the Spirit.

The last Adam had to be human. Otherwise He could not be Adam since the word or name means "mankind." God, who is spirit, whether as Father, Redeemer, or Spirit, cannot be referred to as "man." This would be ludicrous. Thus only the God-Man—Jesus Christ—qualifies.

To try to prove, therefore, that the above verse proves that the last Adam was created because He is referred to as having "become" a "life-giving spirit" is totally unwarranted.

Here Paul contrasts the two heads of two different families: the family of Adam consisting of all people; and the family of Christ consisting of believers, who are therefore indwelt by the Spirit and who find their existence "in Christ."

The word describing "Adam" is literally "a living soul" (*psyche*). Adam's existence was altogether on the level of *psyche*—natural, human life. As such, Adam—and all the children of Adam—have "natural" (*psychika*) bodies. Christ in His resurrection entered into a new realm of existence—a new order, which is nothing less than the invisible world of God—the Age to Come. As such Paul calls him "a life-giving spirit." He has entered the spiritual realm, taking his resurrected, glorified body with Him.

Paul expresses the same truth at other places such as 2 Corinthians:

"Now the Lord is the **Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."
(2 Co 3:17)

While these words seem to identify the risen Lord and the Holy Spirit, at the same time, Paul distinguishes between them. The point is that there is no difference between being in Christ and being in the Spirit. To be "in the Spirit" means to be indwelt by the new life that is in Christ (Ro 8:9). The same is true of being "in Christ" (2 Co 5:17). Such verses do not mean that Christ and the Spirit are actually identical since Paul clearly differentiates between them by speaking of "the Spirit of the Lord." However, since Christ entered the realm of the Spirit at His resurrection, functionally and dynamically the Lord and the Spirit are **one**. The exalted Lord works in the world and within His people through the Spirit.

Paul speaks of the two families in Adam and in Christ. By contrasting the first man (Adam) who came from the earth with the second man (Christ) who comes from heaven (1 Co 15:47), Paul must be referring to the *Parousia* (Second Coming) of Christ since Christ in His incarnation was also a son of Adam in that He had a "natural" mortal body.

The Bible assumes the existence of two worlds: the visible, natural, historical world of people, and an invisible, "spiritual" world of God. Greek thought often taught that man's true home was not the earth but the invisible, spiritual world which could be apprehended only by disciplined minds. The good life, therefore, meant strict control of the bodily passions and the

careful cultivation of the mind. "Salvation" would be achieved by the "good man" when, at death, he strips off the "burdensome body" and his soul is freed to find its way to the world of ultimate reality.

This is not biblical theology. The entire Bible assumes that the created world, including man in his bodily existence, is the creation of God and is therefore good. The **evil in the world** is **not intrinsic** to its being creation. Rather creation along with man has suffered the penalty of man's sin and lies under a curse. Salvation means the visitation of God from the invisible world into the visible world of men.

God has abandoned neither man nor creation to their fallenness. God visited Abraham in Haran to call him out to be the father of God's people. He visited Moses in the desert to make him the deliverer of his people in Egypt. He visited Israel in her bondage to lead her to the Promised Land and make her a nation. He visited Israel and Judah in judgment when both nations became sinful and hopelessly apostate. He visited mankind in the incarnation, when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" both to reveal Himself and to rescue fallen man. And He will visit mankind again at His Second Coming to finish His work of redemption for the whole world of creation.

Because creation is good, it must be redeemed from the curse of corruption. Because man is God's creation—the apex of His creative power—redemption must mean the resurrection and transformation of his very body. As long as sin, evil, corruption, decay, violence, and death remain in the world, God's redemptive work remains ever incomplete.

In His incarnation, Jesus came from the glory of God (Jn 17:5) to bring the glory of God to people in veiled, incarnate form. In His exaltation, He returned to the glory of God (Lk 24:26). At His *Parousia* (Second Coming), He will bring the glory of God to earth with redeeming, transforming power. Then both creation and creatures will share the divine glory.

The resurrection of our Lord is set before us in the New Testament as the miraculous **restoration** of His physical life, the **reunion** of His spirit with His body, and yet in such a way that the **material limitations**, in which He had previously confined His life—**were set aside**. The resurrection was the beginning of the glorification (Lk 24:37; Jn 20:4,14,26; 21:4). Christ now lives in heaven as a man, but in a glorified body (Php 3:21; Col 2:9; 3:4).

The resurrection of Christ is represented in Scripture as **wrought by the power of God**. Its miraculous power is strongly proclaimed (Ac 13:30; Ro 1:4; 1 Co 15:15). The Scriptures represent the resurrection not as something unnatural, but **natural**, since it is Christ, the Author of Life, who rose. He could not be held by death! He would be raised from the dead (Ac 2:24).

The proclamation of the resurrection lies at the basis of apostolic teaching (Ac 1:22; 4:2,33; 17:18; 23:6; 1 Co 15:14). It ranks first among the miracles which bear witness to Christ's divine character (Ro 1:4). It is the **divine seal of approval** upon Christ's atoning work (Ac 4:25; 5:10; 8:34). The resurrection of Jesus is the **pledge** and **paradigm** of the resurrection and glorification of the true followers of Christ (Ro 8:11; 1 Co 15:20-22; Php 3:21; 1 Th 4:14).

The Purpose for the Incarnation

1. To **confirm the prophecies** of the Old Testament

a. The Statement of Prophecy

- (1) The Protovangelium (Ge 3:15)
- (2) The Promise reiterated (Isa 9:6; 7:14; Mic 5:2)

b. Types of Prophecy (concerning Jesus Christ)

- (1) He was to be a **Savior** from sin (Isa 53:3-6; Da 9:26)
- (2) He was to be a **King** in His Kingdom
(2 Sa 7:8-17; Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5; Zec 14:9)
- (3) He was to **sit on the throne of David forever** (Lk 1:31-33)

Accordingly when Jesus Christ came to earth, He appeared in a dual role:

As Son of David (King)
As Son of Abraham (Savior)

2. He came in order to **reveal** the Father (Jn 1:18; 14:9)

3. He came in order to be **qualified** to act as a faithful **High Priest** (Heb 2:17; 5:1-5)

In order that Jesus Christ might become our High Priest, He must become a man. In becoming a man, He partook of all human experiences except sin. He felt hunger, He wanted sympathy, He was weary, He felt all temptations, He was misunderstood, He was forsaken, He was persecuted, He was delivered to die.

4. He came to **provide a sacrifice** for sin (Heb 9:26; 10:1-10).

This was the "purpose of all purposes"
(see also Jn 1:29; Mk 10:45; 1 Jn 3:5; Isa 53:6; Heb 2:9; 2 Co 5:21)

5. He came to **destroy** the works of the Devil (Heb 2:14; Jn 14:30).
6. He came to give us an **example** of a holy life
(inferred in Mt 11:29; 1 Jn 2:6; 1 Pe 2:21)
7. He came to **prepare** for the Second Advent (Heb 9:28).

The Nature of the Incarnation

The Nature of the incarnation is expounded most thoroughly in Philippians 2:5-8, the passage that is sometimes called the "Kenotic Theory."

"Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but **made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness**. And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself** and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

This passage of Scripture gives the true nature of the incarnation. The *kenosis* is the **self-emptying** manner of existence that took place with the incarnation of Christ. This passage is in a context of man's appearance to man, that is, men should not do things to be seen of men or to be motivated by pride. In other words, the Christian is being exhorted to be a humble kind of person not boasting about himself as though he has or is something better than his fellow man.

The writer proceeds by saying to have the same mind in you that was in Christ when He became incarnate (His enfleshment). Christ could have come down to earth and even though He would have taken on flesh, He could have appeared as God and God only as a result every knee would have bowed to Him while He was on earth. But this He didn't do. Instead He emptied Himself. This *kenosis* or "emptying" refers not to attributes but **rights**. It is a question not of nature, essence, or substance, but of **claim to power**.

The passage deals with like-mindedness, unity, and humility. It stresses freedom from self-assertion or grasping after privilege. Jesus' emptying, then, means that **He emptied Himself of the prerogative of deity**—His rights, privileges, and intrinsic authority as God, to be honored and glorified as God—and gave Himself to being seen, and heard, and treated like any other person in the flesh, yet came as a servant.

This was not something that was foisted upon Him; He gave Himself to being a servant, and becoming a servant He was true to the servant's obligation to be obedient. Full obedience required that He die if He were to take away sin and affect redemption for the world. He not only gave Himself to die but to the "death of the cross"—a death that entailed the shedding of blood (Heb 9:22) and included the shame and ignominy of death by crucifixion.

Wherefore, God has given Christ what He gave up in becoming a man, i.e., the exaltation as Lord, "a name that is above every name." At this name "every knee shall bow" (which was not true while He was on earth), "every tongue should (shall) confess" that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Php 2:9-10).

Jesus is worthy of the highest predicates that Christian faith can give. Only as the Church breaks out in lyrical notes does she make up for the shortcomings of theological prose.

Jesus Christ became a man—"enfleshed" as prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures. He became incarnate that He might live as a man and thereby be able to take man's place in death. The incarnation is the best established fact in history—God became man, lived, died the death of the cross, and rose again.

The Scriptures then, clearly and distinctly teach that Jesus Christ is both human and divine. Jesus Christ is both God and man—the God-Man.

**CHAPTER 7 THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
MORMONISM**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or Mormonism was formally organized in upstate New York in 1830 with six members. It now reports **a worldwide membership of nearly 13 million. With a strong missionary movement, the church has more than half its believers outside United States.**

Mormonism is **a uniquely American religion** because it embodies many of the virtues of the frontier United States: self-reliance, individuality and high expectations of sexual morality.

It is their belief that **the U.S. Constitution is a *sacred, divinely inspired document* virtually on par with the Bible or the Book of Mormon or other standard works of their church.** In studying the Constitution, the National Center for Constitutional Studies approach the document as virtually holy writ.

DISTINGUISHING MARKS

Latter-day Saints are distinguished especially by:

- Active proselytizing by full-time volunteer missionaries
- Belief in modern prophets, beginning with Joseph Smith, Jr., and continuing today with Gordon B. Hinckley
- Acceptance of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price as works of scripture
- A dietary code called the Word of Wisdom, currently requiring abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, and illegal drugs; caffeinated soft drinks are left to individual discretion.
- Belief in God the Father, the Son (Christ), and the Holy Ghost existing as three separate individual beings or personages
- Belief in a form of theosis called exaltation or eternal progression
- Formerly practicing polygamy (plural marriage)
- Wearing ceremonial temple garments under their daily clothes
- Performing baptisms for the dead, and other ordinances by proxy, in temples and doing attendant genealogical research.¹

ORIGIN

Three key questions Mormons address are:

- Why was the Gospel of Jesus Christ restored to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith?
- How can we understand the divine purpose and the eternal significance of the temple?

- Why do we need to understand the restoration of the Gospel?

Mormons believe that Jesus taught everything that is necessary to receive all of the blessings God has in store for His children and that He concluded His “mortal” ministry with the single most compassionate and significant service in the history of the world by offering Himself as the Atonement.

His establishment of the church upon the earth is considered one of the most important accomplishments of the Savior ([Eph 4:11–12](#)).

When Jesus called His twelve Apostles, He laid His hands upon them, ordained them, and conferred upon them the authority to act in His name and govern His church. Peter is commonly understood to have become the chief Apostle, or the President of the Church, after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Early Christians endured the challenges of persecution and hardship and Peter and his brethren had a difficult time holding the Church together and keeping the doctrine pure. Because travel was difficult and information moved slowly the church and its teachings faced false teachings before they had a chance to become rooted firmly.

To the Thessalonians who were anticipating the Second Coming of Christ, Paul wrote that “that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first” ([2 Th 2:3](#)) and he warned Timothy that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine . . . And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” ([2 Ti 4:3–4](#)). Peter wrote of the falling away—the Apostasy—when he spoke of “the times of refreshing” that would come before God would again send His Son:

‘Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, **which God hath spoken by the mouth of all *his holy prophets* since the world began.**’
([Ac 3:19–21](#))

As the apostolic authority of Peter and the other apostles receded into past history, many plain and precious truths were lost. Therefore a great council was held in Nicea in A.D. 325. Although Christianity had emerged to become the state religion of the Roman Empire by this time, the church still faced theological issues. Emperor Constantine, therefore, called together a group of Christian bishops to establish once and for all the official doctrines of the church.

Consensus did not come easily on such basic subjects as the nature of God and Jesus. Instead of decisions being made by inspiration or revelation, they were made by majority vote with some opposing factions splitting off and forming new churches. Similar councils were held later in A.D. 451, 787, and 1545, with similar divisive results.

The beautiful simplicity of Christ's Gospel was being undermined by the philosophical meanderings of uninspired men and thus doctrine became based more on popular opinion than on revelation. The light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ had been lost during this time which appropriately became known as "the Dark Ages."

In 1517, Martin Luther, a German priest, was moved by the Spirit to reform the church. This resulted in such a historic reformation that a movement was taken up by such visionaries as John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, John Wesley and John Smith who were inspired by God to create a religious climate in which God could restore lost truths and the authority of the priesthood. Similarly, God inspired the earlier explorers and colonizers of America and the framers of the Constitution of the United States to develop a land and governing principles to which the Gospel could be restored. By 1820 the world was ready for the "restitution of all things" spoken of by Peter and "all [God's] holy prophets since the world began" ([Ac 3:21](#)).

At this very time, according to the LDS Church, religious excitement was sweeping across the countryside in upstate New York at this time with ministers from different denominations vying zealously for the loyalty of the faithful in villages and towns, including Palmyra, the home of the family of Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Mack Smith. The members of the Smith family were "proselytized" to various faiths with mother Smith and three of the children—Hyrum, Samuel, and Sophronia—joining one church while Father Smith and his eldest son, Alvin, affiliated with another.

When Joseph, Jr. at age fourteen considered which church to join, he investigated each denomination carefully as he listened to the various ministers and tried to sort out the truth. Although he knew there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" ([Eph. 4:5](#)), which was the one true faith, that he did not know. "In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions,"² he wrote later,

"I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?"³

While reading in the Bible, young Joseph came upon a simple, direct admonition in the epistle of James:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" ([Jas 1:5](#)).

Joseph reflected:

“Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know.”⁴

With the simple faith of youth and motivated by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Joseph decided to go into a grove of trees near his home and put the promise in James to the test. On a clear spring morning as Joseph retired to the woods, he paused at a secluded spot, he looked around to make sure he was alone and then knelt and prayed. Instantly an overwhelming feeling

of darkness came over him, as if some evil power was trying to dissuade him. Rather than surrendering, Joseph intensified his pleas to God—and God Himself responded. Joseph described it this way:

“I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air.

One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—
This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him.”⁵

According to the Mormons, those Beings were God our Heavenly Father and His resurrected Son, Jesus Christ, in one of the most supernal spiritual manifestations of all time.

These Beings told Joseph he should join none of the existing churches.

Joseph was left physically drained but spiritually enriched with exciting restored truth. **He knew with certainty that God, our Heavenly Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, are real, because he had seen them. He also knew they are two separate, distinct individuals. Furthermore, he knew that no church on the face of the earth had the authority of the priesthood to act in the name of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.**

In addition, one of the most important lessons young Joseph learned in the “Sacred Grove” was the revelation that **“the heavens are not sealed.”** This means that God does communicate with mortals. God in heaven knows us, loves us and cares about us, individually and collectively, and **He communicates with us, either directly or through His living prophets, according to our needs.**

According to LDS, through subsequent, equally miraculous experiences, Joseph Smith was God's instrument in—

- Translating from ancient records a book of scripture, the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ,
- Restoring priesthood authority,
- Restoring sealing keys to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers,
- Establishing the restored church of Jesus Christ in these latter days with the fullness of the gospel as taught in the meridian of time by the Savior and His Apostles,
- Fulfilling biblical prophecy,
- Preparing for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints claim that the church has been restored to the earth through Joseph Smith and is administered today by a living prophet.

In the last chapter of the Book of Mormon, an ancient prophet named Moroni gave a promise to those who would one day read this sacred book of scripture:

“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.”
 (Moro. 10:4–5)

According to LDS:

“Brothers and sisters, we know the truth. Because we do, we are expected to share it with all of our Heavenly Father's children. To our dear friends of the Church, please do not let pass this opportunity to receive personal revelation from God. Consider what I have said. Weigh it carefully. Measure it against the things you believe. Hold fast to all that is true, and add to that the fullness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Take into account what you have felt as you have listened. You can know if these things are true by asking God. Listen for His answer; then respond to what you feel.”
 If you will do so, I believe you will come to know as I know that The Church

of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God’s true church upon the earth. May God bless you, my dear friends, with the peace and joy the gospel gives, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”⁶

Jesus Christ Established His Church

The LDS Church believes that a few hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ, people had fallen into apostasy and that when Jesus began His mortal ministry, He restored His Gospel and established His church again on the earth.

Jesus Christ gave His Apostles “priesthood authority” to teach His Gospel, perform the ordinances of salvation, and continue to establish His Church in the world. After His Resurrection, Jesus Christ guided His Apostles through revelation, making the Church of Jesus Christ a church led by God and not by men (**Ac 10; Rev 1:1**). In addition to the Twelve Apostles, Christ appointed other leaders to assist the Apostles in the work of His Church. These included:

- Seventies (missionaries)
- Evangelists (patriarchs)
- Pastors (presiding leaders)
- Elders
- Bishops
- Priests
- Teachers
- Deacons⁷

These officers were given the authority (or priesthood) necessary to do the work of Christ’s Church. When His followers asked Jesus Christ what kind of people He wanted them to be, His answer was simple: “Even as I am.”⁸

Both the Holy Bible and the Book of Mormon are records of God’s dealings with His children. Whereas the Holy Bible contains a record of Jesus Christ’s dealings with and ministry to the people in the Holy Land, the Book of Mormon is “Another Testament” of Jesus Christ and is a record of Christ’s dealings with and His appearance to the people of ancient America. Both books teach about our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, and of their love for us.⁹

What is Mormonism?

Mormonism is a term used to describe the **religious, ideological** and **cultural** elements of certain branches of the **Latter Day Saint movement**, specifically, **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** (LDS Church). The term derives from the term **Mormon**, which was originally used as a pejorative term to describe those who believe in the **Book of Mormon**, a sacred text that has been added to the religion's **canon** in addition to the **Bible (Old and New Testaments)**. Today, Mormonism is no longer offensive when used in reference to the **Utah-based LDS**

Church, including **cultural Mormons**, and several smaller denominations and sects of **Mormon fundamentalism** whose adherents embrace the term despite opposition by the LDS Church. However, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members rarely describe their beliefs as Mormonism. Most other Latter Day Saint movement denominations oppose use of the term in reference to their faith, and such usage is now rare.¹⁰

Mormonism and Christianity

Historically, Mormonism has had an uneasy relationship with traditional **Christianity** due to the fact that adherents to Mormonism claim that the movement is a "restoration" of the earliest Christian and Judaic doctrines. This means that the "gospel" has existed since the days of **Adam and Eve**, and that throughout history a series of "apostasies" have occurred but always followed by a "restoration." One such apostasy occurred after the death of **St. Peter** and the other original **twelve apostles**, and that the calling of **Joseph Smith, Jr.** marked a new restoration continued to this day.

Other conflicts have been over the issues of traditional views of Christ, the Trinity, additions to the scriptural **canon**, temple worship and **plural marriage** (a form of **polygamy** where a man can marry multiple wives, that was officially abandoned by the LDS Church in 1890).¹¹

Mormonism and Judaism

Although there have been claims of discrimination, Mormons as a religious body generally embrace Jews, Judaism, and some elements of Jewish culture. This commitment derives primarily from what Mormons believe are historical and doctrinal connections with Judaism.

There has been some controversy involving Jewish groups who see elements of Mormonism as offensive. In the 1990s, Jewish groups vocally opposed the Mormon practice of **baptism for the dead** on behalf of Jewish survivors of **the Holocaust**. According to LDS official Monte J. Brough,

"Mormons who baptized 380,000 Holocaust victims posthumously were motivated by love and compassion and did not understand their gesture might offend Jews . . . they did not realize that what they intended as a 'Christian act of service' was 'misguided and insensitive.'"¹²

Mormonism and Polygamy

Mormonism has been closely associated in both public discourse and LDS scripture with **polygamy**. In the 1830s, **Joseph Smith, Jr.** instituted a form of polygamy referred to as **plural marriage**, which **Brigham Young** first acknowledged and promoted after the LDS church's move

to **Utah Territory**. **Joseph Smith's** July 12, 1843 polygamy revelation, in which **Jesus Christ** states through Smith that "a new and an everlasting covenant" of **plural marriage** is given, contains numerous **biblical** references to and justifications of **polygamy**, as well as the demand that Smith's first wife, Emma, accept all of Smith's plural wives, and warns of damnation if the new covenant is not observed.¹³

Mainstream religions and political forces in the **United States** reacted vigorously by seeking to stamp out such a practice. The **United States Congress** passed laws criminalizing the practice and dissolving polygamous families, disincorporated the LDS Church, and began seizing church property. A few months after a **U.S. Supreme Court decision** upholding the legality of the church's disincorporation and forfeiture of property, the LDS Church issued its **1890 Manifesto** renouncing the practice of polygamy. Today, the LDS Church strongly rejects the practice and excommunicates members who engage in it.

The 1890 renunciation of polygamy by the LDS Church also led to a number of **schisms** involving relatively small groups who describe themselves as **Mormon fundamentalists**, who still practice polygamy as well as other elements of 19th century Mormonism that have been rejected or denounced by the LDS Church. These organizations believe that their doctrines and practices are more true to the original teachings of **Joseph Smith, Jr.** and **Brigham Young**.

BASIC DOCTRINES

Membership in the Church

Articles of Faith

“The basic beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are summed up in 13 simple statements penned by Joseph Smith as a response to frequent queries on the teachings and doctrines of the Church. These statements are now known as the Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

They are:

1. We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.
2. We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.
3. We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.

4. We believe that the principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, **Baptism** by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

5. We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

6. We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.

7. We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.

8. We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

9. We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

10. We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon this the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.

11. We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.

12. We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.

13. We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”¹⁴

Heavenly Father Reveals His Gospel to All

The LDS Church teaches that testimonies of prophets who speak and act in God’s name (Am 3:7) can be found in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and in the Book of Mormon. In fact, throughout the Book of Mormon, there are examples of many prophets who testified of Jesus Christ. Among these prophets are men named Lehi, Nephi, Benjamin, Mosiah, Alma,

Abinadi, Helaman, Mormon, and Moroni. Prophets bore vibrant testimony of Christ so later generations could also develop faith in the Christ and look to Him for redemption. As the prophet Nephi wrote,

"And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins" (2 *Nephi* 25:26).

The scriptures are clear that God repeatedly reaches out to His children by revealing His Gospel through a prophet, who in turn teaches the people.

The divine truths have been restored by God for the final time—never to be removed from the earth again—through the latter-day prophet **Joseph Smith**. As Moses and other biblical prophets received revelation from God, so Joseph Smith saw God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ and was chosen to testify of them and to restore the Gospel and His Church.

In June 1844, Joseph Smith, the first prophet of this dispensation, was murdered in Carthage, Illinois. The leadership of the restored LDS Church then was passed to **Brigham Young**, who was the senior Apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He became responsible for leading the Church under Jesus Christ's direction. Throughout the 33 years Brigham Young led the Church, he:

- Led the first group of pioneers across 1,000 miles of unsettled plains, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.
- Supervised the subsequent immigration of more than 70,000 people from the U.S. and Europe.
- Founded over 350 settlements, including communities in Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, Canada, and Mexico.

Just as Brigham Young was called of God to succeed Joseph Smith, so this pattern of succession of prophets, as directed by Jesus Christ, continues today. The current prophet and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is Gordon B. Hinckley. He is assisted by two counselors: Thomas S. Monson and Henry B. Eyring. Together, they make up the First Presidency of the Church (much like Peter, James, and John in Christ's time).

The **current Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** are:

- Boyd K. Packer
- L. Tom Perry
- Russell M. Nelson
- Dallin H. Oaks

- M. Russell Ballard
- Joseph B. Wirthlin
- Richard G. Scott
- Robert D. Hales
- Jeffrey R. Holland
- Dieter F. Uchtdorf
- David A. Bednar
- Quentin L. Cook
- D. Todd Christofferson
- Neil L. Anderson²⁰

Just as God led the Israelites out of slavery and into the Promised Land through His prophets Moses and Joshua, He now leads His children into happier, more peaceful lives when they choose to follow Jesus Christ by following His living prophet.²¹

Baptism for the Dead

An overview of the religious reasons behind the practice of attempting to baptize the world's dead is explained by Marlin K. Jensen, the executive director of the LDS Family and Church History Department and a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy:

“When I think of the temple, I think of it really in two grand divisions. There's a part of what happens in the temple, it happens for those who are living right now. We go there; we can be endowed, which is essentially blessed with knowledge and the opportunity to make certain commitments to God to live our lives in a certain way. And we can be married there as a husband and wife. Those things happen for living people.

But the temple in its second dimension answers a question that is still very topical among theologians today, and the question is, if Jesus is the savior of mankind and if hearing his Gospel and living life the way he proscribes is necessary for salvation, what about those who have never heard of Jesus? As far as I know, the only really complete answer that can be given to that question

is given by our church. And the answer is if they don't hear it in this life -- and there have been millions of people who have lived at times when that wasn't unavailable or have lived in areas where it wasn't preached -- they, we believe, go to a spirit world following this life. It is in that realm that they're able to hear the Gospel, and their agency is still very much active. They can decide whether they're going to accept it or whether they're going to reject it.

If they do accept it, then we believe that there is still a need for certain essential ordinances or religious ceremonies to be performed for them on their behalf. And these ceremonies are earthbound. One of those is baptism, and another would be marriage, and another would be the endowment I mentioned. And for men it would also involve ordination to the priesthood.

So in God's foresight and in his comprehensive plan, he's given those of us who have the Gospel now the opportunity to do these ordinances for our deceased ancestors in hopes—and we don't have a knowledge ever as to whether they've accepted this or not or whether we're doing it in vain or whether it's efficacious. . .

So it's a tremendous labor of love, and there's a linkage then, a linking of us to our ancestors that, again, provides a tremendous anchor to our souls. And in that process of discovering who our ancestors were, we come to know about them and to love them and to be inspired by their lives. There's just a solidarity there that is missing, I think, in many families and in many societies today in many cases.

And yes, the work of **genealogy** is a tremendous endeavor for the church. We have the finest genealogical library in the world. If there's a Mecca for genealogists, it's our Family History Library in downtown Salt Lake City, where people from all over the world come. We're engaged in a tremendous endeavor to really build the family tree of all mankind. It's done for religious purposes; it's done out of our love and our hope that these people are hearing the Gospel and accepting it and that they need these ordinances performed for them.

You want to reach everyone?

We have [2.4 million] rolls of microfilm, I think, in our storage vaults, containing about 2 billion names, and we've just made a good start on the history of mankind. So yes, it is ambitious, and it's a costly undertaking in a way, but it's a labor of love, and there is a lot to be gained. We have a Scripture that says, 'They can't be saved without us, and we can't be saved without them.' There is this feeling of interdependence, I think, that goes on."²²

The Book of Mormon

God provided the Book of Mormon by His power through Joseph Smith as part of the restoration of the Gospel—Another Testament of Jesus Christ. It was Smith who translated this book from an ancient record written on gold plates. Therefore the Book of Mormon is **“a record of God’s dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains, as does the Bible, the fullness of the everlasting gospel.”**²³

The Book of Mormon is a powerful witness of Jesus Christ. It helps us understand His teachings, including those in the Bible. Examples of Book of Mormon witnesses of Christ include:

- Nephi, who saw the birth and death of Christ in a vision (1 Nephi 11:13–15).
- The brother of Jared, who saw the Lord because of his great faith (Ether 3:7–16).
- The prophet Samuel the Lamanite, who prophesied of Christ’s coming and gave the signs of His birth and death (Helaman 13–14).
- Christ Himself, who, after His Resurrection, appeared to the people of ancient America and invited them to come forward one by one to see and touch Him until “they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves” (3 Nephi 11:13–17).²⁴

In the Bible, Jesus told His Apostles, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (Jn 10:16). Soon after He was resurrected, the Lord visited these “other sheep”—the inhabitants of ancient America. During this visit to the American continent (recorded in the Book of Mormon), Jesus Christ:

- Invited people to feel the wound marks in His hands and feet and side.
- Taught His gospel.
- Called twelve disciples to teach His gospel.
- Healed the sick.
- Prayed for the people.
- Performed miracles.²⁵

In September 1823, Joseph Smith was visited by a heavenly messenger named Moroni, in the same way that angels often appeared to Church leaders in the New Testament. Moroni informed Joseph that God had a work for him to do and told him that a record of the ancient inhabitants of the American continent was buried in a nearby hill. He stated that the record contained the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Joseph Smith—History 1:27–34).²⁶

In September 1827, Joseph received the record, which was written on thin plates of gold. Joseph translated the book into English by the inspiration of God and called the book the Book of Mormon. It is named after Mormon, an ancient prophet who compiled the sacred record. The book verifies, as another testament of Christ, the reality and divinity of Jesus Christ.

It is, then, a second witness that affirms the truth of the Bible. Since its publishing in 1830, the Book of Mormon has blessed the lives of millions of people through its powerful message about Jesus Christ and His gospel.²⁷

God the Father

In Mormon theology God is our Father in Heaven (**Mt 6:9**). We call God Heavenly Father because He is the Father of our spirits and we are created in His image (**Ge 1:27**).

God has a body that looks like ours, though His body is immortal, perfected and has a glory beyond description. He knows us personally and loves us more than we can comprehend. To help you find happiness in this life and guide us to return to live with Him, God has provided a plan called “the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” a guide based on the life and teachings of His Son.

Jesus Christ taught that we must know the only true God to have eternal life (**Jn 17:3**) and we must know who He is and what He is like to find greater peace and joy, both in this life and in the life to come.²⁸

Jesus Christ

Under the direction of our Heavenly Father, as the Son of God, Jesus Christ created the earth (**Jn 1:10**; **Heb 1:1–2**). Through His resurrection, He overcame death for us. Everyone—the righteous and wicked alike—will receive the gift of resurrection at the end of life on this earth when Jesus Christ will serve as the final Judge (**Ac 17:31**; **Jn 5:21–22**; **Ac 10:42**).

Returning to live with God when we die is only possible through the Savior Jesus Christ (**Jn 14:6**). It is through the Atonement provided by Christ in His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and by His suffering and the voluntary surrender of His life on the cross that He saves us from our sins as we repent and follow Him (**1 Pe 2:21**).

If we follow the example of Christ as closely as possible, we will not only find joy in our life, but we will return to live with Him and our Father in Heaven. This requires:

- Have faith in Him (**Mk 11:22–24**).
- Repent of your sins (**Ac 2:38**).
- Receive baptism (**Jn 3:3–6**), the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the other ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Keep His commandments (**Jn 14:15**).

Today, as in the days of Jesus Christ, there are certain principles of the gospel that people are to learn to obey.

The first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are:

- First, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Second, repentance.
- Third, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.
- Fourth, laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Instead of the belief in the trinity, Mormons believe that Jesus Christ is one of God’s literal offspring, just as Satan was, making them “spirit brothers.”

The Web site for the Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints, as the Mormon Church is officially called, addresses the issue:

“On first hearing, the doctrine that Lucifer and our Lord, Jesus Christ, are brothers may seem surprising to some—especially to those unacquainted with latter-day revelations. But both the scriptures and the prophets affirm that Jesus Christ and Lucifer are indeed offspring of our Heavenly Father and, therefore, spirit brothers. Jesus Christ was with the Father from the beginning. Lucifer, too, was an angel “who was in authority in the presence of God,” a “son of the morning” (Isa. 14:12).²⁹

Both Jesus and Lucifer were strong leaders with great knowledge and influence. But as the Firstborn of the Father, Jesus was Lucifer’s older brother (Col. 1:15).³⁰ How could two such great spirits become so totally opposite? The answer lies in the principle of agency, which has existed from all eternity.³¹ Of Lucifer, the scripture says that because of rebellion “he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies.” (Moses 4:4.) Note that he was not created evil, but became Satan by his own choice.

It is believed that when our Father in Heaven presented His plan of salvation, Jesus sustained the plan and His part in it, giving the glory to God, to whom it properly belonged. Lucifer, on the other hand, sought power, honor, and glory only for himself (Isa. 14:13–14; Moses 4:1–2). When he rebelled against God he was cast out of heaven with those who had sided with him”(Rev. 12:7–9).³²

The Commandments

The LDS Church teaches that our Heavenly Father is the source of all truth who loves us and wants to answer our questions. Therefore, He will help us recognize the truth as we sincerely seek it and ask Him for guidance. The feelings of love, peace and joy are from the Holy Ghost and are a personal revelation to us that the restored Gospel is true thus confirming the truth of the Book of Mormon and the gospel of Jesus Christ as restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

The last prophet of the Book of Mormon, a man named Moroni, gave this remarkable promise to anyone who wants to know whether the Book of Mormon is true:

“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (**Moroni 10:4**).

You can discover for yourselves that what you’ve been learning is true by:

- Sincerely praying to your Heavenly Father and asking Him if what you are learning is true.
- Continuing to study and give thoughtful consideration to what you are learning.
- Listening with your heart for the Holy Ghost to whisper the truth to you.
- Following God’s commandments so you can feel the influence of the Holy Ghost.³³

Heavenly Father's Plan of Salvation

According to Mormons, our life did not begin at birth nor will it end at death. We have a spirit body (sometimes called the soul) and a physical body. Our Heavenly Father created our spirit, and we lived with Him as a spirit before we received our physical body and were born on earth. This period is called pre-earth life or premortal life.

Throughout our pre-earth life, we were taught the principles and commandments that would lead to happiness, with freedom to choose to grow in intelligence and love of the truth, or not. During this pre-earth life, Jesus Christ, then known as Jehovah was chosen as the Savior and we learned that, through Him, we would be able to overcome the effects of any wrong choices. God’s purpose—His work and His glory—is to see that the immortality (resurrection) and eternal life (life with God) of His children are realized. It is His desires to see every one of His children find peace in this life and a fullness of joy in His presence after this life. Our Heavenly Father knew that we could only progress to a certain point without the experience of mortality. **In order to become more like Him, we would need to receive a *physical body*.**³⁴

God our Father is the creator of our spirits, and we are created in His likeness physically. Thus, your Heavenly Father instituted His plan to help you reach your divine potential.

A Summary of Mormon Beliefs

Most of what orthodox Christianity considers 'odd' teachings are not initially taught to potential converts by the Mormons. Their explanation is that "they are revealed later as one matures and gains the ability to accept them." The LDS Church tries to make its official doctrines appear Christian but what underlies those "biblical" terms is far from the meaning maintained by historic Christianity.

Although some Mormons may disagree on a few points of doctrines listed, the authors of such doctrines are in good standing in the Mormon Church.

The Bible

"We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly. . ." ³⁵

"Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God." ³⁶

The Book of Mormon

The book of Mormon is more correct than the Bible. ³⁷

Since Mormonism teaches that the canon of Scripture was not closed when the Bible was completed, they have four sources in addition to the Bible, all of which they believe contain God's revelations: the Bible, the *Book of Mormon 2* (which contains over 4,000 changes since 1830), *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Pearl of Great Price*. ³⁸

It becomes obvious that the Mormons follow the teachings of these latter three books even when they contradict the Bible. Mormonism teaches that the Bible is the Word of God "as far as it is translated correctly." Whenever a Mormon belief contradicts Scripture, the Mormons claim that that particular part of Scripture is translated incorrectly, and that the correct translation is in one of the Mormon scriptures. ³⁹

God

God used to be a man on another planet. ⁴⁰

"The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's . . ." ⁴¹

"God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!!! . . . We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil, so that you may see."⁴²

"God the Father had a Father."⁴³

"God resides near a star called Kolob."⁴⁴

God had sexual relations with Mary to make the body of Jesus.⁴⁵

This one is disputed among many Mormons and not always 'officially' taught and believed. Nevertheless, Brigham Young, the second prophet of the Mormon church taught it.

"Therefore we know that both the Father and the Son are in form and stature perfect men; each of them possesses a tangible body . . . of flesh and bones."⁴⁶

God, becoming a god

After you become a good Mormon, you have the potential of becoming a god.⁴⁷

"Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them."⁴⁸

The god of our planet is believed to have once been a man on another planet, who through self-effort and the help of his own father-god, was appointed by a counsel of gods in the heavens to his high position as the god of planet Earth, and now has a physical, resurrected, glorified body.⁴⁹

Joseph Smith explained, "I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ Himself did."⁵⁰

"The Father has promised us that through our faithfulness we shall be blessed with the fullness of his kingdom. In other words we will have the privilege of becoming like him. To become like him we must have all the powers of godhood; thus a man and his wife when glorified will have spirit children who eventually will go on an earth like this one we are on and pass through the same kind of experiences, being subject to mortal conditions, and if faithful, then they also will

receive the fullness of exaltation and partake of the same blessings. There is no end to this development; it will go on forever. We will become gods and have jurisdiction over the world, and the world will be peopled by our own offspring. We will have an endless eternity for this."⁵¹

Through the atonement of Christ and by their good deeds and "holy" living, men can one day become gods, and with their multiplicity of "goddess wives," populate their own planets. This is what the celestial marriage and the Mormon temple vows are all about.

Mormon theology, therefore, humanizes God and deifies man.

God, many gods

There are many gods.⁵²

"And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light: and there was light."⁵³

God, mother goddess

There is a mother god.⁵⁴

God is married to his goddess wife and has spirit children.⁵⁵

God, Trinity

The trinity is three separate Gods: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. "That these three are separate individuals, physically distinct from each other, is demonstrated by the accepted records of divine dealings with man."⁵⁶

. "Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God [anyhow]—three in one and one in three . . . It is curious organization . . . All are crammed into one God according to sectarianism (Christian faith). It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster."⁵⁷

Trinity. Mormonism teaches polytheism (versus monotheism taught in the Bible), believing that the universe is inhabited by many gods who produce spirit children. Joseph Smith declared, "I will preach on the plurality of Gods. I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods."⁵⁸

Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie spoke about the Godhead in this way, "Plurality of Gods: Three separate personages: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a God, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of Gods exists. To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, these three are the only Gods we worship. But in addition there is an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods."⁵⁹

Jesus

The first spirit to be born in heaven was Jesus.⁶⁰

Jesus and Satan are spirit brothers and we were all born as siblings in heaven to them both.⁶¹

Jesus' sacrifice was not able to cleanse us from all our sins (murder and repeated adultery are exceptions).⁶²

"Therefore we know that both the Father and the Son are in form and stature perfect men; each of them possesses a tangible body . . . of flesh and bones."⁶³

"The birth of the Saviour was as natural as are the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood-was begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers."⁶⁴

"Christ was begotten by an Immortal Father in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers."⁶⁵

"Christ Not Begotten of Holy Ghost ...Christ was begotten of God. He was not born without the aid of Man, and that Man was God!"⁶⁶

"Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His mission in the flesh . . ."⁶⁷

Mormonism acknowledges the divinity of Christ, but as noted above, Mormon doctrine on what constitutes divinity does not meet the biblical standard. The LDS Church teaches that Jesus, Lucifer, and all the demons, as well as all mankind, are actually all spirit brothers and sisters, born in the spirit world as spirit babies to our man-god Heavenly Father and his goddess wives. This is based on the belief that God the Father ("Adam-god") had sexual relations on earth with Mary (his own spirit daughter), to produce the physical body of Jesus. Early Mormon apostles also asserted that Christ was a polygamist, and that His wives included Mary and Martha (the sisters of Lazarus) and Mary Magdalene.⁶⁸

Mormon Apostle McConkie explained, "And Christ was born into the world as a literal Son this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. He was begotten, conceived and born in the normal and natural course of events."⁶⁹

Jesus, according to Milton Hunter of the LDS First Council of the Seventy, is the brother of Lucifer: "The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the world was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind."⁷⁰

Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost is a male personage.⁷¹ The sixth LDS prophet, Joseph F. Smith, explains that the Holy Spirit is not a person but rather an impersonal force: "You may call it the Spirit of God, you may call it the influence of God's intelligence, you may call it the substance of his power; no matter what it is called, it is the spirit of intelligence that permeates the universe."⁷²

A distinction is drawn between the Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit. As LDS Apostle Marion G. Romney stated: "The Holy Ghost is a person, a spirit, the third member of the Godhead."⁷³

Baptism

Baptism for the dead.⁷⁴ This is a practice of baptizing each other in place of non-Mormons who are now dead. Their belief is that in the afterlife, the "newly baptized" person will be able to enter into a higher level of Mormon heaven.

Devil

"The Devil was born as a spirit after Jesus "in the morning of pre-existence."⁷⁵

Jesus and Satan are spirit brothers and we were all born as siblings in heaven to them both.⁷⁶

A plan of salvation was needed for the people of earth so Jesus offered a plan to the Father and Satan offered a plan to the Father but Jesus' plan was accepted. In effect the Devil wanted to be the Savior of all Mankind and to "deny men their agency and to dethrone God."⁷⁷

Sin

In Mormon theology, it is not quite clear how the first humans, Adam and Eve, came to live on this earth and received bodies, but somehow they did and began the process of human

procreation, whereby bodies are produced for their spirit children. But at the very beginning of the process of human generation, sin entered necessarily. The earthly bodies of Adam and Eve were intended to be immortal tabernacles for their spirits, "but it was necessary for them to possess through mortality and be redeemed through the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ that the fullness of life might come."⁷⁸ Therefore, they disobeyed God's commands. Since the fall of man was necessary, it became necessary for men to disobey God in order to do His will. Adam's fall, thereby, was a fall "upward."

On June 8, 1873, speaking from the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, Brigham Young said,

"The Devil told the truth ... I do not blame Mother Eve. I would not have had her miss eating the forbidden fruit for anything. . . ."⁷⁹

Another Mormon president declared,

"The fall of man came as a blessing in disguise. . . . We can hardly look upon anything resulting in such benefits [i.e., godhood] as a sin."⁸⁰

Incredibly, Mormonism is based upon the belief that Satan's central lie is the gospel truth!

Concerning the transmission of sin to Adam's posterity, Mormons take a negative position—they believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression. Having rejected the doctrine of the imputation of the guilt of sin, Latter-Day Saints likewise repudiate the transmission of inherent corruption or original sin.⁸¹

Gospel

The true gospel was lost from the earth. Mormonism is its restoration.⁸²

Consists of laws and ordinances: "As these sins are the result of individual acts it is just that forgiveness for them should be conditioned on individual compliance with prescribed requirements—'obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.'"⁸³

Heaven and Hell

There are three levels of heaven: telestial, terrestrial, and celestial.⁸⁴

These are three degrees of glory: the celestial is for good Mormons who are able to cease sinning in this lifetime; the terrestrial is for good people who do not comply with all the teachings of Mormonism and the telestial is for those who have lived unclean earthly lives.⁸⁵

There is a hell, but only for the "sons of perdition," a very small number of souls that cannot be redeemed. Then the vast majority of mankind will be "saved," though it should be obvious that no one will make it to the Celestial Kingdom. [Blacks used to be totally out of the equation: "Black people are black because of their misdeeds in the pre-existence."⁸⁶

"The Negro is an unfortunate man. He has been given a black skin. But that is nothing compared with that greater handicap. He is not permitted to receive the priesthood and the ordinances of the temple, necessary to prepare men and women to enter into and enjoy a fullness of glory in the Celestial Kingdom."⁸⁷ (Elder George E. Richards). In 1978, however, the Mormon Church announced that God had lifted his curse from the African race.

Everyone who lives and dies on this earth goes to a place called the Spirit Prison, except faithful Mormons, who go to Paradise. Mormon Spirit Missionaries go down from Paradise to the Spirit Prison and teach the Gospel of Joseph Smith to the lost Christians and others there. Those who accept Mormonism must remain in prison until a worthy Mormon performs certain essential rituals, called "Ordinances," for them in one of the Mormon Temples. Then they are released from Spirit Prison to join the Mormons in Paradise. Since these rituals or Ordinances require a physical body to be washed, anointed, baptized, etc., they can only be performed by a living person in the place and manner prescribed by Deity, acting under Universal (Mormon) cosmic laws.⁸⁸

Joseph Smith

If it had not been for Joseph Smith and the restoration, there would be no salvation. There is no salvation [the context is the full gospel including exaltation to Godhood] outside the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁸⁹

Pre-existence

We were first begotten as spirit children in heaven and then born naturally on earth.⁹⁰

The first spirit to be born in heaven was Jesus.⁹¹

The Devil was born as a spirit after Jesus "in the morning of pre-existence."⁹²

Prophets

We need prophets today, the same as in the Old Testament.⁹³

Atonement

"Jesus paid for all our sins when He suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane."⁹⁴

"We accept Christ's atonement by repenting of our sins, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and obeying all of the commandments."⁹⁵

Salvation

"One of the most fallacious doctrines originated by Satan and propounded by man is that man is saved alone by the grace of God; that belief in Jesus Christ alone is all that is needed for salvation."⁹⁶

A plan of salvation was needed for the people of earth so Jesus offered a plan to the Father and Satan offered a plan to the Father but Jesus' plan was accepted. In effect the Devil wanted to be the Savior of all Mankind and to "deny men their agency and to dethrone God."⁹⁷

Jesus' sacrifice was not able to cleanse us from all our sins (murder and repeated adultery are exceptions).⁹⁸

Good works are necessary for salvation.⁹⁹

There is no salvation without accepting Joseph Smith as a prophet of God.¹⁰⁰

"The first effect [of the atonement] is to secure to all mankind alike, exemption from the penalty of the fall, thus providing a plan of *General Salvation*. The second effect is to open a way for *Individual Salvation* whereby mankind may secure remission of personal sins."¹⁰¹

"As these sins are the result of individual acts it is just that forgiveness for them should be conditioned on individual compliance with prescribed requirements—'obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.'"¹⁰²

"This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best effort."¹⁰³

"We know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do."¹⁰⁴

Temple Rituals.

The following is a testimony of a former Mormon:

A typical temple ceremony would take place as follows: "The ritual began in a small cubicle where we had to strip completely. We then put on 'the shield,' a poncho with a hole for the head, but open on the sides (similar to a hospital gown). We went through a series of 'washings and anointings,' as various parts of our bodies were touched by elderly temple workers who mumbled appropriate incantations over them. Our Mormon underwear, 'the garments,' are said to have powers to protect us from 'the evil one.' It had occult markings, which were so 'sacred' that we were instructed to burn them when the garments wore out. The endowment ceremony mocked all doctrines held to by Biblical Christianity, and Christian pastors were portrayed as servants of Satan. We had to swear many blood oaths, promising we would forfeit our lives if we weren't faithful, or if we revealed any of the secrets revealed to us in the temple ceremonies. We were made to pretend by grotesque gestures to cut our throats, chests, and abdomens, indicating how we would lose our lives. We were never told who would kill us! The inference was, and history testifies to, that it would be the Mormon priesthood."¹⁰⁵

The blood oaths and portrayal of Christian pastors were removed in April of 1990, despite the fact that the ordinance was purported to have been given originally by a revelation and was never to be changed.¹⁰⁶

DOCTRINAL CHANGES

Many doctrines which were once taught by the LDS church and held to be fundamental and "eternal" have been abandoned. The issue is not whether the church was correct in abandoning them, but that a church claiming to be the church of God takes one "everlasting" position at one time and the opposite position at another. Yet at the same time the church claims to believe and proclaim "the word of God."

Some examples are:

- The Adam-God doctrine (Adam is God the Father);
- The United Order (all property of church members is to be held in common, with title in the church);
- Plural Marriage (polygamy; a man must have more than one wife to attain the highest degree of heaven);
- The Curse of Cain (the black race is not entitled to hold God's priesthood because it is cursed; this doctrine was not abandoned until 1978);
- Blood Atonement (some sins such as apostasy, adultery, murder, interracial marriage must be atoned for by the shedding of the sinner's blood, preferably by someone appointed to do so by church authorities).¹⁰⁷

Although every one of these doctrines were proclaimed by the reigning prophet to be the eternal Word of God to govern the church forevermore, all have been abandoned by the present church.

Many other unusual teachings are part of LDS doctrine which is not "revealed" until a person has been in the church for a long time. The rationale given by the church is that such teachings are not revealed to those showing interest in the church or to new converts because such persons are not yet mature enough to go beyond the "milk" of LDS doctrine. Could it be that the Mormons realize that if those who show interest in the church really knew of these highly unusual teachings they may not join the church. Some of these bizarre teachings are:

- God was once a man like us.
- God has a tangible body of flesh and bone.
- God lives on a planet near the star Kolob.
- God ("Heavenly Father") has at least one wife, our "Mother in Heaven," but she is so holy that we are not to discuss her nor pray to her.
- Jesus was married.
- We can become like God and rule over our own universe.
- There are many gods, ruling over their own worlds.
- Jesus and Satan ("Lucifer") are brothers, and they are our brothers - we are all spirit children of Heavenly Father
- Jesus Christ was conceived by God the Father by having sex with Mary, who was temporarily his wife.
- We should not pray to Jesus, nor try to feel a personal relationship with him.
- The "Lord" ("Jehovah") in the Old Testament is the being named Jesus in the New Testament, but different from "God the Father" ("Elohim").
- In the highest degree of the celestial kingdom some men will have more than one wife.
- Before coming to this earth we lived as spirits in a "pre-existence", during which we were tested; our position in this life (whether born to Mormons or savages, or in America or Africa) is our reward or punishment for our obedience in that life.
- Dark skin is a curse from God, the result of our sin, or the sin of our ancestors. If sufficiently righteous, a dark-skinned person will become light-skinned.
- The Garden of Eden was in Missouri. All humanity before the Great Flood lived in the western hemisphere. The Ark transported Noah and the other survivors to the eastern hemisphere.
- Not only will human beings be resurrected to eternal life, but also all animals - everything that has ever lived on earth - will be resurrected and dwell in heaven.
- Christ will not return to earth in any year that has seen a rainbow.
- Mormons should avoid traveling on water, since Satan rules the waters.
- The sun receives its light from the star Kolob.

- If a Gentile becomes Mormon, the Holy Ghost actually purges his Gentile blood and replaces it with Israelite blood.
- A righteous Mormon will actually see the face of God in the Mormon temple.
- You can identify a false angel by the color of his hair, or by offering to shake his hand.¹⁰⁸

OUTRAGEOUS CLAIMS OF JOSEPH SMITH AND BRIGHAM YOUNG

Joseph Smith

"God made Aaron to be the mouthpiece for the children of Israel, and **He will make me to be God to you** in His stead, and the elders to be mouth for me; and if you don't like it, you must lump it."¹⁰⁹
(Emphasis added)

"**I have more to boast of than ever any man had.** I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, **nor Jesus** ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as **I.**"¹¹⁰ (Emphasis added)

"The whole Earth shall bear me witness that I, like the towering rock in the midst of the ocean, which has withstood the mighty surges of the warring waves for centuries, am impregnable . . . I combat the errors of ages; I meet the violence of mobs; I cope with illegal proceedings from executive authority; I cut the gordian knot of powers, and I solve mathematical problems of universities, with truth—diamond truth; and God is my right hand man."¹¹¹

"And **I prophesy in the name of the Lord God of Israel**, unless the United States redress the wrongs committed upon the Saints in Missouri and punish the crimes committed by her officers that **in a few years the government will be utterly overthrown and wasted and there will not be so much as a potsherd left . . .**"¹¹² (Emphasis added)

This prophecy was made in May of 1843, and the United States government has not been overthrown and wasted.

"Here then is eternal life—to know the only wise **and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves**, and to be kings and priests to God, the **same as all Gods have done before you . . .**"¹¹³
(Emphasis added)

"In the beginning, **the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods;** and **they** came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it."¹¹⁴
(Emphasis added)

"The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead."¹¹⁵

Brigham Young

"I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they **may not call Scripture.** Let me have the privilege of correcting a sermon, and **it is as good a scripture.**"¹¹⁶ (Emphasis added)

"I say, rather than the **apostates** should flourish here, **I will unsheath my Bowie knife, and conquer or die. Now, you nasty apostates, clear out,** or judgment will be put on the line . . . If you say it is right, raise your hands, let us call upon the Lord to assist us in this, and **every good work.**"¹¹⁷
(Emphasis added)

"I could refer you to **plenty of instances where men have been righteously slain, in order to atone for their sins . . .** This is loving our neighbor as ourselves, if he needs help, help him, and if he wants salvation and it is necessary to spill his blood on the earth in order that he may be **saved, spill it.**"¹¹⁸ (Emphasis added)

Many were killed under what is called the "Blood Atonement Doctrine." Leaving Mormonism was one of the sins that the blood of Jesus could not atone for, and a person's own blood must be shed by Mormon priests as an atonement for sin.¹¹⁹

"I intend to meet them on their own grounds . . . **and if any miserable scoundrel comes here, cut their throats.**"¹²⁰ (Emphasis added)

And they obeyed; a wagon train of innocent men, women, and children were massacred at Mountain Meadows under the orders of Brigham Young. They were passing through Utah, and Brigham thought they were from Illinois where Joseph Smith had been killed. Many more were "atoned."¹²¹ (Emphasis added)

"**Gold and silver grow,** and so does every other kind of metal, **the same as the hair upon my head or** the wheat in the field . . ." ¹²² (Emphasis added)

"Who can tell us of the **inhabitants of this little planet** that shines of an evening, **called the Moon?** . . . So it is with regard to the **inhabitants of the Sun.** Do you not think it is inhabited? I rather think it is. **Do you think there is any life there? No Question of it;** it was not made in vain."¹²³ (Emphasis added)

"Do you think **we shall ever be admitted as a State into the Union without denying the principal of polygamy?** If we are not admitted until then, **we shall never be admitted.**"¹²⁴ (Emphasis added)

The Edmunds Act was passed in 1882 forbidding polygamy in the territory, and only then was Utah allowed to enter the Union. At that point the LDS church officially gave up polygamy. Another false prophecy from the Mormon prophet!

"I think these preliminaries will satisfy me, and I feel prepared to take my text. It is the words of Jesus Christ, **but where they are in the Bible I cannot tell you now,** for I have not taken pains to look at them. I have had so much to do, that **I have not read the Bible for many years.** I used to read and study it, **but did not understand the spirit and meaning of it . . .**"¹²⁵ (Emphasis added)

ARE MORMON BELIEFS CHRISTIAN?

To the question, "Are Mormons Christian" we have the following response in 2007:

All Americans

No	31%
Don't know	17%
Yes	52%

Evangelical Protestants

No	45%
Don't know	15% ¹²⁶

Does the Bible teach that God the Father used to be a man on another planet and that He became a God by following the laws and ordinances of that God on that planet? Did God the Father come to this world with his wife (who became a goddess) and produce a spirit offspring in heaven, which include Jesus, the devil, and all human beings, who are all brothers and sisters born in their preexistence? Is there any scriptural basis for the teaching that the preexistent spirits came down and inhabited babies at the time of birth and with their memories of their pre-existence being lost at the time. If Mormonism is Christian, why can only faithful Mormons, who

exhibit obedience to the teachings of the Mormon Church and pay a full 10% tithe of their income to the church, have the potential of becoming gods of their own planets and able to perpetuate such a process over again?

Is the Bible is not really trustworthy, as Mormons teach? Was the true faith lost, and did its leader, Joseph Smith, restore the so-called "true" Christian faith?

Mormonism is considered a cult by Christians who believe the Bible to be the Word of God. Mormon beliefs are clearly aberrant and unbiblical. Joseph Smith fits the warning Jesus gave in Matthew 24:24 when he pointed out that in the last days many false christs and false prophets will arise and deceive many.

SUMMARY

The Mormon Church uses Christian terms but has radically changed the meanings of those terms. So, when it says that Mormons believe in the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, they are really saying they believe in a God from another planet, with a goddess wife, who literally is the father of Jesus, and that there is a spirit being, the Holy Ghost, who is another God. God the father used to be a man on another planet, that He became a God by following the laws and ordinances of that God on that planet and came to this world with his wife (she became a goddess), and that they produce a spirit offspring in heaven. These spirit offspring, which includes Jesus, the devil, and you and me, are all brothers and sisters born in the preexistence. The preexistence spirits come down and inhabit babies at the time of birth and their memories of the preexistence are lost at the time. Faithful Mormons who pay a full 10% tithe of their income to the Mormon church through Mormon temples, have the potential of becoming gods of their own planets and are then able to start the procedure over again.

CHAPTER 8 CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

Christian Science was founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1866 and is practiced by members as well as others who are non-members of **The First Church of Christ, Scientist** (also called **The Mother Church**) in Boston, Massachusetts. "On April 12, 1879, it was voted at a Christian Scientist Association to organize a church **to commemorate the words and works of our Master, a Mind-healing church, without a creed, to be called the Church of Christ, Scientist**, the first such church ever organized."¹ At this meeting, "on motion of Mrs. Eddy, it was voted—To organize a church designed to commemorate the word and works of our Master, which should **reinstate primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing**."² "The charter for this church was obtained in June, 1879."³ (Emphasis added)

The Church of Christ, Scientist, consists of The First Church of Christ, Scientist, (The Mother Church) and **over 1,700 branch churches and societies** throughout the world. They are united in working to fulfill Mary Baker Eddy's vision of "a church which makes Christ Jesus works more universally understood and practiced."⁴

Christian Science is presented as a resurgence of primitive Christianity as a demonstrable scientific system. It is described as Science because it is based upon a set of spiritual principles or laws which relate to the nature of God and His creation that can be applied with expected, consistent results. Mary Baker Eddy describes her religion as a complete and coherent Science which is both demonstrable and provable. Its central texts are The Bible and the Christian Science textbook, *Science & Health With Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy.

The name includes Christian because it uses the Bible as its basis of theology and practice as Christian Scientists seek to follow the teachings and ministry of Christ Jesus. The virgin birth, the crucifixion, the resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus, etc, are all central to Christian Science theology.

Christian Science might be considered an extreme form of philosophical idealism or as a form of theistic monistic idealism in that **there is but one substance which is God and in whom all are embraced in love**. Therefore immortality is not only possible but inevitable. The reality of each person is believed to be a spiritual idea only and not born of the flesh. Therefore, just as the material body is an illusion, so are sin, disease and death. This means that **humanity and the universe as a whole are spiritual rather than material in nature and truth and good are real, whereas evil and error are illusive products of a fictitious material existence**.⁵

Furthermore, they believe that Jesus overcame death as the ultimate demonstration of spiritual reality.

Christian Science claims that Christian Science, like Buddhism, believes in the illusory nature of the world of the senses, but unlike Buddhism it does not believe that aging and death are inevitable. It is their belief that they can overcome sin or the mortal mind according to their understanding of John 8:51 in which Jesus claims:

“I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, **he will never see death.**”

Christian Scientists focus on prayer believing that it **is through prayer, knowing and understanding, all things are possible for good through God.**

It was through the recovery from an injury in 1866 after reading a Bible passage describing one of Jesus' cures that Mrs. Eddy wrote that she learned the Christian Science method of healing.

Mrs. Eddy became convinced that healing was lost after the early centuries of Christianity. She was also persuaded through her study of Scripture that **the healing Jesus Christ practiced is available to everyone as much today as in biblical times.**

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Fundamental to Christian Science is the belief that God and His creation are entirely good and spiritual because He who is Spirit has made everything in His likeness. Therefore spiritual reality or divine idea is the only reality. Everything else is an illusion. Although it is acknowledged by Christian Science that all people “seem” to be experiencing a material existence, it is that very experience which ultimately results in a true spiritual understanding of God and creation. And it is by healing through prayer that makes it possible.⁶

Rather than viewing prayer as a way of having God intervene, Christian Science sees prayer as a process of learning more of God's reality—spiritual reality—that is. Health care is the typical approach of Christian Science toward those who seek help. Instead of attempting to find health through drugs, surgery or other conventional methods, Christian Science treats the person with a “specific form of prayer intended to spiritualize thought.”⁷

Even though Christian Science does not put down the medical profession, it cannot work together in any meaningful way since the medical profession approaches illness from the standpoint that something is physically broken and needs to be treated physically, whereas Christian Science holds that since the spiritual reality is harmonious and perfect any belief that contradicts such a notion needs to be challenged and corrected. This fits with Eddy's definition of Christian Science: “. . . the law of God, the law of good, interpreting and demonstrating the divine Principle and rule of universal harmony.”⁸ This is “. . . the natural law of harmony which overcomes discord.”⁹ It is no wonder that Eddy claims that Christian Science is the Divine Comforter mentioned in the gospel of John.

THEOLOGY

BIBLE

Mary Baker Eddy grew up in the Congregational Church in New England and learned early to believe and love the Bible. This is why she considered the Bible to be central to the study and practice of Christian Science and its system of healing. It was through the study of the Bible that Eddy found not only inspiration and guidance, but what she considered to be the spiritual laws of health and healing that undergirded Jesus' teachings and works. She testified in her book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, that the Bible was her "chart of life":

"The Bible has been my only authority . . . my only textbook . . . [and] contains the recipe for all healing."¹⁰

The Bible and *Science and Health* are the textbooks for self-instruction in Christian Science. A weekly Bible Lesson, made up of selections from these two books, is available for individual study. This same weekly Bible Lesson also serves as the Sunday sermon that is read in Christian Science church services throughout the world. The *Christian Science Quarterly* Bible Lessons are published in 14 languages and are available in print, audio, and electronic formats.¹²

Yet she also believed that the Bible was filled with internal contradictions:

"The decisions by vote of Church Councils as to what should and should not be considered Holy Writ; **the manifest mistakes in the ancient versions**; the thirty thousand different readings in the Old Testament, and the three hundred thousand in the New—**these facts show how a mortal and material sense stole into the divine record, with its own hue darkening to some extent the inspired pages.**"¹³

GOD THE FATHER/MOTHER

Christian Science believes that

"God is incorporeal Spirit—creative Principle, supreme, omnipotent Father-Mother, omnipresent, omniscient—the only intelligence and all that actually exists. God is Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, and Love. 'God is All-in-all.'"¹⁴

God then is "one, infinite God who is All and all-good."¹⁵ God is not distant and unknowable, but all-encompassing and omnipresent. Each person is loved by God, cared for by Him and made in His image, a spiritual, not material image

God is regarded as being both Father and Mother who has both qualities traditionally considered feminine (gentleness, kindness, compassion, nurturing, etc) and qualities traditionally considered masculine (strength, power, support, protection, etc.). According to Christian Science, because people are made in God's image, every person embodies those very qualities as well.¹⁶

JESUS AND CHRIST

Christian Scientists believe that Jesus' teachings and healing work **expressed scientific Christianity**, that is, He applied the laws of God, laws which are still practical and provable today, by anyone, anywhere. Therefore the Commandments and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount are considered central to their life and practice of Christianity.¹⁷

"Jesus" the man, and "Christ" the divine manifestation, are distinguished in Christian Science theology:

Jesus Christ has a dual nature—Jesus the mortal man and Christ the spiritual idea of man.

“Christ is the ideal Truth, that comes to heal sickness and sin through Christian Science, and attributes all power to God. Jesus is the name of the man who, more than all other men, has presented Christ, the true idea of God, healing the sick and sinning and destroying the power of death. **Jesus is the human man, and Christ is the divine idea; hence, the duality of Jesus the Christ.**”¹⁸

(Emphasis added)

Because Christian Science defines God as "The great I AM," Christ is the "divine manifestation of God, which comes to the flesh to destroy incarnate error."¹⁹ Christ, who is completely divine and spiritual, therefore, is not material. Thus Jesus, the son of God—the promised Messiah—embodied Christ to such a degree that He, and He alone, can carry the title Christ. As a corporeal being, however, he was not the totality of Christ. Christian Scientists argue that Jesus never claimed to be God and that he implicitly denied it in Matthew 19:16-17 when He said:

“Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, ‘teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?’

‘Why do you ask Me about what is good?’ Jesus replied. **‘There is only One who is good.** If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.’”

Mrs. Eddy writes, "Throughout all generations both before and after the Christian era, the Christ, as the spiritual idea—the reflection of God—has come with some measure of power and grace to all prepared to receive Christ, Truth."²⁰ She believed that even today, the Christ, the Truth, continues to offer to mankind the truth of a greater understanding of its spiritual identity through healing and thereby the destruction of sin.

Christian Science **rejects the substitutionary atonement of Christ** while accepting the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus—a spiritual resurrection—that is.

The claim is that Jesus only **seemed to die on the cross**. Jesus' triumph was His victory over the belief in death since disease and death are not real. Therefore Jesus' shed blood had no power to cleanse from sin.

"His disciples believed Jesus to be dead while he was hidden in the sepulcher, whereas he was alive, demonstrating within the narrow tomb the power of Spirit to overrule mortal, material sense Our Master fully and finally demonstrated divine Science in his victory over death and the grave."²¹

"Does erudite theology regard the crucifixion of Jesus chiefly as providing a ready pardon for all sinners who ask for it and are willing to be forgiven? . . . Then we must differ. . . .

The efficacy of the crucifixion lay in the practical affection and goodness it demonstrated for mankind. The truth had been lived among men; but until they saw that it enabled their Master to triumph over the grave, his own disciples could not admit such an event to be possible. . . .

The spiritual essence of blood is sacrifice. The efficacy of Jesus' spiritual offering is infinitely greater than can be expressed by our sense of human blood. The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed upon "the accursed tree," than when it was flowing in his veins as he went daily about his Father's business."²²

"One sacrifice, however great, is insufficient to pay the debt of sin. The atonement requires constant self-immolation on the sinner's part. That God's wrath should be vented upon His beloved Son, is divinely unnatural. Such a theory is man-made."²³

When Mrs. Eddy was asked how she knew there ever was such a person as Christ Jesus, she replied:

"If there had never existed such a person as the Galilean Prophet, it would make no difference to me. I should still know that God's spiritual ideal is the only real man in His image and likeness."²⁴ (Emphasis added)

Although Eddy was undoubtedly making a basic metaphysical point, nevertheless such a point distorts the Person of Jesus Christ we find in Scripture.²⁵

Since Christian Science teaches that death is an illusion, it is not surprising that there are contradictory statements on the question of the death of Jesus in Eddy's writings.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Christian Science **denies that the Holy Spirit is a personal being.** In fact, it claims that the Holy Spirit is Christian Science:

"This Comforter I understand to be Divine Science."²⁶

This means it is the infinite mind of God and the unfolding of His thoughts.²⁷

The historic Christian concept of God, the Holy Spirit, indwelling a person then is impossible.²⁸

THE TRINITY

Unlike orthodox Christianity, Christian Science **subsumes the trinity in the unity of God,** Christ and divine Science, or: "God the Father-Mother; Christ the spiritual idea of sonship; divine Science or the Holy Comforter."²⁹

In the after-life there is a period of "probation" and spiritual development or progress based upon one's progress of spiritual enlightenment in this life. The experience of the deceased is in proportion to their ability to avail themselves of the unlimited love of God. A person dying in a state of sin would experience God's love as suffering (like a person used to darkness whose eyes are hurt by the light) while someone who passed on in a state of spiritualized consciousness would experience a corresponding level of happiness.³⁰

Mrs. Eddy clearly repudiates the trinitarian Godhead:

"The theory of three persons in one God (that is, a personal Trinity or Tri-unity) suggests polytheism, rather than the one ever-present I Am."³¹

Instead,

"Life, Truth, and Love constitutes the triune Person called God . . . God the Father-Mother; Christ the spiritual idea of sonship; divine Science or the Holy Comforter."³² (Emphasis added)

Christian Science considers the orthodox concept of the trinity as paganistic with its "heathen gods."³³

DEATH, HEAVEN AND HELL

According to Christian Science:

“Death is the belief in death. There is no death as humans are immortal spirit. After that which we call "death," spiritual development toward Truth continues until all evil, or ‘error,’ destroys itself. Heaven and hell are not places, but states of consciousness that continue after death. ‘Heaven’ is the self-made eternal bliss of realizing oneness with God. ‘Hell’ is the self-made anguish of believing in pain and death.”³⁴

The concept of eternal punishment then is absent in Christian Science thinking. Hell and heaven are not places of punishment and reward, but **states of thought** that correspond to the presence or absence of self-centeredness that characterize the individual undergoing the experience of death. What this means is that a person who seems to die (since death is merely an illusion) does not go to a place or location. Rather he/she simply adjusts to another level of consciousness which is inaccessible to those they have left behind. **The ultimate, and inevitable, goal of all people is the experience of heaven or harmony which in reality is divine Love.** This does not mean that death is necessary for the experience of heaven, but that heaven or harmony can be experienced here and now to the extent that one's thought is elevated to a spiritual level.³⁵

THE RESURRECTION

Because Christian Science teaches that Jesus never physically died on the cross to atone for sins that mankind cannot commit, then the resurrection must have a unique and twisted meaning.³⁶

Eddy explains,

"When Jesus reproduced his body after its burial, he revealed the myth or material falsity of evil; its powerlessness to destroy good and the omnipotence of the Mind that knows this: he also showed forth the error of nothingness of supposed life in matter, and the great somethingness of the good we possess, which is of Spirit, and immortal."³⁷

Jesus' resurrection was thus the manifestation of the error of evil. He demonstrated that sin and death are illusions and that if one wishes to rid themselves of these illusions, they only need to deny their reality.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Instead of following other philosophical systems that would pit "good versus evil" as in orthodox Christianity or "spirit versus matter" as in Gnosticism, Eddy reduced everything to the spiritual realm.

The problem of evil is solved in Christian Science theology by the belief that **evil is not real but is an illusion:**

"Evil is the belief in evil. God is all that is real and God is completely good; therefore, good is real and evil is an illusion/delusion. The only power evil has is to destroy itself; attempts to destroy good naturally result in punishment for the evildoer. Sin creates its own hell. Not realizing one's true nature as spirit results in selfishness, which can lead to error and disharmony."³⁸ (Emphasis added)

Christian Science claims that the Bible does not mention Adam as having "awakened." Such an awakening is considered by Christian Science as a "revolution in thought."³⁹ According to Christian Scientists, if one's belief in evil is replaced by the understanding of the true universality of good, one's perception will also change thus rendering the question meaningless and irrelevant.

PRAYER AND HEALING

It was because of her own ill health through her childhood and into adult years that motivated Mrs. Eddy to study the Bible concerning the issue of healing. This led her to alternative methods of healing which were considered unorthodox by those who used medical techniques which had failed her. She became interested in the various "healers" at that time and at the age of 41 sought a cure from a healer, Phineas P. Quimby (1802-1866). Although Quimby had been a clockmaker with relatively little education, he had developed a method of natural healing which involved techniques of hypnotism and animal magnetism with emphasis on the

role of the human mind in achieving physical health. Quimby felt that **the key to healing was in mutual faith or trust**. This meant that the healer needs to have confidence in the patient's recovery and vice versa.⁴⁰

Mrs. Eddy became a student and an associate-in-training under Quimby until his death in 1866. Although her health initially improved under his care, she later suffered a relapse and shortly thereafter fell on an icy sidewalk and was severely injured. It was on what she believed to be her deathbed that she read one of Jesus' healings and suddenly realized that healing comes not from internal bodily processes, or from the power of a person's mind, but from the Divine Mind, God. As a result she was instantly cured.⁴¹

Like the Apostle Paul, Mrs. Eddy withdrew from society for three years in order to give herself to serious study of the Scriptures. It was during this time that she discovered the source of her healing. In order to share such knowledge with others she wrote her foundational book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, a book which had sold ten million copies by 2001. Mrs. Eddy later published 16 other books and has since been published in over 17 languages, and is available in English Braille, on audio cassette, CD, and in software packages.⁴²

Quimby's position involved the dualism between mind-spirit and matter with emphasis on the supremacy of mind over matter. Unlike Quimby who was antagonistic towards Christianity, Mrs. Eddy saw herself as deeply committed to Christian beliefs. Although Mrs. Eddy was clearly influenced by Quimby's emphasis on the role the mind played in healing, she, however, came to the conclusion that it was the Divine Mind—God—who healed, not the human mind. Thus through a spiritual interpretation of the Bible, Mrs. Eddy believed she had rediscovered its original truths as practiced by the early Christian church.⁴³

Prayer is an understanding of God and the nature of His creation—a spiritual creation. The world we claim that appeals to the senses is in reality a distorted version of the world of spiritual ideas—the only true reality.

It is through prayer that that very distortion is brought into the Kingdom of Heaven (in biblical terms), that is, spiritual reality. Prayer enables us to see the spiritual creation more clearly. This is analogous to adjusting the lens of a telescope or microscope until a clear image appears. The result is healing. In Christian Science thinking then, there are not two creations—a spiritual one and a material one—but only a spiritual creation which is perceived as material even though in reality it is spiritual.⁴⁴

Christian Scientists believe Jesus was "**the Wayshower**" of the divine method of healing sin, sickness and death. This means there are no limits to the type of medical conditions that can be healed through prayer. They believe that **faith is the key that unlocks all possibilities**. In fact, they claim that followers of Jesus can calm a storm (Lk 8:22-25) or raise the dead (Lk 8:49-50) as Jesus did if they exercise that faith.

Unlike orthodox Christianity, Christian Science does not teach that one needs to pray through Jesus Christ as a sole mediator. Because Jesus of Nazareth was not God, but the Son of God, He is not necessary for prayer to be effectual.

It is the conviction of Christian Science that **prayer works through love** and point to biblical texts such as Mark 16:17-18; Matthew 10:8 in support of their contention that **Christian faith requires results**, that is, actual demonstration in healing. They cite Luke 17:5-6 to show that such faith is a demonstration of their **belief in the omnipotence of God**:

“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’

He replied,

‘If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and **it will obey you.**”

Christian Scientists take Jesus’ promise literally:

“If you believe, you will receive **whatever you ask for in prayer**” (Mt 21:22).

They also cite Matthew 7:7-11 to show that Jesus taught that we should claim good as being present, right here and now, and that this will result in healing. Christian Scientists point to Jesus' teaching in John 14:12 that **His followers would do "greater works" than He did** and that a person who lived in conformity with His teachings **would not be subject even to death** (Jn 8:51).⁴⁵

Christian Science is clear that **effectual prayer and moral regeneration are intricately tied together**:

“. . . signs and wonders are wrought in the metaphysical healing of physical disease; but these signs are only to demonstrate its divine origin, to attest the reality of **the higher mission of the Christ-power to take away the sins of the world.**”⁴⁶ (Emphasis added)

Disease is considered mental since it is rooted in ignorance, mortal fear or sin which considers ill-health an eventual necessity. Such a lack of belief is an ignorance of God's love, goodness and power. They believe that when the erroneous belief—unbelief—is corrected, the sickness will disappear. Suffering, therefore, is lodged in one’s belief. It occurs only when one believes—whether consciously or unconsciously—in the supposed reality of a given problem. It is by changing one's understanding that the belief is exposed as being false and thus the acknowledgement breaks the cycle of the power of sickness. This is why the regeneration of heart and mind that brings about physical healing is a most significant element of healing.

Eddy makes an important distinction between the healing of sin (or moral evil) on the one hand, and the healing of sickness or disease on the other:

"The only difference between the healing of sin and the healing of sickness is, that **sin must be uncovered before it can be destroyed, and the moral sense be aroused to reject the sense of error**; while sickness must be covered with the veil of harmony, and the consciousness be allowed to rejoice in the sense that it has nothing to mourn over, but something to forget."⁴⁷ (Emphasis added)

The material world is an illusion due to a misperception of the true spiritual world. By the reorientation of thought or prayer the illusion can be dispelled, revealing the present spiritual reality. It is such a result which is perceived as healing.

The Christian Science Church does not forbid the use of medicine by its members except in the case of Christian Science Centers which may require certain employees to sign a statement of principles. Most of them prefer to use prayer and to rely on God even though they may respect medical practitioners. Yet most of them are practical when it comes to using material aids such as vision correction, splints for broken bones and dental services and will use what they consider appropriate or useful at the time. At the same time, they do claim that numerous claims of healings of near- and far-sightedness, dental problems and broken bones have been cured.^{[12] 6 o 15} According to Eddy:

"If Christian Scientists ever fail to receive aid from other Scientists—their brethren upon whom they may call – **God will still guide them into the right use of temporary and eternal means.**"⁴⁸ (Emphasis added)

She also stated:

"It is impossible to gain control over the body in any other way [divine Mind-Prayer]. On this fundamental point, timid conservatism is absolutely inadmissible. **Only through radical reliance on Truth can scientific healing power be Realized.**"⁴⁹ (Emphasis added)

It is not blind faith that brings healing, but a growing understanding of God and a recognition of one's identity as God's reflection gained through the study of Christian Science. In fact, it is the byproduct of drawing closer to God through the increasing knowledge of the loving kindness of His divine laws and the perfection of His spiritual creation.

Christian Scientists often pray for themselves and find healing. If one feels the need for additional prayerful assistance, however, he or she can call a Christian Science practitioner. Practitioners are men and women who devote their full time to helping others through prayer.

The practitioners claim no personal healing power, nor do they act as intercessors. God alone heals. The practitioner, like the patient, turns to God and humbly seeks His direction and follow His guidance.

MAN

Christian Science views "man" as the perfect reflection or expression of God who is wholly good and perfect:

The universe and humans are reflections of God's likeness and image, which is Spirit—without beginning or end.”⁵⁰

Furthermore it is believed that

“Illusions, or delusions, of a material world and material body result from error in thought and ignorance of the true and only nature of reality, which is spiritual.”⁵¹

Therefore, “God is all that truly exists.”⁵²

Because God is the creator of all, He loves every individual.

Christian Scientists teaches that we are all sons/daughters of God, though not at the level of understanding of Christ Jesus. Jesus was a divine Exemplar, and Christ is the divine idea of ‘sonship’—the Master. Jesus showed the way (the “wayshower”) for all to realize Truth, which is God.”

LOVE

In rejecting the “futility” of mere intellectualism or "coldness" of traditional philosophy, Eddy emphasized the importance of spiritual love as well as abstract thought and the integration of thought and feeling. To her it is not enough to think true thoughts, rather our consciousness must be imbued with the love which is God. And that love must spring into action. It must be lived as well as felt:

"If we would open prison doors for the sick, we must first learn to bind up the broken-hearted. If we would heal by the Spirit, we must not hide the talent of spiritual healing under the napkin of its form, nor **bury the morale of Christian Science in the grave-clothes of its letter**. The tender word and Christian encouragement of an invalid, pitiful patience with his fears and the removal of them, are better than hecatombs of gushing theories, stereotyped borrowed speeches, and the doling of arguments, which are but so many parodies on legitimate Christian Science, **aflame with divine Love**.”⁵³ (Emphasis added)

If love is to be legitimate it must be in a spiritual or Christian sense by accepting only the spiritual identity of each individual as God's likeness, expression or idea. Such an identity consists of an individual's own particular reflection of the qualities or attributes of their Maker such as love, purity, innocence, spiritual understanding, etc. These are the real qualities that constitute our true spiritual being, while eternally known to God and maintained by Him regardless of what our finite material senses may testify to. Since these qualities cannot be perceived materially but only through a spiritual sense—"a conscious, constant capacity to understand God"—an understanding of what God is and what man's relationship to God is.⁵⁴

EVIL AND SUFFERING

According to Christian Science, evil is as follows:

"Evil is a negation, because it is the absence of truth. It is nothing, because it is the absence of something. It is unreal, because it presupposes the absence of God, the omnipotent and omnipresent. Every mortal must learn that **there is neither power nor reality in evil.**"⁵⁵ (Emphasis added)

This statement does not mean that Christian Scientists ignore the belief of evil and its effects, but they do not see evil as either an aspect of God or as a real power separate from God. Evil is not fundamentally "real" because it is not part of God's being or His creation. But it may appear to be real as a mistaken concept of God and man, and consequently must be "seen through" rather than ignored. Christian Scientists believe God and His creation—spiritual creation—to be only good.⁵⁶

Suffering is explained as being illusory:

"Though appearing real, suffering (and illness) is a false belief or error of mortal thought. Suffering is overcome by asserting the truth of one's being as an idea of God. Often, a trained Christian Science practitioner is called to support the patient's thought through prayerfully 'knowing the truth.'⁵⁷

Because evil does not exist since God has created all and all is good, God does not punish evil-doers. However, any thought or action that is contrary to a person's God-given goodness results in some kind of suffering just as the misunderstanding of a mathematical principle results in incorrect answers. It is not that the principles of mathematics cause the mistakes, but that the mistakes are the result of a misconception of the principle.⁵⁸

SIN

Christian Science denies not only the existence of all matter, including man's physical body, but also claim that man is "incapable of sin, sickness and death." They claim sin, like sickness and death, are the "effects of error," thereby denying the reality of sin.⁵⁹

This is consistent with the notion that God is all and God is good and since the man never left his original state of perfection, he does not need salvation. He is safe in the bosom of the Father. Since man is always held in the divine consciousness, and since sin and evil have no reality, all ideas of sin and evil are illusions—the product of the mortal mind. It is then not sin that is sinful, but a sense of sin.

Man's real problem is the *belief* of sin. This is why "Christ came to destroy the belief of sin":

"Jesus came to seek and to save such as believe in the reality of the unreal;
to save them from this false belief; that they might lay hold of eternal Life . . ." ⁶⁰

This means that Jesus came to save mankind from the false belief that sin and death are real.

SALVATION OR ETERNAL LIFE

In Christian Science

“Salvation lies in bringing oneself into *harmony* with one's true nature as God's reflection, through good works, patience, meekness, love, watchfulness, prayerful gratitude, devout obedience in following Christ's example. There are two basic commandments: that one turn only to God, perfect Mind, for guidance—the Mind that was also in Christ; and that one ‘love thy neighbor as thyself.’

Healing and immortality are realized by becoming conscious that the only true reality is God, which is Love, and that one's true and only nature is in God's likeness. As one realizes the error of belief in the reality of suffering and evil, **these images of thought impressed upon the mortal mind can be altered, thus banishing sickness, death, and sin—testimony to the power of faith in God, of Mind over matter.**”⁶¹ (Emphasis added)

Although Christian Scientists do not have an organizational creed, the following is a brief exposition of the important points, or tenets, of the religion as given in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy:

1. As adherents of Truth, we take the inspired Word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal Life.

2. We acknowledge and adore one supreme and infinite God. We acknowledge His Son, one Christ; the Holy Ghost or divine Comforter; and man in God's image and likeness

3. We acknowledge God's forgiveness of sin in the destruction of sin and the spiritual understanding that casts out evil as unreal. But the belief in sin is punished so long as the belief lasts.

4. We acknowledge Jesus' atonement as the evidence of divine, efficacious Love, unfolding man's unity with God through Christ Jesus the Way-shower; and we acknowledge that man is saved through Christ, through Truth, Life, and Love as demonstrated by the Galilean Prophet in healing the sick and overcoming sin and death.

5. We acknowledge that the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection served to uplift faith to understand eternal Life, even the allness of Soul, Spirit, and the nothingness of matter.

6. And we solemnly promise to watch, and pray for that Mind to be in us which was also in Christ Jesus; to do unto others as we would have them do unto us; and to be merciful, just, and pure."⁶²

Seeking and finding God is central to the practice of Christian Science. God is understood as the all-loving, omnipotent Father-Mother, and Christ Jesus as His Son. Jesus' human life characterized the kind of sonship that Christian Scientists believe is provable for all as the children of God. He is seen as the Exemplar. The divine nature He expressed is the Christ, and the Christ-God's expression of Himself-is eternal and ever-present.

No one is beyond redemption and no problem is too great for God to heal. Rather than seeing salvation occurring at some point in the future, Christian Scientists view it as the presence of God's goodness which can be experienced by everyone in the present. Understanding man's pure, indestructible relationship with God is what results in regeneration and healing.⁶³

SCIENCE

Christian Scientists have no intellectual problem with the theories of contemporary geology, cosmology or biology as to the origin of mankind since they are not biblical literalists and because they regard the material world as fundamentally unreal. Yet some of their literature periodically cite developments in cosmology and physics as pointers to how contemporary science is coming to an understanding of "the illusory nature of time and materiality."

They regard the story of the creation in the book of Genesis as having symbolic rather than literal meaning. However, Eddy believed that the theory of evolution wrongly portrayed man as mortal rather than spiritual:

"Theorizing about man's development from mushrooms to monkeys and from monkeys into men **amounts to nothing in the right direction and very much in the wrong.**"⁶⁴ (Emphasis added)

This means both creationism and evolution are false because they both proceed from the premise of belief in the reality of a material universe.

CHURCHES AND READING ROOMS

In addition to regular churches, there are Christian Science "branch churches" in which church members hold services where citations are made from the Bible and *The Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures* by lay members of the church. These Readers are voted into office by the members of the church for a limited period of time (usually for three years). Churches will most often hold mid-week public Testimony Meetings, a time in which anyone can testify to the healing power of the Christ in their lives.⁶⁵

Reading Rooms are maintained in most major cities in the world, in which Eddy's writings can be read, borrowed or purchased, together with the Bible, related concordances and commentaries etc. Many Reading Rooms also have bound volumes that contain articles on Christian Science and claims of healing spanning more than 125 years. The Christian Science church publishes a weekly periodical called the *Christian Science Sentinel*, a monthly publication called the *Christian Science Journal*, and the international, award-winning news web site, formerly a newspaper, the *Christian Science Monitor*.⁶⁶

Christian Science Practitioners are lay persons who have had class instruction on how to heal effectively and who, after years of healing, have gone into the public practice of healing. These Practitioners devote all of their time to healing and charge for their services but do not require fees of those who are unable to pay. In their healing treatment, there is no manipulation or laying on of hands. Such treatments are often accomplished without a Practitioner meeting the patient in the case of those who may live a great distance away from the Practitioner.⁶⁷

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL VIEWS

Christian Scientists generally defend the separation of church and state as affording a protection for civil freedom and religion. Yet Eddy insisted on obedience by Christian Scientists to state laws in regard to health care. She was in favor of women's rights and rejected the "corporeal punishment" of children. While she generally steered clear of politics per se, she stated her support of the Monroe Doctrine as well as her opposition to imperialism and economic

monopoly. The Christian Science Monitor, which she founded, has traditionally been a staunch defender of civil liberties and individual freedom, though it did support the prohibition of alcohol.⁶⁸

Eddy's writings encourage a morally decent life. There is some dissent among Christian Scientists as to what exactly the position with regard to homosexuality ought to be. It is often regarded negatively with a belief that such a condition requires healing through Christian Science practices. The Mother Church, however, has not announced its opposition to homosexuality. As in other matters such as abortion, the Church refuses to have an official position and leaves the decision to each individual Christian Scientist to seek their own sense of what is right through prayer. This is curious since abortion would clearly not be in harmony with seeing God's child as perfect and divine.⁶⁹

MEDICAL CONTROVERSIES

Critics point to scientific studies showing higher mortality rates among Christian Scientists than those using conventional medicine and a lack of evidence for the efficacy of Christian Science aside from anecdotal evidence. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention compared graduates of Principia College to graduates of a Seventh-day Adventist college (Loma Linda University). Again, the Christian Science graduates had a higher overall mortality rate than the comparison students (though the dietary habits of Seventh-day Adventists may make them less susceptible to some diseases than the bulk of the population, thus biasing the result).⁷⁰

Eddy counseled that Christian Scientists should obey the law (respecting quarantine, for example) and that sometimes Christian Scientists will be examined by a doctor for informational purposes (although Eddy disapproved of physical diagnoses, as tending to induce disease).

CHURCH GROWTH

Christian Science experienced rapid growth during the first half of the 20th century, but membership leveled out by 1950 and has since gradually declined. ". . . the closing of hundreds of branch churches over the past two decades suggests that attrition is the biggest threat the Church faces."⁷¹ Current membership data is unknown since the Church does not publish statistics. One source estimates about 400,000 people follow Christian Science teachings, although many are not affiliated with a congregation. Another estimate is that there are 150,000 members, and 100,000 members in the U.S., 15,000 in Germany and Great Britain, and others in over 60 countries.⁷²

Christian Science has about 2,300 branch congregations in 60 countries. There are about 1,600 congregations in the US and about 60 in Canada. They operate Christian Science Reading Rooms where the public is invited to read the Bible and literature published by the Church. In 1908, Mrs. Eddy founded *The Christian Science Monitor*, an international newspaper, whose employees have won 6 Pulitzer prizes. A cable TV channel launched in 1991 was short lived and was terminated for financial reasons.

IS CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHRISTIAN?

Christian Scientists have spiritualized the Bible by using terms with allegorical and metaphysical definitions that are completely different from normal usage. To complicate matters worse, they have given new meanings to many traditional theological doctrines.

Does Jesus Christ have a dual nature? Is Jesus the mortal man and Christ the spiritual idea of man biblical?

The Bible uses the names Jesus and Christ interchangeably, pointing away from the dual nature presented in Christian Science. “Christ” and “Messiah” both find their origins in the word “anointed.” Jesus Christ, therefore, means “Jesus, the anointed.” “Christ” and “Messiah” refer to a person’s title rather than to a “spiritual idea.” The Bible makes it very clear that Jesus and Christ are the same person.

After talking with and following Jesus, Andrew found his brother Simon and told him,

“We have found **the Messiah** (that is, **the Christ**)” (Jn 1:41).

"But these are written that you may believe that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**; and that by believing you may have life in His name." (Jn 20:31)

"Who is the liar? It is the man who **denies that Jesus is the Christ**. Such a man is **the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son**" (1 Jn 2:22).

Jesus is identified with both Christ and the Son of God:

“When **Jesus** came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, ‘Who do people say **the Son of Man** is?’ . . . Simon Peter answered, ‘You are **the Christ, the Son of the living God**’” (Mt 16:13,16).

The Bible tells us to **believe in Jesus and in Christ:**

“**Believe in the Lord Jesus**, and you will be saved—you and your household.”
(Ac 16:31)

“For it has been granted to you **on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him**, but also to suffer for Him” (Php 1:29).

The Bible frequently describes Christ in human terms more appropriate to a physical man (like Jesus) than to a “spiritual idea of man.” For example:

Christ was born:

“Today in the town of David **a Savior has been born to you; He is, Christ the Lord**” (Lk 2:11).

Christ had a human ancestry:

“Does not the Scripture say that **the Christ will come from David’s family and from Bethlehem**, the town where David lived?” (Jn 7:42)

“For you know that it was not from perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with **the precious blood of Christ**, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pe 1:18-19).

Christ was crucified:

“. . . but we preach **Christ crucified**; a stumblingblock to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Co 1:23).

Christ physically suffered, died and rose from the dead:

“. . . explaining to them that **the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.**”
(Ac 17:3)

“. . . that **the Christ would suffer**, and, **as the first to rise from the dead**, would proclaim light to His own people and to the Gentiles” (Ac 26:23).

The Bible is clear that Jesus Christ is not the divine idea of God but was God uniquely manifested in the flesh, truly God and truly man—the God-Man—one divine Person with two indivisible natures, who is the only Savior and the only Truth, Way and Life and sovereign Lord (Jn 1:1-3,14; Col 2:9; Php 2:6-7; Jn 14:6).] Contrary to what Christian Science teaches, Jesus was/is God and the only way to heaven (Jn 20:31; 1 Jn 4:2-3), not merely the “Exemplar” or “Wayshower.”

Jesus physically died on the cross to pay for the sins of mankind. His sinless nature made him uniquely qualified to bear the judgment and punishment that God's holiness and divine justice demand. The Jewish system of animal sacrifice had provided a temporary covering for sin and had pre-figured Jesus' sacrifice; Jesus' shed blood and death paid the debt "once for all" for all who are willing to believe.

CHAPTER 9 SCIENTOLOGY

In the late 1940s, pulp writer L. Ron Hubbard declared:

"Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wants to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion."¹

Hubbard later created the Church of Scientology.

The word Scientology means the “**study of knowledge or truth**” and the salvation of the human spirit.²

Scientologists pride themselves of the fact that “Scientology is **the only major religion to emerge in the twentieth century**”³ and “**the fastest-growing religious movement** in the world today.”⁴ Scientology has gained popularity due to some Hollywood celebrities who have embraced it. The total number of Scientologists in the world is estimated between 100 thousand to 8 million.⁵ According to a Scientology website:

“Today its more than **6,000 churches, missions, related organizations** work around the globe and minister the religion to **more than eight million people \ in 159 languages.**”⁶

Moreover

“It comprises a vast body of knowledge extending from certain fundamental truths. Prime among those truths: Man is a spiritual being endowed with abilities well beyond those he normally envisages.

Scientology provides the individual the means to not only solve his own problems, accomplish his goals and gain lasting happiness, but also to achieve new states of awareness he may never have dreamed possible. And he gains the ability to dramatically improve conditions not only in his own life but also in the world around him.”⁷

BASIC BELIEFS

The following is presented by The Church of Scientology under the heading “SCIENTOLOGY BELIEFS”:

Is man a spirit?

Yes. Here's a short exercise you can do to find out for yourself.

Close your eyes and get a picture of a cat. . . .

That which is looking at that cat is you, a spirit.

How does one know man is a spirit?

It is a matter that each individual must examine for himself. **Scientists** believe man is more than a **mind** and **body** and that it is he, himself, the spirit, who can control his mind and body.

Do you think your body would do anything by itself if it were not guided by you, the being?

What is the Scientology concept of God?

The Church has no dogma concerning God, and each person's concept is probably different. As a person becomes more aware of himself, others, the environment and God, each person attains his own certainty as to who God is and exactly what God means to him. The author of the universe exists. How God is symbolized or manifested is up to each individual to find for himself.

In his book *Science of Survival*, L. Ron Hubbard writes: "No culture in the history of the world, save the thoroughly depraved and expiring ones, has failed to affirm the existence of a Supreme Being. It is an empirical observation that men without a strong and lasting faith in a Supreme Being are less capable, less **ethical** and less valuable to themselves and society

A man without an abiding faith is, by observation alone, more of a thing than a man."

Can't God be the only one to help man?

Scientists take the maxim quite to heart that God helps those who help themselves. They believe that each person has the answers to the mysteries of life; all he requires is awareness of these answers, and this is what Scientology helps a person achieve. Man is accustomed to asking for pat answers. Scientology requires that the person think for himself and thus help himself become more intelligent, happy and healthy.

Does Scientology believe in brotherly love?

Yes, and perhaps goes a step further. L. Ron Hubbard wrote that "To love is the road to strength. To love in spite of all is the secret of greatness. And may very well be the greatest secret in this universe."

Why do Scientologists want to help people?

For several reasons. First, because Scientologists themselves have been helped enormously-and they want others to share the same successes. Second, Scientologists understand that life is not lived alone. An individual has more than just one **dynamic** (the urge to survive as self). He wants to help his family, his groups, mankind itself and living things survive better.

Does Scientology recognize good and evil?

Yes, in **Scientology**, a very clear distinction is made between good and evil. Those actions which enhance survival on the majority of the eight aspects or dynamics of life are good, and those which destroy or deny these aspects of life are evil. Decisions are then based on enhancing the majority of these dynamics of life.

Good may be defined as constructive. Evil may be defined as destructive.

Does Scientology believe man is sinful?

It is a basic tenet of Scientology that man is basically good, but that he is **aberrated** (capable of erring or departing from rational thought or behavior) and therefore commits harmful acts or sins, thus reducing his awareness and potential power.

Through Scientology he can **confront** his actions, erase the ignorance and **aberration** which surrounds them and know and experience **truth** again.

All religions seek truth. Freedom of the spirit is only to be found on the road to truth.

Sin is composed, according to Scientology, of lies and hidden actions and is therefore untruth.

Will Scientology put one in control of his mind?

Yes. As you are a spiritual being, quite separate from your mind and your body, Scientology will help you achieve a far better command over your mind, just as it helps you to intelligently control all aspects of your life.

Is Scientology about the mind?

No. Scientology is about the individual himself as separate and distinct from the **mind**. **Dianetics** concerns the mind and contains the most advanced technology of the mind man has.

Does Scientology believe in mind over matter?

Scientology addresses you-not your mind, not your body, but you.

Scientists have found that the spirit is potentially superior to material things, and that the spirit, i.e., you, if cleansed of past traumas, transgressions and aberrations, can make miraculous changes in the **physical universe** that would not otherwise be possible.

Does Scientology believe one can exist outside of the body?

Before entering Scientology many people experience the feeling of looking down on one's body, and by achieving greater spiritual awareness through Scientology, this experience becomes nothing out of the ordinary. Scientology believes that man is not his body, his mind or his brain. He, a spiritual force, energizes the physical body and his life.

Scientology proved, for the first time, that man was a spiritual being, not an animal.

Does Scientology believe in reincarnation or past lives?

Reincarnation is a definite system and is not part of Scientology. It is a fact that unless one begins to handle aberrations built up in past lives, he doesn't progress.

The definition of the term reincarnation has been altered from its original meaning. The word has come to mean "to be born again in different life forms," whereas its actual definition is "to be born again into the flesh or into another body."

Today in Scientology many people have certainty that they have lived lives prior to their current one. These are referred to as past lives, not as reincarnation. Individuals are free to believe this or not; past lives are not a dogma in Scientology, but generally Scientologists, during auditing, experience a past life and then know for themselves that they have lived before.

To believe one had a physical or other existence prior to the identity of the current body is not a new concept-but it is an exciting one.

In Scientology, you are given the tools to handle upsets and aberrations from past lives that adversely affect you in present time, thus freeing you to live a much happier life.

Does Scientology believe in charity and welfare?

It does. However, Scientologists also believe in the principle that exchange is necessary. If a person only receives and never gives, he will not be a happy person and will lose his own self-respect. Therefore, any Scientology-sponsored charity programs also encourage those receiving the charity to make some form of contribution by helping others so that self-respect can be maintained.

Does Scientology hold any political views?

Scientology is nonpolitical. By its Creed, "All men have inalienable rights to conceive, choose, assist or support their own organizations, churches and governments." Scientologists are free to hold their own political views, vote for the candidates of their choice, etc., and are not given direction from the Church as to what position to take on political issues or candidates. The Church believes there should be separation of church and state.

Can children participate in Scientology?

How?

Yes, there are many children who participate in Scientology. There are no age restrictions as to who can take Scientology courses or receive auditing. Some churches also deliver special courses and study programs specifically designed for young people. If the person is below the legal age, he must first get written consent from his parents or guardian to take Scientology services. Scientologists generally want their children to have Scientology available to them so are quite agreeable to have their children take Scientology services.

What does Scientology say about the raising of children?

L.Ron Hubbard has written a great deal about raising children. In Scientology, children are recognized as people who should be given all the respect and love granted adults.

Scientologists believe children should be encouraged to contribute to family life, not just be "seen and not heard" as the old saying goes. Children are spiritual beings, and as such they need to exchange with those around them in order to thrive and live productive, happy lives. For more information on handling children, the book *Child Dianetics* and the course "How to Be a Successful Parent" are recommended.

Most children raised in good Scientology homes are above average in ability and quickly begin to understand how and why people act as they do. Life thus becomes a lot safer and happier for them.

Can one make up his own mind about Scientology?

One can and indeed one should. Scientology enables you to think for yourself. There is no purpose served in studying Scientology because someone else wants you to. But if you've taken a good look at your life and have decided that you want to make it better, the best thing is to start and find out for yourself what Scientology can do for you. One should read one of the basic books by L. Ron Hubbard, such as *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* or *Scientology: The Fundamentals of Thought*.

What is real in Scientology for you is what you find in it that is real for you.

What is the Scientology cross?

It is an eight-pointed cross representing the eight parts or **dynamics** of life through which each individual is striving to survive. These parts are: the urge toward existence as self, as an individual; the urge to survive through creativity, including the family unit and the rearing of children; the urge to survive through a group of individuals or as a group; the urge toward survival through all mankind and as all mankind; the urge to survive as life forms and with the help of life forms such as animals, birds, insects, fish and vegetation; the urge to survive of the physical universe, by the physical universe itself and with the help of the physical universe and each one of its component parts; the urge to survive as spiritual beings or the urge for life itself to survive; the urge toward existence as infinity. To be able to live happily with respect to each of these spheres of existence is symbolized by the Scientology cross.

As a matter of interest, the cross as a symbol predates Christianity.

What religious holidays do Scientologists celebrate?

Scientologists celebrate several major holidays annually. These include the birthday of L. Ron Hubbard (March 13); the date marking the initial publication of *Dianetics* (May 9); Auditor's Day, in honor of all auditors (second Sunday in September); and the International Association of Scientologists Anniversary, to mark the founding of this organization which unites, supports and protects the Scientology religion and Scientologists in all parts of the world (October 7).

Additionally, each local country or area may observe its own significant dates, such as the founding of the church in its area or the opening of the first *Dianetics* or Scientology organization in that country. Members of the Church also observe traditional religious holidays such as Christmas.²

The Church of Scientology is a *do-it-yourself salvation*, science fiction group that masquerades as the true Church with a thin veneer of Christianity

The movement is **a cult created by L. Ron Hubbard (Elron) in 1952 as an outgrowth of his earlier self-help system called Dianetics**. The word Dianetics comes from Greek *dia*, “through” and *nous*, “soul.” Therefore Dianetics is defined as **what the soul is doing to the body**.

. Initially groups were formed to learn and practice Dianetics, especially on college campuses and among the Hollywood set. In 1947, Hubbard opened an office in Los Angeles to test the application of Dianetics among the Hollywood elite. To promote Dianetics, Hubbard wrote a score of books on the subject in the following decade, delivering some 4,000 lectures, and founding several research organizations to spread the word.

Scientology describes itself as **the study and handling of the spirit in relationship to itself, others, and all of life** to “become certain of one's spiritual existence and one's relationship to God, or the ‘Supreme Being.’”³

Suffering is seen as “[occurring] as part of the spirit's entrapment here in the physical universe. Only when the individual is aware of his spiritual nature can he identify his barriers within the universe and overcome them, rising out of a lower state and into a higher state of happiness and freedom.”⁴

Human beings are considered immortal alien spiritual beings called **thetans** who are trapped on planet Earth in a physical body. Thetans have had innumerable past lives and lived in extraterrestrial cultures before their arrival on Earth.⁵

Scientology claims that people should discover for themselves that what they teach works. Their methods to achieve greater spiritual awareness work when people personally apply its principles. And two primary methods of increasing spiritual awareness are referred to in Scientology as **"Auditing"** and **"Training"** in which there is a progression from level to level, often called **"The Bridge to Total Freedom."** The progression is from **"Preclear,"** to **"Clear"** and ultimately achieve the level of **"Operating Thetan."**

Scientology considers the belief in a God or gods as “something personal and therefore offers no specific dogma. The nature of the Supreme Being is revealed personally through each individual as s/he becomes more conscious and spiritually aware. There exists a life energy or force (Theta) beyond and within all.”⁶

Like most religions, Scientology is basically concerned with the origin and nature of the universe. Scientology holds that **“all is manifestation of the universal spirit, which is all that actually exists.”**⁷

The cosmic source or life force is represented by the Greek letter *theta*.⁸ Although it is not part of the physical universe, it can control it.⁹ **A thetan is the individual expression of theta**¹⁰ and held to be **the true identity of every human being**. And every human being is intrinsically good, all-knowing, non-material and capable of unlimited creativity.¹¹ As thetans, people are **pure spirit, immortal and godlike**, outside of space and time.¹²

The thetan concept then is similar to the Western concept of the *soul* though its assertion of a godlike true nature for human beings goes beyond the typical Western concept of the soul.¹³

Scientology claims that thetans brought the material world into being largely for their own pleasure¹⁴ and that the material universe – composed of matter, energy, space and time (MEST) – was created by thetans in a primordial past, a "time before time."¹⁵ This means that the universe has no independent reality. It derives its apparent reality because most thetans agree it exists. It is also held that thetans became victims of their own involvement with the material universe by becoming entrapped by it¹⁶ as they identified it rather than their original state of spiritual purity.¹⁷ They eventually lost their memory of their true nature as thetans, along with the associated spiritual and creative powers¹⁸ and came to think of themselves as nothing but embodied beings.¹⁹

“Painful experiences and harmful acts in one's prebirth, current, and past lives become imprinted in the reactive mind and lead to irrational behavior. Departures from rational thought and untrue ideas ("aberrations") can result in wrongdoing.”²⁰

Thetans are believed to have occupied innumerable bodies over time,²¹ similar to the Hindu and Buddhist concept of *reincarnation*.²² Reincarnation in Scientology happens through a process called "assumption"²³ and like karma, puts emphasis on the importance of present (or future) consequence of past actions.²⁴

With each rebirth, the effects of the MEST universe on the thetan become stronger, unless a special intervention or salvation occurs.²⁵ The reason for this is because human MEST experiences are stored in what they term the "reactive mind" (a concept similar to Freud's concept of “the *unconscious mind*”). Such experiences respond irrationally and emotionally to any memory of painful or traumatic past experience²⁶ called "engrams." Such engrams are believed to be painful and debilitating; as they accumulate when people move further away from their true identity as thetans.²⁷ “Rebirths continue until one consciously confronts all pre-birth, current-life, and previous-life traumas and realizes one's true nature as a "thetan," immortal spirit--transcending matter, energy, space, and time. Achieving this state enables the spirit to escape the cycle of birth and death—to operate independently of the physical universe and become one with God.”²⁸ The goal of Scientology then is to be saved from this fate and restore

the thetan.²⁹ The Dianetic training is the tool through which its members progress towards the various levels as thetans gain gradual freedom from the reactive mind and acquires certainty of their reality as spiritual beings.³⁰

The basic principle of existence is survival³¹ which is subdivided into eight dynamics:

- Dynamic one is the urge towards survival as **an individual**.
- Dynamic two is the urge towards survival **through procreation**; it includes both the act of sex and the raising and care of children.
- Dynamic three is the urge towards survival **for the group**.
- Dynamic four is the urge of the individual toward survival **for Mankind**.
- Dynamic five is the urge to survive as **a life organism and embraces all life forms**.
- Dynamic six is the urge to survive as **part of the physical universe** and includes the survival of the physical universe.
- Dynamic seven is the urge toward survival as **a spirit**.
- Dynamic eight is the urge toward survival as a **part of the Supreme Being**.³²

The solution which brings the greatest benefit to the greatest number of dynamics is the optimum solution to any problem.³³ Therefore actions are considered "good" on the basis of how many promote survival across the dynamics or realms of action.³⁴ If and when dynamics are in conflict, followers are encouraged to prefer action that helps Scientology since it benefits its own group, Mankind and most of the other higher dynamics as opposed to action that helps only the individual (Dynamic one level). This is why it can be justifiable for members to "disconnect" from their spouses or other family members who are not supportive of Scientology. Since goodness is conceived in terms of "constructive survival action," it will require a degree of destruction for new construction to take place. After all, construction trumps destruction for something to be considered good.³⁵ Because of the Eight Dynamics theology, it is always "rational" (and therefore "ethical") to support Scientology above literally all other concerns.³⁶

The term "**morals**" refers to a **collectively agreed code of good conduct** and defines **ethics as "the actions an individual takes on himself in order to accomplish optimum survival for himself and others on all [eight] dynamics."**³⁷ Thus ethics rate higher than morals: "If a moral code were thoroughly reasonable, it could, at the same time, be considered thoroughly ethical. But only at this highest level could the two be called the same"³⁸

Professor **Stephen A. Kent** is a critic of the movement who quotes Hubbard as pronouncing that "the purpose of ethics is to remove counter-intentions from the environment. Having accomplished that, the purpose becomes to remove other intentionedness from the environment."³⁹ Kent interprets this as "a peculiar brand of morality that uniquely benefited [the Church of Scientology] . . . **In plain English, the purpose of Scientology ethics is to eliminate opponents, then eliminate people's interests in things other than Scientology.**"⁴⁰ (Emphasis added)

At the higher levels of initiation⁴¹ (**OT levels**), teachings are imparted which may be considered mystical and potentially harmful to unprepared readers. They believe that the secrecy is warranted to keep the use of its materials in context and to protect its members from being exposed to materials they are not yet prepared for⁴² This is also why they do not condone the use of their materials for personal entertainment or critical review.

These higher OT levels, the levels above "Clear," whose contents are guarded include accounts of various cosmic catastrophes that befell the thetans.⁴³ The highest level, OT VIII, is only disclosed at sea on the Scientology cruise ship **Freewinds**, which was released in the late 1980s.⁴⁴

On these "advanced" levels above the state of "Clear" members encounter the story of **Xenu** who was supposed to have gathered up all the overpopulation in this sector of the galaxy, brought them to Earth and then exterminated them using hydrogen bombs. The souls of these murdered people are then supposed to infest the body of everyone ("body thetans"). On the advanced levels a person "audits out" these body thetans telepathically by getting them to re-experience their being exterminated by hydrogen bombs. So people on these levels assume all their bad thoughts and faulty memories are due to these body thetans infesting every part of their body and influencing them mentally.

Hubbard believed that a treated patient-called a "clear" was to a current normal individual as the current normal is to the severely insane and claimed that those treated by Dianetics had higher IQs, healed faster, had better **eyesight**, and never got colds. "The clear" was viewed by Hubbard as an evolutionary step toward a new species similar to his outer space adventures in which quasi-superman heroes were encouraged to believe their mental powers were unlimited. "An Operating Thetan is a spirit who can control matter, energy, space, time, thought, and life. Practitioners ("Auditors") are regarded as ministers and counselors who assist others to achieve self-enlightenment. Auditors help others to identify their prebirth, current, and past-life disturbances, which are obstacles to happiness and spiritual enlightenment."⁴⁵

METHODOLOGY

It is the belief of Scientology "that you cannot free yourself spiritually without working to free others, Scientology has founded and supports many organizations for social betterment, particularly in the areas of drug abuse, crime, psychiatric abuse, government abuse of law, human rights, religious freedom, **education**, and morality."⁴⁶ Therefore Scientology strongly favors the use of their methodology for spiritual/mental healing over the use of conventional treatment.

Dianetics' program of self-improvement and spiritual awakening is the use of a crude lie-detector-type device called an 'E-meter' to diagnose an individual's emotional state. This is followed by lengthy and expensive Dianetics counseling sessions to deal with the "problems" the meter detects-and it is the basis of the church's wealth.

A SYNTHESIS OF EASTERN RELIGION AND PSYCHOLOGY

Scientology seems to be a synthesis of Eastern religions and modern psychology. Hubbard claimed it was a new system for mental health that promised to cure all mental disorders and psycho-somatic physical ailments. He explained in *Dianetics and The Modern Science of Mental Health* that he had discovered the hidden source of all psycho-somatic ills and human **aberration** and had developed the skills for their cure.⁴⁷

Hubbard's ideas especially popular throughout the 1960s and 1970s with Dianetics having sold over eight million copies and still sells nearly 400,000 copies a year.⁴⁸

CONTROVERSIES

Scientology and the organizations that promote it have remained highly controversial since their inception. Reports and allegations have been made, by journalists, courts, and governmental bodies of several countries, that the Church of Scientology is **an unscrupulous commercial enterprise that harasses its critics and brutally exploits its members**. In some cases of US litigation against the Church, former Scientologists were paid as expert witnesses and have since stated that they submitted false and inflammatory declarations, intended to be carried in the media to incite prejudice against Scientology, and deliberately harassed key Scientology executives, by knowingly advancing unfounded opinions, either to get a case dropped or to obtain a large settlement.

The Church of Scientology requires every member to sign a **legal waiver** which covers their relationship with the Church before engaging in services in Scientology.⁴⁹

Many claim that their creed is hypocritical because while it says that all people have an inalienable right to free speech, in practice that right is only supported by the church when the speech is positive of Scientology.

Although Scientologists are usually free to practice their beliefs, the organized church has often encountered opposition due to their strong-arm tactics, directed against critics and members wishing to leave the organization. They seek to destroy through litigation and character assassination those who speak out against the group.

Deceptive Recruiting

Scientologists used questionable practices in recruiting new members. Many of those targeted were led to believe that they were enrolling in a self-help or professional organization, without initially mentioning church affiliations. The HealthMed chain of clinics promoted "a **grueling** and excessive system of saunas, exercise and vitamins designed by Hubbard to **purify** the body. Experts denounce the regime as quackery and potentially harmful, yet HealthMed solicits unions and public agencies for contracts."⁵⁰ Then there was a drug-treatment program, Narconon, "a classic vehicle for drawing addicts into the cult."⁵¹ There was also The Concerned Businessmen's Association of America, another Scientology-linked group that, according to Behar, held "**antidrug** contests and [awarded] \$5,000 grants to schools as a way to recruit students and curry favor with education officials."⁵²

There are numerous members of Scientology are reportedly subjected to mental and even physical abuse while paying **exorbitant** prices for an **unending** series of texts and programs. Noah Lottick, age 24, had joined the movement in 1990. A few months later, when he was drained of his money and intimidated to the breaking point, Noah leapt to his death from a 10th-floor window. "The Lotticks [wanted] to sue the church for contributing to their son's death, but the prospect [had] them **frightened**,"⁵³ commented Behar. "For nearly 40 years, the big business of Scientology has shielded itself exquisitely behind the First Amendment as well as a battery of high-priced criminal lawyers and **shady** private detectives."⁵⁴

L. RON HUBBARD

L. Ron Hubbard was a science fiction writer and considered the sole source of Dianetics and Scientology. Hubbard first became known as a writer for the pulp magazines of the 1930s and for a couple of decades wrote westerns, mysteries, sea adventures and science fiction stories under his own name and several pseudonyms. It is estimated that at his peak he wrote over 100,000 words a month. Hubbard published nearly 600 books, stories, and articles during his lifetime. His fiction volumes sold over 23 million copies, while his **nonfiction** books sold over 27 million copies.

He has described his philosophy in more than 5,000 writings, including dozens of books and in 3,000 tape-recorded lectures of Dianetics and Scientology.⁵⁵ All his work has been recorded in 500,000 pages of writings, 6,500 reels of tape and 42 films, is carefully protected and guarded for posterity.⁵⁶

In 2006, **Guinness World Records** declared Hubbard the world's most published and most translated author, having published 1,084 fiction and non-fiction works that have been translated into 71 languages.⁵⁷

Hubbard is not known for his saintliness. His first two marriages ended in disaster. His second wife, Sara Northrup Hubbard, sued him for divorce on April 23, 1951, in Los Angeles County Superior Court. Interestingly, the microfilm copy of that case mysteriously vanished from the court records but it was eventually found in storage at the courthouse and was a twenty-eight page complaint to dissolve their marriage of August 10, 1946. The date is significant because it proved that it was a bigamous marriage for Hubbard since he pretended to be a bachelor to Miss Northrup even though he had not divorced his first wife, Margaret Grubb Hubbard. His first marriage was not legally dissolved until over one year after his second marriage. His second wife's 1951 divorce allegations not only contained bigamy charges, but sleep deprivation, beatings, strangulation, kidnapping of their child and fleeing to Cuba (which was reported in several newspapers in 1951). In addition, she claimed that Ron counseled her to commit suicide, "if she really loved him."

It is believed that Hubbard went into **seclusion** in the early 1980s because of legal problems. He was reportedly living on his yacht in international waters, in one of his homes in England and on a ranch in rural California. In 1982, Hubbard's son Ronald De Wolf tried to have his father declared legally dead or **incompetent** and claimed that officials working for Scientology had stolen millions of dollars from his father's estate. Furthermore, he described his father as "one of the biggest con men of the century."⁵⁸ At the same time, Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue Whipp Hubbard, was sentenced to prison for her part in covering up Scientology break-ins at Federal offices.⁵⁹

Hubbard's Death

Hubbard's death from a stroke on January 24, 1986, was officially announced by church officials several days later, after Hubbard's body had been cremated and his ashes scattered in the Pacific Ocean. In accordance with Hubbard's will, "no **autopsy** was performed," according to the Chicago Tribune, and the bulk of his estate-"estimated at tens of millions of dollars," according to Mark Brown of the County Telegram-Tribune - was given to the **Church of Scientology**.⁶⁰

Hubbard's death was a Scientology event described by the authors of L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman? As they reported, a **missive** dated January 27, 1986, ordered all Scientology churches and missions worldwide to close their doors for the day. In the Los Angeles area, Commander David Miscavage addressed a packed audience at the Hollywood Palladium. As he told the **mourning** group, as quoted in L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?: "For many years Ron had said that if given the time, ... he would be able to concentrate on and complete all of his researches into the upper OT level [for Operating Thetan, a Scientology spiritual state].... Approximately two weeks ago, he completed all of his researches he set out to do."⁶¹ The book noted an audience reaction of approval. Then Miscavage continued: "He has now moved on to the next level of OT research. It's a level beyond anything any of us ever imagined."⁶² According to Miscavage, Hubbard had achieved a state so pure, the body was no

longer needed: "Thus at 2000 hours, the 24th of January, A.D. 36 [signifying the 36th year after the publication of Dianetics], L. Ron Hubbard discarded the body he had used in this lifetime for 74 years, 10 months and 11 days."⁶³

Scientology was concocted from various sources which Hubbard named "Dianetics." Dianetics is a form psychotherapy called regression therapy. It was expanded to appear more like a religion in order to enjoy tax benefits.

In a bulletin dated May 5, 1980, Hubbard told his followers that he would be **reincarnated** in the future, "not as a religious leader but as a political one." He set his followers the task of preserving his teachings until his eventual return.⁶⁴

SUMMARY

L. Ron Hubbard obviously had an over-active imagination. With delusions of grandeur he came to believe that through Scientology he could save the entire universe.

Scientology is a confused concoction of oversimplified psychotherapy and outlandish science-fiction drivel presented as profound spiritual truth.

Their so-called psychotherapy (called "auditing") weakens the mind, making a person more susceptible to suggestion by submerging the critical thinking faculties into a subconscious state. This leads to a light hypnotic trance which makes a person more easily controlled as he loses the ability to think rationally and logically. The result is a person who has lost the ability to think for himself and thus unable to challenge ideas. A perfect target for an organization like Scientology!

It is not surprising that Hubbard wrote a "brainwashing manual" which is still in existence today. In seducing members to belong to "the Sea Org," he successfully created submissive followers who believed every word he said.

A 1991 *Time* cover story characterized Scientology as either a "money-making scam" or a "terrorist organization."⁶⁵ As Cult Awareness Network director Cynthia Kissler has stated, "Scientology is quite likely the most ruthless, the most classically terroristic, the most **litigious** and the most **lucrative** cult the country has ever seen."⁶⁶

Unlike salvation in Christianity that is free, Scientology is a **very expensive religion** to pursue. A fee is associated with every aspect of Scientology. This is why followers of Scientology are wealthy. It is also a very strict religion and very punitive against those who would try to leave behind its teachings and membership.

Although scientologists claim that Scientology is compatible with Christianity, the Bible contradicts every doctrine to which they adhere. The contrast is stark:

- Rather than being a mortal being created in the image and likeness of God, man is an immortal being (called a Thetan) not originally from this planet.
- Rather than man being born into sin and thus with a sinful nature, man in Scientology is trapped by matter, energy, space and time (MEST).
- Rather than salvation resulting from repentance and faith, salvation in Scientology comes through a process called “auditing,” whereby ”engrams” (basically, memories of past pain and unconsciousness that create energy blockage) are removed—a lengthy process that can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.
- Rather than peace, love and joy flooding the soul of a redeemed Christian, in Scientology, when all engrams are finally removed, the Thetan can once again control matter, energy, space and time (MEST) instead of being controlled by it.
- Rather than finding salvation through the grace of God—His unmerited favor—salvation in Scientology is merited as each person is constantly reincarnated until he becomes a Thetan..
- Rather than Jesus Christ being God manifested in the flesh—the God-Man—in Scientology Jesus was simply a good teacher who unfortunately was wrongfully put to death.
- Rather than believing in a triune God—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—Scientology believes that there are multiple gods and that some gods are above other gods.
- Rather than seeing pride as the essence of sin, Scientology teaches that it is despicable to tell a person he is evil and that he must repent.
- Rather than believing that Jesus is the only way whereby man must be saved, Scientology believes that religious practice of all faiths is the universal way to wisdom, understanding and salvation.

It is obvious that Scientology differs from biblical Christianity on every important doctrine.

10. NEW AGE

“The purpose of our lives is to give birth to the best which is within us.”¹

--Marianne Williamson

“In the stillness of your own Presence, you can feel your own formless and timeless reality as the unmanifested life that animates your physical form.”²

--Eckhart Tolle

Although the New Age movement (Cosmic Humanism or The New Spirituality) is considered to have started in England in the 1960s, its roots can be traced back to the 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus, New Age is not new. Rather, it is a modern revival of ancient religious traditions, rituals and fads. In the 1960s it also became known as the “Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ” with its wide embrace of various religious, philosophical and occultic traditions such as Astrology, Channeling, Hinduism, Gnostic traditions, Neo-paganism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, Wicca, etc. Small groups and/or communes were established and the movement quickly became international. New Age teachings became popular during the 1970's in the U.S. New Age Seminars run by the Association for Research and Enlightenment, the establishment of the East-West Journal in 1971 and the active promotion of its philosophy by actress Shirley MacLaine contributed significantly to the growth of the movement.³

Many believe that New Age teachings sprang up as **a reaction against the void that Secular Humanism and Christianity had left** with its failure to provide spiritual meaning and ethical guidance. .

The movement came under criticism from a variety of groups as early as the 1980s and 90s. Practices such as channeling, their uncritical belief in the scientific properties of crystals was ridiculed and seminar leaders were criticized for the excessive money they made from New Agers. Yet the movement became established as a major force in North American religion during the past generation. The New Age continues to expand into various offshoots as it promotes the social and philosophical backlash against the god rationalism—logic, science and technology. Moreover, the more radical wing of the **Modern environmentalism** may be part of the New Age religion because of its deification of Nature.⁴

New Age Spirituality is not a religion in a conventional sense, but **a vast syncretism of numerous religious and philosophical ideas**. As early as the time of **Alexander the Great**, his vast empire opened the door for Eastern religion and mysticism to move West, Greek philosophy with its emphasis on reason and logic moved East. Today the same process continues, but on a global scale especially through the internet.

The New Age Movement has no holy text, central organization, membership, formal clergy, geographic center, dogma, creed, etc. It is basically a spiritual movement with a network of believers and practitioners who share somewhat similar beliefs and practices. John Naisbitt points out that their book publishers take the place of a central organization; seminars, conventions, books and informal groups replace of sermons and religious services:

"In turbulent times, in times of great change, people head for the **two extremes: fundamentalism and personal, spiritual experience**. . . . With **no membership lists or even a coherent philosophy or dogma**, it is difficult to define or measure the unorganized New Age movement. But in every major U.S. and European city, thousands who seek insight and personal growth cluster around a metaphysical bookstore, a spiritual teacher, or an education center."⁵

At the heart of the gospel according to the New Age Movement is a new **“world consciousness.”** What the builders of the Tower of Babel failed to do, New Agers hope to accomplish by **unifying the world under a single religious umbrella** in which the world’s energies converge with **the power of Gaia** (Greek goddess of the Earth).

At the same time there is the emphasis on **the pantheistic nature of God and the self-realization of man**. Pantheism is foundational to the theology of the New Age movement. It means everything has divine power in it and makes the planet sacred. It is **“the god within us”** who lives **“for the NOW”** (a form of existentialism) and Jesus has led the way by illustrating the divine human potential. The New Age philosophy fosters the fraternal spirit whereby the human race is regarded as **one great "brotherhood."**

The New Age is very adaptable as it draws from different belief systems. Its adaptability makes it enduring as it changes to mirror its religious and cultural environment in challenging a postmodern society. Therefore it borrows terms from other beliefs, but often redefines them or adapts them within the context of a New Age worldview—a worldview which is essentially positive and affirming. By using terms familiar to other religions people are more susceptible to its message. Expressions that people are already familiar with makes them more open to consider something new or different.

Although the New Age movement is difficult to define, its beliefs filter into regular religious affiliations. Recent surveys of U.S. adults indicate that many Americans hold at least some new age beliefs:

- 8% believe in astrology as a method of foretelling the future
- 7% believe that crystals are a source of healing or energizing power
- 9% believe that Tarot Cards are a reliable base for life decisions
- 25% believe in a non-traditional concept of the nature of God which are often associated with New Age thinking:
- 11% believe that God is "a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach"
- 8% define God as "the total realization of personal, human potential"
- 3% believe that each person is a god⁶

The group of surveys classify religious beliefs into seven faith groups starting with the largest:

1. Cultural (Christmas and Easter) Christianity
2. Conventional Christianity
3. New Age Practitioner
4. Biblical (Fundamentalist, Evangelical) Christianity
5. Atheist/Agnostic
6. Other
7. Jewish⁷

A study from 1991 to 1995 shows that New Agers on a regular basis represent 20% of the population, and are consistently the third largest religious group.⁸

BELIEFS

Marianne Williamson

The principles of the New Age/New Spirituality are articulated in *A Course in Miracles* by Marianne Williamson, which has become the New Age Bible. It is considered a “new revelation” from Jesus to help all of us humans work through the issues we confront in our own persons, our own lives and the world in these challenging times. It is claimed that this Jesus made his teachings known through channeling in 1965 to a Columbia University Professor of Medical Psychology by the name of Helen Schucman, who heard an “inner voice” stating,

“This is a course in miracles. Please take notes.”⁹

For more than seven years she diligently took spiritual dictation from this inner voice that described himself as Jesus.

The influential *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles* was published in 1975 by the Foundation for Inner Peace and for many years “the Course” was quietly studied individually, with friends or in small study groups.

It was Marianne Williamson’s appearance on a 1992 Oprah Winfrey Show that really skyrocketed her book to the top of the New York Times bestseller list and opened the floodgates for the world-wide distribution of it. Oprah enthusiastically endorsed Williamson’s book and told her television audience that Williamson’s book was one of her favorite books, and that she had already bought a thousand copies and would be handing them out to everyone in her studio audience. Since then the book has sold in the millions every year. In her 2004 book, *The Gift of Change*, Williamson wrote:

“Twenty years ago, I saw the guidance of the Course as key to changing one’s personal life; today, I see its guidance as **key to changing the world**. More than anything else, I see how deeply the two are connected.”¹⁰

Popular author Wayne Dyer told his PBS television audience that the “brilliant writing” of *A Course in Miracles* would produce more peace in the world.¹¹

He also claimed that “God” was responsible for authoring the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*.¹²

Oprah

Oprah Winfrey has catapulted New Age phenomena to new heights since her cataclysmic emergence on the national and international scene. Some have come to call New Age “The Gospel According to Oprah.” The reasons for this are numerous.

1. Her incredible rise to fame in spite of her tragic childhood. Born in poverty to an unmarried mother, she was raped at 9 years old and later bore a child who died in infancy. It is not surprising that thousands of articles have been written about Oprah’s rags-to-riches life story and her philanthropy.

2. The *Oprah Winfrey Show* is the highest-rated talk show in television history, seen by over 20 million viewers each day in the U.S. in 205 television markets and in 132 countries. In fact, it has been the number one talk show for 12 consecutive seasons. Since its beginning in 1986 it has received 32 Emmy awards.

3. Since *Oprah's Book Club* began in 1996, each of the books selected has become an instant bestseller averaging sales of over 1 million copies each.

4. In 1996, *Time Magazine* recognized Oprah as one of America's "25 Most Influential People."

5. In 1997, Oprah was named *Newsweek's* "Most Important Person" in books and media, *T.V. Guide's* "Television Performer of the Year," the People's Choice Award for "Favorite Television Performer."

6. She has been ranked the richest African American of the 20th century with a net worth of 2.4 billion.

7. She is considered the greatest black philanthropist in American history and was once the world's only black billionaire. Her Angel Network has raised more than \$50 million to fund nonprofit organizations worldwide.

8. When asked to list and rank the most influential women in recorded history, Oprah ranked fourth!

Is it any wonder there is the refrain: "When Oprah speaks, people listen!"

Her emphasis on religion and spirituality motivated the influential evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* declared in 2002 that she “has become one of the most influential spiritual leaders in America.”

A video called “The Church of Oprah Exposed” was posted in late March 2010 on YouTube.com. The video, which refers to Oprah’s viewers as “the largest church in the world,” has since been viewed more than 5 million times. The operator of a Christian Web site calls her “the most dangerous woman on the planet.”

Christianity Today writer LaTonya Taylor said:

“To her audience of more than 22 million mostly female viewers, she has become a postmodern priestess—an icon of church-free spirituality.”¹³

It becomes increasingly obvious why Christians warn people about Oprah because many of the statements on beliefs are taken from two books aggressively promoted by Oprah: Marianne Williamson’s book, *A Course in Miracles* and Eckhart Tolle’s book, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*. She referred to the *New Earth* book as “one of the most important books of our time” and the seminars one of “the most exciting things I’ve ever done.”

Tolle’s message is another quest to escape suffering and attain peace. By denying he is offering a religion, he hoodwinks many unsuspecting people, including naïve Christians. His central message that **the secret of life is in what people think** and that **by certain thoughts we can create things**. This appeals to many who feel vulnerable and helpless in a world gone mad.¹⁴

But is it any more than another narcissistic, self-centered lie that denies the sovereign, all-powerful creator—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

In spite of the various philosophical and theological traditions represented by the New Age movement, there are fundamental beliefs that are embraced.

1. **Monism** is the belief that “*all that exists is derived from a single source of divine energy.*”¹⁵

2. **Pantheism** teaches that “*all that exists is God and that God is all that exists.*”¹⁶ The implication is the divinity of the individual—that we are all Gods. God is revealed, therefore, not in a sacred text or in a distant heaven somewhere, but within the self and throughout the entire universe.

3. **Reincarnation** is the belief that “*after death, we are reborn and live another life as a human,*”¹⁷ a cycle which repeats itself many times. Hinduism teaches a similar concept of the transmigration of the soul. The concept of humanity’s unity, the idea that all is one, tends to support the theological concept of reincarnation in which each individual’s soul was present in other material forms earlier in history and that it will manifest itself in still other forms after its present body dies. The body may pass away, but the soul will continue its quest for godhood in other bodies.

This belief in reincarnation caused MacLaine, when recalling her daughter’s birth, to muse,

“When the doctor brought her to me in the hospital bed on that afternoon in 1956, had she already lived many, many times before, with other mothers? Had she, in fact, been one herself? Had she, in fact, ever been my mother? Was her one-hour-old face housing a soul perhaps millions of years old?”¹⁸

In order to understand oneself (and one’s path to godhood), a person must be cognizant of at least some of his or her past lives. Gary Zukav explains:

“If your soul was a Roman centurion, an Indian beggar, a Mexican mother, a nomad boy, and a medieval nun, among other incarnations, for example, . . . you will not be able to understand your proclivities, or interests, or ways of responding to different situations without an awareness of the experiences of those lifetimes.”¹⁹

Reincarnation can serve little purpose unless people can know about and learn from their past lives.

4. **Karma** holds that “*good and bad deeds that we do either add or subtract from our accumulated record, our karma.*”²⁰ Therefore, at the end of our life, we are rewarded or punished according to our karma by being reincarnated into either a painful or good new life. This belief is also derived from Hinduism and linked to a form of reincarnation. Because the Cosmic Humanist believes that every human being and all reality is God, therefore any “truth” our inner self discovers is God’s truth. And if our godhood is not realized in this lifetime, we will soon have another incarnation and another chance to achieve Christ consciousness and godhood and total unity will be restored. Such theology then guarantees a happy ending.

5. **An Aura** is believed to be *an energy field radiated by the body in which an individual’s state of mind and spiritual and physical health can be detected and diagnosed* by those skilled in interpreting auras. Although it is invisible to most people, it can be detected by some as a shimmering, multi-colored field surrounding the body.²¹

6. **Personal Transformation** is considered a *mystical experience which will lead to the acceptance and use of New Age beliefs and practices.*

“Guided imagery, hypnosis, meditation, and (sometimes) the use of hallucinogenic drugs are useful to bring about and enhance this transformation. Believers hope to develop new potentials within themselves: the ability to heal oneself and others, psychic powers, a new understanding of the workings of the universe, etc. Later, when sufficient numbers of people have achieved these powers, a major spiritual, physical, psychological and cultural planet-wide transformation is expected.”²²

7. Ecological Responsibility is a belief in *“the importance of uniting to preserve the health of the earth, which is often looked upon as Gaia (Mother Earth), a living entity.”*²³

Mother Earth and her resources are not ours to be raped. With global warming worsening because of the destruction of the rainforests, overpopulation, the irresponsible use of materials (e.g. chemicals that harm the environment) and the wasting of energy, our time is running out. Since our planet is the only one we have we must take better care of it before it's too late.

Ecological responsibility demands that we realize that we cannot spend our way to fulfillment. Rather than focusing on expensive cars, designer clothes and other luxury goods which only leaves our addiction to consumerism wanting more, we need to find a simple lifestyle in which we can live in peace and harmony without ruining the only planet we have.

8. Universal Religion holds that *since all is God, then only one reality exists, and all religions are simply different paths to that ultimate reality.*

“The universal religion can be visualized as a mountain, with many sadhanas (spiritual paths) to the summit. Some are hard; others easy. There is no one correct path. All paths eventually reach the top. They anticipate that a new universal religion which contains elements of all current faiths will evolve and become generally accepted worldwide.”²⁴

9. New World Order is the belief that *as the Age of Aquarius unfolds, a New Age will develop.*

“This will be a utopia in which there is world government, an end to wars, disease, hunger, pollution, and poverty. Gender, racial, religious and other forms of discrimination will cease. People's allegiance to their tribe or nation will be replaced by a concern for the entire world and its people.”²⁵

The Age of Aquarius is a reference to the precession of the zodiac, which is the view that the earth passes through each of the signs of the zodiac approximately every 24,000 years. Whereas some believe that the earth entered the constellation Aquarius in the 19th Century, so that the present era is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, others believe it will occur at the end of the 20th century.²⁶ Previous constellation changes were:

- **from Aries to Pisces—the fish—circa 1st century C.E.** at a time when Christianity was an emerging religion and many individuals changed from animal sacrifice in the Jewish temple to embracing the teachings of Christianity. The church's prime symbol at the time was the fish.²⁷
- **from Taurus to Aries—the ram—circa 2,000 B.C.E.** at a time when the Jews engaged in widespread ritual sacrifice of sheep and other animals in the Temple.²⁸
- **from Gemini to Taurus—the bull—circa 4,000 B.C.E.** at a time when worshiping of the golden calf was common in the Middle East.²⁹

10. Revelation: Unlike Christians who claim that special revelation exists in a book, Cosmic Humanists are emphatic that there is no need for any revelation in any other form outside of us. The reason for that is because each of us has a higher consciousness which gives us our own special revelation. This is our own ability to get in touch with the part of us that is God.

Therefore we discover truth by searching our own souls, that is, by discovering who we really are. Because man is God, he has the power of determine reality by creating it himself.

11. God: Oprah claims that at a certain point in her life, “I took God out of the box.”³⁰

As we have already seen, the New Age movement is the belief that a non-personal God and nature are one, that there is an **all-inclusive divine unity. God is the sum total of all there is.** This means stars are God, water is God, plants are God, trees are God, the earth is God, all the animals are God, everything is God. Since for Cosmic Humanists the creation and the creator are the same thing, when they worship one they worship the other. For them, there is no difference.

Avatar, James Cameron's 2009 sci-fi epic, is an enormous worldwide blockbuster movie—the most profitable movie ever made. It is a conventional love story with ex-Marine Jake Sully joining forces with the Na'vi, Pandora's natives, to defend their ecosystem—which seems to be their god. The planet has rich mining deposits and Jake has to inhabit an alien “avatar” body so he can infiltrate the local tribe that opposes the mining. Thus he becomes one of these humanoids.

The humanoids believe that each creature is interconnected and charged with divine energy and thus they revere all life. The Na'vi bow and worship before the Tree of Souls, their holiest site and Eywa, an unseen female deity, holds it all together, responding to their prayers for protection against American mercenaries. Thus the “Earth mother goddess” gets all the glory.

Pantheism has long (for at least a generation) been trumpeted by Hollywood. *Star Wars*, *Dances With Wolves* and *Lion King* are other examples of “turning ecology into the religion of the millennium.”

Another example of pantheistic theology occurs in a New Age children’s book entitled, *What is God?*

“There are many ways to talk about God. Does that mean that everything that everybody ever says about God is right? Does that mean that God is everything? Yes! God is everything great and small! God is everything far away and near! God is everything bright and dark! And God is everything in between! If everything is God, God is the last leaf on a tree, if everything is God, God is an elephant crashing through the jungle.”³¹

The god-as-cosmic-energy concept was popularized in George Lucas’ now classic film series, *Star Wars*. In a 1999 interview with Bill Moyers, Lucas explained why he made the series,

“I see *Star Wars* as taking all the issues that religion represents and trying to distill them down into a more modern and easily accessible construct . . . I’m telling an old myth in a new way.” What Lucas fails to mention is “the old myth” he refers to is Eastern religion, not western Christianity. In this way, New Age mysticism was thrust from the big screen into the consciousness of countless viewers, young and old.”³²

Pantheistic religion was woven throughout *Star Wars*. Rather than seeing such a film as merely entertainment, producer Lucas also saw his role as an educator:

“I’ve always tried to be aware of what I say in my films because all of us who make motion pictures are teachers, teachers with very loud voices.”³³

Irvin Kershner, the director of *The Empire Strikes Back* stated in one of his interviews,

“I wanna introduce some Zen here because I don’t want the kids to walk away just feeling that everything is shoot-em-up . . . but that there’s also a little something to think about here in terms of yourself and your surroundings.”³⁴

God is not simply in me, **I am God**, according to the New Age philosophy.

“God is **in everything I see.**”³⁵

“The recognition of God is **the recognition of yourself.**”³⁶

Since **all is One** the external world and consciousness/thoughts are one and the same which accounts for the occult powers of the mind (e.g., psychokinesis and levitation).

“**The oneness of the Creator and the creation is your wholeness, your sanity and your limitless power.**”³⁷

Shirley MacLaine, an ardent spokes-person for the New Age, said the following in her book, *Dancing in the Light*:

"I know that I exist, therefore I AM. I know the God-source exists. Therefore IT IS. Since I am part of that force, then I AM that I AM."³⁸

God is the ground of being (*a la* Paul Tillich). He is the consciousness and the organizing matrix which enlivens matter. "**God**" is **impersonal, cosmic, a God of energy forces.**

God is no longer the personal Jehovah of the Bible, who interacts with man and works His will and purpose through history. Rather, God is an **impersonal, nonfeeling, nonthinking, cosmic, god-force, energy, consciousness, principle, or vibration**, of which everything in the universe is a part. It is immanent in all things, including man. It is possible to tap into that power without the restrictions imposed by morals, whereby we can be the master of all nature, like Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* films in which he used the "**Force**" to gain supernatural powers and win his battles.

God can be referred to either as she or he, mother or father, god or goddess.

12. Jesus: He is one of many masters. He is not divine. He is divine in exactly the sense that all human beings are divine. He is one of many great spiritual masters who have succeeded in tapping into their own godhood. New Agers, like Christian Scientists, generally separate the man Jesus from "the Christ." When they refer to Jesus as "the Christ," they do not think of Him as the only Messiah but as one of many manifestations of a universal power that they call God.

The Christ of the New Age is not Jesus but our combined Christ consciousness. Jesus is only one of a select company who achieved Christ consciousness. And every person can acquire this same level of divine consciousness because everyone is a part of God. After all, man and God are ontologically one. God is your being a part of the whole—all there is.

“The significance of incarnation and resurrection is not that Jesus was a human like us but rather that we are gods like him—or at least have the potential to be.”³⁹

Jesus' death, therefore, has no significance:

“A **‘slain Christ has no meaning.**”⁴⁰

“The journey to the cross should be the last **‘useless journey.**”⁴¹

“Do not make the pathetic error of **‘clinging to the old rugged cross.**”⁴²

“The Name of Jesus Christ as such is but a symbol. . . . It is a symbol that is safely used as a **replacement for the many names of all the gods** to which you pray.”⁴³

Marianne Williamson's New Age colleague, **Neale Donald Walsch**, said his “God” stated that “the era of the Single Saviour is over.”⁴⁴

Jesus then, is no more God than anyone else. The only difference between Jesus and the rest of humanity is that Jesus more fully realized and demonstrated the divine potential that we all have. Jesus' value to us is merely that of an **example**, and it is His desire that the rest of humanity become His equals, not to worship Him. Jesus' "Christhood" was the realization that He was divine while in human life. All people can also attain to such Christhood.

In New Age parlance, Jesus is a **mystic medium**. He is a **guide to self-actualization**. He is a **channel**—one of many ancients who give New Age adherents a "glimpse" of the past. He is a reincarnated avatar, Messiah, or messenger sent to give mankind on earth advanced revelation. Thus the New Age accepts that Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, Jesus, and many others were Christ.

Through previous incarnations, Jesus attained a level of purity that is achievable by all.

When Oprah says, “Jesus did not come to found a religion; He came to get us in touch with our Christ consciousness”⁴⁵ she is contradicting Scripture in which Jesus Himself said, “I will **build my church**” (Mt 16:18).

13. **Man. Man is god** because he not only consists of "the forces," but is the creator of them. This is done exercising the powers inherent in his divinity, to which he needs only awaken. Therefore the supernatural ascribes to the creature, not the Creator (Ro 1:22-24). They fell to Satan's appeal in promising Eve: "You will be like God" (Ge 3:5).

Cosmic Humanist sees Christ's life as important only in the sense that it showed humanity to be capable of achieving perfection, even godhood. An article in the New Age publication *Science of Mind* states,

“The significance of incarnation and resurrection is not that Jesus was a human like us but rather that we are gods like him—or at least have the potential to be.”⁴⁶

This interpretation of Christ allows the New Age theologian to postulate, as John White does, that “The Son of God . . . is not Jesus but our combined Christ consciousness.”⁴⁷ Jesus is looked on as one of a select company, having achieved Christ consciousness. Every person is encouraged to acquire this same level of consciousness.

How can anyone hope to achieve such a divine consciousness? It is because everyone is a part of God. Cosmic Humanists believe that we and God are ontologically one. “What is God? God is the interlinking of yourself with the whole.”⁴⁸

The core of New Age theology: I am God. “Each of us has access to a supraconscious, creative, integrative, self-organizing, intuitive mind whose capabilities are apparently unlimited,” says John Bradshaw. “This is the part of our consciousness that constitutes our God-likeness.”⁴⁹

Most Cosmic Humanists state the case more forcefully. Ruth Montgomery supposedly channeled a spirit that spoke through her, claiming, “We are as much God as God is a part of us . . . each of us is God . . . together we are God . . . this all-for-one-and-one-for-all . . . makes us the whole of God.”⁵⁰ White states that “sooner or later every human being will feel a call from the cosmos to ascend to godhood.”⁵¹

Meher Baba declares,

“There is only one question. And once you know the answer to that question there are no more to ask. . . . Who am I? And to that question there is only one answer—I am God!”⁵²

Shirley MacLaine recommends that every person should begin each day by affirming his or her own godhood.

It is through **the spirit world** that man should seek and accept spiritual instruction and direction. As Neil Anderson points out, the bait the occult use is typically on the basis of **acquiring knowledge or power**.⁵³ **Knowledge** is sought because it offers spiritual and supernatural insight and power and thus is accessible typically only to the elite. Psychics, channelers, palm-readers, card-readers, Ouija boards, astrology, magic charms, automatic writing are considered God-given by those who are serious about spirituality.

Self-actualization is possible through the awareness of the "True Self" within which leads to mastery of one's own reality

14. **Sin and Evil.** Sin and evil **do not exist**. “There is no sin.”⁵⁴ The universe is beyond good and evil.

There is no objective morality, no moral law or absolute truth, or absolute good or evil. Man must think in certain ways to throw off illusion and see truth.

Tolerance for all systems of truth, meaning and purpose. We should create a world of pure relativism, where morality and religion are strictly relative to each person's individual notion of reality itself. Then peace and love become ultimate realities.

15. Salvation. The realization of oneness with the impersonal life force is salvation. Such awareness can be heightened through methods that induce altered states of consciousness (e.g., hypnosis, meditation, **music**, drugs). Crystals, tarot cards, amulets, channeling, fortunetellers, psychics, etc. are spiritual tools that will help the process.

Some believe the salvation of humanity will occur when a critical mass is reached, when people converge in experiencing their oneness with God and with each other. This will bring a New World Order or new Planetary Order, resulting in **oneness of civilization and one-world government, peace, and harmony.**

“The Atonement is the final lesson he [man] need learn, for it teaches him that, **never having sinned, he has no need of salvation.**”⁵⁵

“My salvation comes from me.”⁵⁶

16. Heaven and Hell. Oprah speaks less about salvation through Christ than she does **Christ-consciousness.** Hell and judgment are not real. Heaven is definitely not an eternal destination but **an inner realm of consciousness.**⁵⁷

Since life is for evolutionary purposes there is **no destination in life.** Meaning is found in the journey through the process of reincarnation and the guiding impersonal force of karma.

17. There are many ways to God. This is one of the most emphasized aspects of New Age religion.

She repeatedly dismisses the idea that there is “one way” to God. She has made statements such as:

“There couldn’t possibly be just one way.”⁵⁸

Since each person creates their own reality and there is no absolute truth, each person's religious views are equally valid. Oprah put it:

“One of the mistakes that human beings make is believing that there is only one way to live,” she said. Instead, “there are many paths to what you call God.”⁵⁹

18. All religions and religious teachings are equally good and lead to the same goal. Instead of focusing on out-dated dogma or worn-out ideology, New Agers claim to teach **the art of Self-realization**. Such an approach, it is taught, transcends religion and ideology and benefits people of all religions and even those who have none.

Even as the New Age movement claims that it is not a religion *per se*, it does have a vague connection with Christianity and the major faiths of the East. In fact, many in the New Age faith claim that Jesus spent 18 years in India absorbing Hinduism and the teachings of Buddha and even occasionally dabbled in pantheism and sorcery.⁶⁰

As Dave Hunt points out:

"Ecumenism is essential in creating a "Christianity" which embraces all religions. Psychology plays a major ecumenical role by providing common faith, language and ritual for everyone from atheists, cultists and occultists to Roman Catholics and evangelicals."⁶¹

In his book, *Earth in the Balance; Ecology and the Human Spirit*, Al Gore says he believes we should have a "mother goddess" that we can worship, dating back to ancient religions and Hinduism. He, like so many, believe that man and nature are one, and that God is part of nature, and that nature is part of God. He says,

"The richness and diversity of our religious tradition throughout history is a spiritual resource long ignored by people of faith, who are often afraid to open their minds to teachings first offered outside their own system of belief. . . .

This Pan-religious perspective may prove especially important where our global civilizations' responsibility for the earth is concerned. Native American Religions for instance offer a rich tapestry of ideas about our relationship to the earth."⁶²

Mother Earth, the sun, the moon and the stars—all of Nature—can be worshipped as God.

The Future Hope. The earth is at the dawn of a "New Age" of peace, harmony, and enlightenment that will be achieved through a global transformation. This means a quantum leap of human evolution which will occur after a "critical mass" of individuals have achieved personal transformation through mystical means including meditation, guided visualization and other techniques that help people look within.⁶³

The belief that every individual is God and God is every individual is tied inextricably to the concept of consciousness. Because the essence of humanity is that it is “all is one” man can become attuned to all the powers of its godhood by achieving unity of consciousness. As Beverly Galyean put it:

“Once we begin to see that we are all God, that we all have the attributes of God, then I think the whole purpose of human life is to reown the Godlikeness within us; the perfect love, the perfect wisdom, the perfect understanding, the perfect intelligence, and when we do that, we create back to that old, that essential oneness which is consciousness.”⁶⁴

Similarly Robert Muller states,

“Only the unity of all can bring the well-being of all.”⁶⁵

PRACTICES

The following list are practices common among New Agers even though a typical practitioner is active in only a few of these areas.

1. **Channeling** is a method similar to that used by Spiritists in which *a spirit of a person who has died is conjured up*. Whereas Spiritists generally believe that one's soul remains relatively unchanged after death, most channelers believe that the soul evolves to higher planes of existence.

“In channeling, they usually try to make contact with a single, spiritually evolved being. That being's consciousness is channeled through the medium and relays guidance and information to the group, through the use of the medium's voice. Channeling has existed since the 1850s and many groups consider themselves independent of the New Age movement. As already mentioned, the popular *A Course in Miracles* was channeled by Jesus through a New Age psychologist, Helen Schucman over an eight year period.”⁶⁶

2. **Crystals** are *materials which have their molecules arranged in a specific, highly ordered internal pattern* reflected in the crystal's external structure which typically has symmetrical planar surfaces. It is believed that crystals possess healing energy. Many common substances, from salt to sugar, from diamonds to quartz form crystals which can be shaped so that they will vibrate at a specific frequency. Therefore they are widely used in radio communications and computing devices.⁶⁷

3. **Meditating** is a *process of blanking out the mind and releasing oneself from conscious thinking*, often by repetitive chanting of a mantra, or focusing on an object.⁶⁸

Mark Lewis gives the following analysis of New Age Meditation:

“New Age Meditation is the more up-to-date version of meditation in general. **It has been influenced by many of the aspects of popular new age culture today, such as Yoga and Buddhism.** These are just a couple of the influences that have gone into forming what is now called New Age Meditation. New Age Meditation is **a mix of Eastern Philosophy and tradition mixed with Western culture and new fangled ideas.**

Forms of New Age Meditation include **Transcendental Meditation** and other original ideas of thinking that have spun off from some of the same modes of religion that meditation has. . . .

It is popular with so many meditation newcomers because it utilizes the latest, most innovative and original, up-to-the-minute versions of meditation that utilize all of the scientific innovations and advancements that have been made since meditation first became popular. . . .

New Age Meditation is **a cross between self reflection and awareness and implementation of new fangled western ideas and traditional eastern philosophies and religions.**”⁶⁹ (Emphasis added)

4. **New Age Music** is a *gentle, melodic, inspirational music form as an aid in healing, massage therapy and general relaxation.*

It is **music** of various styles involving the human voice, harp, lute, flute, etc. It is used by listeners for **yoga, massage, meditation,** and **reading** as a method of **stress management** or to create a peaceful atmosphere in the home or other environments. The melodies are often repetitive to create a hypnotic feeling. Recordings of sounds of nature are used as an introduction to a track or throughout the piece.

“New Age music includes both **electronic** forms, frequently relying on sustained **synth pads** or long **sequencer**-based runs, and **acoustic** forms, featuring instruments such as flutes, piano, acoustic guitar and a wide variety of non-western acoustic instruments. In many cases, high-quality **digitally sampled instruments** are used instead of natural acoustic instruments. Vocal arrangements were initially rare in New Age music but as it has evolved vocals have become more common, especially vocals featuring **Sanskrit, Tibetan** or **Native American**-influenced chants, or lyrics based on **mythology** such as **Celtic legends** or the realm of **Faerie.**”⁷⁰

5. **Divination** is the use of *various techniques to foretell the future*, including Ching, Pendulum movements, Runes, Tarot Cards and Scrying (also called crystal gazing, seeing or peeping). It is a practice that involves seeking to **see things psychically** in a medium, usually for purposes of obtaining spiritual visions. Sometimes it is also used for purposes of **divination** or **fortune-telling**, the attempt to divine the past, present or future. Although scrying is most commonly done with a **crystal ball**, it may also be performed using any smooth surface, such as a bowl of liquid, a pond, or a crystal. The media used are most commonly reflective, translucent, or luminescent substances such as crystals, stones, **glass**, mirrors, **water**, fire or smoke. Depending on the culture and practice, the visions that come when one stares into the media are thought to come from **God**, **spirits**, the **psychic** mind, the **devil**, or the **subconscious**.⁷¹

6. **Astrology** is the belief that *the orientation of the planets and the location of one's birth, predicts that person's personality and future*.⁷²

“An astrological age is a time period in **astrology** which is believed by some to parallel major changes in the Earth's inhabitants' development, particularly relating to culture, society and politics. There are twelve astrological ages corresponding to the twelve **zodiacal signs** in astrology. At the completion of one cycle of twelve astrological ages, the cycle repeats itself. Astrological ages occur because of a phenomenon known as the **precession of the equinoxes**. One complete period of this precession is called a **Great Year** or Platonic Year⁷³ of about 25,920 years.”⁷⁴

“There are two broad approaches about the effects upon the world due to the astrological ages. Some astrologers believe the changes upon Earth are caused and marked by the influences of the given **astrological sign**, associated with the Age, while other astrologers do not follow the **causative** model and believe it is a matter of **synchronicity**.”⁷⁵

Many astrologers believe that the **Age of Aquarius** has arrived recently or will arrive in the near future. On the other hand, some believe that the Age of Aquarius arrived up to five centuries ago, or will not start until six centuries from now.⁷⁶

Despite all references provided by various sources, astrologers cannot agree upon exact dates for the beginning or ending of the ages.

7. **Holistic Health** is a *collection of healing techniques which have diverged from the traditional medical model*. It attempts to cure disorders in mind, body and spirit and promote wholeness and balance in the individual. Examples are acupuncture, crystal healing, homeopathy, iridology, massage, various meditation methods, polarity therapy, psychic healing, therapeutic touch, reflexology, etc.⁷⁷

8. Human Potential Movement or Emotional Growth Movement is a *collection of therapeutic methods involving both individualized and group working, using both mental and physical techniques*. Spiritual advancement is the goal and since humans have unlimited or infinite potential, achieving such potential is possible.

Even though its principles are based on eastern mysticism and the occult, it uses scientific and psychological terminology packaged to be acceptable to corporations, government, small businesses and the educational establishment in the form of motivational seminars.

The following elements are typically involved in achieving spiritual advancement:

- Rejecting traditional beliefs that limit us and avoiding any negative thoughts.
- Reprogram the subconscious by daily affirmations, positive thinking, and constant self-talk (e.g., "I am great, I am wonderful, I will achieve!").
- Utilize consciousness altering techniques that create a state of higher suggestibility such as meditation, visualization, guided imagery and other inward-looking activities in order to be reprogrammed. These are also promoted for stress reduction.
- Take responsibility to create your own reality since "Self" is the source of all success which each person can achieve. Examples of the Human Potential Movement are Esalen Growth Center programs, EST, Gestalt Therapy, Primal Scream Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Transcendental Meditation and Yoga.⁷⁸

We should not take much comfort in the Canadian Census (1991) which recorded only 1,200 people (0.005%)⁷⁹ who identify their religion as being New Age because its influence of new age ideas in the country is evident by the **many people who identify with Christianity and other religions, but incorporate many new age concepts into their faith.**

Eckhart Tolle

Eckhart Tolle and his recent book entitled, *A New Earth Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* is the latest phenomena created by Oprah. With more than 2,000,000 people from 139 countries having participated with her and Eckhart Tolle in a live Web-based seminar covering each chapter of Tolle's book, he and his book have been catapulted into the forefront of the New Age movement.

Tolle's message is the same New Age message we have heard before: **"all material things (from planets to pebbles to flowers to animals) result from a universal, immaterial life force expressing itself in material form."**⁸⁰ And Tolle brings emphasis on the fact that **human beings are a part of that expression.** *A New Earth* is another presentation of Eastern mysticism with a focus on separating our identity from our ego.

Tolle believes we have evolved to the point where we have the potential to become aware of our oneness with **the universal life force**, that is, that “**Being is an expression of the One Life Force.**”⁸¹ (Emphasis added) Yet the vast majority of people, according to Tolle, has an illusory self-image or ego and thus are unconscious and unaware of the source of their being. The reason for this is that we have been conditioned by the past, with its repetitious cycle of always wanting and never being satisfied. In addition we have an individual and collective accumulation of old emotional pain Tolle calls the "pain-body." Thus our ego and our pain-body become enemies in that they are actively trying to keep us away from true awareness.

Even though this lack of awareness of our true essence has brought us to the brink of extinction, the universal life force is manipulating this crisis by creating an opportunity for many people to move from an unconscious to consciousness. And the key to consciousness is recognizing that we are not our thoughts and/or egos; “**we must learn to accept and be present in the Now, because the past and the future exist only as thoughts.**”⁸² (Emphasis added) By affirming our intrinsic spiritual value and observe how our ego affects us, we can reduce anxiety and be able to accept our present circumstances.⁸³

The glorious future for Tolle, Oprah and all New Agers, is when most people will be operating from their true essence rather than their egos, for it is then that there will be we drastic social and physical upheavals on this earth that will result in **A New World Order**; or as Tolle puts it, **A New Earth.**⁸⁴

The following is Oprah Winfrey on reconciling *A New Earth* with her Christian background:

“I've reconciled it because I was able to open my mind about the absolute indescribable hugeness of that which we call "God." **I took God out of the box** because I grew up in the Baptist church and there were, you know, rules and, you know, belief systems indoctrinated. And I happened to be sitting in church in my late 20's. . . . And this great minister was preaching about how great God was and how omniscient and omnipresent, and God is everything. And then he said, and the lord thy god is a jealous god. And I was, you know, caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said "jealous." And something struck me. I was thinking God is all, God is omnipresent, God is—and God's also jealous? God is jealous of me? And something about that didn't feel right in my spirit because I believe that God is love and that God is in all things. And so that's when the search for something more than doctrine started to stir within me.”⁸⁵

And I love this quote that Eckhart has, this is one of my favorite quotes in chapter one where he says, **‘Man made god in his own image, the eternal, the infinite, and unnamable was reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as my god or our god.’**⁸⁶

And you know, it's been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we're all talking about here. Jesus came to say, ‘Look I'm going to live in the body, in the human body and I'm going to show you how it's done.’ These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn't come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don't believe that Jesus came to start Christianity. So that was also very helpful to me.⁸⁷

Well, I am a Christian who believes that **there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity.**⁸⁸ (Emphasis added)

IF ALL *RELIGIONS* ARE GOOD,
DOES IT REALLY MATTER WHAT YOU BELIEVE?

“Christianity and Buddhism are really very much alike, especially Buddhism.”⁸⁹
--G. K. Chesterton

Religion has been defined in many ways. What is clear, however, is that it is both a human attitude toward how life should be lived on earth and a belief of a world beyond. This attitude and belief finds its expression in a body of beliefs (creed), rites (ceremonies), and individual and social behavior (community).

MAN IS A RELIGIOUS ANIMAL

Social scientists generally agree that all societies have had religion in one form or another. Missionaries and anthropologists also report that religion, in some form, is universal among humanity at the present time.⁹⁰

For hundreds of years religion dominated and colored all other interests of society. Even today, religion remains important. However, in modern times, the phenomenon of the so-called “religionless” or “secular humanity” has appeared. Undeniably, religion and religious observance have declined in many parts of the world. Some see this decline as indicating that religion does not belong to the essence of humanity that it is simply characteristic of what will come to be seen

as “the childhood of the race.” Yet many times over the centuries when a religion seemed to have exhausted itself and to be on the verge of extinction, it has revived and launched out on a new and more vigorous chapter in its history.

Those who outwardly renounce more normative religions often find some kind of substitute such as mass ideologies and perverted cults. Even if particular forms of religion grow old in the course of time and are no longer able to hold their place, the religious spirit itself endures and seeks new forms, because it has deep roots in our human nature. There simply is no denying the fact that **man is a religious animal**.

Objective Evidence

Objective evidence, not arrogance, must be the basis for Christian truth-claims. It is sadly true that Christians at times have communicated a sense of arrogance about their convictions. These convictions have been so strong that they have been intolerant to even discuss other possibilities. Graciousness and patience must mark any discussion on the issue of religions. It must be clear to any follower of Jesus Christ that Christ’s uniqueness must be established by **objective evidence**, not by personal preference. Although testimonials are important, they are not enough since they are only subjective evidence. All religions can point to testimonials. Ultimately the question is not whether we believe that our religion has helped us in various ways, but **whether our religion is in fact true**. After all, false religions can be helpful in some ways. Ultimately whether a religion is good or not is based on truth, that is, whether it is true or not.

Are Not All Religions Good?

Americans feel that religion has a very **positive impact on society**. Adults think the following would occur if Americans became deeply religious:

- 87% believe people would do more volunteer/charity work more
- 85% believe parents would do a better job raising their children
- 79% believe there would be a decrease in crime in society
- 69% believe there would be less greed/materialism⁹¹

Although the American people are increasingly diverse in their religious views, they continue to be **a very religious people**. Major polling companies point out that although over 90% of Americans consistently respond that they believe in “God,” polls also indicate that they mean different things by “God.” According to a telephone survey of more than 2,000 adults for the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life:

- 38% defined God as some form of “power and might,” using such terms as “creator,” “almighty,” “supreme being”;
- 25% spoke of a more personal relationship, using such terms as “Savior,” “protector,” “guiding force,” “comforting presence”;
- 12% described God as loving or compassionate;
- 6% described God as being good or great;
- 5% described God as “the Father”;
- 15% gave no answer.⁹²

By all these various surveys we find that religion is viewed very positively in our society.

Slightly more than half (54%) of the unchurched people of America believe that all of the major faith groups in the world teach the same basic principles. An identical percentage believe that it does not matter what religion one associates with because of the similarity in the principles being taught. This belief in a kind of one-world-religion is especially prevalent among the unchurched people under 40 years of age.⁹³

When I was a teenager Johnny Mathis and his romantic songs were very popular. In his collection of religious songs one was entitled, “One God.” The opening lyrics expresses what most believe today:

“Millions of stars placed in the sky by one God.
 Millions of men lift up their eyes to one God.
 So many children calling to him by many a different name.
 One father, loving each the same.
 Many the ways all of us pray to one God.
 Many the paths winding their way to one God.”⁹⁴

Are all the religions of the world various paths winding their way to that one God? Is any one religion merely a variation of a basic theme running through all religions? Do not all the world’s religions present in various ways interwoven threads of truth and error which are impossible to disentangle? Is Jesus Christ of Christianity any more unique than Buddha of Buddhism, Muhammad of Islam, Confucius of Confucianism?

Similar but Different

In addressing the question, “Are not all religions good? Does it really matter what you believe?” we need to keep several things in mind.

Religious toleration does not mean equal validity of truth. The problem of exclusive claims to truth is deeply embedded in our culture. We must keep in mind the difference between: 1) Religious toleration as a matter of legal rights and 2) The question of the equal validity of truth-claims.

Virtually all religions teach a universal moral code (the “tao”). There seems to be an underlying “ten commandments” of each of the major religions that undergirds all the religious teachings of the world that have managed to last any significant amount of time. In this sense, all religions are the same. Therefore *most religious codes of behavior have minor differences.*

All religions do not teach the same thing and do not differ only at key points. Attempts to make all religions “basically the same” raises the serious problem of reductionism whereby we reduce everything to a broad common denominator. Analogies such as the “mountain analogy” (“All roads lead to Rome”) in which all religious roads, though they differ in route, ultimately arrive at the same place, obscure the crucial differences between world religions.

POINTS OF CONFLICT

There are serious **points of conflict** between Christianity and all other religions and between other religions themselves.

Worldviews

Judaism and Christianity differ from all other religions in their worldviews. They accept the teaching that God voluntarily revealed Himself in mighty deeds and words through particular historical events and people. Old Testament scholar G. Ernest Wright contends that this historical grounding is unique among religions—that the Bible is the witness to the only religious movement in history that centers its case solely in history and its inspired interpretation. According to the biblical worldview, there is only one arena where ultimate meaning is to be found—the arena of the human struggle for civilization. Nature in itself does not contain ultimate meaning, although it can point to that meaning. Human beings cannot find authentic meaning through their elaborate attempts to get beyond or out of history. Rather, certain key events have been selected which are remarkable, unrepeatable, unique and when interpreted under divine inspiration and illumination, hold the clues to meaning.⁹⁵

To a follower of Plato or to a believer in the Hindu worldview, the notion that ultimate reality can best be known through particular occurrences in history is a complete contradiction and a scandal. The concern of Platonic philosophers and of most Hindu thinkers is to get away from the particulars and move into the realm of universal spirit.⁹⁶

According to the biblical worldview, however, a personal revelation through particular circumstances of time and space is the only way to become acquainted with the sovereign, free, and personal God and His purposes. Since God entered history in divine acts and raised up

people to interpret the significance of these acts, **particularity** (God working through specific people and events), far from being a scandal, has the highest metaphysical credentials—for God Himself is a particular since He is a Person. The starting point for Judaism and Christianity, therefore, is in revelation which comes through particulars—not the rough philosophical reasoning, religious intuition, divination, or human religious consciousness.⁹⁷

Animism

Animism is becoming increasingly prevalent in certain parts of Latin America and is also a rapidly growing phenomena in North America and other parts of the world. Animism is often called “nature worship” or “spiritism.” It is the belief that nature and all the objects of nature are possessed by living spirits. Generally speaking, the spirits are feared in primitive religions. They are believed to have power over human beings, and practitioners of “primitive religions” are not sure exactly how to get the spirits to exercise good rather than evil powers. Much of the ritual that has grown up in tribal religion is an effort to control the spirits. The power held by the shaman or priest is due to belief by others that he has unusual or secret ability in this regard.

Closely related is the fear of ghosts or spirits, especially in the proximity of cemeteries (the departed spirits of the dead are supposed to hover around the locale of their dead bodies). This is a primitive fear that grips many an educated and “Christian” person in the United States. Superstition then, is common in animism. Such superstition is clearly evidenced in New York City where virtually none of the high-rise buildings have a floor marked “13.” Other evidences in society are the belief in or fear of an impersonal power which can influence and control human life such as a black cat, a lucky pocket piece, throwing salt over the shoulder, a charm, amulet, or some more “religious” object.

Yet superstition is rejected by the Christian religion. Those “caught” in such practices are called on to renounce them for they stem from the kingdom of darkness. How then can these religions be reconciled? They cannot. They differ in virtually every conceivable point. Both cannot be true; therefore, both cannot be good.

The study of primitive religions seems to have established that everywhere--even among the most remote and primitive tribes—there is a concept of one High God or Supreme Being. German anthropologist W. Schmidt has given more elaborate study to this line of research than any other scholar. He found that among the Pygmies of Central Africa there is a clear sense of the existence of one Supreme Being to whom all other existences, natural or supernatural, are subject.⁹⁸

It is equally clear that this High-God is given remarkably little thought, prominence, or attention in the rites and observances of most primitive religions. Instead, men and women are absorbed by the need to propitiate and placate a multitude of far more immanent spirits or gods. The primitive seem either to have abandoned or to be fighting against this God. W. Schmidt himself regards this High-God concept as evidence of the survival, in part, of a primitive

revelation of God which has become obscured and overladen by magic, animism, polytheism, and delusion. This is in keeping with Paul's teaching in Romans 1:19-23 that human beings suppress or stifle the truth that they really know.⁹⁹

Morality as we know it is frequently unknown in tribal society. Primitive people may be both fanatically religious and grossly immoral (from the Christian point of view) and sense no incongruity in this situation. Unfortunately, a tribal or primitive view of the nonrelationship of religion and morality is coming to be prevalent throughout much of the United States. This way of thinking is directly opposed to the biblical view, which sees evil and suffering as directly related to the violation of God's revealed moral law.

Ancestor Worship

Animism takes many forms and **ancestor worship** is one of those forms. Although there are a variety of different beliefs of those who practice ancestor worship, there are some beliefs they hold in common. The foundational belief is that the inevitability of death does not dissolve the continuity of personal existence. People simply expect to leave their body and take another body which is less inhibiting than the one they had. Then they expect to live on in this new existence through the rites and ceremonies performed by the living, and it is believed they can have a direct effect on their lives through their spiritual influence.¹⁰⁰ The primitive fears of their ancestors makes them do everything possible to appease them. Much of the evil and suffering they experience is attributed to unhappiness that one of their ancestors has with some aspect of their life.

Judaism

Christian Scripture (the New Testament) is dominated by the conviction that what Israel hoped and longed for has been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. It seems highly probable that during the early part of Jesus' ministry, many Jews did wonder if He were the Messiah. The question of John the Baptist ("Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Mt 11:3) may well have voiced a popular feeling. But when the Jews remained in political bondage to Rome and Jesus died on the cross refusing to use violence or political measures to establish His kingdom, most Jews assumed the Messiah was yet to come.

Christians believe, of course, that the story did not end at the cross. The coming kingdom was far greater than any political entity. Out of Jesus' sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection (which the Jews deny) there sprang a faith which affirmed, beyond a shadow of doubt, that He was the Messiah of God and that He would come again on the clouds of heaven to judge the earth. This belief dominates the New Testament writings. In Jesus of Nazareth, Israel's destiny was fulfilled, and the people of God were reconstituted on the basis of the new covenant, so that it might include those of all nations and actualize God's purpose in the world.

The division between New Testament Christians and Jews over the messiahship of Jesus has continued into the present. There are many kinds of modern Jews, but only those who have been converted to Christianity—the “Completed Jews” or “Hebrew Christians”—accept Jesus as the Messiah.

In the broad Judaic view, the affirmation of Christ as the Messiah can only be read as Christian romanticism. Christians must be romantics who have failed to see, or refused to contemplate, the desperate wrongness of the world. After the Holocaust, especially, the Jews are extremely conscious of the evil in the world. They say that Christians should not wrap a legend of victorious love around the gross and chronic evil that is history and pretend that “God has reconciled the world.” For the Jews, the Christian claim that the Messiah has come must be scorned as a cruel confidence trick unworthy of “the God of Israel.” From the Jewish perspective, the evidence, including the Jewish agony in history, is witness to the conviction that there is no realized messiahship—at least not yet, if ever.¹⁰¹

The Christian faith, in contrast, believes that the redeeming grace of the sovereign God has already liberated present history through the death and resurrection of Jesus. All appearances to the contrary, the redemptive power of God is active in our world. Yet Christians from the New Testament times have always known that the present world is not yet “the kingdom of God and of His Christ” in the fullest sense possible. How could they think this in the face of the cross, not to mention the New Testament insistence that the kingdom in its totality is still to come at the second coming of the risen Jesus?

Islam

It is generally agreed that in the history of religion, **Islam** stands out in regard to its founding and phenomenal growth. Within the span of a single decade (A.D. 622-632), the founder of this religion united the nomadic tribes of the Arabian peninsula into a single cohesive nation. Furthermore, he gave them a monotheistic religion in place of their tribal religion, organized a powerful society and state, and launched a religious and political movement which was to expand into a religious and cultural empire. Within a century after the death of Muhammad, the Islamic empire stretched from Arabia west through North Africa to southern France and Spain. The movement also spread north of Arabia through the Middle East and east throughout Central Asia, right up to the borders of China. In the process of this expansion, much

of the oldest and strongest Christian territory was lost to this new religion of Islam. In the last twenty years Islam has also made serious inroads into the rest of Europe and the United States.¹⁰²

Because of Muhammad's hatred of idols, he placed an immense emphasis on the unity and transcendence of God. He exalted God far above the world and everything that human beings can understand. This unity was absolute in Muhammad's theology. The worst of sins, therefore, was the sin of saying that God was a "partner." Accordingly, Islam is opposed not only to the Christian claim that Jesus is the Son of God, but to any suggestion that God could in any way relate Himself to anything outside Himself. Islamic theology holds that God is too highly exalted to enter into any kind of relationship. He makes no revelation of Himself to humanity; He reveals only His will. Even in paradise, people will not know God as He is.¹⁰³

While the Muslims respect and revere Jesus, the confession of their faith precludes any association of Jesus with God. In their view, Jesus was God's messenger, not His son. Islamic leader Abdullah Yusuf Ali has expressed what it means to a Muslim in our own day to hear Christians speak of Christ as God's Son:

"It is a derogation from the glory of God—in fact it is blasphemy—to say that God begets sons, like a man or an animal. The Christian doctrine is here emphatically repudiated."¹⁰⁴

In the view of the Muslim, with his compelling Allah-consciousness, Christian worship and theology fall short of radical transcendence. For the Muslim, the concept of "God in Christ" represents a compromise of divine exaltedness and the Incarnation represents a forfeiture of God's sovereignty. It is thought that the imperative of the divine will is somehow diminished by what Christianity affirms as divine condescension toward humanity.¹⁰⁵

The "Bible" of Islam is the Qur'an which is believed to contain the utterances of Allah Himself and to have come straight from heaven. Scripture was given to Muhammad in a form that is clear, mandatory, and explicit with an inalienable unity of form and meaning. There is no human element in it at all. Therefore Muslims claim for the Qur'an something that Christians have never claimed for the Bible since Christians admit that there are human elements in the Bible. In fact, it is human and divine. But the argument by Muslims is that if that is so, then how can the Bible be the Word of God? As Scripture, the Qur'an has been understood by Islam to be the final revelation.¹⁰⁶

Christians see the Bible as much more than a source of information and rules to follow; it is God's revelation of Himself to His people. This revelation was given to a large number of people over a long period of time (1500 years). And it was completed in God's revelation of

Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible, therefore, is important and authoritative to Christians, but it is secondary to and dependent on God's revelation of Himself through incarnation.¹⁰⁷

The Qur'an specifically condemns Judaism and Christianity as deviations of the truth. It denies the central Christian teaching about the crucifixion of Christ and rejects the Christian teaching about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Muhammad is considered as "the seal of the prophets," the final one in the succession of prophets. This means that Islam believes there will be no other and thus it repudiates the Christian teaching about the work and finality of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸

Hinduism

The Hindu conception of God maintains that an impersonal Brahman is always beyond any personal manifestation in an *avatar*. However, Brahman can appear in personal form and may be said to have personal qualities. In contrast to the biblical God, who is personal even though He is ultimate, personhood of the Brahman in Hinduism is finally only a part of the semi-illusory world of appearance.¹⁰⁹

Because the visible world is believed to belong to the realm of shadow and appearance, it is impossible in Hindu thought for the visible world to have any final value. Experience is illusory and usually serves to distract humans from the true nature of reality. In contrast, the Bible teaches that God is the source and end of all that is, and that His presence pervades creation, sustains it, and in some ways even causes it to reflect His character.

Karma is in essence the moral law of retribution which requires each person to be continually reincarnated until he or she can attain release or liberation. The constantly changing forms of energy in which consciousness is diffused change according to this definite inexorable law, which essentially determines that our immediately previous life is the sole cause of the nature and disposition with which we began this present life. Since the cosmos has no intrinsic value in Hindu thought, the law of karma finally reaches a dead end as it cannot be creative. Because people are punished in a future life by their own sins, they cannot be punished for them here and now. Redemption, forgiveness, and genuine release are not possible since the law of cause and effect is irreversible.¹¹⁰

Jesus did not merely come to show us something about God, He came as God incarnate to do something for this fallen created order, that is, to provide redemption through His death. While Hinduism teaches timeless superpersonal union that is achieved through knowledge and eventually, in its ultimate form, the end of personal existence, Christianity involves personal communion with a loving God. Salvation in the Christian religion means a heightened, more

meaningful personal existence, not the end of personal existence. Self-knowledge is the highest form of knowledge though Hindus do not think of the self in the same individualistic terms as we do in the West. The goal, in Hindu thought, is for this false sense of individuality to give way to pure consciousness as it expresses itself in the unity of self with all reality.¹¹¹

There is a long Hindu tradition of absorption of other religions, of nondistinction between faiths, and of revering reverence *per se*, that is, of tolerating everything but intolerance. Thus Hinduism is willing to embrace all other religious doctrines. However, this acceptance does not mean Hinduism is willing to give up its fundamental doctrines. Rather, Hindus seek to embrace all other doctrines in order to ultimately modify or change them in accord with Hindu views.¹¹²

Buddhism

Buddhism is one of the most universal of the world's religions. It was founded by Siddhartha Gautama. After a life of luxury and sensuous pleasure Gautama began to seek something higher. There came to him an illumination concerning both the cause and cure of the misery of existence. This illumination was what later caused him to be called "the Buddha, the Enlightened One." It is interesting that Buddha himself had a problem with Hinduism.

The three principles of Buddhism are:

1. **Nothing is permanent**, including human personality. Everything is in a perpetual eternal state of constant change. The world has only relative, or semi-illusory, or seeming existence. Separate, individual existence of personality, therefore, is an illusion.
2. **Sorrow is implicit in all seeming individuality**. The source of sorrow is considered to be the innate quality of clinging to the illusion of individual existence and to the sensory experiences associated with existence. Human beings cannot gain what they want, and they cannot escape what they dislike. This condition produces inner frustration and external conflict with others, and these in turn produce misery.
3. **There is no such entity as the personality or soul**. Although human beings cling to the illusion of individual and eternal existence, they are actually made up of five aggregates, or *skandas*, of which one is material and four are mental. These five aggregates—physical body, sensations, perception (abstract ideas), consciousness, and thought—are held together by an intangible "thread of life" which is never quite identified in Buddhism. In the experience called death, the five aggregates separate from the other. They never come together again in the same combination, although

each individual *skanda* will unite with four other skandas to constitute a new human life. Thus Buddhism rejects all ideas of a unique entity that might be designated a soul dwelling in a body.¹¹³

Buddhism also rejects the concept of reincarnation (samsara) that is so fundamental to Hinduism and many other religions. In Buddhism there is rebirth of *skandas* in ever-differing combinations, but no migration of soul-entity from one body to another. On the basis of this doctrine of no-soul, in Buddhism the final salvation comes at the point when none of the component *skandas* ever again unites with others to constitute a new life.¹⁰⁶ Therefore Buddhists do not speak of nirvana or salvation as a place to which a “person” or self goes. Nirvana is an event, something that happens to the psycho-physical process so that its cause-effect chain reaction is terminated. It is sufficient for the Buddhist to say that nirvana is perfect rest. This means that there is a final cessation of formation and reformation.¹¹⁴

Buddhism’s fundamental opposition to the Christian faith is its rejection of the Christian proclamation that God raised Jesus. The Buddhist disputes the resurrection of Jesus because he believes there is no helper for humanity except humanity itself. The Buddhist, being fundamentally humanistic, believes that human beings cannot sustain their own personal identity. Yet because he is humanistic, the Buddhist believes that human beings can liberate themselves from a state of dependence. Such reasoning seems rather contradictory and ultimately it is the Buddhist’s sense of human sufficiency which must die in order for him to embrace the Christian faith.¹¹⁵

Secularism (Secular Humanism)

Secularism or Secular Humanism is not a religion in the classical sense, yet it is a form of religion in that it adheres to a philosophy that permeates the lives of those who believe in it. At the beginning of this article religion is defined as “a human attitude toward how life should be lived on earth and a belief of a world beyond.” Although secularism is a denial of a belief of a world beyond, it does have a human attitude toward how life should be lived. In fact, its denial of an afterlife brings emphasis on **life here and now**.

It is a philosophy in which the development of scientific knowledge and technological skills seem to set themselves firmly in opposition to all the traditional forms of religion. Secularism has an agnostic mindset and emphasizes man and his achievements. The theory of evolution is treated not as a theory but as a fact. Man is thereby left on his own. He has to observe, classify, form theories, reject and modify them, understand and master his world. No outside power will come to his aid and supply him with information which would otherwise be inaccessible to him.

A secular society is one in which those who govern justify themselves by appeal to technical experts who in turn justify themselves by appeal to scientific forms of knowledge. Therefore there is no appeal beyond the authority of science. This philosophy holds that the vital needs of man are purely technical in nature. Thus all problems that are real have technical solutions.

Probably the most admirable thing about the secularist is his interest in and devotion to truth. Even though the secularist has become indifferent, and even defiant, toward Christian claims to truth in recent decades, nevertheless he is a seeker after truth.

Although there are many facets to secularism, most of it (certainly “secular humanism”), has in common with other religions its interest in humanism, that is, that which is humane. Therefore secularists often speak of the “good” and the “bad,” yet such language to the Christian seems strange and reckless since there is no ultimate, divine authority to whom anyone must give an account. With its denial of an afterlife, moral and ethical categories in secular humanism seem rather arbitrary and useless to the Christian religion if there is no Creator who gave and defined such categories. Such categories become make-believe without a higher authority because they are based on the ideas and feelings of finite human beings.

Other Religions

There are also basic points of difference between other religions, between Judaism and Islam, between Buddhism and Taoism, and between Christianity and Confucianism. For instance, how can Buddhism and Confucianism be true when they deny the existence of a personal God and at the same time Judaism and Christianity be true when they affirm the existence of a personal God? Can there be a personal God and not be a personal God at the same time and in the same relationship?

Christianity as Unique

All religious and cultural expressions, apart from God’s special revelation, are **responses to God** that are both more or less positive and more or less negative. The good and the bad lie side by side, confused and interlocked. The only way out of this confused situation is for Almighty God to act in some unique way. He must take an action which will involve both judgment and fulfillment in regard to the self-contradictory aspirations and intuitions expressed in all philosophical, religious, and cultural striving. This situation calls for a Savior God. For Christians, this is the God of the Bible.

Jesus Christ *alone is worthy of unlimited devotion and service.* His life, work, and teachings set Him apart from all other religious leaders. While He is critical of arrogance and bigotry, He calls everyone to a single-minded devotion to truth. And He claims to be that truth (Jn 14:6). It is the Christians' claim that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth we meet God incarnate. Buddha never claimed to be anything more than a man. Muhammad claimed nothing more than prophet status. Moses and Confucius were mortals. If Christ was in fact God in the flesh, then it is a travesty of justice to ascribe equal honor to Him and the others. This would necessitate either falsely attributing to mortal man the attributes of deity or stripping Christ of His divine nature.

The uniqueness of Christ and His exclusive claims are the heart of the issue. To understand that uniqueness we must understand the whole pattern of biblical history which tells us how God has relentlessly and patiently sought to reconcile man to Himself. If the biblical history is true, we can never suppose that God "has not done enough" to provide for our redemption.

Despite the world's constant rebellion against Him, **God has provided a way of redemption.** The ultimate question of redemption is the question why God would bother to provide any way of redemption for us. The wonderful truth is that even though we don't deserve it, in Christ "we have redemption through his blood . . . according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7).

In light of this information it is impossible to believe that all religions are good and that it really doesn't matter what you believe. There is no way to reconcile the various teachings of religion. The only way is to deny **the law of noncontradiction**, a basic law of logic since the days of Aristotle. If we deny the law of noncontradiction then the answer to the question of the similarities between religions is meaningless.

SUMMARY

The New Age is not new! It is merely Hinduism in a new garb. In the New Age, as in much of Eastern mysticism and Greek philosophy, **all is one**: God is one, we are one, therefore we are God. God did not create the universe but that God **is** the Universe. Thus, the creation account—and the "big bang," for that matter—are out the window, denying both logic and human moral experience.

Larry Eskredge, associate director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College in Illinois, said,

“Oprah’s theology seems to be **a version of America’s secular theology of self-improvement, doing good to others, and the prosperity gospel**. She is also able to foster a tremendous sense of community around her TV show. People who watch feel they are involved in a great quest to improve society and improve themselves.”¹¹⁶ (Emphasis added)

By elevating man to divinity, Oprah, Tolle and all New Agers are not in pursuit of and in communion with God but are in pursuit with the "image of God." The problem with this is **the God of the universe has not called us to join ourselves to His creation but to Himself**, "the Creator who is blessed forever" (Ro 1:25).

Are Tolle and Oprah correct when they claim that spirituality has nothing to do with what we believe?

"How 'spiritual' you are has **nothing to do with what you believe**, but everything to do with your state of consciousness.”¹¹⁷ (Emphasis added)

Doctrine seemed to matter to Apostle Paul:

“for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to **sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel** of the blessed God, which He entrusted to me” (1 Ti 1:10-11).

“**Watch** your life and **doctrine closely**” (1 Ti 4:16).

“If anyone teaches **false** doctrines and does not agree with the **sound instruction** of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Ti 6:3).

“They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who **believe and know the truth**” (2 Ti 4:3).

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and **the knowledge of the truth** that leads to godliness” (Titus 1:1).

“You must teach what is **in accord with sound doctrine**” (Titus 2:1).

Is it hateful and intolerant to believe that Christianity is true and other religions are not? How can all religions be true since they contradict each other at critical doctrines?

Our postmodern culture has undoubtedly undermined our commitment to absolute truth generally and to the truth of the Gospel specifically.

Greater personal peace and an escape from unhappiness promised by New Agers is a poison that kills the soul.

Jesus was not so tolerant!

Unlike Oprah and Tolle who say that what we believe doesn't matter when it comes to spirituality, Jesus said,

"I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to [God] the Father **except through Me**" (Jn. 14:6).

Religious pluralism with its assumption that all religions are works of human interpretation and that *no one religion has "the truth"* has undermined such a claim.

The Person of Jesus Christ is the crucial issue because our salvation, our eternal destiny, is dependent on who we believe Jesus to be. Jesus made this crystal clear when He challenged the Pharisees:

"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not **believe that I am the one I claim to be**, you will indeed die in your sins" (Jn. 8:24).

11. FREEMASONRY

"Just as there is a vital spark in man that defies definition or description, so is there in Freemasonry a divine flame—a vital, living force that transcends all descriptions."¹

--Charles Clyde Hunt, Fellow of the Philalethes Society (1939)

"Freemasonry is deceptive and fraudulent . . . Its promise is light—its performance is darkness."²

--President John Quincy Adams

"Masonry ought forever to be abolished. It is wrong—essentially wrong—a seed of evil, which can never produce any good."³

--President John Quincy Adams

Freemasonry is a fraternal organization that arose from obscure origins in the late 16th to early 17th century. Although the first Grand Lodge was formed by the merger of four local English lodges in 1717, many speculate that its origins are far older. Traces of Masonry go back to the sixteenth century, possibly to the Knights Templars in the 1100-1200's, and in a lesser form to Ancient Egypt. There is evidence in the Chapel at Rosslyn that Masonry was active in England in the 1440's. Sir Robert Moray was initiated into Freemasonry on English soil (Newcastle) in 1641 and Elias Ashmole was made a Mason in Warrington, England, in 1646.⁴

Freemasonry now exists in various forms all over the world, with **a membership estimated at around *five million***, including just **under two million in the United States and around 480,000 in England, Scotland and Ireland.**⁵

Freemasonry, and cults inspired by Masons, grew rapidly during the nineteenth century, particularly during the second half of the century. In addition to founding the Theosophical Society, Freemasonry participated in the rise and spread of Christian Science and Unitarianism; Masons Rutherford and Russell founded the Jehovah's Witnesses and Joseph Smith, another high ranking Mason, founded The Mormon Church. Smith was already heavily into the occult prior to becoming a Mason and had published his book of Mormon in 1830, some twelve years before joining the Order. However, on 15 March, 1842, Smith received his first degree in Freemasonry, and he was raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason on the very next day. "Six weeks later, on May 2, 1842, Smith was teaching these Masonic secrets as his own "revelations" to Mormon leaders as the temple Endowment."⁶ As W. J. McCormick put it, "Into the fabric of Freemasonry he wove his own peculiar brand of occultism, claiming it to be 'revelation' from on high."⁷ Brigham Young, the other significant early Mormon leader, was also a Mason and contributed to the rise of its occultic hierarchy.

Although the organization claims it is not a religion or a substitute for religion, it procured a tax exemption status (501C3) as a religion recently.

The various forms all share moral and metaphysical ideals, which, in most cases, include **a constitutional declaration of belief in a Supreme Being.**

There is no world wide controlling body for the organization. Instead, each jurisdiction has its own Grand Lodge, which is the supreme authority within the jurisdiction, which consists of subordinate (or constituent) Lodges. Many of these Grand Lodges acknowledge each other's legitimacy reciprocally. Most countries have one Grand Lodge, however each state in the United States has its own separate Grand Lodge. In addition, there are attendant bodies, (e.g. The Eastern Star—social order for adults, Job's Daughters—Girls, DeMolay—Boys, Knights of Pythias, Ordo Templi Orientis are the oriental Knights Templar and Rosicruciana) which are organizations related to the main branch of Freemasonry, but with their own independent administration.

Against the allegorical backdrop of the building of King Solomon's Temple, Freemasonry uses the metaphors of stonemasons' tools and implements to convey a system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.

IS FREEMASONRY BASICALLY JUST A “GOOD OLE BOY” FRATERNITY?

Is Freemasonry basically just a "good ole boy" fraternity that does good works and has a good time? Is this a mere façade presented by the Masons?

Unlike Christianity which offers salvation as a free gift, freemasonry requires dues to guarantee of heaven.

BASIC THEOLOGY

Although Freemasonry plays down the idea of being theological, it does emphasize the belief in

“The Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man and the immortality of the soul.”

It does state that if it has a “basic theology” it is as follows:

“There is a Supreme Being
Who created the Universe,
Who has established and revealed a moral law,
And to Whom we must give account
in a life after this.”⁸

As they point out, “These five points are supported by material in the lectures and related contents of the degrees, such as the discourses on the Working Tools. But there is nothing in these points that is in conflict with any major religion of the Western world”⁷ (except for some branches of Buddhism that are non-theistic, and there are those who do not believe in an afterlife).

GOAL

The goal of Freemasonry seems to be expressed in the following statement:

“[Freemasonry] makes no profession of Christianity, and wars not against sectarian creeds or doctrines, but looks forward to the time when the labor of our ancient brethren shall be symbolized by the erection of a spiritual temple whose moral grandeur shall be commensurate with civilization; a temple in which there shall be but one altar and but one worship; one common altar of Masonry on which the Veda, Shastras, Sade, Zend-Avesta, Koran, and Holy Bible shall lie untouched by sacrilegious hands, and at whose shrine the Hindoo, the Persian, the Assyrian, the Chaldean, the Egyptian, the Chinese, the Muhammadan, the Jew, and the Christian may **kneel with one united voice celebrate the praises of the Supreme Architect of the Universe.**”⁹ (Emphasis added)

THREE GREAT PRINCIPLES

Freemasons adhere to three great principles:

1. **Brotherly Love**—Freemasons will show tolerance and respect for the opinion of others and behave with kindness and understanding to his fellow human beings.
2. **Relief**—Freemasons are taught to practice charity and to care, not only for their own, but also for the community as a whole. This is done by charitable giving and by voluntary efforts and works as individuals.

3. **Truth**—Freemasons strive for truth and require high moral standards by aiming to achieve them in their own lives.

LEVELS

Freemasonry is a hidden fraternal order, and defined by them as a system of morality. The first three steps are the Blue Lodge.

The first degree is called Entered Apprentice, the second Fellow Craft, the third degree is called Master Mason. Although most men only advance to the third degree, if they choose, they may advance either through the York Rite or the Scottish Rite, which has thirty-two degrees.

In each degree, the Mason pledges himself to a different Egyptian deity. There is a thirty-third degree that is largely honorary, but the thirty-two degrees give one access to becoming a Shriner.

This means that as Shriners people pledge themselves to the pagan "god" Allah; who by the way lies that Jesus did not even die on a cross, and that God has no Son.

A MIXTURE OF IDOLATRY, PAGANISM, FERTILITY CULTS AND THE OCCULT

Masonry is a mixed of idolatry, paganism, fertility cults, Kabala and the occult.

New candidates of Masonry are offered "the light." The light they are actually giving is Lucifer, who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He also masquerades as an "angel of light," seeking to deceive many.

Unknown to most Masons, there is an occultic side to Masonry. It is at levels in Masonry that most Masons never get to. Freemasonry delves into the occult mysteries with numbers, metaphors and symbols of which many are not acquainted.

THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A MASON

In the process of becoming a Mason, a candidate is led and hoodwinked into believing there is useful knowledge to be learned in Masonry. In each level there are "Secrets" or "knowledge" which is monetarily costly and very time consuming.

Prospective members are made to "swear" and take "solemn oaths." Most do not realize the terrible oaths they are required to take for each advancing degree in this cult. Each Entering Apprentice, for example, is required to repeat:

". . . most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, that I will always hail, ever conceal, and never reveal, any of the arts, parts or points of the hidden mysteries of ancient Freemasonry. . . . All this I most solemnly, sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steadfast resolution to perform the same, without any mental reservation or secret evasion of mine whatever binding myself under no less a penalty than that of having my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by its roots, and buried in the rough sand of the sea at low water mark where the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty-four hours, should I ever knowingly or willingly violate my solemn oath and obligation as an Entered Apprentice Mason. So help me, God."¹⁰

As a group they are officially known as the "Free and Accepted Masons," sometimes called the "Ancient Free and Accepted Masons," but most often they're referred to as "Freemasons" or "Masons."

SYMBOLISM



"Great Architect of the Universe"

Jim Shaw was an Ex-33 degree Mason who claims:

"The Blue Lodge Mason is taught that the "G" in the basic Masonic symbol represents God. Later on, he is told that it represents "deity." Later still, he is told that it represents "geometry." In reality, this letter represents the 'generative principle,' the Sun-god and, thus, the worshipped phallus, the male 'generative principle. . . .

In its position (along with the square and compass) on the east wall over the chair (throne) of the Worshipful Master, it is the representation of the Sun, thus of the Sun-god, Osiris. Its earthly meaning, then, is of the sacred phallus; its cosmic meaning is of the Sun, worshipped since antiquity by pagans while facing the East."¹¹

Albert Mackey wrote in *The Masonic Ritualist*,

"Thus the trestleboard (blueprint for life) of the Jew is the Old Testament, of the Mohammedan the Koran; the Veda Scriptures of Hinduism and the writings of Baha-ullah are just as good as the Word of the Christians' God, for the fact is that **all religions are never as good as the pure teachings of Freemasonry.**"¹²

Jesus is no greater than the other "exemplars" of history (such as Mohammed, Buddah, Aristotle, or Joseph Smith).

It was after participating in a Masonic Maundy Thursday "black communion" ceremony in his Scottish Rites Temple in Florida that Jim Shaw walked away from Freemasonry. He testifies that participants of this ceremony are required to refer to Jesus as an "apostle of mankind who was neither inspired nor divine."¹³ He claims that they then mocked Jesus by enacting a strange "black communion" ceremony.

In the Scottish Rite the Thursday before Easter, "Maundy Thursday," is an important day. On this day Masons always perform a special ceremony of "Communion" in their local Scottish Rite Temple.

Dressed in long black, hooded robes during this Thursday ceremony, Masons chant:

"We meet this day to commemorate the death of our 'Most Wise and Perfect Master,' not as inspired or divine, for this is not for us to decide, but as at least the greatest of mankind."¹⁴

INITIATION CEREMONY

Jim Shaw gives the following depiction of the Initiation Ceremony of the Black Mass/Black Communion service:

"During this ceremony, Masons continue by mocking Jesus' teachings at His Last Supper and the bread and wine [Body and Blood] by saying:

'Take, eat, and give to the hungry. Take, drink, and give to the thirsty.'

One of the Conductors then handed the 'candidate' a human skull, upside down, with wine in it.

‘May this wine I now drink become a deadly poison to me, as the Hemlock juice drunk by Socrates, should I ever knowingly or willfully violate the same [the oath].’¹⁵

The great Masonic lie is that **all religions are equal, including Islam and Satanism**. If all these religions within Masonry are "correct" or of equal validity and each claims to be the valid and correct, then how can Satanists mock and blaspheme God and Muslims deny Jesus ever having died on a cross?

Jesus is hardly ever mentioned in the lodges except in vague, philosophical terms and prayers are not made in His name. Even when Scriptures such as 2 Thessalonians 3:6 is used in the ritual, the words "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" are entirely omitted. Similarly, the ritual includes 1 Peter 2:5 the words "by Jesus Christ" are omitted. Albert Mackey, considered the highest Masonic authority after Albert Pike, calls such changes "a slight but necessary modification."¹⁶

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NUMBERS 33 AND 3 AND 33 DEGREES

Numbers, as in many religions and the occult, play a very significant role in Masonry:

“The numbers 33 and 3 are both prominently featured in occult doctrine. Ancient mythology teach that the ‘Sons of man’ (Fallen Angels cast out of Heaven with Lucifer?) landed on earth on Mount Hermon. It was then in Phoenicia; now in Israel. Its altitude makes it Israel's primary strategic early warning system. This was the first location of extraterrestrial influence on man. Using the old Paris Meridian, this lies exactly at 33.33 degrees north and 33.33 degrees east. It is also 2012 miles from the equator and 2012 miles from the Paris Meridian. The Paris Meridian is the meridian to which many ancient structures are aligned. The number of nautical miles in 33.33 degrees of the earth is 2012.9. This corresponds to the year, month day that (December 21, 2012) the ancient Mayans believed their calendar would end.

Many believe that December 21, 2012 is the date that the ‘sons of God’ will return to earth and establish a new world order. They will be led by a powerful "unearthly" ruler. Will this be the return of the Nephilim through dimensional gates or "stargates"? Will this be the awaited antichrist? Do Nephilim need space craft to enter this dimension? Was Roswell one such craft?”¹⁷

Masons expect such a "new age" or "new world order" to emerge out of chaos.

In *Nephilim Stargates - the year 2012 and the return of the Watchers*, by Thomas R. Horn

“Masonry makes no profession of Christianity...but looks forward to the time when the labor of our ancient brethren shall be symbolized by the erection of a spiritual temple . . . in which there shall be one altar and one worship; one common altar of Masonry on which the Veda, Shastra, Sade, Zend-Avesta, Koran and Holy Bible shall lie...and at whose shrine the Hindoo, the Persian, the Assyrian, the Chaldean, the Egyptian, the Chinese, the Mohammedan, the Jew, and the Christian may kneel . . .”¹⁸

Although Masons are often unnoticed by the general public, in 1827, our country witnessed the birth of a third political party. This new party was dedicated to countering the malevolent and subversive influence of Freemasonry. It was named the Anti-Masonic Party. In fact, in 1830 John Quincy Adams was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives on this Anti-Mason Party ticket. In 1832 the Anti-Masonic Party even managed to elect a congressman named Millard Fillmore, but their candidate for President received only seven votes in the Electoral College.

The sixth President, John Quincy Adams, a devout Christian, wrote a book first published in 1833 to warn the public of the secret society and fraternity of Freemasonry. He was convinced Freemasonry was Luciferian and thus very evil.

It was the tragic murder of Captain William Morgan by a group of Masons in the state of New York in the year 1826 that further heightened Adams' sense of urgency to warn of the dangers of the Masonic Lodge. Morgan, an ex-Mason, had revealed some of the secrets of the Masons—oaths, handshakes and ritual trappings, etc. In retaliation, he was ritually murdered in a gruesome manner, and his mutilated body was abandoned in a lake.

The facts of Morgan's murder were subsequently covered up by lawful authorities, reputed themselves to be Masons. When evidence ensued that the Masonic Society had assisted the culprits responsible for Morgan's death to elude capture and escape punishment, the event caused a national scandal.

Masonic Blasphemy

In the Royal Arch degree of the York Rite, the Companion Captain of the Host is asked if he is a Royal Arch Mason and he replies, "I am, that I am." This is blasphemous because when Moses asked God what name he should give to the Israelites when they asked what the name of God is, God replied, "I am that I am" (Ex 3:13).

In the Scottish Rite, one of the officer's title is Rabboni which is a name given to Jesus by Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:16). By using Jesus' name and combining it with other gods or pagan deities is another example of blasphemy.

Benjamin Franklin was a Deist, those who believe in a God who created the universe and then abandoned it. Dr. Priestley, an intimate friend of Franklin, wrote of him:

"It is much to be lamented that a man of Franklin's general good character and great influence should have been an unbeliever in Christianity, and also have done as much as he did to make others unbelievers."¹⁹

Thomas Paine, a Mason, wrote a very widely distributed pamphlet called "Common Sense" during the American Revolution in which he spells out what Masons really teach and believe. Paine, like Franklin, was a Deist. His pamphlet, "Origin Of Free-Masonry," proposed that Masonry's embodiment of the sun worship of ancient Druidism was a legitimate alternative to Christianity. He notes that Freemasonry's god, Osiris and Isis, theologically represented the Supreme Being and universal Nature. Furthermore, he wrote in his famous book, *The Age of Reason*,

"I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my church."²⁰

THE FALSE RELIGION OF FREEMASONRY

The great mason occultist Albert Pike wrote:

"Every Masonic Lodge is a Temple of Religion; and its teachings are instruction in religion."²¹

"Acacian: a term signifying a Mason who by living in strict obedience to obligations and precepts of the fraternity is free from sin."²²

Strict obedience includes not witnessing about Jesus or even mentioning His name in the Lodge.

Luciferian Doctrine

Albert Pike, the preeminent Masonic authority, was said to be a Satanist, who indulged in the occult and he apparently possessed a bracelet which he used to summon Lucifer, with whom he had constant communication. He was the Grand Master of a Masonic Luciferian group known as the Order of the Palladium (or Sovereign Council of Wisdom), which had been founded in

Paris in 1737. Palladism had been brought to Greece from Egypt by Pythagoras in the fifth century, and it was this cult of Satan that was introduced to the inner circle of the Masonic lodges. The Palladian Rite provides an intensified hands-on course in "fleshly glove" demon possession leading to walking/talking possession of human initiates by Lucifer-associated spirits, demons.²³

Most new candidates to Masonry also have no idea that what they are told initially are lies.

Albert Pike admits that Masons below the 32nd degree are intentionally misled by false interpretations but it is intended that he shall imagine he understands them. The truth is reserved for the Adepts, the Princes of Masonry (those of the 32nd and 33rd degrees).

Although they have 33 degrees, only 32 can be earned because those who are given the rank of 33rd will be selected from those who have already been 33rd degree masons to make sure they will be loyal to the fraternity, that is, "one of the boys."

In Freemasonry the strategy is that the degrees leading up to the thirteenth degree serve as a training school to gradually condition and prepare the candidate for the ultimate acceptance of Luciferian initiation. This is why so much of the language used has double meaning. As a result unsuspecting candidates are practicing occultism throughout their attempt to earn higher degrees without knowing it. They call such deception allegory, where the language is one thing and the meaning is another.

Are the virtues of brotherly love, forgiveness, and charity merely a ploy to make their satanic religion appear acceptable to the community? Freemasonry is also connected with the cult known as Rosicrucian, a secret society. It flourished in a day when secret societies were in vogue, and a century after its origin, it became more popular though its connection with Freemasonry, which borrowed customs from the writings of those who had satirized the

fraternity. The Rosicrucian claim is that there is a "Hidden Church" which is a repository of great secrets learned in the East, and transmitted by various luminaries, sages and adepts down to our own time.

The name 'Rosicrucian' is derived from the Latin words "ros" and "cruces" or rose cross. However, their symbolism of the cross has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. This "Invisible Order" was founded in Germany, several centuries earlier, by Christian Rosenkrutz, born in 1378. It is claimed that in order to perpetuate an ancient tradition he had initiated a few brothers into the mysteries of the Rose Cross. The successors to these brothers brought to light the existence of the Order in 1614, with the publication of the first Rosicrucian manifesto *Fama Fraternitatis*. However, the actual foundation of the Order is believed to have taken place on the occasion of the opening of the allegorical crypt of Christian Rosenkrutz, ten years prior to the publication of *Fama Fraternitatis*. *Fama Fraternitatis* was first published in 1614 in German and in 1615 in Latin, though there are some manuscript copies in existence dating from about 1611. According to them, however,

"The Order of the Rose and Cross has existed from time immemorial, and its mystic rites were practiced and its wisdom taught in Egypt. Eleusis, Samothrace, Persia, Chaldea, India, and in far, more distant lands, and thus were handed down to posterity the Secret Wisdom of the Ancient Ages."²⁴

That its origin remains a mystery was emphasized by Prime Minister Disraeli, who said of the Society, in 1841, that its hidden sources defy research.

After traveling in Spain, Damascus and Arabia, where he was initiated into Arabian magic, Rosenkreutz returned to Germany and set up his fraternity of the Invisibles. In a building they designated as *Domus Sancti Spiritus* they followed such varied studies as the secrets of nature, alchemy, astrology, magnetism (hypnotism), communication with the dead and medicine.

At the heart of Masonry is a secret Luciferian doctrine which a Mason only comes to understand as he reaches the higher levels. Manly Palmer Hall, in her book, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, writes,

"When the Mason ... has learned the mystery of his Craft, the seething energies of Lucifer are in his hands."²⁵

Pierce Dodson gives the following disturbing testimony:

“High level Masons believe that Lucifer never fell to earth and that Lucifer is really God, and refer to Yahweh by the name of ‘Adonay.’ Masons say that it is Yahweh that is the god of evil, because he forces men to be subservient to his repressive dictates. Masonic books given to handpicked members of the 32nd and 33rd Degrees, say that Jesus was an impostor, and that Lucifer is the true God. The Masons have their own Luciferian based calendar. Where ours is based on the years before (B.C.) and after (A.D.) the birth of Christ, theirs counts its years with the suffix A.L. means Anno Lucis or ‘Year of Light (Lucifer). Masons usually refer to God with the vague and general term ‘Deity.’ The god of Masonry can be one of their own choosing, spoken generically as the ‘The Great Architect of the Universe.’ Human nature is also worshipped by some Masons as ‘Deity,’ as are Knowledge and Reason.”²⁶

SHRINERS



Most Shriners are decent men who do bow to the pagan Islamic Allah. They are given a red hat known as a Fez with an Islamic sword and crescent jewel on the front of it. The fez is named after a town in Morocco, where in 980 A.D., 50,000 Christians, including women and children, were brutally murdered by the Muslims. As the streets ran red with the Christians’ blood from the massacre, the Muslims dipped their hats in that blood as a testimony to Allah. Thus the red Fez symbolizes the slaughter of Christians in that town. Yet the Masons still wear the red Fez adorned with the Islamic crescent symbol.²⁷

This sword emblem originates, a symbol of subjugation, is from 7th century Arabia when the Moslems, under the leadership of Muhammad, slaughtered all Christians and Jews who would not bow down to the pagan moon god Allah.

The Illustrious Grand High Priest swears in new members who put their hands on a copy of the Muslim Koran. They swears a long oath that culminates in a typical Masonic vow of secrecy “unto death,” with the closing words "and may Allah, the god of the Arab Moslem and Mohameddan support me. Amen."²⁸

Shriners obligate themselves by making unholy oaths such as allowing the piercing of their eyeballs with a three-edged blade, and the flaying of their feet if they should reveal their Shriner "secrets." Shriners worship of the false god Allah, as the god of their fathers.

Shriners are a pagan Islamic branch of masonry who have reached higher "levels" in Freemasonry. Islamic symbols—including of world conquest—are everywhere in Shriner Temples.

As a Mason goes through the 32 degrees of the Scottish rite, he ends up giving worship to every Egyptian pagan god, the gods of Persia, gods of India, Greek gods, Babylonian gods, and others.

In his book, Satanic Rituals — Companion to the Satanic Bible, Anton Szandor LaVey, States:

“Satanic Ritual is a blend of Gnostic, Cabbalistic, Hermetic, and Masonic elements, incorporating nomenclature and vibratory words of power from virtually every mythos. . . . Masonic orders have contained the most influential men in many governments, and virtually every occult order has many Masonic roots.”²⁹

Declaration on Masonic Associations

The following is an English translation of a Latin Document from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (November 26, 1983) by the Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect (now Pope) and Father Jerome Hamer, O.P. Titular Archbishop of Lorium, Secretary.

“It has been asked whether there has been any change in the Church's decision in regard to Masonic associations since the new Code of Canon Law does not mention them expressly, unlike the previous code.

This sacred congregation is in a position to reply that this circumstance is due to an editorial criterion which was followed also in the case of other associations likewise unmentioned inasmuch as they are contained in wider categories.

Therefore, the Church's negative judgment in regard to Masonic associations remains unchanged since their principles have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church and, therefore, membership in them remains forbidden. The faithful, who enroll in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion.

It is not within the competence of local ecclesiastical authorities to give a judgment on the nature of Masonic associations which would imply a derogation from what has been decided above, and this in line with the declaration of this sacred congregation issued Feb. 17, 1981.

In an audience granted to the undersigned cardinal prefect, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II approved and ordered the publication of this declaration which had been decided in an ordinary meeting of this sacred congregation.

Rome, from the Office of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Nov. 26, 1983.³⁰

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect
 Father Jerome Hamer, O.P. Titular Archbishop of Lorium, Secretary

No Roman Catholic may be a Mason. To continue as a Mason in the light of such knowledge is to be in contempt of this decision and guilty of a "grave matter," a "mortal sin" thus disqualifying such a person from receiving Holy Communion until that person renounces Masonry.³¹

PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE

"The world is governed by people far different from those imagined by the public."³²

--Benjamin Disraeli, Victorian-era Prime Minister of Britain

"In politics, nothing happens by accident. If it happens, you can bet it was planned that way."³³

--President Franklin D. Roosevelt

"Tell me thy company, and I'll tell thee what thou art."³⁴

--Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), Spanish writer

The following list shows the tremendous influence of Masons on the history of our country.

1764 - Samuel Adams, signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Served as delegate to the Continental Congress until 1781, and became governor of Massachusetts from 1794-97.

1775 - Joseph Warren, a soldier and leader in the American Revolution who sent Paul Revere and William Dawes to Lexington and Concord on their famous ride to warn local patriots that British troops were being sent against them.

1775 - Paul Revere, GRAND MASTER GRAND LODGE OF MASSACHUSETTS A.F. & A.M. 1795 – 1797

1776 - John Hancock, wrote and the first to sign the Declaration of Independence, and served nine terms as the Governor of Mass.

1776 - Benjamin Franklin, helped draft the Declaration of Independence, one of the 5 who signed this document, and was instrumental in achieving the adoption of the U.S. Constitution. Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and published the first Masonic book in America. Was also a member of Sir Francis Dashwood's Hell Fire Club, along with the Collins family of Satanists. Both Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were members of this purely Satanic group who practiced satanic sexual occult rituals.

1777 - Lafayette. French noble who fought with the American colonist against the British in the American Revolution.

Charles Taze Russell (founder of the Watchtower and Bible Tract Society).

1779 - John Paul Jones, navel hero in the U.S. War of Independence.

1785 President George Washington, our first president, although Samuel Huntington served as President from September 28, 1779 to July 6, 1781. Washington was a member of Lodge No. 4, Fredericksburg, Virginia where he became a “Worshipful Master.”

1790-1791 John Rutledge, S.C.J. Associate Justice. Chief Justice 1795.

1789-1810 William Cushing, S.C.J. Associate Justice.

1795 John Rutledge, S.C.J. Chief Justice.

1796-1800 Oliver Ellsworth, S.C.J. Chief Justice.

1789-1796 John Blair Jr. S.C.J. Associate Justice. Grand Master of Virginia from 1778 to 1784.

1793-1806 William Paterson. S.C.J. Associate Justice, Nominated by Mason President George Washington.

1800 Aaron Burr, Presidential candidate for Presidency.

1800 John Adams, Presidential candidate for Presidency.

1809 Thomas Jefferson, 3rd. President of the United States and primary framer of the Constitution.

1805-1809 Vice President George Clinton.

Albert (Abraham Alfonse) Gallatin. 4th. Secretary of the Treasury.

1801-1835 John Marshall, S.C.J. Chief Justice. He was not proud or enthusiastic about being a Freemason, at least later in his life.

John Adams. Previously Grand Master of Virginia, from 1793-1795.

1807-1826 Thomas Todd, S.C.J. Nominated by President Thomas Jefferson.

1809-1817 James Madison, 4th. President of the United States.

1811-1845 Joseph Story, S.C.J. Nominated by President James Madison.

1811-1821 Jose de San Martin. Soldier and Statesman.

1812 De Wit Clinton, Presidential candidate.

1812 Winfield Scott. Unsuccessful Whig candidate for President in 1853.

1814 Francis Scott Key, lawyer and the author of the U.S. national anthem. The US Circuit Court said, "In God We Trust" comes from "The Star-Spangled Banner" by Francis Scott Key and is not a reference to a specific faith.

1816 Rufus King, served in the state legislature, in the Continental Congress and was a presidential candidate.

1817-1825 James Monroe, 5th. President.

1824 Henry Clay, Presidential candidate.

Andrew Johnson, U.S. President. Greenville Lodge No. 119, Tennessee.

William McKinley, U.S. President. Hiram Lodge No. 21, Virginia.

William Howard Taft, U.S. President.

Thomas Todd, US Associate Justice (1807–1826)

Robert Trimble, US Associate Justice (1826–1828). Union #16 in Paris, Kentucky

Levi Woodbury, US Associate Justice (1845–1851)

William B. Woods, US Associate Justice (1881–1887)

Thomas C. Clark, US Associate Justice (1949–1967).

John H. Clarke, US Associate Justice (1916–1922).

Henry Clay Speaker of the. U.S. House of Representatives and Grand Master of Kentucky

Davy Crockett, 19th-century American folk hero, frontiersman, soldier and politician.

William Cushing, US Associate Justice (1789–1810), St. Andrews Lodge, Boston.

Alexander John Cuza Romanian Domnitor of the Danubian Principalities, 1859-1866.

Cecil B. DeMille Movie Director, member of Prince of Orange Lodge No. 16, New York City.

Willis Van Devanter, US Associate Justice (1911–1939)

Thomas Dewey, American politician (1902–1971)

Stephen J. Field, US Associate Justice (1863–1897)

Charles Finney, American Preacher, Evangelist and Author (1792–1875). Meridian Sun Lodge No. 32 in Warren, New York. Finney asked for dismissal and was honorably discharged.

Hamilton Fish IV, US Politician

Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company. Raised in Palestine Lodge No. 35.

Nathan Bedford Forrest, confederate general. Member of Angerona Lodge no. 168 in Tennessee, but later resigned from Freemasonry.

James A. Garfield, U.S. President. Magnolia Lodge No. 20, Columbus Lodge No. 30, and Garrettsville Lodge No. 246, Ohio

James Buchanan, U.S. President.

John H. Glenn, Jr., Astronaut and US Senator. Concord Lodge No. 688 Concord, Ohio

Manly Palmer Hall, Esoteric author. Raised 1954/11/22 into Jewel Lodge No. 374, San Francisco

John Hancock, American revolutionary, merchant and statesman.

Winfield Scott Hancock, U.S. General. Charity Lodge #190, Norristown, Pennsylvania

Warren G. Harding, U.S. President. Marion Lodge No. 70, Ohio

John M. Harlan, US Associate Supreme Court Justice.

Joseph Hewes, Signer of the American Declaration of Independence.

J. Edgar Hoover, First Director of the FBI. Grand Cross. Federal Lodge No. 1, Washington, D.C.

Harry Houdini, Escape artist.

Jesse Jackson, US Civil Rights leader and Politician, Harmony Lodge No. 88, Chicago, Illinois (PHA)

Robert H. Jackson, U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice (1941–1954)

John Jay, Chief Justice of the United States (1789–1795)

Lyndon B. Johnson, U.S. President. Johnson City Lodge No. 561, Texas (EA degree only)

Frank S. Land, member of the Ivanhoe Lodge #446 on June 29, 1912 in Kansas City. He was the founder of DeMolay International

Joseph Lamar, US Associate Justice (1888–1893), Webb Lodge No. 166 F.& A.M., Augusta, Georgia

Charles Lindbergh, US Aviator and chairman of the America First Committee, Keystone Lodge No. 243, St. Louis, Mo.

John Marshall, Chief Justice of the United States (1801–1835), Grand Master of Virginia from 1793-1795

Thurgood Marshall, U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice (1967–1991), Coal Creek Lodge No. 88, Tulsa, Oklahoma PHA

General Douglas MacArthur, US General during World War II, Manila Lodge No. 1, 1936, Philippines

Harpo Marx, US film comedian

John S. McCain, Sr. (1884–1945), US admiral, Carrollton Lodge No. 36

John McLean, US Associate Justice (1829–1861)

J. B. Milam (1884–1949), Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, 32 degree Mason

Sherman Minton, US Associate Justice (1949–1956)

Samuel Nelson, US Associate Justice (1845–1872).

Sam Nunn, US Senator.

Irving Berlin. Composer.

Arnold Palmer, Professional Golfer, Loyalhanna Lodge No. 275, Latrobe, Pennsylvania

William Paterson, US Associate Justice (1793–1806) and 2nd governor of New Jersey

Matthew Calbraith Perry, Commodore, US Navy, The Holland Lodge No. 8, New York, New York, 1819

John J. Pershing, Commander, American Expeditionary Force, World War I, Lincoln Lodge No.19, Lincoln, Nebraska.

George Pickett, Confederate general at Gettysburg

James K. Polk, U.S. President. Initiated June 5, 1820, Columbia Lodge No. 31, Tennessee

Stanley F. Reed, US Associate Justice (1938–1957)

Ed Rendell, Governor of Pennsylvania

Roy Rogers, American actor, Hollywood Lodge No. 355, California

Will Rogers American political commentator and satirist, Claremore Lodge No. 53, OK

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, U.S. President. Holland Lodge No. 8, New York

Theodore Roosevelt, U.S. President. Matinecock Lodge No. 806, Oyster Bay, New York

John Rutledge, Chief Justice of the United States (1795), Associate Justice (1789–1791)

Peter Sellers, actor, comedian, star of The Goon Show and The Pink Panther movie series, Chelsea Lodge No 3098, UGLE

Joseph Smith, Sr., Mormon leader, Ontario Lodge No. 23 of Canandaigua, New York, 1818

Joseph Smith, Jr., Founder of the Latter Day Saint movement, Nauvoo Lodge, Illinois

Hyrum Smith, Mormon leader, Mount Moriah Lodge No. 112, Palmyra, New York

John Philip Sousa, Composer,^[26] Hiram Lodge No. 10, Washington, D.C.

Richard Bernard "Red" Skelton, American comedian, Vincennes Lodge No. 1, Vincennes, Indiana

Potter Stewart, US Associate Justice (1958–1981)

Joseph Story, US Associate Justice (1811–1845)

Sir Arthur Sullivan, Sullivan of 'Gilbert and Sullivan', and was also Grand Organist of the UGLE in 1887.

Noah H. Swayne, US Associate Justice (1862–1881)

Alphonso Taft, U.S. Attorney General and Secretary of War. Kilwinning Lodge No. 356, Ohio

William Howard Taft, U.S. President. Made a "Mason at sight" inside Kilwinning Lodge No. 356, Ohio, February 18, 1909 Kilwinning Lodge No. 356, Ohio

Dave Thomas, Founder of Wendy's, raised as a Master Mason in Sol. D. Bayless Lodge No. 359 Fort Wayne, Indiana. Received the 33rd Degree, N.M.J., on 11/16/1961, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Strom Thurmond US Senator from South Carolina and segregationist candidate for the United States presidency in 1948

Harry S Truman, U.S. President, Belton Lodge No. 450, Belton, Missouri. Grand Master of Missouri, 1940-1941

Mark Twain, American author. Polar Star Lodge No. 79, A.F.& A.M., St. Louis, Missouri. (Suspended for non-payment of dues and later reinstated April 24, 1867.

Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the United States (1953–1969), Grand Master of California 1935 to 1936.

John Wayne, American actor, Marion McDaniel Lodge No. 56.

Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright, novelist, and poet, Apollo University Lodge No. 357, Oxford (UGLE).

Cy Young, Perhaps the greatest pitcher in the history of baseball.

Andrew Young, Former Ambassador of the United Nations.

James Doolittle, US General.

William O. Douglas, US Associate Justice (1939–1975).

Oliver Ellsworth, Chief Justice of the United States (1796–1800).

Sam Ervin, US Senator.

Darryl Zanuck, Legendary Co-founder of 20 Century Productions who valued his Masonic affiliation above all other accomplishments!

Norman Vincent Peale, Minister.

Steve Wozniak Co-founder Apple Computers, Charity Lodge No. 362, Campbell, California

Henry Dodge U.S. Senator from Wisconsin

Gerald Ford, U.S. President. Malta Lodge No. 465, Grand Rapids, MI

Bob Dole, US politician. Russell Lodge No. 177, Kansas.

Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel who was initiated into the Masonic Lodge while in U.S. (Spring 1994).³⁵

Ronald Reagan has often been referred to as a Freemason. Although he was an honorary member of the Imperial Council of the Shrine and was on numerous occasions involved in Shrine and Masonic functions throughout his career, he was not a Freemason.

Part of the confusion as to his membership comes from a ceremony held in the Oval Office of the White House on February 11th, 1988, when a group of Freemasons presented President Reagan with a certificate of honor from the Grand Lodge of Washington, D.C. Then he was made an Honorary Scottish Rite mason. The title of Freemason can only be conferred by a Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, which in Reagan's case, was not done. It is believed the reason was because the ceremonies would have taken a full day to confer and the president's time was limited. Therefore, President Reagan should only be referred to as a Shriner or Scottish Rite mason because the Shrine and Scottish Rite are concordant bodies and cannot confer the title Freemason on any person.³⁶

The symbols on the back of the U.S. dollar bill (the pyramid, the all-seeing eye, the number of feathers on the eagle's spread wings, the stars above the eagle's head in the shape of the Star of David, and the mottoes *e pluribus unum* meaning “out of many one” and *novus ordo seclorum* meaning “a new order of the ages” appear to emanate from Freemasonry.³⁷

Perhaps this should not be surprising since many of **our country's founding fathers were Masons** such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Ethan Allen, John Hancock, John Paul Jones, Paul Revere, Robert Livingston, and 35 other lesser known men who were signers of the Declaration of Independence and/or the Constitution and 13 of 39 of those who signed the Constitution.³⁸ There were also several founding fathers who condemned masonry such as John Adams, John Quincy Adams, James Madison, Millard Fillmore, Daniel Webster, and Charles Sumner.³⁹

SUMMARY

Freemasonry is deeply embedded in **a false mystical religious system of salvation by works:**

“. . . salvation by faith and the vicarious atonement were not taught as now interpreted, by Jesus, nor are these doctrines taught in the esoteric scriptures. They are later and ignorant perversions of the original doctrines.”⁴⁰

Any "god" will do in the Masonic religion:

“In his private petitions a man may petition God or Jehovah, Allah or Buddha, Mohammed or Jesus; he may call upon the God of Israel or the First Great Cause. In the Masonic Lodge he hears petition to the Great Architect of the Universe, finding his own deity under that name. A hundred paths may wind upward around a mountain; at the top they meet.”⁴¹

Because they deny the reality of sin, Masons see no need of salvation in the biblical sense. They see salvation as a step-by-step enlightenment, which comes through initiation into the Masonic degrees and their mysteries. Ultimately, **it isn't God who saves one's soul; it is one's own good works.**

For an organization that claims not to be a religion, isn't it rather strange that the room they meet in is referred to as a “temple,” the chairman for that year is called “Worshipful Master,” the seat he sits on is referred to as an “altar,” and the ceremonies end with the phrase “so mote it be,” which is the same terminology used in major satanic rituals?

Many people of good are Freemasons because they were attracted to its appearance as an organization deeply involved in various charitable activities. Unfortunately, Freemasonry must be understood not by its advertisement and promotional gimmicks, but by their teachings which are diametrically opposed to historic Christianity.

Since the majority of the poor in our nation are single women, and their children, the physically and mentally challenged, the African Americans and Hispanics, they are pretty much left out of this fraternity because becoming a Mason requires serious dues. Was it not the poor and the disenfranchised that Jesus reached out to the most?

Although it may be that the rank and file Mason has no idea that the goal of Masonry is **world domination**, the organization does aim for such a goal. This is evident through control of currency, control of major corporations including banking, media, entertainment and communications. Moreover, their influence is seen in their infiltration in the areas of education (e.g. textbooks) and religion, especially the Roman Catholic Church (e.g. Knights of Columbus). This is ironic since Pope Leo XIII, as early as 1884, accused Freemasons as being on the wrong side of the battle raging between "the kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of Satan." Pope Leo XIII identified Freemasonry as "partisans of evil . . . boldly rising up against God Himself."⁴² He claimed that the ultimate purpose of Freemasonry was

"the utter overthrow of that whole religious and political order of the world which the Christian teaching has produced, and the substitution of a new state of things in accordance with their ideas, of which the foundations and Laws shall be drawn from mere naturalism."⁴³

Leo criticized them for believing that human nature and human reason "ought in all things to be mistress and guide"⁴⁴ and therefore

". . . care little for duties to God, or pervert them by erroneous and vague opinions. For they deny that anything has been taught by God; they allow no dogma of religion or truth which cannot be understood by human intelligence, nor any teacher who ought to be believed by reason of his authority."⁴⁵

Masons, like New Agers, are working towards a **one world government** and a **one world religion**. Because of their desire to "belong," new candidates are in the dark about their fraternity's goal.

It is the belief of Masons that one day all of the Ancient Mysteries will be revealed to all those living on the earth. In the Masonic Legend of Hiram Abiff, that day will be marked by his resurrection to rule the world. According to the Bible, the Beast (Antichrist) will be disguised when he comes to rule. He may come as Hiram Abiff to the Masons, as Krishna to the Hindus, as Imam Mahdi to the Muslims and as Sosiosch to the Zoroastrians.

Masons consider Christians of being sectarian and Christianity to be a sect because of its belief its teachings are based on Jesus Christ who is **the Truth**. Such a claim of being the only source of truth runs counter to Freemasonry in which all religious beliefs and institutions are freely accepted whether Buddhists, Muslim, Zoroastrians, Voodooists. All are welcomed so long as each agrees that his particular religion is not exclusive because that would be sectarianism.

Since Jesus Christ testified that He alone is the one true God, that He alone is "The Way, The Truth, and The Life" (Jn 14:6) He and His message is not compatible with Freemasonry. "Christians" who are not dogmatic on the teaching of particularism—the doctrine that Jesus in the only Way to God—are accepted by Freemasonry.

IS JESUS CHRIST *THE ONLY WAY TO GOD*?

"More and more people care about religious tolerance as fewer and fewer care about religion."⁴⁶

--Alexander Chase

Is the God of the Bible narrow-minded? Why do Christians believe that God will save only a few people? Is He not the God of all mankind?

Religious pluralism assumes that all religions are works of human interpretation and that no one religion has "the truth." A question often asked is, "Doesn't the sincere Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu worship the same God as the Christian, but under a different name?" In other words, "**Is Jesus Christ really the only way to God?**"

IS CHRISTIANITY "SPIRITUALLY RACIST"?

Rabbi Schmuley Boteach stated:

"I am absolutely against any religion that says that one faith is superior to another. I don't see how that is anything different than spiritual racism. It's a way of saying that we are closer to God than you, and that's what leads to hatred."⁴⁷

Spiritual racism? That is to say that many people consider it arrogant, narrow-minded and bigoted for Christians to teach that the only path to God is through Jesus Christ. The Indian philosopher Swami Vivekenanda fits that label much better when he told the World Parliament of Religions in 1893: “We [Hindus] accept all religions to be true.”⁴⁸ He then went on to say that the real sin is to call someone else a sinner.⁴⁹

The only way then to hold to such a position would be to jettison the Law of Non-contradiction which makes reason, logic, and language nonsensical. Even the Hindus do not do that though at times they claim to do so. Vivekenanda’s claim simply does not fit his own religion of Hinduism since it holds certain beliefs that are totally contrary to the beliefs of other religions. It is uncompromising on at least three issues: karma—the law of moral cause and effect, reincarnations, and the authority of the Vedas, their holy book. Although Hinduism allows people to practice their own religion it is only as long as they do so as they buy into the Hindu view of syncretistic truth, that is, the attempt to blend together different or even opposing beliefs. But even syncretistic truth must blend in with the Hindu beliefs of karma, reincarnations, and the Vedas.

Furthermore, Hinduism in its purest form teaches that everyone, no matter what their religion is now, is eventually reincarnated as a good Hindu in a future life and then enters paradise. Hindus, therefore, believe that Hinduism is the only way to paradise.

Charles Templeton called the biblical claim that there is

“**no other name** under heaven by which we must be saved” (Ac 4:12)

“insufferable presumption”⁵⁰

Templeton reasons:

“Christians are a small minority in the world. Approximately four out of every five people on the face of the earth believe in gods other than the Christian God. The more than five billion people who live on earth revere or worship more than three hundred gods. If one includes the animist or tribal religions, the number rises to more than three thousand. Are we to believe that only Christians are right?”⁵¹

Is it presumptuous for Christians to claim they are right and everybody else in the world is wrong? In the first place, Christians are not the only ones that believe that. Muslims also believe that. Not only that, but they claim that the Qur’an is the consummate miracle of Islam, which is interesting since it is only recognizable in Arabic. In fact, they contend that any other

translation makes the Qur'an sacriligious. This is especially strange since it takes not just a basic knowledge of Arabic to understand it, but a sophisticated knowledge of the language. This not only rules out foreigners who do not know Arabic, but also their own people, many of whom do not have a sophisticated understanding of the language. Talk about exclusivity! How different with the Bible which is written for the common person (*Koine* Greek) with translations in more than 98% of the world's languages.⁵²

FAITH AND TRUTH CLAIMS

Neither sincerity nor intensity of faith can create truth. **Faith is no more valid than the object in which it is placed.** Believing doesn't make something true, *per se*, and refusing to believe a truth cannot make it false. **The real issue is the question of truth.**

Truth by its very nature is exclusive. We simply cannot say that it is arrogant to claim that $2+2=4$ or that poison is detrimental to our health. If we begin to say that $2+2$ equals "whatever," we will overthrow science in a hurry and if we say that poison is as good as medicine, we bring the whole medical profession into question. Scientists and physicians have to be dogmatic on certain things or their advice will not only be useless, but in fact dangerous. If truth does not exclude, then no assertion of a truth claim can be made. This reduces truth claims to mere assertions or opinions. A truth claim by definition excludes its opposite, that is, falsehood. The irony is that to deny the exclusive nature of truth is also to make a truth claim. Is that person then not arrogant as well?⁵³

Consider Islam and Christianity. In the moral and ethical realms we can find many similarities between them, but the two faiths are diametrically opposed on the most crucial question: Who is Jesus Christ? Islam denies that Jesus Christ is God the Son. It denies that He died on the cross and rose from the dead. Christianity, on the other hand, affirms and focuses upon the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for our sin and then rose from the dead. Both faiths cannot simultaneously be true at this particular point. One is correct, one is incorrect, or both are incorrect. If the crux of Christianity is false, our faith is worthless.

THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

The claims of Christ cannot be ignored! He claimed **a unique relationship** to God. He demands **the same trust** that God demands: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. *Trust in God; trust also in Me*" (Jn 14:1).

Jesus demands **the same devotion** as God the Father: ". . . anyone who does not *carry his cross and follow Me* cannot be *My disciple* . . . any of you who does not *give up everything* cannot be *My disciple*" (Lk 14:27,33; compare with Mk 10:17-31).

He was to receive **equal love** as God the Father: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be *My disciple*” (Lk 14:26; compare with Mt 22:34-40 and Mk 12:28-31).

He was to receive **equal honor and glory** as God the Father: “. . . that all may *honor the Son just as they honor the Father*. He who does not *honor the Son* does not *honor the Father*, who sent Him” (Jn 5:22-23).

The apostle Paul points out that Jesus is **the image of God**:

“He is **the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created *by Him and for Him*.

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood shed on the cross” (Col 1:15-20; see also 2 Co 4:4).

The statement, “For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him” (Col 1:19) and the statement, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col 2:9) show that the very essence of deity was present in totality in Jesus’ human body and thus Jesus alone is the embodiment of **all the fullness of the Godhead**. Similarly in Hebrews 1:3 Christ is described as “**the radiance** of God’s glory and the **exact representation** of His being.”

JESUS PAID THE PRICE

Buddha did not claim to die for anyone’s sins. Zoroaster didn’t die for our sins. Neither did Muhammad or Confucius. The Christian truth claim is unique.

Those who don’t think God has done enough for mankind should be reminded of what the Son of God went through to provide the only way of salvation. How can anyone fault God for not going far enough to redeem humanity?

THE WRONG QUESTION

Instead of asking, “Why is there only one way to God?” we should be asking, “Why is there any way at all?” How is it that God is so merciful as to grant us repentance after we have repeatedly rebelled against Him?

CREDIBLE EVIDENCE

This bold claim of the Christian faith is based upon supernatural evidence. The miracles that Jesus and the apostles performed gave witness to the truth of the message of salvation. Eyewitnesses recorded the miracles in the Bible. And miracles have continued down through the centuries.

The hundreds of predictive prophecies and fulfillment contained in the Bible witness to the authenticity of Christian truth claims. Jesus’ life and ministry was prophesied centuries before He came. Other historical events in the affairs of nations were also prophesied centuries before they came to pass. Scores of these prophecies have been fulfilled down to the most minute detail.

No other alleged sacred or scholarly writing can make such a claim. The Muslim *Qur’an* cannot, the Hindu *Vedas* or Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* cannot make the claim to predictive prophecy and fulfillment.

THE ONLY WAY TO GOD

Many contend that Christians are being bigoted and prejudiced or presumptuous when they say that Christ is **the only way to God**. Is such an indictment fair? Not really, for *we have no other option because Jesus Christ Himself has said this: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

No one else! No other name!

Similarly He claimed: “I am **the way** and **the truth** and **the life**. No one comes to the Father **except through Me**” (Jn 14:6).

Jesus did not say “a way,” “a truth,” “a life.” Jesus is not one way among many, but *the* way. This means that Jesus is the way to the Father in that He is the truth and the life.

Jesus then is asserting in strong terms **the uniqueness and the sufficiency of His work** for people. These words were spoken on the eve of the crucifixion. It is ironic that the One who would shortly hang helpless on a cross would say, “I am the Way,” and who would say, “I am the Truth” when the lies of evil people were about to enjoy a spectacular triumph, and who would say, “I am the Life,” when within a few hours His corpse would be placed in a tomb. This is the paradox (a seeming contradiction) of Christianity.

Although one may choose to believe whatever he wishes, he has **no right to redefine Christianity** in his own terms. If we are going to be faithful to Jesus Christ, we must take our stand on **what He said**. If He is God, this is the only answer. Bigotry is irrelevant to the issue for we are dealing with truth that has come to us by revelation, through the invasion into human history of God Himself in Jesus Christ.

R. C. Sproul uses a couple of illustrations to make this point clear. In some areas of life, the penalties for breaking laws are socially determined. For instance, there's a stop sign on the corner. By vote the community can decide on a \$10, \$30, or \$60 fine for going through that sign. Or it can abolish the fine. The penalty is not determined by the act of going through the stop sign; the legal penalty is not inherent in the violation. In some other aspects of life, such as in the physical realm, we find laws that are not socially determined. Suppose our community passed a unanimous resolution to suspend the law of gravity an hour a day, from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. Who would join in jumping off the roof to try it out? Suppose we passed the resolution three times? Would there be any takers? We do not determine socially the penalty for violating the law of gravity; **the penalty is inherent in the violation**. No matter what we think, say, or do, jumping off roofs will probably maim or kill us.⁵⁴

12. OTHER LESS PROMINENT CULTS

The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (The **Unification Church**) of Sun Myung Moon views Jesus as **a man no better than we are**. Jesus' value is no greater than that of any other man. He categorically has declared: "It is plain that Jesus is not God Himself."¹ It was founded in 1954 by Sun Myung Moon and is a highly authoritarian and destructive group teaches that Jesus failed on the cross. Moon is now the mediator between God and man. Moon views Jesus as **a man no better than we are**. Jesus' value is no greater than that of any other man.

According to the teachings of the Unification Church **Jesus' work and mission were a failure**. His death on a cross was disappointing and second best. Although Jesus as Messiah set out to rule as a religious and political ruler who would inaugurate the kingdom of God, His messianic goals were thwarted when John the Baptist failed to convert his audience into a power bloc for Him.

Instead of admitting defeat, Jesus adopted a secondary mission which was not dependent on popular support. Rather than introducing the kingdom of God, he simply secured spiritual salvation for believers.

Because Jesus failed in His mission to secure physical salvation for His followers, the messianic mission is unfinished and its completion awaits the leadership of another man. That man is Sun Myung Moon. He claims that on Easter morning in 1936

Jesus appeared to him and commissioned him to form a large following and the father perfect children, which would complete his original mission. In the spring of 1980, when Moon's 12th child was conceived, the goal was accomplished and salvation was secured.²

Moon has retired from active leadership by distributing authority to other Unification leaders. He sees his task as complete. Although, like Jesus, he is simply a man, unlike Jesus, he has not been thwarted by historical circumstances and thus his followers believe **that the second coming of Christ is fulfilled**.

The Way International teaches **that Jesus is merely a man and that His existence began at His conception**: "Jesus Christ's existence began when he was conceived by God's creating the soul-life of Jesus in Mary."³ They explain how this was done: "God created, brought into existence, a sperm in an ovum in Mary."⁴ Since flesh is flesh, and God is spirit, so Jesus is not the divine man; He is simply a man. He was just like other human beings, except that His "bloodline" was a little different. Therefore they claim that the Trinitarian belief is "an invention" of the Nicean Council of A.D. 325.⁵

Yet they insist that the Bible accurately records the life of Jesus, and its words are otherwise trustworthy. They believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior of all who believe in Him. They teach that Jesus is the revealed word of God, the *Logos*. God foreknew that Jesus would lead a perfect life and thus become a suitable sacrificial lamb. He gave His life to avert God's judgment of humanity's sins and His substitutionary death and His resurrection from the dead demonstrate God's power and grace.

The Way International cult believes that Christianity, as we have come to know it, is a heretical institution that teaches unbiblical truths. It has robbed believers of many spiritual benefits and thus prevented them from hearing the complete counsel of God. By raising up The Way International Church, God is teaching truth once again after twenty centuries of heretical and defective teaching.⁶

The **New Age** "Jesus" is divine in exactly the sense that all human beings are divine. He is one of many great spiritual masters who have succeeded in tapping into their own godhood. New Agers generally separate the man Jesus from "the Christ."

When they refer to Jesus as "the Christ," they do not think of Him as the only Messiah but as one of many manifestations of a universal power that they call God.

Jesus then, is no more God than anyone else. The only difference between Jesus and the rest of humanity is that Jesus more fully realized and demonstrated the divine potential that we all have. Jesus' value to us is merely that of an **example**, and it is His desire that the rest of humanity to become His equals, not to worship Him. Jesus' "Christhood" was the realization that He was divine while in human life. All people can also attain to such Christhood.

Moreover, God is not simply in me, **I am God**. Shirley MacLaine, an ardent spokesperson for the New Age, said the following in her book, *Dancing in the Light*:

"I know that I exist, therefore I AM. I know the God-source exists. Therefore IT IS. Since I am part of that force, then I AM that I AM."⁷

In New Age parlance, Jesus is a **mystic medium**. He is a **guide to self-actualization**. He is a **channel**—one of many ancients who give New Age adherents a "glimpse" of the past. Through previous incarnations, Jesus attained a level of purity that is achievable by all.

God is no longer the personal Jehovah of the Bible, who interacts with man and works His will and purpose through history. Rather, God is an **impersonal, nonfeeling, nonthinking god-force, energy, consciousness, principle, or vibration**, of which everything in the universe is a part. It is a part. It is possible to tap into that power

without the restrictions imposed by morals, whereby we can be the master of all nature, like Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* films in which he used the "**Force**" to gain supernatural powers and win his battles.

The New Age is not new! It is merely Hinduism in a new garb. In the New Age, as in much of Eastern mysticism and Greek philosophy, all is one: God is one, we are one, therefore we are God. This is pantheism: the belief that God did not create the universe but that God **is** the Universe. God is everything; the rocks, the trees, the sun, the wind, all are God and God is all. Thus, the creation account—and the "big bang," for that matter—are out the window, denying both logic and human moral experience.

OTHER CULTS

David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, Jim Jones and the People's Temple, or Marshall Applewhite and Heaven's Gate are a few of the most notorious and contemporary examples of destructive "cults" in America

1. The Twelve Tribes.

This group began in the early 1970s with Elbert Eugene Spriggs. They claim that salvation can only be found by giving all possessions to them and living in their community. All personal decision-making power is given over to the leadership.

2. The International Churches of Christ (Boston Movement).

This highly evangelistic group which began in 1978 with Kip McKean embraces most of the main tenets of the historic Church. Teaches that it is the only true Church and is highly authoritarian, with immense control over members' lives.

3. The Family (Children of God).

This communal group was founded by David "Moses" Berg. A strange mixture of basic Christian tenets and almost total sexual license. Very controlling and manipulative.

4. Christian Identity Movement (Aryan Nations, Christian Identity Church, Klu Klux Klan, etc.).

A loose-knit confederation of various small groups that are militantly anti-government and conspiracy driven. Each group holds differing, deviant Christian tenets. All hold to Caucasians being the descendants of the ten "lost" Tribes of Israel, God's true people.

5. The Nation of Islam (Black Muslims).

Began in 1930s by W. D. Fard. Group teaches that the black man is good, the white man is the devil, and that Jesus was merely a prophet. A highly controlling group.

6. United Pentecostal Church (UPC).

A highly controlling, legalistic group that was formed in 1945. This group denies the **trinity** and teaches that in order to be saved one must be baptized in the name of Jesus only.

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