

# CHRISTIANITY ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE: BY RON RHODES

## INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY

The more research I do, the stronger my conviction becomes that today's Christianity has been tainted-at least to some degree-by modern culture. The truth of the matter is that America is very religious but biblically ignorant. In this line of thinking, people can look forward to a destiny in heaven as long as their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds by the time they die. Only years later did I realize that the mere act of attending church does not make a person a Christian.

Approximately 25 percent of people claiming to be born again rely on means other than God's grace to get to heaven, thereby indicating an unbiblical view of salvation. America has increasingly become a biblically illiterate nation. I say this not to sound preachy, to condemn, or to make anybody feel guilty. I mention it to make the very important point that Christianity and Christian doctrine may include more (and less) than many of us realize.

At the most basic level, a Christian is a person who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a blessed relationship in which the Christian has the profound privilege of spiritually walking with Jesus on a daily basis and trusting Him to meet each and every need. From a biblical perspective, then, Christianity is not so much a religion as it is a relationship. J.I. Packer put it so well, "The essence of Christianity is neither beliefs nor behavior patterns. It is the reality of communion here and now with Christianity's living founder, the Mediator, Jesus Christ." Indeed, "Christianity is a kind of love affair with our loving Lord and Savior, and the more days we turn into spiritual Valentine's Days by talking to the Lord about our relationship with Him... the richer and more joyful the relationship itself will become." Evangelist Billy Graham said, "Christianity isn't only going to church on Sunday. It is living twenty-four hours of every day with Jesus Christ."

Why do I focus so much attention on the relational aspect of Christianity? Simply because a personal relationship with Jesus is the heart and soul of Christianity. **Christianity is essentially Christ.** The person and work of Jesus Christ are the rock upon which Christianity is built. If He is not who He said He is, and if He did not do what He said He came to do, the foundation of Christianity is undermined and the whole superstructure collapses.

From a scriptural perspective, to know Jesus is to know God (John 8:19). To believe in Jesus is to believe in God (John 12:45). To receive Jesus is to receive God (Mark 9:37, John 12:44). To honor Jesus is to honor God (John 5:23). To worship Jesus is to worship God (Revelation 4-5). A relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship you can have.

**Jesus Is the Heart of Christianity:** If a relationship with Jesus is the heart of Christianity, then the major doctrines (or teachings) of Christianity-including the doctrines of God, man, salvation, the church, angels, and the afterlife-must be tied directly to Christ. Christ is the thread that runs through each of these doctrines.

One thing we'll see is that Jesus Himself is God. In fact, the Bible refers to Him as both "God" (Hebrews 1:8) and "Lord" (Matthew 22:43-45). Jesus also has all the attributes (or characteristics) of God. For example, He's all-powerful (Matthew 28:18) and all-knowing (John 2:24-25). Jesus does things that only God can do-such as creating the entire universe (John 1:3) and raising people from the dead (John

11:43-44). Moreover, the people who came to know Him worshipped Him as God (Matthew 14:33; John 20:28).

Jesus is at the very heart of the doctrine of God. Jesus is the Creator of the universe. Jesus didn't create just the universe, He also created humankind. Jesus was a revelation of God not only in His person (as God) but in His life and teachings as well. By observing the things Jesus did and said, we learn a great deal about God.

**The answer is Jesus:** Jesus came as our beloved Savior and died on the cross on our behalf (Matthew 20:28). Jesus our Savior "gave himself as a ransom for all men" (1 Timothy 2:6). Those who believe in Him are forgiven of their sins, and their relationship with God is instantly restored (Acts 16:31).

**The Holy Spirit:** A primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ and to make known the things of Christ (John 14:26). The Spirit testifies about Christ (John 15:26). The Spirit does not seek to make Himself prominent but rather seeks to exalt Jesus Christ. Jesus is at the heart of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the head of the church. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus affirmed to Peter, "I will build my church."

**Angels:** The angel's worship and serve Jesus. Jesus created the angels. Angels proclaimed Jesus' birth to the shepherds in the field (Luke 2:9-15). Angels ministered to Jesus during His infancy (Matthew 2:13,19-20). The angels worshipped Jesus (Hebrews 1:6). Angels also ministered to Jesus during His ministry (Matthew 4:1-11) and just before the crucifixion (Luke 22:43). An angel rolled away the stone following Jesus' resurrection from the dead (Matthew 28:1-6). When Jesus comes again, angels will accompany Him (Matthew 16:27). These angels will worship and exalt Jesus for all eternity (Revelation 5:11-14).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Has your view of Christianity been influenced by extra-biblical traditions? How so? 2. Why might America be so biblically illiterate even though it is the most churchgoing nation on earth? 3. Summarize the most important elements of what it means to be a Christian. 4. What are some differences between Christianity and what we might call "churchianity"? 5. Summarize how Jesus is the very heart of Christianity.

## **CHAPTER 1: GODS COMMUNICATION TO US**

**Authentic Christianity**, as opposed to cultural (man-made) religion, is based on divine revelation. Revelation makes good sense when you consider that God is our Father.

God has revealed Himself in two primary ways - through general revelation and special revelation. General revelation refers to revelation that is available to all persons of all times. For example, God reveals Himself to everyone through the world of nature (Psalm 19). Special revelation refers to God's specific and clear revelation through His mighty acts in history, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and His message spoken through Old Testament prophets (like Isaiah and Daniel) and New Testament apostles (like Paul and Peter).

The only way for God to be able to fully do and say all that He wanted was to actually leave His eternal residence and enter the arena of humanity. This He did in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was Immanuel-"God with us" (Matthew 1:23). He was God's ultimate special revelation, God's show and tell.

Jesus - as eternal God - took on human flesh so He could be God's fullest revelation to man (Hebrews 1:2-3). Jesus was a revelation of God not just in His person (as God) but in His life and teachings as well. By observing the things Jesus did and the things Jesus said, we learn a great deal about God. For example, Jesus revealed and demonstrated: God's awesome power (John 3:2), God's incredible wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24), God's boundless love (1 John 3:16), and God's unfathomable grace (John 1:14,17)

Another key means of special revelation is the Bible. In this one book, God has provided everything He wants us to know about Him and how we can have a relationship with Him. Amazingly, the Bible's authors were from all walks of life - kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, physicians, statesmen, scholars, poets, and farmers. Yet despite these differences, we can see the Bible's remarkable continuity from Genesis to Revelation.

When we say the Bible is inspired, we mean that God superintended the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities (and even their writing styles), they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man. God did not permit the will of sinful human beings to misdirect or erroneously record His message. Rather, "God moved and the prophet mouthed these truths; God revealed, and man recorded His word." As a direct result of the Holy Spirit's superintendence over the human authors, the Scriptures are inerrant.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How has God revealed Himself throughout history? What is significant about these methods of communication? 2. What do you think are the most significant evidence for the trustworthiness of the Bible? 3. How many evidences can you think of that prove that not all holy books are the same?

### **CHAPTER 2: THE RIGHT WAY TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE**

"You can make the Bible say just about anything you want it to say"; "That's just your interpretation, Other interpretations are just as legitimate"; "The Bible means different things to different people." "You shouldn't take the Bible literally. If you do, you'll end up with some warped viewpoints." People make such comments because they buy into some popular cultural lies about the Bible and Christianity. Remarks like these have found their way into movies, TV shows, newspapers, magazines, and books, and they keep resurfacing year after year.

But wait a minute. The more I think about it, the more I think that somebody really is running such a negative PR campaign - Satan. This emboldens me to suggest that one of Satan's methods today is to undermine confidence in God's Word and cause people to misinterpret it.

So, I begin with a simple but profound principle of Bible interpretation: **When the plain, literal sense of Scripture makes good sense, seek no other sense.** For example, when God says in His Word that He loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for us (Romans 5:8), let's accept that literally and give thanks to God for it. When God says in His Word that His gift of salvation comes only by faith in Christ (Acts 16:31), let's accept that literally and respond accordingly. Where they use a literal means to express their ideas, the Bible student must employ a corresponding literal approach to explain them.

Theological "preunderstandings" - doctrinal opinions we have previously formed - should not bias our interpretation of Scripture. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy addresses this issue: "We affirm that any preunderstandings which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with

scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it. So, to avoid misinterpreting Scripture, students must be careful to examine their presuppositions in the light of Scripture.

We must read each statement in Scripture in its proper context. Every word in the Bible is part of a sentence, every sentence is part of a paragraph, every paragraph is part of a book, and every book is part of the whole of Scripture. The interpretation of a specific passage must not contradict the total teaching of Scripture on a point.

The interpreter of Scripture must seek to step out of his Western mind - set and into a first-century Jewish mind - set, paying special attention to such things as Jewish marriage rites, burial rites, family practices, farm practices, business practices, monetary system, methods of warfare, slavery, treatment of captives, and religious practices.

### **Interpret the Difficult Verses in Light of the Clear Verses.**

**Interpret the Old Testament in Light of the New Testament:** God provided more and more revelation that became progressively full so that by the time the New Testament was complete, God had told us everything He wanted us to know. This is why we should always interpret the Old Testament in view of the greater light of the New Testament.

**Distinguish Between the Descriptive and the Prescriptive:** Is the Bible verse in question merely descriptive, or is it prescriptive? In other words, is the verse merely describing something that took place in biblical times, or is it prescribing something that Christians should be doing for all time?

**Realize That Some Biblical Truths Are Explicit and Others Are Implicit:** Explicit things are "fully and clearly expressed - leaving nothing implied"; implicit things are "implied or understood though not directly expressed."

**Distinguish Between Promises and Principles:** We must be cautious to distinguish between promises and principles in the Bible. Many wisdom sayings in the book of Proverbs, for example, are not intended to be promises. The book of Proverbs is a wisdom book and contains maxims of moral wisdom.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What would you say to a person who tells you, "That's just your interpretation of the Bible - other interpretations are just as legitimate"? 2. What preunderstandings do you have that might influence the way you interpret Scripture? Do you want to adjust or even toss out any of them? 3. Can you think of any incorrect interpretations of the Bible you once held that you later corrected by following principles of proper Bible interpretation? 4. Are you presently struggling with any difficult verses? How might the principles in this chapter help you come to a correct understanding of them? 3 Our God Is an Awesome God What were we made for? To know God!" said J.I. Packer in his modern classic, Knowing God. "What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God... What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God."

### **CHAPTER 3: GOD IS AWESOME**

Man's most important relationship is with God Himself. **Our hearts have a hunger that none but God can satisfy, a vacuum or void that only God can fill.** I'm not talking about mere intellectual knowledge

about God. I'm talking about personally and intimately knowing God. This is what authentic Christianity is all about.

**(Our relationship with God begins the very moment we trust in Christ (who Himself is God) for salvation (Acts 16:31).** The more time we spend with Him, the more intimately we come to know Him. We communicate with God by prayer. Through prayer we talk to God, interact with Him, make requests of Him, verbalize our hurts and our joys to Him, and ask for help (Philippians 4:6). And He hears us.

The fact is, you and I today can enjoy a wonderfully intimate relationship with God. We may not see Him with our physical eyes, but He is here, walking with us side by side as a shepherd accompanies his sheep.

**Gods' characteristics include the following:**

- **The one true God of Scripture is the only God.**
- **God Is a Spirit:** The Scriptures tell us that God is Spirit (John 4:24). A spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39), so we should not think of God as a physical being.
- **The living God:** Some people today choose to believe God is a distant deity who is not too involved with earthly affairs. They are called deists. But the Bible often refers to God as "the living God" (for example, Deuteronomy 5:26; 1 Samuel 17:26-36; Psalm 84:2). The living God is truly among His people (Joshua 3:10).
- **Gods Names:** Yahweh (conveys the idea of eternal self-existence (Exodus 3:14-15).); Elohim( the powerful and sovereign governor of the universe); El Shaddai (El in Hebrew refers to "Mighty God." , and also God is a mighty God but also that He is full of compassion, grace, and mercy.); Yahweh (This name indicates that God is the one who seeks to fight our battles.); Lord of Host( This title pictures God as the sovereign commander of a great heavenly army of angels (Psalm 89:6,8).
- **God is Immanent and Translucent:** immanence - the idea that He is here and among us; The phrase transcendence of God refers to God's otherness or separateness from the created universe and from humanity. The God of the Bible is both transcendent and immanent, high above His creation but at the same time intimately involved with His creatures.
- **Perfection of God:** God is also characterized by absolute holiness that manifests itself in wrath toward sin.
- **God is Eternal:** One theologian describes God as "the eternal without beginning, He who is above the whole course of time, He who in harmony beyond explanation possesses unity and life, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the basis of eternity, the Living One, the only God."
- **God is Love:** God Is Love, He isn't just characterized by love; He is the very personification of love (1 John 4:8). Love permeates His being. And God's love does not depend on our lovability. God loves us despite the fact that we are fallen in sin (John 3:16).
- **God is everywhere present:** God in His whole being is in every place. No one can go anywhere that God is not (Psalm 139:7-8; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:27-28;
- **God is All Knowing:** Denying that God is all-knowing is fashionable in some Christian circles today. In theological systems known as process theology and open theism, the future is radically open, for we are not directed toward a predetermined end. In this view, God does not foreknow future events. Such a view is contrary to the Bible. Because God transcends time - because He is above time - He can see the past, present, and future in a single intuitive act. God knows all things, both actual and possible (Matthew 11:21-23). He knows all things past (Isaiah 41:22), present (Hebrews 4:13), and future (Isaiah 46:10). Because He knows all things, His knowledge cannot increase or decrease. Psalm 147:5.

- **God is All Powerful:** Process theology challenges the biblical teaching that God is all powerful. In this school of thought, some things take place in creation that He has no control over. Scripture, by contrast, portrays God as being all powerful (Jeremiah 32:17). He has the power to do all that He desires and wills. Some 56 times Scripture declares that God is almighty (for example, Revelation 19:6). There are many ramifications regarding God's unlimited power. He not only has the power to fulfill all the promises He has made to us in Scripture but also the power to see all believers securely into heaven without a single one falling away. Moreover, the same awesome power that raised Jesus from the dead will one day raise us from the dead. We may rest serenely in the knowledge that all is in the hands of our all-powerful God.
- **God is Sovereign:** Scripture portrays God as being absolutely sovereign. He rules the universe, controls all things, and is Lord over all (see Ephesians 1). Nothing can happen in this universe that is beyond His control.
- **God is Holy:** God's holiness means not just that He is entirely separate from all evil but also that He is absolutely righteous (Leviticus 19:2). He is pure in every way.
- **God is Just:** That God is just means that He carries out His righteous standards justly and with equity. God's dealings with people never include partiality or unfairness (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 11:7-15).
- **God is Trinity:** The doctrine of the Trinity recognizes only one God and that in the unity of the Godhead are three coequal and coeternal persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This doctrine is based on three lines of evidence in Scripture: (1) evidence that there is only one true God, (2) evidence that three persons are God, and (3) evidence of three-in-oneness within the Godhead. Each person of the Trinity is thus essential to a correct and full definition of God.

**Modern Challenges to the Doctrine of God:** In our modern pluralistic society, we should not be surprised that some people - including some who claim to be Christians - voice challenges to the traditional biblical concept of God.

**Is Belief in a Heavenly Father Sexist?** Some people today claim that the traditional biblical view of God is sexist because God is portrayed as an exalted. In answering the charge of sexism, let us begin by recognizing that God equally values both men and women, for both were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Christian men and women are positionally equal before God (Galatians 3:28). Further, the four Gospels indicate that Jesus defended and exalted women in a very anti-woman Jewish culture (see John 4). So, Christianity is not sexist; rather, Jesus, the head of the church, vigorously fought the sexism of His day.

**Does the Existence of Evil Prove God Is Not All-Powerful?** Some churchgoers claim that the existence of evil in our world proves that God is not all-powerful. Scripture indicates that the original creation was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The turn downward came the moment Adam and Eve used their God-given free wills and chose to disobey God (3:1-7). **Some people wonder why God didn't create man in such a way that he would never sin, thus avoiding evil altogether. But such a scenario would mean that man would no longer have the capacity to make free choices, including the choice to freely love. People would be robots.** So, God's plan had the potential for evil when He bestowed upon man the freedom of choice, but the actual origin of evil was man, who directed his will away from God and toward his own selfish desires. Ever since Adam and Eve made evil actual on that first occasion in the Garden of Eden, a sin nature has been passed on to every man and woman (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22), and because of that sin nature, we today continue to use our free wills to make evil actual (Mark 7:20-23). Let us not forget that God is not finished yet.

**Would a Loving God Send People to Hell?** I often hear people say, "A loving God would not send people to hell. I don't believe He will do it." The fact that God wants people to be saved is precisely why He sent Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins at the cross (John 3:16-17). Sadly, however, not all people are willing to admit that they sin, and they refuse to accept the payment to admit that they sin, and they refuse to accept the payment of Jesus' death on their behalf. God therefore allows them to experience the results of their own choice - an eternity in hell (see Luke 16:19-31). **I have taken comfort in the recognition that God renders perfect justice in regard to the eternal destinies of people. God also assigns levels of punishment for those who, having rejected Christ, spend eternity in hell** (Matthew 10:15; 16:27; Luke 12:47-48;

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How far along are you in getting to know God? 2. How can the attributes of God strengthen your faith and prayer life? 3. How should we picture God as we pray to Him? 4. How should the attributes of God affect the way we live our lives? 5. How does God's sovereignty relate to some of the difficult circumstances you presently face? 6. Are you concerned because you cannot fully comprehend the triune God? Why or why not?

#### **CHAPTER 4: WHAT A WONDER IS JESUS**

People today have different conceptions of Jesus - more often than not, wrong conceptions. This is especially true on today's secular college campuses. Some say Jesus was a mythological figure. Others say that certain claims about Jesus, such as the virgin birth, are rooted in mythology. Still others say He was just a good moral teacher. Sadly, such ideas have penetrated some of today's large liberal Christian denominations. Such liberal Christians would do well to reconsider biblical truth, as follows:

**Jesus Was No Myth:** biblical accounts of Jesus are all based on eyewitness testimony (Luke 1:1-4).

**Jesus Was Not Just a Good Moral Teacher:** The problem with this viewpoint is that no mere example or moral teacher would ever claim that the destiny of the world lay in His hands or that people would spend eternity in heaven or hell depending on whether they believed in Him (John 6:26-40). This would be lunacy. No one has summarized this better than **C.S. Lewis: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."**

**Jesus Is Absolute Deity:** The Bible is a Jesus book. the biblical writers were resolutely clear that Jesus is God. In Isaiah 43:11 God asserts, "I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior." This is an extremely important verse, for it indicates that (1) a claim to be Savior is, in itself, a claim to deity, and (2) the Lord God is the one and only Savior. Against this backdrop, the New Testament highlights Christ's divine nature by presenting Him as "our great God and Savior" (Titus 2:13). Numerous verses demonstrate this fact, including all the divine names ascribed to Jesus. believe in Christ's resurrection, but when he did so, he touchingly expressed his faith with this affirmation: "My Lord and my God [Theos]" (John 20:28). Certainly, this represents a climax in John's Gospel. Christ had earlier given many indications of His deity. He ascribed names of deity to Himself (John 8:58), He claimed holiness (John 8:46), He was all-knowing (John 11:11-14), He raised people from the dead (John 5:28-30), and He claimed to be the Judge of all men (John 5:22,27). At long last, Thomas recognized Christ's deity. He realized that Christ Was indeed God.

**Jesus Divine Attributes:** The Bible clearly indicates He is Eternal, Self-existent, everywhere present, all knowing, all powerful, sovereign, and sinless.

**Jesus' Signs:** We see Jesus' deity not only in His divine names and attributes but also in His miracles. Just a few examples include the following: According to the New Testament, Jesus changed water into wine (John 2:7-8); healed the official's son (John 4:50), healed the Capernaum demoniac (Mark 1:25; Luke 4:35), healed Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:15; Mark 1:31; Luke 4:39), caused the disciples to catch a great number of fish (Luke 5:5-6), healed a leper (Matthew 8:3; Mark 1:41), healed a paralytic (Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20), healed a withered hand (Matthew 12:13; Mark 3:5; Luke 6:10), healed a centurion's servant (Matthew 8:13; Luke 7:10), and raised a widow's dead son (Luke 7:14). There are many more!

**Jesus was Worshipped as God:** The fact that Jesus willingly received worship on various occasions says a lot about His true identity, for Scripture consistently testifies that only God can be worshipped.

**Jesus son of God:** Many people have taken the term to mean that Christ came into existence at a point in time and that He is in some way inferior to the Father. Such an understanding is based on a faulty conception of what Son of meant among the ancients. **The phrase "Son of God" means "of the order of God" and represents a claim to undiminished deity.** When Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, His Jewish contemporaries fully understood that He was making an unqualified claim to be God.

**Jesus Son of Man:** Jesus was both the Son of God and the Son of Man. The term Son of Man is clearly a messianic title. Jesus, as the Son of Man, is the divine Messiah.

**Jesus the Messiah:** The New Testament is clear that Jesus is the promised divine Messiah. Hundreds of messianic prophecies in the Old Testament point to a single Messiah or Christ - Jesus Christ. For example, Isaiah predicted the Messiah's virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14), His deity and kingdom (9:1-7), His reign of righteousness (11:2-5), His vicarious suffering and death on the cross (52:13-53:12), and much more. Hundreds of other Old Testament messianic prophecies were written hundreds of years before they occurred. They could never have been foreseen, and they depended upon factors outside human control for their fulfillment. All of these prophecies perfectly fit the person and life of Jesus Christ, so Jesus had to be the Messiah.

**The Words of Jesus the Messiah:** Jesus always presented His teachings with ultimate and final authority. He never wavered in this. Jesus unflinchingly placed His teachings above Moses' and the prophets - and in a Jewish culture at that! Jesus' teachings had a profound effect on people. His listeners always seemed to realize that these were not the words of an ordinary man. For example After the Sermon on the Mount, "the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28-29). To give His words the stamp of divine authority, Jesus often performed a miracle immediately following a teaching.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

: Can you think of any ways that your concept of Jesus has been distorted by modern scholars and cultural religion? 2. In what ways does Christianity stand or fall on the identity and work of Jesus Christ? 3. How does a correct understanding of Jesus' identity enhance your faith? Do you feel confident in entrusting Jesus with your life for all eternity? 4. If someone were to ask you to prove the deity of Jesus Christ, how would you do so?



## CHAPTER 5: GODS MAGNIFICANT CREATION

David penned Psalm 19. Consider his words: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (Psalm 19:1-4).

- **Universe:** David considered the magnificence of interstellar space a universal testimony to the Creator's glory. This glory is visible to people all over the world. Astronomers have used giant new telescopes to estimate that the universe contains 10 million billion billion stars. Scientists also estimate that this is about the number of grains of sand in the world. God knows precisely how many exist and has even assigned a name to each one of them (Psalm 147:4; Isaiah 40:26).
- **Earth the Center of Divine Activity:** God sovereignly chose our tiny planet as a center of divine activity. Relatively speaking, the earth is but an astronomical atom among the whirling constellations, only a tiny speck of dust among the ocean of stars and planets in the universe. "On it the Highest presents Himself in solemn covenants and Divine appearances; on it the Son of God became man; on it stood the cross of the Redeemer of the world; and on it - though indeed on the new earth, yet still on the earth - will be at last the throne of God and the Lamb (Revelation 21:1-2; 22:3)."
- **The Universe Is Intelligently Designed for Life on Earth:** Our universe is literally fine-tuned to promote human life on planet earth. As one scholar put it, almost everything about the basic structure of the universe is "balanced on a razor's edge for life to occur." Scientists tell us, for example, that if the strength of gravitational attraction were different, life on earth would not be possible. If our moon were significantly larger, the gravitational pull of the moon would be greater, and this would cause tidal waves that would engulf the land. Likewise, more than one moon would cause great tidal instability. If earth were significantly closer to the sun, the heat would increase and make life on earth impossible. Earth has just enough oxygen for creatures to be able to breathe. In short, everything about our earth and the universe seems tailor-made for the existence of human life (and other life forms).
- **The Creation of Humans:** When God created man on this fine-tuned earth, He made him from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into him (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7,22-23). We learn from Scripture that human beings are creatures, created a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:3-6; Hebrews 2:7-8) by God's own hands (Job 10:8-12; Isaiah 64:8). They are wonderfully complex (Psalm 139:14) and designed specifically to live on the earth (Isaiah 45:12).
- **Humans Are Created in God's Image:** Human beings were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The fact that human beings are created in the image of God simply means that they are a finite reflection of God's rational nature (Colossians 3:10), moral nature (Ephesians 4:24), relational nature (Genesis 1:26), and dominion over creation (Genesis 1:27-28)
- **Human Beings Have Both a Material and an Immaterial Nature:** The Bible shows Humans have both a material and an immaterial nature - that is, a body and a spirit and/or soul (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 6:9-10).

- **All Races of Humanity are Equal:** Some people - even some churchgoing people - vainly try to find justification for racist views from the Bible. But the truth is that God created all races of man. All human beings are completely equal - equal in terms of their creation (Genesis 1:27-28), the sin problem (Romans 3:23), God's love for them (John 3:16), and God's provision of salvation for them (Matthew 28:19). Revelation 5:9 (NASB) tells us that God's redeemed will be from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation." The Bible leaves no place for racial discrimination, for all human beings are equal in God's sight.
- **Men and Women in the Bible:** On one hand the Bible indicates that men and women are equal in worth before God, and both are created in His image. On the other hand, God has set order in the family unit by placing the man as the head of the household. This is certainly not politically correct, and it flies in the face of cultural religion. But the Bible is clear on this issue. Jesus openly displayed a very high view of women in an anti-woman first-century Jewish society. Jesus taught women right alongside men as equals (Matthew 14:21; 15:38). And when He taught, He often used women's activities to illustrate the character of the kingdom of God. Galatians 3:28 tells us that there is neither male nor female in Jesus Christ. First Peter 3:7 says men and women are fellow heirs of grace.
- **Human Beings Did Not Evolve:** Many people today - some Christians included - choose not to believe that God created the universe (including humankind) but rather believe that evolutionary theory best explains the issue of origins. This theory, however, is plagued by a number of critical problems: Scientists largely agree that the universe had a beginning, The universe around us points to a Designer. As we examine the fossil records, we not only find no evidence supporting evolution but find evidence against it. The universe is running down (devolving), not evolving upward. Evolutionists often make false claims. Some have claimed that scientific evidence proves that evolution is true. These individuals generally appeal to the fact that mutations within species do happen (microevolution). This is entirely different from macroevolution, which involves one species evolving into an entirely different species through mutations. Scientists have never observed macroevolution. You cannot breed two dogs and get a cat!
- **Humans Do Not Become Angels at Death:** A popular myth in cultural religion is that human beings become angels at the Time of death. But Scripture indicates that Christ Himself created all the angels. Psalm 8:5 indicates that man was made lower than the angels but will be made higher in the afterlife (in heaven). Both angels and humans are created beings, both are finite and limited, both depend on God for their continued existence and well-being, and both are responsible and accountable to God for their actions (John 16:11; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrews 9:27). So, angels and humans have some similarities, but in terms of nature, they are in different classes altogether.
- **Bow before Christ:** We are to recognize that we are creatures who are responsible to Him, our Creator. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care (Psalm 95:6-7).

One day, we shall dwell with Christ face-to-face in His unveiled, glorious presence. Even now, Christ is preparing an eternal, glorious dwelling place for us (John 14:1-3). If the present created universe is any indication of what Christ can do, this eternal dwelling place must be sublimely supreme.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How much do you appreciate the excellence of God's creation? 2. What does the immense magnitude and design of the creation indicate to you about God? Be specific. 3. What does knowing that you are created in the image of God mean to you?

## CHAPTER 6: HUMAN SIN

Many people today ignore the evidence of sin everywhere around us. But anyone who reads the morning newspaper will find overwhelming evidence to confirm that human beings have made a mess of this world.

Of course, if people do not recognize a sin problem, they will never seek the cure for their spiritual ills - Jesus Christ, the Savior. A weak view of sin always produces a weak view of salvation. A weak view of sin blinds us to our need for a Savior.

### **Lucifer:**

**The Beginning of Sin:** Satan's Rebellion Sin in the universe began not with man but with a great angelic personage known as Lucifer. Scripture reveals that God created Lucifer as an incredibly beautiful and powerful angel. Lucifer became so impressed with his beauty and power that he wanted to take God's place. First Timothy 3:6 tells us that Lucifer's sin was pride. Lucifer's sin, of course, had widespread and devastating effects - on creation (Genesis 3:17; Romans 8:20-22), on other angels (Revelation 12:7), and on people everywhere (Ephesians 2:2). His sin was a direct challenge to God's power and authority.

As a result of this heinous sin against God, Lucifer was banished from living in heaven (Isaiah 14:12). He became corrupt, and his name changed from Lucifer ("morning star") to Satan ("adversary"). His power became completely perverted (Isaiah 14:12-17). His purpose in life is now to stand against God and all who are related to God.

**Adam & Eve's Sin:** Soon after their creation, Adam and Eve sinned against God and catapulted the entire human race into sin. The serpent (Satan), who had previously fallen into prideful sin, sneaked up to Eve, and in a fatal conversation, he led her astray.

**When Adam and Eve sinned, they broke their relationship and fellowship with God, acquired a nature of sin and rebellion against God, and infected all their descendants with that sinful nature** (Romans 5:12). This nature is the source of all our individual acts of sin and is the major reason we are not acceptable for a relationship with a holy God. Romans 5:19 emphasizes the idea that all human beings are born in sin: "Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners." Ecclesiastes 7:20 we read, "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins."

This sin nature remains an active force in every Christian's life. It cannot be removed or eradicated in this life (Romans 8:3-4; Galatians 5:16-17). We cannot use other people as our moral measuring stick. God is the standard.

**The Depth of Human Sin:** Jesus taught a great deal about human sin. In fact, He paints a rather bleak picture of the human predicament. He said that man is utterly lost (Luke 19:10), that he is a sinner (Luke 15:10), that he is in need of repentance before a holy God (Mark 1:15), and that he needs to be born

again (John 3:3,5,7). Jesus also taught that both inner thoughts and external acts render a person guilty (Matthew 5:28). He taught that from within the human heart come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly (Mark 7:21-23). **He also affirmed that God is fully aware of every person's sins, both external acts and inner thoughts; nothing escapes His notice** (John 4:17-19).

**Mortal Sin and Venial Sin:** Some people, particularly Roman Catholics, distinguish between mortal sins (deadly sins) and venial sins (lesser sins). The problem with such a view is that if a person grows up thinking that most of his sins have been venial sins, he may think he's essentially a good person. He may not see his dire need of a Savior. **The Bible makes no such distinction between mortal sins and venial sins.** Some sins are in fact worse than others (Proverbs 6:16-19), but never does Scripture say that only certain kinds of sin lead to spiritual death. **All sin leads to spiritual death, not just one category of sins** (Romans 3:23).

**The Penalty for Sin: Death the penalty for sin includes both spiritual and physical death** (Romans 6:23; 7:13). Death, in the biblical sense, literally refers to separation. Spiritual death, then, is spiritual separation from God. Physical death is separation of the soul from the body. Physical death is the inevitable result of spiritual death. The fall into sin introduced the process of age and decay, leading ultimately to death-the separation of the soul from the body.

The truth is death - and separation from God - is not natural. It is an unnatural intruder. God intended for people to live and have fellowship with Him. Death is therefore foreign and hostile to human life. Death arose because of our rebellion against God. It is a form of God's judgment.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Have modern Christians lost sight of the seriousness of sin? Explain your answer. 2. Does the severity of sin help you appreciate God's grace? How so? 3. The more you grow as a Christian, and the older you get, do you sense that you are becoming increasingly righteous, or do you sense your unworthiness as never before? 4. Does God want you to deal with any areas of perpetual sin in your life?

#### **CHAPTER 7: JESUS THE SAVIOR BECAME MAN**

Some books I read suggest that Jesus was a good man whose goal was to show us how to live. The doctrine of the incarnation completely obliterates such an idea. Jesus the eternal Son of God forsook the splendor of heaven and became as genuinely human as we ourselves are.

**The Humanity of Christ:** To deny either the undiminished deity or the perfect humanity of Christ in the incarnation is to put oneself outside the pale of orthodoxy. First John 4:2-3 makes this clear: "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist.

**Innumerable passages in the New Testament confirm Christ's full humanity in the incarnation.** For example, Heb 2:14, Timothy 3:16, Romans 8:3. "Apart from the virgin conception and overshadowing ministry of the Holy Spirit, Mary's pregnancy was no different than that of any other human mother."

Jesus experienced normal human development through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. According to Luke 2:40, Jesus "grew," "became strong," and was "filled with wisdom." These are things that could never be said of Jesus' divine nature.

Christ's development as a human being was normal in every respect, with two major exceptions: (1) Christ always did the will of God, and (2) He never sinned. We see Jesus' full humanity in His human characteristics. Besides growing as a normal child (Luke 2:40,52), Jesus had a physical body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39), experienced weariness (John 4:6), hunger (Luke 4:2), sorrow (Matthew 26:37), and weeping (John 11:35), and He needed sleep (Luke 8:23).

If Christ retained His essential deity during the incarnation, then in what way did He make Himself "nothing" when He became a man (Philippians 2:7)? Three basic issues are involved: the veiling of Christ's preincarnate glory, a voluntary nonuse of some of His divine attributes on some occasions, and the condescension involved in taking on the likeness of human beings.

Had Christ not veiled His preincarnate glory, humankind would not have been able to behold Him. Though Christ sometimes chose not to use His divine attributes, at other times He did use them. Jesus demonstrated that He was all-knowing (John 2:24; 16:30), everywhere-present (John 1:48), and all-powerful (John 11). Whatever limitations Christ may have imposed on Himself when He "made himself nothing" (Philippians 2:7), He did not subtract a single divine attribute from Himself or in any sense make Himself less than God. He never used His divine attributes on His own behalf, though certainly His attributes were gloriously displayed in the many miracles He performed for others. He also took on the likeness (literally "form" or "appearance") of humans and the form ("essence" or "nature") of a bondservant Christ was thus truly human.

"He was not now God minus some elements of His deity, but God plus all that He had made His own by taking manhood to Himself. He who made man was now learning what it felt like to be man." In other words, the incarnation did not subtract His deity but added His humanity.

Though the incarnate Christ had both a human and a divine nature, He was only one person - as indicated by His consistent use of I, me, and mine in reference to Himself. Though Christ sometimes operated in the sphere of His humanity and in other cases in the sphere of His deity, we can attribute everything He did and everything He was to His one person. Christ in His human nature knew hunger (Luke 4:2), weariness (John 4:6), and the need for sleep (Luke 8:23) at the same time that He was all-knowing (John 2:24), everywhere-present (John 1:48), and all-powerful (John 11). He experienced all of this as one person. When the human and divine natures joined in one person in the incarnation, they never mixed to form a third compound nature. The human nature always remained human, and the divine nature always remained divine.

**Christ did not sin:** Christ was genuinely tempted, but the temptations stood no chance of luring Christ to sin. I believe the reason why Christ went through the temptation experience with the devil (Matthew 4:1-11) was not to see whether He could be made to sin, but to prove that He could not be made to sin.

**Christ Our High Priest:** Christ's human-divine union also enabled Him to become our eternal High Priest. Through the incarnation, Christ became a man and therefore could act as a human priest. He is fully able to understand and empathize with us in our struggles as human beings. Hebrews 4:15-16 tells us that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet yet was without sin."

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does an understanding of Jesus' humanity help you pray confidently, especially about tough issues that all humans face?
2. How does a clear understanding of Jesus' humanity help you deal with your temptations?
3. Has this chapter helped you better understand the Jesus of the Gospels? How so?
4. The God-man, Jesus, is your Redeemer and High Priest. What does that mean to you personally?

## CHAPTER 8: HUMAN SALVATION

How could God remain holy and just and at the same time forgive the sinner and allow him into His presence? God's ineffable purity cannot tolerate sin.

Scripture tells us that even before God created the world, He had decided that Jesus, the Lamb of God, would die on the cross for the sins of man (Revelation 13:8). We must recognize a uniform plan, guided by God, which in the course of human history has been unfolding and will one day find its culmination when Christ comes again (the second coming).

**The Father's Role:** A careful reading of Scripture shows that the Father's role was to devise the plan of salvation (Ephesians 1:4). This plan includes the means to provide salvation (Jesus' death on the cross), the objective (the forgiveness of sins), and the beneficiaries (those who believe in Jesus).

**Jesus Role:** The Son's task in the eternal plan of God included playing a key role in the creation of the universe (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2), making preincarnate appearances to the patriarchs in Old Testament times (Genesis 16:7; 22:11), coming to earth as God's ultimate revelation (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-2), dying on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for man's sins (John 3:16), rising from the dead (1 Peter 1:3; 3:21), and mediating between the Father and humankind (1 Timothy 2:5). The eternal plan also called for the second coming of the Son in glory to consummate human redemption (Revelation 19-22).

Peter said that people are redeemed by "the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world" (1 Peter 1:19-20). The phrase it is finished is better translated from the Greek, "it stands finished." On the cross, the Son of God was announcing that God's eternal plan of salvation had been enacted in time and space. And the sacrificial aspect of that plan had been completed.

**Holy Spirit:** Notable ministries of the Holy Spirit include: The Holy Spirit undertook the ministry of inspiring Scripture (2 Peter 1:21), The Holy Spirit "regenerates" (or gives new life spiritual life) to believers, (Titus 3:5 NASB), and The Holy Spirit seals believers for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). This means that believers are secure in their salvation, and The Holy Spirit enables believers to overcome sin and gives them the power to live righteously (Galatians 5:22-23).

**Summary Gospel:** Perhaps the single best definition of the gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

### **Popular Misconceptions include the following:**

- Some have taught that we must plead for mercy before we can be saved. However, this idea is found nowhere in Scripture. Salvation comes by faith in Christ (John 3:16; Acts 16:31). God provides pardon for anyone who believes; no one has to plead for it.
- Some have taught that we must follow Christ's example and seek to live as He lived in order to be a Christian. From a scriptural perspective, however, we simply do not have it in us to live as Christ lived. We are fallen human beings (Romans 3:23).
- Some have inadvertently communicated that prayer is a necessary component in becoming saved. In other words, one must pray the "prayer of repentance." The scriptural perspective is that even though prayer may be a vehicle for the expression of a person's faith, the faith brings about salvation, not the prayer that communicates that faith. In fact, a person can bypass prayer altogether by simply exercising faith in his or her heart, thereby becoming saved at that moment.
- Plus, many more misconceptions

**How Believers Receive Salvation:** Salvation is a gift of grace that believers receive by faith alone, not by doing good works. But God's gift of salvation is a grace-gift. The word grace means "undeserved favor." Because salvation is a gift, it can't be earned. It's free! Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "By grace you have been saved through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." Grace and meritorious works are mutually exclusive. Romans 11:6 says this about God's salvation: "If by grace, then is it no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace."

**Believers Receive Salvation Through Faith.** God has not made the gospel complicated. In fact, according to the New Testament, a relationship with Jesus begins simply by placing faith in Him. This may sound too good to be true, yet it is the clear teaching of Scripture. Some people try to add good works as a condition for salvation, but this goes against Scripture. The Bible portrays salvation as a gift that we receive by faith alone. Acts 16:31 "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

**Close to 200 times, the New Testament teaches that salvation is by faith alone-with no works in sight.** Examples include John 5:24, 11:25, 12:46

**Commandments:** God gave us the law for several reasons:

- To show us what sin is. God did this purposefully, for as we grow to see that we don't measure up to the holy standards of the law, we're all forced to admit that we have a sin problem.
- To provoke sin. God wants us to become so overwhelmed with the sin problem that we cannot deny its reality and severity. He wants us all to see how much we need the Savior, Jesus Christ.
- Still another very important function of the law is that it is like a tutor that leads us to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). The law does this by showing us our sin and then pointing to the marvelous grace of Christ.
- Once we have trusted in Him as our Savior, the law has done its job and no longer holds sway over us. For believers, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). For those in Christ, the law no longer holds sway.

### **Baptism**

Because baptism is not a part of the gospel, it is not necessary for salvation. Nevertheless, less, we should still get baptized because God has instructed us to. Salvation is all by God. Not even the smallest part of it is the result of anything we do or don't do (Ephesians 2:8-9). We Are Born Again. Being born again literally means to be born from above. It refers to God's act of giving eternal life to the person who

believes in Christ (Titus 3:5). The moment we place our trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit infuses our dead human spirits with the eternal life of God, and we're reborn spiritually.

**Righteousness:** Romans 3:24 tells us that "A key blessing that results from being declared righteous is that we now have peace with God (Romans 5:1). The Father sees believers through the lens of Jesus Christ. By believing in Jesus, who paid for our sins at the cross, we are reconciled to God. The alienation and estrangement that formerly existed is gone.

**Forgiveness:** We are forgiven! Guilt - the legal condemnation for the offense - is gone. This is one of the greatest blessings of salvation. We are truly and completely forgiven. "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:11-12). Christ took the certificates of debt posted on each of our lives and nailed them to the cross. He paid for all our sins at the cross. Jesus' sacrifice paid in full the price for our sins.

**We Are Adopted into God's Family:** One of the greatest blessings of salvation is that believers are adopted into God's forever family. We become "sons of God" (Romans 8:14). Because of this new relationship with God, believers are called "heirs of God" and "co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

**We are Secure in Our Salvation:** Scripture consistently teaches that once a person trusts in Christ and becomes a part of God's forever family, he or she is saved forever (Romans 8:28-30). Regardless of what that child of God does after the moment of salvation, he or she is saved. In addition, Jesus taught that the Father keeps us in His sovereign hands, and no one can take us out of His hands (John 10:28-30).

**Universalism:** The idea in the end everyone is saved. Certain verses - John 12:32; Philippians 2:11; and 1 Timothy 2:4 - are typically twisted out of context in support of this viewpoint. Such verses, properly interpreted, do not support universalism.

**More Than One Way to Salvation?** Many people today - even some Christians - claim that Jesus is one of many ways to salvation. This line of thinking embraces the idea that all the world religions teach the same basic truths. The reason Jesus' teachings have absolute authority is that He is God. This is not the case with the leaders of the other world religions. Indeed, the Buddha taught that his ethical teachings were important, not he himself. He emphasized that these teachings were important whether or not he himself even existed. But Jesus said, "I tell you the truth..." with the very authority of God.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

How do you feel knowing that God planned your salvation far before you were even born? 2. Can you summarize some false contemporary views of the gospel? What is the true gospel? 3. Why might people have a relentless propensity to seek to earn salvation by good works? 4. Do you think Christians are eternally secure in their salvation? Why or why not? 5. What are the main problems with universalism?

## **CHAPTER 9: JESUS THE RISEN SAVIOR**

Jesus' crucifixion must have been utterly horrific. Scripture indicates that He was whipped, beaten and scourged beyond recognition, forced to carry His crossbeam to the place of execution (which He was not able to complete by Himself), and stripped of His clothing. Then the blows of a heavy mallet drove huge spikes through His wrists. Another huge spike tore its way through His feet and into the wood beneath.



The cross, with the body attached by spikes, was then heaved up and dropped into a hole in the ground (Matthew 27:35-50).

Jesus would have experienced a variety of physical and emotional symptoms on the cross - blood loss and the accompanying dizziness, extreme pain, growing infection from the wounds caused by the spikes, fever due to the infection, great thirst and hunger as time slowly passed, difficulty breathing as a result of hanging by the arms, deep shame as those below watched the horror, and an ever-present anticipation of the moment of death. Shortly after Jesus died, a Roman soldier thrust a spear into Jesus' side so that blood and water came out (John 19:34). Four Roman executioners pronounced Him dead, and He was taken to be buried.

**Friends and enemies of Christianity have long recognized that the resurrection of Christ is the foundation stone of the Christian faith.** "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

**Reasons to Believe Christ Rose:** Contrary to a variety of skepticism, **believing in the resurrection is reasonable because the historical evidence supports it** (Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18). Consider the facts:

- He was wrapped in a linen cloth, and about 100 pounds of aromatic spices-mixed together to form a gummy substance - were applied to the wrappings of cloth around His body.
- After His body was placed in a solid rock tomb, an extremely large 4000 pound stone was rolled by means of levers against the entrance.
- Roman guards would have affixed on the tomb the Roman seal, a stamp representing Roman power and authority.
- All this makes the situation at the tomb following Christ's resurrection highly significant. **The Roman seal was broken, which meant the person responsible would-be crucified upside down. Furthermore, the large stone was moved a good distance from the entrance, as if it had been picked up and carried away. The Roman guards had also fled. The penalty in Rome for a guard leaving his position was death. We can therefore assume they must have had a substantial reason for fleeing!**
- The biblical account has **Jesus appearing first to a woman, Mary Magdalene** (John 20:1). In first-century Jewish culture, a woman's testimony was unacceptable in any court of law except in a very few circumstances. A fabricator would have been much more likely to portray Peter or the other male disciples at the tomb.
- Mary promptly told the disciples the glorious news. That evening, the disciples gathered in a room with the doors shut for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). The risen Christ appeared among them and said to them, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). **Jesus immediately showed the disciples His hands and His side (John 20:20).The wounds showed that He did not have another body but the same body. He had been dead, but now He is alive forevermore.**
- **Following Jesus' resurrection appearances to the disciples, their lives were transformed. As Michael Green put it, "How have [these early followers] turned, almost overnight, into the indomitable band of enthusiasts who braved opposition, cynicism, ridicule, hardship, prison, and death on three continents, as they preached everywhere Jesus and the resurrection?" The only thing that could account for their sudden incredible transformation into powerful**

**witnesses for Jesus is the resurrection.** This is the only thing that can explain why they were even willing to die for their beliefs.

- These disciples appeared on the historical scene boldly proclaiming the good news of the gospel, that this Jesus who had been crucified, dead, and buried was now alive from the dead and the Lord of life and the sole determiner of men's eternal destinies. **They endured some of the worst abuse and punishment known in their own day. In fact, many of them were tortured and even martyred for their faith in this resurrected Messiah. These witnesses seemed convinced beyond any doubt about the reality of Jesus' resurrection** (John 20:24-29; Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:18-20; 10:39-40; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8).
- The many thousands of Jews who became unflinching followers of Jesus abandoned many of their long held and cherished sacred beliefs and practices. Such abandonment of Jewish doctrine, according to Jewish authorities, could lead to an eternity in hell.

**Only the resurrection of Jesus could explain the conversion of hard-core skeptics in New Testament times.** The apostle Paul is an example. Saul, as he was known formerly, delighted in breathing out "murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" (Acts 9:1). Clearly Saul was not open to following Jesus; he hated Jesus' disciples. As the rest of Acts 9 reveals, **Saul had an encounter with the living, resurrected Jesus and not only became His follower but became Jesus' most explosive preacher and promoter to ever appear on the planet. Only a resurrected and living Christ could cause such a radical conversion of a hard-core skeptic like Paul.**

**Many early Christians died for their testimony and commitment to Jesus. The only thing that could explain such widespread commitment is a resurrected Jesus who promised eternal life to those who followed Him.** Jesus made too many appearances over too many days to too many people for the resurrection to be easily dismissed. Acts 1:3 says, "He showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God." Moreover, **"He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep"** (1 Corinthians 15:6). Paul mentions that many of these were "still living" because if Paul had uttered any falsehood, plenty of people could have stepped forward to call Paul a liar. They did not do this, however, because the resurrection appearance of Christ was well attested. The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 includes Christ's resurrection in a public confession that had been handed down for years. First Corinthians was written around AD 55, a mere 20 years after Christ's resurrection. But biblical scholars believe the confession in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 was formulated within a few years of Jesus' death and resurrection.

**Some people have responded to claims of Jesus' resurrection by claiming His followers were hallucinating.** However, hallucinations are by nature individual experiences. All 500 people could not have seen the same hallucination at the same time. Moreover, Jesus appeared to too many different kinds of people on too many occasions (literally dozens) over too long a time (40 days) for this view to be feasible. This was also not an option because the body was missing from the tomb.

**Did Jesus' Followers Have Distorted Memories?** Other people today explain stories of Jesus' resurrection from the dead by calling them distorted memories among His followers. Not a shred of evidence supports such a view. One could easily make this same kind of argument against any event of ancient history. Still further, would critics have us believe that multitudes of Jews left Judaism, joined

the cause of Christ, and suffered torture and even martyrdom for their faith in Christ, all because of distorted memories?

**Was the Body of Jesus Stolen?** Some people have suggested that the dead body of Jesus was stolen. Such a scenario is highly unlikely. The tomb had a huge stone that weighed two tons blocking it. It had a seal of the Roman government. It was guarded by brawny Roman guards who were trained in the art of defense and killing and who would have risked their lives to fulfill their mission. A tomb robbery would have been quite a feat. Further, why would Christians steal the body and then, instead of recanting their false claim of resurrection to save their lives, become imprisoned and go to their deaths (often after being tortured) defending the lie of the resurrection?

**Did Jesus Merely "Swoon" on the Cross?** Still other people have speculated that Jesus did not really die on the cross. He was nailed to the cross and suffered from loss of blood and went into shock. But He didn't die. He merely fainted. This theory is highly imaginative. In fact, I think it requires more faith to believe this theory than the actual resurrection account given all the above items and the horrible to true he experienced.

Other extreme theories include the apostles went to the wrong tomb, he only spiritually rose and that the resurrection was a conspiracy.

**The factual evidence for Christ's resurrection is truly staggering. Canon Westcott, a brilliant scholar at Cambridge University, said it well: "Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ". After examining all the data on Christ's resurrection Professor Tom Arnold concluded this: "I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquiry, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."**

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

What do you believe are the most convincing evidences that Jesus has risen from the dead? 2. How would you respond to a person who tries to explain away the resurrection by suggesting that Jesus' followers were hallucinating or merely had distorted memories? 3. What biblical evidence can you cite in support of a physical resurrection of Jesus (as opposed to a mere spiritual resurrection)?

#### **CAPTER 10: HOLY SPIRIT**

In John 14:16 Jesus informed the disciples, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever." **The word counselor is a rich one-carrying the meaning of "comforter, helper, advocate, one who strengthens."** This one word conveys the concepts of encouragement, support, assistance, care, and shouldering responsibility for another's welfare.

Just as Jesus was a personal comforter who helped the disciples for three years during His earthly ministry, so also would Christ's followers have another personal comforter - the Holy Spirit - who would be with them throughout their lives.

**What a wonderful truth this is! We are never alone in our troubles.**

**Scripture portrays the Holy Spirit as a Person:** The Holy Spirit has a mind. We see the Holy Spirit's intellect in 1 Corinthians 2:10 where Paul writes that "the Spirit searches all things" (see also Isaiah 11:2; Ephesians 1:17). The Greek word for search means "thoroughly investigate." The very next verse (verse 11) says the Holy Spirit "knows" the thoughts of God. Romans 8:27

**The Holy Spirit has emotions:** The Holy Spirit feels the emotion of grief when believers sin. In the context of Ephesians, such sins include lying, anger, stealing, laziness, and speaking words that are unkind (verses 25-29).

**The Holy Spirit has a will:** The Holy Spirit's will is displayed in 1 Corinthians 12:11 (NASB), where we are told that He distributes spiritual gifts "to each one individually just as He wills."

**The Holy Spirit's Works Confirm His Personality:** The Holy Spirit does many things in Scripture that only a person can do. The Holy Spirit teaches (John 14:26), bears witness (John 15:26), guides (Romans 8:14), commissions people to service (Acts 13:4), issues commands (Acts 8:29), prays for believers (Romans 8:26), and speaks to people (John 15:26; 2 Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit bears witness The Holy Spirit prays for believers. the Holy Spirit issues commands.

**The Holy Spirit Is Treated as a Person:** The Holy Spirit is sent. Just as Jesus was sent by the Father (John 6:38), so also was the Holy Spirit sent by the Father (John 14:26; 16:7).

**The Holy Spirit can be blasphemed:** Matthew 12:32, Mark 3:29-30

**The Holy Spirit can be lied to:** Acts 5:3 indicates that Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of lying to the Holy Spirit. A person does not lie to a mere power.

**In view of the above-since the Holy Spirit has all the attributes of personality, does things only a person can do, and is treated as a person - we must conclude that the Holy Spirit, the divine comforter, is truly a person.**

**The Comforter Is Truly God:** Not only is the Holy Spirit a person, He is also God. He is just as much God as the Father and Jesus are. He is the third person of the holy Trinity. How do we know the Holy Spirit is God? For one thing, the Holy Spirit is called God in the Bible (Acts 5:3-4). Further, the Holy Spirit is called Lord (2 Corinthians 3:17-18), is often identified with Yahweh (Acts 7:51; 28:25-27; 1 Corinthians 2:12; Hebrews 3:7-9; 10:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21) and is spoken of as divine (Matthew 12:32; Mark 3:29). Beyond that, the Holy Spirit has all the attributes of God. For example, the Holy Spirit is everywhere-present (Psalm 139:7), all-knowing knowing (1 Corinthians 2:10), all-powerful (Romans 15:19), eternal (Hebrews 9:14), and, of course, holy (John 16:7-14).

**The Comforter Glorifies Christ:** Scripture reveals that a primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to Jesus.

**Marvelous Ministries of the Holy Spirit:** The Scriptures tell us that the Holy Spirit is involved in a number of wonderful ministries among believers. **The Holy Spirit Seals Believers** - The apostle Paul informs us that at the moment we believe in Jesus, we are "sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). **The Holy Spirit Guides Believers** - Guidance is another vital ministry of the Holy Spirit. John 16:13 tells us that He guides us into all truth and reveals the things of Christ to us.

**The Filling of the Holy Spirit:** Every Christian is commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). So, to be filled with the Holy Spirit means that we will be controlled or governed no longer by self but by the Holy Spirit. A believer becomes filled with the Spirit when he or she is fully yielded to the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**Walking in the Spirit:** we can have victory over the sin nature by walking in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:16 tells us, "Live [or walk] by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

**Fruit of the Spirit:** Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that "**the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** Many theologians have noted that as we look at the qualities listed in Galatians 5:22-23, we find an accurate profile of Jesus Christ Himself. **As we walk in the Spirit, He reproduces Jesus' character in us.** In this way, we progressively take on the family likeness (as members of God's forever family).

**Don't Grieve the Spirit:** Are you consistently falling into a particular sin? If so, Scripture exhorts you to stop grieving the Holy Spirit and walk in dependence upon Him. If you do that, you will enjoy victory over the sin.

**The Holy Spirit Bestows Spiritual Gifts:** Yet another ministry of the Holy Spirit is that **He gives believers spiritual gifts** (1 Corinthians 12:11). We each have different spiritual gifts. But our gifts are to be used for the mutual benefit of the church, which is the body of Christ.

**Avoiding Extremes:** Many churchgoers today have taken some extreme positions on certain aspects of the Holy Spirit's work and ministry. These include so-called holy laughter, being "slain in the spirit," and the idea that speaking in tongues is necessary for salvation. Some people overreact to an extreme teaching by swinging to the opposite extreme. Don't fall into this trap. You can't have a healthy spiritual life without the Holy Spirit's involvement.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Have you ever thought of the Holy Spirit as more of a power or force than a person? How has your perspective changed?
2. Do you feel that the doctrinal extremes of some televangelists-emphasizing emphasizing such things as holy laughter and the necessity of speaking in tongues-have soured your view on the Holy Spirit? Do you need to make any adjustments regarding your attitude toward the Holy Spirit?
3. Do you think you can live the Christian life without a proper relationship to the Holy Spirit?
4. What ministries of the Holy Spirit do you most appreciate?

## **CHAPTER 11: The Church**

**The universal church is a global company of people who have one Lord and who share together in one gift of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ** (Titus 1:4; Jude). All of them share in one Spirit and worship one Lord (Ephesians 4:3-6). The way you become a member of this universal body is to simply place your faith in Jesus Christ. This body is comprised only of believers in Christ. If you're a believer, you're in!

Scripture indicates that the universal church was born on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2; compare with 1:5; 11:15; 1 Corinthians 12:13). We are told in Ephesians 1:19-20 that the church is built on the foundation of Christ's resurrection, meaning that the church could not have existed in Old Testament times.

**The church involves two very important relationships - relationships with other Christians and a corporate relationship with the Lord.** One relationship affects the other. If we don't attend church and worship with other Christians, our relationship with the Lord will suffer. If we don't have a good relationship with the Lord, we may treat other Christians poorly. We do well to take both relationships seriously.

**Christ is the Head of the Church:** Christ Himself builds the church. The church is His and His alone. He provides for, preserves, protects, and cherishes the church as His own.

**A Place of Equipping and Discipleship: The primary role of the church is to equip and disciple church members (that is, build the body) in regard to Bible study, worship, ministry, and much more.** The task of the church and the Pastor is to be a place of equipping.

**A Place of Salt and Light:** Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Salt is an effective preservative. We are to have a preserving effect on the world by influencing it for Christ. Jesus also said, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14). **Jesus did not call us to be "secret agent" Christians. We are not to cloak our lights.**

**A Place of Fellowship:** The Church should be the family activity of God's people in the local church (Hebrews 10:25). This gathering together with fellowship and sharing gives believers' strength. The church, then, is for our benefit. **God does not want us to be Lone Ranger Christians.**

**A Place of Involvement:** Every church member should get involved in serving the Lord Jesus and ministering to the needs of other Christians (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Every Person Is Important. We Need Each Other One reason for each person to get involved is that we need each other. God has given every member of the church unique gifts and talents, and each person can render service in ways that no one else can.

**A Place of Worship:** The church is a place of worship. In worship we reverence God, adore Him, praise Him, venerate Him, and pay homage to Him, not just externally (by rituals and singing songs) but in our hearts as well (Isaiah 29:13; see also 1 Samuel 15:22-23).

**A Ministry of Comfort:** In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 the apostle Paul makes reference to "the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

**Church Attendance Isn't Optional:** Scripture, however, does not present church attendance as a mere option. Hebrews 10:25 (NASB) specifically instructs us not to forsake "our own assembling together." Scripture shows us that we are to live the Christian life within the context of the family of God and not in isolation (Ephesians 3:14-15; Acts 2). As we have seen, the Bible knows nothing of a Lone Ranger Christian (see Ephesians 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:10-11; and 1 Peter 3:8).

**Tithing:** The Hebrew word for tithe literally means "a tenth." In Old Testament times, God commanded tithing because "the earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it" (Psalm 24:1 NASB). The people of God tithed to acknowledge that God owned all things and was sovereign over them. In fact, the New Testament does not include a single verse where God specifies that believers should give 10 percent of their income to the church. This should not be taken to mean, however, that

church members should not support the church financially. The New Testament emphasis seems to be on what might be called "grace giving." **We are to freely give as God has freely given to us.**

**The Sacraments of the Church: The New Testament speaks of two sacraments-the Lord's Supper and Baptism.** The Lord's Supper Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at the Last Supper, where He shared bread and wine with the disciples prior to His crucifixion (Mark 14:12-26).

**Baptism:** There are three views for baptism- the Roman Catholic view, a covenantal view, and A symbolic view. **Ron Rhodes view is that baptism does not produce salvation and does not convey grace but rather is a symbol pointing to the believer's complete identification with Jesus Christ.** It is a public testimony that shouts to the world that a change in status has occurred in the person's life: Formerly, the person was identified with the world and was lost, but now the person is identified with Jesus Christ. The immersion into the water and the coming up out of it symbolizes death to the old life and resurrection to the new life in Christ (Romans 6:1-4). Certainly, baptism by immersion best pictures the significance of death to the old life and resurrection to the new life in Christ (Romans 6:1-4). And, despite what sprinkling advocates say, every instance of water baptism recorded in the New Testament was by immersion.

**The Sabbath and the Lord's Day:** The Hebrew word for Sabbath means "cessation." The Sabbath was a holy day and a day of rest for both man and animals (Exodus 20:8-11). This day commemorated God's rest after His work of creation (Genesis 2:2). **God set the pattern for living - working six days and resting on the seventh.** The Sabbath thus finds its ultimate origins in the creation account.

**Role of Women:** So, should women be involved in ministry in the church? Absolutely!

"That women are gifted for and called to service in the church is plain, "However, this call to service, according to Scripture, is not to involve ecclesiastical authority over men. Within that authority structure, both men and women are given the privilege of serving God-but in different ways. In short, women are privileged to serve God in many different ways within the authority structure He designed.

**Summary:** We all agree that the church is a place of equipping, teaching, and discipleship. It is a place of worship, a place of fellowship, a place where the ministry of comfort takes place, and a place of involvement where every Christian's role is important.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1.Has your perspective on the church changed since reading this chapter? How so? 2.Would you say that the church you are presently attending is faithful to the New Testament criteria for a church? 3. Do you think "seeker-sensitive" churches are biblical churches? Why or why not? 4.Do you agree with the position taken in this chapter regarding the role of women in the church? Why or why not? 5.Do you agree with the position taken in this chapter regarding ing the proper day of worship (the Lord's Day)? Why or why not? 6.In what way are you contributing to the ministry of your church?

## **CHAPTER 12: ANGELS AMONG US**

We are living in an age of celestial quackery. Over the past decade, all kinds of strange ideas about angels have surfaced in our society - even in Christian churches. For example, a popular belief today is that angels can be contacted by various means, including praying to them, writing letters to them, and meeting them during deep meditation. Contrary to such absurd views, the biblical pattern is that angels

always show up among people unexpectedly. We never once witness anyone in the Old or New Testaments seeking to contact an angel. Other people today are making extravagant claims regarding the alleged benefits of angel contact. Some say angels can introduce us to entirely new religious experiences. Others say angels are cheerleaders for our "higher selves" and are here to guide us into a new age of enlightenment and harmony.

**The problem is that not a single verse in the entire Bible gives credence to such fanciful views.**

**Angels Are Created Beings:** Colossians 1:16 tells us that Jesus Christ created the entire company of angels. One moment they did not exist. The next moment they did exist. The angels were apparently all created simultaneously (Hebrews 2:22; Revelation 5:11). There has been no increase in their ranks. Angels do not marry and thus do not procreate. Most theologians believe God created angels sometime prior to the creation of earth, and good evidence supports this view.

**Elect and Evil Angels:** When God created the angels, they were all good and holy. God did not create Satan and the fallen angels (demons) in a state of wickedness. That they were subjected to a period of probation. Some of the angels retained their holiness and did not sin, while others - following Lucifer's lead - rebelled against God and fell into great sin (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:12-16; Revelation 12:9). Once the angels were put to the test to remain loyal to God or to rebel with Lucifer, their decision seems to have been made permanent in its effect. The good angels are called elect angels. Good angels are therefore now incapable of sinning. The lines have been drawn, and the lines are now absolute. In keeping with this, the evil angels who rebelled against God are nonredeemable. The evil angels are destined for eternal suffering (Matthew 25:41).

**The Abode of the Holy Angels:** Though angels apparently have access to the entire universe, and though God sends them on specific errands or assignments on earth (Daniel 9:21), Scripture indicates that they actually live in heaven. **Daniel 7:10 speaks of "thousands upon thousands" of angels attending God in heaven, and "ten thousand times ten thousand" (one hundred million) angels standing before Him.**

**The Nature of Angels:** Angels are personal beings. Angels are persons (spirit persons) with all the attributes of personality. They have intelligence, emotions, and will. Beyond having the attributes of personality, angels engage in personal actions. For example, angels love and rejoice (Luke 15:10), they desire (1 Peter 1:12), they contend (Jude 9; Revelation 12:7), they worship (Hebrews 1:6), they talk (Luke 1:13), and they come and go (Luke 9:26).

**Angels are incorporeal and invisible:** The word incorporeal means "lacking material form or substance." Angels, then, are not material, physical beings; they are spiritual beings and are invisible (Hebrews 1:14). (This doesn't contradict the fact that angels can appear to humans.) Because angels are invisible, you and I are generally unaware of their activities behind the scenes.

**Angels are localized beings:** Despite the fact that angels are spirit beings, they nevertheless seem to have spatial limitations. Scripture is clear that at least many angels have wings. The cherubim and seraphim are represented as winged (Exod. 25:20; Isa. 6:2). Angels can appear as men. A person who helped you during a time of need could possibly have been an angel that appeared as a human.

**Angels are powerful.** The Scriptures portray the angels as extremely powerful and mighty beings. Psalm 103:20 calls them "mighty ones who do his bidding." Second Thessalonians 1:7 makes reference to God's "powerful angels." Scripture does seem to indicate that some angels are more powerful than others.



Angels are not, however, all-powerful. Despite the fact angels are very powerful, none of them - the archangel Michael included - are all-powerful like God. They are creatures with creaturely limitations.

**Angels are holy.** The angels who passed their probationary test and did not sin were confirmed in their holiness (1 Timothy 5:21). In contrast, the fallen angels (demons) are unholy in every way. They are set apart from righteousness and set apart to the devil, to do his unholy bidding. They are against everything related to God. Their time is limited, and their ultimate destiny is the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41).

**Angels are obedient.** God's holy ones are obedient to Him.

**Angels have greater knowledge than do human beings:** Though angels are not all-knowing (as God is), they nevertheless possess great wisdom and intelligence. God created the angels as a higher order than humans (Psalm 8:5). Therefore, they innately possess a greater knowledge than man.

**Angels are Immortal.**

**Angels are Innumerable:** Daniel 7:10, speaking of God, says that "ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him." The number "ten thousand times ten thousand" is 100,000,000 (one hundred million).

**The Ranks of Angels:** There are different ranks of angels: Thrones, Dominions, Rulers, and Authorities. Beyond these specific angelic ranks, Scripture also speaks of other angels who have varying levels of authority and dignity - including the archangel Michael, the cherubim, the seraphim, and Gabriel. Michael is undeniably the prominent archangel.

**The cherubim:** Scripture depicts the cherubim as powerful and majestic angelic creatures who surround God's throne and defend His holiness from any contamination by sin (Genesis 3:24; Exodus 25:18,20; Ezekiel 1:1-18). They are indescribably beautiful and powerful spirit-beings of the highest order (Ezekiel 1:5-14; 28:12-13,17).

**The seraphim:** The Hebrew term for seraphim literally means "burning ones." This speaks of their consuming devotion to serving God.

**Gabriel:** The name Gabriel literally means "mighty one of God." The name speaks of the incredible power God entrusted to him. Gabriel stands in the very presence of God (Luke 1:19). Gabriel apparently has the ability to fly "swiftly" - perhaps faster than any other angel (Daniel 9:21).

**The Ministry of Angels:** Hebrews 1:14 reveals that **angels are "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation." This includes bringing messages, answering believer's prayers, giving encouragement, restraining evil, taking care of believers at death, and executing judgement. A key ministry among Christians is to act as guardians.** Scripture seems to indicate that the whole company of angels may be involved in protecting all Christians. "Every true believer in Christ should be encouraged and strengthened) Angels are watching; they mark your path.

One day, in heaven, we will join our voices with the voices of angels in worship and praise to our eternal God. **Imagine what it will be like with over 100 million angels (Revelation 5:11) and untold millions of the redeemed (7:9) will sing praise to God in unity and harmony.**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has this chapter changed the way you view angels? How so? 2. Do you think you have experienced angelic assistance in your past-particularly in a time of danger? Explain. 3. How do you reconcile the existence of guardian angels with the fact that Christians still suffer and experience some bad things in life? 4. What impression do you think God's Angels have of you as they watch over your life?

## CHAPTER 13: SATAN

Many people in our society today, including some who claim to be Christians, believe Satan is not a real person - an idea no doubt inspired by Satan himself. After all, if we don't believe we have an enemy to contend with, we will not prepare for defense.

**The biblical evidence for the existence and activity of Satan and demons is formidable.** Seven books in the Old Testament specifically teach that Satan is real (Genesis, 1 Chronicles, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah). All of the New Testament writers and 19 of the books talk about him (for example, Matthew 4:10; 12:26; Mark 1:13; 3:23,26; 4:15; Luke 11:18; 22:3; John 13:27). Jesus refers to Satan some 25 times.

The Scriptures reveal that Satan, formerly named Lucifer, is both a fallen angel and a genuine person. The Scriptures portray Satan as a created being who, though powerful, has definite limitations. **Satan does not possess attributes that belong to God alone, such as being everywhere-present, all-powerful, and all-knowing.**

Though Satan possesses creaturely limitations, he is nevertheless extremely powerful and influential in the world. He deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9; 20:3). He has power in the governmental realm (Matthew 4:8-9; 2 Corinthians 4:4), the physical realm (Luke 13:11,16; Acts 10:38), the angelic realm (Jude 9; Ephesians 6:11-12), and the ecclesiastical (church) realm (Revelation 2:9; 3:9). Clearly, Christians should be very concerned about Satan.

**Satan's Fall:** Lucifer led a rebellion against God, at which time his name was changed to Satan. Lucifer was created in a state of perfection, and he remained perfect in his ways until iniquity was found in him. (Ezekiel 28:12,15). What was this iniquity? We read in verse 17, "Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor." Lucifer apparently became so impressed with his own beauty, intelligence, power, and position that he began to desire for himself the honor and glory that belong to God alone. The sin that corrupted Lucifer was self-generated pride. God rightfully judged this mighty angelic being: "I threw you to the earth" (Ezekiel 28:17). As a result of Lucifer's heinous sin, God banished him from heaven (Isaiah 14:12). He became corrupt, and his name changed from Lucifer ("morning star") to Satan ("adversary"). His power became completely perverted (Isaiah 14:12,16-17).

**Sin originated when Lucifer freely chose to rebel against the Creator-with full understanding of the issues involved.** Apparently, one-third of the angels freely chose to follow Lucifer in his rebellion. The New Testament calls these fallen angels demons. The demons are highly committed to their dark prince, Satan.

**Satan's names:** Accuser of our Brethren, Devil, Enemy, Adversary, Beelzebub, Evil One, Father of Lies, Roaring Lion, Tempter, Serpent, Murderer, God of this Age, and Prince of this World. From this brief survey of names, we can see that Satan's purpose is to thwart God's plan in every area and by every means possible.

**Satan Has Vast Experience:** Satan has vast experience bringing people down. In fact, his experience is far greater than any humans has ever been. **Because of his vast experience, Satan knows the best way to foul you up. He is a master tempter, with thousands of years of practice of luring people into sin.**

**Satan as the Ape of God:** Augustine called the devil Simius Dei-"the ape of God." Satan is the great counterfeiter. He mimics God in many ways. **"The principal tactic Satan uses to attack God and His program in general is to offer a counterfeit kingdom and program."** Second Corinthians 11:14 hints at this by saying Satan masquerades as an angel of light. One theologian has concluded that "Satan's plan and purposes have been, are, and always will be to seek to establish a rival rule to God's kingdom. He is promoting a system of which he is the head and which stands in opposition to God and His rule in the universe."

This passage indicates that Satan inhibits the unbeliever's ability to think or reason properly about spiritual matters. Satan seems to do this is by leading people to think that any way to heaven is as acceptable as another. In other words, Satan promotes the idea that one does not need to believe in Jesus as the only means to salvation. Satan also seeks to snatch the Word of God from the hearts of unbelievers when they hear it (Luke 8:12). Demons, under Satan's lead, seek to disseminate false doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1). As well, they influence false prophets (1 John 4:1-4) and entice men to worship idols (Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:36-38). In short, fallen angels do all they can to spread spiritual deception.

**Fallen Angels Among Believers:** Fallen angels are also very active opposing believers in various ways: Satan tempts Christians to sin (Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5), Satan tempts Christians to lie (Acts 5:3), Satan tempts Christians to commit sexually immoral acts (1 Corinthians 7:5). Fallen Angels Among Believers Fallen angels are also very active opposing believers in various ways, Satan accuses and slanders Christians (Revelation 12:10), Satan sows tares among Christians (Matthew 13:38-39), Satan incites persecutions against Christians (Revelation 2:10), Satan plants doubt in believers' minds (Genesis 3:1-5), Satan fosters spiritual pride in Christians' hearts (1 Timothy 3:6), Demons instigate jealousy and division among Christians (James 3:13-16), Demons hinder answers to believers' prayers (Daniel 10:12-20).

**Can Christians Be Demon Possessed?** A demon-possessed person has a demon residing within and exerting direct control and influence. This is not the same as mere demon influence. A demon-possessed person may manifest unusual, superhuman strength (Mark 5:2-4). He may act in bizarre ways such as going nude and living among tombs rather than in a house (Luke 8:27). The possessed person often engages in self-destructive behavior (Matthew 17:15). The possessed person often engages in self-destructive behavior (Matthew 17:15). **God has delivered Christians from Satan's domain.** As Colossians 1:13 puts it, God "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves." Furthermore, we must remember that "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

**Does the Devil Still Have Access to Heaven?** Many Christians wonder whether the devil still has access to heaven. I believe that he does. The events that took place in the book of Job make clear that Satan has the freedom to appear before God and engage in discourse with Him (Job 1:6; 2:1). Revelation 12:10 tells us that Satan is the "accuser of our brothers," indicating that he goes before God's throne and makes slanderous statements about the saints. In the future tribulation period, however, God will decisively cast the devil out of heaven (Revelation 12:9). Sometime later God will throw Satan into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10 NASB). Our enemy's time is definitely limited. Nevertheless, Satan is a highly intelligent being (Ezekiel 28:12) who has had thousands of years of experience dealing with human beings, and so he may give the appearance of knowing our thoughts.

**Can Christians Bind the Devil?** Christians often claim that references to binding and losing in the New Testament indicate that we have authority over the powers of darkness (Matthew 18:18). **This is a common misconception.**

**THE CHRISTIAN DEFENSE:** We as Christians should be very thankful that God has made provision for our defense against Satan and his fallen angels.

**Christ Intercession:** To begin, we must ever keep in mind that twice the New Testament tells us the Lord Jesus lives in heaven to make intercession for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). In other words, Jesus prays for us on a regular basis. Certainly, Christ's intercession for us includes the kind of intercession He made for His disciples in John 17:15, where He asked the Father to keep them safe from the evil one.

**Spiritual Armor:** But you and I must choose to put on this armor. God doesn't force us to dress in it. We do it by choice. Without wearing this spiritual armor—the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, and the like—you and I don't stand a chance against the forces of darkness. But with the armor on, victory is ours. **Wearing this armor includes such things as living in righteousness and obedience to God's will, having faith in God, and using the Word of God effectively. Word of God:** Using of the Word of God effectively is especially important for spiritual victory. **Knowledge:** Scripture specifically instructs us that each believer must be informed and alert to Satan's attacks. **Reconciliation.** We must not give place to the devil by letting "the sun go down while you are still angry" toward someone (Ephesians 4:27). Permitting unrighteous anger to dwell in our hearts gives the devil a chance to work in our lives. **The Holy Spirit.** We are instructed to rely on the indwelling spirit of God, remembering that "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). **Prayer.** We should pray for ourselves and for each other. **Avoiding the occult.** Assurance in God. Finally, we must remember that Satan is on a leash. He cannot go beyond what God will allow him. God is in control of the universe and realize that Satan cannot simply do as he pleases in our lives.

**By following these disciplines, we will have victory over Satan and his host of demons.** And remember, above all, that successfully defeating the powers of darkness rests not on what you can do in your own strength but on what Christ has already done. Indeed, you are more than a conqueror through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What would you say to a person who told you he or she believes that Satan is just a biblical myth? 2. What do you think are the most important things we learn about Satan from his names? 3. Do you feel that Satan or any of his demons are targeting you in any area of your life? How so? 4. Do you struggle with pride? Sexual temptations? Jealousy? Lying? Have you considered the possibility that Satan or his

demons may be actively seeking your downfall in these areas? 5. Do you think a Christian can be demon possessed? Why or why not? 6. Summarize the Christian's defense against the devil.

## CHAPTER 14: GODS END OF TIMES PROPHECIES

The Bible also contains many specific prophecies of end-time events and persons that will be fulfilled just as literally. **These include prophecies of the rapture, the tribulation period, the Antichrist and his false prophet, God's two prophetic witnesses, Armageddon, the second coming, the millennial kingdom, and the new heavens and new earth.**

**The Rapture:** The rapture is that glorious event in which the dead in Christ will rise and living Christians will be instantly translated into their resurrection bodies - and both groups will be caught up to meet Christ in the air and taken back to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). **I believe in the Pretribulationisim - the view that Christ will rapture the entire church before any part of the tribulation begins.** (ie. the church will not go through the judgments prophesied in the book of Revelation (chapters 4-8).

**The Tribulation:** Scripture reveals that the tribulation will be a definite time of great travail at the end of the age (Matthew 24:29-35). It will be so severe that no period in history, past or future, will equal it (Matthew 24:21). **This will be a period of wrath (Revelation 11:18), judgment (Revelation elation 14:7), indignation (Isaiah 26:20-21), trial (Revelation 3:10), trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), destruction (Joel 1:15), darkness (Amos 5:18), desolation (Daniel 9:271), overturning (Isaiah 24:1-4), and punishment (Isaiah 24:20-21).**

- **The Antichrist.** The apostle Paul warned of a "man of lawlessness," who is the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3,8-9). This individual will perform counterfeit signs and wonders and deceive many people during the tribulation period (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). This demon-inspired individual will rise to political prominence in the tribulation period, seek to dominate the world, attempt to destroy the Jews, persecute all true believers, set himself up as God in a rebuilt Jewish temple, and set up his own kingdom (Revelation 13).

- **The false prophet.** The false prophet - an assistant to the Antichrist - will entice the world to worship the Antichrist (Revelation 13:11-12). He too will perform great signs and wonders, even causing fire to come down from heaven (13:13).

- **The 144,000.** Revelation 7:4 makes reference to 144,000 Jews - 12,000 from each tribe of Israel - who supernaturally become Christians during the tribulation period and are divinely protected for service to God. The 144,000 Jews of Revelation 7 may be the ones who will fulfill God's original calling on Israel by witnessing all over the earth during the tribulation period.

- **The two witnesses.** The two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:3 receive power from God in much the same way that Moses and Elijah did. They will prophesy for 1260 days, and their message will no doubt be a call to repent. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

**Armageddon: Human suffering will steadily escalate during the tribulation period.** First are the seal judgments: bloodshed, famine, death, economic upheaval, a great earthquake, and cosmic disturbances

(Revelation 6). Then come the trumpet judgments: hail and fire mixed with blood, the sea turning to blood, water turning bitter, further cosmic disturbances, affliction by demonic scorpions, and the death of a third of humankind (Revelation 8:6-9:21). Then come the bowl judgments: horribly painful sores on people, more bodies of water turning to blood, the death of all sea creatures, people being scorched by the sun, total darkness engulfing the land, a devastating earthquake, and much more (Revelation 16). Worse comes to worst, however, when these already traumatized human beings find themselves engaged in a catastrophic series of battles called Armageddon.

**The Second Coming of Jesus Christ:** Explaining away the second coming of Jesus Christ is fashionable in our day. Some liberal Christians claim the second coming is a symbolic reference to finding God again in our hearts. Some cultists believe the second coming is a spiritual event (that is, Jesus is not coming physically and visibly). Still others try to argue that the second coming refers not to Jesus but to some other religious leader who will guide the world into a new age of enlightenment. **In reality, the second coming is that event when Jesus Christ - the King of kings and Lord of lords - will return to earth in glory at the end of the present age and set up His kingdom.** The very same Jesus who ascended into heaven will come again at the second coming (Acts 1:11). The second coming will be a visible, physical, bodily return of the glorified Jesus. **The second coming will be a universal experience; every eye will witness the event.**

**The Millennial Kingdom:** Following the second coming of Christ, Jesus will personally set up His kingdom on earth. A literal and plain reading of Scripture leads effortlessly to premillennialism. **Premillennialism teaches that following the second coming, Christ will institute a kingdom of perfect peace and righteousness on earth that will last for one thousand years.** After this reign of true peace, the eternal state begins (Revelation 20:1-7; see also Isaiah 65:17-25; Ezekiel 37:21-28; Zechariah 8:1-17). The reason I subscribe to this view is that it recognizes that just as Christ literally fulfilled the Old Testament messianic prophecies at His first coming, so He will literally fulfill the prophecies of His second coming and millennial kingdom.

**The New Heaven and New Earth:** The Scriptures say the old heaven and earth will pass away. In the book of Revelation we read, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. The new heaven and new earth will conform with all that God is-in a state of fixed bliss and absolute perfection. The new earth will actually be a part of heaven itself.

God gave us prophecy for more than just excitement. He gave it to us so we'd be motivated to purify our lives (see Titus 2:12-14). So this is my challenge: Live your life in such a way that when the rapture occurs, you won't be embarrassed to see your Lord face-to-face. Let us live to please Him every single day.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is your position regarding when the rapture will occur? Can you defend your position biblically?
2. How do the rapture and second coming relate to the way you live your life in the present? Are you ready for Christ to return today?
3. What's the problem with setting dates for the rapture or second coming? Have you ever postponed a long-range project because you thought Christ's coming might be near?
4. God knows the end from the beginning and is in control over human history. What does this mean for you personally?

## CHAPTER 15: THE WONDER OF HEAVEN AND THE AFTERLIFE

**The doctrine of the afterlife involves four fundamental issues: the reality of death, the future judgment, heaven, and hell. Every human being - Christians and unbelievers-will face death and a judgment. Christians will spend eternity with Christ in heaven. Unbelievers will be consigned to hell for all eternity.** Let's consider the details:

**Death:** At the moment of physical death, man's spirit separates or departs from his body (2 Corinthians 5:8). At the moment of death "the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Such verses indicate that at death, the believer's **spirit departs from the physical body and immediately goes into the presence of the Lord in heaven.**

**Both believers and unbelievers remain as disembodied spirits until the future day of resurrection.** Believers' resurrection bodies will be specially suited to dwelling in heaven in the direct presence of God-the the perishable will be made imperishable and the mortal will be made immortal (1 Corinthians 15:53). Unbelievers will also be resurrected, but they all spend eternity apart from God.

**Judgement:** Few people today - even among Christians - govern their actions as if they will be held accountable for them at a future judgment. Though many prefer to ignore any mention of the subject, the fact remains that every human being - Christian and non-Christian - will face a judgment. **The Christian is judged not in relation to salvation (which is absolutely secure) but in relation to receiving or losing rewards from God. The unbeliever, however, is judged as a precursor to being cast into the lake of fire.**

**The Judgment of Christians:** All Christians will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:8-10). At that time God will examine the deeds each believer has done. He will also weigh our personal motives and the intents of our hearts. In the case of Christians, each of us will stand before Christ the judge and receive-or lose-rewards.

**Rewards:** Scripture often uses crowns to symbolize various achievements and awards in the Christian life. The crown of life is given to those who persevere under trial, and especially to those who suffer to the point of death (James 1:12; Revelation elation 2:10). The crown of glory is given to those who faithfully and sacrificially minister God's Word to the flock (1 Peter 5:4). The crown incorruptible is given to those who win the race of temperance and self-control (1 Corinthians 9:25 NASB). The crown of righteousness is given to those who long for the second coming of Christ (2 Timothy 4:8). Because of the different rewards handed out at the judgment seat of Christ, believers will have differing capacities to bring glory to God.

**The Judgment of Unbelievers: Unlike Christians, whose judgment deals only with rewards and loss of rewards, unbelievers face a horrific judgment that leads to their being cast into the lake of fire.** The judgment that unbelievers face is called the **great white throne judgment** (Revelation 20:11-15). Christ is the divine Judge, and those who are judged are the unsaved dead of all time. **The judgment takes place at the end of the millennial kingdom, Christ's thousand-year reign on earth. The destiny of the unsaved includes weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:41-42), condemnation (Matthew 12:36-37), destruction (Philippians 1:28), eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46), separation from God's presence (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9), and trouble and distress (Romans 2:9).** The Scriptures also indicate that hell will have degrees of punishment.

**Heaven – The City of Glory:** This is a scene of ecstatic joy and fellowship of sinless angels and redeemed glorified human beings. "Images suggesting immense size or brilliant light depict heaven as a place of unimaginable splendor, greatness, excellence, and beauty. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). "The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory."

**The Holy City.** In Revelation 21:1-2 we find heaven described as "the holy city." This is a fitting description, for this city will not know sin or unrighteousness of any kind. Only the pure of heart will dwell there. But heaven will be the home of righteousness. It will therefore be a perfect living environment for those who have been made righteous by Christ. Christ's own divine light illumines the holy city of light (Revelation 21:23).

**The Paradise of God:** The word paradise literally means "garden of pleasure" or "garden of delight." Revelation 2:7 calls heaven the "paradise of God."

**The New Jerusalem:** Perhaps the most elaborate description of the heavenly city is in Revelation 21, where we read of the new Jerusalem. **The city measures approximately 1500 miles by 1500 miles by 1500 miles. The eternal city is so huge that it would measure approximately the distance between the Mississippi River and the Atlantic Ocean.**

**The Blessings of Heaven:** Absence of death, intimate fellowship with God and Christ. Christian than to enjoy the sheer delight of unbroken fellowship with God and have immediate and completely unobstructed access to the divine glory (John 14:3; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:17)? We shall see him face-to-face in all His splendor and glory. We will gaze upon His countenance and behold His resplendent beauty forever.

**Reunion with Christian loved ones:** One of the most glorious aspects of our lives in heaven is that we will be reunited with Christian loved ones.

**Satisfaction of all needs:** In our present life on earth, we sometimes go hungry and thirsty. Our needs are not always met. But in the eternal state, God will abundantly meet each and every need. As we read in Revelation 7:16-17, "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat."

**Serene Rest:** The Scriptures indicate that a key feature of heavenly life is rest (Revelation 14:13). No more deadlines to work toward. No more overtime work in order to make ends meet. No more breaking one's back. Just sweet, serene rest. And our rest will be especially sweet because it is in the very presence of God, who meets our every need. Serene rest. The Scriptures indicate that a key feature of heavenly life is rest (Revelation 14:13)

**Sharing in Christ's Glory:** In the heavenly state believers will actually share in the glory of Christ. Romans 8:17 tells us, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory".

The incredible glory of the afterlife should motivate each of us to live faithfully during our relatively short time on earth. Especially when difficult times come, we must remember that we are but pilgrims on our way to another land—to the final frontier of heaven, where God Himself dwells.



**Hell: The Infernal Destiny of the Wicked:** The Scriptures assure us that **hell is a real place**. But hell was not part of God's original creation, which He called "good" (Genesis 1:31). Hell was created later to accommodate the banishment of Satan and his fallen angels who rebelled against God (Matthew 25:41). People who reject Christ will join Satan and his fallen angels in this infernal place of suffering. Scripture sometimes refers to the destiny of the wicked as the "fiery furnace." Jesus said that at the end of the age the holy angels will gather all evildoers and "throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42).

**Eternal punishment: Jesus affirmed that the wicked "will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life"** (Matthew 25:46). Exclusion from God's presence. The greatest pain suffered by those in hell is that they are forever excluded from God's presence. If His presence brings ecstatic joy (Psalm 16:11), then the eternal absence of His presence will bring utter dismay.

### **Controversial Questions About the Afterlife:**

**Near Death Experiences:** Christian researchers note the strong possibility that many of these experiences are actually caused by the evil one—Satan, the father of lies, who has the ability to perform counterfeit miracles (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Here's an important point: In Scripture, God condemns occultism and psychic phenomena. Anyone who doubts this should meditate on Deuteronomy 18:10-13. Much of what is going on in so-called near death experiences is clearly not of God. Reader beware!

**Purgatory:** The Roman Catholic church teaches that Christians who are perfect at death are admitted to heaven. Christians who are not perfectly cleansed and are still tainted with the guilt of venial sins, however, do not go to heaven but rather go to purgatory, where they allegedly go through a process of cleansing (or "purging"). **Purgatory is clearly not a scriptural doctrine.** We are cleansed not by an alleged fire of purgatory but by the blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:14). Jesus "Himself is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2 NASB). Solely through Jesus' work on the cross are we made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**Reincarnation:** Some churchgoers claim that reincarnation is compatible with Christianity. Indeed, 21 percent of Protestants and 25 percent of professing Catholics say they believe in reincarnation." But the salvation-by-works doctrine of reincarnation has many practical problems. **Reincarnation also has many biblical problems.** For example, in 2 Corinthians 5:8 the apostle Paul states, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." At death, the Christian immediately goes into the presence of the Lord, not into another body. Likewise, Luke 16:19-31 tells us that unbelievers at death go to a place of suffering, not into another body. Further, Hebrews 9:27 assures us that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." **Each human being lives once as a mortal on earth, dies once, and then faces judgment. He does not have a second chance by reincarnating into another body.**

**Annihilation:** Some Christians today hold to a doctrine known as annihilationism. This doctrine teaches that man was created immortal. However, those who continue in sin and reject Christ are, by a positive act of God, deprived of the gift of immortality and are ultimately destroyed in hell. Consciousness is snuffed out. They are annihilated and do not suffer eternally. **Annihilationism is answered by Matthew 25:46, which tells us that the wicked "will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Has the reality of a future judgment been a motivation for you to live righteously? Do you need to make any changes in your life as you anticipate this judgment? 2. What do you most look forward to in heaven? 3. What dangers do you see in regard to the near-death experiences that so many people speak of? 4. What are the big problems with believing in reincarnation? 5. Do you think unbelievers will suffer for all eternity in hell? Why or why not? 6. Do you presently have a top-down perspective?

**BOOK POSTSCRIPT:** I have tried to show that modern cultural religion accepts many ideas that are not Christian at all and are, in fact, patently unbiblical. Here are just a few examples:

- Cultural religion weds religion with evolutionary theory. Biblical Christianity teaches that God created all things-including including human beings.
- Cultural religion teaches that the problem of evil proves that God cannot be all-powerful and all-knowing. Biblical Christianity portrays God as being infinite in perfections, including being all-powerful and all-knowing. Surely this all-powerful and all-knowing God has a sovereign purpose for allowing evil to exist temporarily.
- Cultural religion downplays sin in favor of a "feel good" Christianity. Biblical Christianity reveals the true ugliness of sin, clearly delineating its damning effects.