

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?



by
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"Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15).

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*"God decided, through the foolishness
of our proclamation, to save those
who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21).*

"We proclaim Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

*"For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim
Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5).*

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Abbreviations

Some Old Testament Scriptures

Gen.	Genesis	Isa.	Isaiah
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Jer.	Jeremiah
Psa.	Psalms	Ezek.	Ezekiel

The New Testament Scriptures

Mt.	Matthew	1 Tim.	1 Timothy
Mk.	Mark	2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Lk.	Luke	Tit.	Titus
Jn.	John	Phile.	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb.	Hebrews
Rom.	Romans	Jas.	James
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Gal.	Galatians	1 Jn.	1 John
Eph.	Ephesians	2 Jn.	2 John
Phil.	Philippians	3 Jn.	3 John
Col.	Colossians	Jude	Jude
1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	Rev.	Revelation
2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians		

The reader is encouraged to obtain either a New Testament or a complete Bible and to read all references to the scriptures which are made in this book. Other than the Bible, the only source which will be quoted will be a Greek dictionary, since the New Testament was originally written in Greek: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Walter Bauer. Translated and edited by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. This work will be abbreviated *BAGD*. The abbreviation "cf." inside parenthetical references means "compare."

What Is Christianity?

What is Christianity? The purpose of this book is to explain Christianity to you in simple terms, to show you how you can become a Christian, and to summarize what you must believe and how you should act as a Christian. The Christianity of which you will read in the following pages is Christianity as known and practiced in the apostolic age of the first century. A sincere attempt will be made to document accurately from the sacred scriptures every claim made about Christianity. What follows is an attempt to present to you Christianity without the additional traditions of men and women from the last 2,000 years. While most of these later traditions are harmless, some are erroneous and should be avoided.

Many people today are confused about what Christianity really is because they associate it with traditions which obscure the truth. Maybe you have been prejudiced against Christianity in the past, because you were turned off by an inadequate example of it in a church or in the lives of some individuals who called themselves Christians. If this is true for you, please read this book and judge Christianity by the ideal of what it ought to be, not the flawed attempt of some humans to be Christians. Judge Christianity by the standard given to us in the New Testament for what Christians and the church ought to be. Those who claim to be Christians may not live, worship, or teach as they should for a variety of reasons. Maybe they are ignorant of the whole truth. Maybe they have been misled by false teaching. Maybe they are hypocrites. Most likely they are sincere, but they have made some mistakes as all humans do. Please do not reject Christianity because of the failure of someone you know who claims to be a Christian. Judge Christianity by Jesus Christ. You will find that Jesus Christ, the author and founder of the Christian

religion, will not disappoint you in any way. While his followers make mistakes, he is without fault.

The Need for Salvation

Christianity is the religion of those who are called "Christians" (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). A Christian is simply a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, who is called the Christ or the Messiah by those who believe in him. Why should anyone be a Christian? The answer to this question is that we need salvation from our sin. To understand our need for salvation from sin, let us first see what it means to be a human being who is responsible and accountable before God.

All human beings are more than mere physical creatures such as animals. We have something within us that is called a "spirit" or a "soul," which means we are spiritual creatures (Acts 7:59; 1 Cor. 2:11; 1 Thess. 5:23; Jas. 2:26). In the beginning God created everything (Gen. 1:1), but he created mankind "in his image" (Gen. 1:26-27; Col. 3:10; Jas. 3:9). This means that God has given us the ability to think and reason. We have the ability to comprehend spiritual things and to believe in a supreme being whom we call "God." We are able to know right from wrong, to feel guilt, as well as to understand those things which are honorable and noble. We are able to feel a sense of awe when we meditate on the greatness of God. We are able to worship, and everywhere in the world among all races and classes of people, the urge to reach out to a higher being in worship is universal. We are able to live a more noble life in imitation of the perfect holiness of God (Mt. 5:48; Eph. 4:21-23; 1 Pet. 1:14-16).

When the apostle Paul was preaching in Athens, Greece, he commended the Athenians for being "extremely religious" (Acts 17:22). They had altars and objects to worship many

different gods. To make sure that they did not miss any gods, they had built an altar "To an unknown god" (Acts 17:23). Paul then informed the Athenians about the only real God:

The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:24-28).

Since God is our creator, we are accountable to him (Isa. 43:7; Rev. 4:11). Paul told the Athenians that they would be judged by God one day: "He commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness" (Acts 17:30). Since God has placed within us the ability to reason and to know right from wrong, we are responsible to him. Paul spoke of people who did not have any written law from God; yet, they knew "instinctively what the law requires" (Rom. 2:14). Because we are able to know that God exists (Psa. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20), and because we are able to know right from wrong, we must give an account of our thoughts, our deeds, and our lives before God (Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5).

The sad reality is that all humans who have matured and come to know the difference between good and evil have sinned. Sin is whatever is contrary to the will of God. It is

"lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4). "All wrongdoing is sin" (1 Jn. 5:17). Right and wrong are not determined arbitrarily by God. Instead, whatever is similar to God is right and whatever is unlike God is wrong. God is love, so being unloving is sinful (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). Truthfulness is right, because God never lies (Tit. 1:2). There are many lists of various kinds of sin in the New Testament which help us understand what it involves. In Romans, Paul wrote of sinners:

They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless (Rom. 1:29-31).

Paul also lists some common "works of the flesh" or sins: "Fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (Gal. 5:19-21). Paul lists some examples of those who will not inherit a home in heaven, that is, unless they repent and seek salvation. These include "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers" (1 Cor. 6:9-10; cf. Col. 3:5-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-11; 2 Tim. 3:2-5; Jas. 3:14-16; 1 Pet. 2:1-2).

We can not blame others for our sin. We sin because we give in to temptation (Jas. 1:12-15). Although Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, we were never forced to sin. We have sinned because we followed the example of others and because we desired to do that which is evil. This is how sin has spread to all of mankind (Rom. 5:12). Just as all who follow Christ are saved, likewise all who have imitated Adam

and followed him in the path of sin are lost (Rom. 5:15-21). Some people wrongly teach that we inherit a sinful nature from Adam, and that we are all guilty of sin from the moment we are born. The Bible teaches differently. Each person is individually responsible before God. Children will not be condemned as guilty for the sin of their parents or for the sin of Adam. Likewise, parents will not be condemned by God for their children's sins (Jer. 31:29-30; Ezek. 18:1-20). Each of us is individually accountable to God.

Because we are sinners and because God is a holy and perfect God, we are separated from him (Isa. 59:1-2). Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden after they had sinned (Gen. 3:1-24). Likewise, God judges us when we are guilty of sin. Everyone is guilty of sin before God, even religious people (Rom. 3:9). "There is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23; cf. 1 Jn. 1:8-10). The payment we all deserve for our sin is death: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23; cf. Gal. 6:7-8). In this we find our great need for salvation. We are lost, because we are sinners. We are unable to save ourselves. We are helpless (Rom. 5:6). If we try very hard, we might sin a little less in the future, but we will still sin. Furthermore, we are unable to pay for the sins we have already committed. We desperately need salvation. We need a savior!

The Savior From Heaven

Imagine a man stuck at the bottom of a deep hole. He is unable to climb out. He needs help from outside or from above. He needs someone to throw down a rope or a ladder. He needs a savior. Mankind was in the same situation because of our sin. We needed help from heaven, and our great God

provided us with a savior. There is only one God (Deut. 6:4; Mk. 12:29, 32; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Eph. 6:6; Jas. 2:19), but this God is known to us in three ways, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Jn. 15:26). Calling God the "Father" does not mean that God was married or that he and a heavenly wife had a son. "Father" tells us that God is like a father as he watches over us and cares for us (Mt. 6:9; 7:9-11). Jesus Christ is not called the "Son of God," because God and a heavenly wife gave birth to Jesus, or because the Father is older than the Son. He is called the "Son of God" because he was submissive in his relationship to God the Father as any son should be submissive to his father (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all eternal and are all divine. They are God, not human.

This means that our Savior, Jesus Christ, did not begin his life or existence when he was born into this world. He had lived long before Abraham (Jn. 8:58). He was alive before the world was created (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 1:2). This is commonly referred to as the pre-existence of Christ (Jn. 3:13; 8:23; 17:5, 24; 18:37). Our Savior Jesus Christ is eternal. He has always existed and always will exist (Rev. 1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13; Jn. 1:1; Heb. 13:8). Even though he was in heaven where multitudes of angels could have served him, he voluntarily came to earth to be our savior (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul explains the marvelous good news which makes the story of Christianity so unique:

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
 but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness (Phil. 2:5-7).

Sinful mankind needed a savior. Instead of asking the impossible from us, that is, that we pay for our own sins, God sent his only Son into the world to solve the problem of sin for us (Jn. 3:16). This is why the Christian message is called the "gospel" (Mk. 1:1; 16:15; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:11). The word "gospel" means "good news" (*BAGD*, 317-18). It is good news that our situation is not hopeless. God sent us a savior to save us from our sins. Salvation has come down to us from heaven in the person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

The Birth of Christ

In order for the Son of God to be our savior, God arranged for a very special, miraculous birth to take place. God chose a good Jewish man and woman, Joseph and Mary, to be parents for this special child. Joseph and Mary were betrothed which means they were promised to one another and were considered husband and wife, but they had not begun to live together and had not consummated their marriage through sexual relations (Mt. 1:18-25). Mary was still a virgin (Lk. 1:26-34). God miraculously created the infant Jesus in the womb of Mary through the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:20; Lk. 1:35). In this way Jesus had a human mother, but God was his father (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 1:3; Lk. 1:35). This is what is usually called the "virgin birth" of Christ.

The term most often used to describe this whole process is "incarnation." This term means that the Son of God became a human being. The apostle John uses the title "the Word" for Jesus as he describes the incarnation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God....And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn. 1:1, 14; cf. Rom. 8:3;

1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 7). In order to become our complete savior, Christ became one of us (Heb. 2:14, 17).

Jesus Christ is unique in many ways, and his two natures, the human and the divine, combined into one being is very important. While he was in this world, Jesus Christ was very much a human being. He descended from and was born of human beings (Mt. 1:1-17; Rom. 1:3; 9:5). He went through the normal growth process that all humans experience. He was a tiny baby who grew into adulthood (Lk. 2:40). He had normal human physical needs for food, water, and rest. He even had the need to pray (Mt. 4:2; 8:24; 14:23; Jn. 4:5-7; 19:28). As a human Jesus felt emotions such as joy, sorrow, anger, love, and compassion (Mt. 9:36; 26:37; Mk. 3:5; 10:21; Lk. 10:21; Jn. 12:27; 15:11). Jesus even wept (Jn. 11:35) and was tempted (Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13; Heb. 4:15). Jesus felt physical pain and experienced death as a human (1 Pet. 3:18; 4:1). Yes, Jesus was very much a human being.

At the same time, however, Jesus was very much divine (Jn. 10:30). He is not only called the "Lord" and "Son of God," which are used as divine titles (Jn. 10:25-33; Lk. 2:11; Rev. 4:8-11; 19:16), but also he is even called "God" (Jn. 1:1; 20:28; and maybe Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1). Although Jesus Christ did not fully use all of the powers associated with being "God," he was in full possession of deity or divinity (Col. 1:15, 19; 2:9). Jesus Christ was the God-man. He was both God and man at the same time. When black and white paint are mixed together, the result is something in between, grey paint. But Jesus Christ was not something in between God and man. He was not an angel. He was both God and man at the same time.

Because Jesus Christ was both God and man, he is the perfect savior. He can perfectly represent or mediate for both parties in the covenant between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

As a human he could pay the debt of our sin. As God he was a perfect and a worthy sacrifice to pay for our sin. We will study this further in a few pages as we discuss the atonement, but it is important to know that it was all a part of God's plan since the creation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20). Since Jesus Christ was to be both God and man at the same time, he came into the world by means of a unique birth with a human mother and a heavenly Father. Our savior came from heaven, and that savior was the Son of God. As the shepherds were told: "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Lk. 2:11).

The Life of Christ

If you do not know very much about the life of Christ, you should read the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four documents tell of the birth of Jesus (Mt. 1:1-2:12; Lk. 1:26-2:20) and of one incident when he was twelve years old (Lk. 2:41-52), but their emphasis is on the last three or four years of Jesus' life which was his public ministry. From the time that he was thirty years old, Jesus preached and taught people the will of God. He attracted many disciples, and he chose special followers, called "apostles," who were to proclaim his message after his departure from the world.

Jesus performed many miracles which are evidence that God approved of what he said and of what he was doing (Jn. 2:11; 5:36; 10:25, 37-38; 14:11; Lk. 7:20-22; Mt. 9:1-8; Heb. 2:4). Only a few of the miracles of Jesus are recounted in the four Gospels, but they are "written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:30-31). The following is a list of the miracles of Jesus in the four Gospels:

1. Changing water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11)
2. Healing an official's son (Jn. 4:46-54)
3. Healing a man in a synagogue (Mk. 1:23-26; Lk. 4:33-35)
4. Healing Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14-15; Mk. 1:30-31; Lk. 4:38-39)
5. First great catch of fish (Lk. 5:1-11)
6. Healing a leper (Mt. 8:2-4; Mk. 1:40-42; Lk. 5:12-13)
7. Healing a paralyzed man (Mt. 9:2-7; Mk. 2:3-12; Lk. 5:18-25)
8. Healing a sick man at the Pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:1-9)
9. Healing a man with a withered hand (Mt. 12:10-13; Mk. 3:1-5; Lk. 6:6-10)
10. Healing a centurion's servant (Mt. 8:5-13; Lk. 7:1-10)
11. Raising a widow's son from death (Lk. 7:11-15)
12. Healing two blind men (Mt. 9:27-31)
13. Calming a storm (Mt. 8:23-27; Mk. 4:37-41; Lk. 8:22-25)
14. Healing a demon possessed man (Mt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:1-15; Lk. 8:27-35)
15. Healing a hemorrhaging woman (Mt. 9:20-22; Mk. 5:25-29; Lk. 8:43-48)
16. Raising Jairus's daughter (Mt. 9:18-19, 23-25; Mk. 5:22-24, 38-42; Lk. 8:41-42, 49-56)
17. Healing a mute, demon possessed man (Mt. 9:32-33)
18. Miraculous feeding of 5,000 (Mt. 14:15-21; Mk. 6:35-44; Lk. 9:12-17; Jn. 6:5-13)
19. Walking on water (Mt. 14:25; Mk. 6:48-51; Jn. 6:19-21).
20. Healing a Canaanite woman's daughter (Mt. 15:21-38; Mk. 7:24-30)
21. Healing a deaf mute (Mk. 7:31-37)
22. Miraculous feeding of 4,000 (Mt. 15:32-38; Mk. 8:1-9)
23. Healing a blind man (Mk. 8:22-26)

24. Healing a demon possessed boy (Mt. 17:14-18; Mk. 9:17-19; Lk. 9:38-43)
25. The coin in the fish's mouth (Mt. 17:24-27)
26. Healing a man born blind (Jn. 9:1-41)
27. Healing a deaf and blind man (Mt. 12:22; Lk. 11:14)
28. Healing a crippled woman (Lk. 13:11-13)
29. Healing a man with dropsy (Lk. 14:1-4)
30. Raising Lazarus from death (Jn. 11:1-44)
31. Healing ten lepers (Lk. 17:11-19)
32. Healing two blind men (Mt. 20:29-34; Mk. 10:46-52; Lk. 18:35-43)
33. Withering of the fig tree (Mt. 21:18-22; Mk. 11:12-14, 20-25)
34. Healing Malchus's ear (Lk. 22:50-51)
35. Second miraculous catch of fish (Jn. 21:1-11)

The four Gospels also tell of the baptism of Jesus (Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22). Jesus was not baptized because of any sins for which he needed forgiveness. He was baptized because it was a right thing to do to obey God. He identified himself with us so that he could be our savior. At his baptism the voice of God from heaven declared: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17). The Gospels also tell of the temptation of Jesus right after his baptism (Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13). One very important event in the life of Jesus Christ is called the "transfiguration" (Mt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-10; Lk. 9:28-36; 2 Pet. 1:16-18). In this event Jesus was changed before the eyes of three of the apostles, Peter, James, and John. He was dazzling white in appearance, probably because his deity was shining forth. God's voice from heaven declared: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" (Mk. 9:7). Near the end of Jesus' life we read of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:1-11;

Lk. 19:28-40; Jn. 12:12-19), his cleansing of the temple (Mt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11:15-19; Lk. 19:45-48), and his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection (Mt. 26:36-28:10; Mk. 14:32-16:18; Lk. 22:39-24:49; Jn. 18:1-21:14).

The Teachings of Christ

Christians refer to Jesus as the Master Teacher. As far as we know, Jesus had no formal education (Jn. 7:15); yet, he taught in such a remarkable way that people were astonished (Jn. 7:46). Jesus often taught in parables or stories which made his teaching very interesting. He used common everyday illustrations from the life of people to apply his teaching. In contrast to most teachers who fail at some point to live up to their own teaching (Mt. 23:3), Jesus practiced perfectly what he taught. Jesus taught with great authority (Jn. 3:34; 7:16; Mt. 7:28-29). He did not have to appeal to various human authorities to prove his point. He could simply declare: "I say to you" (Mt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). Jesus not only taught the truth, he was the truth (Jn. 14:6). The way of life which Jesus taught us to live is a way of life that will lead to happiness (Jn. 10:10; Mt. 5:3-12). Many psychologists have discovered that what they have told people to do in order to be happy was the same as what Jesus taught people long ago.

Some of the parables of Jesus are remarkable because of their tender beauty and spiritual depth. Read, for example, the three parables in Luke 15, the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coins, and the lost son. These parables tell us that God wants us, his lost children, to come home and he will welcome our return. Also read the account of the good shepherd in John 10. Some of the greatest teachings of our Lord Jesus have been collected together in long sections in the Gospel of Matthew. Read the following three sections of Jesus' teachings

and you will see why he has been correctly called the Master Teacher.

1. The Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:1-7:28)
2. Parables of the kingdom (Mt. 13:1-53)
3. Life in the kingdom (Mt. 18:1-35)

The ethical or moral teaching of Christ is the greatest this world has ever known. The ethical standard which Jesus taught was not a mere external legal code of rules and regulations. He went to the heart of the matter (Mt. 23:1-28). Murder is wrong, but Jesus taught us to remove hate and anger from our hearts too, for they can lead to the act of murder itself (Mt. 5:21-26). The act of adultery is wrong, but Jesus taught us to avoid lust in our hearts (Mt. 5:27-30). Jesus taught us to do good deeds, but we should do them because of proper motives (Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18). A good deed done from a selfish motive loses most of its goodness. Much of the teaching of Jesus was about the "kingdom of God" (Mk. 1:14-15; Mt. 13:1-53). Most of the time the "kingdom of God" refers to the ruling or the reign of God. When Jesus speaks of inheriting the kingdom, he is referring to our receiving the reward of heaven and eternal life (Mt. 25:34). By speaking of the kingdom of God so often, Jesus was encouraging people to submit to God as king and to obey him in all things (Mt. 6:10). Jesus also stressed repentance, humility and service to others (Mk. 1:15; 9:35; 10:15; Lk. 22:25-27).

Jesus focused very strongly on love as a key to living right. By "love" Jesus did not simply mean "to feel good toward someone" or "to like someone." The love of which he spoke meant to seek what was best for another person in an unselfish way. He said that we should even love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-48). Anyone can be nice to someone who is nice to them, but

can we be kind to someone who is our enemy? Jesus taught his disciples to "love one another" (Jn. 13:34; cf. Jn. 15:10; 1 Jn. 5:3; 2 Jn. 6). He taught that love is the supreme duty of man: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mt. 22:37-39; cf. Mk. 12:29-30; Lk. 10:27; Deut. 6:5). And Jesus gave us what has come to be called the "golden rule" of life: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Mt. 7:12; Lk. 6:31). Without a doubt Jesus has the "words of life" (Jn. 6:68).

The Sinlessness of Jesus Christ

The scriptures speak of Jesus "having been made perfect" (Heb. 5:9). "In him there is no sin" (1 Jn. 3:5). As our sacrificial lamb Jesus had to be without blemish (Jn. 1:29; Heb. 9:14). The apostle Peter said: "He committed no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22). The apostle Paul wrote: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus "in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Jesus even dared to ask his opponents: "Which of you convicts me of sin?" (Jn. 8:46). Certainly Jesus Christ is the "Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14). Jesus was sinless on the negative side in that he never did anything wrong and on the positive side in that he was good and righteous (Acts 10:38).

The evidence for the sinlessness of Jesus was quite diverse. It came not only from sympathetic friends who might have been inclined to exaggerate, but also it came from people who were quite neutral concerning Jesus. Most surprising of all, evidence even came from those who were not sympathetic to

his cause. Here is a summary of the evidence for Jesus' sinlessness:

1. Sympathetic witnesses

- A. Peter - Lk. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22; 3:18; Jn. 6:69; Acts 3:14
- B. John - 1 Jn. 2:1, 29; 3:5, 7; Acts 4:27
- C. Paul - 2 Cor. 5:21
- D. The writer to the Hebrews - Heb. 2:10; 4:15; 5:8-9; 7:26, 28; 9:14
- E. Stephen - Acts 7:52
- F. Ananias - Acts 22:14
- G. The early Christians - Acts 4:30
- H. The angel Gabriel - Lk. 1:35

2. Unsympathetic witnesses

- A. Jewish leaders - Mt. 26:55-59; Mk. 14:48-56; Lk. 22:52-53; Jn. 18:20-21
- B. Judas - Mt. 27:4
- C. The demons - Mk. 1:24; Lk. 4:34

3. Neutral witnesses

- A. Pilate - Mt. 27:18, 23-24; Mk. 15:14; Lk. 23:4, 14-15, 22; Jn. 18:38; 19:4-6
- B. Pilate's wife - Mt. 27:19
- C. The thief on the cross - Lk. 23:41
- D. The centurion - Lk. 23:37

4. Jesus' own testimony

- A. Jn. 8:46; 14:30; 15:25; 18:23
- B. His perfect obedience - Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 7:18; 8:29, 55; 15:10; 17:4; Lk. 22:42; Heb. 10:5-7

The testimony of Jesus himself may be the most valuable of all. The better people are, the more they tend to be aware of minor faults in their own lives. The more evil people are,

the more they tend to minimize major sins in their lives. The inner person of Jesus shows no evidence that he was aware of any sin or wrongdoing in his life. For him to claim that he was without sin was either one of the most arrogant claims ever made by a human being, or it was the truth. Jesus was either a lunatic, a liar, or the Lord. All other evidence tends to confirm the claim for Jesus' sinlessness, so Christians believe he was perfect and without blemish. We will now see the tremendous importance of Jesus' sinlessness as we examine his work as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins.

The Atonement

The term "atonement" refers to the covering of sins that is accomplished by the death of Jesus on the cross. If you have not read about the terrible suffering and death of Jesus on the cross, please do so from one or more of the Gospel accounts (Mt. 27:27-52; Mk. 15:16-39; Lk. 23:26-48; Jn. 19:16-37). God was preparing mankind to understand the atonement through various sacrifices which he commanded for the Jewish people during the Mosaic age (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6). For example, when death was going to take the oldest son of each family in Egypt, the children of Israel were commanded to sacrifice a spotless lamb. They were to place the blood of that lamb around their door. The houses which had the blood on the door were safe from death. God was showing us in a symbolic way what he would make known much later. We can escape eternal death by means of the blood of Jesus.

Another Old Testament lesson on atonement comes by means of the Jewish Day of Atonement. The Jews used two goats. One would be sacrificed and the blood was sprinkled in the temple. The high priest would then place his hands on the other goat, sometimes called the scapegoat. He would confess

the sins of the people, symbolically transferring their sins to the innocent goat. That goat was then driven out into the desert. People then understood that their sin had been removed from them and was taken away. The shedding of blood along with the giving up of life was the means of cleansing from sin. "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). Christ is our sacrifice of atonement and he is our scapegoat who takes our sin upon himself and takes them away: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24).

The Old Testament sacrifices, which were mostly animals, were not meant as a complete solution to the problem of man's sin. They were only temporary while God was preparing to send his Son into the world (Gal. 3:23-25; 4:4). They were designed to teach mankind obedience and to trust in God's promises. They were there to teach us the concept of a sacrifice, of one life being given to atone for another. We are told by the writer to the Hebrews that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). But the blood of Jesus and the sacrifice of his innocent life on the cross could take away our sin. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he declared: "Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). Rather than offering an animal sacrifice for the sins of the world, Jesus offered himself: "He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26).

Another great lesson in atonement from the Old Testament is found in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, commonly known as one of the Suffering Servant passages. This passage is applied to Jesus in the New Testament (Acts 8:32-35). In Isaiah 53 one who was

a servant of God was innocent just as Jesus was sinless (Isa. 53:7, 9). The suffering of this servant was quite complete, as was the suffering of Jesus (Isa. 53:5, 8, 12). The suffering of this servant was not accidental, but was planned by God, as was the suffering of Jesus (Isa. 53:6, 10; Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:20). The suffering of this servant was vicarious, as was the suffering of Jesus (Isa. 53:4-6, 12; 2 Cor. 5:21). Finally, the suffering of this servant was victorious as, again, was the suffering of Jesus (Isa. 53:11-12; Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:54-57). In the death of Christ we gain victory over sin, death, and the devil (Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:14-15).

Jesus foretold his death in the words: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt. 26:28). Paul said Jesus' death was "a sacrifice of atonement by his blood" (Rom. 3:25). Peter tells Christians that they were ransomed, that is, bought out of slavery to sin, "with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish" (1 Pet. 1:19). It is by Jesus' blood that he "ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9; cf. Eph. 1:7; 5:25; Mk. 10:45; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Jn. 1:7).

The death of Jesus was for all of mankind. Some people incorrectly teach that Jesus only died for those chosen by God to be saved. They say the atonement is limited, but the Bible says that Jesus died for the whole world (Jn. 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:14). He died for "all" (2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; Tit. 2:11), even for sinners (1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 5:6-8) and for those once saved but now lost (2 Pet. 2:1). This is consistent with the character of God who wants all to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). Although Jesus died for all of mankind, not all of mankind will be saved. Atonement is available for everyone, but only some will believe and be saved (1 Tim. 4:10).

The primary means by which the death of Jesus atones for our sins is by substitution. Jesus was sinless. He was perfect, without blemish or spot. He did not deserve to suffer and die. Although he did not deserve death, he took our place and took our sins upon himself. He died for us in our place. He restored us to full fellowship with God, removing the separation between us and God that was caused by sin (Isa. 59:1-2). As Peter explains: "Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). Paul explains the atonement in detail:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life (Rom. 5:6-10).

This is why Jesus Christ is the only hope of salvation for sinful mankind: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). No one can approach the Father except through him (Jn. 14:6).

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but God did not demand the death of some innocent human being against that person's will. God did not tell mankind: "Sacrifice a newborn baby for your sin." Instead, God the Son became a man by means of the incarnation and the virgin birth of Christ. God

himself, in the form of the Son, lived a perfect, sinless life. God himself provided the sacrifice for our sins. God's love is shown by means of the death of Jesus on the cross (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 5:25). This is why Christians put so much emphasis on preaching about the death of Jesus on the cross (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; 15:1-4; Gal. 6:14). As Christians we are thankful for the great gift of God in giving his Son. We are touched by the love of God, so that we are motivated and inspired to live more noble lives (Mk. 8:34-37; 1 Jn. 4:19; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Jn. 12:32; 15:13; Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 2:21; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 12:1-3). As Christians we do not boast of ourselves or think that we are something special. We boast and glorify in Christ because of what he has done for us (Gal. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:5).

The Resurrection of Christ

After Jesus died on the cross, he was buried in a tomb with a large stone covering the entrance. Soldiers were placed as guards outside the tomb. On the morning of the first day of the week, however, Jesus came back to life and left that tomb (Mt. 28:1-15; Mk. 16:1-18; Lk. 24:1-49; Jn. 20:1-29; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20). Do not confuse the resurrection of Jesus with the teaching of reincarnation or the transmigration of souls. We are not born and reborn over and over again in various bodies where we live different lives. We only live and die once (Heb. 9:27). After that we will be raised from the dead in order to stand before God in judgment to learn what our eternal destiny will be (Jn. 5:29).

There are several reasons why Christians believe that Jesus was resurrected or raised back to life. His tomb was empty, and the body had not simply been stolen away (Acts 2:29; Mt. 28:13). Furthermore, there were many witnesses who saw

Jesus alive after the resurrection (Acts 2:32; Jn. 20:27-28; 1 Cor. 15:4-7). The remarkable change that occurred in the lives of many people is best explained by the resurrection of Christ. It is because of the resurrection of Christ that many believed while others gained the courage to preach (Jn. 7:5; Acts 1:14; 4:13-21; 5:42). The remarkable conversion of Saul of Tarsus, later known as the apostle Paul, is best explained by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:8-10; Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-16).

We are to respond in faith to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus (Jn. 20:27; Rom. 10:9-10). We should be baptized in imitation of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord (Rom. 6:1-6; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21). We should be moved to want to worship Christ as a result of his resurrection, since it proves that he is the Lord (Mt. 28:9, 17; Rom. 1:4; Jn. 20:28). We ought to feel great joy, because his resurrection gives us hope (Mt. 28:8; Jn. 20:20; Rom. 6:9). His resurrection is proof from God that we will be raised from the dead at the end of the world (Rom. 8:29; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23, 51-54; Eph. 2:6; Col. 1:18; 2 Tim. 1:10; Rev. 1:5, 17-18). Without his resurrection, we are lost and everything we do in his name is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14-19). It is by the death and the resurrection of Jesus that God has provided salvation for us (Rom. 4:25; 1 Pet. 3:21). If we "know Christ and the power of his resurrection," then we can "attain the resurrection from the dead" and a home in heaven (Phil. 3:10; cf. Jn. 14:19; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:3).

As the early church preached much about the cross of Christ, they also preached much about the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:24, 31; 4:2, 10; 5:30; 13:30-33, 37; 26:22-23). In fact, this is an integral part of the mission of the church, namely, to preach the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Lk.

24:48; Acts 1:8; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39-41; 13:47; 1 Cor. 11:26).

The resurrection was followed by the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven (Lk. 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-11). The ascension meant an end to the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and it was the occasion of his exaltation by God the Father in heaven (Acts 2:32-36; 7:56; Col. 3:1-2; Heb. 1:3; 8:1). After speaking of the death of Jesus on the cross, Paul told of this exaltation of Christ:

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

Because of his perfect life and his sacrificial death, God raised Christ from the grave and gave him all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18). Christ has been made head of the church (Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:16-18; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mk. 12:10). "God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior" (Acts 5:31). This means that Jesus is alive, is in a position of supreme authority, and is able to intercede on our behalf in heaven (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3; 7:25; 8:11, 34; 1 Jn. 2:1). Christ has become nothing less than the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Lk. 1:32-33; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). As we consider Christ's position in heaven at the right hand of God, we ought to obey God and set our minds on spiritual things instead of worldly things (Col. 3:1-2).

Saved by Grace

Because we deserve death and punishment for our sins, salvation must be by the grace of God. Grace is usually defined as "unmerited or undeserved favor." Maybe the greatest story ever told which illustrates grace is the story of the wayward son (Lk. 15:11-32). This son had taken his inheritance and left home. He wasted the money in sinful living. When he was out of money and hungry, he decided to go home and possibly get a job as a servant for his father. He did not deserve to be treated well by his father, but the father welcomed him back home and treated him as his son once again.

It is impossible for us to earn or merit our salvation. We can not pay for our sins; we can not put God in a position where he is in debt to us. We can work for God and do good deeds, but we are obligated to be good already, so there is no special merit in this. Even if we have been good, we are like the servant in one of the parables of Jesus: "We have done only what we ought to have done" (Lk. 17:10). This is what the Bible means when it says that we can not be saved by works (Gal. 2:16). If salvation were by works, it would be owed to us, and it could no longer be a gift by the grace of God (Rom. 4:1-8). As Paul said: "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:5-6; cf. 2 Tim. 1:9).

In order to be saved we must be humble. If we could save ourselves by our own effort in some manner, we would not be humble, but proud. We would brag and boast about what we did in order to be saved. This is why we can only be saved by grace, so that boasting will be eliminated (Rom. 3:27; Eph. 2:8-9). The apostle Paul is a good example of someone who had reason to boast of human abilities and accomplishments (2

Cor. 11:1-12:13). But Paul said: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). What did Paul brag about? He bragged about the love of God shown in Christ Jesus: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14). "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31; cf. 2 Cor. 10:17).

Salvation comes from God as a free gift, since it is by grace. Paul said we are "justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23; cf. 2 Cor. 9:14-15; Rev. 22:17). If salvation is free and if it is a gift, does that mean we need to do nothing in order to be saved? Of course this is not true, and throughout the rest of this book I will be sharing with you what you must do. But for the moment let us see why we have to do something for salvation even though it is a free gift of God's grace.

Although salvation is a gift, it is necessary for us to receive it and make it effective in our lives. We are saved by grace, but grace comes "through faith" (Eph. 2:8). As we shall see in a few pages, we must also repent and obey God if we want to be saved. What actually saves us? Our faith? Or God's grace? Our obedience? Or God's grace? A simple illustration can explain this seeming contradiction. Suppose it is noon and you are with two friends in a room with a window. You ask your two friends why there is light in the room. One friend says: "Because there is a window." The other friend says: "There is light in the room, because the sun is shining outside." Which friend is correct? They both are. The sun is the actual source of the light, but the window is a necessary means by which the light of the sun can get into the room. The sun causes the light, but the light comes "through" the window.

Our salvation is the same way. Just as the sun causes the light, what actually saves us is God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the blood of Jesus, and God's grace. But God will not force salvation on anyone. We must provide the necessary ingredient "through" which the grace of God comes into our lives to save us. What is the window "through" which God's salvation reaches our soul? It is "faith" (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 5:1-2). It is, as we shall see, repentance. It is obedience. It is also baptism, which we shall study in more detail shortly. We do not earn or merit anything when we are baptized. It is merely the means "by" which or "through" which God saves us. As Paul wrote: "He saves us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth [baptism] and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5; cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Salvation by grace is not something meant to stop effort on our part to be good and to live holy lives. We should not take God's grace for granted. We must not assume that we can sin all we want, and God will forgive us automatically (Rom. 6:1-2; 2 Pet. 2:17-22; Jude 4). We conclude this section on grace with Paul's classic statement of the doctrine: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Faith

Since we are saved "through faith" (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 1:16), it is important to understand this very important concept. Jesus said: "You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he" (Jn. 8:24; cf. Acts 15:9). We must believe that God exists (Heb. 11:6). We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (1 Jn. 5:1; Rom. 10:9-10). We are promised that if we believe in

Jesus, we will not perish but will have eternal life (Jn. 3:16, 18, 36; 6:35; 11:26; 20:30-31; Acts 10:43; 16:31). We are justified by faith (Rom. 3:24, 28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:24). Since faith is so crucial to salvation, what is it?

Faith, or belief, begins with knowledge. It begins by one giving mental assent to certain truths. Paul asked:

How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?...So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:14-17).

So faith begins by hearing about God and Jesus Christ and agreeing to certain truths concerning them. But the kind of faith that saves is far more than this. This is only the starting point. For example, I may believe that a certain woman is a medical doctor, that she has been trained, and that her diagnosis of my illness is correct. I may believe that the medicine she has prescribed will cure my illness. All of that belief is in vain, however, if I do not trust the doctor enough to take the medicine. Likewise, a faith that merely believes that God exists, but which never trusts and obeys God is not much faith at all. As James said: "Even the demons believe—and shudder" (Jas. 2:19). Demons believe that God exists. They are even afraid of God's power and they tremble in fear, but they do not obey God and they are not saved.

The kind of faith that saves is faith that includes trust. Saving faith is making a commitment and acting upon what you believe is true. Notice how this is modeled by many great heroes of the Bible (Heb. 11:1-38). If our faith is limited to mental assent, then it is dead faith and will not save us (Jas.

2:14-26). Our faith must be active and working (Gal. 5:6). Some people will tell you that all you have to do to become a Christian is sign a short statement in a book that you believe in Jesus as the Son of God. But believing in Jesus or having faith in him means much more than that. It means that you are changing your allegiance, your priorities, and the direction of your life. You must live by faith by following Jesus each day and obeying him. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath" (Jn. 3:36).

Repentance

Repentance was a key part of Jesus' preaching about the kingdom of God (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; Mk. 1:15; 6:12). It was a frequent part of the preaching of the early church (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 26:20). Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he said that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (Lk. 24:47). Because sin is universal, repentance needs to be universal. Paul said that God "commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Repentance is important because it is an essential part of what we must do in order to be saved (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18). That is why God wants everyone to repent, and he patiently gives us many opportunities to do so (2 Pet. 3:9). When one sinner repents, it brings joy to heaven (Lk. 15:7, 10).

What is repentance? The Greek word for "repentance" means "a change of mind, remorse, turning about, conversion, the beginning of a new religious and moral life" (*BAGD*, 512). Repentance includes sorrow for our sin. Paul said: "Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret" (2 Cor. 7:10), but many people get confused at this point. There are different kinds of sorrow. A lot of people are

sorry they got caught in sin. Some people are sorry that they are being punished for their sin. If our sorrow goes no further than this, we have not repented. Repentance means that we are sorry enough that we have a change of attitude. It means that we are sorry enough that we make a commitment to try to do better (Mt. 21:28-31). We change the direction of our life. Notice how frequently in the Bible people are encouraged to act in such a way that it can be known by others that they have repented (Mt. 3:8; Lk. 3:8; Acts 26:20). Repentance is easy to define, but it is not easy to do. It is the point where we quit living for self and start obeying God.

Obedience

If a boy tells his father that he loves the father, but then he disobeys the father, his actions are inconsistent with his claim of love (Mt. 21:28-31). Obedience to Christ and God is not optional. In the final analysis, obedience is essential if we are going to love God or Christ. There is no other way to show that you love God than by obedience: "For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments" (1 Jn. 5:3; cf. 1 Jn. 2:5; 2 Jn. 6). Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15; cf. Jn. 15:10). We purify our souls by obedience to the truth (1 Pet. 1:22). Salvation is for those who are obedient (Heb. 5:9; Acts 10:34-35). God's judgment will be upon those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Simply saying that you believe and claiming that you follow the Lord is not enough. Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt. 7:21). If you think obedience to God is an overly difficult task, though, do not get discouraged. Obedience is absolutely

essential to our salvation, but it is not an insurmountable problem for the true believer who loves the Lord. John tells us that God's "commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3). When you realize what Christ has done for you in coming to the world and dying on the cross, you will *want* to obey him, and you can do so with joy.

Free Will

Salvation is a free gift by the grace of God, but it is conditional. The gospel is preached, but people must believe. Forgiveness is freely offered, but we must repent. God is merciful, but we must be obedient. Salvation has been paid for by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, but it is only effective in the lives of those who surrender to the will of God. Throughout the Bible two options are given to people, namely, the way of life and the way of death (Deut. 30:15; Acts 2:40). We are given the choice of which path to follow. We can follow Jesus or we can reject him (Jn. 14:6; Mt. 11:28-30). God gives us numerous incentives to do what is right. In contrast he makes a sinful life empty in order to motivate us to repent, but God does not force us to do good or evil.

The fact that we are commanded to believe, repent, and obey implies that we have a free will. Some people wrongly teach that mankind has no free will and that all people are predestined either to obey God or to live in sinful rebellion. Some people mistakenly teach that God has predestined every person either to be saved or to be lost and that we have no choice in deciding our destiny. But if God is going to hold us responsible for our sins, it must be because we have freely chosen to disobey him. The Bible teaches that we can choose between right and wrong (Jas. 4:17; Jn. 7:17; Acts 13:46). God calls us to a life of obedience resulting in salvation (1

Thess. 2:12; 1 Tim. 6:12; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 2:9), and this call or appeal is offered by means of the preaching of the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). We choose to answer his call by repentance, which is a change of mind, will, and heart.

God has not predetermined whether or not we will believe or repent. The Bible does reveal that God made certain choices even before he created the world. God chose that Christ would come into the world to save us from sin (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:18-20). The Bible even speaks about predestination, but this does not involve choosing one person to be saved and another person to be lost. It is not an individual predestination, but a general predestination of certain classes or types of individuals. God predestined that those who believe in Christ and those who live a certain kind of life will be saved (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:4-5, 11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2-3).

Compare the doctrine of predestination with a school teacher. If the teacher decided which students would pass and which ones would fail without giving them a chance to study and take a test, this would be unfair. If, however, the teacher decided that all students who made from 90 to 100 would get an "A" rating, all who got between 80 and 89 would receive a "B" grade, and so forth, this would be fair. God chose ahead of time that all who believe in Christ and who live a holy life will be saved. Those who reject Christ and live a life of sinful rebellion will be lost. God has left the choice of which life we want to live to our free will.

Baptism

Baptism is very important because it is the point at which one is initiated into the church. "Baptism" comes from the Greek word *baptisma* and the verb "baptize" comes from *baptidzō*. Baptism should be performed by submerging or

immersing a person completely under water. The Greek word for "baptize" means "dip, immerse, baptize" (*BAGD*, 131). These Greek words do not mean "sprinkle" or "pour." Even without knowing the meaning of the Greek words, you can know that baptism should be performed by submerging or dipping a person in water. Baptism symbolizes that a person is dying to the old way of life by repenting of sin. As you are buried in the water in baptism, that old life is left behind. As you come up out of the water of baptism, you are raised to a new way of life. You should now follow Christ as a Christian and live in godliness and holiness (Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 2:12).

We know that baptism was performed by immersion in water in the first century, because people went to certain locations where there was a plentiful supply of water (Jn. 3:23; Mk. 1:4-5; Acts 8:36). If baptism were by sprinkling, then the one who administered baptism could have carried a bag of water with him. It would not be necessary to take the candidate for baptism to a place where there was a plentiful supply of water. Some people ask: "What difference does a little water make?" The point is not the amount of water. The point is that we should obey God who commanded us to be immersed. Furthermore, immersion is consistent with the symbolism that we are dying to our old sinful way of life, being buried, and being raised to live a new life.

Who should be baptized? Baptism is for those who believe and have repented (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38). Baptism is for those who are making a choice to become a Christian and to follow Jesus. Babies are not old enough to understand these things. Baptizing a baby, as many churches erroneously do, may be a sentimental ceremony which human tradition has created, but it is not commanded by Jesus or the apostles. A little baby does not need to be baptized. A little baby has no sin and is therefore innocent before God (Mt. 18:2-4; 19:13-

15; Rom. 9:11; 1 Cor. 14:20; Deut. 1:39). Little babies that die will go to heaven.

Some people think Ephesians 2:3 and Psalms 51:5 prove that children are sinful by birth and must be baptized to get rid of the guilt of original sin inherited from Adam. But when Paul wrote that the Ephesian Christians were once "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), he was not speaking of when they were children or infants. "Children of" or "sons of" simply means that someone possesses a certain quality (Mk. 3:17; Jn. 12:36; Acts 4:36; 1 Thess. 5:5; Eph. 2:2; 5:6, 8). Paul was speaking of the Ephesian Christians after they were adults. They followed sin, thus, they were under the wrath of God. The phrase "by nature" does not mean "by birth" (Gal. 2:15; Rom. 11:21, 24), but an acquired condition which has become natural or second nature (1 Cor. 11:14; Rom. 2:14). The Ephesians had adopted a sinful lifestyle. Living an evil life had become natural to them, but this was something they chose by their own free will. It was not a depraved condition with which they were born. Furthermore, Psalm 51:5 only teaches that David was very sensitive to sin from an early age as he came into a sinful world (cf. Isa. 48:8; 1 Sam. 20:30).

One of the primary reasons adults are baptized is to allow them to receive forgiveness of their sins. A little baby has no need for this. The act of baptism itself has no ability to save. It is the spirit of trust and obedience in the heart of the one being baptized that matters (1 Pet. 3:21). Baptizing a little baby, who has no idea of what is happening, is useless. It will only cause confusion later on when he or she grows up. So baptism is for those old enough to believe, to confess their faith in Christ, to repent of sin, and to be able to make a decision to follow Christ (Acts 8:12, 36; 16:33; 18:8).

Why should a person be baptized? We should be baptized to obey God and Christ (Mt. 28:18-19), to receive forgiveness

for our sins (Acts 2:38), to have our sins washed away (Acts 22:16; Heb. 10:22), to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:28; 5:32; Rom. 8:15; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13-14), to be saved (Mk. 16:15-16; 1 Pet. 3:21), to be united with Christ (Rom. 6:3-6), to put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27), to become a member of the church or the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Acts 2:41, 47), to become holy (Eph. 5:25-27), and to be born again and renewed by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:5; Tit. 3:5).

The act of baptism itself, apart from faith and repentance, does not save us. External actions alone can not cleanse a person's soul or spirit (1 Pet. 3:21; Jn. 3:3-8). The reason baptism is effective is that we are putting our faith into action, we are trusting in God, we are calling on his name (Acts 22:16; Rom. 10:13), and we are appealing to God for a clear conscience (1 Pet. 3:21). On God's part baptism is effective because he grants us the benefits of the blood sacrifice of Jesus at this point (Rom. 6:3-6). We receive the hope of a resurrection to life based on the resurrection of Jesus at the point of baptism (1 Pet. 3:21). Throughout history baptism has been recognized by faithful Christians as the line of demarcation which separates Christians from non-Christians, members of the church from non-members, and the saved from the lost.

Before you are baptized, you may have a measure of faith in Christ and be a follower of him to a certain extent, but you have not been united with him (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:27). Baptism is like a wedding ceremony. It is where you confess your faith in Christ and pledge to be loyal to him (1 Tim. 6:12-13; 1 Jn. 4:2-3, 15; Mt. 10:32-33; Lk. 12:8-9; Rom. 10:9-10). Before baptism you are still outside Christ, and there is no hope outside of him or apart from him (Eph. 2:12). In Christ, however, you have "every spiritual blessing" (Eph. 1:3), salvation (2 Tim. 2:10), and forgiveness of sins (Eph.

1:7; Col. 1:14). Baptism is the point where God transfers you from being outside of Christ to inside Christ. It is the point where you get "into" Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27).

Baptism is only for those who believe in Christ (Mk. 16:16), who have repented of their sins (Acts 2:38), and who are making their pledge to live as a Christian (1 Pet. 3:21). If you believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, then you should put him on in baptism in order to become a Christian and a member of his church. How do you do that? You should find a church or a preacher that practices baptism by immersion and ask to be baptized. If you are asked to start agreeing with some creed other than the Bible, leave and seek another church. If a preacher tries to tell you that baptism is just a symbolic ceremony and that it has nothing to do with your salvation, do not believe him. Restudy your Bible and believe it (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). If you can not find anyone who will baptize you according to the truth, you may have to ask a friend or relative to do it for you.

The Bible does not tell us exactly how to perform baptism or what words to say, but the following approach would be appropriate, reverent, and pleasing to God. You might begin by saying a prayer, confessing to God that you are a sinner, asking God to accept you as a Christian, confessing that you believe in Jesus, and pledging to follow the truth for the rest of your life. You and the person who is to baptize you can walk into the water of a river, a swimming pool, or a small lake. If no body of water like this is available, you can fill a large tub with water and use it. The person administering the baptism can say some words similar to these: "Because you have confessed that you believe Jesus is the Son of God, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19; Acts 2:38). The one performing the baptism can then lean you forward, backward, or push you

straight down, until your whole body is submerged in water momentarily. When you come out of the water, it would be a very appropriate time to pray again to God. You might thank God for sending Jesus as your savior, thank him for taking away your sins, and ask him to help you grow and mature as a Christian.

Once you have been baptized, you are a newborn child of God (1 Pet. 2:2). The Holy Spirit has come into your heart to sanctify you, that is, to make you holy (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20). You are now a member of the church for which Jesus died (Mt. 16:18; Acts 20:28). Your name has been enrolled in the book of life, that is, the reservation book for a home in heaven (Rev. 20:15). Your sins have been washed away (Acts 22:16). This does not mean that you will never make a mistake again (Rom. 7:15-25). Temptation will still come your way. But now that you are a Christian, you do not need to be baptized again and again every time you sin. When you sin you should repent and pray to God that he will forgive you of that sin (1 Jn. 1:6-10). Also, you need to find a good, Bible believing church, so that you can worship with other Christians and be encouraged by them. Since you are a Christian, you should act like a Christian, which is the topic of the next few sections.

The Christian Life

Once you become a Christian, you must continue to live a life pleasing to the Lord. If you turn away from Christ and again start living an ungodly life, you can lose your salvation. Some people erroneously teach that once you are saved, you are always saved no matter what you do in the future. This teaching is contrary to what is written in the Bible, however (1 Cor. 9:27; 10:5-12; Gal. 5:1-4; 1 Tim. 4:1, 16; 2 Tim.

4:10; Heb. 3:12; 6:4-8; Jas. 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Rev. 2:4-5; Lk. 8:11-15; Jn. 15:1-14). If we could not lose our salvation once we were saved, there would be less motivation to live a godly life. The grace of God did not appear only to save us, but also to change our lives for the better. As Paul wrote: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly" (Tit. 2:11-12).

So once you are a Christian, how should you live? Very often in the first century the Christians themselves were said to belong to "the way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The word "way" simply means a "road, highway," but metaphorically it means "way of life, way of acting, conduct" (*BAGD*, 553-55). Jesus said that he was "the way" (Jn. 14:6), that is, the means by which we can get to heaven. Imitating Jesus in our lives is how we follow "the way." Very often in early Christian teaching, two ways were described. There is a way in which we ought to live and a way in which we ought not to live. There is the right way and the wrong way, the way of virtue and the way of vice, the way that leads to life and the way that leads to death, the way of the Spirit and the way of the flesh. The Christian life is the "way of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:21; cf. Mt. 7:13-14; Lk. 13:23-24).

If the Christian life is a "way" like a "highway" or a "road," then living the Christian life is like "walking" on that road, and the Bible frequently uses the term "walk" to describe the Christian life (*BAGD*, 649). The apostle John summarized it well: "By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, 'I abide in him,' ought to walk just as he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6). On the negative side we should not walk after the flesh, in sin, or in darkness (Rom. 8:4; Eph. 2:1-2; 4:17; Col. 3:5-7; 2 Thess. 3:6, 11; 1 Jn. 1:6; 2:11). On the

positive side we should walk according to the Spirit, in the light, or in the truth (Rom. 8:4; 2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:10; 4:1; 5:2, 8, 15; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; 1 Jn. 1:7; 2 Jn. 4, 6; 3 Jn. 3, 4).

A similar Greek term is the word for one's "way of life, conduct, behavior" (*BAGD*, 61). Christians are to turn away from their former sinful lives (Eph. 4:22) and live a godly life in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 4:12; Jas. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:15; 2:12; 3:1-2, 16; 2 Pet. 3:11). Paul tells the church at Ephesus "to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts" (Eph. 4:22; cf. Col. 3:5-9). Instead, "clothe yourselves with the new self" of "righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24; cf. Col. 3:10). It is clear that there is a definite lifestyle that you must pursue as a Christian.

How do we define the Christian way of life? The standard is not a set of rules like the ten commandments of the Old Testament. Rules are meant to point us to a higher authority which gives rules validity. While there are many specifics on what we should and should not do as a Christian, the actual standard is God himself. The reason some behavior is good is that it is consistent with the way God acts. The reason other behavior is bad is that God would not act that way. Paul said our "new self" as a Christian should be "according to the likeness of God" or "according to the image of its creator" (Eph. 4:24; Col. 1:10). He urges us to "be imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1). Jesus also said that God is the standard for our lives: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Peter declared: "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Christ is also a perfect example for us (Phil. 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:21-24; 1 Cor. 11:1). Since God himself is the standard, our goal

in trying to imitate him is a very high one. Even though we will never do this perfectly, we will live better by trying to be as perfect and holy as God. We should be strongly encouraged by the example of God to make moral and spiritual progress in holiness and, because perfection by human effort is impossible, to depend more and more upon the Lord's grace and sustaining love.

One interesting Greek word in the New Testament is usually translated "worthy." It means "corresponding" or "comparable" (*BAGD*, 78). In several verses in the New Testament we are urged to live a life "worthy" of something else. This means that our lives ought to correspond to, be comparable to, or equal to that something else. We are to live "worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27), "worthy of God" (1 Thess. 2:12), and "worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him" (Col. 1:10). We are to live lives "worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). What is our calling? "God did not call us to impurity but in holiness" (1 Thess. 4:7; cf. 1 Tim. 4:9; Eph. 1:4). He has called us "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). God calls us "children of God" (1 Jn. 3:1). God has called us "to be saints" (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2). Saints are not a few very good people whom the Pope has canonized. Every Christian is a saint. The word "saint" means "holy one," and we are sanctified, that is, made holy, at baptism (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27). Since God calls us to be saints, we ought to act like saints.

The heart of the Christian life is love (1 Cor. 13:1-3, 13). Paul wrote: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8). "For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14; cf. Jas. 2:8; Mt. 22:36-40). Paul gives us a detailed description of how a loving person acts (1 Cor. 13:4-

7). Christ himself is the standard for how we ought to love (Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Jn. 3:23). We are to love "just as" he loved (Jn. 13:34; 15:9-12). One reason love is so important in the Christian life is that we act outwardly based on what we are inwardly (Mt. 12:33-35; 15:18-19; 23:25-26; Lk. 6:43-44). To be truly good, we must change our heart and our attitudes (Rom. 12:1-2; Psa. 51:10; 119:36; 2 Cor. 10:5; Eph. 4:22-23). Our inward person must become pure and loving, so that our outward actions will be good. In living the Christian life we need to avoid both outward sinful deeds and the inward sins of an evil heart.

Many other positive qualities or virtues are a part of the Christian life such as humility, unselfishness, patience, doing good to others, devotion to God, compassion, and a forgiving attitude (Eph. 4:32). Compile a list of good qualities which you should strive to attain in your life from the following passages: Mt. 5:3-9; Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Tim. 6:11; Jas. 3:13, 17-18; 2 Pet. 1:5-7. When you finish your list of good qualities, contrast it with vices or bad qualities you ought to avoid based on the following passages: Rom. 1:29-31; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-11; 2 Tim. 3:2-5; Jas. 3:14-16; 1 Pet. 2:1-2.

The best way to learn about the Christian life is to read large sections of the New Testament which address this topic. Many of these compose roughly the second half of a book of the New Testament. The first half is teaching or doctrine which explains the religious basis for why we ought to live a certain way. The second half tells how our Christian faith is to be acted out in our lives (Tit. 2:1). Study the following sections of scripture on how to live the Christian life. The Bible teaches about family life, business, your relationship to government, personal integrity, sexual morals, and many more things (Mt. 5:1-7:28; 18:1-35; Rom. 12:1-14; Eph. 4:17-6:20;

Col. 3:1-4:6; 1 Thess. 4:1-12; Tit. 2:1-11; Heb. 12:1-13:19; Jas. 1:2-5:20; 1 Pet. 2:11-5:11). As a Christian train yourself "in godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7). "Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11).

The Church

The Greek word for "church" means "assembly, gathering, meeting, congregation, or the church" (*BAGD*, 240-41). When you think of the church, do not confuse it with the building. A church may own a building and other property, but the church consists of people who have been saved by Jesus. When you think of the church, do not confuse it with church organization, hierarchy, bishops, or denominational structure. Again, the church refers to the people who have been saved, not to an organization or institution. Even before the New Testament was written, the Jews had translated the Old Testament scriptures into Greek about two centuries before Christ was born. They used the term "church" quite often in the Greek Old Testament, and there it primarily referred to the people of God, Israel. Likewise, in the New Testament the church is the people of God.

The term "church" can refer to the church universal which consists of all Christians in the world. This is what Jesus meant when he said: "I will build my church" (Mt. 16:18). Or "church" can refer to a congregation in one location such as the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2). "Church" can also be used for Christians who assemble in worship (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:19). The church itself is called by many descriptive terms in the Bible. No single name is given in the New Testament for what the church ought to be called. The name of a congregation might help us in locating it by inclusion of the name of a city, a street, or some other locale. This method is used in the New

Testament when it refers to "the church in Jerusalem" or other cities (Acts 8:1; 11:22; cf. Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1), or "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2; cf. Gal. 1:22; 1 Thess. 2:14; 1 Cor. 16:1, 19; Rev. 1:4). The location is even made very specific as in "the church" that meets in someone's house (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phile. 2).

Another principle seems evident in New Testament designations for the church in that they tend to give glory to God or Christ, not some human being like Peter, Paul, Mary or John (1 Cor. 1:10-17). Thus the church is known as the "household of God" (1 Tim. 3:15), the "church of God" or "God's church" (1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:5; Acts 20:28), the "church of the living God" (1 Tim. 3:15), the "church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28 in some manuscripts), the "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), or "the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 1:1). Rather than using a name which highlights some distinctive doctrine or the name of a human, a better practice would be to use names which give glory and praise to God and Christ. After all, the church does belong to them.

The nature of the church is illustrated in the many metaphors which are used to describe it. The church is compared to a building or a house (1 Cor. 3:9; Heb. 3:6; 1 Tim. 3:15). The church is "God's temple," because God dwells in us individually and collectively (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20). This temple or building is not made from brick and stone, but from human beings who are "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:5). The church is the "body of Christ," and Christ is the "head" of the body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4, 15-16; Col. 1:18, 24). To change the metaphor slightly, the church is thought of as a body in that each of us have different talents and we are

mutually dependent on one another (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:14-26). The body metaphor highlights our fellowship together as do the family metaphors for the church (Mt. 12:49-50; Eph. 2:19; 2 Cor. 6:18; 1 Tim. 5:1-2). We should share in joy and sorrow with fellow Christians (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2, 10). The church is a "fellowship" in many ways (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 3:9; Phil. 3:10; 1 Jn. 1:3, 6-7). The church is the bride of Christ, which means we are to be pure so that one day we will go to live with Christ in heaven (Eph. 5:22-32; 2 Cor. 11:2). The apostle Peter describes the church beautifully using primarily Old Testament imagery (1 Pet. 2:9-10):

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

The organization of the church is very simple. Christ is in charge. This is evident from various metaphors used to describe his relationship to the church. He is the "chief shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4), the "head" (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4, 15-16; Col. 1:18, 24), the "cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20), or the "foundation" (1 Cor. 3:11). Local congregations of the church in New Testament days were overseen by elders who were also known as bishops, pastors, shepherds, or overseers (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Phil. 1:1; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:17). The elders took care of the congregation where they were members. There was no elder

or bishop who ruled over several congregations. Congregations were all bound to obey Christ and the apostles, but no congregation ruled another congregation. Elders were assisted in their work by some who were appointed as deacons or servants of the church (1 Tim. 3:8-13; Phil. 1:1). Also, Christ wanted the church to be unified. Unity is a goal that is desirable because it brings efficiency to our work and honor to the name of our Lord (Jn. 13:34; 17:20-21; Rom. 12:16; 15:5; 1 Cor. 1:10; 3:3; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 2:2).

How do you become a member of the church? If you are a baptized believer, you became a member of the church when you were baptized "into" Christ. Since the church is the "body of Christ," then you are in the church because you are in Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3). You should, though, affiliate yourself with a congregation of faithful believers. You need the mutual support and encouragement of other Christians (Heb. 3:13; 10:24-25). It is difficult to live the Christian life as a solitary person. That is one reason why Jesus came not only to save individuals, but also to build the church.

Some errors related to the doctrine of the church should be noted. Although the apostle Peter was very instrumental in helping to get the church established after the resurrection of Jesus, he was never given earthly rulership over the church. Peter preached the gospel and converted people (Acts 2:14-47; 10:1-48). He also wrote two epistles of the New Testament and acted as a pastor for many first century believers (1 Pet. 5:1; Jn. 21:15-17). However, any rights and privileges given to him (Mt. 16:17-19) were also given to the other apostles (Mt. 18:1, 18; Jn. 20:23). Peter and all of the apostles were a part of the foundation of the church in the sense that they were the first preachers and they were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 12:28; Rev. 21:14), but the church is built on Jesus Christ first and

foremost (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8). Paul wrote: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Nothing is written in the New Testament about Peter ruling over the whole church as Pope and nothing is written about successors of Peter in any such position. Peter himself refused worship when he was alive (Acts 10:25-26) and on occasion was corrected by others for his errors (Gal. 2:11-14). He had no authority to settle disputes by himself (Acts 15:1-30). Therefore, the veneration, exaltation, and power given to Peter and his supposed successors as Popes in Rome by Roman Catholics are an insult to the position Christ ought to hold in the church.

The church is composed of a priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Every Christian can approach the throne of God the Father in prayer and worship (Heb. 10:19-22; Rom. 5:1-2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12; 1 Jn. 2:1-2) through the mediation of Jesus Christ, our high priest (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-5:10; 7:1-10:39). We do not have to go through a human mediator or priest in order to receive forgiveness and salvation from God. It is not necessary for one to go to a priest to confess sin. Confession of sin can be made to any Christian and, more importantly, confession of sin can be made to God in prayer (Jas. 5:16; 1 Jn. 1:9). Moreover, no human, including a Roman Catholic priest, has the power or right to absolve or forgive anyone of all sin. No one stands in the position of God with the power of salvation and damnation in his or her hands. As humans we have the power to teach the truth or to withhold the truth, which can affect someone's salvation (Acts 13:38-39; Mt. 18:5-6, 18; 23:13; Lk. 11:52), but God is the final judge who forgives or condemns.

Another error which many religious people practice is the veneration and adoration of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary was a good Jewish woman who was chosen from "among

women" to be the mother of Jesus Christ (Lk. 1:39-43), but the Bible says very little about Mary's life. At the death of Jesus she was committed to the care of John the apostle (Jn. 19:25-27). She was a believer in Jesus as were the brothers of Jesus (Acts 1:14). No one ever prayed to her in the Bible. She had no miraculous powers. She did not remain a virgin after Jesus was born (Mt. 1:24-25; 13:54-56; Mk. 6:3; Lk. 2:7). She was a good example of one who was humbly submissive to God and of one who believed in Jesus (Lk. 1:38), but she was not divine. She is neither our savior nor our mediator, and we should not pray to her. The position given to Mary by Roman Catholics usurps the place Jesus Christ ought to hold in our devotion and is an insult to his lordship (Col. 1:15-20; Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Jn. 2:1-2).

Service and Evangelism

Since the church is the body of Christ, the work of the church is to carry on the mission of Christ in the world. As a nation of priests we work together to serve God (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet.2:5, 9). While some are appointed to special tasks, such as being elders, deacons, or teachers, all Christians are to be servants or ministers in the Lord's work (Eph. 4:11-13; Mt. 20:26-28; 25:44-45; Rom. 16:1-2). Our work is to serve both God and man. Our service to God in worship will be discussed in the next section.

Let us note the twofold mission of the church to the church itself and the world. First, the church should serve its own members, building them up, helping them to grow spiritually, and helping them to stay saved (Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:28). Some within the church are teachers or preachers who help others to grow spiritually by teaching them more of the truth (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:10-4:5). Christians

should help with the physical needs of other Christians (Acts 11:29; Gal. 6:10; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15; 1 Jn. 3:17-18). In serving one another we are following the example of Jesus (Mt. 20:28; Phil. 2:7-8). Most Christians enjoy fellowship with one another and form close friendships within the church. As a family the church sometimes has to discipline its own members in hopes of bringing the wayward one to repentance and to keep the sin from spreading any further (1 Tim. 1:20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Mt. 18:15-17; 2 Jn. 10-11; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; Tit. 3:10-11).

Second, the mission of the church is directed toward the world. Christians live in the world but should not live like the world (Jn. 8:23; 15:19; 17:15-18), just as a boat in the water remains afloat as long as it does not take on water. Christians are not to partake of the sins of the world (2 Cor. 6:14-17). Our lives should be a shining light to the world, exemplifying the right way to live (Mt. 5:13-16; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:15-16; Phil. 2:15). Christians are God's army in this world in the fight against evil and sin (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-17). We do not use violence or sinful means. Instead, we use persuasion, a good example, and a proclamation of the truth in order to evangelize the world (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 9:16). As Paul said so eloquently: "God...has given us the ministry of reconciliation....So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

It is quite popular for non-Christians to make light of the church's failures. Since the church is composed of fallible human beings who make mistakes, the church itself is not perfect. Christians know that they are not perfect, but they also know that Jesus Christ is perfect. He is the one to whom people should look when judging Christianity. Even when one takes into consideration the many mistakes that Christians

make, a fair evaluation of the evidence will show that the church has done much more good than harm throughout time. Much of the harm attributed to the church occurred in the name of Christ, but was done by a false church or a non-Christian. These people used the name of Christ as a front to try to justify some unholy action. True believers of Christ have done untold and immeasurable amounts of good in the world through prayer, benevolence, supporting family values, teaching, charitable works, and good deeds. The church is made up of the best people in the world. While every Christian and congregation has room for improvement, the church has been like a city on a hill with a beacon of light to guide people to heaven (Mt. 5:14-16).

Worship

The work of the church is not only directed at itself and the world, but also it is directed toward God in worship. What is worship? Worship can be defined broadly as all that we do in serving our God (Rom. 12:1-2). The truth to be learned from this definition is that our whole lives should be lived for God (Col. 3:17). We should not give one or two hours a week in worshipping God and then forget about him and live for ourselves the rest of the week. Everything we do should be done in such a way that we might be pleasing to God and obedient to his will. But this broad, general sense of worship is not the primary focus in this section. A more limited definition of worship is "reverence and praise paid to a being regarded as divine." Worship ascribes worth to God. One Greek word often translated "worship" in the New Testament means "fall down and worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to" (*BAGD*, 716-17; cf. Mt. 2:2, 8, 11; 4:9, 10; Jn. 4:23-24; 1 Cor. 14:25; Rev. 4:10; 5:14).

Worship is praising and honoring God for his great glory. Study the atmosphere that is present in heaven before the throne of God to get a sense of what worship entails (Rev. 4:1-5:14; Isa. 6:1-5; 56:7; Mt. 21:13). But do not think of God as a selfish God who is vain and wants us to praise him all of the time in order to build up his ego (Acts 17:24-25; Psa. 50:10-12). God commands us to worship him, because it is for our benefit. We need worship in order to fulfill our nature as spiritual beings. In worshipping God we encourage others and help ourselves.

Because God is omnipresent, Christian worship can be done anywhere. One does not have to be in a sacred place or a certain building to worship God (Jn. 4:19-24). People can worship in rented buildings, in homes, outdoors in a natural setting, or in a building owned by a congregation (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Acts 2:46; 5:42; 16:13; 20:7-8). Christian worship is not determined by outward trappings, but by the internal devotion we feel in our hearts for God. This is why a pure life and a sincere heart are essential corollaries for acceptable worship (Psa. 15:1-5; 24:3-4; Mt. 5:8). God is a spiritual being, so our worship must flow from our hearts. Jesus declared: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:24). If you are a Christian and are unable to find a church nearby which is loyal to the truth, you can worship God in your home with family and friends.

The early church assembled on the first day of the week, Sunday, in order to worship (Acts 20:5-7; 1 Cor 16:1-2). The Jews worshipped on the seventh day of the week, Saturday or the Sabbath, but Christians did not continue that custom. Because Jesus had been raised on the first day of the week, this day became known as the Lord's day and was the day for Christians to assemble in worship (Rev. 1:10; Mt. 28:1; Mk.

16:1-2). Of course, there is nothing wrong with Christians performing most of the functions of worship at any time. It will help your spiritual growth if you spend time alone throughout the week reading your Bible and praying to God (Mt. 6:6). Many Christians enjoy gathering in homes or other locations throughout the week to sing Christian hymns, to pray to God, to study the Bible, and to benefit from good Christian fellowship (Acts 2:46; 5:42). Gather with other Christians as often as you desire, but be sure to develop the habit of assembling with other Christians every Sunday to worship, unless prevented from doing so because of a hindrance such as illness (Heb. 10:25). You need the regular encouragement and support that comes from worship and fellowship with other believers.

Not everything that Christians do during the Sunday assembly is worship in the strict sense of showing reverence to deity. Another purpose of the assembly is to encourage and teach one another (1 Tim. 4:13; 1 Cor. 14:19, 26). Christians sing in worship. Some of the songs should be hymns of praise and worship to God and Christ, but other songs can be songs by which we teach and encourage one another (Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:16; Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15). Bible reading is a common feature of Christian worship from which much benefit can be derived (Rev. 1:3; 1 Tim. 4:13; 1 Thess. 5:27). Teaching, exhortation, and instruction based upon the Bible are other common features of Christian worship and are very important for Christian growth (1 Tim. 4:13-16; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:1-2; 3:10, 16; Acts 20:20-21; Jas. 3:1). The assembly is also a time for fellowship, for being with other Christians, and for sharing together our common devotion (Rom. 12:3-8, 15; 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Jn. 1:3-4).

The church usually has a treasury which is used for benevolent work, to support its leaders, and for a variety of

other needs (Rom. 12:13; 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 9:1-14; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15; Heb. 13:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:3-18; Jas. 1:27). Sunday is a convenient time for Christians to give to the church treasury (1 Cor. 16:2). By doing so we show our unity and fellowship with one another. In fact, the Greek word for "association, communion, fellowship, close relationship" is used in reference to contributing to the church's work which is "generosity, fellow-feeling, participation" as a "sign of fellowship or proof of brotherly unity" (*BAGD*, 438-39; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Rom. 15:26; Heb. 13:16). The Jews had a system of tithing, that is, giving ten percent. Christians have a more flexible system of giving as one has been prospered and as there is a need (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Prayer is an essential form of both public and private worship. Christians believe that God exists, that he hears prayer, that he loves mankind, and that he answers prayer. God does not always give us what we ask for, especially when it is not in our best interest, but we can be certain that God is willing what is best for our spiritual welfare (Rom. 8:28). Every person should develop a habit of praying on a regular basis (1 Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2; Lk. 18:1). Avoid things that will hinder your prayer life, such as trouble in the home (1 Pet. 3:7), an unforgiving spirit (Mt. 6:14-15; Eph. 4:32), insincerity, a lack of penitence (Psa. 66:18; Isa. 1:15), unconfessed sin (1 Pet. 3:12), or a lack of faith in God (Jas. 1:6-8). On the other hand, many things will aid your prayer life, such as a good moral life (Psa. 24:3-4), a spirit of obedience (1 Jn. 3:21-22), a reverent attitude (Mt. 6:9), humility, faith in God (Mt. 21:22; Mk. 11:24), sincerity (Mt. 6:5-6; Psa. 17:1), and a thankful heart (Col. 4:2; Phil. 4:6). Our Lord was a great example of one who prayed (Jn. 17:1-26; Mt. 14:23; 26:36; Lk. 5:16; 6:12; 9:28), and he taught much on prayer (Lk. 11:5-13; 18:1-8), as did others (1 Thess.

5:16-25; 1 Tim. 2:1-8; Jas. 5:13-18). The disciples wanted Jesus to teach them how to pray, and the Lord's Prayer is a perfect model prayer which outlines all of the major items one ought to address in prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one (Mt. 6:9-13; cf. Lk. 11:1-4).

The Lord's supper or the communion is a memorial service honoring Jesus Christ. It was instituted by Jesus when he celebrated his last Passover meal with the disciples (Mt. 26:17-30; Mk. 14:22-24; Lk. 22:14-23; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). He asked his followers: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24-25). The purpose of the Lord's supper is to remind us of the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:24-26). The Lord's Supper should not be made into a feast or a banquet with the purpose of filling our stomachs (1 Cor. 11:34). Its purpose is meditation, self-examination, and worship (1 Cor. 11:27-28). It is a time for fellowship where we can show unity with other believers (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:29-33). The bread and the fruit of the vine are symbolic to remind us of the body and blood of our Lord. Unleavened bread, that is, bread without yeast, should be used, because the leaven is symbolic of sin. Our Lord was sinless as our perfect sacrifice, so unleavened bread reminds us of him as a lamb without blemish (1 Cor. 5:7; Mk. 14:1). This makes the Lord's supper a good time for us to renew our commitment to try to conquer sin in our lives (1 Cor. 11:27-32). The fruit of the vine is the juice of the grape which, by its color and texture, reminds us of the

blood that Jesus shed for our sins. Christians ought to partake of the Lord's supper every first day of the week as an expression of the unity of the church which assembles every Sunday (1 Cor. 10:16-17), as a reminder that Jesus is alive and present because of his resurrection (1 Cor. 11:26), because it is the Lord's day, and in imitation of the practice of the early church (Acts 20:5-7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

The Roman Catholic celebration of the Lord's Supper is called the Mass, and it is linked with the false doctrine of transubstantiation. They believe the bread and the fruit of the vine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus and that he is sacrificed again during this ceremony. By way of contrast the New Testament teaches that the suffering and death of Jesus were a one time event effective for all mankind (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 24-28; 10:10-14; Rom. 6:9). Jesus is not sacrificed over and over again. When Jesus said in reference to the bread: "Take, eat; this is my body," and of the cup: "Drink from it all of you; for this is my blood" (Mt. 26:26-28), he was speaking metaphorically. He obviously did not mean that it was his actual body or his blood, because he was holding the bread and the cup in his hands. This is figurative as were many similar statements by Jesus (Jn. 10:7, 14; 15:5; Mt. 5:13-14). Instead of transubstantiation, Christians believe Jesus is spiritually present when the church gathers in worship (Mt. 18:20). The bread and the cup are symbolic reminders of his presence and of the body and blood he offered for our sins on the cross of Calvary.

The New Testament gives no set order by which worship services must be conducted. Men have been given the role of leadership in the worship assemblies, as they have been in the home and the church in general (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:18; 3:16; 4:7; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:33b-36; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:1-15; 3:1-13; 1 Pet. 3:1-7). Worship should

be done with the right attitude, in an orderly manner, and according to the truth (Jn. 4:24; 1 Cor. 14:40). A worship service similar to the following would be pleasing to God if it were done in a reverent manner. When you assemble with other Christians, you might begin by praying to God. This could be followed by singing and more prayers. Someone could read a chapter of the Bible for all to hear. If one is qualified to teach, instruction from the Bible in the form of a sermon is common practice. The Lord's Supper should be observed at some point and could be accompanied by further prayers and hymns. The assembly is a convenient time to take a collection to be used to help the needy or to fund other work of the church. Announcements of important information could be shared with everyone. For example, one might take note of those who are ill and pray for them. The service could be closed with a prayer or a hymn. Prayer, singing, Bible reading, teaching, the Lord's Supper, and the collection are the traditional forms by which Christians have always conducted their assemblies.

The Future

The Christian view of history is that this world had a beginning, which we call creation (Gen. 1), and it will have a consummation, which will occur at the second coming of Christ. After the second coming of Christ, everyone must stand before God and Christ in judgment. From judgment everyone will be sent either to heaven or hell for all eternity. God is sovereign and works his will in history, and the goal of all things in this world is the complete glorification of Jesus Christ as Lord (Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:16). Life comes from God, and the hope for eternal life rests completely in him (1 Tim. 6:16). Where do you fit into this divine scheme? You

should be very interested in what the future holds for your destiny (Psa. 90:12; Jas. 4:14; Mt. 16:26).

Since we are human beings, we all must face death one day. The Bible does not teach reincarnation or the transmigration of souls in a series of births, lives, and deaths. We will only die once (Heb. 9:27). We are mortal; yet, because we are spiritual beings, a part of us lives on after death (2 Cor. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:13-14). Death is defined from a spiritual standpoint as the point when the soul or the spirit leaves the body (Jas. 2:26). We naturally fear death, but the gospel gives us hope and can help us overcome this fear (Psa. 39:5; Rom. 7:24; Heb. 2:15; 1 Cor. 15:26; Phil. 1:21-23). The Old Testament scriptures do not tell much about life after death. It was left to Jesus and the New Testament scriptures to explain this more fully. Paul said that Jesus Christ "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). And it is through Jesus Christ that the sting of death, sin, can be taken away, giving us victory over death (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

What is the condition of the soul between the point of death and judgment day? This condition is called the intermediate state. Some people think the soul sleeps during this time and is awakened at the second coming of Christ. The Bible does use the term "sleep" to describe one who is dead, but this is merely descriptive of how the body of a dead person appears to those who are alive (1 Thess. 4:13). One is asleep in that one is no longer active in this material world (Rev. 14:13). Other passages of scripture imply that the souls of those who have died are conscious after death (2 Cor. 5:8; Lk. 16:19-31). The souls or spirits of those who have died go to Sheol or Hades. Hades is divided into two portions (Lk. 16:26). The good part is called Paradise, and this is the condition of those who are saved (Lk. 23:39-43; Acts 2:27). The bad part is called torment, and this is the condition of those who are lost

(Lk. 16:23). Our eternal destiny is sealed at the point of death. The scriptures reveal no information about a second chance after death. Likewise, the scriptures say nothing about purgatory or a punishing fire which most Christians must endure in order to be cleansed before going to heaven. If you are a faithful Christian when you die, the atonement of Jesus Christ pays for all of your sins (1 Jn. 1:6-10). The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory wrongly places a limit on God's forgiveness that is available through the blood of Jesus.

The end of this world will occur at the second coming of Jesus Christ. No one knows when the second coming will occur (Mt. 24:44). Jesus himself said that he did not know when it would happen, but only the Father (Mt. 24:36). Beware of those who set dates and make claims that they can read the signs and know when it will occur. God has promised that Jesus will return, and God always keeps his promises. Even though some people are doubters, we should continue in faith. Some will attempt to make God abide by man's timetable, but God will act according to his own will (2 Pet. 3:1-14). Because we do not know when Jesus will return, we should always be ready (Mt. 24:44). The doctrine of the second coming and the end of the world should motivate us to live holy lives. As Peter explained: "Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness?" (2 Pet. 3:11). Because the second coming of Jesus Christ means salvation and a home in heaven for Christians, it is described as our "blessed hope" (Tit. 2:13).

When Jesus returns to this world, there will be a general resurrection of all mankind. Jesus said: "The hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of

condemnation" (Jn. 5:28-29). Those who are dead will be resurrected, and those who are still alive at the second coming of Christ will join them for judgment day, and then enter eternity (1 Thess. 4:13-18). When our spirit or soul is reunited with our body in the resurrection, a transformation occurs. We receive a new resurrection body which will never die (1 Cor. 15:35-57). We do not know the exact nature of this new existence, but we know it will be like Jesus' resurrection body (1 Jn. 3:2).

Immediately after the second coming of Christ and the end of the world, there will be a general judgment of all mankind. We will be judged by God and by Christ (Jn. 5:22, 27; Acts 17:30-31; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 12:23). God will judge us according to what we have done in this life by the standard of his word (Rev. 20:12; Jn. 12:48; Rom. 2:6, 16). There will be a great separation of mankind into those who are saved and those who are lost (Mt. 25:31-46). The saved will be told: "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25:34). The lost will be told: "Depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41). Judgment day is not a fearful event for the believer in Christ, since we will be rewarded on that day rather than condemned (Rom. 8:1; Mk. 9:41; Lk. 6:35).

"Heaven" is the name which Christians use to refer to the state of eternal bliss which God will grant to his children. Heaven is so wonderful and the limitations of human language and thinking are so great that the Bible often uses symbolic, figurative language to describe heaven (Rev. 21:1-22:5). Heaven is a wonderful place because it means we will be with the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:1-3; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). It is like being at a great feast or banquet (Mt. 22:1-14; Rev. 19:9). The apostle John saw this vision of heaven:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more."

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river, is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever (Rev. 21:3-4; 22:1-5).

"Hell" is the word Christians use to describe the state of eternal loss for all those who are not faithful to Jesus Christ. The word "hell" originally referred to a garbage dump outside the city of Jerusalem. It was a place where trash burned continually. It was a place of smoke, fire, filth, stench, and corruption. It is a graphic picture to remind us that we do not want to go to hell. The biblical descriptions of hell are often figurative or metaphorical, as they are with heaven. Hell is a place of darkness, because it means separation from God (Mt. 25:30; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 13). It is a place of smoke and fire (Mt. 13:42; 25:41; Mk. 9:48; Rev. 20:10-15) and pain (Mt. 25:30; Rev. 14:11). Once a person is condemned to hell, there is no way out. The loss is permanent and there is no hope

(Mt. 25:10, 46; Rev. 14:11). It is easy to see why Jesus warned people about hell (Lk. 12:4-5; 13:28; Mt. 5:29-30; 10:28).

Beware of certain doctrines such as premillennialism or dispensationalism. Proponents of these doctrines frequently set dates for the second coming of Christ or the end of the world. They speak of a rapture and a millennial reign of Christ on earth, but there will be no secret rapture when the saints suddenly disappear. Neither will there be a return of Christ to reign on earth for 1,000 years. When Christ returns, everyone will be resurrected and judgment day and eternity will follow rather than an earthly reign of Christ (Jn. 5:28-29; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 1 Cor. 15:23-24).

Premillennialists make two key mistakes in interpreting the Bible. First, they think of the kingdom of God and the reign of Jesus as a materialistic rule in this world. But Jesus' kingdom and kingship are present now as a spiritual reign (Jn. 18:36; Rom. 14:17). Jesus is already King of kings and the kingdom of God already exists (Mt. 3:2; 11:12; 12:26-28; Mk. 9:1; Lk. 1:32-33; 16:16; Acts 2:29-33; 7:56; Eph. 1:20; Col. 1:13; Heb. 2:9; 12:28; Rev. 1:6, 9; 11:15). Second, they take many passages of scripture which have already been fulfilled and claim they are yet to be fulfilled in modern day events in Palestine. Most of the passages to which they direct attention have already been fulfilled either in the return of Israel from Babylonian captivity or in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 (Mt. 24:1-28; Mk. 13:1-23; Lk. 21:5-36). They usually claim the book of Revelation predicts events which have not yet occurred, but almost all of Revelation is already fulfilled. Its main theme is the persecution of the early church by the Roman Empire (Rev. 17:1-2, 15-18), because Christians would not worship idols or the Roman Emperor (Rev. 1:9; 2:10, 13; 6:9-11; 7:9, 13-14;

9:20-21; 12:17; 13:5-6, 15-17; 14:9-13; 16:2, 5-6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2, 20; 20:4).

The Trinity

The term "trinity" is not used in the Bible, but it is often used by Christians to describe their understanding of the doctrine of God. Christians are monotheists, that is, they believe there is only one real God. Some people in the world are polytheists and believe that there are several, even thousands, even millions, of gods. But Christians, along with Jews, believe in only one God (Deut. 6:4; Mk. 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4; Jas. 2:19). We know this one God in three ways, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is a distinction between these three; yet, there is also a unity among them. We have already studied that Jesus Christ is God, that is, deity or divine (Jn. 1:1; 20:28; Phil. 2:6; see pages 6-9 above). Because he is God, he is worthy of our worship (Rev. 5:1-14). Note that the same is true of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Father is God, that is, deity or divine (1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:2; Jn. 6:27). When the term "God" is used in the Bible without any further definition, it very often is used in reference to the Father. God is great in his being and character. The following are only a few of the attributes of God the Father. He is self-dependent (Isa. 40:13-14; Psa. 50:12; Acts 17:25), eternal (Psa. 90:2-4; Deut. 32:40; Jas. 1:17), a spiritual being (Jn. 4:24; Deut. 4:15; Acts 17:29), omnipotent (Isa. 14:27; Psa. 2:4), omniscient (Psa. 147:5), and omnipresent (Jer. 23:23-24; Psa. 139:7-12). God the Father is loving (1 Jn. 4:8; Psa. 118:1-29; Rom. 8:35-39), holy (Isa. 6:3-5; Psa. 99:9; Rev. 15:4), merciful (Deut. 4:31; Psa. 145:8), and righteous or just (Isa. 5:16; Psa. 11:7). God is great, majestic, awesome, and very much worthy of our

worship and devotion (Rev. 4:1-11; Mt. 4:10; Lk. 4:8; Deut. 6:13).

The Holy Spirit is also God, that is, deity, or divine. Notice in Acts 5:3-4 that Ananias lied to the "Holy Spirit" and then he lied to "God" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20). That is because the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit possesses the attributes of God (Rom. 8:2; Jn. 16:13; Heb. 9:14; Psa. 139:7), does work only God can do (Gen. 1:2; Psa. 104:30; Jn. 3:8; 16:8; Rom. 8:11; 2 Pet. 1:21), is made equal with God (Mt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:13), and receives honor and worship due only to God (1 Cor. 3:16). Do not refer to the Holy Spirit as a "thing" or an "it" as if the Holy Spirit were an impersonal force. The Holy Spirit is personal and can be lied to or grieved (Acts 5:3-4; Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit dwells in Christians to sanctify and to strengthen us (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Rom. 8:9-16, 26; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:11, 19-20; 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13; 3:14-16; Tit. 3:5; 1 Jn. 4:13; Jude 19). The Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus Christ and intercedes on our behalf (Rom. 8:26-27).

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then, are all God, all equal with one another, and are united as one (Jn. 10:30; 15:26; Mt. 28:19; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Cor. 12:4-6). Notice how Paul considers them together: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor. 13:14). The doctrine of the trinity excludes the two extremes of an absolute monism and polytheism. Christians do not believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all the same having no distinctions between them. But, on the other hand, Christians do not believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three different Gods. Is there any room between these two extremes for a God who is one yet is also three? As finite creatures working within the limits of human reason, we can not expect

to understand God completely. God is infinite. Comprehending God completely is beyond our ability. An element of mystery remains in the doctrine of the trinity even after the world's greatest scholars have tried to understand it during the past 2,000 years. What we can say is that we know the one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and Miracles

God performed many miracles in Bible days through his servants by the power of the Holy Spirit. The chief purpose of miracles was the confirmation of the word of God (Mt. 9:4-5; 12:28-29; Mk. 2:10-11; 16:17-20; Lk. 5:24; Jn. 21:24-25; Acts 2:32-33; 2 Cor. 12:12). In reference to the great salvation God has offered to mankind, the writer to the Hebrews stated: "It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will" (Heb. 2:3-4). Once God's revelation in Christ had been fully made known, the miracles had fulfilled their chief purpose. During the first century a decline in miraculous events became apparent, and by the second century miracles were no longer being performed.

Modern claims of miracles by religious people, Christian and non-Christian, are weak by comparison with the genuine miracles of the New Testament era. Sometimes a modern claim of a miracle is only a psychosomatic healing. At other times it is simply an unusual event rather than a supernatural one. Other modern claims of miracles can easily be explained as natural occurrences. For example, the modern claim to speak in tongues is not related to the New Testament gift. Speaking in tongues in the New Testament was the speaking of a foreign language one had never studied (Acts 2:6, 8).

Modern tongue speaking is nothing more than infantile babbling which linguists say is not a real language and which psychologists say is explained by personality traits often characteristic of charismatics. Many modern claims to perform miracles are the result of deceit and trickery by unscrupulous con artists. They prey on the naivety of people or on the desperate hopes of crippled or severely ill individuals. Numerous investigations by unbiased scientists have failed to uncover bona fide miracle workers in today's world. At the same time many phonies have been exposed. No person today has the power to work miracles, to heal the sick, to speak in tongues, or to raise the dead.

God did not plan for miracles to continue throughout all the ages. Miracles were to confirm the word and help initiate his scheme of redemption. Once that was done, God did not want people to rely on a crutch in order to believe. He wanted people to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Once the church had the confirmed message and once a permanent, reliable record of this message was written, that is, the New Testament scriptures, God let miracles diminish and cease altogether. This process allowed the church to be whole and mature, acting as an adult walking in faith, rather than a child in need of a miracle for proof. Paul referred to this as the coming of the "complete" or the "perfect" (1 Cor. 13:8-13; cf. Eph. 4:11-16). To ask for miracles today is to return to a childish state (Mt. 12:38-39; 1 Cor. 13:11). Even when miraculous gifts were present in the New Testament church, Paul noted their minor importance and stressed the greater significance of love in our lives (1 Cor. 12:29-13:13). What was to endure throughout the Christian age was faith, hope and love, as Paul explained in this passage: "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13; cf. Mt. 22:36-40).

Sacred Scripture

The documents which make up the Old and New Testament scriptures, the Bible, are considered to be authoritative by Christians. They are the highest court to which one can turn to answer any religious question. The Bible reveals to us the will of God and records how God has acted in history for the salvation of mankind (Psa. 119:105). The authors of scripture were aided by the Holy Spirit in their compositions, so the Bible is not an ordinary book. It is inspired, that is, it is alive with the Holy Spirit and it can lead one to eternal life (Heb. 4:12). The source or origin of scripture is God himself. These writings are not merely the opinions or interpretations of the authors (2 Pet. 1:20-21). As Paul said: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Books other than the Bible may be studied, either to our profit or our loss. However, to study, believe, and obey the Bible means salvation (Jas. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 1:22-25; Jn. 20:30-31).

The Bible is a collection of sixty-six different writings of variant length from over forty authors and written over 1,500 years. The Bible is divided into two major divisions, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament scriptures were written during the Mosaic dispensation or time period. They contain instructions telling the Israelites how to live and worship. They also contain history, poetry, songs of worship, wise sayings, and prophetic proclamations. Christians believe in the Old Testament scriptures as an inspired revelation of the will of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; Jn. 10:35), but we do not follow all of the religious commands found there. These commands were given to the Israelites for

the Mosaic time period (Deut. 5:1-2; Ezek. 20:10-12). Jesus Christ has ushered in a new era (Mt. 5:17; Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:15; Rom. 6:14; 7:4; 10:4). The Old Testament was preparatory for the New Testament, and Christians live under the new covenant (Gal. 3:23-26; Heb. 7:12; 8:1-13; 10:1-10; Col. 2:14). For example, Christians do not offer animal sacrifices, because Christ is our once for all sacrifice.

Even though Christians do not live under the Law of Moses, there are many reasons to study the Old Testament writings. The early church preached from, quoted from, and studied the Old Testament (Acts 2:14-36; 8:31-35; 17:2-3, 11; 18:28; 28:23). Paul affirmed that it was useful and helpful for Christians (1 Cor. 10:11; Rom. 15:4). Many principles have their origin in the Old Testament. Good and bad qualities are exemplified in the lives of Old Testament characters. It is an important historical record. It explains many things in the New Testament, and it bears witness to Jesus Christ. Study the books of the Old Testament to learn great truths about God's character and about how to live a good, moral life. But be careful not to follow Old Testament religious duties which were meant only for the Israelites (Gal. 5:4).

The New Testament writings are essential, because they tell the story of Jesus and the early church. The meaning of God's revelation in Jesus Christ is explained in the New Testament scriptures. The New Testament contains documents which stand in a unique historical position, because they were written by men who were eyewitnesses of the life, miracles, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many New Testament books were written by Jesus' specially chosen apostles (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1). In reading the Bible it is recommended that one begin with the Gospels and then read the rest of the New Testament before reading the Old Testament.

Summary of Bible Books

Old Testament Scriptures

Genesis: A history of the beginning of the world, the human race, and God's early dealings with mankind through the Patriarchal Age. The first five books of the Old Testament are called the Pentateuch.

Exodus: The deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery.

Leviticus: Ceremonial, ritual, and moral laws for Israel.

Numbers: A record of Israel's wilderness wanderings.

Deuteronomy: The law covenant between God and Israel.

Joshua: The conquest and division of the Promised Land by the tribes of Israel.

Judges: The history of Israel before the monarchy.

Ruth: The story of the great-grandmother of King David.

1 Samuel: The lives of Samuel, Saul, and David.

2 Samuel: More of the life of David, Israel's second king.

1 Kings: The lives of Solomon and other kings and part of the life of the prophet Elijah.

2 Kings: Elijah and Elisha and the histories of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah down to the Babylonian captivity.

1 Chronicles: Genealogies and a retelling of David's reign.

2 Chronicles: A retelling of the reign of Solomon and other kings down to the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon.

Ezra: The return of the Israelites from Babylon, the rebuilding of the temple, and the work of Ezra.

Nehemiah: The rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls under the leadership of Nehemiah.

Esther: The salvation of the Jews by Esther during the Persian period.

Job: A dramatic discussion of God's justice when a righteous individual is allowed to suffer.

Psalms: A collection of songs and prayers of the Israelites.

Proverbs: A collection of wise sayings, many by Solomon.

Ecclesiastes: A discussion of the meaning and purpose of life.

Song of Songs: A love poem.

Isaiah: Prophetic oracles about the sovereign kingdom of God and the Messianic hope. This book and those that follow are the prophetic writings.

Jeremiah: Prophetic proclamations, especially about Judah's fall to Babylon.

Lamentations: A lament over the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon.

Ezekiel: A prophetic view from Babylonia of Judah's fall to Babylon and the eventual restoration.

Daniel: Some events during Babylonian captivity and an affirmation of God's control of history.

Hosea: Israel's unfaithfulness and God's love, partially told in the marriage of Hosea to Gomer.

Joel: A call for repentance following a locust plague.

Amos: A call for social justice in Israel.

Obadiah: Edom condemned for rejoicing at the misfortune of Israel.

Jonah: A reluctant prophet preaches to the city of Ninevah.

Micah: A denunciation of injustice and empty ritualism and an explanation of true religion.

Nahum: A declaration of God's sovereignty as seen in his judgment of Ninevah.

Habakkuk: Faith in God's justice challenged by the oppression of the poor and the prosperity of the wicked.

Zephaniah: The judgment of God on the sins of Judah and other nations.

Haggai: An encouragement to the Jews to rebuild the temple.

Zechariah: The rebuilding of the temple and the Messianic hope.

Malachi: An exhortation for sinful Israel to repent.

New Testament Scriptures

Matthew: The first of the four Gospels which tells the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Mark: The shortest of the four Gospels which stresses deeds rather than the teachings of Jesus.

Luke: The Gospel which shows Jesus' universal love of all kinds of people.

John: The last Gospel to be written and designed to bring its readers to faith in Jesus.

Acts: A history of the early church which stresses the work of the apostles Peter and Paul.

Romans: One of Paul's thirteen epistles which outlines God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians: An attempt to correct problems in the church at Corinth.

2 Corinthians: Paul's defense of himself and his apostleship.

Galatians: A defense of justification by faith over against attempts to bind Jewish rites on the church.

Ephesians: An explanation of God's eternal purpose in Christ and the church.

Philippians: The joy of the gospel and Paul's gratitude.

Colossians: An early heresy refuted by the preeminence and adequacy of Christ.

1 Thessalonians: The second coming of Christ, church life, and Paul's ministry.

2 Thessalonians: Exhortation to continue working until Christ returns.

1 Timothy: A letter of encouragement to a young preacher faced with difficulties and false teachers.

2 Timothy: Another letter of encouragement to Timothy shortly before Paul's death.

Titus: Guidance for another young preacher.

Philemon: An attempt to reconcile a recently converted runaway slave and his Christian master.

Hebrews: The superiority of Christ as high priest and the gospel over the Old Testament system.

James: Practical instruction for everyday Christian living.

1 Peter: Holy living in the face of growing persecution.

2 Peter: A problem with false teachers in the church.

1 John: Reassurance for the church faced with the false teaching of Gnosticism.

2 John: The importance of loving the faithful while opposing false teachers.

3 John: A personal letter of thanks.

Jude: A warning against false teachers.

Revelation: A figurative condemnation of the Roman Empire for persecuting the early church and a prophecy of Rome's downfall and of the end of the world.

Conclusion

What is Christianity? After much discussion on a variety of topics, it is hoped that the answer is clear. Christianity is the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the Christ, and the Lord. It is the conviction that the highest revelation of the love and will of God is found in him. To be a Christian means that you "know Christ" and become "like him" until "Christ is formed in you" and "lives" in you (Phil. 3:10; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; cf. Eph. 4:13). A Christian is one who "lives by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). Knowing Christ is so important that everything else in the world is rubbish by comparison (Phil. 1:21; 3:7-9), because Jesus Christ is the only hope of salvation for mankind (Acts 4:12; Jn. 14:6).

The significance of Jesus Christ is summarized well by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-3).

The apostle Paul also wrote a masterful summary of who Jesus is:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church, he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15-20).

The little Greek word *dia* is usually translated by the word "through." It is often used for an agent, that is, someone or something who stands between attainment and non-attainment of an object or a goal. Notice in the following passages how grace, truth, salvation, life, forgiveness, peace, justification, righteousness, victory over death, and reconciliation all come

"through" Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17; 3:17; 10:9; 14:6; Acts 10:43; 13:38; 15:11; Rom. 1:5; 5:1, 2, 9, 17, 18, 19, 21; 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Cor. 3:4; 5:18; Eph. 1:5; 2:18; Phil. 1:11; Col. 1:20; 1 Thess. 5:9; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 4:9).

The significance of Jesus is seen in the many names, titles, and descriptive terms he is given in the Bible, which include Christ (Mt. 16:16), God (Jn. 1:1; 20:28), Son of God (Jn. 3:16; 20:31; Rom. 1:3), Emmanuel (Mt. 1:23), the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29), the light of the world (Jn. 9:5), Savior (Lk. 2:11; Jn. 4:42), the Word (Jn. 1:1, 14), the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 21:6), the good shepherd (Jn. 10:11), the King of the Jews (Mt. 27:37), the Lord (Acts 2:36), the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16), the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8), the Holy One of God (Mk. 1:24), the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20), the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11), the chief shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), and the Beloved Son (Lk. 3:22; 9:35).

It is for these reasons that we plead with the reader to believe in Jesus Christ and to render obedience to his will. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose. On one occasion several people turned away from following Jesus. Jesus turned to the remaining disciples and asked them: "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn. 6:66-69). Why was this book written? To use the words of the apostle John, it "was written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:30-31).

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