



CHALLENGES
to
Christianity

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INTRODUCTION

PART 1

Jesus Christ made an audacious claim when He said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” In those words, He is claiming to be God and is also claiming to be the exclusive pathway to a relationship with God. He is saying that ultimate reality and life are found in Him. These are stupendous claims. Normal people do not make claims like this. Are His claims true? These claims position Christianity as an inclusively exclusive religion. Why do I say that? It is exclusive because Jesus is the only way. However, it is inclusive because everyone is freely invited to God through Jesus. This is grace, and it is distinct from every other religion because all other religions are based on human effort as opposed to divine favor.

However, there are certainly other religions that challenge the claims of Christ or re-define Jesus and the Christian faith according to their own beliefs. There are challenges to Christianity from within the church, from pseudo-Christian religions that claim to be the church but are not, and from religions outside the church. This material will examine the claims of those religions and how they stack up against true biblical Christianity.

I. The Warning Against False Teachers

Tim Challies has written, “Satan’s greatest ambassadors are not pimps, politicians, or power-brokers, but pastors. His priests do not peddle a different religion, but a deadly perversion of the true one. His troops do not make a full-out frontal assault, but work as agents, sneaking into the opposing army. Satan’s tactics are studied, clever, predictable, effective. Therefore, we must always remain vigilant.”¹ Here are some biblical warnings to heed in order to help us remain vigilant against false teaching.

1. Jesus warned against false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing but are really wolves (Matthew 7:15-20). He also told us that they can be known by their fruits. Paul describes what a wolf in sheep’s clothing looks like in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

2. Paul also warned against wolves (Acts 20:28-31). The specific context is him warning the Ephesian elders before he departs from Ephesus. Here are some things that he reminds them of:

- A. Elders are to guard their own spiritual condition, first and foremost.
- B. Elders are to guard the flock.
- C. It is the Holy Spirit who makes elders overseers of the church.
- D. It is God’s church, purchased with the blood of Jesus, that we are shepherding.
- E. He warns them that savage wolves will come in from outside the church.
- F. He also warns them that false teachers will rise up from within the church to lead

people to follow them instead of Jesus.

Faithful shepherds are called to protect the sheep from all wolves, whether inside or outside the church, by teaching, training, equipping, warning and guarding the sheep. John Stott writes, “In the ancient Near East wolves were the chief enemy of sheep. Hunting now singly now in packs, they were a constant threat. Sheep were defenseless against them. Shepherds could not afford to

¹ Tim Challies (2017). Seven False Teachers In The Church. Retrieved from challies.com

relax their vigilance. Nor can Christian pastors. Jesus himself warned of false prophets; ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’ he called them. So the shepherds of Christ’s flock have a doubly duty: to feed the sheep (by teaching the truth) and to protect them from wolves (by warning of error). As Paul put it to Titus, elders must hold firm the sure word according to apostolic teaching, so that they would be able both ‘to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it.’ This emphasis is unpopular today. We are frequently told always to be positive in our teaching, and never negative. But those who say this have either not read the New testament or, having read it, they disagree with it. For the Lord Jesus and his apostles refuted error themselves and urged us to do the same. One wonders if it is the neglect of this obligation which is a major cause of today’s theological confusion. If, when false teaching arises, Christian leaders sit idly by and do nothing, or turn tail and flee, they will earn the terrible epithet ‘hirelings’ who care nothing for Christ’s flock. Then too it will be said of believers, as it was of Israel, that ‘they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and . . . they became food for all the wild animals’.”²

3. Paul instructs us to accurately handle God’s Word and stay away from false teaching (2 Timothy 2:14-18). He even named two false teachers in this passage. He said false teaching “will spread like cancer,” and it overthrows the faith of some people.

4. Paul warns us against any teaching that is not according to Christ (Colossians 2:9). Jesus is the center of the faith so He is the ultimate test of all truth. He warns us against worldly philosophies (Colossians 2:8), the doctrines of men (Colossians 2:22), and even against the doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1).

5. The Holy Spirit, speaking through the Apostle Paul, pronounces a curse upon those who distort the gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:6-10). “Accursed” is “anathema” in the Greek and literally means to pronounce eternal damnation upon someone. This is a fearsome warning! The meaning of distorting (or perverting, depending upon the translation) the gospel is “to twist into something different.” We have to get the gospel right.

6. The Apostle John, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, commands us to be spiritually discerning (1 John 4:1-6). He writes, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (v. 1). He then presents our beliefs about Jesus as the ultimate test of doctrinal orthodoxy.

II. Characteristics of False Teachers

How do we spot a false teacher? What characteristics define a man or woman as a false teacher? Here is some biblical insight for those questions. Jude 3-4 says, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

² John R.W. Stott, *The Message Of Acts (Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 328-329.*

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Also, all of 2 Peter 2 is about false teachers and is similar but goes into more detail than Jude 4. I think that Tim Challies gives a very helpful overview of the types of false teachers that are presented in Scripture. False teachers manifest themselves in different ways, and I think it is very important for us to recognize that fact. Pastor Challies posted an article entitled, “7 False Teachers in the Church Today,” on his blog on January 31, 2017. I am going to share a large portion of his post. Wherever words are in quotations, he is being quoted, unless it is a scriptural quotation.

1. The Heretic

“The Heretic is the most prominent and perhaps the most dangerous of the false teachers. Peter warned against him in his second letter. ‘But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction’ (2 Peter 2:1). The Heretic is the person who teaches what blatantly contradicts an essential teaching of the Christian faith... Yet in denying the faith and celebrating what is false, he leads his followers from the safety of orthodoxy to the peril of heresy.

From the church’s earliest days, she has been afflicted by the Heretic in his various forms. He continues his evil work today, sometimes by contradicting the truth and sometimes by adding to it. He may reframe the doctrine of the Trinity, as Arius did in the third century and as Oneness Pentecostals do today. He may, like Marcus Borg and other prominent scholars, deny the virgin birth or the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like Jehovah’s Witnesses, he may alter God’s finished word, or like Mormons, he may add to it. Always, he boldly tampers with ‘the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 1:3).”

2. The Charlatan

“The Charlatan is only interested in the Christian faith to the extent that it can fill his wallet. The Charlatan is the person who uses Christianity as a means of personal enrichment. Paul charged Timothy to be on guard against him.” Paul spoke of people “who suppose that godliness is a means of gain” and said “from such withdraw yourself” (1 Timothy 6:5)... “Simon Magus was motivated by the love of money when he tried to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:9-24). Since him, the Charlatan has appeared in many forms, always seeking prominence in the church so that he can live in extravagance. When Pope Leo X famously commissioned Tetzl to sell indulgences, the profits not only funded the reconstruction of St. Peter’s Basilica, but also his luxurious lifestyle. In the 1990s, televangelist Robert Tilton brought in tens of millions of dollars each year by exploiting the vulnerable and gullible. Today Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, and a host of others peddle the prosperity gospel to enrich themselves from their followers’ gifts.”

3. The Prophet

“The Prophet claims to be gifted by God to speak fresh revelation outside of Scripture—new, authoritative words of prediction, teaching, rebuke, or encouragement. In reality, though, he is commissioned and empowered by Satan for the purpose of misleading and disrupting Christ’s

church. John offered an urgent warning about him. ‘Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world’ (1 John 4:1). Christians must ‘test the spirits’ to determine if they originate with the Holy Spirit or with a demonic spirit. Later, John declared that God has spoken fully and finally in Scripture and offered the most solemn warning against anyone who claims to bring revelation equal or contrary to Scripture. ‘I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book’ (Revelation 22:18-19). The Prophet appears throughout the history of the church. As early as the second century, Montanus and his disciples claimed to speak on behalf of the Holy Spirit. In the nineteenth century, Joseph Smith claimed to receive The Book of Mormon from the angel Moroni. Today the airwaves are chock-full of people claiming to speak in the name of God through the power of the Spirit.”

4. The Abuser

“The Abuser uses his position of leadership to take advantage of other people. Usually, he takes advantage of them to feed his sexual lust, though he may also desire power. Both Peter and Jude were aware of the Abuser’s lechery: ‘And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed’ (2 Peter 2:2)... The Abuser claims he is tending souls, but his true interest is ravishing bodies. He works his way into women’s lives, confidence, homes, and beds. When he is not pursuing illicit sexual pleasure, he may be domineering people to gain power, abusing them on his path to prominence. He does this in the name of ministry, with the claim of God’s anointing. He unapologetically uses and abuses others to feed his lusts. Tragically, the history of the Christian faith features countless Abusers. Even in the church’s earliest days, there were sex cults and other depraved perversions of the faith. For centuries, the papacy was little more than a corrupt power struggle. Today it seems that every week, we learn of another leader who has been found guilty of sexual sin with men, women, or even children. Meanwhile, we hear sad tales of survivors who have been abused and cast aside by a leader craving power. The Abuser carries on his work.”

5. The Divider

“The Divider uses false doctrine to disrupt or destroy a church. He gleefully divides brother from brother and sister from sister. Jude warned about him: ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.’ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit’ (Jude 18-19). The Divider is devoid of the Holy Spirit whose first fruit is love and whose special work is holding believers together in the bond of peace (Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:3). This false teacher brings strife, not love. He generates factions, not unity. He desires discord, not harmony. Congregations and denominations have often been splintered by the Divider as he promulgates his lies. He sometimes makes a minor doctrine into the mark of Christian maturity, causing factions to arise within the body. He may slyly introduce unbiblical doctrines, or he may undermine the ordained leadership.”

6. The Tickler

“The Tickler is the false teacher who cares nothing for what God wants and everything for what men want. He is the man-pleaser rather than the God-pleaser. Paul thought of him as the ear-tickler: ‘For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths’ (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The Tickler craves popularity and praise from the world. To maintain his follower’s respect, he preaches only the parts of the Bible they deem acceptable. Therefore, he speaks much of happiness but little of sin, much of heaven but nothing of hell. He gives them only what they want to hear. He preaches a partial gospel which is no gospel at all. He preaches an empty gospel to a packed out church... Like the false prophets of Jeremiah’s day, he and the thousands like him say, ‘Peace, peace, when there is no peace’ (Jeremiah 6:14).” Joel Osteen is the best known example of this today, but he was predated by men like Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller.

7. The Speculator

“Finally, the Speculator is the one obsessed with novelty, originality, or speculation. The author of Hebrews warned his church of these ‘strange teachings,’ while Paul told Timothy to protect the church against any ‘different doctrine’ (Hebrews 13:9, 1 Timothy 1:3). Teaching focused on speculation displaces the sure and steady doctrine of Scripture. The Speculator tosses aside the bulk of the Bible’s content and the weight of the Bible’s emphasis in order to obsess about matters that are trivial or novel. He grows weary of the old truths and pursues respectability through originality. Today, as in every age, the Speculator obsesses about the End Times, and somehow his failed predictions dissuade neither himself nor his followers. Recently we saw him obscuring the clear message of Scripture to search for hidden codes in Scripture. Sometimes he plants himself in academia, where one of his recent masterpieces is a re-imagined God who is unable to see and know the future.”³

III. How To Respond To False Teachers

I think it is important to distinguish between false teachers within the church, particularly our own local church but also in the Body of Christ as a whole, and false teachers, or possibly what we would call false religions, that are clearly outside the true church. Paul seems to make this distinction of false teachers within and outside the church in Acts 20:29-30. So, biblically, the way we respond to false teachers inside and outside the church is the same in some ways and different in other ways.

1. The way to deal with false teachers inside the church is through the practice of church discipline. Shepherds have to protect the sheep from the wolves, and this is part of the process God has established in order to protect the sheep. Romans 16:17-18 says, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” Paul

³ Challies.

gives a specific example of this in 1 Timothy 1:18-20, where he writes, “This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” The final phrase of verse 20 pictures church discipline.

2. The way to deal with false teachers outside the church is through refusing to support them and sharing the gospel with them. 2 John 7-11 says, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

In his commentary on 1, 2, 3 John; Dr. Danny Akin writes, “We are not to provide physical or financial support to those who bring false teaching. This much is clear. At the same time, it is our responsibility to bear witness to those who are deceived and need to be confronted with the truth of the gospel. Most persons in the church today feel ill prepared to engage cult members in spiritual conversation. They find it more convenient to simply send them their way. Sometimes this is done in a rude and un-Christlike manner, and the cause of the gospel is harmed.

Is there a strategy followers of Jesus Christ might employ when someone knocks on their door wishing to promote their cult? I believe there is.

First, be kind and gracious. Genuinely love these persons (1 Corinthians 13). Remember Christ died for these who stand before you.

Second, if convenient and appropriate (a woman alone at home should never invite strangers to enter), invite them in for a brief visit. If the time is problematic, set a future time for a conversation.

Third, establish clear and fair ground rules for the visit. I suggest that you give your guests approximately fifteen minutes to share, without interruption, what they believe. Encourage them to tell you what they believe a person must do to know God, be saved, and go to heaven when they die. After they finish, you then take fifteen minutes and share your testimony. Require that you also speak without interruption. Emphasize the assurance you have of eternal life through your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Fourth, when you finish, lead in prayer, asking God to show both of you the truth. In your prayer be evangelistic and gospel oriented.

Fifth, thank the persons for coming and let them know of your openness to visit again in the future.

This strategy is effective because it does not require one to have all the answers or know every detail of theology (theirs or yours). It avoids the tit-for-tat argumentative style in which most cultists are trained. It forces them to think about the testimony of a personal encounter with the

Lord Jesus Christ that they do not have. It allows you to share the joy and blessing of knowing you have eternal life through a relationship with Jesus (1 John 5:11-13).

I believe this approach to be biblically sound, evangelistically effective, and in harmony with John's instruction in his second letter. I have found it to be honored by God and offer it as a loving and wise approach of sharing Christ."⁴

I would agree with what he has written but then add to it some suggestions for engaging with members of false religions if you have further opportunities.

-Make sure you know what you believe and why you believe it if you are going to dialogue with them. Of course, we have a biblical responsibility to be prepared to do so. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."

-Speak the truth in love and remember the goal is to win a soul-not an argument.

-Try to make it a conversation by asking questions and listening. Ask open-ended questions that force them outside of their canned presentation.

-Make sure that everyone in the conversation defines their terms. Tactfully press members of false religions to do this because many of them are trained to use biblical terms with redefined meanings. This is often necessary to prevent talking past each other instead of really communicating and making the gospel clear.

-Reason with them from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2). Make them argue against the Bible. Make sure that any Scripture that is shared is looked at in its immediate and overall biblical context.

-Focus on Jesus, the gospel, and the major doctrines of Scripture.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Have you ever been deceived? How did it feel?**
- 2. What is your response to what Tim Challies said at the beginning about Satan using pastors?**
- 3. Do you view Christianity as exclusive or inclusive? Or both? Why?**
- 4. How would you respond to the following statement? "Doctrine isn't really something worth fighting over. We just need to love each other."**
- 5. Talk through the 7 types of false teachers that Challies names. What are your thoughts? Have you had personal experience with any of them?**
- 6. What should you do if you think you are encountering false teaching within the ministry of a church?**
- 7. What are harmful results from false teaching?**
- 8. What have you done when a "cultist" as showed up at your door? What should you do in the future? Talk through the suggestions for talking to them.**
- 9. Are you equipped to defend and share your faith? What are you willing to do to get equipped?**

⁴ Daniel Akin, *The New American Commentary: 1,2,3 John* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 271-272.

INTRODUCTION

PART 2

IV. The Importance of Sound Doctrine

The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes the importance of sound doctrine in the local church. Many Christians downplay the importance of doctrine, but they are not being faithful to Scripture when doing that. Here are some ways the New Testament emphasizes the importance of sound doctrine.

1. The foundation of the Church is the truth of the New Testament. This truth was originally delivered through the apostles and prophets of the New Testament Church (not prophets in the Old Testament). Ephesians 2:20 says, “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” This refers to the apostles and prophets in the New Testament Church, whose function was “to authoritatively speak the word of God to the church in years before the New Testament canon was completed”⁵ (MacArthur). According to MacArthur, the foundation that is spoken of here “refers to the divine revelation that they taught, which in its written form is the New Testament.”⁶ Thus, the New Testament carries apostolic authority. The apostles were commissioned by Jesus to be witnesses of Him through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 15:26-27). The early church followed the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42). Peter tells us that the purpose of the writing of the New Testament was so that there would be an apostolic witness of the truth after they died (2 Peter 1:12-21). Therefore, we are still under apostolic authority today as we follow the teaching of the New Testament. There are not new apostles today who can give new teaching. We are not free to reinvent Christianity but are required to submit to the authority of Scripture.

In addition, 1 Timothy 3:14-15 says, “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” William MacDonald writes, “A pillar was not only used to support a structure, but often times a pillar was set up in a public marketplace and notices were posted on it. It was thus a proclaimer. The church is the unit on earth which God has chosen to proclaim and display His truth. It is also the ground of the truth. Here ground carries the thought of foundation or supporting structure. This pictures the church as that which is entrusted with the defense and support of the truth of God.”⁷ So the Church is to declare and defend the truth of God. Truth is that which is really real. It is personal, propositional, and practical.

2. Church leaders are commanded to guard sound doctrine. 1 Timothy 6:20 says, “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babbling and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge-by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.” The faith is a stewardship. Kent Hughes writes, “The

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians (The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1986)*, 82.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: New Testament (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990)*, 906.

deposit is the pure faith of the gospel, the essential apostolic teaching, which became known as ‘the rule of faith’ or ‘the canon of truth.’ This was not something Timothy was to work out for himself or was entitled to enlarge. It was divine revelation committed to his care. In the fifth century St. Leo gave Timothy’s charge classic expression:

‘What is meant by the deposit? That which is committed to thee, not that which is invented by thee; that which thou hast received, not that which thou hast devised; a thing not of wit, but of learning; not of private assumption, but of public tradition; a thing brought to thee, not brought forth of thee; wherein thou must not be an author, but a keeper; not a leader but a follower. Keep the deposit.’

This defines the essential work of the church and its leadership today. It is not responsible to do new theology but to guard and exposit the apostolic deposit.”⁸

3. Sound doctrine is necessary to be a pastor. In Titus’s list of qualifications to be a pastor, he writes, “Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:9).

4. Sound doctrine comes from God and not from human beings. Paul wrote, “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul also wrote, “But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12).

5. Sound doctrine is essential to spiritual health and growth. The word, “sound,” basically means “healthy.” 1 Timothy 4:6-7 says, “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.” 2 Timothy 1:13 says, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 1:18-20 says, “This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” John Calvin said, “A bad conscience is the mother of all heresies.”⁹

6. We are commanded to always preach the Word of God even if people do not want to listen to sound doctrine (2 Timothy 3:14-4:5).

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching The Word: 1 & 2 Timothy And Titus*, (Crossway Books, 2000), 164.

⁹ John Calvin, *John Calvin’s Commentaries on St. Paul’s Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Retrieved from google.com

7. Paul considered staying sound in his doctrine to the end of his life to be a great spiritual accomplishment (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

V. Essential and Non-essential Doctrine

By essential and non-essential doctrines, I mean that there are some doctrines that are black and white and must be believed in order to even be a Christian. They are essential and non-negotiable. There are other doctrines that are more gray areas, are non-essential to salvation, and there are differences and debates about them among Bible-believing Christians. Of course, there are also false doctrines that have no place in Christian theology and are considered to be heretical. The New Testament uses the phrase, “the faith,” to describe the essential doctrines of Christianity. Romans 14-15 tells us that there are “disputes over doubtful things,” or gray areas. Let’s do a biblical overview of the concept of essential and non-essential doctrine and then look a rubric to help us evaluate various doctrines. It is very important for us to find a biblical balance between downplaying the importance of doctrine and being legalistic and divisive over non-essential matters. Let’s begin with essential doctrine.

According to Jude 3-4, the nature of the faith is:

1. It is clearly defined. It is “*the* faith.” This refutes liberalism. This usage of “the faith” as a noun refers to the core doctrines of the Christian faith that are revealed in the New Testament as opposed to usage as a verb that would refer to us trusting. It is not what we choose to believe but what God tells us to believe through the Apostles (Acts 2:42). There are at least 31 usages of the “the faith” in this way in the New Testament (Acts 6:7, Acts 13:8, Acts 14:22, Acts 16:5, Acts 24:24, Romans 1:5, Romans 14:1, Romans 16:26, 1 Corinthians 16:13, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 1:23, Ephesians 4:13, Philippians 1:27, Colossians 1:23, Colossians 2:7, 1 Timothy 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:19, 1 Timothy 3:9, 1 Timothy 3:13, 1 Timothy 4:1, 1 Timothy 5:8, 1 Timothy 6:10, 1 Timothy 6:21, 2 Timothy 3:8, 2 Timothy 4:7, Titus 1:1, Titus 1:13, Titus 3:15, James 2:1, 1 Peter 5:9, Jude 1:3). Paul told the church at Philippi to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). 1 Corinthians 15:3 teaches us that the gospel is of first priority so this refers to truths that are gospel issues, the things that we must believe in order to be Christians. That is what we are to unite around. Jude 4 even strongly implies that false religions pervert the person and work of Jesus Christ and deny the grace of God.

2. It is totally exclusive. That is reflected in the fact that it is “the faith.” In fact, it is the one and only faith that is real and true. This is the faith while all competing belief systems are satanic deceptions. This refutes pluralism.

3. It is permanently settled. It is “once for all” delivered to the saints. This refutes modernism and relativism. It is not up for discussion or debate. It does not change with the times but is the unchanging truth of God.

4. It is divinely revealed. It is “delivered to the saints.” By whom? By God the Holy Spirit. Man did not create or invent it, but it was given to him by God. Therefore, we are stewards who are to guard this treasure that was given to us by God. It is not to be tampered with. This refutes humanism.

5. It is subtly attacked. This is what verse 4 teaches us, and this is why we must contend for it. There is no need to defend something that is not being attacked.

Now, let’s look at non-essential doctrine from Romans 14:1-15:13. Unity does not equal uniformity. The Body of Christ is diverse and unified at the same time, but it takes maturity to truly function in unity with our differences. A famous quote often attributed to Augustine without proof says, “In essentials, unity, in non-essentials, liberty, in all things, charity.” There are certainly absolute, black and white, non-negotiable truths of the Christian faith. However, there are also some gray areas, and we need to be able to discern what is black and white, what is gray, and how to handle the two areas. I think that Paul was a pretty black and white kind of guy, but in Romans 14:1 he refers to “disputes over doubtful things,” which clearly indicates there are gray areas. The specific issues that he dealt with in regard to the church at Rome were eating meat and if some days were holier than others. We may not wrestle with the same issues, but we have plenty of other issues we wrestle with today. **It is very important that we find the right balance on this subject because we are heretics if we deny the fundamentals of the faith, and we are divisive if we are legalistic about the gray areas.** *Let’s learn and apply the principles that God gives us in this passage of Scripture so we can have a biblical balance.*

1. We are to receive one another in love instead of despising one another (14:1-3, 15; 15:1-2, 7). Our convictions do not give us the right to condemn and mistreat other believers. We can disagree with someone’s position but not reject him or her as a person. We are not to fight over gray areas. A person who regularly has other believers walking away from him or her often has a judgmental spirit. If people know they are unconditionally loved and accepted, we can usually say almost anything to them if we say it in the right way. It is also important to try to see things from the other person’s point of view even if we don’t agree.

2. As far as our personal convictions in regard to gray areas, we must be convinced personally about what is right and wrong and live accordingly by faith (14:5, 14, 20, 22-23). If in doubt, don’t. Even if something is not wrong, if we think it is wrong, it is wrong for us to do. Here are some questions to ask in our personal decision-making:

-Does it glorify God (1 Corinthians 6:20)?

-Is it beneficial to others and me (1 Corinthians 10:23-24)?

-Can I give God thanks for it as a blessing from Him (Romans 14:6)?

-Will I be ashamed of this decision at the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10-12)?

-Would I want this done to me (Romans 13:8-10, Matthew 7:12)?

-Could this cause a brother or sister in Christ to stumble (Romans 14:13-21)?

-Will this enslave me? Is it addictive (1 Corinthians 6:12)?

-Am I confident this is the right thing to do? (Romans 14:22-23)?

-Am I breaking any previous commitments (Psalm 15:4)?

-Does it place me in submission to God-ordained human authority (Romans 13)?

3. Jesus is Lord and Judge, and each of us will have to answer to Him and not each other (14:7-12).

4. Because Jesus is Lord and Judge, we are not to judge each other (14:4, 13).

5. We are not to do anything that causes our brothers and sisters to stumble and fall (14:13-16, 21).

6. Our first priority is not to focus on gray areas but making sure our priorities and hearts are right (14:17).

7. We are to pursue actions that lead to peace and building one another up (14:19).

How then do we evaluate essential and non-essential doctrine? Let me suggest the following rubric.

1st Order Doctrines: These are primary, essential, non-negotiable doctrines that are essential to the gospel and core to the Christian faith. 1st Order Doctrines would include:

-The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient Word of God.

-The Trinity

-Jesus is fully God and fully man, two natures in one person. He was born of the virgin Mary, lived a perfect and sinless life, died as the substitutionary and atoning sacrifice for our sin, bodily rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will someday literally return to the earth. He alone is the only way to God.

-We are all sinners by nature and choice who are incapable of doing anything to save ourselves. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

-The Church is the body of Christ and includes all of the redeemed, who are one in Christ. She is universal and local in her expression.

2nd Order Doctrines: These are secondary doctrines. They are obviously important but not essential to salvation. Local churches may hold to a definite and exclusive belief about them, but they should not be divisive within the wider body of Christ. In other words, holding to a particular belief on certain doctrines may be essential to church membership in a particular local church, but it would not necessarily preclude us from working with other local churches with a differing belief or cause us to think others with a different belief are not brothers or sisters in Christ or that they are heretics.

3rd Order Doctrines: These are tertiary doctrines. They are matters where members of the same local church can hold different viewpoints and agree to disagree about them. They are

issues that are not spelled out in Scripture and therefore, uncertain, or matters of opinion. They are not essential to salvation.

III. Overview Of Essential Doctrines

For the purpose of review and making sure we have a common understanding, here is an overview of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. It is very important that we are grounded in biblical truth because discerning error is really a matter of discerning deviation from the truth.

1. The Bible: It is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient Word of God (Psalm 138:2; Matthew 5:17-18; Mark 12:26, 36; Luke 24: 27, 44; John 5:39-47, 10:33, 16:13, 17:17; Acts 1:16; Romans 15:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Revelation 22:18-19).

Here are some important terms that we should be clear on regarding this doctrine.

Revelation-an unveiling; God making known that which is unknowable otherwise

Inspiration-The Greek word translated “inspired” literally means God-breathed. Someone (and I don’t know who to attribute the quote to) has defined it as “the act of God through His Spirit by which He superintended/controlled the human authors of the 66 books of the Bible so that using their own individual personalities they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original.”

Inerrancy-The quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake which guarantees that the Bible is totally true and trustworthy in everything it asserts.

Infallibility-The fact that Scripture is incapable of teaching error and properly understood can never lead us astray.

Authority-It basically means that when the Bible speaks, God speaks, and we must obey.

Sufficiency-God’s revelation in Scripture alone is enough for us to know the way of salvation and to equip us to live an obedient life.

Canon-literally means rule or standard; refers to the books acknowledged by the Church as inspired by God, which means they are the rule of faith and practice for Christians

Original Autographs-These were the first manuscripts that were actually penned by the authors of Scripture. There were many copies made of these manuscripts and now they are translated into multiple languages.

Translation-The originals of the Bible are in Greek and Hebrew so they must be translated into the language that a particular group of people speaks so that it can be read and understood.

Interpretation-accurately reading out the God-intended meaning of Scripture

2. The Trinity: First, the Bible clearly asserts from beginning to end that there is only one God. Second, the Bible names three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: as God. The full deity of each of the persons is affirmed. Third, the Bible affirms that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the one God. Fourth, the Bible teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-eternal and co-equal. Fifth, the Bible asserts that the three persons are of the same essence but

are distinct persons. Sixth, the Bible teaches that the Father, Son, and Spirit work together to accomplish the functions of the Godhead. In summation, the biblical doctrine of the Trinity is that there is one God who is a plurality within unity. This one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; who are co-eternal, co-equal, and of the same essence but with distinction of persons. The Father, Son, and Spirit work together to accomplish the will of God, and it is the responsibility of all persons to respond to this God in love, worship, obedience, and service (1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 11:33-34; Isaiah 45:21; 2 Peter 1:17; John 1:1, 5:17, 8:58, 10:30-33, 20:28; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1; Revelation 1:8; John 14:16-17; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 4:16; Hebrews 9:14).

3. Jesus: Christology involves the person and work of Jesus Christ.

A. The Person of Jesus-Historical Christian doctrine has taught that the Bible asserts full deity and perfect humanity in one Person. He is the God-man. This involves the reality of His 2 natures, the integrity of His 2 natures, and the unmingled union of those 2 natures in 1 Person. He is the eternal God who became truly human in the Incarnation.

B. The Work of Jesus-He was born of the virgin Mary, lived a perfect and sinless life, died as the substitutionary and atoning sacrifice for our sin, bodily rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will someday literally return to the earth. He alone accomplished redemption and is the only way to God (Isaiah 7:14; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 4:14-16; Luke 19:10; Romans 3:20-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:2; Matthew 28:7; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 4:25; Acts 1:9-11; Mark 16:19; Hebrews 7:25; John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 19:7-20:6).

4. Salvation: We are all sinners by nature and choice who are incapable of doing anything to save ourselves (Psalm 51:5; Isaiah 59:2, 64:6; Romans 3:9-23, 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-10). Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone (John 1:12, 3:16, 5:24, 10:28; Acts 3:19; Romans 3:21-4:8, 5:1, 8:1-17, 10:9-10, 13; Galatians 2:16-21, 3:10-14, 4:4-7; Ephesians 2:1-10; Hebrews 7:25).

5. The Church: She is the body of Christ and includes all of the redeemed, who are one in Christ. She is universal and local in her expression ((Matthew 16:13-19, 28:16-20; Acts 2:42-47, 9:31, 20:28; 1 Corinthians 11:17-12:31; Ephesians 2:19-20; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 12:23; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 2-3).

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Why is truth the foundation of a New Testament Church (of course, Jesus is the cornerstone of that foundation)?**
- 2. Why is sound doctrine so important? Discuss the reasons listed in this section.**
- 3. Do you agree that there is primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrine? Do you believe that some doctrine is non-debatable and some is disputable? Why or why not? Why is this distinction practically important?**
- 4. What would you classify as primary, secondary, and tertiary? Why?**
- 5. Discuss the essential doctrines? What are their meanings and importance?**

LEGALISM, LICENSE, AND LIBERTY

Introduction: This section does not deal with a particular religion but root issues within Christianity itself. Churches that profess to believe the Bible are inundated with both legalism and license. These false teachings undermine the power of the gospel in individuals and churches. Legalistic and licentious churches tend to throw stones at one another but both are missing the mark.

Jesus saved us in order for us to live in freedom. He said, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). However, it is easy to fall into a ditch instead of walking on the road of liberty, and we can fall into the ditch on either side of the road. Christians sometimes fall into the ditch of legalism on one side of the road, or we can fall into the ditch of license (could also be called licentiousness or antinomianism) on the other side of the road. Legalism and license seem like opposites of one another, but they are really both opposites of and in opposition to the gospel. They are pictured in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The younger son pictures license, and the older son pictures legalism. However, they were both inwardly and equally lost and in need of the gospel. It just manifested in different ways outwardly. The father demonstrated the gospel to both of them.

In *The Whole Christ*, Sinclair Ferguson contends that legalism and license are “nonidentical twins that emerge from the same womb.” He explains, “Antinomianism and legalism are not so much antithetical to each other as they are both antithetical to grace. This is why Scripture never prescribes one as the antidote for the other. Rather grace, God’s grace in Christ in our union with Christ, is the antidote to both.” The problem with legalism and license (antinomianism) is that they both “[separate] the law of God from the person of God.” Each is “a distorted view of God as the giver of his law.” “Love is what law commands, and the commands are what love fulfills. . . . Love requires direction and principles of operation. Love is motivation, but it is not self-interpreting direction.”¹⁰ Tim Challies comments on this and says, “We need to be careful that we never put God’s love in opposition to God’s law. The law is ‘holy and righteous and good’ and ‘spiritual’ (Romans 7:12, 14). Sin is the problem (Romans 7:13), not the law.”¹¹

So, let’s learn how God has equipped us to walk in liberty and also learn what legalism and license are and how to avoid them so we can “walk worthy of the calling with which [we] were called” (Ephesians 4:1b). We will look at multiple Scriptures but use the book of Galatians as our foundation, particularly 5:1 and 5:13, which say, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage [referring to legalism]...For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh [referring to license], but through love serve one another.”

¹⁰ Tim Challies (2016). Did God Break The Law For Love? retrieved from challies.com

¹¹ Ibid.

1. Liberty: We will start by laying a doctrinal foundation to enable us to properly flesh out the practical aspects of this truth. There are three basic aspects of salvation:

Justification-It means to be declared righteous by God. It is imputed, positional righteousness. At the moment of salvation, we are saved immediately from sin's penalty. We are also regenerated, which means we are born again with a new heart that makes us capable of living a new life.

Sanctification-It means to be set apart unto God. It happens positionally at the moment of salvation. However, we are being sanctified as we are saved progressively from sin's power as we become more like Jesus and live more righteously. Theologian Millard Erickson writes, "Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of the believer, making him or her actually holy. By 'holy' here is meant 'bearing an actual likeness to God.' Sanctification is a process by which one's moral condition is brought into conformity with one's legal status before God. It is a continuation of what was begun in regeneration, when a newness of life was conferred upon and instilled within the believer. In particular, sanctification is the Holy Spirit's applying to the life of the believer the work done by Jesus Christ."¹² Hebrews 10:10 says, "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." However, it also requires our effort. Philippians 2:12b says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Glorification-This happens when we are perfected in every way in heaven. We are saved permanently from sin's presence.

Understanding and applying these truths leads to us living in freedom. Here are some of the practical ramifications:

Since we are justified and guaranteed to be glorified, we are eternally secure and do not have to live in fear about our status with God or our future. We do not have to live in guilt or condemnation because we are innocent and righteous in the sight of God.

The fact that I am being sanctified means that I have not arrived yet (that happens at glorification) so I am going to blow it sometimes. However, since I am justified, it does not mean that I lose my salvation because my status with God does not depend on my performance. I am a work in progress, but God will continue to work in me (Philippians 2:13). On the other hand, sanctification means that I cannot be happy in sin and that change is evidence of genuine salvation. These three aspects taken together guarantee that "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Conversely, failing to properly understand these truths leads to bondage because wrong believing always leads to wrong living. Failure to understand that justification is by grace alone through faith alone inevitably leads to legalism and self-righteousness.

If we are going to truly walk with Jesus in our God-given liberty, we must see that the gospel is key to living the Christian life and not just to being saved. As J.D. Greear says, "Most evangelicals see the gospel as merely the entry rite into Christianity, the diving board into the

¹² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Baker Book House, 1985), 967-968.

pool. But the gospel is both diving board and pool.”¹³ We are not only justified by the cross of Jesus, but we also identify with Him. We died and rose with Him. We are in vital, spiritual union with Jesus. We are in Christ, and He is in us. Jesus died to set us free from sin-not to sin. Romans 6:1-7 says, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.” We live this out by knowing it, considering it to be true of us (Romans 6:11), and by surrendering to the Lord (Romans 6:13, 16). Galatians 2:16 says, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” Then, verse 20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” This is justification and sanctification. Jesus living in and through us by faith is how we live the Christian life. Practically, how does that get worked out? It is by walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25). Paul wrote in Galatians 5:16-18, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” Walking in the Spirit keeps us from license (“you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”) and legalism (“you are not under the law”). “Walking in the Spirit” means to live in dependence upon and under the control of the Holy Spirit on an ongoing basis.

2. Legalism: At its core, legalism is a wrong use of the law for the purpose of making us righteous instead of the use of showing us that we are unrighteous and in need of a Savior.

1 Timothy 1:8-10 says, “But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.” Paul explains the purpose of the law in Galatians 3:19-25, where he writes, “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the

¹³ J.D. Greear (2015). Six Unwavering Beliefs of a Church That Loves Its City. retrieved from outreach magazine.com.

law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul was contending with a legalistic group often called the Judaizers. They were basically a “Jesus plus” group in their theology and teaching. They taught that salvation came through faith in Jesus plus circumcision and keeping the Mosaic Law. Paul was vigorously affirming that salvation and spiritual growth comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. He was warning them (and us) against legalism. Galatians 5:1-3 says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.” We are to cling to Jesus and the gospel and live in the power of the Spirit in order to avoid this spiritually destructive poison. Here are some ways that legalism manifests itself:

Manifestation #1-It is legalism when we try to earn salvation through attempting to keep the Law, religious practices, or doing good deeds (Galatians 2:16).

Manifestation #2-It is legalism when our faith is in Jesus plus anything else (Galatians 2:21).

Manifestation #3-It is legalism when we believe we are justified by faith in Jesus but go back to the Old Covenant or rely on man-made rules for our spiritual growth (Hebrews 8).

Manifestation #4-It is legalism when we make our personal convictions in regard to gray areas binding on others (Romans 14).

Manifestation #5-It is legalism when we elevate human traditions and man-made rules to the level of Scripture (Matthew 15:1-9).

Manifestation #6-It is legalism when we strive for outward conformity to the Law without inward heart change and without loving God and others, which is the ultimate point of the Law (Matthew 23).

3. License: Galatians 5:13 tells us to “not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.” Timothy George writes, “Here for the first time in Galatians we have a positive indication that the freedom for which Christ has set his people free can be horribly perverted and misused. Freedom can become a pretext or opportunity (Greek: *aphorme*, lit., a ‘springboard’ or ‘base of operations’) for throwing off all moral restraints and indulging the lusts of the flesh. When this has happened, freedom has been corrupted and liberty turned into license. The result is a fearful delusion, a ‘bewitching’ every bit as spiritually paralyzing as a lapse into legalism.”¹⁴ This type

¹⁴ Timothy George, *The New American Commentary: Galatians* (Broadman & Holman, 1994), 376-377.

of license can also be called antinomianism, and it is very common in modern Christianity. Phil Johnson writes, “In totally non-technical terms, *antinomianism* is simply the view that Christians are not bound by any of the precepts of Moses’ law-moral, civil, ceremonial, or otherwise.”¹⁵ Kevin DeYoung writes, “The antinomian impulse was one which maintained that good works were not necessary for salvation, that God delights in all Christians in the same way, that God does not see sin in the believer, that the moral law is no longer binding for Christians, that law and gospel are diametrically opposed in every way, that to strive after holiness smacks of legalistic effort, that we should not speak of spiritual duties or spiritual progress, that the subject of spiritual activity is not the believer but Christ.”¹⁶

We are certainly not under the civil or ceremonial law anymore, but the Reformers saw three proper uses for the moral Law, paraphrased by me as:

-The Law is like a mirror that reveals God and shows us our sinful condition and need for a Savior.

-The Law is like a guardrail that restrains and protects against evil.

-The Law is like a GPS that guides believers in living life. Phil Johnson writes of this, “In other words, the ‘third use of the law’ makes the law’s moral standards the rule by which the faithful must order their conduct. In this sense, the moral strictures of the law remain binding on Christians, even though we are ‘not under the law’ in the Pauline sense-i.e., not dependent on our own obedience for any part of our justification.”¹⁷ Jen Wilkin writes, “Obedience is only moralism if we believe it carries favor with God. The believer knows that it is impossible to curry favor with God, because God needs nothing from us. He cannot be put in our debt. Knowing this frees us to obey out of joyful gratitude rather than servile grasping.”¹⁸

Paul anticipated this type of thinking that would use grace as license in Romans 6:1, when he asked the question, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” He answers the question in verse 2 with the strongest negation in the Greek language and goes on to assert in that chapter that we are not set free to sin but to obey. This is taught in many other places in the New Testament, including Ephesians 2:8-10, Titus 3:3-8, 1 John 2:3-6, 1 John 5:2-3, and James 2:14-26, which tells us that faith without works is dead.

John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue write of this, “James, however, is not speaking of forensic justification and the imputation of righteousness. He is not speaking about good works that are the ground of our salvation. Rather, he is speaking about good works that are the necessary evidence of our salvation. Abraham’s faith, which was credited to him as righteousness apart

¹⁵ Phil Johnson (2010). A Primer on Antinomianism. retrieved from teampyro.blogspot.com.

¹⁶ Kevin DeYoung (2014). Antinomianism: It’s Bigger Than You Think. retrieved from thegospelcoalition.org.

¹⁷ Johnson.

¹⁸ Jen Wilkin (2014). Failure Is Not A Virtue. retrieved from thegospelcoalition.org.

from anything he had done, was vindicated by his works. In other words, Abraham's works demonstrated that his faith was true faith and not dead faith. (cf James 2:17, 26) True faith is shown by its works (James 2:18), but those works are the evidence and result of our justification and initial sanctification, not the ground of our justification.

Far from refuting the doctrine of *sola fide* [faith alone] in favor of the legalists, James's argument actually provides a defense of the doctrine from the attack of the opposite error: antinomianism. This word comes from the prefix 'anti'- and the Greek word 'nomos,' which means 'law.' Antinomianism, then, speaks of those who are 'against the law,' specifically, in its theological sense, those who deny that sanctification is the necessary fruit of justification. Whereas legalism fails to distinguish between justification and sanctification, antinomianism severs vital union between the two. Whereas legalism undermines the gospel by insisting that we must add our obedience to Christ's work in order to be justified, antinomianism perverts the gospel by subtracting from the efficacy of Christ's work, denying that those who receive Christ as Savior must also submit to him as Lord. James absolutely demolishes that proposition. He explains that the 'faith' of professing Christians who fail to make progress in practical holiness continuing, to walk in patterns of unrighteousness, is no true and saving faith at all. Theirs is a dead faith (James 2:17, 26), a demonic faith (James 2:19), and a useless faith (James 2:20) that marks them out as those who address Jesus as Lord but to whom he will chillingly declare, 'I never knew you: depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (Matt. 7:23).

In fact, John Calvin, the great Reformer and believer in *sola fide*, stood on the teaching of James 2 when he wrote, 'It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone.' In other words, salvation is not a result of good works (Ephesians 2:9), but salvation does necessarily result in good works. This is the very purpose of our salvation: 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them' (Ephesians 2:10). Christ gave himself for us not only to forensically redeem us from all lawlessness but also to 'purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works' (Titus 2:14). Those who deny that good works are the necessary fruit of the justification received through faith alone make out the Lord Jesus Christ to be half a Savior—one who saves from sin's penalty but not its power. Yet Scripture teaches that we are united with Christ not only in his death but also in his resurrection, the necessary result of which is a holy life (Rom. 6:3-6; 2 Cor. 5:14-15). All true Christians have been 'set free' from sin's bondage and have become 'slaves to God,' resulting in sanctification (Rom. 6:1-14, 22). Therefore, while it is faith alone that saves, the faith that saves is never alone but will always be accompanied by the fruit of righteousness (Phil. 1:11) wrought by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (Gal. 5:22-25; cf. John 15:8)."¹⁹

Conclusion: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the

¹⁹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, ed. *Biblical Doctrine* (Crossway, 2017), 622-623.

Lord.” Let us fix our eyes on Jesus Christ so we can be transformed into His image by the Holy Spirit and live in liberty instead of getting off that road and falling into the ditch of legalism or license.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What are examples that you have observed of both legalism and license within local churches and Christian organizations? Talk about issues and not specific people please.**
- 2. How would you describe living in freedom in Christ?**
- 3. Discuss Sinclair Ferguson’s statement that both legalism and antinomianism are antithetical to grace. How is the gospel the antidote to both?**
- 4. Discuss the three basic aspects of salvation (justification, sanctification, and glorification). Discuss their meaning, how they relate to one another, and how this affects our lives practically.**
- 5. How is the gospel the key to daily living the Christian life? Consider J.D. Greear’s analogy of it being the pool and not just the diving board (p. 21-22).**
- 6. Is your natural bent more toward legalism or license? How is the gospel changing that?**
- 7. What is your understanding of the role of the Law in the life of a believer?**
- 8. Read James 2:14-26 and the lengthy quote by MacArthur and Mayhue near the end of the section. Discuss them in light of one another.**

**ONENESS
PENTECOSTALIS
M**

Background: Oneness Pentecostalism is something of an umbrella type name for a theological, religious tree with a variety of branches. Before we get into their doctrine, here is some background on them. This background material is written by Tai Davis of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

“Official Names and Membership (estimates):

Apostolic Overcoming Holy Church of God (AOHCG)-13,000

Assemblies of the Lord Jesus, Inc. (ALJI)-50,000

Bible Way Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ World Wide, Inc. (Bible Way)-250,000

Church of Our Lord Jesus of the Apostolic Faith (COLJF)-30,000

Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW)-1,000,000 reported

Pentecostal Church of Apostolic Faith (PCAF)-25,000

United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic) (UCJC-A)-100,000

United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI)-500,000 (1.5 million worldwide)

Other Designations: "Jesus Only" churches; "Apostolic Pentecostals"; The "Oneness Movement"; The "Jesus Name" Movement

Key Publications:

Pentecostal Herald (UPCI)

The Global Witness (UPCI)

The Bible Way News Voice (Bible Way)

The People's Mouthpiece (AOHCG)

The Contender for the Faith (COLJF)

Christian Outlook (PAW)

History:

The modern Pentecostal movement is generally regarded to have begun in 1901 in a chapel prayer meeting in Topeka, Kan., led by Charles Parham, a teacher at Bethel Bible College. In 1906, the Pentecostal experience of "speaking in tongues" burst on the scene during a revival in an African-American Baptist church on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, Calif. Following these beginnings, Pentecostal preachers and churches spread rapidly coalescing into various denominations and factions.

In 1913, one popular teacher, R.E. McAlister of Toronto, Ont., began teaching that the Trinity doctrine was untrue and that baptism should be done correctly in Jesus' name only-not in the traditional trinitarian formula. Other preachers, such as Frank J. Ewart and John G. Scheppe, joined McAlister in his non-trinitarian perspective.

By 1916, "oneness" views were being expounded by some ministers in the Assemblies of God (AOG) denomination. They were strongly rejected by the denomination's council that year, and the AOG adopted a strong trinitarian stance in its statement of faith. More than 160 oneness ministers who were expelled from the AOG quickly formed their own alliances to promote their doctrines.

After that time, a number of oneness sects formed, most of which were predominately African-American. The largest oneness movements today are the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI) and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW). The UPCI was organized in 1945 with the union of two predominately white groups started earlier in the century. Its headquarters and publishing firm, the Pentecostal Publishing House, is located at 8855 Dunn Road, Hazelwood, MO 63042.

The PAW formed in 1918, but split along racial lines in 1924. Today it is predominately African-American and is headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana.”²⁰

Doctrine: There are some issues with non-essential doctrine when it comes to Oneness Pentecostalism such as insisting on baptizing in the name of Jesus instead of the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (although this flows out of an unbiblical view of God, which is essential doctrine), but the primary issues that make this a false religion are related to the essential doctrines of the Trinity and salvation. Basically, if a religion gets the nature of God and salvation wrong, it does not matter what they get right because it is heretical. So, let’s examine their aberrant views of the Trinity and salvation.

The Trinity: Oneness Pentecostals are essentially modalists when it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue define modalism as, “There is only one God who presents himself in various forms (Father, Son, or Spirit) as he wishes. In this heresy, these forms are modes of manifestation, not modes of being.”²¹ Matt Slick writes this description of their theology regarding God (with the quote within his quote being from one of the Oneness Pentecostal denominations’ websites), “Oneness theology denies the Trinity and teaches that God is a single person who was ‘manifested as Father in creation and as the Father of the Son, in the Son for our redemption, and as the Holy Spirit in our regeneration.’ Another way of looking at it is that God revealed himself as Father in the Old Testament, as the Son in Jesus during Christ’s ministry on earth, and now as the Holy Spirit after Christ’s ascension.”²² Tai Davis describes their theology in this way, “Oneness Pentecostals declare that the Godhead consists of only one Person and deny the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. They maintain that the only real ‘person’ in the Godhead is Jesus. Thus, they are often referred to as the ‘Jesus Only’ Movement. They maintain that God exists in two modes, as the Father in heaven, and as Jesus the Son on earth. Nevertheless, they are the same person, not two separate persons. The Holy Spirit is not regarded as a person at all, merely a manifestation of Jesus’ power or a synonym for Him.”²³ In a nutshell, the difference is that the Bible presents God as eternally three-in-one (three persons, one essence) while modalism says God is one but shows up in three different ways at different times (not three eternal persons).

²⁰ Tai Davis (2016). Oneness Pentecostalism. retrieved from namb.net.

²¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, 209.

²² Matt Slick. What Is Oneness Pentecostal Theology. retrieved from carm.org.

²³ Davis.

What is the biblical response to this teaching? The Bible clearly teaches that the Father, Son, and Spirit are eternal persons who are one in essence but distinct persons so modalism in its various forms is a clear denial of the Trinity. First, the New Testament clearly teaches that each person within the Triune God is eternal. Psalm 90:2 speaks of the LORD being “from everlasting to everlasting.” The Father is generally assumed to be eternal because of the strong and clear affirmation of His deity. In Hebrews 9:14, the Holy Spirit is actually called “eternal.” The Son is not specifically referred to as eternal but His eternality is clearly taught in the Scriptures. Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End*” (Revelation 1:8). John 1:1 states that He was “in the beginning.” This verse is parallel with Genesis 1:1. In John 8:58, Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM {*ego eimi*}.” *Ego eimi* means “I have always been.” Colossians 1:16 says, “For by Him {Jesus} all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” Since Jesus created everything, He is not created, and thus, is eternal. In fact, there has never been a moment in all the eons of eternity that any person of the Godhead was not in existence.

Second, the New Testament clearly teaches that each person of the Triune Godhead is equal. John 5:17 records Jesus referring to God as “my Father..” The next verse relates that the Jews tried to kill Him because He “also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.” Jesus is everything He claimed to be so His Father and He are equal. The Holy Spirit is also equal to the Father and the Son. Some passages that speak of the Father, Son, and Spirit name the Spirit before one or both of the others (cf. Rom. 8:12-17 and Rev. 1:4-5 for examples). J.I. Packer says, “When the Father is put first and the Son third and the Spirit between them, as here, no room remains for doubt as to the Spirit’s coequality with them.”²⁴

Third, the New Testament clearly teaches that each person within the Triune God is of the same essence. Jerry Haughton says, “The divine essence is not divided among three persons, but each one partakes equally of all the attributes of deity so that there is a numerical unity of essence. They are one in essence, but three in person.”²⁵ Jesus said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30). A. T. Robertson says the Greek grammatical construction does not mean one person, “but one essence or nature.”²⁶ Therefore, the Father and Son are of the same essence. This truth also extends to the Holy Spirit because He is another of the same sort as Jesus. H. Wayne House lists eternality, power, omniscience, omnipresence, holiness, truth, and benevolence as attributes of deity shown in the Bible to be shared by all three persons of the Trinity.²⁷

²⁴ J.I. Packer. *Keep In Step With The Spirit* (Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 62.

²⁵ Jerry Haughton. *Every Wind Of Doctrine* (Living Spring Press, 1976), 25-26.

²⁶ A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures In The New Testament, Volume 5* (Richard R. Smith, Inc. 1932), 186.

²⁷ H. Wayne House. *Charts Of Christian Theology And Doctrine* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 49.

Fourth, the New Testament clearly teaches that each person within the Triune God is distinct from the others. John 1:1 says that “the Word was with God.” The preposition, “with,” *pros* in the Greek, could be translated as “toward, and it suggests that the Word and the Father were facing one another. Spiros Zodhiates says, “John is careful to point out to us that Jesus Christ, the eternal *Logos* of whom he spoke in the first clause of the first verse, is not the same person as God the Father. He declares that He is a distinct Person and ought not to be confused with the Father.”²⁸ In addition, Jesus taught His disciples that He must go away in order for the Father to send the Holy Spirit. This clearly shows a distinction among the persons. The passages describing the baptism of Jesus also clearly demonstrate the distinction. Jesus, the Son, is being baptized, the Father is speaking from heaven, and the Spirit is descending like a dove upon the Son. This distinction does not alter the fact that the Son is the eternal “expression of what the Father is” or that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father”(John 15:26). However, the New Testament teaches a clear distinction between the three persons who are the one God. As Wayne House says, “The Godhead exists ‘undivided in divided persons’.”²⁹

Salvation: Tai Davis describes the “plan of salvation” in Oneness theology as containing the following elements.

“The Oneness Pentecostal movements generally teach that to receive and maintain salvation, a person must adhere to four essential requirements.” We will consider each of these and also look at whether or not the belief that we can lose our salvation is biblical because that is also a commonly held belief among Oneness Pentecostals. The quotes describing each of the four elements are by Davis.

“1. Faith in Jesus Only

Oneness teachers would agree that salvation requires putting one's full faith in the Jesus of Oneness doctrine, that is the Jesus who is the totality of the Godhead, who died on the cross as an atonement for sin, and who rose again from the dead.”³⁰

Of course, we affirm that salvation is through faith in Jesus alone. However, our faith must be in the Jesus of the Bible, and the Oneness version of Jesus differs from Scripture. Jesus is the eternal God who took on flesh (John 1:1, 14). He is the second person of the Trinity. Colossians 2:9 says, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” 2 John 9 says, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.”

²⁸ Spiros Zodhiates. *Was Christ God? (AMG Publishers, 1966), 71.*

²⁹ House.

³⁰ Davis.

“2. Repentance and Baptism in the "Name of Jesus"”

Acts 2:38 is used as evidence that the early church baptized only in the name of Jesus. They maintain that baptism in the trinitarian formula is invalid since it implies belief in three gods. They claim Matthew 28:19 is not to be taken as a command to baptize in that formula.”³¹ This also means that they believe that baptism is a part of salvation.

What does the Bible teach about this? In regard to baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; we baptize this way because Jesus commands us to in Matthew 28:19-20. What then is the meaning of “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” in Acts 2:38? New Testament scholar Craig Keener says, “This phrase simply means that the person being baptized confesses Christ. (Acts always uses this phrase with ‘be baptized’- the passive, never the active; it does not denote a formula said over the person being baptized, but rather indicates the confession of faith of the person receiving baptism.)”³² However, this is a secondary issue. The primary issue is how we are saved. Eternity is at stake with that issue. So, is baptism a part of salvation? The answer is no. Let me demonstrate that by showing you the meaning of Acts 2:38 and then looking at four other reasons that baptism is for believers after salvation. Acts 2:38 says, “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’.” “Repent” is second person plural imperative. The phrase, “let every one of you be baptized,” is third person singular. So, Peter is telling everyone to repent and then telling those who repent to get baptized. Baptism follows repentance, and in the New Testament, repentance and faith are not synonymous but they are inseparable. We repent because we believe, and we believe because we are repenting. Plus, in regard to the phrase, “for the remission of sins,” “for” can sometimes mean “because,” and I believe that is the meaning in this case. Also, we are to compare Scripture with Scripture in our interpretation so here are four other reasons to believe that the New Testament does not teach baptism as a component of salvation.

Reason #1-The Work of the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” According to John 3:5, we are born again by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if the Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ at the moment of salvation, water baptism, while important, has nothing to do with salvation. We receive the Holy Spirit at the moment we trust Christ and not when we are baptized. Water baptism only pictures what took place at the moment of salvation.

Reason #2-The Nature of Salvation: Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Jesus Christ paid the full price for our sins on the cross. We can add nothing to that. His

³¹ Davis.

³² Craig Keener. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), 329.

blood is totally sufficient (1 Peter 1:18-20). We have absolutely no merit before God, no matter how many good works we do. Baptism is a work, and according to the Bible, we are not capable of earning or even helping to gain our salvation by working for it. We work because we are saved (Ephesians 2:10).

Reason #3-New Testament Example:

A) The Thief on the Cross (Luke 23:39-43): Jesus promised one of the men that was crucified with him that “today you will be with me in Paradise” (v. 43). However, this man did not realize the identity of Jesus, repent of his sin, and request that he be saved until he was on the cross. Therefore, it is impossible that he could have been baptized. Yet, Jesus promised him that he would be in heaven (paradise and heaven are synonyms) after his death. The only possible conclusion is that baptism was unnecessary to his salvation.

B) The 3000 Saved on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47): Verse 41 says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” “Received” is the Greek word, *apodechoma*, and it means “to take fully.” James 1:21 says, “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” I believe, therefore, that when we compare Scripture with Scripture it becomes clear that they were saved before they were baptized because they had fully received God’s Word, and that brings salvation according to James.

C) The Ethiopian Treasurer (Acts 8:26-40): The Holy Spirit led Philip to the Ethiopian who was reading from the book of Isaiah. This man did not understand what he was reading so Philip took the Scriptures and preached Jesus to him. The Ethiopian then asked Philip, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” However, Philip did not immediately baptize him. He first said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The Ethiopian had to confess Christ and be saved before the man of God would baptize him.

D) Paul’s Salvation Experience (Acts 9:1-19): Paul was saved on the Damascus Road where he encountered the risen Christ and confessed Him as Lord (v. 6). Ananias baptized him over three days later.

E) The Gentiles Saved in the Home of Cornelius (Acts 10): God sent Peter to begin the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter preached in the home of a man named Cornelius. Verse 44 says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” The Jews who were with Peter were amazed that Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. Peter answered them by saying, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” They were baptized with water. Therefore, it is obvious that these people were saved before they were baptized because only saved people are indwelt by the Spirit of God.

F) The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:16-34): Paul and Silas were in jail. God sent an earthquake that opened the doors and loosened the chains, but they did not escape. The jailer was trembling as he ran to Paul and Silas and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (v. 30-31). This is the only time that question is directly asked in the New Testament, and the answer called for faith and did not involve baptism in any way.

G) The Believers at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-10): Paul encountered a group of false disciples at Ephesus. They had been deceived. They had been baptized into John's baptism, but they had not truly believed on Christ and received the Holy Spirit. After Paul explained the truth to them, "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5). Therefore, they had been baptized once, but they still needed to have believer's baptism after their salvation.

Reason #4-The Nature of Sinners: 2 Peter 2:22 says, "But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit', and 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'." It is possible to take a pig away from mud, wash it, and dress it up. However, that pig will always return to the mud because that is its nature and cleaning up the outside does not change the inside. By the same token, it is possible to take a sinner and baptize him, but the sinner will always return to sin because it is his nature. Regeneration is being made spiritually alive and given a new nature with new desires through the inward work of the Holy Spirit. It is not an external act accomplished by baptism.

"3. Speaking in Tongues

Like most traditional Pentecostals and charismatics, Oneness Pentecostals teach that speaking in tongues is a gift to be exercised today. However, unlike most traditionalists, the Oneness movements maintain that speaking in tongues is not just a post-conversion indicator of the filling or baptism of the Holy Spirit, but an essential ingredient in the salvation experience itself."³³

What does the Bible teach about this? Is it true that you are not saved if you do not speak in tongues? A key verse in regard to this question is 1 Corinthians 12:13. It says, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free-and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." The Corinthian believers were those who were referred to as being baptized, and the conclusion can be drawn that this applies to all true believers. The Corinthians were baptized into the body of Christ, and it was the Holy Spirit who was the baptizer. It says that "we were all baptized into one body," and there are two key inferences that can be drawn from this statement. First, this has to be referring to the moment of salvation in order to include all believers because if the baptism takes place after conversion not all would be included yet. Second, the text states that the Spirit is baptizing us (which means fully immersing or placing) into the body of Christ. Since every Christian is part of the church, it has to happen at salvation. Gordon Fee, who is a Pentecostal, writes, "Most likely, therefore, Paul is referring to their common experience of conversion, and he does so in terms of its most crucial ingredient, the receiving of the Spirit."³⁴ J.I. Packer says, "Reference to a second blessing has to be read into the text; it cannot be read out of it."³⁵ Therefore, an examination of

³³ Davis.

³⁴ Gordon Fee. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 605.

³⁵ Packer, 203.

this verse demonstrates that salvation and the baptism of the Spirit happen at the same time, and the Pentecostal view of receiving the Spirit after salvation is shown to be false.

Along with that, this section of Scripture also demonstrates that tongues were never intended for every believer. Paul does this by demonstrating the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the giving of gifts in verses 4-11, showing the diversity of giftedness within the unity of the body through an extended analogy in verses 12-26, and using a series of rhetorical questions in verses 27-30. One of the questions he asks is, “Do all speak with tongues?” (v. 30). J.W. MacGorman says, “In all seven of the questions he used the negative particle *me*, indicating that he expected the answer no.”³⁶ Renald Showers says, “Thus in Paul’s day all believers had been baptized with the Spirit, but many were never given the ability to speak in tongues.”³⁷ The same is true today. Therefore, speaking in tongues cannot be part of salvation. Beyond the debatable question of whether or not it is a valid gift for believers today, the text of Scripture is clear that it was not a gift that was given to all believers in the New Testament church. So, we are indwelt by the Spirit at the moment of conversion, and speaking in tongues has nothing to do with getting saved or demonstrating that we are saved.

What about speaking in tongues in the book of Acts? To begin with a general statement, it is vital that we remember that the Book of Acts pictures a transitional time in the life of the church while the epistles show us how the church is to function when it is established. In Acts, the gospel is just taking root and spreading from place to place. The unity of Gentiles and Jews in the body of Christ that was purchased at the cross is being practically worked out. I believe that in this transitional period as the gospel spread to the Gentiles according to the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:8 (“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnessed to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”) that speaking in tongues as the outward manifestation of receiving the Holy Spirit was a sign to the Jews that God was actually saving Gentiles. This is not just my theory or speculation, but it is actually referenced at least three times in the text of Acts. Acts 10 records the story of God sending Peter to preach to a Gentile named Cornelius and a crowd gathered at his house. Verses 44-48 record the response to his sermon. They say, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.” In Acts 11, Jewish believers were questioning Peter about Gentiles being saved. Here is part of Peter’s response, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the

³⁶ J.W. McGorman. *The Gifts of the Spirit* (Broadman Press, 1974), 54.

³⁷ Renald Showers. “*Spiritual Gifts-Their Distribution And Relationships*” (*Israel My Glory*, June/July 1988), 22.

word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?’ When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:15-18). At the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15, “the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter [of whether or not Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law to be saved]. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith’” (verses 6-9). This explains why tongues was in some cases a sign to the Jews that the Gentiles had really been saved. It took an outward sign for them to believe this. However, we have the full revelation of God in Scripture today and no longer need a sign like this so it was temporary and transitory. Furthermore, even in the book of Acts, the majority of recorded salvation experiences were not accompanied by tongues (or at least speaking in tongues was not recorded in the scriptural accounts). Therefore, it was not normative then so it certainly cannot be normative today.

“4. Adherence to Holiness Standards

Most Oneness Pentecostals teach that once salvation is gained initially by the preceding ingredients, it must be maintained by daily adherence to legalistic codes of personal behavior. Alcohol and tobacco are prohibited. Women are not allowed to cut their hair, wear short dresses or slacks, use make-up, or wear jewelry. Men are expected to dress conservatively (white shirts and dark slacks), be clean shaven, and have short haircuts. Violations of these codes may result in a loss of salvation and exclusion from church fellowship.”³⁸

I consider this to be legalism and would refer you back to the previous section titled, “Liberty, Legalism, and License” for an explanation as to why.

In addition, it is common for them to believe that a person can lose their salvation. Here are some scriptural reasons why that is not possible:

Assurance of Salvation: Can a genuine believer ever lose his/her salvation? According to the Bible, the answer is no. Why?

1. God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24)
2. God gives us eternal life (John 5:24)
3. We cannot be taken from God (John 10:28)
4. Salvation is the work of God in us instead of our works (Philippians 1:6, Ephesians 2:8-9). Therefore, if our works do not save us, they cannot cause us to lose our salvation.
5. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit who abides with us forever (Ephesians 4:30, John 14:16).

³⁸ Davis.

6. We are adopted children of God (Romans 8:16, Galatians 4:4-7). In biblical times an adopted child could not lose his inheritance. The same is true spiritually.
7. God guarantees that we will be glorified someday (Romans 8:30). The Holy Spirit is given to us as a down-payment on the future glorification and inheritance that we will receive in heaven someday (Ephesians 1:14).
8. There is no more condemnation to those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1).
9. Our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).
10. It is not the Father's will that Jesus lose any that He has been given (John 6:39-40).
11. We are perfected forever by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:14).
12. God will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He is faithful even when we are not (2 Timothy 2:13).
13. Hebrews 7:25 says, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them." "Save to the uttermost" means that God saves us completely and forever. Also, we cannot lose our salvation because Jesus is *always* interceding for us.

As we think about these questions, keep this quote by John MacArthur in mind. He says, "Security is the Holy Spirit revealed fact that salvation is forever. Assurance is one's confidence that he possesses eternal salvation."³⁹ In other words, security is an objective fact based on our relationship with Christ while assurance is a feeling or belief based on the quality of our walk with Christ. It is possible to be saved and not feel assurance at a particular moment or to feel like you are saved without truly being saved.

Conclusion: For these reasons, we are compelled to consider Oneness Pentecostalism as a false doctrine and pseudo-Christian religion. However, Oneness Pentecostals are people who are loved by God and died for by Jesus so we should love them, pray for them, and share the true gospel with them.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What are the differences between Oneness Pentecostalism and more mainstream Pentecostalism?**
- 2. Work on this in groups and then share with each other. If someone asked you to define and defend the doctrine of the Trinity biblically, what would your response be?**
- 3. How would you respond biblically to someone saying that you have to be baptized in order to get saved?**
- 4. How would you respond biblically to someone saying that you are not a Christian if you don't speak in tongues?**
- 5. Do you believe that a genuine Christian can lose his or her salvation? Why or why not?**
- 6. How much do these doctrinal distinctives matter?**

³⁹ This is a John MacArthur quote that I have used for around 20 years, but I do not know the original message or writing that it came from at this point.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

PART 1

Introduction: Before we examine the primary doctrine of Jehovah’s Witnesses, the following introduction is a brief history and overview of Jehovah’s Witnesses, written by J. Warner Wallace. He writes, “The Jehovah’s Witnesses were founded by Charles Russell, a Pennsylvania businessman, in 1869. He was only 18 years old when he first began holding Bible studies on his own. He was frustrated with his personal experiences in the traditional Christian church of his day and he was particularly upset about what Christianity taught about the nature of hell. He was attracted to the Seventh Day Adventist movement. He eventually disassociated himself from this movement, however, on the basis of false predictions of Christ’s second coming.

Russell was a gifted communicator and writer. In 1879 he began his own magazine called the Zion’s Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence, which today is simply known as Watchtower (it is presently written by anonymous authors within the church). With the publication of the magazine, 30 congregations formed within a year. Russell next founded Zion’s Watch Tower Tract Society as a religious corporation in 1884. In 1886, he wrote what is viewed as sacred text, called Studies of the Scriptures. In 1896, he renamed the group ‘Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society,’ and this remains as the church’s official name today. The church is head-quartered in Brooklyn, New York. In addition to founding the church, Russell made a number of important predictions, including the prediction 1914 would be the beginning of the millennial age and the return of Jesus. When this did not occur (and the world instead witnessed a series of terrible events, including the beginning of World War I), Russell had to adjust his prediction. He died in 1916, never seeing the fulfillment of any of his predictions about the Millennium.

Joseph Rutherford became the next president of the church and began an important expansion. Rutherford wrote extensively (approximately a book a year) and started a magazine called The Golden Age. Today, this magazine continues to be published as Awake. Rutherford began using the radio as a means of broadcasting Bible lectures, growing his audience to 403 radio stations by 1933. Rutherford also initiated the door-to-door visitation program. Under his leadership, Rutherford renamed the group Jehovah’s Witnesses, to distinguish themselves from other Christians. Rutherford died in 1942 and Nathan Knorr became the next president.

Under Knorr’s leadership, the Watchtower proclaimed itself to be the Word of God, and Knorr affirmed that the Jehovah’s Witnesses alone represented God as his spokesman on earth. During this period of their history, Jehovah’s Witnesses began to encounter legal trouble due to their restrictions on the military involvement of their members (they are in essence a pacifist organization). The Jehovah’s Witnesses won 36 cases before the Supreme Court, successfully defending the rights of their members to refuse to serve in the military. In addition, Knorr oversaw the translation of The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures in 1960, and this is still the main sacred text of the church. Under Knorr’s leadership a missionary school was also established to advance worldwide exposure. Membership in the Jehovah’s Witnesses religion

grew from 115,000 members in 1942 to over 2 million members in 1977 when Knorr died. He was replaced by Frederick Franz.

Franz also affirmed the Jehovah's Witness claim their religion alone spoke for God (and the claim God's words could be found in the Watchtower Magazine). In fact, Franz testified in court on October 15th, 1931 that 'Jehovah God' was the editor of the Watchtower. But during this period of church history, Franz also predicted the world would end in 1975. After this failed to happen, there was confusion and reaction within the church. Eventually the presidency was replaced with a 'Governing Body' of eighteen men. Presently, local meeting places are called Kingdom Halls and members are either 'Publishers' (part-time missionaries) or 'Pioneers' (full-time missionaries). Members must meet 5 times a week and keep full records of their missionary activities. It is of primary importance to Jehovah's Witnesses that they gain members and grow the body of believers. Jehovah's Witnesses are trained to approach people, sell literature, teach people with proof texts and follow up with them. They work extremely hard and devote countless hours to evangelism.

According to church officials, there are approximately 6 million Jehovah's Witnesses in 232 countries [some reports say the number is over 8 million] and it is one of the fastest growing religions in the world. Only 40% of its membership is in the West, with its most dramatic growth in Latin America. They affirm the full divine inspiration of the Bible, but only accept the New World Translation as the correct translation of the text. They are most famous for their refusal to participate in any holiday and birthday celebrations (which they see as pagan), their refusal to receive blood transfusions and their refusal to participate in the government or military."⁴⁰

Doctrine: The doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses is clearly false, unbiblical, heretical, and non-Christian. Let's identify their primary beliefs and compare them with Scripture.

1. Scripture: Jehovah's Witnesses do affirm the entire Bible as the inspired Word of God. However, they have literally re-written Scripture in their New World Translation (that is really not a translation), see themselves as the channel of divine truth, place their teachings basically on the level of Scripture, and interpret the Bible for people instead of recognizing the priesthood of all believers. In essence, they confess the authority of Scripture with their lips but deny it with their actions. Let me spell out these claims.

A. They have re-written Scripture in their New World Translation that is really not a translation. They have not done a new translation of Scripture by linguistically qualified scholars, but they basically changed the parts that did not fit with their theology without linguistic warrant. Examples include changing the last phrase of John 1:1 to say "the Word is a god" instead of "the Word is God." There is no basis in Greek grammar for doing this. They only do it because it fits with their belief that Jesus is not God. They add the word, "other," in

⁴⁰ J. Warner Wallace (2014). A Brief Overview Of The Jehovah's Witness Worldview. retrieved from coldcasechristianity.com.

brackets in Colossians 1:16 because they believe Jesus was the first creation of God through whom everything else was created.

B. They see themselves as the channel of divine truth. In his book, *Kingdom of the Cults*, Walter Martin shares various quotes from different editions of *The Watchtower Magazine* to demonstrate this. For example, the June 1, 1938 edition says, “So Jehovah’s visible organization under Christ is a channel for bringing the divine interpretation of his word to his devoted people.”⁴¹ The April 15, 1939 edition says, “We acknowledge as the visible organization of Jehovah on earth the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, and recognize the Society as the channel or instrument through which Jehovah and Christ Jesus give instruction and meat in due season to the household of faith.”⁴² The May 1, 1972 edition says, “They [Witnesses] must adhere absolutely to the decisions and scriptural understanding of the Society because God has given it this authority over his people.”⁴³ The January 15, 1983 edition says, “Avoid independent thinking...questioning the counsel that is provided by God’s visible organization...Fight against independent thinking.”⁴⁴

C. They place their teachings basically on the level of Scripture. Charles Russell, the founder, wrote in the September 15, 1910 edition of the *Watchtower* regarding his *Studies in the Scriptures* the following quotation, “If the six Volumes of SCRIPTURE STUDIES are practically the Bible, topically arranged with Bible proof texts given, we might not improperly name the volumes THE BIBLE IN AN ARRANGED FORM. That is to say, they are not mere comments on the Bible, but they are practically the Bible itself...Furthermore, not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see, also, that if anyone lays the SCRIPTURE STUDIES aside, even after he has used them, after he has become familiar with them, after he has read them for ten years-if he then lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he had merely read the SCRIPTURE STUDIES with their references, and had not read a page of the Bible, as such, he would be in the light at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures.”⁴⁵

D. They interpret the Bible for their people. The quotations in A-C demonstrate this. Their authority is not really Scripture, but it is actually the Watchtower organization. In fact, their leaders would probably deny everything I am claiming here, but the proof is in their actions.

Here is the biblical response to their teachings. First, we believe that the original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts (the autographs) are inspired. Therefore, a translation is only valid as long as it is faithfully and accurately translating the original. As a result, the New World Translation

⁴¹ Walter Martin. *The Kingdom Of The Cults* (Bethany House Publishers, 2019), 70.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 57-58.

must be rejected as actually being the Bible. Second, the Scripture itself is authoritative-not our interpretations of Scripture or the pronouncements of an earthly organization. In Acts 1 and 15, we see the apostles themselves submitting to the authority of Scripture by making decisions according to what the Bible says. They followed Scripture in deciding to replace Judas as an apostle (Acts 1:15-26, particularly v. 20) and in affirming that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Acts 15:1-29). Third, 2 Timothy 2:15 commands us to rightly divide the Word of truth. We are to accurately interpret Scripture instead of blindly accepting someone else's statements about Scripture.

2. The Trinity: Jehovah's Witnesses deny the Trinity and teach that only Jehovah is Almighty God, while Jesus is a created being, and the Holy Spirit is God's active force.

Over the years, but particularly when I was in my twenties, I spent a lot of time in discussion with Jehovah's Witnesses. One of the booklets they gave me is entitled, "Should You Believe in the Trinity?" It is subtitled, "Is Jesus Christ the Almighty God?" I will share their teachings on the Trinity from this publication. The whole booklet is a denial of and argument against the Trinity, and here are a few summary statements. "If people were to read the Bible from cover to cover without any preconceived idea of a Trinity, would they arrive at such a concept on their own? Not at all. What comes through very clearly to an impartial reader is that God alone is the Almighty, the Creator, separate and distinct from anyone else, and that Jesus, even in his prehuman existence, is also separate and distinct, a created being, subordinate to God."⁴⁶ "Instead, what the Bible writers did make abundantly clear is that God is one Person-a unique, unpartitioned Being who has no equal."⁴⁷ "Jesus never claimed to be God. Everything he said about himself indicates that he did not consider himself equal to God in any way-not in power, not in knowledge, not in age."⁴⁸ "The Bible's use of 'holy spirit' indicates that it is a controlled force that Jehovah God uses to accomplish a variety of his purposes. To a certain extent, it can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations."⁴⁹

Here is the biblical response to their teachings. The fundamental premise of Old Testament theology is monotheism. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Youngblood writes, "The Book of Genesis begins by assuming that there is only one true God, and that assumption is maintained throughout the Old Testament." Exodus 20:2-3 says, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me." The theological truth that serves as the foundation for these verses is the fact that God is one instead of many. Deuteronomy 6:4 is the basic Jewish statement of faith known as the *shema*. It states, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the

⁴⁶ Author unknown. Should You Believe In The Trinity? (Watch Tower Bible And Tract Society, 1989), 12.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 20.

LORD is one!” In addition, Isaiah 45:5a says, “I am the LORD, *and there is no other; there is no God besides Me.*” Therefore, the Old Testament clearly teaches that there is only one true God.

As a result of this clear teaching of monotheism, many people conclude that it is impossible for the doctrine of the Trinity to be taught in the Old Testament. However, there is more evidence to be considered before this conclusion is hastily drawn. In Genesis 1:1, God is translated from the Hebrew word, *elohim*, “which is plural in form but not in number.” Many scholars believe this indicates a plural of majesty, but other scholars believe it implies the trinity of God, and this implication is at least a plausible option. In regard to Deuteronomy 6:4, the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* says, “To the Jews v. 4 is not only an assertion of monotheism, it is also an assertion of the numerical oneness of God contradictory to the Christian view of the Trinity of the Godhead. This kind of oneness, however, runs contrary to the use of *ehad* in the sense of a unity made up of several parts. *Ehad* ‘is used of a single bunch of grapes which in turn is divisible into distinguishable individual grapes, rather than *yahid*, which means uniquely one’.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, there are verses in the Old Testament that seem to at least imply plurality within the unity of the Godhead. Genesis 1:26a states; “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.’” This verse asserts (like Gen. 1:1) that there is only one God, but the verse also uses the plural pronouns “us” and “our” in reference to God. Deliberation and communication within the Godhead are also implied in this verse. In addition, in Genesis 11:7, the LORD says, “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

There are other verses in the Old Testament that bear an implicit witness to the doctrine of the Trinity. Psalm 110:1 says, “The LORD (*Yahweh*) said to my Lord (*adonay*), ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’.” According to the interpretation given by the New Testament writers, the first “LORD” refers to the Father, and the second “Lord” speaks of Christ. Isaiah 63:7-10 refers to the LORD, the Angel of His Presence (Savior), and His Holy Spirit. Isaiah 44:6-7 says, “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: *I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me There is no God.*” This is practically incomprehensible apart from the doctrine of the Trinity. Therefore, it seems to be a reasonable conclusion from a survey of the Old Testament data that the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly taught but is definitely implied because it is asserted that there is only one God, but there are also references to the plurality of the Godhead.

The New Testament doctrine of God does not contradict the Old Testament teaching that there is only one true God. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, “For *there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*” Galatians 3:20 says, “Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one only, but God is one.” 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 teaches that there are many false gods but only one true God. Therefore, both testaments clearly teach that God is one. This is foundational to the doctrine of the Trinity because the doctrine asserts “God’s oneness and threeness.” Here is the New Testament witness to the threeness of God.

⁵⁰ Earl Kalland. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 3* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 65.

There are passages in the New Testament that refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together. Matthew 28:19 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” It is important to note that “name” is singular even though it refers to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Gleason Archer says, “This suggests that the name of God is Father-Son-Holy Spirit.”⁵¹ Other “triadic” passages include Revelation 1:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 1:3-13, 2:18, 3:14-19, 4:4-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; and 1 Peter 1:2. However, these passages do not specifically teach that each of the three is God.

In order to establish the doctrine of the Trinity; it must be shown that the New Testament refers to the Father as God, the Son as God, and the Spirit as God; and the New Testament clearly does this. First, the Father is called God. 2 Peter 1:17 says, “For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory.” John 6:27; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Galatians 1:1, 1:3; Ephesians 5:20, 6:23; Philippians 2:11; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 John 3; and Jude 1 are other verses that use the phrase, “God the Father.” Millard Erickson says, “It is apparent that, for Jesus, God’ and ‘your heavenly Father’ are interchangeable expressions.”⁵² In summation, Erickson also says that the Father’s deity “is scarcely in dispute.”⁵³

Jesus is also specifically called God in the New Testament. Hebrews 1:8 records the Father saying to the Son, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.” Therefore, the Son, Jesus Christ, is specifically called God. This is taught in many other places in the New Testament. Matthew 1:23 refers to Jesus as Immanuel, meaning, “God with us.” John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word {and the context clearly refers to Christ}, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In several places in the Gospel of John, including 8:58, Jesus refers to Himself as I AM. This refers back to Exodus 3:14, “where the words stand for the eternal person of YAHWEH.” Doubting Thomas, after seeing the resurrected Christ, exclaimed, “My Lord and My God!” (John 20:28), and Jesus received this as worship. Romans 9:5 refers to Christ as the “eternally blessed God.” Colossians 2:9 says, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Revelation 1:8 refers to Jesus as “the Almighty.” Many other verses could be quoted, but these should suffice to prove the point that Jesus is God.

Third, the New Testament also refers to the Holy Spirit as God. Acts 5:1-11 contains the story of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, who received the judgment of God because they lied to God. Peter indicated that they had lied to the Holy Spirit (v.3). He then proceeded to indicate that they had lied to God (v.4). They had only told one lie, but Peter said they had lied to the Holy Spirit and God. The logical conclusion of this is that the Holy Spirit is God. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?” However, 1 Corinthians 6:19 states, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” One of

⁵¹ Gleason Archer. Encyclopedia Of Bible Difficulties (Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 357.

⁵² Erickson, 324.

⁵³ Ibid.

the verses states that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit while the other states our bodies are the temples of God. The verses do not say the Spirit and God. This seems to indicate that they are interchangeable expressions which would put the Spirit on equal footing with the Father. Furthermore, it has already been noted in a previous paragraph that John 1:1 teaches the deity of Christ. In John 14:16, Christ says, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper {the Holy Spirit, according to v. 17}, that He may abide with you forever.” J. I. Packer notes the connection of these two verses in revealing the plurality within the unity of the Godhead.⁵⁴ There is a connection because “another” is translated from the Greek word, *allos*, meaning “another of the same sort”, as opposed to *heteros*, which means “another of a different sort.” Therefore, the Holy Spirit is of whatever sort Christ is. Therefore, if Christ is God, which He is, the Holy Spirit is also God, and it is His job to continue the ministry of Christ.⁵⁵

Further evidence of the deity of the Holy Spirit is revealed in the fact that the Spirit is a person. Packer says, “John underlines the point {that the Spirit is God} by repeatedly using a masculine pronoun (*ekeino*, ‘he’) to render Jesus’ references to the Spirit, when Greek grammar called for a neuter one (*ekeino*, ‘it’) to agree with the neuter noun ‘Spirit’ (*pneuma*): John wants his readers to be in no doubt that the Spirit is he not it.”⁵⁶ R. A. Torrey lists three proofs of the personality of the Spirit. He asserts that the marks of personality are knowledge, feeling, and will; and each of these is ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the Bible (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:11, 1 Corinthians 12:11, Romans 8:27, Romans 15:30, and Ephesians 4:30)⁵⁷ Second, he says, “Many actions are ascribed to the Holy Spirit that only a person can perform.”⁵⁸ Torrey illustrates this by noting that the Spirit speaks (1 Corinthians 2:10), prays (Romans 8:26), and teaches (John 14:26).⁵⁹ Third, Torrey notes that the Holy Spirit is “another Comforter”, and this is an office only a person can fill.⁶⁰

The preceding paragraphs demonstrate that the New Testament teaches that there is only one God, but it names three persons (Father, Son, and Spirit) as fully and equally God. This demonstrates the three-in-oneness of God.

⁵⁴ J.I. Packer. *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), 58.

⁵⁵ W.E. Vine. *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell, 1981), 60.

⁵⁶ Packer. *Keep in Step With The Spirit*, 61.

⁵⁷ R. A. Torrey. *The Holy Spirit* (Fleming H. Revell, 1927), 16-22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 24.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 24-26.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 27.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Why should we run from a church that doesn't want you to think for yourself? On the other hand, why should we run from a church that is okay with people believing or doing almost anything they want?**
- 2. Why is it dangerous to follow human leaders instead of the Word of God?**
- 3. Why are people who claim to speak from God apart from Scripture dangerous?**
- 4. How is what we believe about the Bible foundational to all our other beliefs?**
- 5. Discuss the Trinity and try to make sure everyone in the group has a biblical understanding.**
- 6. While acknowledging that we cannot come close to fully understanding God, why is it important that we have a biblically accurate understanding of God?**

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

PART 2

3. The Person of Jesus: Jehovah's Witnesses are basically modern day Arians. Arianism is named after Arius, who declared that the Son is neither eternal nor immutable, and therefore is subordinate in essence to the Father. This heresy was condemned by the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). What do Jehovah's Witnesses specifically believe about Jesus? Consider the following statements from the same booklet that I quoted in the Trinity section. "The fact is that Jesus is not God and never claimed to be."⁶¹ "While on earth, Jesus was a human, although a perfect one because it was God who transferred the life-force of Jesus to the womb of Mary."⁶² "Jesus had an existence in heaven before coming to the earth. But was it as one of the persons in an almighty, eternal triune Godhead? No, for the Bible plainly states that in his pre-human existence, Jesus was a created spirit being, just as angels were spirit beings created by God. Neither the angels nor Jesus had existed before their creation. Jesus in his prehuman existence, was 'the first-born of all creation' (Colossians 1:15)...So it was by means of this master worker, his junior partner, as it were, that Almighty God created all other things."⁶³

What do Bible-believing, doctrinally sound Christians believe and why? Historical Christian doctrine has taught that the Bible asserts full deity and perfect humanity in one Person. He is the God-man. This involves the reality of His 2 natures, the integrity of His 2 natures, and the unmingled union of those 2 natures in 1 Person. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue write, "In AD 325, the Council of Nicaea affirmed Scripture's revelation of Jesus was at the same time human and divine, involving a 'hypostatic union' of the two natures without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. The Apostles' Creed (fifth century AD) thus states, 'I believe in... Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.' In other words, the hypostatic union consists of the two natures of Christ in one theanthropic (God-man) person. This union maintains Christ's deity undiminished and his humanity unexalted.

The hypostatic union is distinct from the virgin birth and from the incarnation. The incarnation refers to the whole concept of God manifesting himself in human flesh. The virgin birth constituted the means by which the incarnation was accomplished. As Charles Feinberg once explained, 'The hypostatic union is that which was effected and brought into being by the incarnation.' The hypostatic union differs from theophanies in that there were multiple, temporary theophanies, while the existence of two natures in Christ since his incarnation is eternal. He is now and forever the God-man.

While the human nature that the Son of God received in his incarnation allows him to experience humanity, he does not exist as two persons. He is but one person with two natures—the divine and the human."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Should You Believe In The Trinity?, 20.

⁶² Ibid, 14.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, 264.

Here are Scriptures that demonstrate to us who Jesus is.

-The Teaching of the Apostles:

- A. John 1:1-18
- B. Philippians 2:5-11
- C. Colossians 1:13-18
- D. Hebrews 1
- E. Romans 9:5
- F. Colossians 2:9
- G. Titus 2:13
- H. Revelation 1:8

-The Statements of Christ Where He Calls Himself God:

- A. Matthew 26:62-68
- B. John 5:16-18
- C. John 8:58
- D. John 10:30-33

-The Claims of Christ to Deity:

- A. He claimed that He would judge the world at the end of time (John 5:22).
- B. He claimed that He should be honored as much as God (John 5:23).
- C. He claimed that He could give eternal life to people (John 5:21, 40).
- D. He claimed that to see Him was to see God (John 14:9).
- E. He claimed that to know Him was to know God (John 8:19).
- F. He claimed that to hate Him was to hate God (John 15:23).
- G. He claimed that He could forgive sin (Mark 2:5, 10).
- H. Jesus accepted worship and being called "God" (John 20:28-29).
- I. He claimed to hear and answer prayers (John 14:14).
- J. He received worship, which is reserved only for God (John 9:38).

4. The Work of Jesus: There are three areas we need to consider in regard to Watchtower teaching regarding the work of Jesus.

A. Atonement: They believe that Jesus, a perfect human, became a ransom for us who compensated for what Adam lost so we can have perfect life on earth. The first Adam died so the second Adam died. However, he did not actually atone for our sins.

However, the Bible clearly teaches penal substitutionary atonement, which means that Jesus paid the price for our sins to God by dying in our place as substitute, exchange His righteousness for our guilt and satisfying the wrath of God. Laying aside the ample Old Testament evidence of this, here is a basic overview of what the New Testament teaches on the subject. 1 Peter 2:24a says, "Who Himself [Jesus] bore our sins in His own body on the tree." Hebrews 9:28a says, "So Christ was offered once [meaning 'once for all'] to bear the sins of many." Ephesians 5:2 says, "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." 1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ

also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.” Romans 5:6-8 says, “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die, but God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” In Wuest’s Word Studies From The Greek New Testament, Kenneth Wuest writes of these verses, “Paul now speaks of a demonstration of God’s love for mankind in that Christ died for the ungodly. When sinners were in the condition in which they were powerless for good, He died for (*huper*) them. The preposition *huper* means ‘for the sake of, in behalf of, instead of.’ In John 11:50, we have, ‘It is expedient for you that one man should die (*huper*) instead of the people and not that the whole nation should perish,’ and in Galatians 3:13, ‘Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse (*huper*) instead of us.’ Dana and Mantey in their Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament say, ‘In both of these passages the context clearly indicates that substitution is meant.’ Thus our Lord died instead of us, taking our penalty, and on behalf of us, in that His death was in our interest.”⁶⁵ These are just a few examples that show the clear New Testament teaching of penal substitutionary atonement. This had to happen for atonement to occur because Genesis 2:16-17 says, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’.” Romans 6:23a says, “For the wages of sin is death.” Death is the just penalty for sin against a holy God. In order to be holy, righteous, just, and true to His Word, God the Creator and righteous Judge of the universe, had to impose the sentence. But because He is also loving, merciful, gracious, and kind; God took on humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, the God-Man, and died as our personal substitute making atonement for our sins so God can justly justify sinners. Therefore, we worship our great God and King as perfectly and simultaneously just, holy, loving, merciful, and gracious! The language of Scripture in regard to this is not metaphorical, but it speaks of the literal work of God on our behalf to atone for our sins and give us salvation. This “scarlet thread of redemption” ties together the entire Bible.

B. The Resurrection: They believe in a spiritual resurrection instead of a physical resurrection. In a publication entitled, *Let God Be True*, they say, “The firstborn from the dead was raised from the grave, not a human creature but a spirit.”⁶⁶ “Jehovah God raised him from the dead, not as a human Son, but as a mighty immortal spirit Son.”⁶⁷ “Jesus did not take his human body to heaven to be forever a man in heaven.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Kenneth Wuest. *Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, volume 1 (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), Romans-80.

⁶⁶ Author Unknown. *Let God Be True* (Watch Tower Bible and Track Society), 276.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 30.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 41.

However, Scripture clearly teaches the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. In fact, it seems to go to great lengths to demonstrate this truth. Consider the following examples. Matthew 28 describes women going to the tomb and encountering the empty tomb and the angel. As they left to tell the disciples what they had experienced, they encountered Jesus. Verse 9 says, “So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.” Jesus walked and talked and then ate with two disciples on the Emmaus road after his resurrection (Luke 24:13-35). After that, he appeared to his disciples. They were frightened “and supposed they had seen a spirit” (Luke 24:37). After that, he had them touch the wounds in his hands and feet and ate in front of them to prove that he was a person and not a spirit (Luke 24:38-43). Thomas had not been with the other disciples when Jesus appeared, and he told them that he would not believe unless he could see and touch Jesus’s wounds so Jesus graciously appeared to Thomas for him to see and touch his wounds. Thomas then called Jesus, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:24-29).

C. The Literal Second Coming of Jesus: Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe in the bodily return of Christ. Their website says, “Jesus was resurrected with a spirit body, so he comes as a spirit creature, not in the flesh.”⁶⁹ Other Watchtower publications in the past have said the same thing. J. Warner Wallace writes, “Jehovah’s Witnesses believe God has an answer to the death and evil plaguing us. Like orthodox Christians, they expect the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. But when Charles Russell’s 1914 prediction related to the Millennial Reign of Christ failed to materialize, Jehovah’s Witnesses began to argue Jesus did return invisibly. They now believe Satan and his demons were expelled from heaven in 1914 and were sent to earth, resulting in the increased evil, suffering and wars seen at the time. They believe we are in the ‘last days,’ a period of time initiated in 1914.”⁷⁰

However, Scripture clearly teaches the literal, bodily return of Jesus to earth. Here are some passages that clearly demonstrate this truth. Zechariah 12:10 says, “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” Acts 1:9-11 says, “And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven’.” John 14:3 says, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” Titus 2:13 says, “Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” Revelation 1:7 says, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.”

⁶⁹ From an article on jw.org.

⁷⁰ Wallace.

5. Salvation: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that salvation is faith plus works. J. Warner Wallace writes, "For the Jehovah's Witness, Jesus' death was not a payment for our sin but was instead a ransom sacrifice for Adam's sin. This is a fundamental deviation from orthodox Christianity, because the death of Jesus does not pay for our sins in this life. We are still responsible to live a life worthy of God and we will not be reunited with God unless we work to earn our salvation.

Eternal life requires more than faith in Jesus. It comes from 'learning about Jehovah and obeying his requirements,' and working hard to be a loyal Subject of Jehovah, listening to the Kingdom message and acting on it. According to the Watchtower Organization (as printed in the Watchtower Magazine, February 15th, 1983 on page 12), there are four requirements for salvation:

1. 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?
 2. Many have found the second requirement more difficult. It is to obey God's laws, yes, 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 Corinthians 6:9, 10; 1 Peter 4:3, 4).
 3. A third requirement is that we 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 (Acts 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.
 4. The fourth requirement is connected with 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' (Matthew 24:14). Will you meet this requirement by telling others about God's Kingdom?
- Jehovah's Witnesses believe salvation comes through the Jehovah's Witness organization alone, and it is earned by good works and witnessing to non-believers. It is not a free gift of grace."⁷¹

However, Scripture very clearly teaches that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone. Ephesians 2:7-10 says, "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

The ultimate purpose of salvation is the glory of God so the only possible means of salvation is the grace of God. This statement expresses the flow of what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:1-10, particularly in verse 7. The first word of verse 7, "that," expresses purpose so

⁷¹ Ibid.

the meaning is that Jesus has raised spiritually dead sinners to life by His grace for the purpose of us eternally glorifying God as trophies of His grace. This is what was also expressed in verses 6, 12, and 14 of chapter 1. Let's look at the two sides of that statement.

-The ultimate purpose of salvation is the glory of God.

A. The nature of the glory of God: Rick Warren writes, "It's all for him. The ultimate goal of the universe is to show the glory of God. It is the reason for everything that exists, including you. God made it all for his glory. Without God's glory, there would be nothing. What is the glory of God? It is who God is. It is the essence of his nature, the weight of his importance, the radiance of his splendor, the demonstration of his power, and the atmosphere of his presence. God's glory is the expression of his goodness and all his other intrinsic, eternal qualities"⁷² (see Isaiah 6:3, 42:8, 43:7; Romans 11:36, 1 Chronicles 16:29, John 17:1-5, 24). It is vital for us to understand this ultimate design and purpose so everything else can be ordered around it.

B. We are trophies of grace who eternally receive God's gracious kindness in Jesus Christ (Psalm 16:11, Revelation 7:13-17, 21:3-7). This is a great blessing to us, but it is only a byproduct of salvation.

C. We eternally glorify God.

-There is no boasting about self in heaven (Ephesians 2:9).

-God is eternally showing off His grace in us (1 Peter 1:3-12).

-We will be worshipping Jesus Christ forever (Revelation 5:1-14, 7:9-12).

-The only possible means of salvation is the grace of God. If the purpose of salvation is the glory of God, we can only be saved by grace, which is God's unmerited favor that causes Him to work on our behalf. If salvation were by works, we could take the credit for it and give the glory to ourselves instead of God (Ephesians 2:8-10 flow out of verse 7, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Therefore, grace can only be received through faith.

These are somewhat secondary matters, but I will share them because they connect to the doctrine of salvation. Wallace goes on to write:

"There are two classes of Jehovah's Witnesses:

The 'Anointed Class'

This group is comprised of 144,000 people (the number is derived from Revelation 7:4) who were either first century believers, were "Witness-like" Christians from the 2nd through the 19th centuries, were Charles Russell's Bible students, or are among a small number of Witnesses who have lived since then. Of course, Charles Russell is included in this anointed class, but beyond Russell, no one can have certainty about who is in this class of believers. The 'anointed Class' will live with God in Heaven and will reign over the 'Great Crowd.'

⁷² Rick Warren. *The Purpose Driven Life*. (Zondervan, 2002), 53.

The 'Great Crowd'

This group is comprised of all the Jehovah's Witnesses who make it through Armageddon who are not part of the 'Anointed Class.' They will be resurrected and live in paradise on earth forever, but they will not have the same status as the 'Anointed Class' and they will not reign over others."⁷³

In addition, Jehovah's Witnesses deny the scriptural truth that hell is eternal, conscious torment separated from the presence of God. In *Let God Be True*, they write, "The Bible hell is mankind's 'common grave'."⁷⁴ In *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, they write, "Hell could not be a place of torment because such an idea never came into the mind or heart of God. Additionally, to torment a person eternally because he did wrong on earth for a few years is contrary to justice."⁷⁵ The same publication says, "The wicked, of course, are not literally tormented because, as we have seen, when a person is dead he is completely out of existence."⁷⁶

What does Scripture say to these ideas? We cannot treat them extensively here, but they are both unbiblical ideas. The Bible makes no distinction between classes or eternal destinations of Christians. The 144,000 of Revelation 7 are Jews who are sealed during the period of tribulation pictured in Revelation. Jesus promised all Christians that we could go to be with Him (John 14:1-6). 2 Corinthians 5:8 teaches us that "to be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord." "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). God will eternally dwell with His people in heaven (Revelation 21:3).

In regard to hell, Jesus Himself taught that it is a place of conscious, ongoing existence in torment (Luke 16:19-31). He also said, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). This means that if heaven is eternal, then hell is also eternal. He also called it a place "where the fire is not quenched" three different times in Mark 9. Revelation 20:11-15 describes it as a lake of fire that those who reject Jesus are cast into.

Discussion Questions:

1. **What is the evangelical doctrine regarding who Jesus is?**
2. **Walk through the verses regarding who Jesus is and discuss them together as a group.**
3. **Why is it important that we not create our own version of Jesus that is different than the biblical version? Isn't it enough if I believe in "Jesus?" Why be so particular about doctrinal formulations?**
4. **Why is penal substitutionary atonement necessary for our salvation?**
5. **Why does it matter if the resurrection was physical or spiritual?**
6. **Why does salvation have to be by grace alone through faith alone?**

⁷³ Wallace.

⁷⁴ Author unknown. *Let God Be True*, 92.

⁷⁵ Author unknown. *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

MORMONISM

PART 1

Introduction: The history of Mormonism is very lengthy and complicated. Our focus is primarily on doctrine, although the history is certainly important. For the sake of space and time, here is a brief overview from [history.com](https://www.history.com).

“In Fayette Township, New York, Joseph Smith, founder of the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormonism, organizes the Church of Christ during a meeting with a small group of believers.

Born in Vermont in 1805, Smith claimed in 1823 that he had been visited by a Christian angel named Moroni who spoke to him of an ancient Hebrew text that had been lost for 1,500 years. The holy text, supposedly engraved on gold plates by a Native American historian in the fourth century, related the story of Israelite peoples who had lived in America in ancient times. During the next six years, Smith dictated an English translation of this text to his wife and other scribes, and in 1830 The Book of Mormon was published. In the same year, Smith founded the Church of Christ—later known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—in Fayette Township.

The religion rapidly gained converts, and Smith set up Mormon communities in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. However, the Christian sect was also heavily criticized for its unorthodox practices, such as polygamy, and on June 27, 1844, Smith and his brother were murdered in a jail cell by an anti-Mormon mob in Carthage, Illinois.

Two years later, Smith’s successor, Brigham Young, led an exodus of persecuted Mormons from Nauvoo, Illinois, along the western wagon trails in search of religious and political freedom. In July 1847, the 148 initial Mormon pioneers reached Utah’s Valley of the Great Salt Lake. Upon viewing the valley, Young declared, “This is the place,” and the pioneers began preparations for the tens of thousands of Mormon migrants who would follow them and settle there.”⁷⁷

Let’s examine their doctrine from a biblical viewpoint now. Mormonism is very complicated so this is certainly only an overview.

1. Scripture: I will let the Mormon Church speak for itself in regard to its view of Scripture. All quotes in the rest of this section, unless otherwise noted, are from the website of The Church Of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. They write, “When holy men of God write or speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, their words ‘shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation’ (Doctrine and Covenants 68:4). The official, canonized scriptures of the Church, often called the standard works, are the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price...God, who is the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (2 Nephi 29:9), continues to reveal scripture in modern times as He did in ancient times. Latter-day prophets counsel people everywhere to study the scriptures daily, including the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ History.com Editors (2019). Mormon Church Established. retrieved from [history.org](https://www.history.com).

⁷⁸ Author unknown. Scriptures. retrieved from [lds.org](https://www.lds.org).

The Bible

“Because the Bible has been translated many times, it is printed in different versions. In English, the King James Version of the Bible is accepted as scripture by the Church. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we revere the Bible and its sacred teachings.”⁷⁹

The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ

“The Book of Mormon came forth in this dispensation by the will of the Lord. It is a record of God’s dealings with the people who lived in the ancient Americas. Prophets of the Lord engraved the original records on gold plates. The Lord declared that the Book of Mormon contains ‘the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ’ (Doctrine and Covenants 20:9; see also Doctrine and Covenants 42:12). On September 22, 1827, an angel named Moroni—the last Book of Mormon prophet—delivered these records to the Prophet Joseph Smith. By the gift and power of God, the Prophet Joseph translated the record into English. Since then, the Book of Mormon has been translated into many other languages. The primary purpose of the Book of Mormon is to convince all people ‘that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations’ (title page of the Book of Mormon). It teaches that all people ‘must come unto him, or they cannot be saved’ (1 Nephi 13:40). Joseph Smith said that the Book of Mormon is ‘the keystone of our religion, and a man [will] get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book’ (introduction to the Book of Mormon). The Book of Mormon is another witness for the truths taught in the Bible. It also restores ‘plain and precious’ truths that have been lost from the Bible through errors in translation or ‘taken away’ in attempts to ‘pervert the right ways of the Lord’ (see 1 Nephi 13:24–27, 38–41). The Bible and the Book of Mormon ‘shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace’ (2 Nephi 3:12). Near the end of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Moroni teaches us how we can know the book is true: ‘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; see also Moroni 10:3 and Moroni 10:5).”⁸⁰

The Doctrine and Covenants

“The Doctrine and Covenants contains revelations given to the Prophet Joseph Smith. It also includes a few revelations given to other latter-day prophets following Joseph Smith. This book of scripture is unique because it is not a translation of ancient documents. It is a collection of revelations given by the Lord to His chosen prophets in the latter days. The Prophet Joseph Smith said that the Doctrine and Covenants is ‘the foundation of the Church in these last days,

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

and a benefit to the world, showing that the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom of our Savior are again entrusted to man' (section heading for Doctrine and Covenants 70)."⁸¹

The Pearl of Great Price

"The Pearl of Great Price contains the book of Moses, the book of Abraham, the Prophet Joseph Smith's inspired translation of Matthew chapter 24, and some writings of the Prophet Joseph. The book of Moses is a small excerpt from Joseph Smith's inspired translation of the Bible. It is a more complete record of Moses's writings at the beginning of the book of Genesis in the Old Testament. It contains many doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible and gives additional information about the plan of salvation, the creation of the earth, and the Lord's dealings with Adam and Enoch. The book of Abraham is a translation of ancient records written on papyrus that came into the possession of the Church in 1835. The Prophet Joseph Smith translated the records by revelation. This book contains truths about the pre-mortal Council in Heaven, the creation of the earth, the nature of God, and the priesthood."⁸²

Christian Response To This: Mormonism violates the basic Christian belief of Jesus alone, grace alone, faith alone, the glory of God alone, and Scripture alone. The Bible alone is not considered the Word of God by them but the four standard works listed above plus the living voice of the prophet, who is supposedly continuing to give revelation from God, are considered to be the Word of God. They are violating the warning of Revelation 22:18-19, which says, "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book." They are violating it by both taking away from and adding to Scripture. Thus, they treat Scripture as if it is neither inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, or sufficient. No church who does this can be considered to be a Christian church. Also, the poisonous fruit of the rest of their doctrine comes from this corrupt root of their incorrect doctrine of Scripture. In addition, scholars from the Smithsonian Institute and leading universities have completely debunked the historical and archaeological claims of their literature as having no basis in fact. For example, the Book of Abraham mentioned above in The Pearl of Great Price is nothing of what they claim it to be. This information is documented by Walter Martin in *Kingdom of the Cults* and also in many other sources.

2. The Trinity: What do Mormons believe about the nature of God? They have an aberrant view of the makeup of God's nature, the definition of the Trinity, and who we are in relation to God.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

A. God's Nature: Walter Martin writes, "Mormon theology is polytheistic, teaching, in effect, that the universe is inhabited by different gods who procreate spirit children, which are in turn clothed with bodies on different planets, 'Elohim' being the god of this planet."⁸³ Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 says He "has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's."⁸⁴ The teaching material on their website says, "Since that sermon, known as the King Follett discourse, the doctrine that humans can progress to exaltation and godliness has been taught within the Church. Lorenzo Snow, the Church's fifth President, coined a well-known couplet: 'As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be.' Little has been revealed about the first half of this couplet, and consequently little is taught. When asked about this topic, Church President Gordon B. Hinckley told a reporter in 1997, 'That gets into some pretty deep theology that we don't know very much about.' When asked about the belief in humans' divine potential, President Hinckley responded, 'Well, as God is, man may become. We believe in eternal progression. Very strongly.'" "Eliza R. Snow, a Church leader and poet, rejoiced over the doctrine that we are, in a full and absolute sense, children of God... Latter-day Saints have also been moved by the knowledge that their divine parentage includes a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father. Expressing that truth, Eliza R. Snow asked, 'In the heavens are parents single?' and answered with a resounding no: 'Truth eternal / Tells me I've a mother there.' That knowledge plays an important role in Latter-day Saint belief. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote, 'Our theology begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them'."⁸⁵

Christian Response To This: There are at least four ways that Scripture refutes this teaching. They are:

#1. There is only one God. The Bible is strictly monotheistic and not polytheistic, and their teaching clearly expresses a belief in a plurality of gods. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one!" 1 Timothy 2:5 says that there is one God as do many other Scriptures. Exodus 20:1-3 says, "And God spoke all these words, saying: 'I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage You shall have no other gods before Me'."

#2. God is an immaterial, spiritual being. Jesus said, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). God is not limited by time and space. He is infinite, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. Jesus manifested God in flesh (John 1:1, 14, 14:9; Colossians 2:9). God is a spiritual being in His essence. Only Jesus took on flesh in the incarnation. The Bible does use what is called anthropomorphic language, which means physical descriptions to teach about his spiritual character, to describe God in a way our minds can grasp. If we try to take these literally, we will have to say that God has feathers and wings (Psalm 91:4).

⁸³ Martin, 275.

⁸⁴ As quoted by Martin, 273.

⁸⁵ Author Unknown. *Becoming Like God*. retrieved from lds.org.

#3. There is no such thing as a Heavenly Mother. There is nothing about this in the Bible. It becomes a moot point if God is not a physical being. It is blasphemous to suggest that God is having sexual relations, and this is what Mormons are saying. Do you find that hard to believe? A Mormon publication entitled, *Achieving A Celestial Marriage*, says, “By definition, exaltation includes the ability to procreate the family unit throughout eternity. This our Father in heaven has power to do. His marriage partner is our Mother in heaven. We are their spirit children, born to them in the bonds of celestial marriage.”⁸⁶ Jesus clearly taught that there is not sex in heaven when in refuting the Sadducees, he said, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:29-30).

#4. There is a specific distinction between Creator and creature, and the essence of sin is for the creation to try take the place of the Creator. God is God, and we are not. He is Creator. We are creation. He is ruler. We are servants. Mixing this in any way is deadly. This kind of pride led to the first sin and is the root of all sin. Genesis 3:4-5 says, “Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’.” God never intended for us to know evil-only good. Therefore, the fall brought evil into the world and led to every problem that is in the world today. God created us for love, peace, joy, and goodness. The Fall perverted all of that because we believed the Lie that we could be gods. Romans 1:25 says, “Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” This completely refutes their doctrine of exaltation.

B. The Trinity: The Church’s first article of faith states, “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost. These three beings make up the Godhead. They preside over this world and all other creations of our Father in Heaven.”⁸⁷ Their website says, “Latter-day Saints view the members of the Godhead in a manner that corresponds in a number of ways with the views of others in the Christian world, but with significant differences. Latter-day Saints pray to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. They acknowledge the Father as the ultimate object of their worship, the Son as Lord and Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as the messenger and revealer of the Father and the Son. But where Latter-day Saints differ from other Christian religions is in their belief that God and Jesus Christ are glorified, physical beings and that each member of the Godhead is a separate being.”⁸⁸

Christian Response To This: After learning what we learned in section 2A, there is almost no point in even discussing the Trinity. They have a completely different version of God than the triune God of the Bible. This is one of many examples of the doublespeak they use to deceive people and pull them into their fold. They do not believe in the Trinity in any biblical sense.

⁸⁶ Author unknown. *Achieving A Celestial Marriage* student manual. retrieved from ldslearning.org.

⁸⁷The Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. retrieved from lds.org.

⁸⁸ Author unknown. *Godhead*. retrieved from lds.org.

They deny that God is one in essence and nature by calling them separate beings. However, this goes way beyond theological technicalities because they are obviously polytheists who believe that we can become gods. This is blasphemous and cultish.

C. Who We Are In Relation To God: “In 1832, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon experienced a vision of the afterlife. In the vision, they learned that the just and unjust alike would receive immortality through a universal resurrection, but only those ‘who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise’ would receive the fulness of God’s glory and be ‘gods, even the sons of God.’ Another revelation soon confirmed that ‘the saints shall be filled with his glory, and receive their inheritance and be made equal with him.’ Latter-day Saints use the term exaltation to describe the glorious reward of receiving one’s full inheritance as a child of Heavenly Father, which is available through the Atonement of Christ, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.”⁸⁹

Christian Response To This: I would again refer back to section 2A. This is polytheistic, extra-biblical, and blasphemous. Those who are saved by Jesus do become children of God who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. All people are made in the image of God. None of that indicates that we are gods, however. The Mormon doctrine of our preexistence and then exaltation seems to me to be the foundation of their entire theology, and it is a foundation built on sand and not the rock of the truth of God’s Word. Their idea of heaven having three levels, the celestial, terrestrial, and telestial, is not found in Scripture either. 2 Corinthians 5:8 says, “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What kind of spiritual issues can potentially arise if we do not follow Scripture alone?**
- 2. Discuss the Mormon doctrine of God and a scriptural response to it. How does this teaching make you feel?**
- 3. There is a saying that goes, “Things that are different are not the same.” We have seen in this study, including Mormonism, that religions sometimes use biblical or Christian terms and give them different meanings. Discuss the saying quoted in the first sentence and its implications in light of the second sentence.**
- 4. How does the image of Mormonism portrayed in their advertising fit with this doctrine?**
- 5. How would you respond if someone said to you, “You can become a god in the future.”?**

⁸⁹ Becoming Like God.

MORMONISM

PART 2

3. Jesus:

A. The Person of Jesus: Remember that we have already seen that Mormons view the Father and Son as separate beings. Mormons seem to believe that Jesus and Satan are spirit brothers. “Satan, who was called Lucifer, also came, saying, ‘Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor’ (Moses 4:1). ... Under Satan’s plan, we would not be allowed to choose. He would take away the freedom of choice that our Father had given us. Satan wanted to have all the honor for our salvation. Under his proposal, our purpose in coming to earth would have been frustrated (see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* [2003], 207). After hearing both sons speak, Heavenly Father said, ‘I will send the first’ (Abraham 3:27).”⁹⁰ Jess L. Christensen, Institute of Religion director at Utah State University, Logan, Utah writes, and is quoted on the Mormon website, as saying, “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.”⁹¹

Christian Response To This: This is incompatible with the biblical teaching of the full deity of Jesus Christ who is eternally God. Please refer back to the section on Jesus in the material about Jehovah’s Witnesses for a detailed explanation of who Jesus is. Let me also point out that He is uncreated because He is the creator of all things. He is not the offspring of God and certainly not the spirit brother of Satan. Colossians 1:15-18 says, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [firstborn refers to position and not physical birth] over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

B. The Work of Jesus: Mormons do affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Some of what they say about the atonement sounds biblical and correct, but there is a lot of error mixed in with it as well. Let me highlight some of the errors. “Jesus Christ redeems all people from the effects of the Fall. All people who have ever lived on the earth and who ever will live on the earth will be resurrected and brought back into the presence of God to be judged (see 2 Nephi 2:5–10; Helaman 14:15–17). Through the Savior’s gift of mercy and redeeming grace, we will all receive the gift of immortality and live forever in glorified, resurrected bodies.”⁹²

⁹⁰ Author Unknown. Jesus Christ Chosen as Savior. retrieved from lds.org.

⁹¹ Jess Christensen. How can Jesus and Lucifer be spirit brothers when their characters and purposes are so utterly opposed? retrieved from churchofjesuschrist.org.

⁹² Author Unknown. Atonement of Jesus Christ. retrieved from lds.org.

“Although we are redeemed unconditionally from the universal effects of the Fall, we are accountable for our own sins. But we can be forgiven and cleansed from the stain of sin if we ‘apply the atoning blood of Christ’ (Mosiah 4:2). We must exercise faith in Jesus Christ, repent, be baptized for the remission of sins, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”⁹³

“Latter-day Saints see all people as children of God in a full and complete sense; they consider every person divine in origin, nature, and potential. Each has an eternal core and is ‘a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents.’ Each possesses seeds of divinity and must choose whether to live in harmony or tension with that divinity. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all people may ‘progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny.’ Just as a child can develop the attributes of his or her parents over time, the divine nature that humans inherit can be developed to become like their Heavenly Father’s.”⁹⁴

“Latter-day Saints use the term exaltation to describe the glorious reward of receiving one’s full inheritance as a child of Heavenly Father, which is available through the Atonement of Christ, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.”⁹⁵

Christian Response To This: This is not the Christian, biblical concept of atonement. It borders on universalism, as Mormons do believe most go to some level of heaven. It relates to another Mormon belief that we have not really developed, and that is we were preexistent spirit children in heaven who received bodies on the earth. An article by Norman Gardner on the Mormon website states, “In our premortal life, we were taught lessons that prepared us to assist Heavenly Father in bringing about the salvation of His children (see D&C 138:56). We also had the agency to follow and obey God. Some of Father’s children distinguished themselves through their ‘exceeding faith and good works’ and were foreordained, or given assignments, to serve in specific ways on earth (Alma 13:3). The greatest of those who followed Heavenly Father back then was His firstborn spirit son, Jesus Christ—or Jehovah, as He was known there.”⁹⁶ Scripture teaches nothing like this regarding us or Jesus. It also relates to their belief in our exaltation as gods, which we have shown to be the complete opposite of biblical teaching. The Bible teaches that God is holy (Isaiah 6) and love (John 3:16). He is the Creator (Genesis 1:1) and made us in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). We are not gods but are created for a relationship with God (John 17:3). However, we are all sinners by nature and choice (Psalm 51:5, Romans 3:23). Our sins separate us from God and result in spiritual and physical death (Isaiah 59:2, Romans 6:23). We have no righteousness to offer God (Isaiah 64:6). Therefore, we need a Savior. Jesus came and died for our sins in order to save us. Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ has redeemed us from

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Becoming Like God.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Norman Gardner. What We Know About Premortal Life. retrieved from lds.org.

the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree’).” This happened so that God can “be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). This means that God is perfect and holy so He must uphold His Law and punish sin, but He also loves us and wants to save us. The way that He can be just and justify us is by bearing the punishment for our sins Himself in our place (1 Peter 3:18). As God, Jesus can make an infinite sacrifice for all sin, and as a man, He can be our personal substitute. When we trust Jesus, God exchanges our sin for His righteousness as a gift of His grace. On the cross, He treated Jesus like He lived our sinful life so He can now treat us like we lived Jesus’ righteous life.

4. Salvation: Here are some of the basic Mormon teachings in regard to salvation, according to the church’s website.

“The gospel is our Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness. The central doctrine of the gospel is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, ‘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’ (Articles of Faith 1:4). In its fulness, the gospel includes all the doctrines, principles, laws, ordinances, and covenants necessary for us to be exalted in the celestial kingdom. The Savior has promised that if we endure to the end, faithfully living the gospel, He will hold us guiltless before the Father at the Final Judgment (see 3 Nephi 27:16).”⁹⁷

“Conversion is a process, not an event. Conversion comes as a result of righteous efforts to follow the Savior. These efforts include exercising faith in Jesus Christ, repenting of sin, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end in faith.”⁹⁸

“Baptism by immersion in water by one having authority is the first saving ordinance of the gospel and is necessary for an individual to become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to receive eternal salvation. All who seek eternal life must follow the example of the Savior by being baptized and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. . . . Those who are baptized enter into a covenant with God to take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ, keep His commandments, and serve Him to the end (see Mosiah 18:8–10; Doctrine and Covenants 20:37). Church members renew this covenant each time they partake of the sacrament (see Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79). Those who keep the covenants they made at baptism are blessed by the Lord for their faithfulness. Some of the blessings include the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, the remission of sins, and the privilege of being spiritually reborn. If they continue faithfully, they are promised eternal life (see 2 Nephi 31:19–20).”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Author Unknown. Gospel. retrieved from lds.org.

⁹⁸ Author Unknown. Book of Mormon Seminary Teacher Manual.

⁹⁹ Author Unknown. Baptism. retrieved from lds.org.

“Jesus Christ taught that baptism is essential to the salvation of all who have lived on earth (see John 3:5). Many people, however, have died without being baptized. Others were baptized without proper authority. Because God is merciful, He has prepared a way for all people to receive the blessings of baptism. By performing proxy baptisms in behalf of those who have died, Church members offer these blessings to deceased ancestors. Individuals can then choose to accept or reject what has been done in their behalf...

Because He is a loving God, the Lord does not damn those people who, through no fault of their own, never had the opportunity for baptism. He has therefore authorized baptisms to be performed by proxy for them. A living person, often a descendant who has become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is baptized on behalf of a deceased person.”¹⁰⁰

The Christian Response To This: The two primary errors of the Mormon theology of salvation relate to the means and end of salvation. By the end of salvation, I am referring to their belief that the end result is exaltation in the celestial kingdom. This was dealt with in section 2. I would add that multiple Scriptures deal with the afterlife (Luke 16:19-31, 1 Corinthians 15, Revelation 21-22 for example) and none of them picture us a gods. We are glorified but are still human beings.

As far as the means of salvation, Mormonism is clearly a religion of works. Multiple statements quoted above demonstrate the preceding sentence to be true. However, the Bible teaches us that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone for the glory of God alone. Mormonism is clearly Jesus plus, with a wrong version of Jesus at that. Jesus saves us without any assistance from us. Ephesians 2:7 teaches us that the ultimate purpose of salvation is the glory of God so the only possible means of salvation is the grace of God. Galatians 2:16 says, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” Other examples of this include Ephesians 2:1-10 and Romans 3:19-4:8.

In regard to baptism being part of salvation, that is a biblically incorrect teaching, and I would refer you back to the section of this material regarding Oneness Pentecostalism for the details. However, let’s touch on their doctrine of baptism for the dead because it is a very important element of their faith and practice as can be seen from the quotes above. It is based on 1 Corinthians 15:29, which states, “Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?” 1 Corinthians 15 is about the reality and necessity of the resurrection. In this section, Paul is dealing with some of the practical consequences of the resurrection. He is saying that if Jesus did not rise from the dead that we do not have a purpose in living life or in facing death. As far as verse 29 in particular, there are multiple interpretations, and no one can say absolutely for sure what it does mean. However, we can say that it is not wise to build a doctrine on one disputed verse, and we can definitely say some things that it does not mean. First, since baptism does not save living people

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

it cannot save dead people. Second, we cannot have faith for someone else or do things to bring salvation to another person. Romans 14:12 says, “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Third, we do not have an opportunity to get saved after death. Hebrews 9:27 says, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

5. The Church: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints certainly uses unbiblical terminology such as stakes and wards in their church organization and practice an unbiblical form of church structure that is hierarchical instead of autonomous. Mormons believe they are the only true church, although they believe most people will end up going to some level of heaven. This view originated through a supposed revelation to Joseph Smith that is extra-biblical and certainly should be rejected. We are going to conclude by looking at their reasons for believing they are the only true church. I think this is a good way to wrap up this section.

An article for youth on the Mormon church’s website says, “A revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1831, soon after the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, spoke of those who had been given ‘power to lay the foundation of this church.’ The Lord then referred to the Church as ‘the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased’ (D&C 1:30).

Because of this declaration of the Lord, we refer to this, His Church—our Church—as the ‘only true Church.’ Three features—(1) fulness of doctrine, (2) power of the priesthood, and (3) testimony of Jesus Christ—explain why God has declared and why we as His servants maintain that this is the only true and living Church upon the face of the whole earth.”¹⁰¹

A. Fulness of Doctrine: Based on the information we have reviewed in this section, we must reject the Mormon church as teaching true doctrine. They are certainly perverting “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and must be rejected as a Christian Church.

B. Power of the Priesthood: This is another primary reason to reject them as a true church. There are at least four reasons to reject this doctrine.

#1. It is based on supposed visions of angelic beings without biblical basis.

#2. It includes the President of the church being considered a prophet who can give new revelation to the church. This is also an unbiblical concept that is similar to the papacy in the Roman Catholic Church. The foundation of the Church is the apostles and prophets with Jesus being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). We reject new revelation that purports to add to Scripture (Jude 3).

#3. The New Testament is clear that the priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek was abolished with the coming of Christ (Hebrews 5:5-11, 6:20, 7-8).

#4. Every believer is a priest. This means that we have direct access to God through Jesus without need for a human intermediary and are empowered by God to minister to others for Him. In 1 Peter 2:5 and 9, we are called “a holy priesthood” and “a royal priesthood.”

C. Testimony of Jesus Christ: As has been demonstrated in this material, Mormons have an unbiblical view of the person and work of Jesus Christ. 2 John 9-11 says, “Whoever

¹⁰¹ retrieved from lds.org.

transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” Galatians 1:6-9 says, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What are points of similarity between Mormon and Christian doctrine? What are the points of disagreement?**
- 2. How does it make you feel that they claim that Jesus and Lucifer are spirit brothers?**
- 3. How would you share the gospel with a Mormon?**
- 4. Let’s assume for argument’s sake for a moment that we are saved by our own efforts instead of by grace. In that hypothetical scenario, how could we know that we had been good enough or done enough to earn salvation?**
- 5. How would you respond to someone telling you that we should be baptized for our dead ancestors?**
- 6. The Bible teaches us that every Christian is a priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9). How does this truth affect your spiritual life?**

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

PART 1

Introduction: The britannica.com article on Roman Catholicism says, “The Roman Catholic Church traces its history to Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Over the course of centuries it developed a highly sophisticated theology and an elaborate organizational structure headed by the papacy, the oldest continuing absolute monarchy in the world. The number of Roman Catholics in the world (nearly 1.1 billion) is greater than that of nearly all other religious traditions... These incontestable statistical and historical facts suggest that some understanding of Roman Catholicism—its history, its institutional structure, its beliefs and practices, and its place in the world—is an indispensable component of cultural literacy, regardless of how one may individually answer the ultimate questions of life and death and faith.”¹⁰² It is a true statement that understanding these different components of the Roman Catholic Church is very important. However, we will only have time and space to consider the beliefs of the church.

There are certainly similarities between Roman Catholicism and evangelical Christianity. The moral teachings are very similar. Our view of God is very similar. Both groups believe in the Trinity. We view the person of Jesus in the same way. However, there are key differences, and the differences are primarily what we will focus on. Let me address three common objections to pointing out differences as we begin. First, I am not saying that every Protestant is a true Christian and that no Roman Catholics are true Christians. Denomination does not determine that. There are Catholics who are genuinely trusting Jesus alone for salvation despite the doctrine of the church. People who are genuinely trusting Jesus are saved no matter what religious label they are wearing. However, I will endeavor to demonstrate that the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is a false gospel and not the true gospel presented in Scripture. Second, some people say that we are to be united as Christians instead of disputing over doctrinal differences. However, I believe that this material has already sufficiently demonstrated that the New Testament teaches us that our unity is centered in “the faith” and departing from that faith, not standing for it, is what brings division. Third, this is a gospel issue and our eternal destinies hang on a true knowledge of the gospel. James White writes, “God is not glorified, then, when His truth is denied, redefined, or compromised. In the same way, since God has revealed the Gospel of Jesus Christ and has deemed it proper to save men and women *only* through that Gospel, the purity of that Gospel—its truthfulness—must be safeguarded at all costs.”¹⁰³

I will ultimately follow the same format in this section that I have in other sections, but I want to give a simple overview of how I view Roman Catholicism in this introduction. I basically believe it is a modern day example of the Judaizers that the Apostle Paul dealt with in his letter to the church at Galatia. The Judaizers were teaching that salvation was through Jesus

¹⁰² John McKenzie and Lawrence Cunningham (2019). Roman Catholicism. retrieved from britannica.com.

¹⁰³ James White. The Roman Catholic Controversy (Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 14.

AND keeping the Mosaic Law, particularly circumcision. Paul was teaching that salvation is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, for the glory of God alone. The difference between Paul and the Judaizers was the words plus and alone. This was also the difference between the Protestant Reformers and Catholic leaders, and I will demonstrate that this is still the difference today. **There is only one gospel, and it is Jesus alone and not Jesus plus.** In Galatians 1:6-12, Paul wrote, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” He also wrote, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love” (Galatians 5:1-6). The Book of Galatians teaches us that:

- 1. Jesus alone saves.** Jesus and His finished work are enough without any religious addition. Galatians 1:4 says, “Who [Jesus] gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).”
- 2. Grace alone is sufficient.** Galatians 2:21 says, “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”
- 3. We are saved through faith alone.** Galatians 2:16 says, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”
- 4. The ultimate purpose of salvation is the glory of God alone.** Paul wrote, “And they glorified God in me” (Galatians 1:24).

With that said in the way of introduction, we will now examine Roman Catholicism through the same categories that we have viewed the other religions.

1. Scripture: The five words we have used to describe the evangelical doctrine of Scripture are inspired, inerrant, infallible, sufficient, and authoritative. I believe that Catholic theology affirms the first three of those words but not the last two. However, there is an issue regarding the first

three words because the Catholic Church has a different canon of Scripture, which includes the Apocrypha. So, there are two key questions that need to be answered in this section. First, what books should be in the canon of Scripture? Second, is Scripture alone authoritative and sufficient or does it share authority with the church and require the church to determine and explain what it means?

A. The Canon of Scripture: What books should be in the canon (canon refers to the rule of faith, the books inspired by God as Scripture) of Scripture? Roman Catholics include the Apocrypha and Protestants do not. There is some debate amongst Protestants as to whether or not it is acceptable to read the Apocrypha, but the real issue is whether or not it is canonical Scripture. I will make the case that it is not. Greg Lanier writes, “Though the original King James Version included the Apocrypha in a separate section essentially all Protestant Bibles after the late-1600s have excluded these books. We now face a strange situation: The Bibles of almost 60 percent of global Christianity (i.e., Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy) include these writings as ‘Deuterocanon,’ while many Protestants either don’t know they exist—or view them with suspicion. The ‘Apocrypha’ are a collection of Greek writings (though some may have had Hebrew sources) that emerged from 300 BC to AD 100 , including the following (brackets indicate debated status):

1–2 Maccabees

Judith

Tobit

Additions to Esther

Wisdom of Solomon

Sirach

Baruch

Epistle of Jeremiah

Additions to Daniel (Susanna, Bel, and so on)

[Two books of Esdras]

[3–4 Maccabees]

[Prayer of Manasseh]

[Psalm 151]

[Psalms of Solomon]”¹⁰⁴

Should they be in the canon of Scripture? Here is the evangelical response, which involves a no answer.

It is often claimed that the Old Testament was canonized at the Council of Jamnia, which was a meeting of the rabbis, in 90 A.D. However, those who make that claim are really making a serious overstatement because the Old Testament canon had really been settled long before that. The end result of that informal council was the affirmation of the already existing canon. Josh McDowell writes, “The earliest record of a three-fold division of the Old Testament is in the

¹⁰⁴ Greg Lanier (2019). Can Protestants Be Edified By The Apocrypha? retrieved from thegospelcoalition.org.

prologue of the book *Ecclesiasticus* (ca 130 B.C.). The prologue, written by the author's grandson, calls it: 'The Law, and the Prophets and the other books of the fathers.' There existed three definite divisions of Scripture."¹⁰⁵ Let me give a word of explanation. We often divide the Old Testament into five sections (Law, History, Poetry, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets), but the Jews classified it in three sections (Law, Prophets, Writings). Historically, the Jews considered the voice of God to be silent after about 400 B.C. after Malachi and Chronicles were written. It is also interesting to note that the famous Jewish historian Josephus named the 39 books of the Old Testament (even though he grouped them into 22 volumes in the 1st century A.D.

Even more important though, the New Testament states the content of the Old Testament canon. In Luke 24:44, Jesus said, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." F.F. Bruce explains, "He indicated the three sections into which the Hebrew Bible was divided—the Law, the Prophets, and the 'Writings' (here called 'the Psalms' probably because the Book of Psalms is the first and longest book in this third section)."¹⁰⁶ In Luke 11:51, he used the phrase "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah." A note in *The Believer's Study Bible* says, "Zechariah's murder is recorded in 2 Chronicles (2 Chr. 24:20-22), the last book in the Hebrew Bible. Abel is the first to be martyred (Gen. 4:8); thus the period from Abel to Zechariah spans all the record of the Hebrew Bible."¹⁰⁷

John MacArthur writes, "The Old Testament canon was functionally established by Ezra in the fifth century BC following the return from captivity. It is generally recognized that the Old Testament canon was established by a three-principle evaluation. First, the book was written through the process of inspiration itself—usually affirmed by the author himself (2 Sam. 23:1-2; Isa. 1:1; Jer. 1:1-2). Second, the prophet's contemporaries frequently recognized the work (Ex. 24:3; Josh. 1:8; Jer. 26:18; Dan. 9:2). Third, the prophet's contemporaries determined to preserve the book as part of God's Word (Deut. 31:26; 1 Sam. 10:25; Prov. 25:1; 2 Kings 23:24; Dan. 9:2). In addition to these basic considerations, Jewish leaders compared any new revelation with the existing Scriptures as required by God's law (Deut. 12:32; 13:1-5).

By the time of Christ, a universally accepted and fixed collection of books was recognized as the canonical Old Testament. These books coincide with the thirty-nine books contained in the Protestant Old Testament; Israel never accepted the Apocrypha as canonical. The testimonies of Jesus and the apostles demonstrate their absolute acceptance of the Hebrew canon as Scripture. Jesus quotes from each of the major sections of the Old Testament—including Moses and the Pentateuch (Matt. 4:1-11; John 3:14; 5:45-47), David in the Psalms (Luke 20:41-44), and Isaiah (Matt. 13:13-15) and Jonah (Matt. 12:39-40) from the Prophets. He affirms each as part of God's authoritative Scripture by basing both doctrine and practice on what it says. The testimony of the apostles mirrors that of Jesus. They quote from the Old Testament

¹⁰⁵ Josh McDowell. *A Ready Defense* (Here's Life Publishers, 1990), 36.

¹⁰⁶ F.F. Bruce. *The Canon of Scripture* (InterVarsity Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁷ W.A. Criswell, ed. *The Believer's Study Bible: New King James Version* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 1461.

in their preaching (Acts 2:17-21, 25-28, 31, 34-35; 3:22, 25; 4:25-26). They frequently build their case for the gospel in the New Testament from Old Testament citations (Matt. 1:22-23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; John 12:38-41; 19:24; Rom. 1:16-17; 3:9-20; 4:1-12; 9:6-13, 15-17, 25-26, 27-29, 33). Even Paul's evangelistic practice of going first to the Jews in the synagogues and reasoning from the Old Testament Scriptures attests to their unreserved acceptance of the Jewish canon (Acts 17:2-3)."¹⁰⁸

B. The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture: The questions here are, "Is Scripture alone authoritative?" "Is Scripture alone a sufficient rule of faith and practice." Evangelicals answer these questions in the affirmative and Catholics in the negative. Here is the Catholic doctrine demonstrated from a series of quotes, all of which except the last one are taken from the official Catechism of the Catholic Church.

"As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence'."¹⁰⁹

"The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ."¹¹⁰

"Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God" (*DV* 10) in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all."¹¹¹

A popular Roman Catholic writer, John O'Brien, authored "Finding Christ's Church", in which he wrote, "Great as is our reverence for the Bible, reason and experience compel us to say that it alone is not a competent nor a safe guide as to what we are to believe."¹¹²

Here is the evangelical response:

Acts 15 records one of the most important events in the history of the church. The Book of Acts is amazing as it records many miraculous works of God, most importantly, the salvation of multitudes of people. However, a very important dispute had arisen within the church over the nature of salvation. The dispute resolved around this question, "Do you have to obey the Law of Moses in addition to believing in Jesus or is faith in Christ enough for salvation?" Translated for us today, the issue is, "Is faith in Jesus alone sufficient for salvation or is it faith plus works?" Or stated another way, "Do we earn God's approval by what we do or do we receive it based on

¹⁰⁸ MacArthur and Mayhue, 121-122.

¹⁰⁹ Author Unknown. The Official Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, 82. retrieved from vatican.va. Please note whenever this document is quoted, the number that is included is the reference number for statements within the catechism itself.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 85.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 97.

¹¹² White, 92.

what Jesus has done for us?” So, the church had a meeting that was led by the apostles and the elders in order to answer this question. Key leaders like Peter, Paul, and Barnabas spoke. However, they decided the issue by appealing to Scripture when James showed them that what Peter was saying lined up with Scripture (Acts 15:13-17). They had already done this in making the decision of who would replace Judas as recorded in Acts 1:15-26 (particularly verse 20). The Bible was clearly their authority and should be ours as well. They were the Apostles, the human leaders and foundations of the early church. They had authority, but it was only a delegated authority as they followed Scripture. If they needed to follow Scripture, how much more do we? In fact, the Bible is still authoritative for us today. The New Testament is the apostolic witness to Jesus preserved for all ages (2 Peter 1:12-15). Peter shared the purpose for the writing of the New Testament in verse 15 when he said, “Moreover, I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.” In other words, there needed to be a written record for when the apostles, the God-appointed human, authoritative leaders of the early church, were no longer there. That means that the New Testament carried apostolic authority. It is “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). It is the certain and unerring rule of faith and practice, which is meant to be believed and obeyed. One of the criteria for the early church recognizing that a writing belonged in the canon of Scripture is that it had to be written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle. Even beyond that, however, we see here the connection between the Old and New Testaments. He speaks of the prophetic word in verse 19. In chapter 3, verse 2, he writes, “That you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior.” Jesus had already confirmed the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:44) so the Old Testament and the apostolic witness comprise the Scriptures. James White writes, “The Bible claims to be the *sole* and *sufficient* infallible rule of faith for the Christian Church. The Scriptures are not in need of any supplement; their authority comes from their nature as God-breathed revelation; their authority is *not* dependent upon man, church, or council. The Scriptures are self-consistent, self-interpreting, and self-authenticating. The Christian Church looks to the Scriptures as the only infallible and sufficient rule of faith, and the Church is always subject to the Word, and is constantly reformed thereby.”¹¹³ He also says the following, “When Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379) encountered opponents who claimed authority for their own custom and tradition (over against that which prevailed in Basil’s experience), he responded in these words:

‘If custom is to be taken in proof of what is right, then it is certainly competent for me to put forward on my side the custom which obtains here. If they reject this, we are clearly not bound to follow them. Therefore, let God-inspired Scripture decide between us; and on whichever side be found doctrines in harmony with the word of God, in favor of that side will be cast the vote of truth’.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ White, 60.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 55.

2. Trinity: Evangelicals and Catholics both believe in the Trinity and hold very similar views regarding the nature of God. However, there is one issue that I would like to briefly point out in this section in regard to worshipping God. Quoting from the Old Testament, Jesus said in Matthew 4:10b, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.” Many evangelicals, including me, believe that Catholics violate this verse by worshipping saints, particularly Mary. Of course, they deny this. They call it venerating the saints. According to James White, they make a distinction between the Greek words, *latria* and *dulia*, and claim that *latria* is a higher form of worship reserved for God while *dulia* is for the saints. However, I agree with White, when he says, “If the Protestant still has his wits about him [after hearing this Roman Catholic explanation], he might respond, ‘I don’t know much about *latria* or *dulia*, but I do know this: when you bow down before a statue and say prayers and light candles, no matter what you call it, I call it worship’.”¹¹⁵ John Calvin wrote, “In fact, the distinction between *latria* and *dulia*, as they called them, was invented in order that divine honors might seem to be transferred with impunity to angels and the dead. For it is obvious that the honor the papists give to the saints really does not differ from the honoring of God. Indeed, they worship both God and the saints indiscriminately, except that, when they are pressed, they wriggle out with the excuse that they keep unimpaired for God what is due him because they leave *latria* to him.”¹¹⁶

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What do you see as points of similarity and points of disagreement between Catholicism and evangelical Christianity?**
- 2. Do you view Catholicism as a Christian or a non-Christian religion?**
- 3. Discuss the Galatians section of the chapter. Also look at 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Make sure the group is clear in regard to a biblical expression of the Gospel.**
- 4. Do you think the Apocrypha should be included in Bibles? Why or why not?**
- 5. Do you believe that Scripture alone is authoritative? What is your understanding of that concept? How does it affect your life? Are there ways you are compromising in regard to the authority of Scripture?**
- 6. Do you think that Roman Catholic practice violates Matthew 4:10?**
- 7. If we are honest, what kind of idols do we have in our lives?**

¹¹⁵ White, 206.

¹¹⁶ White, 209.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

PART 2

3. Jesus:

A. Person of Jesus: Evangelicals and Catholics have the same doctrine regarding the person of Christ.

B. Work of Jesus: Evangelicals believe the work of Jesus alone is all-sufficient for our salvation. Catholic doctrine makes the same basic claim but ends up denying it by their teachings and practices. Let me demonstrate. The Council of Trent said, “No Catholic ever understood that through our satisfactions the efficacy of the merit and satisfaction of our Lord Jesus Christ is either obscured or in any way diminished.”¹¹⁷

James White comments on this by saying, “The claim that the concept of satisfaction does not detract from the satisfaction derived from the atoning work of Christ is very important. No representation of Roman Catholic doctrine is accurate if it does not honestly state that Rome tries to safeguard the work of Christ with such claims. Rome is certainly concerned about this issue. The important question for the honest inquirer, as we will see, is whether Rome succeeds or fails in her attempt to avoid obscuring or diminishing the efficacy of the merit and satisfaction of Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁸

The issue at hand is whether or not the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross alone is sufficient to atone for our sins or do we have to add to it in some way. **I will demonstrate how the Catholic Church fails by taking away from the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus.** Here are examples of how Catholic doctrine takes away from the sacrifice of Jesus by adding other elements to what Jesus did on the cross (see John 19:30). Really, it does this through the sacramental (a sacrament is something that is believed to impart grace) system and purgatory.

James White writes, “In Roman Catholic Theology, there is a difference between guilt and the temporal punishment of sin. The atoning work of Christ, applied by the ‘laver of regeneration’ (i.e., baptism), cleanses from the guilt of sin (including original sin) and results in justification. However, as the Council of Trent explains,

‘If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema.’

According to Trent, the temporal punishments of sins committed before baptism are remitted by baptism; but if one sins after baptism, even when these sins are forgiven through the sacrament of confession, the temporal punishments remain. These punishments are then ‘expiated’ by works either in this life, or, if a person dies with unexpected punishments

¹¹⁷ White, 127.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

remaining, they are satisfied in purgatory by suffering. Men's actions, including suffering, tears, prayers, pilgrimages, acts of charity, etc., are considered in Roman Catholic theology to have merit in God's eyes. As one writer puts it,

‘Man, for this part, in order to arrive at full sanctification, must cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit through faith, hope, love of God and neighbor, and prayer; but he must also perform other ‘works.’ It is a universally accepted dogma of the Catholic Church that man, in union with the grace of the Holy Spirit must merit heaven by his good works. These works are meritorious only when they are performed in the state of grace and with a good intention.... We have shown that according to Holy Scripture the Christian can actually merit heaven for himself by his good works’.’¹¹⁹

He goes on to say, “Sacraments, then, are ‘channels of grace,’ the means by which the grace of God is applied to individuals. According to modern Roman Catholic teaching, the Sacraments number seven: Baptism, Confession, Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction.”¹²⁰

Let's look at how some of them take away from the sufficiency of the atonement of Jesus.

A. Baptism: James White writes, “A person enters into a state of ‘sanctifying grace’ through baptism, which the Council of Trent called the ‘laver of regeneration’.”¹²¹ The Catholic Catechism says, “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*),⁴ and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word’.”¹²² White goes on to say, “Baptism is an absolute necessity for salvation, for as Canon 5 of the ‘Decree Concerning the Sacraments’: from the Council of Trent says, ‘If anyone says that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation, let him be anathema.’ And if anyone disagrees with this view of baptism they are condemned by anathema as well (Canon3).”¹²³ Please refer back to the section on Oneness Pentecostalism for a biblical view of baptism.

B. Confession: White writes, “The Sacrament is made up of three parts: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Contrition is the sorrow for sin; confession the action of confessing those sins to the priest to receive absolution for them (an action that is absolutely necessary for salvation for anyone who would commit a mortal sin after their baptism); satisfaction is

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 128.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 129.

¹²¹ Ibid, 126.

¹²² Catechism, 1213.

¹²³ White, 129.

undergoing some kind of penance, normally assigned by the priest, to expiate the temporal punishment for the sin(s).

The Reformers rejected the concept of Roman Penance, confession, and satisfaction because they felt all of these in one way or another denied the sufficiency of the atoning work of Jesus Christ: (1) *penance*, because it asserts that Christ's death does not cleanse from all of sin, including the temporal punishments; (2) *confession*, because it affirms the existence of a sacramental priesthood in the New Testament Church; and (3) *satisfaction*, because it assures that man by his undergoing of some kind of penance can 'satisfy' justice. It is in the sacrament of penance where some of the most basic differences between Roman Catholicism and the biblical view espoused by the Reformers can be seen."¹²⁴

C. Holy Eucharist: The Catholic Catechism says, "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: 'The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.' 'In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner'."¹²⁵ The Bible says in Hebrews 9:23-28, "Therefore *it was* necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another— He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation."

D. Purgatory: I heard John MacArthur say in a sermon one time, "Purgatory is what holds the whole system together." I believe he is exactly right, and I also believe it is the ultimate proof they do not believe in the sufficiency of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Here is what the Catholic Catechism says about purgatory: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven."¹²⁶ "The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire:

¹²⁴ White, 130.

¹²⁵ Catechism, 1367.

¹²⁶ Catechism, 1030.

As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.”¹²⁷

“This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture [the Apocrypha]: “Therefore Judas [Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.”¹²⁸

There is no scriptural basis for this outside of the Apocrypha, which is not true Scripture. It completely demonstrates that they do not believe the sacrifice of Jesus is enough. On the other hand, Scripture says in Hebrews 10:14, “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” Also, 2 Corinthians 5:8 teaches us that after Christians die, they are “present with the Lord.”

Let me share the evangelical doctrine by simply sharing Scripture. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Romans 5:6-10 says, “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Romans 8:1-3 says, “*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.” 1 John 1:7-9 says, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

4. Salvation: Evangelicals and Catholics each believe that salvation is by grace through faith. The very first canon on justification from the key Roman Catholic Council of Trent says, “If anyone saith that man can be justified before God by his own works, whether done by his own natural powers or through the teaching of the law, without divine grace through Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.”¹²⁹ However, there are some key differences as I mentioned in the

¹²⁷ Catechism, 1031.

¹²⁸ Catechism, 1032.

¹²⁹ Author Unknown. Council of Trent, First Canon on Justification. retrieved from the counciloftrent.com.

introduction. The key differences are that evangelicals believe that salvation is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, for the glory of God alone. Catholics object to the word and concept alone. Also, evangelicals believe that faith produces good works while Catholics believe it is faith plus works. They combine salvation and sanctification.

A. The Distinctions and Debate (particularly centering in the Reformation): Martin Luther called justification by faith alone “the article upon which the church stands or falls.”¹³⁰ R.C. Sproul wrote, “The logic followed by the Reformers is this:

1. Justification by faith alone is essential to the gospel.
2. The gospel is essential to Christianity and to salvation.
3. The gospel is essential to a church’s being a true church.
4. To reject justification by faith alone is to reject the gospel and to fall as a church.”¹³¹

He also says, “The Reformers concluded that when Rome rejected and condemned [which they did at the Council of Trent] *sola fide* [*salvation by faith alone*], it condemned itself, in effect, and ceased to be a true church...

The same can be said of the next affirmation: ‘we are justified...*through faith*.’ Again Rome has always insisted that faith is a necessary condition for justification. What they denied historically is that it is a *sufficient* condition. The Reformation was waged, not over the question of justification by faith, but over the issue of justification by faith *alone*.”¹³²

Sproul goes on to say, “The Roman Catholic view of justification is analytical in that God declares a person to be just when justice (or righteousness) inheres in the subject. The subject, under divine analysis or scrutiny, is found to be just. God justifies the just. The justified person could not have become righteous without the assistance of infused grace, but he is still deemed righteous only when he has become inherently righteous. Nothing is added by which the person is considered righteous. The just are declared just because analysis demonstrates that they are just.”¹³³ Sproul is saying that the Roman Catholic view is that grace empowers us to become righteous enough for God to justify.

He goes on to say, “By stark and radical contrast the Reformation view of justification is synthetic. God declares a person just based on something that is added, something that is not inherent in the person: the imputed righteousness of Christ. The gracious character of our justification stands out in bold relief, revealing that God is both just and the justifier of those who believe. G. C. Berkouwer observes: ‘But in the declaratory character of justification lies the constant reminder of the pure correlation between grace and faith’.”¹³⁴ This means that through

¹³⁰ R.C. Sproul. *Faith Alone* (Baker Books, 1995), 18.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 19.

¹³² *Ibid*, 19, 36.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 109.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*.

faith we are treated as through we are righteous because of an outside righteousness (the righteousness of Christ.)

However this is understood, it is clear that Rome does affirm some sort of justification by faith. What Rome affirms, however, differs dramatically from the Reformation view of justification by faith. Most obvious is Rome's exclusion of the word *alone (sola)*. Martin Luther and the Reformers insisted that justification is by faith alone. Rome affirms that justification is 'by faith,' but not 'by faith alone'.¹³⁵

B. The Catholic Position: Roman Catholic scholar Ludwig Ott, in his book *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, said the following concerning the idea of "achieving justification": "The reason for the uncertainty of the state of grace lies in this, that without a special revelation nobody can with certainty of faith know whether or not he has fulfilled all the conditions which are necessary for achieving justification."¹³⁶

Karl Keating comments, "The Catholic Church, not surprisingly, understands justification differently. It sees it as a true eradication of sin and a true sanctification and renewal. The soul becomes objectively pleasing to God and so merits heaven. It merits heaven because now it is actually good."¹³⁷

R.C. Sproul writes, "Baptism is the *primary* instrumental cause of justification in that it is the first or initial cause of justification. Since the grace of justification received by baptism may be lost, the *secondary* instrumental cause of justification is the sacrament of penance. In chapter 14 of Trent's sixth session, we read: 'Those who through sin have forfeited the received grace of justification, can again be justified when, moved by God, they exert themselves to obtain through the sacrament of penance the recovery, by the merits of Christ, of the grace lost. For this manner of justification is restoration for those fallen, which the holy Fathers have aptly called a second plank after the shipwreck of grace lost'.¹³⁸

C. The Evangelical Position: Let me begin by defining some terms. By salvation, we mean rescue from sin. It includes justification, sanctification, and glorification. Justification refers to God declaring the believer righteous in a legal sense.

Michael Horton and J.I. Packer write, "The doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone has since the Reformation been acknowledged by mainstream Protestants as 'the article by which the church stands or falls,' and the tenet that distinguishes a true from a false church. While affirming an indissoluble bond between justification and sanctification, this doctrine insists that justification itself is God's present forensic declaration of pardon and acceptance, and that the righteousness required for this declaration is neither attained

¹³⁵ Ibid, 122.

¹³⁶ White, 132-133.

¹³⁷ White, 134.

¹³⁸ Sproul, 122.

by human effort nor infused or worked internally by God in the human soul, but is the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to those who believe. The Council of Trent anathematized those who embrace this doctrine, and all subsequent magisterial declarations, including those of the Second Vatican Council, continue to bind Roman Catholics to the conviction that this Gospel of free justification by faith alone, apart from works, and the assurance of salvation that springs from it, is not consonant with Roman Catholic teaching. While gladly noting in modern Roman Catholic exposition a growing emphasis on Christ and the biblical promises as objects of faith and trust, *we see justification by faith alone as an essential of the Gospel on which radical disagreement continues, and we deny the adequacy of any version of the Gospel that falls short at this point.*¹³⁹

R.C. Sproul writes, “Now we merely note in passing that we are either justified by a righteousness that inheres within us or by someone else’s righteousness attributed or given to us. Does faith enable us to become actively righteous so that God will declare us righteous? Or does God declare us righteous before we actually become actively righteous by imputing to us the righteousness of Christ? The conflict over justification by faith alone boils down to this: Is the ground of our justification the righteousness of Christ imputed *to* us, or the righteousness of Christ working *within* us? For the Reformers the doctrine of justification by faith alone meant justification by Christ and his righteousness alone.”¹⁴⁰ He also says, “The question of *inherent* versus *imputed* righteousness goes to the heart of the Reformation debate. When the Reformers spoke of forensic justification, they meant a legal declaration made by God that was based on the *imputation* of Christ’s righteousness to the believer, not on Christ’s righteousness inherent *in* the believer. James Buchanan stated as his first proposition of justification that ‘justification is a legal, or forensic, term, and is used in Scripture to denote the acceptance of any one as righteous in the sight of God.’ Likewise Francis Turretin argued that in the Scriptures *justification* ‘is never taken for an infusion of righteousness, but as often as the Scriptures speak professedly about our justification, it always must be explained as a forensic term’.”¹⁴¹

James White says, “Justification, while distinct from sanctification, *cannot possibly be separated from it*. This is extremely important. In Roman Catholic theology justification and sanctification are synonymous; in Protestant theology a very important distinction is made between the two terms. God *changes* us in regeneration and sanctification; God *declares* us righteous in justification. Anyone who is justified *will be sanctified*. It is *impossible* to separate justification and sanctification, but it is *absolutely necessary* to distinguish them.”¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Sproul, 44-45.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 73.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 99-100.

¹⁴² White, 145.

D. The Biblical Teaching: Here are some biblical affirmations that affirm the evangelical position and are vital to understating the true, biblical teaching on this vital subject:

Affirmation #1: If we have been justified by Jesus, it is a permanently settled issue. It is our permanent standing before God. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice that it is past tense. This is the opposite of Catholic teaching.

Affirmation #2: Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, apart from good works as the ground of justification. Romans 3:19-4:5 says, “ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law. What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”

Affirmation #3: Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, but good works are always the fruit of genuine salvation. Those who are justified are also sanctified. We are not just legally declared righteous but also given a new heart through regeneration. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Affirmation #4: Salvation is for the glory of God alone. Ephesians 2:7 says, “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” This teaches us that the ultimate purpose of salvation is the glory of God so the only possible means of salvation is the glory of God. This eliminates human boasting and leads to the worship of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1:29-31 says, “That no flesh should glory in His presence. But

of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord’.”

5. Church: While maybe softening slightly on this, over the centuries, the Roman Catholic Church has taught that it is the only true church. It is a hierarchical structure with priests, bishops, and ultimately the pope. The pope is considered to be the Vicar of Christ and pastor of the entire church. Priests are needed as go-betweens between people and God. There is a sharp distinction between clergy and laity. Let’s look at these one by one by showing what Catholicism teaches and what the Bible actually teaches.

A. Catholicism teaches that the Roman Catholic Church is the true church while evangelicals teach that the Church is the Body of Christ that is expressed in local churches.

The Catholic Church Catechism says, “‘Outside the Church there is no salvation.’ How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers?³³⁵ Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.”¹⁴³

Evangelicals believe that the universal Church is the Body of Christ, which is comprised of everyone in Christ, whether in heaven or earth (1 Corinthians 12), regardless of denomination. The New Testament pictures the tangible expression of the universal church being local churches that gather together and function according to Scripture.

B. Catholics believe that the church is a hierarchy while Baptists believe in autonomous churches. Autonomous means that local churches are self-governing. When the church first started, the Apostles gave leadership to it. In time as the church spread and new churches were planted, the leadership was localized in pastors of those local churches. There is an example of this in Acts 14. Paul and Barnabas returned to some of the churches they had planted to check on them and encourage them. Part of their ministry was appointing elders in those churches. Verse 23 says, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” After the apostles, the New Testament only knows two offices, pastors and deacons. Peter even called himself an elder (1 Peter 5:1). Kevin DeYoung writes, “The apostolate was an exceptional and temporary office in the New Testament church. Granted, there should be a succession of apostolic *truth*, and

¹⁴³ Catechism, 846.

there is a sense in which overseers/elders care for churches like the apostles did. But in the strictest sense, the apostles have no successors. They are a part of the non-repeatable, once-for-all foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20).¹⁴⁴ So, there is no basis for any denomination to have a hierarchy of leaders ruling over local churches from outside those churches.

C. Evangelicals see no biblical or historical basis for the office of Pope while Catholics see him as the earthly leader of the church.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “‘The Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered’.”¹⁴⁵

Further reinforcing his power and authority, the catechism claims, “‘The Pope enjoys, by divine institution, supreme, full, immediate, and universal power in the care of souls’”. The catechism presents the papacy as a divinely appointed institution that presides over the life of the church and exercises its rule over God’s flock.¹⁴⁶ It also says the following,

“Jesus entrusted a specific authority to Peter: ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ The ‘power of the keys’ designates authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate after his Resurrection: ‘Feed my sheep.’ The power to ‘bind and loose’ connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgements, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church. Jesus entrusted this authority to the Church through the ministry of the apostles and in particular through the ministry of Peter, the only one to whom he specifically entrusted the keys of the kingdom.”¹⁴⁷

“‘The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful - who confirms his brethren in the faith he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals’.”¹⁴⁸

De Young gives a good summary of the evangelical position and response, when he writes, “There is no scriptural proof that Peter had a unique authority different from or superior to the other eleven Apostles. Even if we take Matthew 16:18 to mean that Jesus promised to build his church upon Peter (and not simply upon his confession), the fact is that Jesus only makes such a promise in view of Peter’s confession. Peter would be foundational to the early church, but so would the rest of the Apostles (Eph. 2:20), for they too confessed Jesus as Christ (Matt. 16:15-16). Moreover, the power of the keys was extended to all the apostles in Matthew 18:18

¹⁴⁴ Kevin DeYoung (2015). Why Don’t Protestants Have A Pope? retrieved from thegospelcoalition.org.

¹⁴⁵ Catechism, 882.

¹⁴⁶ Catechism, 937.

¹⁴⁷ Catechism, 553.

¹⁴⁸ Catechism, 891.

and John 20:23 (4:363). The picture of Peter in the rest of the New Testament is never one of a man who has been given (or understands himself to have been given) authority over the whole church. He is rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11) and had no jurisdiction over Paul (Gal. 2:6, 9). He is sent along with John to Samaria by the other apostles (Acts 8:14). He is never mentioned as prince of the apostles (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Rev. 21:14) and refers to himself meekly as a fellow elder (1 Peter 5:1, 3). Even if Peter had been given unique authority over the church (which is not the case), this would still not establish the primacy of the bishop of Rome. For the Catholic understanding of the papacy to be true, it would have to be the case (1) that Peter spent some twenty plus years in Rome, (2) that he was the bishop there and primate over the entire church, and (3) that he consciously and intentionally transferred the authority in these two offices (bishop and primate) to Linus his successor. In Paul's letter to Rome, and in his several letters from Rome, there is no mention of Peter's ministry there, let alone a pontifical one. According to the oldest documents from the early church, the church in Rome was led by a college of presbyters, not by a monarchical episcopate (4:365).¹⁴⁹

D. Catholic doctrine creates a distinction between clergy and laity while evangelicals affirm the priesthood of all believers. We addressed the priesthood of all believers in the Mormonism section. In the Catholic Church, ordination is the sacrament of holy orders. Here is a good explanation about the Catholic view and the biblical response from Kevin DeYoung. He writes, "The distinction between clergy and laity that underlies the Roman Catholic hierarchy is neither taught in the New Testament nor exhibited in the organization of the first-century church. To be sure, the Bible distinguishes between shepherds and flock. Church offices are manifestly biblical, but in Catholic theology 'clergy' and 'laity' refer to more than just 'pastor' and 'church member.' As Bavinck explains, 'In the Roman Catholic Church 'clergy' has become the word for a special class of ecclesiastical persons who by being tonsured and consecrated have been separated from all others, constitute a unique class of 'clerics,' are in a very special sense the Lord's possession' (4:358). By contrast, the Scriptures teach that the people as a whole are the *kleros*, the Lord's possession and inheritance (Exod. 19:5-6). There is no special priestly class in the New Testament, for all true believers are filled with the Spirit, led by the Spirit, share in the Spirit's anointing, are a royal priesthood and God's treasured possession. Pastors and elders are shepherds who serve the flock, not priests who make sacrifices or hierarchical bishops who rule over the people."¹⁵⁰

E. Catholics see priests as go-betweens between God and people while evangelicals believe that Jesus is our High Priest who is the only Mediator between people and God. A Catholic writer by the name of John O'Brien wrote the following in *The Faith of Millions*, "When the priest announces the tremendous words of consecration, he reaches into the heavens, brings Christ down from His throne, and places Him upon our altar to be offered up again as the Victim for the sins of man. It is a power greater than that of saints and angels... Indeed it is

¹⁴⁹ DeYoung.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

greater even than the power of the Virgin Mary...The priest speaks and lo! Christ, the eternal and omnipotent God, bows his head in humble obedience to the priest's command. Of what sublime dignity is the office of the Christian priest who is thus privileged to act as the ambassador and the vice-regent of Christ on earth! He continues the essential ministry of Christ: he teaches the faithful with the authority of Christ, he pardons the penitent sinner with the power of Christ, he offers up again the same sacrifice of adoration and atonement with Christ offered on Calvary. No wonder that the name which spiritual writers are especially fond of applying to the priest is that of *alter Christus*. For the priest is and should be *another Christ*."¹⁵¹

Let me respond by simply quoting Scripture. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." Hebrews 4:14-16 says, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 7:19-28 says, "For the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, *there is the* bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. And inasmuch as *He was* not *made priest* without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him:

'The Lord has sworn

And will not relent,

'You *are* a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek'),

by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.

Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who has been perfected forever."

I am adding an additional section after the discussion questions that is a paper I wrote in college about the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Virgin Mary with an appendix attached to it. It is a brief overview.

¹⁵¹ White, 161.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What is the difference between a sacrament and an ordinance?**
- 2. What is the difference between our view of the Lord's Supper and the Catholic view of the Eucharist?**
- 3. Why do we not believe in sprinkling babies?**
- 4. How does their plan of salvation undermine the sufficiency of the atonement of Christ and salvation by grace alone through faith alone?**
- 5. What is the difference in inherent and imputed righteousness and why is it so important?**
- 6. Is there a need to go to a priest and confess sins? What does it mean to you that Jesus is your High Priest?**
- 7. Do you think a debate about faith vs. faith alone really matters?**
- 8. How does it make you feel to know that you are justified by faith in Jesus?**
- 9. What is your opinion on the statement that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls?**
- 10. How would you respond biblically to someone telling you that you should believe in the office of the pope?**

The Roman Catholic Doctrine Of Mary Considered Biblically

The Virgin Mary is probably the most adored and loved woman in the history of the world. Even in our modern, sometimes skeptical world, her popularity is on the rise. In fact, according to “Time” magazine, there has been an explosion in visits to her shrines and reported sightings of her.¹⁵² Pope John Paul II had a golden M emblazoned on his coat of arms when ordained a bishop, calls upon Mary in most of his public prayers and speeches, and believes that Mary’s intercession saved his life during an assassination attempt and also freed Europe from the clutches of communism.¹⁵³ Obviously, the Virgin Mary is a central figure in Roman Catholic theology. This paper will trace the development of the Roman Catholic Marian doctrine from its quiet beginning to the prominent position it now holds in Catholic theology and then assess the doctrine in light of the Scriptures.

References to Mary in second century writings are not very common.¹⁵⁴ Justin Martyr compares and contrasts her with Eve, and Irenaeus picks up on this theme and develops it even further.¹⁵⁵ The Protevangelium of James, written in the mid-second century, was the first writing to assert the perpetual virginity of Mary.¹⁵⁶ However, in 222, Tertullian, one of the greatest leaders in the early church, raised a voice in protest to the assertions of the Protevangelium.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, it seems clear that Marian doctrine was not highly important or extremely clear during the first century after the completion of the New Testament.

In contrast, twentieth century Marian doctrine is both clear and important. For example, Pope Pius, XII proclaimed 1945 as Marian Year.¹⁵⁸ The New Catholic Encyclopedia quotes from the Mediator Dei, written in 1947, that devotion to Mary is a “sign of predestination.”¹⁵⁹ Hopefully, these examples demonstrate the vast difference in Catholic thought about Mary between the second and twentieth centuries. The paper will

¹⁵² Richard Ostling. Handmaid or Feminist? Time Magazine, Dec. 30, 1991.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 64.

¹⁵⁴ Mircea Eliade, editor. The Encyclopedia of Religion, Volume 9 (MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 251.

¹⁵⁵ F.L. Cross, editor. Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (Oxford University Press, 1974), 882.

¹⁵⁶ Eliade, 251.

¹⁵⁷ Loraine Boettner. Roman Catholicism (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962), 136.

¹⁵⁸ New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 9 (McGraw Hill Book Company, 1967), 347.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 365.

now chronologically trace the development of the Marian doctrine over the intervening years.

Even though it was not officially defined as dogma until 1854, the first doctrine about Mary to be recognized by the Church was the doctrine of her complete sinlessness.¹⁶⁰ It probably originated in the fourth century and then evolved into a doctrine.¹⁶¹ In her case, “perfect sinlessness implies more than merely the absence of sin; it implies also a complete indefectibility in the moral order, or the actual inability to sin.”¹⁶² However, Catholic theology does teach that God’s grace brought about her sinlessness. Mary is not considered to have been innately perfect.¹⁶³ The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was disputed even through the Middle Ages.¹⁶⁴ However, in 1854, Pius IX, defined this concept as dogma in *Ineffabilis Deus*. He wrote, “The most blessed Virgin Mary.... was preserved free from all stain of original sin.”¹⁶⁵

Another doctrine that developed fairly early was the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. As stated earlier, it was first mentioned in the apocryphal book of James. This view was certainly held by Athanasius who referred to Mary as “ever virgin,” and it has been accepted by both the eastern and western orthodox fathers since the fifth century.¹⁶⁶

A third doctrine that developed, and the first to cause a great deal of controversy, was the doctrine that conferred upon Mary the title of “Mother of God”. This title began to be used in either the third or the fourth century. It grew out of the official establishment of the doctrine of the full deity of Christ.¹⁶⁷ Nestorius fought this doctrine. He insisted on Mary being called christotokos (“the one who bore Christ”) rather than theotokos. However, Cyril of Alexandria stood for “God-bearer”, and this was officially established as a title for Mary at the council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. and the council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.¹⁶⁸

A fourth doctrine that developed over the years was the Assumption of Mary. Despite the absence of valid historical information concerning her death, Roman Catholics assert that “three days after death her body was carried by angels up to heaven,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 348.

¹⁶¹ Anderson Scott. *Romanism and the Gospel* (The Westminster Press, 1937), 69.

¹⁶² *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 347.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 348.

¹⁶⁴ Cross, 883.

¹⁶⁵ Eliade, 252.

¹⁶⁶ Cross, 882.

¹⁶⁷ *New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Volume 7 (Chicago, 1990), 898.

¹⁶⁸ Eliade, 251.

and her tomb was found empty.”¹⁶⁹ The Church celebrates the feast of her Assumption on August 15th.¹⁷⁰ Gregory of Tours formulated the doctrine in the sixth century, and it spread without much opposition.¹⁷¹ It was an unofficial doctrine of the church for hundreds of years. However, in 1950, Pope Pius XII made it official dogma when he stated that “the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was run, was assumed in body and soul to heavenly glory.”¹⁷²

A fifth and final doctrine that is widely accepted but not official church doctrine is that of Mary being “Mediatrice of All Graces” and “Co-Redemptress”. There has been an effort to secure papal sanction for these titles during the last two centuries. However, at the Second Vatican Council, a chapter on Mary was added to the Constitution on the Church instead of a separate document on Mary as many had desired. The chapter stresses Mary’s full reliance on her Son.¹⁷³ On the other hand, many Catholics believe that Mary does co-operate with Christ in imparting grace. In fact, “the vast majority of theologians” believe Mary “is to be styled Coredemptrix because she cooperated directly and immediately in the redemptive process itself.”¹⁷⁴ Catholic theology also teaches that Mary participates in the actual application of graces to individuals.¹⁷⁵ This concept may or may not become part of official church dogma.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of Mary can be summarized by saying that she is officially regarded as immaculately conceived, sinless, perpetually a virgin, the mother of God, and resurrected into heaven. Unofficially, she is regarded by many as co-redeemer and co-mediator with Christ. This doctrine developed over a lengthy period of time. Factors in its growth include “growing Christian emphasis on asceticism, with Mary as virgin model, and contacts with ‘mother goddesses’ in other religions.”¹⁷⁶

I would like to conclude by giving a biblical assessment of Roman Catholic teaching regarding Mary. It is my personal conviction that the Bible, and not any person or religious organization, is the authority for our lives because “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, King James Version). Therefore, the Marian doctrine must be assessed by comparing it to Scripture.

¹⁶⁹ Scott, 72.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Cross, 882.

¹⁷² New Encyclopedia, Britannica, 898.

¹⁷³ Cross, 883.

¹⁷⁴ New Catholic Encyclopedia, 359.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 362.

¹⁷⁶ Eliade, 251.

First, Mary could not have been sinless according to the Scriptures. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (KJV). In Luke 1:26-30, the angel speaks to Mary in very positive terms but never speaks of her as sinless or says anything to indicate she is anything more than a regular human being graced and chosen by God for a special task.

Second, the New Testament refutes the concept of Mary’s perpetual virginity because Matthew 13:55-56 names Jesus as having brothers named James, Joses, Simon, and Judas. The text also says that Jesus has sisters. Roman Catholics attempt to explain this away by calling them cousins, but this is eisegesis and not exegesis of the text. Obviously, Mary had children so she was not a virgin (see the Appendix to this paper for a more detailed explanation of this).

Third, it must be remembered that Mary was only the earthly mother of Jesus. She was chosen by God in His grace to bear His only begotten Son. Mary is not the heavenly mother of the eternal Word (John 1:1).

Fourth, there is no Scripture that indicates that Mary was assumed into heaven. Furthermore, one of the titles given to Mary because of the doctrine of the assumption is “Queen of Heaven.” Jeremiah 44 states that at one time the Jews burned incense to one known as the queen of heaven (a pagan goddess). Jeremiah 44:22 states that God considered this evil and an abomination.

Fifth, as far as the unofficial doctrine of being co-redeemer goes, the Bible declares, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5, KJV). The Bible also teaches that we were redeemed by the “precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19, KJV).

I believe that the Roman Catholic doctrine concerning Mary takes too much away from her humanity and exalts her to a position that no human being deserves. In my opinion, it would be better to present her as the trusting, faithful, obedient, loving, courageous woman the Bible presents her to be.

Appendix

Question: Did Jesus Christ truly have half brothers and sisters from Mary and Joseph?

Answer: Yes

According to the following Scriptures Jesus did have half brothers and sisters:

<i>Mt. 12:46-50</i>	* Matthew 13:53-58	<i>John 2:12</i>
<i>Mk. 3:31-35</i>	* Mark 6:1-6	
	* Luke 8:19-21	<i>John 7:3</i>
	* Matthew 1:24-25	

* Galatians 1:19

Reasons:

- (1) Brothers is used in these passages of “male children of the same mother” (Vine).¹⁷⁷
- (2) According to Vine, sister is used “of the sisters of Christ, the children of Joseph and Mary after the virgin birth of Christ.”¹⁷⁸
- (3) The Greek word used in these passages (*adelphos*) means “male children of the same mother.”
- (4) In Matthew 13:53-58, the reference to Jesus as “the carpenter’s son” (v. 55) and “His mother called Mary” followed by the naming of “His brothers” and a reference to “His sisters” definitely place this in the context of His physical family.
- (5) In Luke 8:19-20 it is stated, “Now Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.”
In Luke 8:21, Jesus said, “My mother and my brothers are these who hear the Word of God and do it.” Here Jesus is speaking of His **spiritual family**. The contrast does not make sense if His physical family is not actually being referred to in verse 20.
- (6) James is referred to as “the Lord’s brother” in Galatians 1:19.
- (7) The belief that Mary and Joseph did not have children together is based on the presupposition of the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary first asserted during the 2nd century in The Protevangelium of James.¹⁷⁹ Obviously, she could not have borne children if she remained a virgin. However, the Bible teaches very clearly that she did not remain a virgin because Matthew 1:24-25 says Joseph “did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.” “Know” means “to know carnally.”¹⁸⁰ “Know her till” clearly indicates that they had sexual relations after the birth of Jesus.

¹⁷⁷ Vine, 154.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 36.

¹⁷⁹ Eliade, 251.

¹⁸⁰ Wesley Perschbacher. The New Analytical Greek Lexicon (Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 81.

PROSPERITY GOSPEL

PART 1

Introduction: Costi Hinn says, “A very basic definition of the prosperity gospel can be described as this: God’s plan is for you to live your best life now. Health, wealth, and happiness are guaranteed on Earth for all who follow Jesus. Heaven is simply the eternal extension of your temporal blessings.”¹⁸¹ Here is an overview of the Word of Faith Movement or Prosperity Gospel (I will basically use them interchangeably in this) from a sermon by Justin Peters. He says,

“Okay now, let’s get in to the Word of Faith Movement and in order to understand any Movement, I think it really helps and it’s really imperative to have an understanding of the origins of the Movement in order to have a fully orbbed understanding of any Movement, we need to look at the origins. And we don’t have time to go into this and that, but I want to just briefly tell you that The Word of Faith Movement, the prosperity gospel is actually rooted in the metaphysical cults, like Christian Science, New Age, New Thought, Gnosticism. Most of what you see on Christian television, on TBN and Daystar and Inspiration at Work, and the Word Network, and the Sea of Broadcasting, it’s not Christian, okay? It’s cultic, cultic doctrine that has been wrapped in some Christian terminology. And so briefly, let’s look at this, where did the Word of Faith Movement begin?

Well, it began with a guy named Phineas Parkhurst Quimby. Quimby you could call the Great Grandfather of the Word of Faith Movement. Quimby was the father of New Thought, a metaphysical cult. Now when I say metaphysical, that’s a big word, all it means is beyond the physical realm, beyond what we can see and touch here. And when I say cult, I mean any group or sect that calls itself Christian yet compromises or denies some of the fundamentals of the faith. Mormonism is a cult. Jehovah’s Witnesses belong to a cult. Roman Catholicism is a theological cult...okay, not a sociological cult, not drink-the-Kool-Aid Jim Jones kind of a cult. But it is a theological cult because it compromises and denies some of the fundamental tenants of historical Christianity. Quimby was the father of the metaphysical cult known as New Thought. New Thought essentially held that whatever you think about and whatever you speak, you will attract those things to you. But Quimby was the father of the metaphysical cult known as New Thought, he was a student of a cultism, hypnosis, parapsychology and Quimby’s theoretical formulation started as the basis for the mind science called Christian Science.

¹⁸¹ Costi Hinn. *God, Greed, And The (Prosperity) Gospel* (Zondervan, 2019).

Now what happened, you've probably heard of Christian Science, but Mary Baker Eddy claimed that she was physically healed by Phineas Quimby, she really wasn't, she was a sickly woman most all of her life. But she thought she was physically healed by Quimby and she was so impressed by his teachings that she took his doctrines and developed them a bit further and from that formed what is today known as Christian Science. And Christian Science is neither Christian, nor is it scientific, but there are a lot of Christian Science overtones in the Word of Faith Movement. One of which is the denial of physical symptoms when it comes to sickness and disease. If you have a friend or a family member who is in this Movement, you might notice that when they get sick, they deny that they're sick. You know, maybe they've got a cold, their eyes are watering, their nose is running, they're sneezing, they're congested, the whole nine yards, but you say something to them about it, 'Oh no, no, no, I'm not sick. I won't confess that.' Well that's Christian Science that has just been wrapped in some Christian terminology. The father of Word of faith...not the father, the grandfather, you could say, of the modern Word of Faith Movement is a guy named Essek Kenyon. Essek Kenyon I had very clear ties to the metaphysical cult, particularly the New Age, New Thought Movement. He attended college at the Emerson School of Oratory in Boston where the Metaphysical cults flourished and he was heavenly influenced by them. We don't have time to get all into all of his doctrinal distinctives. Kenyon was not wrong on everything, on a lot of things he was spot on. But he did have some serious errant theology. He believed that we could speak things into existence, that Jesus died a spiritual death in hell where He atoned for our sins. But what these modern false preachers [like Benny Hinn and Kenneth Copeland] have done is they have taken Kenyon's mistakes and made them much worse. So compared to the modern Word Faith preachers, Essek W. Kenyon was actually fairly orthodox by comparison...by comparison.

Kenneth Hagen, father of the modern Word of Faith Movement, despite Kenneth Hagen's teaching that no believer should die until he's at least 120 years old. You see Kenneth Hagen didn't quite make it. He was around 86. But Kenneth Hagen claims like all of the Modern Faith preachers that much of what they teach you, they received directly from Jesus Himself. God spoke to me...Jesus spoke to me and gave me these teachings...and that is their way of insulating themselves against biblical criticisms. And so, they'll say, 'Well, if you can't find what I'm teaching you in the Bible, don't worry about it, it's okay because I have it from the

highest authority, Jesus Himself came and gave me these teachings. So if you can't find it in the Word, don't worry about it, it's okay, I got it from Jesus.'

Well, Hagen claimed that Jesus physically appeared to him on at least eight different occasions throughout the course of his life. On one of these occasions, Jesus appeared to Hagen and gave him these exact words, according to Hagen, Jesus dictated these exact specific words. It's interesting, however, that Jesus apparently bears a striking resemblance to Essek W. Kenyon. You can see that it's practically word for word identical. Hagen did not get this from Jesus. Hagen plagiarized Essek W. Kenyon extensively among other authors as well, by the way. He was a plagiarist. So the faith teachers are very fond of claiming divine origin for what they teach. But as you can see, the origins are not nearly so supernatural. They steal from other people, plagiarize other people, just repackage old heresies, you know, repackage for a different modern audience.'

These are some of the roots of the Word Faith, prosperity gospel, movement. From those beginnings it was further popularized by Oral Roberts and then Kenneth Copeland, Joel Osteen, and Benny Hinn, among others."¹⁸²

Why has this theology and movement become so popular? I believe that Costi Hinn provides a compelling answer when he writes, "The prosperity gospel appeals to the deep longing of every human heart for peace, health, wealth, and happiness. There is nothing wrong with wanting a good and happy life, but the prosperity gospel uses Jesus Christ as a pawn in its get-rich-quick scam. The prosperity gospel sells salvation and false hope. But true and lasting peace can be found only through faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ."¹⁸³ Is Hinn correct? Is this "another gospel" (Galatians 1), or is it teaching that is faithful to Scripture? That is what we are going to examine. The format will be different for this section out of necessity because the error is different. I will attempt to show ways that this is an aberrant form of the gospel. There is not exactly a formal statement of faith for the prosperity gospel so we will have to examine it by piecing together some of the most common teachings. Also, prosperity gospel proponents would affirm many of the basic tenets of the Christian faith on the surface but end up denying them by other teachings. Here are some of the key areas where their theology is biblically incorrect.

1. The prosperity gospel is not the true gospel but a false, distorted gospel. Here are some facts that demonstrate the truth of this statement:

¹⁸² Justin Peters. The Devilish Puppetmaster of the Word-Faith Movement. Sermon delivered on October 17, 2013. retrieved from gty.org.

¹⁸³ Hinn, 155.

A. We are called to die to ourselves to follow Jesus. In Luke 9:23-25, Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?” His words stand in contrast to Joel Osteen, who said in *Your Best Life Now*, “You were born to win; you were born for greatness; you were created to be a champion in life.”¹⁸⁴ The prosperity gospel is about self: self-esteem, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and using Jesus to satisfy our selfish desires. On the other hand, the gospel is about us dying to self so Jesus can be exalted and glorified as we live to honor Him instead of ourselves.

B. The prosperity gospel does not fit with the life of Jesus. There are prosperity gospel teachers who teach that Jesus was rich so His followers should be as well. For example, John Avanzini, among others, has claimed that Jesus lived in a big house, had lots of money, and wore designer clothes. However, Jesus said that He had nowhere to lay His head (Luke 9:58). Isaiah 53:3 prophesied that He would be “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Philippians 2:5-8 says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” My point is that the prosperity gospel cannot be a true gospel when it does not even line up with Jesus.

C. The prosperity gospel does not fit with the lives of the apostles. 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 says, “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.” Of course, we know that Paul was ultimately martyred for his witness to Jesus. History tells us that all of the apostles were persecuted and most were martyred. This reality is the complete opposite of the teaching of today’s prosperity gospel preachers. Once again, the prosperity gospel cannot be a true gospel if it does not line up with the life of Jesus or the lives of the apostles.

D. A call to suffering is included in the gospel. Jesus said, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” Philippians 1:29 says, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Paul defended his apostleship against false teachers in 2 Corinthians by claiming that suffering for Jesus is the mark of a true apostle as

¹⁸⁴ Joel Osteen. *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (Hachette Book Group, 2004),

opposed to the false teachers boasting about themselves and their outward qualifications. Nothing in this indicates that the gospel is about getting everything we want now. If the prosperity gospel is true, its preachers are the heroes of the faith and something would be seriously wrong with the faith of martyrs. It's completely backwards.

E. The prosperity gospel confuses sanctification and glorification. Our salvation is past, present, and future. In a sense, we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. We were justified, which means we were saved immediately from the penalty of sin (Romans 3:21-24). Justification is God forgiving us and declaring us innocent in Christ but also imputing the righteousness of Christ to us positively. We are being sanctified, which means that positionally we were set apart to God at the moment of salvation and are progressively being delivered from the power of sin and conformed to the image of Christ (Acts 26:18, Romans 8:29). We will be glorified, which means that we will eventually and eternally be delivered from the presence of sin. We will be perfected physically and spiritually in the presence of God (Romans 8:30, Philippians 3:20-21). One of the implications of these truths is that the prosperity gospel cannot be true because it is claiming what happens in heaven when we are glorified can actually happen on the earth. Also, Scripture teaches that God uses trials to sanctify us and build our faith (James 1:1-8) while the prosperity gospel teaches something is wrong with our faith if we are experiencing trials.

F. The prosperity gospel focuses more on what we do for God instead of what Jesus has done for us. It is important to check out who the verbs focus on when evaluating a presentation of the gospel. Scripture presents Jesus as the Savior because of His finished work alone. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone for the glory of God alone. We are called and chosen by Him. Salvation is the gracious work of God from start to finish. We receive Him by faith but even that is the gift of God. However, there is a subtle but distinct shift in focus in the prosperity gospel. The emphasis is on our faith, our words, our confessions, certain formulas, sowing and reaping, etc. While outwardly emphasizing faith, the prosperity gospel ends up promoting human works. Costi Hinn writes, 'Faith isn't giving money to get his love. Faith isn't paying a fee for his saving grace. Faith isn't going broke to get healed. Faith isn't traveling to a special service to get his anointing. Faith is repenting of your sins and turning to him, believing that he is the Son of God. Any religion that says you need to do good works, give enough money, or speak enough positive declarations to unlock God's saving grace or abundant blessings on your life is a false religion...The prosperity gospel turns faith into a works-based system and confuses it by adding burdens that people cannot carry. The Pharisees did the same thing when they were manipulating and exploiting people (Luke 11:46).'¹⁸⁵

G. The prosperity gospel focuses on the Old Testament Covenants instead of the New Covenant. David Jones writes, "The Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22) is one of the theological bases of the prosperity gospel. It's good that prosperity theologians recognize much of Scripture is the record of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, but it's bad that

¹⁸⁵ Hinn, 176-177.

they don't maintain an orthodox view of this covenant. They incorrectly view the inception of the covenant; more significantly, they erroneously view the application of the covenant. In his book *Spreading the Flame* (Zondervan, 1992), Edward Pousson stated the prosperity view on the application of the Abrahamic covenant: 'Christians are Abraham's spiritual children and heirs to the blessings of faith. . . . This Abrahamic inheritance is unpacked primarily in terms of material entitlements.' In other words, the prosperity gospel teaches that the primary purpose of the Abrahamic covenant was for God to bless Abraham materially. Since believers are now Abraham's spiritual children, we have inherited these financial blessings. As Kenneth Copeland wrote in his 1974 book *The Laws of Prosperity*, 'Since God's covenant has been established and prosperity is a provision of this covenant, you need to realize that prosperity belongs to you now!' To support this claim, prosperity teachers appeal to Galatians 3:14, which refers to 'the blessings of Abraham [that] come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus.' It's interesting, however, that in their appeals to Galatians 3:14 these teachers ignore the second half of the verse: 'that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.' Paul is clearly reminding the Galatians of the spiritual blessing of salvation, not the material blessing of wealth."¹⁸⁶ Also, there is a great emphasis on the Old Covenant in prosperity theology. For example, the book of Deuteronomy lists many blessings for the Jews under the Old Covenant when they obeyed and also lists many curses that they would be given when they disobeyed. Prosperity teachers take these blessings and curses out of context and try to apply them to Christians under the New Covenant today. There are several issues with this. First, these promises were given to God's chosen nation, Israel, and not to the church. Second, blessings under the Old Covenant were primarily external while under the New Covenant, we are "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:3). Third, we cannot claim the blessings because of our disobedience. Fourth, we cannot get the blessings without also receiving the curses as well. Fifth, the only way we can be blessed is because Jesus lived the obedient life we failed to live and died the death we deserved to die, becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13-14). In other words, we are blessed by His obedience instead of our own. On the cross, God treated Jesus like He lived the life we have lived so He can now treat us like we lived the life that Jesus lived. That is grace, and that is the true gospel.

H. The prosperity gospel is partially built on the unbiblical idea of generational curses. The idea of generational curses is basically that sins and their consequences and curses are passed down from ancestors so believers must name and renounce them or Satan will have a stronghold, some type of legal right, in their lives. This is an insult to the sufficiency of the cross of Christ, whose blood cleanses us from all sin. It is a misunderstanding of Exodus 20:4-6. It goes against Ezekiel 18, which teaches that we are all personally responsible before God. It is also a misunderstanding of what a curse is. Biblically, a curse is a judgment from God (Genesis 3:14-19) and not something that comes from Satan. Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')." Jesus bore all of our curses, or all of the judgment of God for us. He propitiated the wrath of God (1 John 2:2). So, Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no

¹⁸⁶ David Jones (2015). 5 Errors of the Prosperity Gospel. retrieved from thegospelcoalition.org.

condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” We are blessed by Jesus through grace because of the cross. We do not need a human teacher to get us blessed. We are “blessed with every spiritual blessing” (Ephesians 1:3).

I. The prosperity gospel fails to properly emphasize the glory of God as the ultimate purpose of salvation. The prosperity gospel places man at the center instead of God. It magnifies us instead of God. It focuses on the gifts of God instead of the Giver Himself. John Piper says, “First, it deflects attention onto God’s gifts as the main source of our happiness, rather than God himself. It obscures texts like, ‘Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you’ (Psalm 73:25–26). Or texts like, ‘At God’s right hand are pleasures forevermore’ (Psalm 16:11). Or, ‘I count everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord’ (Philippians 3:8). The emphasis falls so heavily on happiness because of the gifts that he gives — like health, wealth, prosperity — rather than on him.” He goes on to say, “The fifth and final thing I’ll say is simply from Philippians 1:20–21. The majesty and the beauty and the glory of Christ is going to be obscured if we don’t make plain to our people that one of the primary ways that Christ is magnified is when we are more satisfied in him than in the things we are losing. Paul says, ‘My desire is that Christ would be magnified in my body whether by life or by death for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.’ So Christ is magnified when in my dying, by which I lose everything, and I consider that a better deal than if I had everything in this world. So, the glory of God is obscured and the glory of Christ is obscured, I think, by the prosperity gospel.”¹⁸⁷

J. The prosperity gospel demeans Jesus. Costi Hinn writes, “Paul says, ‘To live is Christ and to die is gain’ (Philippians 1:21). John the Baptist says, ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ (John 3:30). Over and over the Bible expresses the glory of Jesus Christ as the be-all and end-all for the Christian. Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory and sustainer of all things (Hebrews 1:3), whoever has Jesus has life (1 John 5:12), and he is the only way to heaven (John 14:6). Without Jesus, heaven would be hell. All the health and wealth this world can offer can never compare to the vast riches of abiding with the Son of God for all eternity. Jesus is everything. The prosperity gospel makes human satisfaction to be material and Jesus to be the cherry on top. If it makes Jesus a central focus, it’s that he is the main avenue to getting what you want. This version of Jesus is a shell of who he really is. The prosperity gospel promises people the abundant life that Jesus offers only to deliver a gospel with no Jesus at all.”¹⁸⁸ For example, one of the most watched sermons on YouTube is a sermon by Joel Osteen called “The Power of I Am.” Incidentally, Oprah Winfrey said this sermon changed her life, which tells you a lot about the sermon. The fact that I want to point out from the message is that the name of

¹⁸⁷ John Piper (2017). Five Ways the Prosperity Gospel Makes You Poor. retrieved from desiringgod.org.

¹⁸⁸ Hinn, 174.

Jesus is used zero times in the actual body of the sermon between the confession about the Bible at the beginning and the sinner's prayer at the end.¹⁸⁹

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Why would a religion that promises what the prosperity gospel promises be enticing to people? How enticing is it to you personally?**
- 2. Do you believe the prosperity gospel is a genuine gospel or false gospel? Why?**
- 3. Do you see ways that we lean in the direction of a man-centered gospel without being full scale prosperity gospel?**
- 4. What does it look like practically for us to die to ourselves in our day to day lives?**
- 5. What are some ways that you have suffered for Jesus?**
- 6. Do you ever try to make deals with God?**
- 7. What does it look like practically in our lives to live under the New Covenant instead of the Old Covenant?**
- 8. Do you or have you ever believed that you were under a generational curse?**
- 9. What does it look like practically in our lives to emphasize the glory of God as the ultimate purpose of salvation?**
- 10. How does the prosperity gospel demean Jesus?**

¹⁸⁹ Joel Osteen. The Power of I Am. Sermon preached at Lakewood Church on October 28, 2012. retrieved from youtube.com.

PROSPERITY GOSPEL

PART 2

2. The prosperity gospel diminishes the sovereignty of God. Psalm 115:3 says, “But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.” God rules and reigns over all. He is in control. Nothing happens that He does not cause or allow to happen. This is what the Bible teaches, and this is what the prosperity gospel denies. Here are some ways it denies this truth:

A. Some prosperity teachers say to never pray, “Your will be done.” Of course, this is in direct contradiction to how Jesus taught us to pray in the Sermon on the Mount. Saying this is considered to be a lack of faith. However, if God is all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, loving, and sovereign; what else would we want except His will to be done?

B. The idea of name it and claim. If we believe our words create reality and we can basically tell God what to do, it undermines His sovereignty. It basically puts us in His place.

C. Prosperity teachers teach that Satan basically took over the world and God has to have permission to work in the world. This is blasphemous toward God.

3. The prosperity gospel distorts the true nature of faith. It distorts it into a force instead of personal trust in God. The biblical definition of faith is taking God at His Word and acting on it (James 2). It involves trust and submission. Hank Hanegraaff quotes Kenneth Copeland as saying, “Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force...It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function.”¹⁹⁰ Hanegraaff says, “Copeland even claims that ‘God cannot do anything for you apart or separate from faith’ because ‘faith is God’s source of power’.”¹⁹¹

4. The prosperity gospel teaches us that our words are a creative force. In a sermon titled, “Your Words Become Your Reality,” Joel Osteen says, “I want to talk to you today about how your words become your reality. You are where you are today in part because of what you’ve been saying about yourself. Words are like seeds. When you speak something out, you give life to what you’re saying. If you continue to say it, eventually that can become a reality. Whether you realize it or not, you are prophesying your future...Many people don’t realize with their words they’re cursing their future.”¹⁹² In the “Power of I Am” sermon I mentioned before, he said, “Here’s the principle: what follows the I am, will always come looking for you. When you say, I am so clumsy, clumsiness comes looking for you. I am so old, wrinkles come looking for you. I am so overweight, calories come looking for you. It’s just like you’re inviting them. Whatever you follow the I am with, you’re handing it an invitation, opening the door, giving it

¹⁹⁰ Hank Hanegraaff. *Christianity In Crisis*. (Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 65.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*.

¹⁹² Osteen. *Your Words Become Your Reality*. Sermon delivered at Lakewood Church on January 7, 2016. retrieved from youtube.com.

permission to be in your life.”¹⁹³ He is essentially saying what other prosperity gospel teachers say. Words are a creative force that have the power to create reality. This is blasphemy because it takes the action and power of God (Genesis 1) and gives it to humans. Scripture teaches us that words are powerful, but only God’s Words can actually create reality.

5. The prosperity gospel has an unbiblical view of healing. The prosperity gospel teaches that divine health is part of the life of a Christian. It basically teaches that sickness is from Satan and that a believer should never be sick if we have enough faith and make the right confessions.

Here are some of the basics of what I believe the Bible teaches about healing:

1. I fully affirm that God heals and that praying for the sick is a normative part of the ministry of the local church (James 5:13-18).
2. God can and does heal either in the presence or absence of faith. Consider these examples from Scripture.

A. Those done in response to the faith of the sick person—the cleansing of a leper (Matthew 8:1-4), woman healed of a flow of blood (Matthew 9:18-26), two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31), two blind men coming out of Jericho (Matthew 20:29-34), the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19)

B. Those done in response to the faith of relatives or friends of the sick person—healing of a paralytic (Mark 2:1-12), raising the ruler’s daughter (Matthew 9:18-26), healing the Gentile lady’s demon-possessed daughter (Matthew 15:21-28), demon-possessed epileptic (Matthew 17:14-21), the centurion’s servant (Luke 7:1-10), the nobleman’s son (John 4:46-54), blind man (Mark 8:22-26), centurion’s servant healed of paralysis (Matthew 8:5-13).

C. Those done in the absence of faith—healing the sick at evening (Matthew 8:16-17), demon-possessed mute man (Matthew 9:32-34), healing a man’s withered hand (Matthew 12:9-14), a demon-possessed blind and mute man (Matthew 12:22), healing a deaf-mute (Mark 7:31-37), young man raised at Nain (Luke 7:11-17), healing a woman with a spirit who could not straighten up (Luke 13:10-17), man healed of dropsy (Luke 14:1-6), healing of the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15), the raising of Lazarus (John 11), Peter’s mother-in-law healed of a fever (Mark 1:29-31), man born blind (John 9), and when Jesus restored the ear that was cut off by Peter (Luke 22:51) [This man was an unbeliever and the disciples certainly weren’t releasing their faith at that point].

3. I am not denying the importance of faith. God’s promises are totally true, and we are to receive them by faith. I am sure that we miss out on some things (including healing) that God has for us because we do not trust Him.
4. God is sovereign. Faith is not. Daniel 4:35 says, “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him ‘What have You done?’” God can choose to heal or not to heal when He chooses. He can choose to heal in response to faith or in the absence of faith as is clearly indicated in the Scriptures above.

¹⁹³ Osteen. The Power of I Am.

5. Scripture does not indicate that it is God's will to perform physical healing on the earth (every believer is healed by being taken to heaven) in every case. That is why it is different than exercising saving faith because there is no absolute "whosoever will" promise in regard to healing. If it were God's will to heal everybody, why did the leper cleansed in Matthew 8:1-4 pray, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." When I pray that way in regard to healing, I have biblical precedent.
6. In some cases, people suffer because of sin, but in other cases they are suffering because it is God's will for them (John 9:1-3).
7. There are biblical examples of Satan afflicting people, but there are also certainly biblical examples of God putting sickness upon people. Those examples include: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Job, Exodus 4:11, 2 Kings 15:5, and Luke 1:19-20. We must be careful to believe all of a truth and not just part of it.
8. If sickness is truly caused by a demon in a particular case and that demon is cast out in the Name of Jesus, then that demon must go and the sickness will go with it and the person will be instantaneously healed. That is what always happened when Jesus dealt with a person who was sick because they were demon-possessed. If they are not instantaneously healed, then either there is no demon or the person does not have enough faith to cast out the demon (Matthew 17:14-21). That is what is happening on this radio station. It is both foolish and irresponsible for people on this station to be casting out demons over the air when praying for people that they don't even know who they are. Furthermore, how can a demon inflict a Christian who is possessed by the Holy Spirit?
9. It is wonderful to want to build up people's faith but truly building up someone's faith is building them up in the truth of the Word of God. If someone is guaranteed a healing that God doesn't guarantee and God does not heal them, then it is very likely that their faith will be hurt in the long run.
10. We need to remember that in order to have answered prayer that is not enough to pray in faith. That is necessary, but we must also pray according to God's will (1 John 5:14-15). Therefore, answered prayer occurs when our faith meets with God's will.

A second area I would like to mention is the area of the relation of healing to the atonement. I believe that the atonement is for our sins-not our physical healing. The word itself refers to us being reconciled to God and brought into a relationship with Him. It can only refer to the spiritual and not the physical because the atonement is the penalty that Christ paid for our sins. How do you pay a penalty for sickness? It is mixing categories and does not make sense. I believe Isaiah 53:4 refers to Christ's healing ministry while verse 5 and following is talking about the atonement on the cross. The immediate context makes that clear. In addition, the fact that verse 4 is quoted in Matthew 8:16-17 in the context of Christ's healing ministry before the cross also demonstrates this. Verse 3 tells us that Christ was acquainted with grief or sickness, and I believe that is the sense in which he bore our sicknesses. In his humanity through the Incarnation, He understands our suffering (see Hebrews 4:14-16). Also, the way the verse is used in 1 Peter 2:24 makes it clear that the reference is to the forgiveness of sins and imputation of righteousness to us. As I will document momentarily, that is what the atonement always refers to. It is unsound biblical

interpretation to build a doctrine on one debatable verse when the Bible is clear in dozens of places elsewhere. Furthermore, the word can mean physical or spiritual healing (see Jeremiah 3:22 for an example of this) and its usage is determined by the context. The context in this case is spiritual healing.

To understand the Bible correctly, we must interpret Scripture with Scripture. These are the New Testament references I can find to the cross of Christ and the atonement. All of them connect the cross to the forgiveness of sins and none to physical healing. The references in Acts are from the sermons of the apostles. Why didn't they preach healing in the Atonement if it is true? Please check these Scriptures out: Acts 2, Acts 3, Acts 5, Acts 8, Acts 10, Acts 13, Romans 3:19-26, Romans 4:25, Romans 5:6-11, Romans 5:12-21, Romans 6:1-10, Romans 8:1-3, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 1 Corinthians 15:1-10, 2 Corinthians 8:9, Galatians 1:4, Galatians 2:16-21, Galatians 3:13, Galatians 4:1-7, Ephesians 1:7, Ephesians 2:13, Colossians 1:13-14, Colossians 2:11-15, 1 Timothy 2:5-6, Titus 2:11-15, Titus 3:4-8, Hebrews 1:1-4, Hebrews 2:14-18, Hebrews 7:24-28, Hebrews 9:11-28, Hebrews 10:11-18, 1 Peter 1:18-21, 1 John 1:7, 1 John 2:1-2, 1 John 4:7-11, Revelation 1:5, Revelation 5:9-10 and Revelation 7:9-17.

Finally, I wanted to make a couple of brief comments about suffering in the life of the believer. There is much that can be said, but I will restrict it to two passages of Scripture. First, please read Romans 5:1-5. It very clearly shows the purpose of suffering. Second, I would direct your attention to Hebrews 5:8, which says, "Though He [Jesus] was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." We also learn obedience through suffering. Furthermore, if Jesus wasn't too good to suffer, how can we say that we are too good to suffer?

6. The prosperity gospel teaches that Christians are not only supposed to be healthy but wealthy as well. Prosperity teachers teach that Jesus was rich and His followers should be as well. After all, we are the "King's Kids" who deserve the best (so they say). If we have faith and make the right confessions, we can get what we want. We can also plant a seed of faith and get a hundredfold return on it. That is a common teaching. The Bible says a lot about money. Here is an exposition of a lengthy passage in 1 Timothy 6 that covers the basics of what Scripture teaches about money.

A. We are to avoid false teachers who teach that godliness is a means of material gain (v. 3-5). According to Wuest, the word, "otherwise," is translated from a Greek work that means, "another of a different kind," and is used here to refer "to something diametrically opposed to what is right."¹⁹⁴ They were teaching the opposite of Jesus and true, biblical doctrine, and this was leading to spiritual sickness instead of spiritual health. In particular, they were teaching that being godly leads to material gain. We are told to withdraw from that type of teacher. Napoleon Bonaparte captured this essence of this kind of teacher when he said, "I am

¹⁹⁴ Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Volume 2* (William B. Eerdmans, 1973), *The Pastoral Epistles-92*.

surrounded by priests who repeat incessantly that their kingdom is not of this world and yet they lay their hands on everything they can get.”¹⁹⁵

B. We are to be content (v. 6-8). Verse 6 really presents a contrast to the previous verses. The Holy Spirit is saying through Paul that true gain is godliness with contentment. Contentment is inwardly accepting our circumstances and not being controlled by what is going on outwardly (Philippians 4:10-13). It is not resignation to our circumstances and does not preclude godly ambition, but it refers to an accepting and peaceful state of mind and heart. We can be rich and content or discontent, and we can be poor and content or discontent. Contentment also refers to more than material things. Part of an article by Catey Hill says:

“Mo’ money, mo’ problems. New research shows the richer we get, the less happy we become. A study, published this month in the journal *Nature Human Behavior*, found that once we reach a certain household income — \$105,000 in the United States, \$95,000 globally — more income “tended to be associated with reduced life satisfaction and a lower level of well-being.” And it’s not just adults who are impacted by this phenomenon. Children who come from affluent families are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and substance abuse than those who come from less affluent families, research shows. So what exactly is eating at the rich? A lot. More money, more wants. It may be that once you have enough money to meet basic needs and be able to purchase small conveniences or repay debt, extra money may simply fuel “desires such as pursuing more material gains and social comparisons, which could, ironically, lower well-being,” researchers from Purdue University believe. Psychologist Elizabeth Lombardo — who studied high-net-worth families for her new book, “From Entitlement to Intention: Raising Purpose-Driven Children” — calls this quest for more and more the “treadmill effect.” “We think external things we buy will bring us happiness, but then we get them and we wonder ‘what’s next?’” she explains. “That [next thing] has to be bigger and better” than what we had before and than what other people around us have, she adds. The problem with this, of course, is that plenty of research shows that most material possessions don’t make us happier — instead, it’s things like experiences and having more time to do things we love — and spend time with people we love — that drive happiness. “The deepest pleasures are derived from interpersonal love, warm relationships, giving, appreciation, and gratitude,” explains Fran Walfish, a Beverly Hills family and relationship psychotherapist and author of “The Self-Aware Parent.”¹⁹⁶

C. We are to flee from the temptation to love money and passionately pursue Jesus instead (v. 9-16). The warning here is not against us having money but against money having

¹⁹⁵ Napoleon Bonaparte. retrieved from goodreads.com.

¹⁹⁶ Catey Hill (2018). *The Dark Reasons So Many Rich People Are Miserable Human Beings*. retrieved from marketwatch.com.

us. The issue is not the state of our bank accounts but the state of our hearts. It is not sinful to be rich (Joseph of Arimathea was called rich and a disciple of Jesus in Scripture), but it is sinful to be greedy, love money, and make money an idol. It cannot be the ultimate pursuit of our lives. It is only a tool and a test. Jesus is enough! He is our source, satisfaction, and provision. We are to pursue Him instead of pursuing getting rich. Godliness is to be our priority over material gain. Then, if God gives us material gain, we can use it in a way that glorifies God.

D. We are to humbly trust God instead of proudly trusting money (v. 17). Money is like a trust fall. It tangibly reveals what we are trusting in. Is money a source of pride for us or are we humbly trusting the Lord? What is really our God (Matthew 6:24, 33)? Notice here that God gives us what we have and wants us to enjoy it.

E. We are to be generous (v. 18-19). In verse 18, we are commanded to do good. We fulfill this command by being “rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share.” We are preparing for eternity by doing this (Matthew 6:19-21). Ed Young Jr. says, “Want to know your net worth? Simply add up everything money can’t buy and death can’t take away.” Levi Lusko says, “We either leave our treasure or go to our treasure.”

Conclusion: Let me close this section with this quote from Costi Hinn, who writes, “The prosperity gospel ruins Christianity’s witness. Jesus said, ‘So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions’ (Luke 14:33), to make his point that worship of stuff is not the mark of his followers. Yet the prosperity gospel worships material goods, and the world knows it. The prosperity gospel couldn’t be worse for our Christian witness. Men and women who preach the prosperity gospel on Sunday are laughing all the way to the bank on Monday. The world looks on as it makes a mockery of Jesus, the pastoral leaders of the church, and the Bible as the foundation we stand on for teaching. Unfortunately, many people are leaving the church because of this abuse of power. Christian leaders are expected to be free from the love of money (1 Timothy 3:3), not obsessing over how to raid the offering buckets. Christian leaders are expected to take care of people as loving, humble shepherds (1 Peter 5:2), not act as manipulative salesmen. Finally, Christian leaders are expected to use their God-given authority to protect people from deception and boldly steer the church into truth (Hebrews 13:17), not exploit and control desperate people. The prosperity gospel abuses vulnerable people. The prosperity gospel attracts those who are looking to get rich off of people desperate for hope. What these desperate, vulnerable people need is a pastor who will love them, protect them, and give them real hope. Too many churches are being overrun by charlatans, and the church at large has got to say, ‘Enough is enough’.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Hinn, 177.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What does it mean that God is sovereign? How is it a comforting doctrine? How is it a challenging doctrine?**
- 2. How would you define faith?**
- 3. Do you believe that our words have creative power? Do you believe that we can tell God what to do? How important are our words?**
- 4. What do you believe the Bible teaches about healing? Why? Take some time to pray for people in need of healing at some point in the group.**
- 5. Are Christians supposed to be wealthy? What does the Bible teach about money?**
- 6. How is the prosperity gospel hurting people? How is it hurting the witness of the church?**

ISLAM

PART 1

For the sake of transparency, let me share that the first part of the Islam material was written by someone other than me who does not want his or her name used for a legitimate reason. Pastor Phillip Lyons is doing the teaching on the video and has contributed the material for the second part and some of the discussion questions in the first part.

I. Introduction: Welcome/Explanatory Note

Although what follows omits volumes of theology, history, and political science, hopefully it will provide a brief primer which may lead the serious student into a deeper investigation of the overwhelming influence of Islam. I don't consider it a stretch to say that you must grasp a little of the spirit and history of Islam in order to understand the last 1400 years of human history.

We don't have time to cover the Islamic Conquests, the Crusades, or Islamic terrorism, nor can we drill down deeply into the worship of the Kaaba Stone in Saudi Arabia where Islam began. However, we must state the obvious from the outset: Islam is a force to be reckoned with. Islam is a world-conquering, proselytizing belief system that has conquered multiple nations both by force and by faith.

History has shown that once a nation comes under the dominion of Islam, it is generally very difficult (absent war) for citizens of that nation to ever again fully enjoy the freedoms we cherish as Americans – most importantly, the freedom to preach Christ, worship Christ, and lead other Muslims to Christ without fear of persecution or death.

Frequently the adherents of Islam are openly and aggressively hostile to Christians in multiple nations. Even today, adherents of Islam are attacking and killing American soldiers, oppressing and killing Christians, and converting people to their faith all over the globe. For example, in some Muslim countries, it is considered an “honor killing” when a family member murders another family member who has converted to Christianity. For a more in-depth look at the Muslim persecution of Christians worldwide, please visit The Voice of the Martyrs (www.persecution.com).

In a very real sense, Islam has been at war for the souls and governments of men for 1400 years. And quite honestly, with a slate of 50 Islamic nations and an estimated 1.8 billion souls under its grip, Muslims have done a really good job of accomplishing their goal.

Demographics

- Founded in what is today Saudi Arabia by “The Prophet” Mohammed (B. 570 D.-632 A.D)
- By warfare and by conversion, Islam advanced after Mohammed’s death in 632 to conquer nations in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Many of these nations remain Islamic to this day.
- Islam is the fastest growing religion of Europe (primarily due to immigration) and is the predominant religion of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Islam is also the predominant religion in many of the countries of Eurasia (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc.), and Indonesia (which has 225 million Muslims).
- In some countries over 99% of the entire nation are Muslim.

II. A Brief Look at Mohammed and His Teachings

Untold numbers of books have been written about Mohammed both by secular and Islamic writers. At the risk of oversimplification, there is little doubt among any scholarly source that Mohammed had lost both of his parents by the age of 6, and was orphaned in what is now Saudi Arabia. In his youth he became a herder in the hills above Mecca, then, around the age of 20, he earned the honor of leading caravans for a wealthy merchant who later became his wife.

Mohammed became increasingly ascetic and began to receive visions beginning in 610 A.D. at the age of 40. These visions, dreams, and revelations continued for many years. The revelations, some reportedly being delivered to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel, were eventually accumulated, and form the most sacred book of Islam – the Quran (“Koran”).

After being recognized as a prophet, Mohammed was driven out of his home city of Mecca, and emigrated to the city of Medina. From here he became a raider of caravans, and ultimately a general who eventually forced Mecca into submission.

Along the way, Mohammed married multiple wives (somewhere between 10-12), one of which was his favorite – Aisha, who was most likely betrothed around the age of 6 and was 9 at the time of their consummation (this is continually debated).

At his death, his followers chose to advance the message and the power of “The Prophet” through the force of arms, and had conquered Jerusalem within 15 years. Many other nations were to fall.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The most well-known tenets of the Islamic faith, the Five Pillars are the five goals that every good Muslim is expected to fulfill throughout the course of his or her lifetime.

1. The Profession of Faith (Shahada) – “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger.” This brief creed must be wholeheartedly recited in order for someone to be converted into Islam.

2. Daily Prayers (Salat) – Five times each day bowing toward Mecca. The Profession of Faith is included in these prayers.

3. Alms (Zakat) – The payment of Zakat is “an obligation (imposed) by Allah” (Koran 9:60) to benefit the poor and needy. It is a compulsory 2.5% of what one owns, paid annually.

4. Fasting (Sawm) – Muslims fast during the daylight hours of the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims believe many things about the month of Ramadan, but a simple summation would be that it is a holy month dedicated to practicing self-control, studying the Koran, and giving to others.

5. Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) – A Muslim is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once during his lifetime if financially and physically able. The Hajj draws Muslims from all over the world into Mecca for worship.

Islam and Christ

1. Islam rejects that Jesus is the Son of God.

-Jesus, or “Issa” in Arabic (the language of the Koran), is understood to be a revered teacher, but not God in the flesh. According to scripture and 2000 years of Christian history, this doctrine of Islam is clearly to be considered a lie, and a teaching of antichrist (See I John 2:22-23). This doctrine strikes at the heart of who Christ is, and what he came to do. It instructs Muslims to venerate Jesus, but only as a man.

2. Islam rejects that Christ died on the cross.

-“They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him” (Quran 4:157). Do not miss the importance of this doctrine. If Jesus did not die for our sins, then he was not resurrected after dying for our sins. According to Paul, if Christ was not killed, and resurrected, then we are still in our sins, our faith is futile, and we are of all people the most miserable (I Corinthians 15: 17-19).

3. Islam rejects the Trinity.

-“Exalted is He above having a son” (Quran 4:171). For two millennia Christians have understood God to be Father, Son, and Spirit, in One. This is a core tenet of our faith, a hill we must be willing to die on. Many who have not seriously investigated the claims of Islam and Christianity will often say both faiths worship the same God, but consider how rejecting the deity of Christ helps you to answer whether the God of Christianity and the god of Islam are the same being.

4. Islam teaches that Mohammed’s word is supreme to all other teachers. Mohammed is the final messenger of Allah (God). Mohammed quotes Christ, but rejects his divinity and ultimate authority. Mohammed has greater authority than Christ, and if the two are in conflict, then

Mohammed must prevail (as is reflected in The Profession of Faith/Shahada). To the Muslim, Christ is an underling. Compare this to “the name above every name” (Philippians 2:9).

5. Islam is a religion delivered in part by an angel who taught that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is untrue (See 1-4).

-Like Mormonism, Islam sprang from a man who claimed that he had been given visions and instructions from an angel. As it so happened, this angelic visitor told Mohammed that Jesus was not God’s son, Jesus did not die on the cross, God is not triune, and Jesus is an underling to Mohammed. St. Paul said “but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8).

III. Small Group Questions (after watching the first section of the video):

1. How does the life of Muhammed differ from the life of Christ?
2. Do Christians and Muslims believe in the same God?
3. What attitude should Christians have towards Muslims? How does it make you feel to think: “many Muslims are my friends/neighbors?”
4. How could this perspective help you to witness to a Muslim?
5. What are some false ideas people have about Muslims?
6. Would you be willing to learn and use Arabic terms to talk to a Muslim in hopes of having a Gospel conversation with them?
7. How does it affect you to know that Jesus is so highly esteemed in the Koran (Islamic Holy Scriptures)?
8. How does it affect you to know that Muslims around the world are coming to Christ?
9. Knowing that many Muslims have had dreams that have opened them to coming to Christ, how should we pray for them?

ISLAM

PART 2

I. Recap: Welcome/Explanatory Notes

Last week we covered the brief primer/introduction to Islam (above) and watched the first part of the video. We identified some false ideas that people have about Islam; we talked about Muslims as our friends and how that could affect our perspective; we talked about the dreams/visions that Muslims have, how many are coming to Christ, and how we should pray for them.

This week we are going to finish the 2nd part of the video then talk about some other discussion questions.

II. Small Group Questions (after watching the second section of the video):

1. How does it affect you to know that the Koran denies that Jesus died on the cross?
2. Given that Muslims celebrate the account of the sacrificial ram provided by God (Allah) to take the place of Abraham's son (Genesis 22:1-18), how could we use this story to point to Christ?
3. How could we use the dilemma of Muslims believing both the "Before Scriptures" and the Koran to witness to a Muslim?
4. Would you be willing to learn the Koranic Bridge as a tool to find a person of peace (Matthew 10:1-20; Luke 10:1-12) and/or get someone to the Gospel?

*Here is a list of documents that will help someone go deeper into the study of Islam and how to witness to a Muslim:

- <https://brigada.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PEACE-Camel-Training-Final.pdf>, which is The Camel Method: Muslim Evangelism Training for Christians, Developed by Kevin Greeson and Randy Owen, Adapted for P.E.A.C.E. by Mark Snowden, October 2005. This is a more comprehensive training for not only evangelism, but also principles of ministering to Muslims and planting churches with those who come to Christ.
- Insights Into Islam
- 10 Frequently Asked Questions from Muslims
- Outline - Koranic Bridge to the Gospel
- Key Arabic Terms & Greetings (These last 4 documents on this list were created and modified by servants on the mission field of West Africa. Many of the principles are

more thoroughly covered in the first document [booklet] on the list. We are going to share these four documents as an addendum to the Islam materials.)

Islam Addendum

INSIGHTS INTO ISLAM

The following is taken from a summary of the radio programming that was originally crafted for the Wolof of Senegal, West Africa. It is targeted toward the African Muslim, however it serves as an excellent summary of Basic Muslim beliefs in the West African context.

MUSLIMS ARE MY FRIENDS

With so much media attention given to radical, violent Muslim groups, we need to remind ourselves that most Muslims are friendly, hospitable, peace-loving people. They are our neighbors and our friends. In general, I feel more comfortable speaking with Muslims than with secularized Americans. Unlike so many in the West, most Muslims fear God, sense His impending judgment, and are willing to talk about God and the prophets. For those unfamiliar with a Muslim's basic beliefs and practices, the following observations may be helpful.

ISLAM, MUSLIMS AND ALLAH

Islam is the religion of Muslims. The Arabic word *Islam* means *submission* (to Allah). *Muslim* (or Moslem) means *one who submits*. *Allah* is the Arabic word for *God*. Islam's fundamental concept of God is that God is one. God is great, indescribable, almighty, and compassionate—especially to Muslims. Everything that happens in the world has been predetermined by God. Muslims believe that God has revealed His will, but not Himself, to humankind. Muslims view their relationship to God as a master-slave relationship, with no possibility of a more intimate father-son relationship.

FIVE PILLARS

The roughly one billion Muslims around the world find themselves in widely differing socio-economic-cultural circumstances—ranging from the wealthy oil sheiks of the Persian Gulf to the rural farmers of West Africa. While local culture and perspectives affect Muslim beliefs considerably, all Muslims assent to Islam's "Five Pillars." Most Muslims believe that they must fulfill these five duties to atone for their sins and merit a place in paradise.

The Five Pillars of Islam are:

- 1.) **The Witness** (*Shahada*): *La illaha illa Allah, wa Mohammed Rasul Allah*. “There is no god but God, and Mohammed is the prophet of God.”
- 2.) **Ritual Prayers** (*Salat*): Five times daily at hours specified, in the Arabic language, facing toward Mecca, preceded by a ceremonial washing of face, hands and feet.
- 3.) **Alms** (*Zakat*): Sharing 2.5% of one’s wealth with those in need.
- 4.) **Annual Fast** (*Saum*): An obligatory, dawn-to-dusk, month-long fast which takes place during Ramadan, the ninth month on the Islamic lunar calendar.
- 5.) **Pilgrimage to Mecca** (*Hajj*): Required of all able-bodied Muslims who can afford it, at least once in a lifetime.

THE PROPHETS AND THE QUR’AN

Most Muslims profess belief in **the prophets** of the Bible. The Qur’an names more than twenty Bible prophets, including Abraham (*Ibrahim*), Moses (*Musa*), David (*Dawud*), John the Baptist (*Yahya*) and Jesus the Messiah (*Isa al Masih*). Muslims consider Mohammed (born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570 A.D. and buried in Medina in 632 A.D.) to be the last and greatest prophet.

Muslims maintain that God revealed His will through **four holy books**: the Torah (“*Taurat*”) of Moses, the Psalms (“*Zabur*”) of David, the Gospel (“*Injil*”) of Jesus, and the Qur’an (also spelled *Koran*) of Mohammed. Many Muslims assert that the Qur’anic revelation annuls the earlier revelations, but this assertion has no clear support from the Qur’an. They believe that Mohammed (who never learned to read or write) received the Qur’anic verses over many years from the angel Gabriel in a desert cave near Mecca. Mohammed recited the verses to his followers who wrote them down. Years after Mohammed’s death, these verses were collected into a single book known as *the Qur’an*-which means “*recitation*.”

The Qur’an has 114 chapters (*suras*) and is about two-thirds the length of the New Testament. Muslims venerate the Qur’an and are profoundly affected by its Arabic language and poetic style. Though most Muslims have never read the entire Qur’an, it is their point of reference for every area of life: religion, family, health, ethics, economics and politics. Like the Bible, the Qur’an affirms the reality of God and Satan, angels and evil spirits, a coming day of resurrection and judgment, a hell to shun and a paradise to gain. But the similarity ends there. The Qur’an’s descriptions and definitions of these realities differ greatly from those recorded by the prophets of the Bible.

GOD

The Qur’an presents God as a single entity. “*Say not, ‘Three.’ Forbear, it will be better for you. God is only one God! Far be it from His glory that He should have a son!*” (4:172) {Note: “4:172” means chapter 4 and verse 172 of the Qur’an. However, the verse may be as many as five verses away in different versions of the Qur’an.} This and other Qur’anic verses (5:116), combined with the Roman Catholic Church’s unscriptural practice of praying to Mary, have caused many Muslims to think that Christians believe in three gods-God, Mary and Jesus. This is

a serious misunderstanding of what a true Christian believes. The Bible says: “*There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*” (1 Timothy 2:5)

The Bible clearly condemns polytheism and idolatry, and consistently confirms the oneness of God, declaring: “*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve...The LORD our God, the LORD is one!*” (Matthew 4:10; Deuteronomy 6:4, 13; Mark 12:29) Oneness, however, does not preclude depth and dimension. The Qur’an reveals God as unknowable and *one-dimensional*. The Bible reveals God as self-revealing and *tri-dimensional*-Eternal Father, Eternal Son and Eternal Holy Spirit.

SATAN, SIN AND MAN

The Qur’an teaches that Satan became the Devil (*Iblis*) when he stubbornly refused to bow down to Adam at God’s command (7:11-18). Adam is said to have been in a heavenly Paradise before he ate the forbidden fruit. After Adam transgressed, God sent him down to earth. The Qur’an views Adam’s disobedience as *a minor slip* rather than *a major fall*. According to many Qur’anic scholars, all Adam had to do to get back into God’s favor was to learn and recite certain prayers (7:18-30; 2:30-40).

While the Bible portrays God as absolutely holy and man as totally depraved, the Qur’an portrays man as weak and misguided. In the Muslim view, man does not need redemption; he only needs some guidance so that he might develop the inherently pure nature with which the Creator has endowed him. If he will be faithful in his prayers, almsgiving and fasting, God is likely to overlook his sins and usher him into Paradise, a garden of sensual delights.

JESUS

Every Muslim professes to believe in *Isa* (the Qur’anic name for Jesus). They believe that Jesus is one of 124,000 prophets, that he was sent uniquely to the Jews, that he denied the Trinity, that he predicted the coming of Mohammed, that he was not the Son of God and that he was not crucified! The Bible calls such a Jesus “*another Jesus.*” (2 Corinthians 11:4)

The Qur’anic profile of Jesus presents Muslims with a difficult paradox. While certain verses declare that Jesus was “*no more than a prophet*” (4:171-173; 5:75; 2:136), others ascribe to him characteristics and titles never attributed to any other prophet. For example, the Qur’an affirms that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he was righteous and holy, and that he possessed the power to create life, open the eyes of the blind, cleanse the lepers and raise the dead (3:45-51; 5:110-112; 19:19). Furthermore, the Qur’an calls him the Messiah (*Al Masih*), the Word of God (*Kalimat Allah*) and the Spirit [Soul] of God (*Ruh Allah*) (4:171,172). These supernatural descriptions and titles have caused many Muslims to seek the truth about who Jesus really is.

One day, a devout Muslim man said to me, “The Qur’an calls Jesus *Ruh Allah*. If Jesus is the Soul of God, then He must be God!” This Muslim was beginning to grasp one of the most basic truths of Holy Scripture-not that a man became a god-but that God became a man in order to reveal Himself to the children of Adam and save them from their sins. Some time later, at the

cost of being cast out by his family, this same Muslim boldly acknowledged Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

THE SON OF GOD

The ultimate sin in Islam is “*shirk*” (Arabic for *association*). *Shirk* is the sin of regarding anything or anyone as equal to God. The Qur’an rejects Jesus’ title as the Son of God. “*They say: ‘Allah has begotten a son. God forbid!’*” (2:110) “*Say: ‘If the Lord of Mercy had a son, I would be the first to worship him.’*” (43:81; 4:172; 5:72.73) Unfortunately, many Muslims interpret “Son of God” in a carnal sense. They understand the term to mean that God took a wife and had a son by her! In several *Way of Righteousness* lessons (including #50, 61, 63, 75, 90, and 99), we explain from the Bible *why* the prophets, the angels, and God Himself call Jesus *the Son of God*. These simple explanations have helped many Muslims so that they no longer say, “*Astaghferullah!*” (“God forgive you for this blasphemy!”) when they hear Jesus called by His rightful title as *The Son of God*.

The Bible gives **three main reasons why Jesus is called *the Son of God***. Interestingly, the Qur’an contains verses that appear to affirm all three reasons.

- 1) The Bible calls Jesus the Son of God because ***He came from God*** (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:34, 35). Similarly, the Qur’an teaches that Jesus came directly from God, that He was born of a virgin, and that He had no earthly father (3:47; 19:20). Also, the Qur’an sets Jesus apart from all other prophets by calling Him *the Messiah (the Anointed One)* (4:157,171,172). Unlike Adam, who was formed from dust, the Messiah came from Heaven.
- 2) The Bible calls Jesus the Son of God because ***He is like God***. He has God’s holy and sinless character and all of God’s mighty attributes. Like Father, like Son (Hebrews 1:1-9; Matthew 17:5). The Qur’an calls Jesus “*a holy son.*” (19:19; 3:46) While the Qur’an speaks of the other prophets’ need of forgiveness (38:24; 48:1), it never attributes a single sin to Jesus. Also, it ascribes to Jesus supernatural powers that God alone possesses (3:45-51; 5:110-112).
- 3) The Bible calls Jesus the Son of God because ***He is One with God***. He is the Eternal Word who “*was in the beginning with God.*” (John 1:1-18; Philippians 2:5-11) Similarly, the Qur’an calls Jesus *the Word of God* and *the Soul/Spirit of God* (4:171,172). Just as, in some mysterious way, a person is one with his words, spirit, and soul-so God and Christ are eternally One.

THE CROSS

All the prophets of the Bible in one way or another foretold the Messiah’s sacrificial death. But the Qur’an says: “*They denied the truth and uttered a monstrous falsehood against Mary. They declared: ‘We have put to death the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of Allah.’ They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it appeared so to them.*” (4:157) While Qur’anic scholars interpret this verse in a variety of ways, most Muslims fervently deny the historical and

Scriptural records concerning Jesus' death on the cross. They believe it inappropriate that a great prophet like Jesus should die such a shameful death. Thus, Muslims dismiss the central message of the prophets of the Bible-that Jesus the Messiah *willingly* offered Himself as the final sacrifice to pay the sin-debt of the world *"that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."* (Matthew 26:56)

The Qur'an omits the Good News of atonement through Jesus' shed blood by which God *"might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."* (Romans 3:26) The Muslim sees no need for the sin-bearing death of the sinless Messiah. The Qur'an says, *"No soul shall bear another's burden."* (6:164; 17:14-16; 39:7) Islam teaches that God excuses sin based on man's repentance and good works (42:26, 31; 39:54, 55). The Qur'an bases salvation on **what man can do for God**. The Bible bases salvation on **what God has done for man**, saying, *"not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us..."* (Titus 3:4)

ISLAM'S SACRIFICE

While Islam denies the Messiah's death on the cross, it faithfully commemorates an Old Testament sacrifice which prefigured the Messiah's sacrificial death. Every year, on the tenth day of the last month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims celebrate **the Feast of Sacrifice** (*Id al-Adha*). On this day Muslims around the world slay carefully selected rams (or lambs, male goats, cows or camels) in commemoration of the ram that God provided on the mountain to die in the place of Abraham's son. Tragically however, they overlook the fact that, about two thousand years after God provided the ram for Abraham, **God fulfilled the symbolism of Abraham's sacrifice**. For on the same mountain (not far from where the Dome of the Rock is located today), Jesus the Messiah willingly shed His righteous blood as God's sufficient and final payment for sin. And three days later God raised Jesus from the dead - the triumphant Savior and Lord of all who believe.

Through Jesus' voluntary substitutionary sacrifice, God has revealed His great love and mercy to humankind. The Messiah's death and resurrection perfectly fulfilled God's plan of salvation about which the prophets wrote - thus eliminating the need for continued animal sacrifices. Yet millions persist in sacrificing animals while ignoring the purpose, meaning and fulfillment of the animal sacrifice.

THE QUR'AN SAYS...

Many are surprised to learn that the Qur'an commands Muslims to believe the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel. The Qur'an says:

*"If you are in doubt concerning what we revealed to you, then **question those who read the Scripture that was before you.**"* (10:94) *"We sent down **the Torah** in which there is guidance and light."* (5:44) *"We have revealed to you **as we revealed to Noah and the prophets after him**, and as we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon and David, to whom we gave **the Psalms.**"* (4:163) *"We sent forth Jesus, the son of Mary, to follow in the footsteps of the prophets, **confirming***

the Torah which was before him, and we gave him the Gospel with its guidance and light, confirmatory of the preceding Torah; a guidance and warning to those who fear God. Therefore let the people of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down therein. Evildoers are those that do not judge according to God's revelations.” (5:46) “Those who treat the Book, and the message we have sent through our apostles, as a lie, will know the truth hereafter: when, with chains and collars around their necks, they shall be dragged through scalding water and burned in the fire of hell.” (40:71)

The Qur'an contains dozens of similar verses.

THE DILEMMA

Such Qur'anic verses confront sincere Muslims with a serious dilemma: **How can one accept both the Bible and the Qur'an when they clearly contradict each other?** Furthermore the Qur'an emphasizes the high risk involved: to treat any of the Writings of the Prophets as a lie is to be *“burned in the fire of hell.”* Many attempt to resolve their dilemma by contending that the original Bible has been lost or falsified and is no longer reliable. Yet this explanation does not satisfy those who know their Qur'an, which says: *“The Word of God shall never change. That is the supreme triumph.”* (10:64) *“None can change the decrees of God.”* (6:34) The Qur'an claims that it was given **to confirm and guard** the preceding Scriptures. Muslims must ask themselves, *“Would the Qur'an confirm a corrupted, unreliable book?”*

Some suggest that Christians and Jews falsified the Bible after the time of Mohammed. This argument is disproved by the fact that today's Bibles are translated from ancient manuscripts which date to a time long before Mohammed. The Bible we are reading today is in harmony with the Bible of Mohammed's time. *“Allahu Akbar!”* **God is great** and has preserved His eternal Word for every generation.

Those who read the Bible with a desire to understand it will discover that it defends itself. The best defense is a good offense. *“The Word of God which lives and abides forever”* presents an awesome offense.

“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field: the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord stands forever!” (1 Peter 1:23-25)

THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Africans say, “Truth is a hot pepper” and “Whoever wants honey must brave the bees.” Similarly, the penetrating power of *God's Truth* and everlasting sweetness of *God's way of righteousness* make going after it worth every possible risk - even ostracism, persecution, and physical death.

The prophet Solomon wrote: ***“In the way of righteousness is life (a relationship with God), and in its pathway there is no death (separation from God)!”*** (Proverbs 12:28) Does this claim sound too good to be true? Friends, with God - nothing is “too good to be true.” *Allahu Akbar!* God is great!

To all who submit to God's *way of righteousness*, He promises to give freely that which religion can never provide: Salvation from the penalty and power of sin, a credited-righteousness, assurance of sins forgiven, a cleansed conscience, a deep peace, an untouchable joy, a new nature, a personal relationship with God, an eternal home with Him in Paradise, and infinitely more!

To all who have read or heard these one hundred lessons--we commend you to God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, *the Righteous*--who extends this life-giving and life-transforming promise to all who will claim it:

“You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13)

***“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
for righteousness,
for they shall be filled.”***
(Matthew 5:6)

Ten Questions Muslims Most Frequently Ask

Question #1: Why do Christians believe in three gods?

You can answer this question in sharing that Christians believe in one God who appears in three persons. Then move to explain how the Trinity is seen in the following illustrations:

- Sun, light, heat, yet still one star
- Body, soul, mind, yet one person
- Three angles, yet one triangle
- Vapor, liquid, solid, yet one water (H₂O)

None of these completely explain God, but these illustrations help us to see how the concept of 3-in-1 appears in the world that God has created – the Taurat and the Injil.

God is one in essence (that which makes Him who He is) but three in person. The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Spirit is God. But, the Father is not the Son or the Spirit; the Son is not the Father or the Spirit; and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

There is a common misconception among Muslims about the Trinity. Many have been taught that the Christian Trinity is composed of God, Jesus and Mary. It is important to make it clear when sharing about this concept that we do not believe in this combination as the Trinity.

Question #2: Why do Christians say Jesus is the son (physical) of God?

The Qur'an says that God has no "walid", which equals the physical concept of a son, i.e. A child born out of the physical union between a man and a woman. This leads to the misunderstanding that Christians believe that God had a physical union with Mary which led to the conception of Christ. We can agree with our Muslim friend that this is blasphemy and is not what Christians believe at all when referring to Jesus as the "Son of God."

As followers of Christ, we use the Arabic word, "ibn", which conveys the idea that Jesus is "from" God. You can illustrate this point by saying, for example, I am a "son of Cairo", *bint al-shata* (daughter of the beach), *ibn al-sahara* (son of the desert), *ibn al-florida*, (son of Florida)

etc. None of these mean that I was born of a physical union of my hometown, or the beach or desert, I merely come “from” there—my identity comes from there.

Question #3: Why do Christians say that Jesus died on the cross?

The Qur'an teaches that while people thought it was Christ on the cross, it was actually Judas who was crucified. It would be (*'shirk'*) blasphemy for Muslims to believe that the prophet Jesus could be crucified. Islam is a religion of works; therefore, there is no need, in their eyes for a Savior. The following illustration helps them to begin to come to terms with the necessity of the cross.

Without the death of Christ on the cross, God's justice will never be satisfied and his essence of being merciful could not exist. In sharing with Muslims, I have found several illustrations which touch the heart of the Muslim experience and yet challenge them to examine their faith. One of the most effective has been talking about the Justice and Mercy of God. The concept of mercy is the greatest obstacle in their coming to understand the Christian concept of the forgiveness of God through Christ.

All Muslims hold to the belief that God is Just and Merciful. I ask them how can God be all-justice and all-merciful at the same time. I give the illustration of the court. If the court is a court of justice, when a person comes in having committed a murder, justice demands that he be punished equal to his crime. Thus, one who has committed murder must die. That is justice.

However, if it is a court of mercy, then when the man comes to the court having committed murder, if the court is merciful, it will pardon his crime. That is mercy. Of course, this could never be the case, because they will admit that someone who commits a sin such as murder must be punished by God.

They may come with the argument that committing small sins do not merit severe justice as something like murder. While that is true, we must draw their attention to the nature of God. God is Holy (pure light), to which they will agree. If God is holy, then he can have nothing in his presence, which is not holy. Even the smallest sin is impure in the face of God, thus it must be punished. We are held responsible for all that we do which is contrary to the nature and will of God.

So, I ask, how can God be both Just and Merciful at the same time? (It is good to give them some time to think about this - their religion does not offer them an answer). I share with them the verse from the Qur'an, which says that if one has doubts, he should ask the People of the Book. I then say: "I am one of them, would you like for me to offer you a solution to this dilemma?" In order for God to show mercy to man and allow him to stand in his presence on the Day of Judgment, the price for his sin has to be paid. Only in the cross of Christ can both the Justice and the Mercy of God meet (Ps. 85.11). Christ took upon himself the sin of mankind, allowing God to look with favor on all those who accept His sacrifice for their sin.

Question #4: Why is the church divided into many denominations?

The church is diverse in forms of worship because man is diverse culturally. Yet all denominations are established on the same principals in general. It is good here to give some similarities among denominations—foundations for the faith (Belief in Christ as Lord, Bible, Lord’s Prayer, Apostle’s Creed, etc.). You can also share that there is no single form of worship which is compulsory for all Christians all over the world. Jesus Christ did not give any such instruction.

You can also take the time to talk about how the diversity in Islamic sects is far greater than that in Christian denominations. The Ahmadiyya movement (Rabwah), for example believes in its founder as another prophet after Mohammed. Another sect, the “People of the Qur’an”, reject the authority of the Hadith. Shi’ites and Sunnis have many differences in the foundations of their faith.

Question #5: Why are you not a Muslim?

When a Muslim asks such a question, he is usually asking it out of love for you as a friend. He wants to know why you do not follow the way he believes, because that is the only way he knows. Knowing this will help to respond to the question with a loving reply, this will catch his attention and encourage him to listen to you.

I usually reply by saying that I appreciate his love for me, but I am a Christian because...and then I begin to share my testimony with him. I talk about my life before Christ and how accepting Christ has given me assurance of salvation and true peace. These are things that the Muslim cannot share in return as to why he is a Muslim, for he is never assured of his final destiny and thus never truly at peace.

I can also reply by saying that I am a Christian NOT because I was born in a Christian home, because we do not believe you can inherit a personal relationship with God. Every believer must have a spiritual relationship with God, and that does not come by being born in a religious family. Then I share my testimony, and in doing so, I do not stress cultural issues, but the personal relationship with God and how I became a new creation. Putting an emphasis on the assurance we receive in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit as a down payment of the paradise to come.

In sharing your testimony, give him the mechanics of how to accept Christ, being sensitive to his limitations and background. Some books on comparative religion will be a great help in how to convey your personal salvation experience to a Muslim effectively without hindering him.

Question #6: Do you believe in Mohammed, the prophet?

This question can catch you either way you answer. If you say “no”, then you have offended the other person, and a wall immediately goes up. If you say, “yes”, then he will say that you are a Muslim. Therefore, I try to take the opportunity to talk about the word “belief”.

I take time to explain the difference between “belief” and “knowledge”. It is then easy to move from Mohammed to Christ, by saying that I may know a lot about the Bible and about Jesus. I have a lot of head knowledge about his life and miracles, but I also have belief in Christ in the fact that I have put my faith in him and trusted him as my Savior. My belief in Christ has led me to experience him in a real and personal way.

I do not have that kind of experience with Mohammed. I know a lot about him and have studied his life and work, but do not have the same belief in him as I do Jesus. As a good Christian, I have to honor my Bible as you honor the Qur’an. Mohammed is not in the Bible. Jesus did all the work needed for mankind to be saved from sin.

Question #7: Did the Bible prophesy about the coming of the prophet Mohammed?

When this question is asked, they are referring to the words of Jesus in the book of John about the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. This question can be settled by reading *all* that Jesus said about the Comforter. You can read to your friend John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15. It is only if all of these verses can apply to Mohammed that we could say Mohammed is the Comforter.

Mohammed has never been referred to in Islamic writings as the Holy Spirit. The Qur’an says that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus during his time on earth—long before Mohammed was even born. The Comforter was said to have already been dwelling in the disciples. If this were Mohammed, how could that be?

Once you have worked through some of these issues, take the time to share the true facts about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been at work since the beginning of time, and after the ascension of Christ, He came in a new way to fill the hearts of all who believed in Christ with the power of God and the ability to live in a way that is pleasing to God while still on this earth.

Question #8: Why do Christians say they are the only ones going to heaven?

Try to approach this question in a friendly manner to prevent your friend from becoming defensive at your response. As Christians, we base our belief on what we believe as God’s Word, the Bible. Jesus, in the Bible, says of himself: “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father, but by me.”

We can also take time to share in general about the various religions in the world and then ask the question: If God has more than one way for man to be saved, why are the various religions so different? If God is truly holy and just, as we have already agreed, would it not be good and right for him to have one way for man to become acceptable in his sight and therefore gain salvation?

It is important to add that not “all” Christians will go to heaven. There are many who call themselves Christian, but have no evidence in their life that they have a relationship with God or are living in a way that is pleasing to him. It is not the title, “Christian” that means a person is going to heaven, but the inner relationship between man and God. We believe that he has made that way to be through faith in Jesus alone. Because of Christ, I already have a relationship with God here on earth, and I also have the assurance that I will be living in heaven after death.

Any religion can make this claim, but faith through Christ is the only way, not because of the claims of the religious system, but because of the reality of the Christian life—the reality of the relationship between the Creator and the creature. It is this relationship that restores the image of God in man’s life, enabling him to live in peace, be patient, loving, humble, etc. He knows from where he came and where he is going. The abundant life which shows in a man’s character is the ultimate testimony of the assurance of heaven after death. Thus the Christian faith will reflect in man’s personality. Even if a Muslim tries to say he has the same experience, Islam never gives such assurance. There is never evidence of the fruit as discussed above.

Question #9: Why do Christians like Jews?

The answer to this question can get complicated depending on the angle you take. It is good to share that the word “Jew” has several connotations: political, cultural and religious. When a Muslim asks this question, he is usually using the word in a political sense. I think it is good to keep focused on the Biblical concept of “the People of God” rather than get in a political discussion. In doing so, you can explain to them how the word refers to the descendants of Abraham as a people, chosen by God. He established a covenant with them. However the Hebrew people did not keep their part of the covenant and the relationship was broken. They failed to show the other nations the reality of God and later on felt superior to other nations. When Jesus came, he condemned this.

Christ came to earth to restore the relationship between God and man. Now the “people of God” are those who put their faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, no matter their ethnic background. Therefore, the true Christian will look at the Jews of today as people in need of a savior, just as those from any other religious background. It is hard for a Muslim to accept that, but we need to understand it is hard on many Christians too.

Even with this answer, however, I think it is good to be honest with your Muslim friend in sharing that there are many Christians who do believe that Jews continue to have a favored status

with God. As a result, our country (USA) in particular maintains a close relationship with the nation of Israel.

Question #10: Do you believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God?

As you look at this last question, it is good to remember that in all questions posed by Muslims, there is the need for a spiritual answer. There is a faith question behind every religious question. Try to find what's behind the question.

In the case of this particular question, the Muslim is trying to find out not only if you respect his holy book, but whether or not the Qur'an is true for himself. The Qur'an is written in an Arabic that is difficult for most Muslims to understand, and that is if they are native Arabic speakers. Those from other regions do already have a problem in comprehending the book.

Try to begin by talking about the difference between the words "believe" and "know." To believe something is to put your faith or trust in it. We cannot say that we believe the Qur'an in this way. However, we can tell our friends that we know that the Qur'an is a holy book in their eyes and we respect that book because of this fact. In the meantime, as followers of Christ, we put our belief only in the Bible. Our Holy Book says that the revelation of God is complete in the Bible. For this reason, we cannot put our trust or faith in the Qur'an as God's Word.

Taken from <http://www.brigada.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PEACE-Camel-Training-Final.pdf>)

Koranic Bridge to the Gospel (outline)

- ❖ I have discovered an amazing truth in the Koran that gives hope for eternal life with Allah. Would you read from the Koran from the passage . . .
 - ❖ Al Imran (Surah 3):42-55 . . . so that we could talk about it?
1. Isa is Holy (42-47)
 - What did this passage say about Isa? (He was born of a virgin named Mary and sent by Allah)
 - Did this say that He was sent by Allah without having a human father? (Yes)
 - Do you know of any other prophet who was sent by Allah without having a human father? (No)
 - Why do you think that Allah wanted Isa to be born by a virgin without a human father?
 2. Isa has power over death (48-49)
 - What did these ayats (verses) have to say about Isa? (that he had the power to heal the sick and even to raise the dead)
 - What is one thing that most people fear in life? (death)
 - Do you know of any other prophet who had power over death? (no)
 3. Isa knows the way to heaven (55)
 - Where is Isa, now? (In heaven with Allah)
 - Why? How do we know? (because we read it in the Koran – it is also written in the Injil)
 - If you wanted to come to my house, and you didn't know the way – who would you ask to help you get to my house?
 - I am a sinner. I have Adam's blood flowing through my veins. I've done good things in my life, but I've done bad things, too. Because of my sin, I know that in the power of my flesh, I could never stand before Holy God. Out of all the prophets, who is most capable of helping me get to heaven?
 - But, if you ask me what I think about the prophet Mohammed, I say of him what he said of himself in Al Aquaf (46):9 "I am nothing new among the prophets.

What will happen to me and my followers, I do not know. I am only a plain warner.”

Ask if you can pray for them. Pray. And if there are those who would like to speak more about Isa, you would be happy to dialogue with them, since you are one of His followers.

Other Koranic passages to help bridge:

1. Yunus (Jonah) 10:94 -- if you doubt ask those who read the Scriptures.
2. An Nisa (The Woman) 4:136 – believe in the ‘before Scriptures’ – don’t be a ‘wanderer’.
3. Al Anaam (The Cattle) 6:115 – nothing can change the Word of Allah/God
4. Al Maeda (The Table) 5:65-66 – observe the Taurat and the Injil

Key Arabic (or Koranic) Terms

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Allah (Ah-lah) | = | God |
| 2. Imam (Ee-mahm) | = | Muslim prayer leader (like a pastor) of a mosque |
| 3. Injil (in-Jill) | = | New Testament |
| 4. Taurat (toh-Raht) | = | Old Testament books of Moses |
| 5. ‘Isa (Ee-sah) | = | Jesus |
| 6. ‘Isahi (ee-Sah-ee) | = | follower of Jesus |
| 7. Kitab (kee-Tahb) | = | holy book |
| 8. Masi (mah-See) | = | Messiah |
| 9. Maryam (Mah-re-ahm) | = | Mary |
| 10. Nuh (nuh) | = | Noah |
| 11. Ibrahim (Ee-brah-heem) | = | Abraham |
| 12. Musa (Moo-sah) | = | Moses |
| 13. Surah (Soo-rah) | = | chapter (in the Koran) *Note: there are no books, only chapters and verses in the Koran. |
| 14. Ayat (Ah-yaht) | = | verse (in the Koran) |

Other Arabic Greetings:

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Assalamu Aleikum | (Ah-sah-LAHM-oo Ah-laye-koom) | Peace be to you (entering). |
| 2. Aleikum Salam | (Ah-LAYE-koom sah-Lahm) | And to you, peace. |
| 3. Bi simillah | (BEE-see-mih-laah) | In the name of Allah -
practically used for
“Welcome, come in,
go ahead.” |

4. Al Hamdoulilaye (Ahl HAHM-doo-lee-lahye) Praise to God (Allah)
5. Ta Baraka la (tah BAH-rah-kah lah) God bless you.

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