

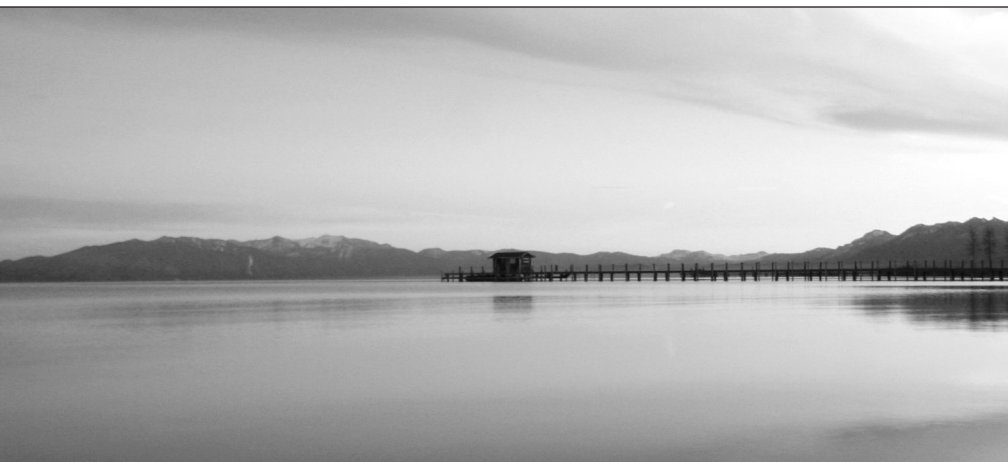
Q & A on the Basic Beliefs

INQUIRY SERIES



Q&A on the Basic Beliefs

INQUIRY SERIES



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ISBN: 1-930264-04-6

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CHAPTER

1

God's Existence

1.1

Science has made religion obsolete. There is neither any reason to believe in God today, nor any need for religion.

- ◆ Science and religion explore reality from different perspectives. Science studies how things work, but religion seeks also their origin and meaning. While science allows us to learn about God's creation, it can't answer the questions, "Why is the universe here?", "Why do we exist?", and "What is our destiny?" These are issues beyond the scope of science. They can only be answered by religion.

1.2

Evolution has done away with the concept of a creator.

- ◆ According to Michael Poole, lecturer in science education at King's College, London, "A distinction needs to be made between evolution — the fact that changes take place from generation to generation, which is generally accepted by biologists; and the mechanisms by which changes occur — a matter of continuing debate. Darwin's theory is about the mechanisms of change. It is based on certain assumptions."
- ◆ The Darwinian theory of random mutation and natural selection still depends on some kind of pre-existing order.

Evolution may describe a process of creation, and scientists may successfully use its principles to manipulate or clone creatures, but it cannot explain away the first cause. Even if the theory of evolution is correct, it still does not rule out a creator: “Creation is an act — the act of an agent, in this case God. Evolution is a process. A description of the processes of creation is not a logical alternative to the act of creation, as Darwin himself realized . . . Nobody would claim that understanding the mechanisms of an invention ruled out an inventor. Yet a similar claim is made that understanding the mechanisms of creation rules out a Creator.”²

1.3

We came about by chance.

- ◆ If we say the whole world was the result of random changes, then no empirical evidence, or science, could ever prove it. Indeed, if everything came about by chance, then what would be the purpose of science?
- ◆ There are even darker ramifications to this question. If our mind were just an accidental result of chemical reactions, then it would be no more significant than a clod of dirt. Could we then rely on any of our observations, our thoughts, or our feelings? If we came about by chance, if there is no overarching purpose to existence, then what meaning would there be to life?
- ◆ We may exult in the ability to “shape our own significance,” but what guarantee do we have of actually doing that, if life ultimately were nothing more than randomly moving particles? If our desires determine or justify all things, then what makes killing worse than blinking, or love better than hate? In a universe caused by chance, we are reduced to characters in an absurdist play, and the actions we judge to be deeply

meaningful become, in the cosmic perspective, equivalent to tossing a ball, kicking a rock, or otherwise passing the time of day. Without God, how can human life have meaning?

- ◆ We use the word “chance” to describe an event when we can’t see an obvious pattern. But we shouldn’t rule out the possibility that someday we may discover a pattern. Applying the label “chance” to something certainly doesn’t deny a divine cause or purpose. Rather, it’s actually an indication that we can’t figure out everything by ourselves.

1.4

Why do Christians insist that the universe is only a few thousand years old when scientific findings clearly show that the universe must be billions of years old?

- ◆ Not all Christians believe that the universe is only a few thousand years old. Those who hold the old earth view recognize the scientific evidence that the earth is billions of years old and interpret the days of creation in Genesis as eras. Those who hold the young earth view understand the days in creation to be 24-hour periods and believe that the universe appears to be billions of years old when it is actually a few thousand years old. In other words, God could have made the universe in an “aged” state.

1.5

Since the universe has been in existence for so long, it is highly probable that the first single living cell was produced randomly, and that cell evolved gradually to all the species

of living organisms. In fact, science has shown that the building blocks of life can be randomly produced. There is no need for a creator.

- ◆ In the 1950s, in his famous experiment, Stanley Miller subjected a mixture of hydrogen, methane, ammonia, and water vapor to repeated electric discharges to yield amino acids, the building blocks of proteins, which in turn are the building blocks of cells. The experiment was designed to show how the primitive earth atmosphere could have generated life. More recent scientific findings, however, question whether the mixture he used could have represented the earth's "primitive atmosphere."³
- ◆ While scientists have been able to generate various organic acids and even sugars in laboratory experiments with different gaseous mixtures, they have not been able to produce the next stage. Even scientists recognize, too, that what they engineer occurs in highly contrived, controlled environments, "with considerably more foresight and technical support than the prebiotic world could have enjoyed."⁴
- ◆ The following illustration shows that it takes much more faith to believe that the first DNA was a result of random events than to believe in an intelligent creator:

"If a computer randomly typed letters and spaces on a page, how long would it take to produce ONE page accurately describing someone? All words must be spelled correctly. Sentences must be complete and grammar perfect. It would take a long time even at a rate of a page a second."

"Now imagine that any letter has a 50% chance of being upside down, one of which would destroy the page. At a page a second, it would take more than 100 billion years just to get a page of all upright letters (like flipping a coin 5000 'heads')."

“This is analogous to the evolutionary model of random events creating the first DNA ... except for one thing: instead of one page, we would need to create 500,000 pages to produce a single DNA molecule.”⁵

- ◆ As researcher James P. Ferris states in *Scientific American*, “Scientists are not close to knowing the exact processes that took place on the earth which led to the origins of life. They may never know the exact answer.”⁶ Though they may suggest plausible processes, they can never supply the real cause.

1.6

The universe is infinitely old. Because it has always existed, it does not need a cause or creator.

- ◆ According to the second law of thermodynamics, the amount of usable energy in the universe is decreasing. The universe, in other words, does not have an infinite quantity of energy. Since the universe is finite, or limited, it must have had a beginning.
- ◆ The premise that the universe had a beginning receives strong support from natural science. Science has shown that the universe is steadily expanding: therefore, at some point in the distant past, it came into being. The big bang theory, supported by the discovery of a radiation echo in the universe, or low-level radiation from an awesome explosion, points out that the universe is not eternal, but had a beginning from a single source.
- ◆ We observe that all matter changes and is contingent. If all matter comprises the universe, then how can the universe be eternal?

- ◆ If the past were infinite, then how could we ever have arrived at the present? We would have to pass through an infinite series of moments, which is impossible.

1.7

The universe results from an infinite series of finite causes.

- ◆ An infinite series of finite causes is irrational because we still have to explain the first cause in this infinite chain. Everything finite must have a cause. Thus, in reality, there cannot be such a thing as an “infinite series of finite causes.” A real being must be the first being in the chain, and this being must be God.

1.8

The universe comes from an endless series of things mutually supporting each other's existence.

- ◆ Nothing is entirely self-sustaining. All things are dependent on other things for their existence. But a thing needs to exist before it can give existence to another. There must exist something — God — whose being is not caused by something else or dependent on anything else. For example, water evaporates into water vapor, vapor rises to form clouds, and clouds condense to become water. But the hydraulic cycle does not account for its very existence. Something that is not caused by the hydraulic cycle must have caused the hydraulic cycle to come into being in the first place.

1.9

The Big Bang Theory tells us that the universe was created by an explosion of great energy, not a personal creator.

- ◆ The Big Bang theory speaks nothing about what or who caused the Big Bang because such questions are beyond the realm of natural science. If anything, the model points out that the universe is not eternal and provides strong support that there is indeed a creator. Although the name “Big Bang” seems to suggest that the universe resulted from chaos and blind chance, the theory in fact has no such implication. Some have even proposed a better name for the Big Bang model, such as “the Grand Opening,” that would more accurately represent the awesome origin of the universe.

1.10

How can we know God exists?

◆ **From Creation**

If something exists, it has either 1) always existed, 2) been created by something that always existed, or 3) created itself. We know from evidence that the universe has not always existed. We also know that it is impossible for something finite to create itself. It would have to exist in order to create; but how can something be and not be at the same time? Therefore, the only option remaining is the universe was created by something that has always existed, has infinite might and eternal life.

The Bible tells us that “since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead”

(Rom 1:20). When we see a tree, we realize that there was once a seed from which it grew. When we see a child, we recognize that there were parents that gave birth to the child. When we consider the universe, we know there must be a source for its being:

“Existence is like a gift given from cause to effect. If there is no one who has the gift, the gift cannot be passed down the chain of receivers, however long or short the chain may be... If there is no God who has existence by his own eternal nature, then the gift of existence cannot be passed down the chain of creatures and we can never get it. But we do get it; we exist. Therefore there must exist a God: an Uncaused Being.”⁷

We are able to exist today because there are complex forces, systems and structures working in the universe, keeping it in order. The earth sustains life because it is located at just the right distance from the sun, between the thermally uninhabitable limits of the boiling and freezing points of water. We live because each cell of our bodies possesses about 80,000 genes that enable the trillions of cells we have to function and communicate with each other. From the macro world to the micro, we see both precision and complexity, but above all, purpose, in existence. Nudge the earth a little off its path of orbit, and the temperature would cause all of life to die; alter or remove a gene, and the whole body may be destroyed. Such explicit design declares the existence of an intelligent creator.

► **From His Word**

God has revealed His existence and His plans for humankind through His own word. The existence of the Bible and its lasting influence over thousands of years attest to something greater than the invention of man. Indeed, how could over forty authors, from peasants to kings, statesmen to fishermen,

and over a span of forty generations have presented such a consistent image of God and message of His divine plan unless His existence were real? Accumulated evidence has demonstrated the truth of the Word: not only through corroborating archaeological findings,⁸ but also through the fulfillment of over 600 specific, biblical prophecies through the ages⁹ and its ultimate materialization in Jesus Christ (Jn 1:1, 14).

► **From Human Consciousness**

God exists because we know and experience Him. The book of Romans tells us that humans “knew God” but “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (1:21, 18). And yet an underlying moral consciousness, a universal sense of right and wrong, persists within us, testifying to that ultimate source of justice. Though laws may vary across boundaries and “values” are subjective, there are universally accepted notions of how one ought (e.g. with honor, kindness) or ought not (e.g. murder, rape, lie) to behave that have prevailed through history and across cultural boundaries. Fundamentally, or at the very least, we recognize the obligation to obey our conscience—an obligation that neither arises from nature nor ourselves, nor society, for none of the three can fully “impose” that obligation on us. The only source for the absolute moral obligation to obey our conscience is God.

The universal desire, found among people in every age and culture, to seek out and worship God also affirms His existence. Why would the desire exist if there were no real object for it? We would not feel hunger or thirst unless food and water existed. As C.S. Lewis argued in *Mere Christianity*, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” A person might win a million dollars, achieve a certain level of fame, or gain the affection of others,

but still seek something better that he knows exists “out there.” The fulfillment, the perfect goodness, the complete love we long for truly exists; the delusion occurs when we fail to recognize we are really missing God.

◆ **From Experience**

Our knowledge of God, however, is not only based on inference. We can know He exists through experience. God does directly intervene in our lives, as testimonies reveal. When we hear about a person healed from a fatal illness, or a baby found sleeping, cradled in the limb of a tree, after a tornado, we recognize that certain incidents cannot be rationally explained. There must be someone beyond our “ordinary,” “rational” world who has control over it: there must be God.

When we practice God’s word, we will see the results. When we pray, as He instructed us, God listens and answers our prayers, even in miraculous ways. If we pray for the Holy Spirit, we will receive it, as many believers can testify — truly experiencing the power and joy in the spirit as the Bible describes. Moreover, when we receive the Holy Spirit, we experience the guiding presence of God daily (Ezek 36:27).

1.11

What kind of God exists?

◆ **God exists absolutely, and of necessity.**

Regardless of what they are, all limited things have a need for being that they cannot supply themselves. But God cannot have that need; as the cause of all creation, He must exist. Because there is no difference between what He is, and that He is, He exists absolutely. Thus God said, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:14).

◆ **God is limitless.**

The universe includes space and time and all limited things. As the cause of the universe, God must exist before and beyond it.

◆ **God is one.**

If God has sovereign power, then there cannot be more than one God (Deut 32:39).

◆ **God is spirit (Jn 4:24).**

All matter is subject to change. God is changeless; therefore He is immaterial.

◆ **God is transcendent and immanent: He is “above all, and through all, and in all” (Eph 4:6).**

God exists independently from His creation, the universe. Yet God sustains all creation; all life exists because of Him. Therefore God is omnipresent, filling heaven and earth, and dwelling among us (Jer 23:23–24, 2 Cor 6:16).

◆ **God is wise.**

God reveals His wisdom in His creation. As Creator, God has complete knowledge of all things (Ps 147:5).

◆ **God is good.**

As giver and sustainer of life, God is infinitely good (Ps 145:7–9). Being wholly good, He cannot tolerate evil; He is holy (Lev 11:44), just (Isa 45:21), and true (Jn 17:17). Being good, He is also loving (1 Jn 4:8) and merciful (Ex 34:6). His perfect goodness is manifested in Jesus Christ, through whom He fulfills His requirement for justice and demonstrates His boundless love.

1.12

If everything has a cause, then what caused God?

- ◆ The law of causality does not say that everything must have a cause. It states that for every effect there is a cause (an “effect” is something that requires a cause), or that everything that has a beginning needs a cause. But God is not an effect nor does He have a beginning. He was not created, but has always been. He is eternal, and therefore does not require a cause.
- ◆ There is a difference between self-existence and self-creation. The concept of self-creation involves contradiction. A being cannot create itself because to do that, it would have to exist already. But it is not a contradiction to conceive of something that has always existed. God, eternal, unlimited by time or space, and without a cause, was not created, but has always been. As we have seen in the previous questions, it is because He first exists, uncaused, that everything else came into being.

1.13

How do we know a self-existent, infinite force, and not a personal God, didn't cause the universe?

- ◆ If the first cause had no mind or intelligence, then how do we explain the intelligence displayed in the grand design of this universe? If what caused our existence did not do so with a purpose, our existence is also without purpose. All talk of intelligence or purpose is meaningless unless someone had given everything a purpose in the first place.

- ◆ If the first cause were an infinite, impersonal force, then all the conditions for the existence of the universe would have been present eternally. But the universe is finite and had a beginning. Its existence, therefore, cannot be attributed to an impersonal, infinite force; rather, it must be the result of a personal choice.
- ◆ God chose to create the world; His intent is behind it. And just as the universe displays intelligent design and purpose, we know its creator must have intelligence and purpose. Though we cannot fully know or understand Him, it is important to consider what His intent for creation is, and specifically, what purpose we have to live. Knowing that we owe our existence to Him, we must acknowledge that He deserves our worship.

1.14

Can God make a rock so big that He can't lift?

- ◆ This question is meant to stump a person on the idea of an omnipotent being. It appears to raise a contradiction that challenges the very idea of God's existence. In fact, the question can be restated as, "Can God make Himself anything less than omnipotent?" Just as God cannot lie, or disown Himself, having almighty power does not mean God can contradict His own nature. This does not challenge His omnipotence; on the contrary, it confirms His absoluteness.
- ◆ Using a logical puzzle to confound our concept of God only says something about our own limitations, not God's.

1.15

Because of our finite knowledge, it is just not possible for us to know whether God exists (agnosticism).

- ◆ The claim that God cannot be known is self-contradictory. If we cannot know anything about God, how can we know God so well to know that He cannot be known? It is like saying, “I believe it is not possible to believe anything.”
- ◆ Until we can confidently explain how we came to be, and why we exist, we cannot confidently say, “There is no God.” But it is equally impossible to suspend our judgment about matters of faith because religious beliefs are not just intellectual theories. Matters of faith concern life, and how we should live; and “since we cannot suspend judgment about life itself, in the end we cannot be neutral about religious faith.”¹⁰ Jesus tells us that whoever believes in Him is saved, but whoever does not believe in Him stands condemned (Jn 3:16–18). If we refuse to believe Him based on the rationale that we cannot possibly know anything about God, then we already have made a decision to be an unbeliever.
- ◆ Blaise Pascal, the French scientist, mathematician and founder of modern probability, formulated this wager: if we bet God exists, then even if we are wrong, we have lost nothing, for in the end, we would be left with eternal nonexistence. If we bet against God, and if we are wrong, then in the end, we have lost everything: heaven, eternal life with Him, and infinite joy and gain.
- ◆ We owe it to ourselves, but moreover, we owe it to God, to examine the evidence carefully and open-mindedly, before we make our choice.

1.16

There are many finite gods who reign over separate realms of the universe. The multiplicity and chaos of the world show that there are many gods with sometimes discordant plans. These gods were either once men or arose from nature (polytheism).

- ◆ If the gods are not eternal, then they are not ultimate. We still need to explain where everything in this finite world comes from. But if there is a Creator who is eternal and ultimate from whom all things came to being, why should we worship the other so called “gods”?
- ◆ God’s word, the Bible, clearly reveals to us that there is no other god besides Him (Deut 32:39; Isa 45:18–22). God alone is the Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, and Judge.

1.17

Believers often posit that because belief in God is a “universal phenomenon,” God must exist. But the majority is not always right. Most people were wrong about the sun moving around the earth. So why can’t they be wrong about the existence of God?

- ◆ Even though people were wrong about the movements of the sun and earth, they still experienced the sun and earth and motion. They were simply wrong in attributing the motion to the sun. But if people are wrong about God, then what have they been experiencing? How do we explain the

living testimonies of people who have prayed and have been healed of chronic diseases, or have received the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues? Unless there is another plausible reason, we can only attribute these experiences to the existence of God.

1.18

But religious belief has a very plausible psychological explanation. Belief in God may stem from our childhood fears. God is in fact a projection of our human fathers, our “protector” in our helplessness against the forces of nature.

- ◆ First, we need to acknowledge that what is posited as an “explanation” really begins with the assumption of God’s nonexistence. Given that, to the atheist, God cannot exist, another account of religious belief must be formed: “since the closest earthly symbol for the Creator is a father, God must be a cosmic projection of our human fathers. But apart from the assumption of atheism, there is no compelling evidence at all that God is a mere projection.”¹¹
- ◆ We could equally posit a psychological explanation of atheism: alienation from the human father causes one to reject God.

1.19

If God wants us to believe in Him, why doesn't He just appear to us?

- ◆ God has shown Himself to the world through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who is God Himself (Col 1:15–17), manifested God's glory (Jn 1:14; Heb 1:3) and made God known to the world (Jn 1:18). Jesus came to demonstrate His love for us, and teach us exactly how to be with Him, God, forever. But many still refused to believe Him (Jn 1:10–11). So even if God merely appeared in the sky to everyone, that wouldn't do us much good; even if “seeing is believing,” it takes more than that — faith — to be willing to follow and obey Him.
- ◆ God does reveal Himself in more meaningful ways. He reveals His greatness in nature, from the tiny atoms to the gigantic galaxies. He reveals His character in Jesus Christ, who lived and taught among human beings. He reveals His wisdom in the Bible, teaching us how to live a full life by relying on Him. He reveals His love to us in prayer, comforting our sorrows and helping us through our troubles. He reveals His life-transforming power by having His Holy Spirit live in us.
- ◆ God persuades powerfully, but He doesn't force you to believe. Ultimately, it is your choice. If you can give God the benefit of the doubt by following His teachings, you will experience for yourself that God is indeed real.

NOTES

1. Michael Poole, *A Guide to Science and Belief* (Oxford, Lion Publishing, 1990) 96.
2. *Ibid.*, 110.
3. See Christian de Duve. "The Beginnings of Life on Earth," *American Scientist* (September-October 1995), <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/feature/the-beginnings-of-life-on-earth/>; and Sean Henahan. "From Primordial Soup to the Prebiotic Beach: An interview with exobiology pioneer, Dr. Stanley L. Miller," *Access Excellence*, <http://www.accessexcellence.org/RC/miller.html>
4. Christian de Duve. "The Beginnings of Life on Earth."
5. Ralph O. Muncaster, *Creation versus Evolution: New Scientific Discoveries* (Mission Viejo: Strong Basis to Believe) 17.
6. James P. Ferris. "Scientific American: Ask the Experts: Biology," *Scientific American*, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=how-close-are-scientists>.
7. Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 51.
8. For a measured look at current archaeological evidence, see Jeffery L. Sheler, "Is the Bible true?" *U.S. News and World Report* (October 25, 1999).
9. For a detailed discussion of biblical prophecy and fulfillment, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979) 265–323.
10. Stephen C. Evans. *Why Believe? Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996) 8.
11. Kreeft & Tacelli, 84.

CHAPTER

2

God's Goodness

2.1

What is evil, and where did it come from?

- ◆ Evil is, quite simply, the lack of good, the negation of good. It has been defined as the “lack of something that should be there in the relationship between good things.” Evil is not a substance or being; it is real, but not a real thing. God did not create evil, for we know that God made everything good. And things are not evil in their being: a knife or a gun, for example, is not evil in and of itself. Rather, it is the will or intent that causes disorder and corrupts what is good. Even Satan was good in his being, for as the Bible says, “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you” (Ezek 28:15). To sin is to transgress the will of God, to fall short of His intention for us. Augustine called evil disordered love, or disordered will, a wrong relationship, or a lack of conformity between our will and God's will. Therefore God did not create evil; His creature caused it.

2.2

If a good and all-powerful God exists, then how can He allow the existence of evil?

- ◆ Atheists argue that the existence of evil refutes the existence of God. Others argue that God is neither good nor evil, or

that God must be limited. Some religions maintain that evil does not really exist, but is only an illusion of “unenlightened human consciousness.” But the Christian believes that God exists, is good and rules over all, but also affirms that evil exists. How can all four truths be reconciled?

- ◆ If God had created the world as it exists today, then indeed, God would not be good and worthy of worship. But God created all things good, and the goodness of His creation included freedom. Love must have an object; God created the universe to manifest His nature of Love. But true love can only exist with freedom, just as true righteousness can only exist with freedom. We cannot truly love if we are forced to do so against our will; we cannot be morally perfect if we do not choose to do good out of our own volition.
- ◆ God did not create a world of robots to mechanically serve His purposes. He shows us what is good: “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly” with Him (Mic 6:8). He also gives us commandments so that we may understand the consequences of our choices (Rom 5:13). But He permits us the freedom to do as we will, and by allowing that freedom, He allows the possibility of evil. When Satan chose to rebel against God, he set the precedent for sin. Adam and Eve sinned because they failed to obey the command God had given them, despite their knowledge of the consequences. Their disobedience displayed a lack of faith in God and introduced the separation between God and man. Death, the price of sin, was the result.
- ◆ Evil exists, so long as there is freedom to choose evil. But this does not mean that God is powerless against evil or in any way subject to it. On the contrary, God has already defeated evil through Jesus Christ. He came into the world as Jesus and suffered life’s hardships with us. Jesus demonstrated that it is possible to have free will and not sin. He satisfied God’s

requirement for justice and manifested God's love on the cross by paying the ultimate price for human evil: death and complete severance from God.

- ◆ Through faith in Him, we can be justified, or made blameless, in the eyes of God once more — overcoming evil and its consequence of death. If we believe in Jesus, one day God will wipe every tear from our eyes. “There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain...” (Revelation 21:4).
- ◆ Even today, He can give us the same victory and help each one of us through our sorrows in life. How do we know? Because Jesus resurrected. When we believe in Jesus, our old, weak, error-prone self dies with Him and we are resurrected into a new life. Then we no longer fear suffering because Jesus strengthens us, comforts us, and gives us peace.

2.3

Why should we be held guilty for something Adam did?

- ◆ Romans 5:12 tells us that “through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Because of Adam's sin, mankind, having descended from Adam, exists in a fallen state and is alienated from God. Is that unfair? Consider it this way: if you were to discover that your grandfather was a murderer, you would probably feel shame, even though you had nothing to do with his crime. On the other hand, you would be proud to know if your grandfather was a hero who had saved many lives. Either way, we cannot deny our heredity or the way it shapes who we are, for we exist because our ancestors existed. As a race, all of humankind is related more or less.

We share in the inheritance of our common ancestor, Adam. Just as a person whose parent was an alcoholic is predisposed to alcoholism, we are all predisposed to sin because Adam sinned. And we have all sinned, not because we lack the ability to choose righteousness, but because our will is inclined not towards God, but towards evil. We follow our strongest desires, and our strongest inclinations are usually away from God.

- ◆ God does not condemn us to this inheritance, however, for He has provided a way out. While we cannot change our physical heritage, we can receive a new spiritual one. When we choose, through faith, to be baptized in Jesus' blood, we put off the body of the flesh that leads to sin, and are born again, freed from the guilt of our Adamic heritage (Rom 6:6–7; Col 2:11–13). When we receive the Holy Spirit, we receive the “Spirit of adoption,” identifying us as the children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:15–17).

2.4

Why does a good God allow suffering?

- ◆ Goodness is not equivalent to kindness, for “[i]f goodness meant only kindness, a God who tolerated pain in his creatures when he could abolish it would not be an all-good God.”² Because His nature is perfectly good and just, however, God cannot tolerate sin. Having sinned and turned away from God, we are subject to His divine wrath. And since our souls are alienated from God, our bodies, too, are alienated and no longer under His complete protection. God gave humankind authority over nature (Gen 1:28), but when humanity rejected God's authority, we rejected the authority He gives to us: “If you rebel against the king, his ministers will no longer serve you.”³ Therefore we suffer both physical

evil from the natural world (disease, famine, earthquakes; cf. Deut 28:15–68; Lk 13:1–5) as well as moral evil from the sins we commit (hatred, envy, deceit; cf. Gal 5:13–15).

- ▶ Why, then, do the righteous suffer? We cannot always equate suffering with wrongdoing, as Job’s friends were too quick to do. When Jesus’ disciples asked why the man He healed was born blind, He replied, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (Jn 9:3). Suffering ultimately reveals to us God’s sovereign power. Through suffering, our faith in God grows, as we come to realize our limitations and learn to turn, instead, to Him. Thus, God allows suffering for our own good, so that in the end, “the genuineness of [our] faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7).

NOTES

1. Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990) 61.
2. Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 140.
3. *Ibid.*, 135.

CHAPTER

3

Jesus Christ

3.1

Why is it important to know Jesus?

- ◆ If you were told that someone died for you, wouldn't you at least find out if this was true, and, if so, why? A man named Jesus died on a cross. He said He did this for you, to save you from eternal suffering and lead you back to God. This is either an extraordinary act of love and power or a ridiculous lie. Even out of curiosity alone, we would want to find out how much of this claim is true. And when our destiny is at stake, we must make every effort to find out.

3.2

Who is Jesus Christ?

- ◆ Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin named Mary (Mt 1:18; Lk 1:34–35). Matthew 2:1 and Luke 1:5 tell us Jesus was born when Herod the Great was still alive, and thus indicate His birth occurred sometime before Herod's death in 4 BC. Due to a mistake in calculation by a Scythian monk, our era is dated according to Christ's birth in 1 AD. According to most historians, however, Jesus was born sometime between 8 and 4 BC, and about 750 years after the traditional date for the founding of Rome in 753 BC. He was born in Bethlehem of Judah (Lk 2:4), the city of David, and grew up in Nazareth, a small city in Galilee. His name, "Jesus,"

is from the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “The Lord saves.” The title “Christ” is derived from the Greek term that means “Anointed One” (The Hebrew equivalent is “Messiah”).

- ◆ Despite His unique birth, Jesus fully displayed His humanity. He experienced hunger (Mt 4:2), thirst (Jn 19:28), and needed rest (Mk 4:38). He felt anger and grief (Mk 3:5), wept when one of His dearest friends died (Jn 11:35), and suffered agony before and during His crucifixion (Lk 22:44; Mt 27:46). He died on a cross; His side, pierced by a Roman soldier’s spear, gushed water and blood (Jn 19:34). He was buried according to Jewish customs (Jn 19:38–42), resurrected and appeared to His disciples, including to over five hundred of them at once (1 Cor 15:6).
- ◆ Beyond the data we have about Him, Jesus made several significant claims about Himself:
 1. He is God: “I and My Father are one (Jn 10:30); “He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (Jn 14:9).
 2. He is the way to God and salvation: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn 14:6); “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (Jn 10:9).
 3. He carries supreme authority, even over nature (Lk 8:25), for “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18).
 4. He has power to forgive sins (Mk 2:5–12; Lk 7:48–50; Jn 8:24)—power that only belongs to God.
 5. “Before Abraham was, I AM” (Jn 8:58): He existed before Abraham; He is the eternal “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:14).

6. His words are eternal: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Mk 13:31).
7. He is the light of the world (Jn 8:12).
8. He is the living bread and gives His flesh as food (Jn 6:51); He provides living water to quench thirst eternally (Jn 4:14).
9. He will answer prayer (Jn 14:14).
10. He is the resurrection and source of eternal life (Jn 11:25–26).

3.3

What evidence is there to support the claims of Jesus’ identity?

◆ The goodness of His character

Even though many have rejected His claims regarding His identity, few fail to recognize the goodness of Jesus’ character. He had compassion on others, comforted those in need, associated freely with the outcast and downtrodden, and humbled Himself as a servant. His teachings upheld the strictest standards of moral goodness, and He fulfilled them with His own blameless life. “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” He asked, “And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?” (Jn 8:46).

If we recognize His goodness, then how can we deny Jesus’ claims to be God? If He were not God, He would be a blatant liar — the greatest sham and hypocrite of them all. This is the contradiction we are faced with, just as the Jews at the time debated the same questions (see Jn 7:12; Jn 10:21). But even Pilate, the Roman who judged Jesus, found no fault in Him (Mt 27:24; Lk 23:4). If His claims were false, why would Jesus

deliberately deceive, and willingly die for a lie? And why would He then make no attempt to defend or justify Himself before His accusers (Mt 27:14, Mk 15:4–5)? No one in his right mind would willingly suffer and die for a lie he created.

◆ **His wisdom astonished others**

Jesus not only exemplified goodness in His life, He displayed extraordinary intelligence and wisdom. His knowledge and understanding astonished His listeners (Mt 7:28; 13:54), even in His boyhood (Lk 2:47, 52). His enemies marveled at His replies to their challenges and were unable to answer Him (Mt 22:22, 33, 46). He was perceptive of the doubts, questions, and difficulties those around Him faced and was able to address them. He proclaimed prophecies regarding His own death, as well as the destruction of the temple, which were later fulfilled.

◆ **His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies**

The Bible predicted that there would be a Messiah who would come to save God's people. Several different authors, at various stages in history — centuries before Jesus — prophesied about the Messiah's coming, His mission, His life. Jesus' life fulfilled these Messianic prophecies one by one: He would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14) in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2) of the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3) and the house of David (2 Sam 7:12ff); He would be preceded by a messenger, Elijah (Mal 3:1, 4:5); He would be betrayed by a close friend (Ps 41:9) for thirty pieces of silver (Zech 11:12); He would be silent before His accusers (Isa 53:7); He would be crucified, sneered and mocked (Zech 12:10; Ps 22:7); He would resurrect (Ps 16:10) and ascend to heaven (Ps 68:18).

As Jesus said, the Scriptures bear testimony of Him (Jn 5:39,47) that He is indeed the Christ, the Savior of man.

◆ **His miraculous ministry**

Jesus did not just dispense moral teachings during the three years of His ministry; He performed numerous miracles that healed the leprous, paralytic, and blind (e.g. Mt 8:1–3; 9:1–7; 28–30); multiplied bread (Jn 6:11); cast out demons (Mk 9:14–27); even raised the dead (Lk 8:49–56). These signs and wonders were proof to an otherwise unbelieving people (Jn 4:48) that Jesus came from God and was the prophesied Messiah (Isa 35:5–6). Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews who came to believe, said to Jesus: “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (Jn 3:2).

◆ **His resurrection**

The women who followed Jesus went to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body with fragrant oils and spices. When they arrived, they found the stone rolled away, and His body gone. Peter and John came to inspect the tomb and saw only the grave cloths lying there. Jesus later appeared to the disciples several times, showing them His hands and feet and eating with them to show that He had indeed resurrected. He spent some time with the disciples explaining the Scriptures: “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem” (Lk 24:46–47). It was the first time in history that such an event had occurred; no other religion can make the same claim.

◆ **The gift of the Holy Spirit**

Jesus promised His disciples that when He went away, the Helper, the Spirit of truth, would come to guide them. He told them, “[I]f I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (Jn 16:7). The pouring out of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts testifies

to Jesus' claims, for it fulfills the promise He made to His disciples. Jesus must have returned to the Father in order to send the Holy Spirit to them (Acts 3:33). Today, we can receive the Holy Spirit because Jesus fulfills His promise to us. This is manifest in the physical evidence of believers who pray for the Holy Spirit and, in being filled, speak in tongues as the apostles did.

◆ **The testimony of his followers**

Among the Jews, given their strict monotheism, it is highly unlikely that any would so easily come to believe the “myth” that the man, Jesus, was also Lord. Yet even the Jewish rulers — including someone as well educated as Nicodemus — came to believe in Jesus (Jn 3:1–2; 12:42).

When Jesus was arrested, His disciples and followers scattered out of fear and went into hiding. Peter denied Jesus three times to avoid any trouble with the authorities (Mt 26:69–75). Yet within a few months after the Lord's death and burial, Peter and the other disciples fearlessly preached Jesus and His resurrection before the multitudes and the authorities that had sentenced Jesus to death. Even the authorities marveled at their boldness (Acts 4:13). The apostles persisted in preaching the gospel despite being threatened, beaten, imprisoned and stoned—even unto death. The dramatic change that took place in them, and the witness that they continued to bear under extraordinary pressure to stop, testify to the truth of their claims. As they said to the council of rulers that threatened them: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

The persistence of Christianity to the present day, despite all odds, supports the truthfulness of its beliefs. Jesus' followers continue to bear witness of Him today, despite societal pressures and even heavy persecution in various parts of the world.

◆ **He answers prayers**

The work of Jesus continues today; in His name, addictions are conquered, diseases are cured and lives are transformed — all testifying to the power, authority, and eternal words of a living Lord. As verified by testimonies, He answers the prayers of those who earnestly seek Him: healing our bodily ailments; imparting peace and true joy; empowering us to overcome the conflicts and temptations that bind us; giving us the most precious gift of His Holy Spirit.

3.4

Jesus was a good man, a teacher, or a prophet at best.

- ◆ Jesus claimed that He was the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father in heaven except through Him (Jn 14:6). He also claimed to be alive even before Abraham was (Jn 8:58). Such would not be the claims of someone who is only a moral teacher.
- ◆ No one can reasonably feel neutral about Jesus. His self-portrayal doesn't give you that option. You can call Him crazy and walk away in disgust, or you can believe that He really is God. What's important is not to brush Him off without first examining the facts. Through His life on earth, Jesus has proven that He is God who had come to save us.
- ◆ When Paul presented his case for Christ before King Agrippa, Festus, the Roman governor, proclaimed that the apostle was out of his mind: "Much learning is driving you mad!" But Paul answered: "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king... knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner"

(Acts 26:24–26). The evidence, which is plain, would sway us, as it nearly did Agrippa, if we were not as quick as Agrippa to dismiss all notions of faith. If we take the time to examine the evidence, we will discover that there is truth behind the claims, and reason to believe.

3.5

What does “resurrection” mean? How did Jesus resurrect?

- ◆ While the exact nature of resurrection remains a mystery to us, we know very simply that Jesus’ body “stood up” and was transformed into a spiritual body; thus, He was able to appear to the believers even though the doors to where they were gathered were locked. Jesus was not, however, a ghost (i.e. a spirit without a body) because He could be touched, and He ate with them (Lk 24:36–43). He was not merely “revived” as was Lazarus (Jn 11:44–45), for while Lazarus walked out of the tomb with his grave clothes, Jesus’ grave linens lay in the tomb (Lk 24:12; Jn 20:5–7); Lazarus would suffer physical death again, whereas Jesus was clothed in an immortal body. Jesus’ resurrection is not the same as reincarnation, either, because His body was immortal, even as it still bore the scars and resemblance to His old self. Finally, Jesus’ resurrection was not assumption — He was not taken up directly into heaven as were Enoch and Elijah (Gen 5:24; 2 Kgs 2:11). Rather, He came from the dead, having paid the penalty for our sins (1 Pet 3:18), back to earth to reinforce the message of His resurrection. As Paul explained, “The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42–44).

3.6

How do we know Jesus' resurrection really happened? Does it even matter?

- ◆ Paul writes that “if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (1 Cor 15:14). Thus it is crucial that we understand and believe in the truth of the resurrection.
- ◆ Jesus' death has been confirmed: the Roman soldiers saw that He had died (Jn 19:33), and it is impossible He could have survived the final stab in His side (Jn 19:34). His body was buried behind a large stone (Mt 27:60), and guarded by Roman soldiers (Mt 27:62–66), and yet on the third day the tomb was discovered empty (Mt 28:1–6; Mk 16:1–6). Either Jesus resurrected, or His body was stolen. But who, other than the disciples, would want to steal the body? Those who were against Jesus could have proven that the resurrection was a hoax simply by trotting out His body from the tomb. They did not, because they could not.
- ◆ Jesus' resurrection is a fact established by Paul's own testimony, the witness of the other apostles, as well as the witness of over 500 hundred other believers (1 Cor 15:3–8). It is incomprehensible that they would suffer and die for a lie that they had created. They had neither the means to pull the fraud, nor the motive to promote it, given the immense hostility they were facing.
- ◆ We know He resurrected and lives today through tangible evidence: 1) we receive the Holy Spirit, just as the apostles did in Acts, and 2) because He answers our prayers, even in miraculous ways (see Question 3.3).

3.7

Jesus saves? From what?

- ◆ On one level, Jesus came to save us from our sorrow and burdens (Isa 53:4; Mt 11:28–30). But more importantly, Jesus came to show us what life is really about and what is beyond our life today (cf. Lk 12:15–21; Jn 10:10; 11:25).
- ◆ It is only through Jesus that we can make an informed decision about our destiny. Can we afford to remain uncertain about our worth and our future, or do we place our hopes in Jesus’ true promise to change our lives for the better? Where will we end up? Will we be in heaven, forever with God and His love, or will we be in hell, forever apart from God and all that is good? The stakes are too high to ignore.
- ◆ Jesus Christ died and rose again to show us the hope we have in Him (1 Thess 4:14–18). When we believe in Him, our old, troubled self dies and we are resurrected to become a new person (Rom 6:5–11). That’s how Jesus saves us from evil and suffering. When we believe in Him, He will help us through our troubles and live a life filled with God’s love and guidance. Ultimately, He will save us into His eternal glorious kingdom (Jn 14:1–3; 2 Tim 4:18).

NOTES

1. The Greek verb for “resurrect” in the Bible means “raise up” or “stand up.” See William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., 83 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

CHAPTER

4

Holy Bible

4.1

How do we know the Bible is God's Word?

- ◆ No work of literature written over thousands of years by over thirty writers from various walks of life can deliver a coherent and consistent message. The Bible does. No storybook has the authority to make claims about heaven and hell or to make promises concerning life after death. The Bible does. No ordinary book could have accurately made so many prophecies about events in human history and about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible has.
- ◆ The Bible deals with the basic problems of human life and points to a single solution: salvation through Jesus Christ. Who else but God has the perspective and authority to inspire such a book? The Bible was penned by humans; God revealed its contents.
- ◆ The writers of the Bible claimed to be inspired by God and that their writings are the very words of God. To see whether these claims are trustworthy, we need to examine the evidence and test whether the Bible as a whole is reliable and carries divine authority:
 1. **Its unity:** The Bible was written over a span of 1,500 years by about 40 authors from various walks of life. Despite its great diversity, the Bible delivers a coherent and consistent message. From Genesis to Revelation,

we see the gradual unfolding of God’s salvation plan. Although the Bible contains teachings on hundreds of controversial subjects, there are no contradictions among the various authors. Together, the Bible offers us definite answers to our most basic questions: Where are we from? Where do we go after death? How can we know and be reconciled with our Creator? The amazing unity of the Bible tells us that it was God who inspired and oversaw the writing of the books in the Bible.

2. **Its historical and geographical accuracy:** Modern archeological findings have confirmed the accuracy of the people, places, and historical events recorded in the Bible. Time and again, archeological evidence has disproved the claims of critics who believed many of the biblical accounts to be errors or myths. Even today, new discoveries continue to affirm rather than discredit the Bible! Consequently, the Bible’s reliability reveals to us that its claim to divine origin is trustworthy.
3. **Its prophetic accuracy:** “The Bible itself offers the standards by which to test those who claim to speak authoritatively about the future. It says in Deuteronomy 18:20–22 that the test of a prophet’s authority is the accuracy of his predictions. The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies, so we can measure it by its own test.... Whenever the Bible speaks prophetically, therefore, it is accurate. Hundreds of prophecies have been literally fulfilled. On this basis, we can also believe what the Bible has to say about things to come. It has already proven itself!”²
4. **Its scientific accuracy:** Although the Bible is not a book about science, its scientific accuracy confirms that the author of the Bible is also the creator and ruler of this universe. Many of the statements in the Bible

were confirmed by scientific discoveries hundreds or thousands of years after the time of their writing. (E.g. a spherical earth (Isa 40:22); earth suspended in space (Job 26:7); the stars uncountable (Jer 33:22)).

5. **Its fulfillment of promises:** Through the Bible, God has offered many promises to those who believe and obey Him. Today, we can experience these blessings when we put the words of the Bible into practice. For example, believers today still receive the Holy Spirit just as the apostles did thousands of years ago. Through prayers in faith, demons are cast out, the sick are healed, and even the dead are raised. In our daily lives, we experience the Lord's guidance and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. In difficult times, we receive comfort, strength, peace, and joy. All of these are the fulfillment of the Bible's promises to believers.

4.2

The Bible is full of inaccuracies.

- ◆ No scientific or archaeological discovery has ever disproved any of the Bible's accounts. In fact, certain biblical passages that were thought to be mistakes have later been confirmed to be true. Error lies not in the Bible, but in our misinterpretation resulting from our limited knowledge. As we continue to learn about the world around us, we gain a better understanding of biblical claims and God's greatness.
- ◆ Besides, to read the Bible solely as a scientific manual or a historical account would be missing its point. We ought to read the Bible to learn about God and His salvation.

4.3

The Bible is outdated.

- ◆ People of different generations, cultures, and upbringings have all proclaimed the power of the Bible in their lives. Why would the Bible strike a chord in so many hearts?
- ◆ For one thing, the basic problems of human life remain the same: how to deal with evil and suffering, how to find something lasting in a life so finite and frail, and, ultimately, how to receive eternal life. The Bible gives us the answer to our problems, a solution that's good for all ages: Jesus Christ. To see for yourself what the Bible is good for, you can't just skim through or read it like any other book; you have to put its teachings into practice in your life.

4.4

The Bible is full of contradictions.

- ◆ Many assume that the Bible is full of contradictions but never examine whether this charge is true. When we examine these so-called “contradictions” or “errors,” we realize that they are only apparent. For example, while two Bible passages may record the same event with varying details or from different perspectives, the accounts do not contradict each other.
- ◆ “Not every biblical discrepancy has been resolved. But the direction of the evidence is very encouraging. As biblical scholarship increases and our knowledge of language, text, and context increases, the problem of discrepancy becomes smaller and smaller. There is less reason today to believe that the Bible is full of contradictions than at any time in the history of the church. Prejudice and critical philosophical theories, however, die a very slow and hard death.”³

- ◆ See *Reasons to Believe*⁴ for the story of a student who charged the Bible with contradictions but was later convinced that what he thought to be contradictions were only apparent.

4.5

The Bible has been copied and translated over and over again for hundreds of years. How do we know that it has not been altered over time?

- ◆ To test the reliability of historical documents, historians examine the textual transmissions by which the documents reach us. By looking at the number of manuscripts (copies), the consistency among manuscripts, and the time interval between the composition of the original work and the date of the earliest manuscripts still in existence, we can determine the accuracy of the transmission.
- ◆ A vast number of biblical manuscripts have been discovered over time. To be skeptical of the biblical text's accuracy is to discredit all classical works of antiquity, because no other text has been as well-preserved. For example, there are 37 times more copies of the New Testament manuscripts than copies of Homer's *Iliad*. Besides the great number of manuscripts, the fact that these biblical manuscripts agree with each other assures us that the Bible has not been altered over time.
- ◆ It is important to keep in mind that the ancient Hebrews regarded the Scripture as sacred text. Copyists, therefore, took extreme care in copying and storing the manuscripts. Among these copyists were the Talmudists and Masoretes, who followed very strict rules in treating scriptural text. As

a result, the manuscripts we have today are not casual copies but the faithful transmissions of the divine word.

- ◆ For a more thorough treatment on the reliability of the Scriptures as historical texts, see *Evidence that Demands A Verdict*, vol. 1:⁵

4.6

What does the term “canon” refer to?

- ◆ The word canon comes from the root word “reed” (English word “cane”; Hebrew form *ganeh* and Greek *kanōn*). The “reed” was used as a measuring rod and eventually meant “standard.”⁶
- ◆ The word “canon” applied to Scripture means “an officially accepted list of books.”⁷

4.7

Who decided which books to include in the Bible? On what basis was this decision made?

- ◆ One thing to keep in mind is that the church did not create the canon or books included in what we call Scripture. Instead, the church recognized the books that were inspired from their inception. They were inspired by God when written.
- ◆ We don’t know exactly what criteria the early church used to choose the canonical books. There were possibly five guiding principles used to determine whether or not a New Testament book is canonical or Scripture. Geisler and Nix record these five principles:⁸

Is it authoritative? Did it come from the hand of God?
(Does this book come with a divine “thus saith the Lord”?)

Is it prophetic? Was it written by a man of God?

Is it authentic? [The fathers had the policy of “if in doubt, throw it out.” This enhanced the “validity of their discernment of canonical books.”]

Is it dynamic? Did it come with the life-transforming power of God?

Was it received, collected, read and used? Was it accepted by the people of God?

Peter acknowledged Paul’s work as Scripture parallel to Old Testament Scripture (2 Pet 3:16).

4.8

How can we trust the canon, which was determined by man? Couldn’t the canon have left out some of God’s words or added books that were not God’s words?

- ◆ If we believe that the Bible is indeed God’s word, as it claims to be, then we ought to also believe these words: “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Mt 5:18). “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Mt 24:35).
- ◆ The canon was not the result of a Rabbinical discussion or church council, as some think it was. It was a gradual process through which God’s people upheld certain books as inspired and excluded others as the works of men. We must trust that God oversaw not just the writing but also the making of the Bible.

- ◆ In addition, we have the endorsement of Christ Himself and the New Testament writers on the validity of the Old Testament canon. The early church also readily accepted the New Testament as the inspired word of God because of its apostolic authority. Therefore, based on our belief that the Bible is reliable and that the words of Jesus Christ, who is God Himself, are trustworthy, we can be confident that the Bibles we have in our hands are the same words that God had intended when He moved the biblical writers to set His words down on paper. Nothing has been added or taken away.

4.9

What is the Apocrypha?

- ◆ According to Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, “Today the word apocrypha is synonymous with the fourteen or fifteen books of doubtful authenticity and authority. These writings are not found in the Hebrew Old Testament, but they are contained in some manuscripts of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, which was completed around 250 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt.

Most of these books were declared to be Scripture by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), though the Protestant Church rejects any divine authority attached to them.”⁹

4.10

Why do you not consider the Apocrypha as scripture?

- ◆ According to H.L. Willmington, there are many sound scriptural reasons for rejecting the Apocrypha:¹⁰

1. The Apocrypha was never included in the Old Testament canon by such recognized authorities as the Pharisees, Ezra the prophet, etc.
2. It was never quoted by the Jews, by Jesus, or by any other New Testament writers.
3. The great Jewish historian Josephus excluded it.
4. The well-known Jewish philosopher Philo did not recognize it.
5. The early church fathers excluded it.
6. The Bible translator Jerome did not accept the books as inspired, although he was forced by the Pope to include them in the Latin Vulgate Bible.
7. None of the fourteen books claim divine inspiration; in fact, some actually disclaim it.
8. Some books contain historical and geographical errors.
9. Some books teach false doctrine, such as praying for the dead.
10. No Apocryphal book can be found in any catalogue list of canonical books composed during the first four centuries A.D. In fact, it was not until 1596 at the Council of Trent that the Roman Catholic Church officially recognized these books, basically in an attempt to strengthen their position, which had been grievously weakened by the great reformer Martin Luther.

4.11

The Bible doesn't make sense.

- ◆ Just because we can't appreciate an abstract painting doesn't make it any less meaningful. Just because a foreign language seems like gibberish doesn't mean that it is.
- ◆ The same goes with the Bible. Using limited human vocabulary to describe profound spiritual truth, the Bible may at first appear to be incomprehensible. However, because God inspired it, He will help us understand it if we read it prayerfully and reverently. Reading the Bible is different from reading any other book because it is the word of God set before us concretely. Through the Bible, God shows us who He is and how He saves us. God's own words give us life, and that's how the Bible can change us profoundly.

NOTES

1. For a basic list of findings that confirmed biblical recordings, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands A Verdict, vol. 1* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979) 68–73.
2. *Can I Really Trust the Bible?* (Grand Rapids: RBC Ministries, 1987) 22.
3. R.C. Sproul, *Reasons to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982) 26.
4. *Ibid.*, 25–26.
5. Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands A Verdict, vol. 1* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979) 39–65.
6. *Ibid.*, 29.
7. Ralph Earle, *How We Got Our Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971) 31.
8. Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968) 141.
9. Josh McDowell, *Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics Ask about the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1980) 46.
10. H.L. Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1984) 805.

CHAPTER

5

Heaven and Hell

5.1

Heaven is only wishful thinking and human invention. There is no scientific evidence for heaven.

- ◆ Not everything can be proved with methods known to science today. For example, can you show someone your love with scientific evidence? Since our scientific knowledge is limited, we cannot use it as the ultimate authority.
- ◆ Is there any scientific evidence that proves the assumption that whatever cannot be proven by science does not exist? If even this assumption cannot be proven by science, why do you believe it?
- ◆ To find out whether heaven is real, we need to find out whether the Bible and Jesus are true because they both teach us about heaven. If the Bible is indeed God's word (chap. 4) and if Jesus is indeed Lord and Savior (chap. 3), then heaven must be real.
- ◆ We know that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead because He answers our prayers and pours out His Holy Spirit as He had promised (Question 3.3). Since we know that Christ has risen and gone to heaven, we know that heaven is real.
- ◆ The argument that heaven does not exist because we want it so much is fallacious. If this reasoning is true, it could work the other way, too (i.e. because you don't want heaven to exist, heaven must be real because your wishful thinking

has to be false). To refute an idea, we should provide solid evidence instead of simply calling it wishful thinking.

5.2

Heaven is such a remote idea. Why talk about something so far from reality when there are enough things in this life to worry about?

- ◆ Our life on earth is not detached from our eternal destiny. Our earthly tasks reflect what we believe to be our ultimate goal. If you set your goal on something false, you will waste your entire life in meaningless pursuits. That is why we must find out whether there is heaven. If heaven is real, then we have to orient our daily lives to this goal!
- ◆ The belief in heaven actually makes a direct positive impact in this life. Believers who look forward to heaven bring blessings to others because they obey God's command to love others as themselves. While God's promises may pertain to the life to come, God's commandments are for this life, not the afterlife. Our belief in heaven does not detract from our present responsibilities. On the contrary, it motivates us to make a difference on earth (2 Cor 5:1-11).

5.3

Heaven is too "spiritual" and boring. How can you be happy there if you do nothing but worship all day?

- ◆ "Boredom" is simply another label for the spiritual emptiness in human beings as a result of alienation from God. When we go to heaven, we will not be in our present earthly

bodies. The spiritual bodies we will have will be marvelously different. We cannot project our fleshly limitations onto the glorious spiritual state in heaven. The joy of being with the Lord in heaven is “far better” than anything we can experience on earth (Phil 1:23). It is no wonder that Peter, who had but a glimpse of the Christ in glory during Jesus’ transfiguration, desired to remain on the mountain (Mt 17:1–4).

- ◆ We may think that without earthly pleasures, heaven will be dull. But what our flesh enjoys on earth will seem childish when we are in our spiritual bodies in heaven. As adults, we don’t even think about the toys we “couldn’t live without” when we were children. Likewise, when we are in heaven, we will “put away childish things” (1 Cor 13:9–12). The perfect eternal joy will replace the short-lived earthly joys.
- ◆ As believers who have “tasted the heavenly gift” and “become partakers of the Holy Spirit” (Heb 6:4), we know from our personal experience that the joy of spiritual communion with the Lord far surpasses any earthly pleasure. It is no wonder that Paul would rather choose to be with Christ. Even though we have not fully experienced the joy of heaven, our foretaste of God’s immense love through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; 2 Cor 1:21–22) tells us that heaven is anything but boring.

5.4

Hell is something that people made up to make kids behave.

- ◆ The arguments for the existence of hell are similar in nature to the arguments for the existence of heaven. To test whether hell exists, we need to examine whether our sources of information — the Bible and Jesus Christ — are trustworthy (Question 5.1)?

5.5

How can God, who is love, send anyone to hell to suffer eternally? If He loves every human being, He should allow everyone to go to heaven without any condition.

- ◆ God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23). Like the prodigal son's father, He wants everyone to turn from evil and live (Lk 15:11–24; Ezek 18:31, 32; 33:11). Out of His love, He even gave His own Son to us so that we may have eternal life (Jn 3:16, 17).
- ◆ While God offers everyone love and forgiveness, He does not force His love on those who do not want it. Because He loves us, He wants us to be free. We are given free choice to accept or deny God's love. God does allow everyone to go to heaven, but not everyone chooses heaven. If a person chooses to sin and refuses to repent, he chooses to reject God's love. By rejecting God's love, he chooses hell because hell in essence is the absence of God's love.

5.6

Is anyone really so evil as to deserve the eternal punishment of hell? Can God not forgive those who don't believe in Him?

- ◆ God does not intend to send anyone to hell. Instead, He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). We should not think of hell as God's vengeful punishment. Hell is a choice. People choose hell by rejecting the grace of God. When we sin, we choose to be separated from God, and this separation is exactly what hell

is — eternal separation from God, His love, and His joy. Our very action of sinning is its own punishment.

- ◆ When addressing the question of whether anyone deserves hell, Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli explain, “Hell’s punishment fits sin’s crime because sin is divorce from God. The punishment fits the crime because the punishment is the crime. Saying no to God means no God. The point is really very simple. Those who object to hell’s over-severity do not see what sin really is. They probably look at sin externally, sociologically, legalistically, as ‘behaving badly.’ They fail to see the real horror of sin and the real greatness and goodness and joy of the God who is refused in every sin. We all fail to appreciate this. Who of us fully appreciates God’s beauty? The corollary immediately follows: who of us fully appreciates sin’s ugly horror?”³
- ◆ If God makes everyone go to heaven, including those who do not want God or to be forgiven by Him, then human beings have no free choice. God does not force anyone to be in heaven, although His grace of forgiveness is available to all. We need to make the choice to accept this grace.

5.7

If God knew that some would go to hell, why did He still allow them to be born into the world? He could have stopped them from even being conceived.

- ◆ If God allows only those who choose heaven to be born, He is taking away free will because those who would choose to sin are not even given the freedom to live, not to mention the freedom to choose.

5.8

Hell is a means by which God forces people to believe in Him. Such a threat robs people of their freedom of choice. People should be given the choice to reject God without fearing the fires of hell.

- ◆ Hell is not a scare tactic that God uses to pressure people into believing in Him. God did not invent hell to scare us. Hell is simply reality. If anyone does not want to be with God, that's what he will get — separation from God. There is no other alternative. Seeing the reality of hell for what it is doesn't rob us of the freedom of choice because we can still choose to reject God. On the contrary, it helps us make an informed decision. Out of His love for us, God wants us to see the dreadful nature of sin and come to Christ for forgiveness.

NOTES

1. For biblical references to heaven as believers' destiny, see Mt 5:12; 2 Cor 5:1; 1 Pet 1:4; Heb 11:16; Lk 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4.
2. For biblical references to hell, see Mt 5:29; 10:28; 13:42; 25:41; Mk 9:43–48; Lk 16:23; 2 Pet 2:4.
3. Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 300.

CHAPTER

6

Religion and Salvation

6.1

I don't need a religion.

- ◆ If religion were only good for teaching people to live good lives, then perhaps not everyone needs a religion. But what is a “good life”? More importantly, where is your life heading?
- ◆ Faith in God is more than what we do in our everyday life of work and play. It is also more than some vague idea of meaning or value. Faith in God is finding the answer to our “ultimate concern.” It is about where we came from, why we live, and where we will end up. Without God, we are trapped in evil, sin, suffering, and death. But, through Jesus Christ, we can be saved from our afflictions and receive eternal life. This means that we have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

6.2

All religions are pretty much the same.

- ◆ You might say, “Different religions are simply different paths up the same mountain.” But what if one guide told you that the only way up the mountain was to crawl back downward, while another told you to jump off its side, while yet another told you to keep climbing up? They couldn't all be right at the same time!

- ◆ Different religious traditions often offer completely opposite answers to our problems. For example, one religion teaches about a heavenly afterlife, while another denies that heaven exists at all. Which is right? Given that our entire existence is at stake, we have to find the answer — not just a plausible answer, but the right answer.

6.3

Your religious beliefs may be true for you but not for me. There is no absolute right or wrong when it comes to religion. Who is to say which religion is right? We should just respect each other's beliefs.

- ◆ Is the belief that “there is no absolute right or wrong” absolute? If so, then it’s self-defeating because it claims to be absolutely right.
- ◆ Religious beliefs must be based on reality. Any belief that is not true to reality is false belief. Different people may choose to believe differently, but not all beliefs are based on the truth. You may choose to believe that there is no such thing as gravity, but would your belief be valid? If you then jumped off a cliff, would you not fall anymore? Like gravity, religion isn’t just a matter of personal taste, where your opinion is as good as the next person’s. Because our religious belief determines our destiny, it must be firmly rooted only in the absolute truth.
- ◆ God tells us, “There is no god besides Me” (Isa 45:5, 18, 21, 22). Jesus said, “He who believes in [the Son of God] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already” (Jn 3:18). Either this is true or this is a lie. We must

find out which, because the future of our very existence is at stake.

6.4

If Christians cannot even agree among themselves, how can you claim that there is absolute truth? Even if I want to know the absolute truth, I am getting different answers from different Christians.

- ◆ Just as the diversity of beliefs among world religions does not disprove the existence of absolute truth, the differences in beliefs among Christians do not disprove absolute truth. Although there are many Christian denominations that disagree in their basic doctrines, the Bible tells us that there is only one true gospel (Gal 1:6–12).
- ◆ Despite the various views on salvation, it is not impossible to find the true gospel. Instead of only looking to men for answers, we must turn to God's word and Spirit for guidance (Gal 1:11–12). We need to humbly and diligently examine the message we hear against the Scriptures to see if it is true (like the Bereans in Acts 17:11–12). If a church preaches the true gospel, she would agree completely with the teachings of the apostles (Eph 2:19–20; 1 Tim 3:15). The believers in this church would also receive the Holy Spirit as the apostles did (Acts 10:47; 11:15; cf. 2:2–4; 10:44–46; 19:1–7). If we seek the true gospel with sincere prayer for guidance, God promises us that we will find it (Jer 29:13; Mt 7:7–8).

6.5

Isn't "trying to do the right thing" enough? God will accept me if I be a good and sincere person.

- ◆ Trying to be good is just not good enough. The Bible tells us that we all have sinned (Rom 3:23), and no sinner can save himself from sin no matter how much “good” he has done (Rom 3:20). Salvation is by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ because only Christ can deliver us from sin and judgment (Eph 2:8,9; Tit 3:5).
- ◆ In answering the claim that sincerity is good enough, Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli write, “No one accepts sincerity alone as sufficient in any other field than religion. Sincerity may be necessary but it is not sufficient. Is it sufficient that your surgeon, your accountant or your travel agent be sincere? Is sincerity alone enough to save you from cancer, bankruptcy, accident or death? It is not. Why then do you think it should be enough to save you from hell?”¹
- ◆ Kreeft and Tacelli continue the above argument, “Your hand shakes; how can you be the surgeon on your own hand? You’ve fallen into quicksand and have no solid place to stand for leverage to get yourself out. You’ve sold yourself into slavery and you are no longer free or rich enough to buy your own freedom back. You need more than sincerity; you need a Savior. Sincerity is necessary for salvation — only those who sincerely seek, find — but it is not sufficient.”²

6.6

Why is God so narrow-minded that He only saves believers?

- ◆ Imagine a person drowning. Now if someone threw this person a lifesaver, the only logical response would be to reach out and grab it. Would he or she ask instead, “Why can’t I be saved by my own methods?” or say, “I don’t want to hold on to the lifesaver, but you should still save me”?
- ◆ Like the person drowning, we can’t save ourselves from the destiny of hell because we all have fallen away from God. But He has offered salvation to everyone without exception. He even came to this world and laid down His own life to save us. Far from being narrow-minded, God opens His arms to anyone who believes in Him.
- ◆ God has shown us the solution to our problem. If we then still refuse to accept Him or insist on other ways, we’re actually the ones who are narrow-minded.

6.7

What about those good pagans who have never heard of Christ? Can a person be saved through other means?

- ◆ Even those who have not heard of the gospel are without excuse “because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them” through His creation (Rom 1:18–23). Not only so, God’s law is written in their hearts, and God will judge the secrets of men on this basis (Rom 2:15,16).

- ◆ God rewards eternal life to those “who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality” (Rom 2:6–11). God is able to save those who have never heard of the gospel but seek Him just as He is able to save the believers in Old Testament times who never heard of Christ.
- ◆ The Bible clearly states that Christ is the only Savior: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12); “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn 14:6). Even if the pagans who seek God will be saved, they are saved not by their paganism, but by the atoning work of Christ, who brought God’s grace and reconciliation to the world.
- ◆ Although we do not know exactly how God will judge those who never heard of the gospel, we do know that God’s judgment is always just. He demands from everyone according to what they have been given (Lk 12:48).
- ◆ We do not need to know how God will judge the pagans. Each person will have to be accountable to God on an individual basis. Instead of speculating about the salvation of the pagans, we need to be sure that we respond to the gospel we have heard (Heb 2:1–4).

6.8

Christianity is a crutch for weak people. To cope with the problems of life, some people use alcohol, some drugs, others Christianity.

- ◆ If by “weak people” we mean sinners and by “crutch,” God’s grace, then everyone needs this “crutch.”
- ◆ The more important question is this: does this “crutch” work? While other “crutches” such as alcohol or drugs do not offer

real solutions to our problems, the salvation of Jesus Christ is the ultimate answer to all of life's problems.

- ◆ It is not right to reject the Christian faith based on the assumption that it was invented for some psychological need because we could also claim that atheism is a crutch for people who are afraid to acknowledge God. We should examine whether the Christian faith is true. If Jesus is indeed the Son of God, and if He is able to give us eternal life, then we must believe Him and accept Him as our Savior.

6.9

I believe in God, but I don't believe in religion. Joining an organized religion involves too many restrictions and obligations.

- ◆ While the word “religion” may bring up negative connotations for many people, we need to first understand the meaning of religion. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines religion as follows:

“1. belief in and worship of God or gods. 2. a specific system of belief or worship, etc. built around God, a code of ethics, a philosophy of life, etc.”

According to the first definition, it is not possible to believe in God and not be part of a religion because the belief itself constitutes the religion.

The second definition involves a more formal expression of personal belief, including religious institutions or organizations. It is religion in this sense of the word that many want to avoid. They do not want to be part of an organization and follow its rules. More specifically, many want to be a believer of Christ without joining a church. But before we reject all types of institutions, we must ask, “Are all institutions bad?”

- ◆ An institution is good if it's a divine institution, such as marriage and family. In the context of organized religion, God instituted the church, which is a spiritual community of all believers. Joining a church is different from joining a club. Just as an infant naturally becomes a member of the family, a believer who accepts Christ naturally becomes a member of God's house — the church (Gal 3:26–29; Eph 2:19–22). God grants us the privilege to be a member; we do not acquire it ourselves. By God's will, believers unite in fellowship and build each other up in the faith (Mt 18:19–20; Eph 4:11–16; Heb 10:25; Acts 2:42–47). If we truly believe in God, we would actively take part in church.
- ◆ Unlike secular organizations, where people make up the rules, the church and her members abide by God's word. The church must be built on God's truth and it's her responsibility to teach this truth to her members (1 Tim 3:15; Mt 28:20). As long as the church does not impose human restrictions beyond what God's word requires, we should gladly fulfill our God-given duties and functions as members in the body of believers.

6.10

I don't want to become a Christian because there are too many hypocrites in the church.

- ◆ The fact that some professed Christians are hypocritical does not invalidate the Christian faith. We need to look at Jesus, the foundation of Christianity. If He is indeed God, as He claimed to be, if He led a perfect life, and if He had risen from the dead, then we ought to believe and accept Him as our Savior regardless of whether His followers are truthful to His teachings.

- ◆ While there are hypocrites in the church, not all Christians are hypocrites. Many Christians are true followers of Christ who abide by His teachings. They may make mistakes, but they are not afraid to repent and change. There is a difference between hypocrites and sinners. By definition, a hypocrite is someone who pretends to be righteous in order to receive praise from others. Believers who sincerely and humbly repent of their sins are sinners saved by grace, but they are not hypocrites.
- ◆ Jesus Himself condemned hypocrisy and warned His followers against hypocrisy (e.g. Mt 6:1–18). If you are a true believer who obeys Christ’s teachings, you would not be a hypocrite. Becoming a Christian doesn’t make you a hypocrite. It is when you become a false Christian that you turn into a hypocrite.

NOTES

1. Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 323.
2. *Ibid.*, 324.

CHAPTER

7

Sacraments and Salvation

7.1

What are sacraments?

- ◆ “Sacraments” is a term that refers to three New Testament institutions: baptism, footwashing, and Holy Communion. These three sacraments were instituted by the Lord Jesus and commanded to His followers (Mk 16:16; Jn 13:1–17; Mt 26:26–29).
- ◆ The sacraments all involve the use of physical elements or actions. According to the Lord’s promise, the sacraments have the effect of salvation. In baptism, the effect of remission of sins takes place when the believer is immersed in water in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 22:16). In footwashing, the believer has a part with the Lord by accepting the washing of feet in water (Jn 13:8). In Holy Communion, the believer partakes of the eternal life of Jesus Christ (Jn 6:53–58). The sacraments signify the believer’s covenantal relationship with the Lord and mark the beginning of regeneration.

7.2

Sacraments are only symbols that signify what Christ has done for us. They are not necessary.

- ◆ If the Lord has commanded us to administer and receive the sacraments, how can they be unnecessary? The Lord’s

command alone makes them necessary. Every believer ought to receive the sacraments in obedience to Christ.

- ◆ Sacraments signify our salvation, but they are not mere symbols without effect. God’s word tells us that Christ’s salvation is made effective on the believer through the sacraments. Although we cannot rationalize how God brings us spiritual saving effect through material things or physical actions, with faith in God’s promise we trust that we can receive this effect when we accept the sacraments.

7.3

We are saved the moment we believe and confess Christ (Rom 10:9–10; Eph 1:13). Sacraments are only symbolic of the salvation we have already received. They do not have any saving effect.

- ◆ In Romans 10:9–10, Paul is not saying that intellectual acceptance or open confession is the totality of faith and anything else would be deeds subsequent to faith. Nor is he concerned with the exact moment of justification. If he were, he would have said something like “when you agree that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess Jesus as Lord, you are justified and saved.” In that case, the sacraments would be acts subsequent to justification. But is Paul referring to the time of justification? Notice that the sentence consists of two parts, namely belief unto justification, and confession unto salvation. As we know, confession doesn’t usually occur at the same moment in time as belief (in the sense of conceptual agreement). So does it mean that salvation is a separate event in time from justification?

Where would repentance come in, then? Is repentance an act subsequent to justification?

- ◆ In Ephesians 1:13, Paul's message to the church may seem to suggest that a person is already in Christ the moment he intellectually agrees with the gospel. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13). It would be a mistake to interpret "heard" or "believed" as only intellectual agreement that occurred at a specific point in time. The hearing and believing must include accepting Christ, confessing of sin, repentance, receiving the sacraments, and entrusting one's whole life to the gospel, all of which make up "the word of truth." If Paul's words referred to a moment in time, then he would be literally saying that a believer is included in Christ the second he hears a Christian message for the first time in his life (in this case, even before intellectual agreement). His confession of sin and repentance have no effect. They are only symbolic of the salvation he has received. Such interpretation is not only out of context, but also without biblical support.
- ◆ Sacraments are not just symbols. God works through them to bring us salvation when we receive them with faith.
- ◆ The saving effects of the sacraments are clearly stated by the Lord Himself. We cannot reduce them to mere symbols or deny their necessity just because we do not understand how God's saving effect can take place through some outward actions. If a person believes that God raised Christ from the dead but does not believe that he can receive a new life through baptism, he doesn't qualify as a true believer. If a person confesses that Jesus is Lord but rejects footwashing, he would be like those who call "Lord, Lord" but do not do what He says (see Luke 6:46). True belief in the heart

would encompass acceptance of the sacraments, and that is the belief that justifies. True confession would encompass receiving the sacraments in the name of the Lord Jesus, and that is the confession that saves.

7.4

Salvation is by grace through faith, not by works (Eph 2:8,9). Sacraments are of works, not of faith.

- ◆ The works here refer to the works of the law (Gal 2:16; 3:2; Rom 9:32), i.e. actions that do not come from faith but from a desire to obtain righteousness without the saving works of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ It would be a mistake to say that anything involving action is a “work.” If that is the case, belief with our heart and confession with our mouth would be a “work.”
- ◆ Sacraments are commanded by the Lord Jesus Himself. Denying the Lord’s commands is not faith at all.
- ◆ In receiving the sacraments, it is not the physical action on the part of the believer that saves. It is the mercy of God and the saving work of Christ that brings us the effect.
- ◆ Faith is not just intellectual agreement. Faith without action is not true faith. Such false faith cannot save (Jas 2:14–16; Mt 7:21–23).

7.5

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy

He saved us..." (Tit 3:5). Sacraments are righteous deeds, and therefore cannot save us.

- ◆ Sacraments are not "works of righteousness we have done." Receiving the sacraments involves confessing our sins and having faith in the saving work of Christ. Sacraments do not establish our own righteousness. They are effective not because of our actions but because of God's mercy and Christ's salvation.
- ◆ The same verse reads, "... He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5). The washing of regeneration, which refers to the effect of the sacrament of baptism, is a necessary part of God's saving act. How can we say that sacraments have no saving effect? (see also 1 Pet 3:21). Sacraments do not belong to the category of "works of righteousness we have done." They are the mercy of God.

7.6

Romans 10:9 reads, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Baptism, footwashing, and Holy Communion are not mentioned and are as such not necessary for salvation.

- ◆ Repentance is also not mentioned; is repentance, then, not necessary for salvation? It sure is! (Mt 3:2; Acts 3:19; 2:38; 11:18; 2 Cor 7:10) So we cannot deny the effect and necessity of sacraments based on this verse. We must bring this verse into harmony with other verses in the Bible to understand all the necessary steps to salvation.

- ◆ Here Paul is emphasizing justification and salvation through faith as opposed to seeking to establish one's own righteousness without Christ (see 10:3). The argument in verses 9 & 10 is drawn from verse 8, which quotes Deut 30:14 (note the repeated use of the words "mouth" and "heart").
- ◆ The word is in our mouth and in our heart so we may obey it (Deut 30:11–18). Paul cited this passage to show Christ is the Word that became flesh, whom we should confess and believe. This confession and belief is realized in the obedience to Christ — the Word. His argument here was to show that observance apart from Christ cannot attain righteousness. He was not at all saying that confession and belief in Christ removes the need for sacraments. In fact, true confession of and belief in Christ would involve obedience to the Lord's command to receive the sacraments.

7.7

Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus has eternal life (Jn 3:36; 5:24; 6:47). A person is guaranteed of salvation upon belief. Sacraments are not necessary for salvation.

- ◆ Believing in the Lord Jesus includes believing and carrying out His command (Lk 6:46–49). Those who only confess the Lord's name without doing the will of God are not true disciples (Jn 8:31) and cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 7:21–23).
- ◆ If belief means intellectual agreement without obedience, even Satan would be a believer (Jas 2:19). Faith without obedience is false faith; it cannot save (Jas 2:14).

7.8

A person's good works show that he is already saved. If sacraments are required for salvation, then how do you explain the good works of Christians who have never received the sacraments?

- ◆ A person could perform good works without faith in Jesus Christ. So good works cannot be a sign of a person's salvation.
- ◆ Cornelius's good works were not enough. He still needed to hear the gospel, repent and be baptized to receive eternal life (Acts 10:1–47; 11:18).
- ◆ The sacraments are fundamental to our covenantal relationship with God. Without them, all subsequent works of faith would amount to nothing. Unless a person is baptized into Christ, he still stands condemned because he is still in sin (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Unless his feet are washed by Christ, he still has no part with Christ (Jn 13:8). Unless he partakes of the Lord's body and blood, he does not have life in him (Jn 6:53). The good works that he performs may seem to assure him that he is an elect of God, but these good works would not be much different from the works of the law because he has not received the righteousness of Christ.

7.9

In Romans 4:10–12, Paul stresses that Abraham was justified before circumcision, not after. Circumcision was only a sign of the righteousness he had already received by faith.

Likewise, sacraments are only signs which have no effect.

- ◆ In terms of necessity, this passage cannot be used to argue that sacraments are not necessary. Sacraments are necessary for us because they are commanded by the Lord Himself, just as circumcision was necessary for Abraham because it was commanded by God. Had Abraham denied the necessity of circumcision with the rationale that it was only a sign, would he still be a man of faith?
- ◆ In terms of saving effects, we cannot confuse circumcision with the sacraments. Circumcision is a covenant of flesh for Abraham and his earthly descendants (Gen 17:13). It is done by the hands of men and is a work of the law as such. Because no divine action is involved, its only function was to signify God's promise and justification of Abraham. More importantly, it was a foreshadow of the saving work of Christ to effect justification for all men, whether Jews or Gentiles. "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal 3:19). So the law, including circumcision, could only signify the reality, which is Christ. In the sacraments, on the contrary, there is divine action, mediated by Christ Himself. Baptism, for instance, is a circumcision done by Christ, not by men's hands (Col 2:11–12). Sacraments are on a totally different level from circumcision because they are divine actions rather than just symbolic signs.

7.10

The people in the Old Testament were saved without the sacraments.

- ◆ God did not command the sacraments in the Old Testament.
- ◆ Before Christ came, the chosen people were under the old covenant. But the sacraments are signs of the new covenant (see Mt 26:28).

7.11

What about those believers who never had a chance in their lifetime to receive the sacraments?

- ◆ Whether God chooses to save them has no relevance to the necessity of sacraments. These people belong to a different category from those who do have the chance to accept the sacraments. If a person has the chance to believe in Christ and obey His words but refuses to, he stands condemned (Jn 3:18–21; Mt 7:21–23).

7.12

In Lk 7:37–50, the Lord saved the sinful woman by her faith. She did not accept the sacraments.

- ◆ The sacraments had not yet been instituted.

7.13

In Lk 23:39–43, the Lord promised the repentant criminal salvation. The criminal was saved without accepting the sacraments.

- ◆ We should not make an exception the rule. Besides, the exception was made because the circumstance did not allow the criminal the chance to accept the sacraments.
- ◆ God, not sacraments, is our savior. God could choose to save someone who does not have a chance to receive the sacraments. But there is a big difference between not being able to receive the sacraments and refusing to receive them. If the criminal lived today and refused the sacraments, he would not be saved.

7.14

Since believers in the Old Testament as well as some in the New Testament (such as the repentant criminal on the cross) were saved without the sacraments, sacraments are not absolutely necessary, and if they are not absolutely necessary, they are not required for salvation.

- ◆ The command to receive the sacraments for salvation is by the Lord. His word makes them a requirement.
- ◆ The rationale “if it’s not required of them, it’s not required of us” is misleading. It mistakenly puts us in the same category as believers who either lived before the command was given or who could not carry out the command. It is similar to

arguing that confessing Jesus' name is not necessary for salvation because Enoch and Elijah in the Old Testament were taken to heaven without confessing Jesus' name (cf. Gen 5:21–24; 2 Kgs 2:1–11). The sacraments may not have been required of those in the past, but they are required of us, who have received the command and are able to carry them out. The salvation of these believers in the past does not negate our responsibility now. Each person will be judged based on what he has been given (cf. Mt 11:20–24; Lk 12:47–48).

7.15

Sacraments take away the glory and power of Christ's saving work on the cross.

- ◆ Sacraments would be meaningless without the cross of Christ. In fact, Christ manifests His salvation on the cross and the power of God through the sacraments. For example, baptism is effective because of the death and resurrection of Christ. Through baptism, our old self is crucified with Christ (Rom 6:3–10).
- ◆ Sacraments cannot be detached from the cross. The effect of salvation on the cross takes place in the believer through the sacraments.

NOTES

1. In both Catholic and Reform theology, the word "sacrament" refers to the Christian rites, such as baptism and the Lord's supper. Tertullian was the first to employ the word *sacramentum*, the Latin version of the New Testament term "mystery" (see Eph 5:32; 1 Tim 3:16; Rev 1:20). The use of this word to refer to the New Testament divine institutions may be due to the spiritual effect, which we cannot rationalize.

CHAPTER

8

Baptism

8.1

John 3:16 reads, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” A person receives eternal life when he believes; he does not need to be baptized.

- ◆ Believing in Christ is not just intellectually agreeing that He is Lord and Savior. True faith involves obeying His words (Lk 6:46–49). We are saved by grace through faith, but faith without deeds is not true faith (Jas 2:14–20). Even the demons believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Mt 8:28–29; Lk 4:41), but their belief is not true faith (Jas 2:19–20). We cannot dismiss the necessity of baptism since baptism itself is part of, and an act of, belief and faith in Jesus Christ (Mk 16:16; see Acts 16:30–33).

8.2

“Mark 16:16 mentions the need both to believe and to be baptized, for it was assumed that once a person believed in Christ, he would be baptized to publicly express his salvation. This same verse indicates, however, that the only

basis for condemnation is unbelief: ‘He that believeth not shall be condemned.’”¹

- ◆ If it is assumed that baptism, with no saving effect, follows belief, then why did Jesus say, “He who believes *and is baptized* will be saved” (italics added)? Wouldn’t this be redundant? This very statement by the Lord is clear proof that a person must be baptized to be saved.
- ◆ If baptism is an expression of salvation, why didn’t the Lord say, “He who believes will be saved, and his baptism expresses that salvation”?
- ◆ The logic should instead be applied to the second phrase, “He that believeth not shall be condemned.” It is assumed that if a person does not believe in Christ, he will not be baptized. A person who does not believe obviously would not want to be baptized. So to say, “He who believeth not and is not baptized shall be condemned” would be redundant.
- ◆ Baptism is not simply a public expression of salvation. We receive God’s saving effect through baptism (1 Pet 3:20–21; Col 2:11–12; Rom 6:3–4; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal 3:26–27; see also Questions 7.2 & 7.3).

8.3

In Acts 16:30–31, the jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Thus belief is the sole requirement for salvation.

- ◆ Belief in the Lord Jesus also consists of belief in and following His word (Jn 5:24; see Lk 6:46–49). This is why Paul and

Silas “spoke the word of the Lord to [the jailer] and to all who were in his house” (Acts 16:32). And having believed in the word, “immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33). There are many similar examples in which converts were baptized immediately after they had accepted the gospel (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 35–36; 9:18; 10:44–48; 16:14–15; 18:8).

- ◆ True belief involves obedience. It is by faith that one repents and is baptized. So the words, “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,” do not contradict with or deny the necessity and saving power of water baptism.

8.4

Acts 3:19 reads, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Baptism is not necessary since a person’s sins are forgiven when he repents.

- ◆ We must read the Bible in its entirety. If repentance alone can cleanse sins, wouldn’t this verse contradict with Acts 22:16, where it says, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins”?
- ◆ We do not deny the necessity of repentance. But repentance is coupled with baptism (Acts 2:38). And it is during baptism, not repentance, that sin is washed away (see Acts 22:16; Rom 6:3).
- ◆ Peter does not mention baptism here because his main message is that the people should turn from their evil (Acts 3:26). One must repent before he considers baptism (Acts 2:37–38).

8.5

According to the Bible, water baptism is not required for salvation; rather, it is an evidence that salvation has already taken place.²

- ◆ Baptism is far more than just an expression of salvation. Rather, according to the Bible, believers are saved through baptism (1 Pet 3:20–21; Tit 3:5).
- ◆ The Bible makes it clear that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:16; 2:38). If believers' sins are forgiven before baptism, then the command to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins would be misleading. If baptism is only an expression, why then does the Bible repeatedly emphasize its effect?

8.6

The phrase “for the remission of sins” in Acts 2:38 should be translated as “in view of the remission of sins” or “referring to the remission of sins.” In other words, we must be baptized to show that we have already received the remission of sins when we believed the gospel. John said, “I indeed baptize you with water unto [*eis*] repentance” (Mt 3:11). This is the same language as “for [*eis*] the remission of sins” (Lk 3:3; Acts 2:38). Baptism does not bring about, but is a result of, repentance. Likewise, baptism does not

bring about, but is the result of, the forgiveness of sins.

- ◆ If remission of sins takes place apart from baptism, why was Paul commanded not to wait but be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16)? Why such urgency in the command if his sins had already been washed away?
- ◆ The Greek word *eis* means “into, in, toward, to,” denoting an extension involving a goal or place.³ That is why the Bible translators chose “for” instead of anything else.
- ◆ If we were to read Mt 3:11 as “I baptize you with water as a result of repentance,” the force of the language would be lost. The correct interpretation would be that the ministry of John, which was to baptize, would bring about the effect of repentance among the people. (This effect is general — the effect of leading people to repentance. It does not mean that the action of baptism causes inward repentance of the individual being baptized). So the meaning of *eis* in this case is still “for,” not “in view of” or “as a result of.”
- ◆ While it is important to emphasize faith and inward conversion, it is wrong to deny the effect of the sacraments and consider them as mere outward rites.

8.7

“Being born of water” in John 3:5 does not refer to baptism. It either refers to the rebirth through God’s word (Eph 5:26; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23), or serves as a synonym for the Holy

Spirit because the rest of the passage is about the Holy Spirit.

- ◆ It is true that the Bible uses water as a symbol for the Holy Spirit (e.g. Jn 7:37–39). But to interpret the water in John 3:5 as only referring to the Holy Spirit essentially eliminates “water” from the verse. Furthermore, the word for “washing” in Titus 3:5 as used elsewhere in the Bible is associated with the water of baptism (Acts 22:16; Eph 5:26). The reason Jn 3:6–8 emphasizes Spirit rather than water is that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual rebirth, not a physical one (Jn 3:6). In fact, baptism and receiving of the Holy Spirit are closely related and together they comprise the spiritual rebirth of which Jesus was speaking. To be born of the Spirit, we need to accept baptism and live a new life according to the Spirit.
- ◆ The Bible clearly teaches spiritual rebirth through baptism. Rebirth involves receiving a new life. This new life is given to a person when his old self has died and been buried during baptism (Rom 6:3–4; Col 2:12). So considering the use of the words “water” and “washing,” it would be correct to interpret Jn 3:5 and Tit 3:5 as referring to the specific event of baptism.
- ◆ The word of truth and baptism are not mutually exclusive but are closely related (cf. Eph 5:26). The word of truth includes the command of baptism, and baptism is effective because God’s word has promised salvation through it (Mk 16:16; 1 Pet 3:21). It would be a mistake to refer to the birth through the word of truth in order to deny the rebirth through baptism.

8.8

Paul stated, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor 1:17).

He rarely baptized anyone. If baptism truly washes away sins, why was he not sent to do this necessary and important task?

- ◆ It would be wrong to assume that Paul rarely baptized people. In Acts alone we read two instances of baptism where Paul was directly involved (Acts 16:33; 19:5).
- ◆ The context of 1 Corinthians tells us that the Corinthian believers took pride in being the followers of prominent workers of God. Lest anyone took pride in receiving his baptism or claimed that they were baptized into Paul's name (1 Cor 1:13), Paul reminded them that his mission was not to baptize, but to preach the gospel. Even if it were true that Paul hardly baptized anyone, nowhere does he deny the necessity of baptism. Just because Paul did not personally perform baptism himself does not mean that it wasn't done or that it had nothing to do with salvation.

8.9

If baptism is indeed for the forgiveness of sins, as you claim, then does it mean that Jesus also had sin that He needed to be baptized?

- ◆ Jesus is without sin (Jn 8:46; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15).
- ◆ John's baptism was a baptism of repentance (Acts 19:4). It did not have the power to cleanse sins since Jesus had not yet offered his body and shed His blood (cf. Mt 26:28; Heb 9:26). Only baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus can wash away sins (Acts 2:38; 4:10,12; 10:43).
- ◆ Jesus was baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:13–15), meaning to fulfill the will of God and duty as a man. Jesus, being in the flesh, must also obey the Heavenly Father's

will (see Jn 4:34). His baptism therefore sets an example of obedience to God's requirements. It also shows us that we need to be baptized to be accepted by God.

- ◆ As far as the Lord Jesus Himself was concerned, His baptism also served as a testimony to His ministry and that He was the Messiah whom John had been preaching about (see Jn 1:30–34).

8.10

The Bible states that our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ (Rev 1:5). How can the water during baptism possibly remove a person's sins?

- ◆ The apostle John bears witness that from Jesus' side flowed blood and water (Jn 19:34). In 1 John 5:6, John explains that Jesus did not come by water only (here the water refers to baptism; notice water is mentioned first), "but by water and blood," and that it is the Spirit who testifies. In other words, the effect of Jesus' blood, by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, is present during baptism to cleanse the sin of the person being baptized. Although it is the candidate's body that is physically immersed in water, it is his spiritual being that is cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb 10:22⁺).
- ◆ The explanation by John is confirmed by the baptisms performed in the True Jesus Church, during which many have witnessed blood in the water.

8.11

The mode of baptism is insignificant and it makes no difference how one is baptized. After all, the Bible never instructs believers how baptism should be performed.

- ◆ The word “baptism” itself already denotes how and where one should be baptized (i.e. immersion in living water; see 8.13). If done otherwise, the action could not be called baptism, nor could it carry any effect to cleanse sins.
- ◆ The way a person is baptized carries great spiritual significance (e.g. bowing of head signifies dying with Christ in the likeness of his death; full immersion signifies complete burial of the old self). And, in addition to this spiritual significance, baptism in the correct manner actually results in the effect of death and burial of the old person and resurrection of the new person (Rom 6:3–5; Col 2:12).
- ◆ Eph 4:5 points out that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”. All true believers of Jesus Christ must believe in the same Lord, hold the same faith, and receive the same baptism. So it is important to know what the Bible says about how one should be baptized.
- ◆ The baptism of salvation has spiritual power to cleanse sins. The baptism is thus different from the traditional ceremonial washing of the Jews. It must be performed in the name of the Lord Jesus since a person receiving baptism of salvation is baptized into Christ, who forgives sins through baptism (Gal 3:27; Acts 2:38); He is not simply following a ritual.
- ◆ Although the Bible does not specifically prescribe the mode of baptism, the Lord Jesus and the disciples did set examples

of baptism for believers to follow (Mt 3:13–17; Mk 1:9–11; Jn 3:22–23; Acts 8:36–39).

8.12

Are you saying that a person’s salvation hangs on such trivial details as the mode of baptism? Such teaching is contrary to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith because it presupposes that God saves us based on technical correctness of the procedure.

- ◆ Naaman was cleansed when he followed Elisha’s instructions (2 Ki 5:10–14). The ten men with leprosy were healed as they went on the way according to the Lord’s words (Lk 17:11–14). The blind man received his sight when he obeyed the Lord and washed in the Pool of Siloam (Jn 9:6–7). In each of these instances, it was the grace and power of God, not the action of the person that saved them. But their willingness to obey showed their faith in God, and through their obedience, God’s healing took its effect on them.
- ◆ The mode of baptism in itself does not save us. We are saved by grace through faith. But it is wrong to reduce baptism to mere “procedures” we go through. Baptism is our Lord’s command, and the cleansing is made effective through God’s word (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Eph 5:26). During baptism, God acts to bring us salvation (Col 2:11–12). We, in turn, receive God’s grace by receiving baptism in obedience to His word.
- ◆ It is wrong to trivialize the biblical way of baptism. Faith means being willing to obey God’s word even if it appears trivial and doesn’t seem to make sense. It is such faith that God looks for. By imitating the Lord and the apostles in baptism, we aim to follow God’s word as closely as possible. If

we claim to have faith but do not want to obey God's will, we cannot receive God's grace of salvation (cf. Acts 3:19; 5:32).

- ◆ Other than the grace of God and the atonement of Jesus Christ, the effect of baptism comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:21–23; 1 Jn 5:6–9). God has established the True Jesus Church with the Holy Spirit, revealed to her the truth of salvation, and confirmed the truth with the works of the Holy Spirit. In particular, God has revealed to her the “one baptism” according to the Bible (Eph 4:5). Through our faith in the word of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit and through the testimony of the Holy Spirit, our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ during baptism. So it is important for us to receive the baptism of the True Jesus Church because of the perfect gospel that she preaches and the presence of the Holy Spirit in this church. The issue once again boils down to whether we have the faith to humbly obey God's will, which He has revealed and testified to with the Holy Spirit.

8.13

Sprinkling is a form of baptism. God promised in Ezekiel 36:25 that He would sprinkle on His people to make them clean. In 1 Peter 1:2 the apostle Peter states that believers have been sprinkled by the blood of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews also confirms that our hearts have been cleansed by sprinkling (Heb 10:22).

- ◆ Sprinkling is not baptism. The word “baptism” is derived from the Greek word *baptismos*, which means immersion:

The Greek word *baptein* (“to baptize”) means to plunge, to immerse, or to wash⁵

- ◆ The language in Ezekiel 36:25–26 is figurative (e.g. heart of stone and heart of flesh). So the cleansing through sprinkling is figurative of the inward cleansing (see point 4). The reference to sprinkling comes from the ceremonial cleansing in Numbers 8:6–7.
- ◆ 1 Peter 1:2 does not refer to the physical action of baptism, but the spiritual cleansing by the sprinkling of Christ’s blood (sprinkling of blood is a foreshadow in the Old Testament; See Heb 9:18–22). If the verse did refer to actual sprinkling, then one must be sprinkled by the physical blood of Christ (which is impossible).
- ◆ Hebrews 10:22 cannot be a basis for sprinkling. On the contrary, this verse actually supports baptism by immersion. Notice that it is the heart, not the body, that is being sprinkled spiritually; the body is “washed with pure water” physically (washed=immersed⁶). So when the candidate is immersed in water during baptism, his spiritual being is being cleansed.

8.14

Sprinkling should be permissible, especially when the candidate is seriously ill or when it is not convenient to perform baptism with immersion. In Acts 2:41, for example, when 3,000 were converted in one day, it must have

been almost impossible to perform baptism other than by sprinkling.

- ◆ Sprinkling is not baptism (see previous question). The Word of God cannot be altered regardless of the circumstances (Mt 5:19; Rev 22:18–19).
- ◆ There are countless miracles in the True Jesus Church concerning candidates of baptism in critical illness being healed by God during baptism.
- ◆ It was not uncommon for large numbers of people to be baptized. John the Baptist, for example, constantly performed baptism for the people at Aenon “because there was much water there” (Jn 3:23; attesting to immersion). It is certainly possible to baptize 3,000 with immersion in one day if there were, say, 30 people performing baptism at different spots at the baptismal site.

8.15

If baptism must be by immersion, why did the Bible not say clearly that it must be by immersion?

- ◆ This is an issue of translation. It is not clear from the English translation, but the Greek word for “baptism” means immersion (see 8.13). This would have been clear to readers or speakers of the original language. It is not a surprise, therefore, that the Greek Orthodox Church baptizes by immersion.

8.16

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus clearly instructed the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

- ◆ If the Lord's exact words were a formula to be recited, then why did the disciples always baptize or instruct the people to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5)? "In the name of" is not just recitation, but indicates the authority and power of the risen Christ (Phil 2:10–11). It is in Jesus that we can have the forgiveness of sins during baptism (Col 1:14). Because it is into Christ that we are baptized (Gal 3:27), the baptismal candidate must believe the Lord Jesus as his Lord and Savior and determine to live for Christ all his life.
- ◆ Instead of saying "in Jesus' name," which He never did, Jesus mentioned "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of Holy Spirit" to show that all authorities that are God's have now been given to Him.
- ◆ "Father," or "Son," or "the Holy Spirit" are not names. They are titles. The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is "Jesus" (Jn 5:43; 17:11; 14:26; also note that "name" is in the singular form).
- ◆ There is no other name (than the name of Jesus Christ) under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:10,12). Only through the name of Jesus is a person's sin cleansed during baptism (Acts 2:38; 10:43).

8.17

“In the name of Jesus” does not need to be a baptismal formula. It means in the authority or in relationship to Jesus Christ (Col 3:17).

- ◆ It is true that the Bible does not say that a person’s salvation hinges on the baptist’s pronouncement of Jesus’ name, and it is true that “in the name of” should be more than a formula. But it is also unlikely that the apostles baptized people “in the name of the Lord Jesus” or “in the name of Jesus” without actually saying so. There is evidence that the apostles did say, “in the name of Jesus” when they cast out demons because that was what the exorcists did when they imitated the apostles (Acts 19:13).
- ◆ In Acts 19:4–5, the believers were re-baptized. Not only were they commanded to believe in Jesus, they were baptized again “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” In terms of the way of baptism, what would be different about this baptism from the baptism they had received if the name of Jesus was not pronounced?
- ◆ The name “Jesus” is very important. It carries authority and honor (Phil 2:9–11). God has revealed to the True Jesus Church to baptize in the name of the Lord Jesus and has confirmed such baptism with miraculous signs and wonders. In the same way, God often manifests His power by casting out demons through believers who do so in the name of the Lord Jesus. But it is not merely the recitation of the name that makes baptism effective or drives away demons. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit and the promise of God that manifests God’s power in Jesus’ name.

8.18

Baptism may be performed in a pool or in a baptistry.

- ◆ Baptism in the Bible was performed in natural water.⁷ The Lord Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Mt 3:13). John the Baptist also baptized at Aenon (Jn 3:23); the word “Aenon” means “spring.” The Ethiopian eunuch was also baptized in a natural body of water (Acts 8:36–38).
- ◆ There is no Scriptural basis for baptism in pools.
- ◆ It has been prophesied that a fountain would be opened to cleanse sins (Zech 13:1). Figuratively, baptism is represented by the flood at Noah’s time (1 Pet 3:20) and by the crossing of the Red Sea (1 Cor 10:1–2). The prophet Micah also prophesied that God would “cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19). In all cases, baptism is always represented by natural water, never man-made pools or cisterns.
- ◆ The early church also performed baptism in living water.⁸

8.19

If you insist that baptism must be performed in natural flowing water because the Lord Jesus was baptized in the river, then shouldn’t you also perform baptism in the Jordan River only?

- ◆ The apostles baptized at places other than Jordan, such as on the desert road (Acts 8:26, 36–38) or in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–5). This shows that the exact location of baptism is not

important, as long as there is abundant natural flowing water (Jn 3:23).

8.20

What is the biblical support for baptizing people with their heads bowed?

- ◆ In Romans 6:3–4, Paul states that believers are “buried with Christ through baptism into death.” Through baptism, we receive the spiritual effect of dying with Christ. Paul continues in verse 5, “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom 6:5). Since our death with Christ is signified by baptism, our union with Christ in the likeness of His death is also signified by baptism. In other words, the manner of baptism during biblical times was in the likeness of the Lord’s death. Paul uses this physical likeness in baptism to discuss the spiritual likeness that believers carry.
- ◆ The description of the physical likeness of Jesus’ death is found in John 19:30, “bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.” This is the only detail about the form of Jesus’ death that John records. A literal translation of the verse would be “After bowing the head, He gave up the Spirit.” It is clear in the Greek text that Jesus deliberately bowed His head before giving up His Spirit. In other words, Jesus did not bow His head as the natural result of His death, but He did so intentionally before He gave up His spirit. John also made mention of this special act to convey to us Jesus’ likeness when He died.
- ◆ In the Bible, the bowing of head is a gesture that signifies disgrace and heaviness of sin (Ps 40:12; Lk 18:13; Job 10:15). Just as Christ died to sin once for all, we also die to sin so

that sin should no longer have power over us (Rom 6:2,10). As we bow our heads and are immersed in water, our sinful self dies and is buried with Christ. As we rise from the water, we are raised with Christ and receive a new life in Him (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).

8.21

The phrase “uniting together in the likeness of His death” (Rom 6:5) refers to a spiritual likeness to Christ’s death. It cannot be taken to literally mean bowing of the head during baptism.

- ◆ While the “likeness of His death” refers to the putting off of the sinful self, in the context of baptism, it also refers to the manner of baptism. Since baptism signifies spiritual truth and effect, the way it is performed must be biblical. Otherwise, it loses its signifying character. This bowing of the head in the physical likeness of Christ’s death is essential since it signifies the spiritual unity with Christ in the likeness of His death. This action represents the actual death of the old person during baptism (see Rom 6:3–5; Col 2:12).

8.22

If we must receive baptism in the physical likeness of Jesus’ death, shouldn’t we also stretch out our hands and put our feet together during baptism?

- ◆ The Bible stresses the likeness of the Lord’s death, not the likeness of His crucifixion.

- ◆ The only biblical description of the likeness of Jesus' death was that He bowed His head (Jn 19:30).
- ◆ While the bowing of the head also signifies humble repentance (Ps 40:12; Lk 18:13), stretching the hands or placing the feet together would not signify anything related to spiritual rebirth or remission of sins.

8.23

Infants or children may not receive baptism since they do not understand the truth, do not have faith, and cannot repent.

- ◆ Infants and children are born in sin (Ps 51:5). Therefore they also need to be born again.
- ◆ The promise of baptism for the remission of sins is also given to the children (Acts 2:38–39). Children were never excluded from God's covenant with His people (Gen 17:9–14).
- ◆ We must not forbid children from receiving salvation since the Lord Jesus Himself does not reject little children but instead loves them (see Lk 18:15–17).
- ◆ Children were healed of their diseases through their parents' faith (Mt 15:28). By the same token, children and infants may be baptized based on the faith of their parents (Jn 4:49–51). However, we must also keep in mind that it is the grace of God and the cross of Christ, not the conscious choice of humans, that gives baptism its effect. So even if children cannot make a conscious choice to receive God's grace, they should not be excluded from God's grace.
- ◆ In the early church, entire households were baptized (Acts 16:15, 32–34; 18:8; 1 Cor 1:16). Children and infants are, of course, part of the household.

- ◆ Circumcision prefigures baptism (Col 2:11–12). In the Old Testament the male infants of the chosen people were circumcised on the eighth day (Lev 12:2–3), prefiguring infant baptism.
- ◆ Crossing of the Red Sea prefigures the New Testament baptism (1 Cor 10:1–2). The Israelites, including the children and infants, crossed the Red Sea (Ex 10:9–10, 24; 12:31). The children and infants were not left in the land of bondage. In the same way, children and infants must also be baptized to be cleansed of their sins and be released from the bondage of Satan.

8.24

The Lord Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:14). Children do not need to receive baptism because they are already accepted by the Lord into His kingdom.

- ◆ If children are saved by Christ, then every human being would be saved, since everyone has been a child at one point. Or does a person, saved right after birth, somehow become unsaved when he becomes an adult?
- ◆ The Lord Jesus said that we must turn and become like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt:18:3). He was not saying that all children are in the kingdom of heaven.

8.25

If children are baptized when they could not make a choice, what happens if they choose not to accept the gospel when they grow up? Will they be saved?

- ◆ If a person chooses to forsake the covenant of grace, he will have to face God's judgment (Heb 6:4–8; 10:26–31).
- ◆ Parents have the responsibility to bring their children up in the teachings of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

8.26

Isn't there biblical basis for baptism for the dead (1 Cor 15:29)?

- ◆ This passage does not command baptism for the dead nor make any judgment about such practice. Paul asked the question, "Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?" (1 Cor 15:29). His point was not that such practice was necessarily correct, but that such practice demonstrated people's belief in the resurrection.
- ◆ Paul could not have endorsed vicarious baptism (the living being baptized on behalf of the dead) because it is against biblical teaching for several reasons:
 1. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:16). Since all have sinned (Rom 3:23), everyone must be baptized for the forgiveness of his own sins (Acts 2:38). No one may be baptized for the forgiveness of another's sins.

2. Baptism is not merely a formality or an immersion of the body; it is a spiritual cleansing and salvation of the soul (1 Pet 3:21; Heb 9:14). Once a person dies, the soul leaves his body. Baptizing a living person on behalf of the dead cannot in any way save the soul of the dead.
 3. After a person dies, he is to face judgment (Heb 9:27). Those who had failed to believe in the Lord will be condemned (Mk 16:16; Rev 21:8), and every person will be judged according to what he had done (Rev 22:12). So once a person dies, he has to give an account of his disbelief; no one else may receive salvation on his behalf.
- ◆ This verse might possibly refer to baptism of family members for the sake of a Christian member who had passed away and had expressed the wish before death that his/her family believe in the Lord Jesus and be baptized.

NOTES

1. Harold J. Berry, *What They Believe: The Worldwide Church of God* (Lincoln: Back to the Bible, 1987) 12–13.
2. *Ibid.*, 12–13. (The quotation is an argument made by the author, a professor of Grace College of the Bible; it is not the belief held by The Worldwide Church of God.)
3. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 288.
4. Various forms of the same Greek word for “wash” may be found elsewhere in the New Testament, including “wash away” in Acts 22:16 and “washing” in Eph 5:26. They are allusions to the spiritual washing during baptism.
5. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Rev. and augm. throughout, 306 (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1996).
6. See “BAPTISM.” *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 1987 ed. Mircea Eliade, et al. (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1987).
7. “The external form of baptism was immersion in flowing water which is presupposed in Ac 8:22, He 10:22. . . .” Hastings. “BAPTISM.” *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963).
8. Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak* (Austin: Sweet Publishing Company, 1971) 51.

CHAPTER

9

Footwashing

9.1

Footwashing is merely a Jewish custom; it is not a sacrament and has no relationship to a person's salvation. The Lord Jesus washed the feet of His disciples only to set an example of humility and serving others.

- ◆ The footwashing that the Lord Jesus instituted is beyond being merely a custom. According to tradition, slaves washed the feet of the master, never the reverse. The Lord, however, washed the feet of His disciples even though He was their master. Peter, not realizing the significance of this footwashing, refused to be washed by the Lord (Jn 13:6, 8).
- ◆ Footwashing is directly related to salvation for the following reasons:
 1. Jesus told Peter, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (Jn 13:8). To receive footwashing is to have part with the Lord. As such, footwashing cannot be simply a custom.
 2. Jesus also said, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean” (Jn 13:10). A person who is baptized needs also to receive footwashing.
- ◆ By performing footwashing on His disciples and commanding His disciples to do likewise, the Lord turned a

custom into a sacrament that carried saving spiritual power and effect.

9.2

Footwashing cannot be a sacrament. If footwashing is so essential and relates directly to a person's salvation, why is the institution only found in the Gospel according to John and not anywhere else in the Bible?

- ◆ The Bible does not give us a reason for omitting Jesus' footwashing in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). But omission of an institution in other parts of the Bible cannot be a basis for dismissing its necessity. For example, the Gospel according to John omits Jesus' institution of the Holy Communion, but the Holy Communion is still necessary for believers because it is recorded elsewhere in the Bible. By the same token, despite the fact that footwashing is found only in the Gospel according to John, it is still to be kept and its relationship to salvation is still valid.
- ◆ All of the Lord's commandments need to be kept. Not a single commandment should be neglected regardless of how many times they are being mentioned in the Bible (see Mt 5:18–19; Rev 22:19). The Lord instructed His followers to perform footwashing as He had done for His disciples; therefore, we also need to keep this commandment.

9.3

The Lord Jesus instructed His disciples, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (Jn 13:14). But why is that during the footwashing sacrament in your church, only the ministers wash the feet of new members, and other members do not wash one another’s feet?

- ◆ The footwashing the Lord Jesus established serves two functions, namely: (1) sacrament, and (2) practical teaching.

(1) As a sacrament, footwashing is to have part with the Lord. The disciples did not wash each other’s feet during the sacrament. It was performed by the Lord Jesus for the disciples. That is why He did not say, “If you do not wash each other’s feet, you have no part with me.” Rather, He said, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (Jn 13:8).

Today, during the footwashing sacrament, rather than washing one another’s feet, the church performs footwashing on the Lord’s behalf so that the believers who receive the sacrament may have part with the Lord. The sacrament does not involve mutual washing. Instead, the task of performing the sacrament is given to “he who is sent” (i.e. those in the church who administer the sacrament on the Lord’s behalf; “he who is sent” = apostles; see Jn 13:16).

(2) As a practical teaching, footwashing shows believers that they should love one another (Jn 13:1), humbly serve one another (Jn 13:4–5,12–17), and keep their holiness (Jn 13:10).

CHAPTER

10

Holy Communion

10.1

It is not important whether we hold the Holy Communion. Partaking of bread and cup was the customary way to remember the Lord's death at the time of the apostles. Today, however, there are many other ways for Christians to remember the Lord's death.

- ◆ After the Lord Jesus gave thanks, broke the bread and gave it to the disciples, He said, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (Lk 22:19; see also 1 Cor 11:23–25). The Lord clearly instructed that partaking the Holy Communion is the way to remember His death. It is by keeping the Holy Communion that we proclaim the Lord's death (1 Cor 11:26). How then can we dismiss the Holy Communion as unimportant?
- ◆ Partaking of the bread and the cup to proclaim the Lord's death was to be done not only by the apostles but also by all believers, even those of modern age, until the Lord comes (1 Cor 11:26).
- ◆ The partaking of the bread and the cup during Holy Communion is not merely a custom or formality. It carries great significance and spiritual efficacy (see next question).

10.2

The Holy Communion is nothing more than an occasion to remember the Lord's death.

- ◆ While the Holy Communion is an occasion to remember and proclaim the Lord's death, it also consists of essential spiritual functions for believers. By partaking of the Holy Communion:
 1. We unite with the Lord and with one another in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 10:16–17; the Greek word for “communion” also means “fellowship” or “partnership”; Jn 6:56).
 2. We receive eternal life (Jn 6:53–54).
 3. We will be raised on the last day (Jn 6:54).

10.3

The bread and cup only symbolize the flesh and blood of Jesus. The Lord Jesus could not have given His flesh and blood to His disciples to eat and drink since He was not yet crucified at the time He gave thanks for the bread and cup.

- ◆ When the Lord Jesus instituted the Holy Communion, He did not say, “This symbolizes My body”; or “This symbolizes My blood”; rather, He said, “This is My body” and “This is My blood” (Mt 26:26, 28).
- ◆ The Lord Jesus said, “For My flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed” (Jn 6:55). During Holy Communion,

the bread we eat is actually the Lord's body and the cup we drink is actually the Lord's blood.

10.4

Only priests may partake of both the bread and the cup. Believers in general may only partake of the bread.

- ◆ When the Lord Jesus instituted the Holy Communion, the disciples partook of both the bread and the cup (Mt 26:26–27). They were believers, not priests.
- ◆ When Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning the Holy Communion, he was addressing the members in general (see 1 Cor 10:16; 11:26). So every believer has the privilege to partake of the bread and the cup.

10.5

Why does your church not allow non-members to participate in the Holy Communion?

- ◆ In the Old Testament, Gentiles were forbidden to eat the Passover lamb (Ex 12:43). The Passover feast prefigures the New Testament Holy Communion (1 Cor 5:7–8). Similarly, those who do not participate in the salvation of the Lord may not partake the Holy Communion since they are foreigners to the kingdom of God.
- ◆ The Lord's body and blood are holy and pure; those whose sins have not been cleansed through baptism are not worthy to partake of the Holy Communion (see 1 Cor 11:27–29). And only those who have received the correct baptism for the remission of sins may partake of the Holy Communion.

- ◆ The Holy Communion is a fellowship among the believers within the church (1 Cor 10:16–17). Unbelievers or those who do not share the same faith with us are not part of the communion in the true church. So they should not partake of the Holy Communion.

CHAPTER

11

Holy Spirit

11.1

Your church claims that baptism can cleanse sins (Acts 22:16), sanctify and justify (1 Cor 6:11), regenerate (Tit 3:5), raise to life (Col 2:12) and save (1 Pet 3:20–21). Then why do we need to receive the Holy Spirit at all? Baptism would be sufficient.

- ◆ The saving effects of both water baptism and the Holy Spirit are closely related; neither one should replace the other. While baptism is essential for salvation, receiving the Holy Spirit is also a necessary step of salvation. One must be born of the water and of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5; see Tit 3:5).
- ◆ Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ (Holy Spirit) does not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). The Holy Spirit also testifies that we are the children and heirs of God (Rom 8:15–17; Gal 4:6–7). He is a seal of our future inheritance (Eph 1:13–14).
- ◆ A person who is dead spiritually must be revived by the Holy Spirit (Ezek 37:14; Rom 8:11). The Holy Spirit will also raise the believers from the dead and transform them into spiritual beings on the last day (cf. Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22–23). God has given us the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our future resurrection (2 Cor 5:1–5).

11.2

The New Testament never instructs believers to pray for the Holy Spirit. God has complete authority to give His Holy Spirit to anyone He pleases. The Holy Spirit is given, not acquired.

- ◆ In Luke 11:13, the Lord Jesus clearly states, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”
- ◆ In John 4:10, the Lord said to the Samaritan woman, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink’; you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (living water refers to the Holy Spirit; see Jn 7:37–39).
- ◆ The Lord Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Mt 7:7–8; Lk 11:9–10). Does this statement contradict or deny the authority of God as the giver of all blessings? Of course not.
- ◆ In addition to being the promise of God, receiving the Holy Spirit also requires prayer and asking on the part of human beings. This point is clearly illustrated in Luke 11:13 and John 4:10 (quoted above). The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is also contingent upon one’s obedience of the Lord’s instructions (see Mt 28:20; Acts 5:32). Praying for the Holy Spirit does not deny the authority of God; instead, it is a natural expression of our faith (Mt 15:22–28; Rom 10:14), earnestly (Lk 11:5–8), and persistence (Lk 18:1–8).

11.3

After the ascension of the Lord, the disciples “continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” in the upper room (Acts 1:12–14). Verse 14 only says that they prayed together and does not say that they were praying for the Holy Spirit. In fact, the disciples would have received the Holy Spirit anyway even if they had not prayed, since the Lord’s promise never fails.

- ◆ The Lord Jesus had told the disciples the importance of receiving the Holy Spirit and specifically instructed them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4–5,8). The disciples themselves must have been eager to receive the Holy Spirit; that is why they prayed constantly. The only logical conclusion was that they were praying for the Holy Spirit. If they weren’t praying for the Holy Spirit, what were they praying for?
- ◆ Waiting involves prayer and asking (see Ps 40:1). To say that the disciples would have received the Holy Spirit without prayer because it was the Lord’s promise would also imply that we do not need to pray for anything that the Lord has promised.
- ◆ For example, in Luke 18:1–8, Jesus promised that God would see that His chosen gets justice, and quickly (v. 8). If this promise were to fulfill anyhow without prayer, why did Jesus give the parable to show that the disciples should always pray and not give up (v. 1)?

11.4

In Acts 8, the Samaritans did not join together to pray for the Holy Spirit. Similarly, in Chapter 10, Cornelius and his relatives and friends received the Holy Spirit without even asking or praying.

- ◆ The believers in Samaria received the Holy Spirit when the apostles prayed and laid hands on them (Acts 8:15,17). The passage does not record that the believers prayed for the Holy Spirit; but neither does it say that the believers just sat there to watch Peter and John pray for them. It is only logical that they must have been praying constantly for the Holy Spirit just as the disciples had once been in the upper room. Peter and John were there only to assist them in prayer.
- ◆ The miracle at Cornelius' house was God's direct sign that He "has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life" (Acts 11:18). Several miracles occurred to show the apostles and other circumcised Jewish brothers that God also gave His grace to Gentiles: (1) Cornelius was told in a vision to send for Peter (Acts 10:5); (2) Peter was revealed in a vision that he should not regard the gentiles as unclean (Acts 10:28); (3) The listeners received the Holy Spirit without the laying of hands (Acts 10:44-46).

This event is a special case, and this special case in no way implies that believers should not pray for the Holy Spirit or receive the laying of hands.

11.5

The baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost would never reoccur. The Holy Spirit was given once for all and has been staying in all the believers ever since.

- ◆ The baptism of the Holy Spirit reoccurred over and over again in the early church in the Bible. We can find individual cases throughout the Book of Acts to show that receiving the Holy Spirit is an individual experience:
 1. The Holy Spirit came upon the believers in Samaria when Peter and John laid hands on them (Acts 8:14–17).
 2. Cornelius and his relatives and friends received the Holy Spirit while listening to Peter’s preaching (Acts 10:44–48).
 3. The disciples in Ephesus received the Holy Spirit after being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1–7).
- ◆ The apostle Peter confirmed that the household of Cornelius had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit just as the disciples had on Pentecost (Acts 10:47; 11:15–17).
- ◆ The Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:15–17). The Holy Spirit would abide in the church as long as the church teaches and obeys the truth (see Mt 28:20; Acts 5:32). Yet church history shows that heresies prevailed in Christendom a few generations after the apostles; so we do not read about the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit in church history. But in the last days, during the period of the latter rain, the Holy Spirit will again be poured out (Zech 10:1; Jer 5:24; Joel 2:23; Hos 6:3). This promise has been fulfilled in the true church today.

11.6

In John 20:21–23, Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” At this point, the disciples received the Holy Spirit and the Lord’s promise of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16 and 16:7 was fulfilled.

- ◆ The Lord Jesus said, “For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you” (Jn 16:7). At this point the Lord Jesus had not yet ascended to heaven, thus He could not have given the Holy Spirit to them.
- ◆ The apostle John wrote, “for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn 7:39). The Lord Jesus had not yet been glorified because He had not yet ascended into heaven (being glorified refers to ascension and exaltation; Acts 2:33; 5:31; Phil 2:9–10); so He could not have given them the Holy Spirit at this point.
- ◆ If the disciples had already received the Holy Spirit at this time, then the Lord Jesus would not have told them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4–5). The Holy Spirit was actually given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost — a few days after Jesus had ascended to heaven (Acts 2:1–4,33).
- ◆ The words, “receive the Holy Spirit” is a promise and an assurance, not an immediate fulfillment. The same sentence structure is found in “Peace be with you” (vv. 19, 21), which is also an assurance and a promise.

11.7

Everyone who says “Jesus is Lord” has already received the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).

- ◆ The verse reads, “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). It does not say that anyone who acknowledges Jesus as Lord has received the Holy Spirit. A person who has not received the Holy Spirit may also be moved by the Holy Spirit to acknowledge Christ as Lord.
- ◆ If everyone who can say “Jesus is Lord” has received the Holy Spirit, why did the people in Samaria not receive the Holy Spirit even after they had accepted the word of God and been baptized? (Acts 8:12–17). Were they not able to say, “Jesus is Lord”?
- ◆ The disciples in Ephesus had not received or even heard of the Holy Spirit when they had already believed in the Lord. It was not until Paul laid hands on them that the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 19:1–6).

11.8

The Lord Jesus said, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:38–39). Paul asked the Galatians, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal 3:2) He also wrote to the Ephesians, “...having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). So anyone who believes in the

Lord, regardless of his race or status, has received the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor 12:13).

- ◆ The correct interpretation of Ephesians 1:13 must be based on Acts 19:1–7, where it tells us exactly how the Ephesians received the Holy Spirit. They did not receive the Holy Spirit when they believed. They did not receive the Holy Spirit when they were baptized. They only received the Holy Spirit when Paul placed his hands on them. So the Ephesians wouldn't have taken Paul's letter to mean receiving the Holy Spirit instantaneously upon belief.
- ◆ A person must believe in “the word of truth, the gospel of salvation” in order to receive the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). If a person believes in a false gospel, he is unable to receive the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ The verse “Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” means that every believer of the true gospel will receive the Holy Spirit, but it does not mean that he receives the Holy Spirit the moment he confesses Jesus as Lord.
- ◆ Those who listened to Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost were told to “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins” before they could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). True faith consists of following the commands of the Lord Jesus (Jas 2:17, 22).
- ◆ Paul was writing to the churches in Galatia and Ephesus, which were established by the Holy Spirit. The word “you” in both passages does not automatically include all present-day professed Christians, who may not have yet believed in the word of truth.
- ◆ In 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, Paul was stressing the unity and oneness of the believers, who are members of Christ's body

and have received the same Spirit (v. 13). Again, we may not apply verse 13 to just any modern day church.

- ◆ A person does not automatically receive the Holy Spirit the moment he believes (see previous question). The sign of receiving the Holy Spirit is speaking of tongues (Acts 10:44–46; 19:6; 2:4).

11.9

Anyone who has love or faith, or the fruit of the Holy Spirit, or whom God works with, has been filled with the Holy Spirit.

- ◆ A person who is filled with the Holy Spirit would naturally have love and faith, and God would work with him. However, a person who has love and faith or whom God works with is not necessarily filled with the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ The fruit of the Holy Spirit is a result of a believer's submission to the Spirit (Gal 5:16–18). But we may not conclude that a person who has not received the Holy Spirit is filled with the Holy Spirit just by looking at their good character.
- ◆ Cornelius was a devout man who had both love and faith (Acts 10:1–2); yet he did not have the Holy Spirit before he accepted the gospel from the apostles.
- ◆ Apollos was a learned man who was well-versed in the Scriptures, and fervently preached Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, he had not received the Holy Spirit when he met Priscilla and Aquila because he knew of only the baptism of John (Acts 18:24–28; cf. Acts 19:1–5).
- ◆ Speaking in tongues is the sole basis for discerning whether a person has received the Holy Spirit (see Acts 10:44–46; 19:6; 2:4).

11.10

We should not base a doctrine on historical recordings. Luke simply recorded things as they happened. But he did not say that this was the way it has to happen all the time. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that everyone who receives the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues.

- ◆ “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable *for doctrine*, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (italics added; 2 Tim 3:16). Historical writing, including Acts, make up a major portion of the Scripture. It is not wrong to base doctrine on historical recordings as long as the passages in question are interpreted correctly.
- ◆ In 1 Corinthians 10:1–11, Paul did not hesitate to base his teachings on history. What happened to the Israelites was recorded for a reason. They serve as warnings for present-day believers.
- ◆ In the case of speaking in tongues, Luke as well as the apostles did interpret the occurrence of tongues in relation to receiving the Holy Spirit:
 1. Acts 8:16 records, “For as yet He [the Holy Spirit] had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” The people of Samaria had believed in the Lord Jesus and been baptized. If tongues are not the necessary sign of receiving the Holy Spirit, on what basis did Luke conclude that they had not yet received the Holy Spirit?
 2. In Acts 10:44–48, Peter knew that the people had received the Holy Spirit just as the apostles had on the day

of Pentecost. Peter interpreted the evidence of tongues according to their own experience (Acts 11:15–17).

Likewise, based on the experience of the apostles, we also know that a person today has received the Holy Spirit when he speaks in tongues.

3. In Acts 19:1–7, Paul asked the Ephesian believers, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” and the response was negative. Why did Paul have to ask such question if there is no physical sign when a person receives the Holy Spirit, or that a person receives the Holy Spirit the moment he believes? After they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, why didn’t Paul just tell them, “you have now received the Holy Spirit”? When the Holy Spirit came on them, there is clear evidence of speaking in tongues (v. 6). If the external signs were not evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, how did Luke conclude that the Holy Spirit came on them when Paul placed his hands on them and not when they were baptized?

11.11

In Acts, the believers always received the Holy Spirit in groups and never individually. If we base the necessity of tongues on Acts, why is it that in your church, people receive the Holy Spirit individually?

- ◆ The necessity of tongues is based on the way Luke and the apostles interpreted the occurrences of receiving the Holy Spirit. In Acts 10:44–48, Peter and the brothers knew that the Holy Spirit had come upon Cornelius and his relatives and friends when they heard them speaking in tongues (v. 46).

This was the evidence on which they based their judgment. The Bible does not say that the Holy Spirit came on them because entire groups received the Holy Spirit at once. Therefore, receiving the Holy Spirit as a whole group is not necessary evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.

- ◆ It is not true that the believers never received the Holy Spirit individually. Paul received the Holy Spirit after his conversion when he was with Ananias (Acts 9:17).
- ◆ Acts 8:17 records the Samaritans' experience of receiving the Holy Spirit when the apostles laid hands on them: "Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." The English translation seems to imply that all the believers in Samaria received the Holy Spirit instantly the moment the apostles laid hands on them. But the verbs "laid on" and "received" in Greek are in the imperfect tense, which indicates durative or continual action. We may thus translate the verse as "Then they were laying hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit." In other words, the believers in Samaria most likely received the Holy Spirit one after another over a duration of time while the apostles stayed with them and prayed for them.

11.12

Speaking in tongues cannot save a person and is as such insignificant. We should not insist that every believer should speak in tongues.

- ◆ Speaking in tongues is the sign that a person has received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:44–48; 19:6). Every true believer of Christ must receive the Holy Spirit (evidenced by speaking in tongues) to be saved (Jn 3:5; Eph 1:13–14;

2 Th 2:13; Tit 3:5). Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9).

- ◆ Even though we are not saved by speaking of tongues per se, speaking in tongues in itself is also very important. A person who speaks in tongues speaks to God and edifies himself (1 Cor 14:2,4). This edification is derived from the intercession of the Holy Spirit expressed in spiritual tongues (see Rom 8:26–27).
- ◆ While we do not instruct believers to speak in tongues, we do emphasize that every believer must pray for the Holy Spirit, who helps us to sanctify ourselves so that we may be saved (2 Th 2:13; see 1 Pet 1:2). When a person receives the Holy Spirit, they will naturally be able to speak in tongues in prayer.

11.13

If speaking in tongues is a necessary sign of receiving the Holy Spirit, every believer must speak in tongues to be saved. This teaching is against the Bible. Are you telling me that people such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, Mother Teresa, and Billy Graham cannot be saved because they couldn't speak in tongues?

- ◆ Neither the Bible nor the True Jesus Church ever commands anyone to speak in tongues to be saved. The ability to speak in tongues is given by God. We cannot command anyone to speak in tongues to receive salvation.
- ◆ But the Bible does promise that everyone who believes in the true gospel and is baptized will receive the Holy Spirit

(Acts 2:38, 39; Eph 1:13). The believer also needs to pray and ask for the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13). When he receives the Holy Spirit, he will speak in tongues.

- ◆ It is our duty to preach the full gospel according to the Bible. We are not in the position to conclude whether anyone who has never known the full gospel or heard of the true church will be saved. If we deny the words of the Bible based on people's experience, then we could even go as far as saying that believing in Christ is not necessary because countless good people in history had died without believing in Christ; are they not saved? What is important is personal accountability. If we have heard of the gospel but refuse to obey it because someone else had never heard of it or received the experience, we are still personally accountable to God (Rom 14:12).

11.14

Speaking of tongues is one of, and the least of, the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:10–11). Furthermore, not every believer must speak in tongues (1 Cor 12:30). So speaking of tongues is not an absolute sign of receiving the Holy Spirit.

- ◆ In 1 Corinthians 12:10, Paul is referring to speaking in tongues to a congregation, which must be interpreted (see 14:26–28). The gifts mentioned in this passage are for the edification of the church. “Kinds of tongues” here does not refer to the speaking of tongues when receiving the Holy Spirit which need not be interpreted because the person is speaking to God.
- ◆ “Do all speak with tongues?” (v. 30) also refers to the gift of speaking in tongues to a congregation because it is followed by “do all interpret?” (i.e. such tongues must be interpreted

for edification of the church; v. 27–28.) It is a gift not everyone has.

- ◆ Though not every believer can speak in tongues to edify the church, everyone who has received the Holy Spirit speaks in tongues. Speaking in tongues is definitely the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. The apostles received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and spoke in tongues (Acts 2:1–4). Peter and the other disciples were certain that Cornelius and his relatives and friends received the Holy Spirit because “they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:44–47; see also Acts 19:6).
- ◆ If Paul regarded speaking in tongues as insignificant, why did he thank God that he spoke in tongues more than all the believers? (see 1 Cor 14:18).

11.15

In chapter 2 of Acts, 3,000 people were baptized. Yet we do not see any hint of speaking in tongues by these people. Similarly, the Bible does not say that the believers in Samaria spoke in tongues when they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–17).

- ◆ The Bible does not record that the 3,000 people received the Holy Spirit, so it is also not necessary to record that they spoke in tongues.
- ◆ Although the Bible does not mention that the believers in Samaria spoke in tongues, we can infer that there was a clear sign to show that they received the Holy Spirit, for “when Simon *saw* that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given” (Acts 8:18; italics added).

- ◆ The apostle Peter must have heard the believers in Samaria speak in tongues. For him, speaking in tongues was the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit (see Acts 10:44–47).
- ◆ That speaking in tongues by the believers was not mentioned in either incident does not lead to the conclusion that they did not speak in tongues.

11.16

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in foreign languages, which were understood (see Acts 2:4–11). In your church, however, people speak in tongues that are completely unintelligible even to themselves.

- ◆ “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him” (1 Cor 14:2). Prayer in tongues, unless interpreted, cannot be understood.
- ◆ The disciples did not actually speak in foreign languages. But God opened the ears of the Jews so that they heard the disciples speaking in their own languages (see Acts 2:8, 11).
- ◆ Ordinarily if several people speak in more than two or three languages at once, no one else can make out what is being said. On the day of Pentecost, however, 120 people all spoke in tongues, and the Jews from about 15 language groups were able to understand that they were “speaking the wonderful works of God” in their own tongues (Acts 2:8–11).
- ◆ The tongues were not intelligible to everyone in the crowd. While the devout Jews understood the tongues, others thought that the disciples had had too much wine (Acts 2:13). If the disciples were indeed speaking foreign languages, why did only the devout Jews understand what was being said

(Acts 2:5–12)? And why did the ungodly think the disciples were drunk?

- ◆ God intended to save the devout Jews and therefore allowed them to understand the tongues, which declared the wonders of God. Consequently, many believed and were baptized into Christ (see Acts 2:37–41). The mockers, on the other hand, could not understand.

11.17

To claim that Christians today may also speak in tongues is to add to the Scripture. The Bible is the only divine authority for present-day Christians, and there must not be additional divine interventions (see Rev 22:18). The New Testament churches might have had the gift of tongues. However, after the Bible was completed, all tongues and other signs ceased.

- ◆ To say that the divine work has ceased after the Bible was completed is essentially to say that all the promises in the Bible have ceased and do not apply to modern-day Christians. This assertion subtracts from the Scriptures.
- ◆ Revelation 22:18 refers to adding teachings or claims that are beyond or contradictory to the Bible. Receiving the Holy Spirit is a promise in the Bible and definitely applies to Christians today.
- ◆ Speaking in tongues is the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–46; 19:6; 2:4). If Christians today may not speak in tongues, does it mean that Christians today may not have the Holy Spirit in them?

- ◆ The gift of the Holy Spirit is given to everyone who believes in the Lord (Jn 7:38–39), who is baptized (Acts 2:38), and who asks for the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:9–13). This promise is timeless and is certainly given to Christians today as well.
- ◆ The Lord Jesus promised His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age*” (Mt 28:19–20; italics added). This abidance of the Lord refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:15–20). In other words, as long as the believers obey the Lord’s commands, the Holy Spirit would be with the church to the very end of the age. Therefore, today, believers in the true church that is established by the Holy Spirit may also pray for and receive the promised Holy Spirit.

11.18

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul discourages the believers from speaking in tongues during service. He writes, “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33). But some churches today, in contradiction to the Bible, ask the congregation to speak in tongues all at once during service without any interpretation.

- ◆ “Yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (v. 19). Here Paul is referring to preaching (prophecy) in tongues, not prayer in tongues. When there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet

and “speak to himself and to God” (v. 28). Thus, Paul discourages preaching in tongues without interpretation but never discourages praying in tongues during service (see 1 Cor 14:39).

- ◆ Paul says that “God is not the author of confusion but of peace” because during church service in Corinth, the members would preach in tongues even when there was no interpreter and many would speak at once (see vv. 27–30). All this caused confusion and disorder.
- ◆ Prayer in tongues is directed to God and needs no interpretation (v. 2). When everyone prays in tongues during church service, there is no confusion or disorder. Rather, there is a spirit of unity.

11.19

If a person must receive the Holy Spirit in addition to being baptized to be saved, then can baptized believers be saved if they pass away before they are able to speak in tongues? What about baptized infants who pass away? They cannot even pray, let alone speak in tongues.

- ◆ The promise of the Holy Spirit for those who have been baptized is also given to children (Acts 2:38–39). Children, of course, include infants. So infants, or children in general, not only can be baptized, they can also receive the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Since receiving the Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation, God would give the Holy Spirit to those who have been baptized before they pass away. There have been members in

the True Jesus Church who received the Holy Spirit shortly before they pass away (they spoke in tongues during prayer).

- ◆ Speaking in tongues helps us discern if a person has received the Holy Spirit. But infants or adults who receive the Holy Spirit shortly before they pass away might not have the opportunity to speak in tongues (or, in the case of adults, there might not have been anyone else present to hear them speak in tongues). Nevertheless, based on the Lord's promise we believe that they have received the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Could infants be saved, who are not able to “confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord”? If the answer is yes, then does it mean that it is not necessary to confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord? We should not use exceptions of believers who are prevented by circumstances to speak in tongues to conclude that speaking in tongues is not necessary. Exceptions are not rules. Those who are not in such circumstances should still pray for the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes on them, they will speak in tongues.

11.20

Romans 8:9 states that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Christ. What about those who have been baptized into Christ but have not yet received the Holy Spirit? Do they not belong to Christ?

- ◆ Those who have been baptized into Christ certainly belong to Christ (Gal 3:27-29).
- ◆ As far as God's salvation is concerned, baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit are two sides of the same coin. The promise of the Holy Spirit is given to everyone who accepts God's grace through baptism (Acts 2:38-39). Believers who have

been baptized belong to Christ, though they might not have yet received the Holy Spirit. Through faith, they have accepted Christ and His baptism, and the promise of the Holy Spirit is already theirs. In time, they will receive the promise if they continue to hold fast to their faith in the Lord.

- ◆ From the context of Romans 8:9, we understand that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ are those who live according to the flesh and set their minds on the things of the flesh (Rom 8:5–8). They are not Christ’s because in their carnal mind they are against God (Rom 8:7, 8). Likewise, Jude 19 also speaks of sensual persons who walk according to their own ungodly lusts as “not having the Spirit.” Therefore, Romans 8:9 does not refer to those who are still waiting to receive the promised Holy Spirit, but to those who live by their fleshly desires.

11.21

The Lord Jesus strictly warns us not to repeat the same words in prayer (Mt 6:7). Yet some people teach others to pray for the Holy Spirit by repeatedly saying “Hallelujah.”

- ◆ The Lord Jesus is teaching us to pray from our hearts, for God is not persuaded by prolonged and meaningless repetitions of words (see context: vv. 5–8). But this is not to tell us that we should not make long prayers or pray for a specific goal with similar words. The Lord Jesus repeated the same thing when He prayed three times in Gethsemane (Mt 26:44); He also prayed all night (Lk 6:12).
- ◆ “Hallelujah” means “praise the LORD.” This phrase is found throughout the psalms (see Ps 104–106; 111–118; 135; 146–150) and even in the vision of heavenly worship (Rev 19:1–6).

Saying “Hallelujah” is completely based on the Bible and is the best way to pray since God is worthy of our praise. And a person should also pray from the heart while he praises God with his words.

- ◆ In the True Jesus Church, countless members have received the Holy Spirit by repeating “Hallelujah” and praying with sincerity.
- ◆ This is not to say that we should not say anything else except “Hallelujah” when praying for the Holy Spirit. We may freely express our request to God in prayer using our own words.

11.22

Could I receive evil spirit when I pray for the Holy Spirit?

- ◆ A person who sincerely yearns for the Holy Spirit must accept the true church — the body of Christ, which is established by the Holy Spirit. Anyone who wishes to receive the Holy Spirit must obey the true gospel taught by the church and pray in the way that the church instructs. The believers in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17), Paul (Acts 9:3–17), Cornelius and his relatives and friends (Acts 10:1–8, 44–46), and the disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7) received the Holy Spirit only when they came into contact with and obeyed the disciples of the Lord. Similarly, those who yearn to be baptized by the Holy Spirit must also seek the true church and accept the true gospel.
- ◆ The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:15–17). A person must believe and obey the truth to receive the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:15–16, 21, 23; Acts 5:32). Those who reject the truth or refuse to accept the true church that preaches the truth might receive evil spirit even if they pray for the Holy Spirit.

- ▶ If a person prays with the wrong motives or an unrepentant heart, he allows room for evil spirits to work. But anyone who accepts the truth, follows the way of prayer instructed by the church, and prays sincerely for the Holy Spirit will not receive evil spirit. The Heavenly Father will not allow evil spirit to possess those who sincerely ask Him (Lk 11:11–13).

CHAPTER

12

Sabbath Day

12.1

The Old Testament Sabbath was a shadow of the things to come. New Testament believers need not observe the Sabbath since Christ removed the law by nailing it to the cross (Col 2:13–17).

- ◆ According to verse 14, it was the “handwriting of requirements that was against us” that God has wiped out and nailed to the cross. The written code was nailed to the cross because it was “contrary to us.” In other words, Christ’s death has freed us from the condemnation of the law. This passage is not about the doing away of food, drink, a festival, a new moon, or sabbaths, but the abolition of the written code and regulations concerning these things. For example, God did not wipe out food or drink (in that case, we should not eat or drink), but He removed the regulations about food and drink. Likewise, this passage says nothing about abolishing the Sabbath commandment.
- ◆ The Sabbath, being one of the Ten Commandments, has not been abolished, but the strict regulations concerning the keeping of the Sabbath day were fulfilled by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.
- ◆ Christians today still need to keep the Ten Commandments (see question 12.7, point 3).

12.2

The Old Testament Sabbath Day was only a picture of the rest that a person enters when he places his faith in Christ and ceases from his own works (see Heb 4:9–11).¹

- ◆ The Sabbath rest does not only point to accepting the gospel but also to the eternal rest. This promise still stands (v. 1); so we need to “be diligent to enter that rest” (v. 11). Sabbath observance today also foreshadows the eternal Sabbath rest.
- ◆ This passage cannot be the basis for abolishing the Sabbath because the promise of eternal rest still remains. It does not say that we need not keep the Sabbath after we have placed our faith in Christ. Observance of the Sabbath day, being one of the Ten Commandments, still must be kept today (see questions 12.6 to 12.9).
- ◆ The weekly Sabbath was part of God’s creation, for He “blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (see Gen 2:2–3; Ex 20:11). Since God’s creation has lasted to this very day, the Sabbath day instituted by God continues to be a blessed and holy day as it has always been since the creation week. The rest we have received in Christ Jesus does not and should not displace the rest on the seventh day or the observance of the Sabbath according to God’s commandment.

12.3

The Lord Jesus healed the blind on the Sabbath, thereby abolishing the Sabbath (Jn 9:13–16).

- ◆ Jesus healed on the Sabbath not to abolish the Sabbath but to show that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Mt 12:11–13).
- ◆ Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17–20). The Pharisees condemned Jesus of breaking the Sabbath; yet Jesus was actually demonstrating the correct way to keep the Sabbath.
- ◆ Jesus never said that it was not necessary to keep the Sabbath. In fact, He Himself always kept the Sabbath (Lk 4:16; 13:10; Mk 6:2).

12.4

In Matthew 12:1–8, Jesus defended the disciples when they violated the Sabbath. He cited the example of priests desecrating the Sabbath in the temple and said, “in this place there is One greater than the temple,” meaning if the priests could break the Sabbath, He could do so all the more.

- ◆ Jesus did not say that New Testament believers do not have to keep the Sabbath. He defended the disciples on the basis that God desires mercy (Mt 12:7). The issue here is not whether to keep the Sabbath but how to keep the Sabbath in the true spirit.

- ◆ Jesus did not mean that He could violate the Sabbath all the more. Rather, He was saying that if the priests were not condemned for what they did in the temple, Jesus, being greater than the temple, had the authority to not condemn the disciples:

12.5

Christ resurrected on Sunday and appeared to His disciples and Mary Magdalene on Sunday, not on the seventh day of the week (Mt 28:1–10; Mk 16:9; Lk 24:13–15; Jn 20:19). Thus He established the first day of the week to be a day of worship.

- ◆ Jesus appeared on the same day to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:14–18), to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13–15), and to the disciples in the house (Jn 20:19) because He had risen before the dawn of that day (see Lk 24:1–3). The second time Jesus appeared to the disciples was on the second day of the week (Jn 20:26). The day of his third appearance is unknown (Jn 21:1–14). So Jesus did not specifically set aside the first day of the week and the day itself is not significant.
- ◆ Nowhere in the Bible does it record that Jesus Christ replaced the seventh-day Sabbath with the first day of the week to be a day of worship. Nor did Jesus Himself instruct the disciples to worship on the first day of the week instead of on the Sabbath. In fact, He called Himself the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk 2:27). If He had intended to abolish the Sabbath, He would not have identified Himself this way.

- ◆ We must not interpret the Bible based on what we think a certain event signifies, especially when the interpretation contradicts the commandment of God.

12.6

Sabbath is a commandment exclusively given to the Israelites (Deut 5:15). It is also a token of God’s covenant with Israel (Ex 31:13–17; Ezek 20:12–13). In the New Testament, God is dealing with the church, not the Israelite nation and He has set aside the covenant. As such Christians do not need to keep the Sabbath.

- ◆ Sabbath was instituted since the beginning (Gen 2:1–3; Ex 20:11) even before the Israelite nation existed. The Sabbath was made for man (Mk 2:27); “man,” of course, does not only refer to the Jews.
- ◆ That the Ten Commandments were given to the Israelites does not mean that they have nothing to do with Christians. The words of God were first entrusted to the chosen people of the Old Testament (Rom 3:1–2) and are passed on to the chosen people of God of the New Testament (see Acts 7:38).
- ◆ Luke was not a circumcised advocate for the law (see Col 4:10–14; note v. 11) and, being a co-worker with Paul (see Acts 16: 10; Phm 24; 2 Tim 4:11), he could not have preached the Mosaic law. However, he specially mentioned in his writings that Jesus, as His custom was, went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day (Lk 4:16), and that the women from Galilee rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment (Lk 23:55–56); he also recorded that Paul went into the synagogue on the Sabbath as his custom was to reason with

the Jews from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2). This fact tells us that all Christians, whether Jew or gentile, must also keep the Sabbath according to God's commandment.

- ◆ Isaiah's prophecy that foreigners will keep the Sabbath further confirms that Gentile believers in the New Testament will keep God's Sabbath (Isa 56:6–7). So Sabbath observance is not only limited to the Israelite nation.
- ◆ The Sabbath is a sign between God and Israel. But it is not ONLY an Old Testament token. It is also a commandment and it has a significance that applies to Christians (Heb 4:9–11).
- ◆ We were once sinners and were under the bondage of sin and Satan (Jn 8:34; Rom 8:23–24; 1 Jn 5:19), but Christ has freed us from this bondage (Rom 8:2; see Acts 26:18). Just as the Israelites needed to keep the Sabbath to remember God's deliverance from the land of Egypt, we also need to keep the Sabbath to remember God's deliverance from the bondage of sin.

12.7

God did not command the patriarchs to observe the Sabbath day. Clearly, the command to keep the Sabbath was only meant for the Israelite nation.

- ◆ The Bible also does not record that God gave the Ten Commandments to the patriarchs. Does this mean that the Ten Commandments were only meant for the Israelite nation?
- ◆ God did not formally give His commandments to His people until the Israelites were led out of Egypt and entered the wilderness. Sabbath observance, being one of God's

commandments, was thus not formally decreed before that time.

- ◆ The fact that we find no record that God commanded the patriarchs to observe the Sabbath does not necessarily mean that the patriarchs did not keep the Sabbath; nor does it deny God's institution of the seventh day as the Sabbath day since the beginning.
- ◆ The Ten Commandments had never been abolished; they still need to be kept by Christians today (Lk 18:18–20; 1 Cor 7:19; 1 Jn 5:2–3; Rev 14:12). God's commandments were first given to the Israelites because Israel was God's chosen nation, not because the commandments merely applied to the Jews (Rom 3:1–2).

12.8

Romans 10:4 states that Christ is the end of the law. It is a mistake to preach that Christians today should still observe the law by keeping the Sabbath.

- ◆ Here Paul is talking about the Israelites trying to establish their own righteousness by observing the law rather than submitting to God's righteousness (v. 3). He is not saying that Christ did away with the law. Even Christ Himself stated that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17–20). The passage is not teaching that Christ had done away with God's commandments, but that a person is justified by believing in Christ, not by keeping the law.
- ◆ The purpose of keeping the Sabbath is not to gain our own righteousness; instead, we are fulfilling our duty by obeying God's commandments under the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

12.9

Jesus and the apostles never taught that Christians should observe the Sabbath. In Acts 15:28–29, Sabbath observance is not included as a requirement. So Sabbath observance has been done away with in the New Testament.

- ◆ It's true that the New Testament never specifically instructs Christians to keep the Sabbath; however, it also never states that Christians need not keep the Sabbath. The Lord Jesus kept the Sabbath (Lk 4:16; 13:10; Mk 6:2). And so did the apostle Paul (Acts 13:13–14; 16:13; 17:1–2; 18:4). Luke also confirmed Sabbath-keeping by Christians (see question 12.6, point 3).
- ◆ Sabbath observance was not instructed because it had long been a custom since the Old Testament (Acts 15:21).
- ◆ Just because Sabbath observance is not included in the requirements prescribed by the apostles, this does not mean that it had been done away with. There are many other commandments which are not included (e.g. do not murder, do not steal). The believers were expected to learn the other commandments from the synagogues on every Sabbath (Acts 15:19–21).

12.10

The sum of all the commandments is love for God and man (Mt 22:35–40). As long as we have love for God and for others, it is not important whether we keep the Sabbath.

- ◆ How can we love God and not keep His commandments? We show our love for God and for our brothers by obeying God's commands (1 Jn 5:2–3; Jn 14:15).
- ◆ In Matthew 22:37–40, Jesus does not mean that love for God and for others replaces God's commandments, but that the underlying spirit of God's commandments is love.

12.11

The disciples held a service on the first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord (Jn 20:19). We must do the same today.

- ◆ The verse reads, “when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews” (Jn 20:19). It does not say that they were having a service. The verse tells us that the disciples were hiding from the Jews.
- ◆ At this point the disciples still did not believe that the Lord had risen and were thus rebuked later by the Lord (Mk 16:9–14). Thomas, who was not present when Jesus appeared to them, was still unbelieving (Jn 20:24–25). If the disciples did not even believe in the Lord's resurrection, how could they have been celebrating it?

12.12

In Troas, Paul and the believers worshiped on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Paul stayed in Troas seven days, yet the passage gives no mention of worship on the seventh day of the week. This proves that the Christians always worshiped and partook the Holy Communion on the first day of the week.

- ◆ The breaking of bread here should refer to a love feast or fellowship meal, which was a common practice in the Apostolic period (Acts 2:46; see Jude 12). The phrase “breaking of bread” does not necessarily mean the Lord’s Supper (see Lk 22:16 vs. Lk 24:30; Acts 27:33–35).
- ◆ Paul’s companions were sailing while Paul was speaking (v. 13). If the first day was the day of worship, Paul would not have arranged for his companions to be sailing while he himself was worshipping.
- ◆ The passage does not mention the Sabbath because Sabbath observance was a custom and needed not to be mentioned. The first day of the week is mentioned instead because Paul was to leave the next day (v. 7) and would probably never see the members again (Acts 20:22–25). So this special occasion deserves mention.

12.13

In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul instructs the church to make offerings on the first day of the week. Offering is a part of worship (Heb 13:15–16; Deut 16:16; Phil 4:18). The Corinthians must have been worshipping on the first day of the week and this is why Paul specified that day to be a day of offering.

- ◆ Here Paul is not telling the members to have worship services on the first day of the week and at the same time make offerings. Paul was suggesting that on the first day of the week each member should set aside (or “save” in NIV) some of the money earned (or things stored) the previous week so that “there be no collections when I come.” This instruction is only to facilitate the collection of offerings.
- ◆ Paul specifies the first day of the week rather than Saturday probably because Saturday is a day to rest from labor. It’s also quite possible that he wanted the believers to set aside the donation at the beginning of the week (Sunday) so that it would not be consumed during the rest of the week.

12.14

The majority of Bible commentators agree that “the Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10 is the day of Christ’s resurrection. Christians today should observe the Lord’s Day.

- ◆ None of the writers of the New Testament, including the apostle John himself, ever stated that “the Lord’s Day” was

the first day of the week. The conjectures by Bible commentators cannot be held as the truth.

- ◆ The Bible never teaches that we should worship on “the Lord’s Day” or on the first day of the week.
- ◆ The Lord’s Day should refer to the “day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6; 2:16; 1 Cor 1:8) or the “day of the LORD” (Isa 13:6,9; Joel 2:1; Zeph 1:14).

12.15

I can observe the Sabbath any day of the week; I don’t necessarily have to observe the seventh day of the week. If I think the first day is the best day, I’d keep the Sabbath on that day (Rom 14:4–6; Gal 4:10–11).

- ◆ The Bible never says, “Choose one day out of seven as a Sabbath day and observe it.”
- ◆ The day (seventh day) itself is a holy day and God especially blessed this day. God has set this day aside to be a day of rest (Gen 2:1–3).
- ◆ God was very specific about exactly which day the Sabbath was. In Exodus 16:23, God said, “*Tomorrow* is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord” (italics added). And in verse 26 Moses explains that the seventh day (not any other day) is the Sabbath day. The same clarity and explicitness are also expressed in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:9–11; Deut 5:12–14).
- ◆ We must do what God has commanded us, not what we feel is the best choice (see 1 Sam 15:22).
- ◆ Romans 14:4–6 and Galatians 4:10–11 do not refer to the weekly Sabbath day but to the observance of special days.

The context of Romans 14 shows that Paul was talking about Mosaic regulations on days and food (see v. 2). Galatians 4:10–11 is even clearer in that it refers to observance of special occasions prescribed in Old Testament regulations.

12.16

How can we be sure that the seventh day today is the original seventh day God set aside in the beginning? It might be possible that we lost track of time at certain points in the history of human race.

- ◆ The Lord Jesus observed the Sabbath day (Lk 4:16; 13:10; Mk 6:2). So it should be beyond doubt that the day had not been lost up to Jesus' time.
- ◆ The apostles confirmed the Sabbath kept by the Jews (Acts 15:21). Paul himself also kept the Sabbath (Acts 13:13–14; 16:13; 17:1–2; 18:4).
- ◆ During the same period, sun worshippers observed Sunday and Sunday worship was later brought into the church.³ Yet the Jews were still keeping the Sabbath (7th day). Both practices have been observed until today.
- ◆ Although the Jews have been dispersed to different parts of the world, they all have been keeping the Sabbath on the same day even until today.
- ◆ The seven-day week is found in many countries around the world since ancient times, and the days are the same from country to country.
- ◆ God, the creator of the Sabbath as well as the universe, would not have allowed His sacred day to be lost.

12.17

When Joshua fought the Amalekites, “the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day” (Josh 10:12–13). So Sunday is actually the original seventh day (see diagram⁴).

Sun Time	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
Days of Week	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Night and Day	☾☼	☾☼	Joshua's Long Day		☾☼	☾☼	☾☼
Hours	24	24	24	24	24	24	24

- ◆ God's definition of a day is not a 24-hour period. Rather, a day is marked by evening and morning (see Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31 cf. Lev 23:32).
- ◆ A correct diagram⁴ is shown below:

Sun Time	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	1st
Days of Week	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Night and Day	☾☼	☾☼	Joshua's Long Day	☾☼	☾☼	☾☼	☾☼	☾☼
Hours	24	24	48	24	24	24	24	24

- ◆ If a day had indeed been lost at Joshua's time, the Lord Jesus would have been observing the wrong day (see Lk 4:16) — an impossibility, since Jesus Himself is the creator and the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk 2:27–28).

12.18

At the time of Gregory XIII, 10 days were dropped from the Julian calendar in 1582. The British countries did not conform with the calendar change until 1752, when they dropped 11 days out of the calendar. So it is clear that the Sabbath cannot fall on today's Saturday.

- ◆ The dates were changed, yet the days of the week remained the same:

OCTOBER, 1582

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

- ◆ SEPTEMBER, 1752

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

- ◆ The Julian calendar was put into effect 45 years before Christ and the change to the calendar had no effect on the days of the week. In other words, the Saturday today on which we keep the Sabbath is the same seventh day of the week as it had always been since Jesus' time.

12.19

The world is divided up into time zones. Saturday in China, for example, comes earlier than it does in America. Which time zone should be the standard if we wish to be so precise about the day of the week to observe the Sabbath?

- ◆ God knew long ago that the earth was a sphere and that there would be time differences. God would not give a commandment that is impossible to follow. We simply keep the Sabbath day from sunset to sunset (or the corresponding hours) at our own locale.
- ◆ If the objection's misleading logic were to hold, it would also be impossible for Sunday worshippers to decide which time zone should be the standard to mark the first day of the week.

NOTES

1. Harold J. Berry, *What They Believe: Seventh-Day Adventists* (Lincoln: Back to the Bible, 1987) 23. (The quotation is an argument made by the author, a professor of Grace College of the Bible; it is not the belief held by Seventh-Day Adventists.)
2. In fact, there is no biblical evidence that priests actually desecrated the Sabbath; they only performed their priestly duties on the Sabbath as they were commanded to do. Jesus was using the logic of the Pharisees to make a supposition (i.e. if the Pharisee's standard holds, the priests would have been violating the Sabbath by doing work on that day).
3. John Nevins Andrews, *History of the Sabbath and the First Day of the Week*, chapter 16, http://dedication.www3.somegms.com/historyof_sabbath/hos_sixteen.html.
4. This is a modified version of the diagram presented in *Has Time Been Lost?*, a publication of the World Wide Church of God.

CHAPTER

13

Church

13.1

Why is your church called the “True” Jesus Church? Are you telling me that all other churches are false?

- ◆ The word “True” refers to the true God, for God is true (Jer 10:10; Rom 3:4; Isa 65:16; Jn 17:3; 7:28; 1 Jn 5:20), and it shows that the church belongs to the true God.
- ◆ Jesus is the true God Himself (1 Jn 5:20). Jesus said, “I am the true vine” (Jn 15:1), and “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). The Bible also refers to the Lord Jesus as “the true light” (Jn 1:9), and as “holy and true” (Rev 6:10). So it is proper that Jesus be called “True Jesus.”
- ◆ Because believers are branches of the true vine and they constitute the church — the body of Christ — the church is also the “True Church”. If the church belongs to the “True God” and the “True Jesus,” it is the “True Church.”
- ◆ The True Jesus Church does not only bear the name of the true church. The Holy Spirit abides with the church to testify that this church preaches the truth and that it is indeed the true Church (Heb 2:3–4; Eph 1:13–14; 2:22).
- ◆ We have no intention of condemning anyone; but that does not make the church any less true. The True Jesus Church preaches the complete gospel of salvation, has the presence of the Holy Spirit, and is accompanied by signs and miracles; it is the true church not just in name but also in substance.

13.2

The name “True Jesus Church” is just as good as any other name. As a matter of fact, the name of the church is not very significant.

- ◆ The name “True Jesus Church” stands firmly on biblical ground and best reflects the nature of the church as being the church of the True God and Jesus Christ.
- ◆ The True Church should bear the name “Jesus” — the name of God — for the following reasons:
 1. Jesus is the head of the church and the church is His body (Eph 5:23; 1:22–23; Col 1:18, 24).
 2. The church is purchased by the blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28; Rev 5:9) and it belongs to Jesus (Mt 16:18).
 3. The Old Testament temple prefigures the church, and the temple was a house for God’s name (1 Chr 28:3; 1 Kgs 8:16, 18–20; 2 Chr 7:20) and God’s name dwells in the temple (1 Kgs 8:29; 2 Chr 7:16). In the New Testament, the name of God, “Jesus,” has been revealed and believers are saved under the name of Jesus (Jn 17:11). It should not be surprising that the True Church bears the name of Jesus.
 4. The place of worship must be a place for God’s name (Deut 12:5, 11; Ex 20:24). Today, the church is an assembly for worship and should uphold the name of Jesus (cf. Phil 2:10).

So the name “True Jesus Church” has a profound meaning and is by no means insignificant.

- ◆ To see why the word “True” is affixed, see previous question.

13.3

The church of the apostolic era was the true church, but it did not have a name. Why should the true church today establish a name?

- ◆ The church in the apostolic era was the first church established by the Holy Spirit. At that time there was only one church and false churches did not yet exist. All Christians belonged to this only true church, which preached the name of Jesus. No name was necessary since the gospel they believed and preached in itself was the identity of the church (see Acts 2:33–36; 3:15–16; 4:13–18).
- ◆ In the end time, false prophets, false christs, and false doctrines will arise (Mt 24:24; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 Jn 4:1). Today there are thousands of churches and denominations, but there is only one true church. The name of the church will set apart the true church from other churches and draw all men to believe the true gospel of salvation.

13.4

The Lord Jesus is the author of salvation, not the church. As long as I believe in the Lord Jesus and follow the correct path to salvation, I will be saved; I don't need to go to church.

- ◆ The church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22–23, 4:12, 5:23; Col 1:24). How can a person believe in Christ yet refuse to be a member of the body of Christ? True believers of Jesus Christ are members of the same body, i.e. the church (1 Cor 12:12–13; 27–28).

- ◆ There is no doubt that Jesus is the author of salvation, but the Lord Jesus imparts His salvation through His church by sending His workers and giving His church the authority and power to forgive sins (Jn 20:21–23, Mt 16:18–19). Baptism, footwashing, Holy Communion, all of which have to do with believers’ salvation, are performed by the church. A person must also pray for the Holy Spirit in the true church (see question 11.22, point 1). Furthermore, the Lord is the savior of the church as a whole (Eph 5:23–27; see also Acts 20:28). Believers are not saved apart from the church.
- ◆ While those who have been purchased by the blood of Jesus are already members of the church (Acts 20:28), it is necessary that the members stay in fellowship with one another in the Lord (see Acts 2:42–47). Church services are held for members to worship together (see Mt 18:20; Heb 12:22–24); to encourage one another (Heb 10:24–25; see 1 Cor 14:3–4); to pray together (Mt 18:19–20, see Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:23–31; 12:5,12); to edify one another with spiritual gifts (Eph 4:11–12,16), so that the body of Christ may be built up to become the dwelling of God’s Spirit (Eph 2:19–22) and be prepared as the bride of Christ (Rev 19:7; 21:2).

13.5

All churches that believe in and preach the Lord Jesus Christ can lead people to salvation. A person needs not be affiliated with a particular church; he may join any church.

- ◆ The Bible indicates that there is only one church that can lead people to salvation (see next question, point 2). All other so called “churches” that preach different gospels from that of

the true church cannot guide people to salvation since they are not the body of Christ.

- ◆ Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt 7:21). Those who do not preach or follow the true gospel of salvation cannot be accepted by God even though they might be “professed Christians.”
- ◆ The true church that leads people to salvation must have the Holy Spirit. Any “church” that does not have the Holy Spirit does not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9), and is spiritually dead (Jas 2:26; see also 1 Cor 12:13). The baptism it performs has no effect to cleanse sins because the authority to forgive sins is from the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22–23) and the efficacy of baptism is also witnessed by the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 5:6–8).

13.6

A believer’s affiliation with a particular church or denomination is insignificant. Whether I am a Methodist, a Presbyterian, or a Jehovah’s Witness is not really important. The question we should be concerned with is, “Am I a true follower of Christ?”

- ◆ A true follower of Christ would obey the true gospel preached by the true church. If we claim to be a follower of Christ but refuse to accept the truth of salvation, our claim would be false.
- ◆ There is only one church, just as there is only one body of Christ (1 Cor 12:20; Eph 4:4). We are either members of this body or we are not. Whether or not we are in the true church makes an important difference.

- ◆ The question that a believer should be concerned with is “Am I a true follower of Christ and am I in the true church of God?” It is crucial that we become members of the true body of Christ and a branch of the true vine. There is only one church that preaches the true and complete gospel of salvation and is established by the Holy Spirit and can lead people to Christ completely. So to find the true church is absolutely essential.

13.7

Claiming that your church is the only true church is a sign of arrogance and boasting. Such an attitude is against the Christian spirit of humility. Who are we to judge? (Rom 14:10).

- ◆ What makes the True Jesus Church true is the gospel that it preaches, not the qualification of the members. We preach the doctrine of one true church not because we feel superior to other Christians, but because it is the teaching of the Bible. We do not judge any individual. It is God’s word that judges (Jn 12:47, 48).
- ◆ The church belongs to God, not any individual. So when discussing the truth of one church, we cannot take matters personally. Truth is objective. It should not have anything to do with the arrogance and pride of the preacher. We must study the Scriptures to see if the Bible indeed teaches one gospel and one church. If it does, we need to find out what the true gospel is according to the Bible and which church upholds the true gospel. This is the attitude of the Bereans, who diligently studied the Scriptures to examine the message they had heard (Acts 17:11).

- ◆ Paul insisted that there was only one true gospel (2 Cor 11:1–4; Gal 1:6–9). He did not hesitate to condemn all preachers of a false gospel because it concerned believers’ salvation. But he was not boasting about himself. He said, “But *even if we*, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (italics added; Gal 1:6–9). Paul did not make himself the exception; if he turned away from the gospel, he himself would also be condemned.

13.8

All Christian churches and denominations are members of the body of Christ. Each church has its unique gift (i.e. emphasis on certain teachings); and they should join together to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:16).

- ◆ There is no biblical support to show that different churches are members of the body of Christ. Rather the believers are members of Christ’s body (Eph 4:12) and the body is the church (singular; Eph 1:22–23; 5:23; Col 1:24).
- ◆ The church holds only one faith (Eph 4:5). Today different churches proclaim different, or even conflicting, beliefs about salvation. They cannot be of the same body.
- ◆ The church believes in one baptism (Eph 4:5). Many churches, however, disagree on the importance, efficacy, and mode of baptism. So they cannot be of the same body.
- ◆ The church receives only one Spirit (Holy Spirit; Eph 4:4; 1 Cor 12:13). Many churches do not even believe that believers need to pray for the Holy Spirit, with speaking in tongues as the evidence. How can they be of the same

body with the true church, where believers pray for and receive the promised Holy Spirit?

- ◆ For the church to unite and become one, members of different denominations must remove their differences in faith, become one under the name of Jesus (Jn 17:11), and unite in the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:3–4; 1 Cor 12:13) and in truth (i.e. common faith; Eph 4:5).

13.9

How can God be so narrow-minded as to save only one church and reject all those others who love Him deeply?

- ◆ It is not God who is narrow-minded, but those who do not accept His gospel. If God were to accept everyone regardless of whether they obey Him, He would not be the just God that He is, and His words would mean nothing at all.
- ◆ The Lord said, “If anyone loves Me, He will keep My word” (Jn 14:23; cf. 1 Jn 5:3). If someone claims to love God but refuses to obey Him, His claim is false.
- ◆ God knows who truly loves Him (1 Cor 8:3). If a person never hears of the true gospel in his lifetime, it is God who will ultimately determine whether he was a true believer. But as for us who have already known the true gospel, it is our responsibility to accept and obey it.

13.10

There are countless Christians in various denominations all over the world who truly love the Lord and are very fervent. If a person has to be a member of the only true church to be saved, then will these Christians not be saved?

- ◆ Christians of other denominations who have heard the true and complete gospel proclaimed by the church and yet refuse to accept it cannot be called true Christians; for they do not follow the will of the Heavenly Father, even though they might be working fervently in Jesus' name (see Mt 7:21–23). They will have to take full responsibility for their rejection of the true gospel (Heb 2:1–4).
- ◆ Indeed there are many others who humbly search for the truth and love the Lord with great fervor but have never heard the complete gospel of salvation. These people are the “other sheep I have which are not of this fold” and the Lord Jesus will bring them so that all true believers will be one flock (Jn 10:16). It is the Lord's will that all believers become one for the glory of the Heavenly Father (Jn 17:11, 20–23).
- ◆ “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it” (Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–3; see also Hag 2:6–9). This prophecy points to the glory of the true church in the future and that all true believers will join the true church.
- ◆ As for those Christians who never had a chance to find the true church in their lifetime, it is not up to us to judge if they

would be saved. The Lord God will be the ultimate judge. But most importantly, we need to accept the complete gospel and the true church once we have found it.

13.11

If the True Jesus Church is the only true church, why does it have such small membership and slow growth?

- ◆ We cannot measure a church by its popularity. It is the true gospel that saves (1 Cor 15:1). Many who confess the Lord's name will be rejected by the Lord (Mt 7:22–23).
- ◆ “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Mt 7:13–14).
- ◆ When Jesus was crucified, almost all His followers deserted Him. Many despised Him because of His lowly life and shameful death. But that did not make Him any less true. God chose to use what men considered foolish to save those who believed (1 Cor 1:20–25).
- ◆ The apostolic faith was also not popular in its days. In fact, people everywhere spoke against it (Acts 28:22). The believers were persecuted, killed, and scattered. But the church was still the true church.
- ◆ Although the church in the current state may seem lowly, God has already promised her future glory and prominence (Isa 2:1–3; Hag 2:6–9; Zech 8:20–23).
- ◆ The true church does not just consist of believers who are now on earth, but also believers of the past (Heb 12:22–23;

Lk 13:28–29). In this respect, the true church has more members than it seems.

13.12

Most Christians believe in the same Bible, even though they may be members of different denominations. Therefore they all share the same faith and preach the one gospel.

- ◆ Using the same Bible doesn't necessarily mean accepting the true gospel. Many Jews during the time of Jesus and the apostles used the same Scripture but refused to accept Christ and His gospel.
- ◆ What makes one denomination different from another is its beliefs. Although all Christians claim to believe and preach the Bible, not all accept the beliefs about salvation. For example, not all Christians agree with the biblical teaching about baptism, footwashing, Holy Communion, and Holy Spirit, all of which are related directly to our salvation. Only if we obey the truth of salvation can we enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 7:21–23).

13.13

We should not insist on our own doctrines because it all depends on how you interpret the Bible.

- ◆ Although there are many interpretations, when it comes to the truth of salvation, there can be only one true gospel (Gal 1:6–9; Eph 4:4–6). For example, we either need to be baptized to be saved or we do not need baptism. Both cannot

be true. We must study and find the true gospel that is according to the Bible.

- ◆ The truth of the gospel does not come from academic research but by the direct revelation of God through His Spirit (1 Cor 3:9–13; Gal 1:11–12). In the True Jesus Church, the gospel of salvation was revealed to the first believers, and we who have received the promised Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, are also able to understand and accept the true gospel (Jn 16:13).
- ◆ The interpretation that God confirms is the correct interpretation. Just as God sent fire from heaven to confirm the preaching of Elijah, God also confirms the truth of the gospel with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and miraculous signs (Heb 2:3–4; Mk 16:20; 1 Cor 2:4). Believers in the true church experience God directly when they receive the Holy Spirit; people witness blood in baptism, which demonstrates the power of baptism to forgive sins; many receive healing and miracles when they seek and obey the gospel. All these wondrous deeds of God show that the truth the church preaches is from God.

CHAPTER

14

One True God

- ◆ Before we discuss the doctrine of one true God, let's look at a summary of the doctrine of Trinity:
 1. God is one.
 2. The Godhead consists of three distinct eternal coequal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons are the same in substance, but distinct in subsistence.
 3. God is indivisible and unquantifiable.
 4. All three persons of the triune God are involved in every work of God in the world. All acts of God proceed from the Father, through his Son or Word or Image, in the power of his immanent Holy Spirit! For example, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit can individually be said to raise the dead because, as God, each one does raise the dead.² The act is one act, performed by one God, but involving all three ways in which God is God.³
 5. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. He is God, but He is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ The trinitarian view of God came as a result of an attempt to understand God rationally. Although the language of trinity was found in Christian confessions before this time, the word “trinity” itself was first formally used at the synod held at Alexandria, in A.D. 317, and took its place in the language of Christian theology for the first time in a biblical work of Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, in Syria from A.D. 168 to 183.

- Based on the Bible, we do believe and agree that God is one, that Jesus Christ is God, and that the Bible does make a distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But we cannot fully agree with the trinitarian view of God for the following reasons:
1. The use of words and concepts such as “trinity,” “three persons,” “coequal,” “substance,” and “subsistence” are often misleading. If these terms would clarify the concept of God, the Bible would have used them. The fact that they are absent shows that we must be careful about using our own terms when we explain God. Even theologians such as the Cappadocians, Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin all used the word “person” reluctantly and with much qualification.⁴ Many well-respected trinitarians feel that it is misleading and should actually be dropped from contemporary trinitarian creeds.⁵
 2. Our Lord Jesus used terms that we can understand, such as “Father” and “Son,” to help us come to know Him, the God who has taken on flesh and blood in the likeness of human beings. Being in the flesh, the Lord Jesus was the Son of God. He had come from God the Father and was going back to God the Father (Jn 16:28). Contrary to the claim of the doctrine of trinity, which teaches three coequal persons, the Lord clearly stated, “My Father is greater than I” (Jn 14:28). Being the Son, Jesus must submit to God the Father in every way. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus called the Holy Spirit “another Helper” because the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit would be distinct from those of the Jesus who walked on earth (Jn 14:16–17; 16:7). In short, we see in the Bible that such distinctions between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, always pertain to the incarnation of the Son of God and the redemptive plan of God. It is

never the intention of the Bible or of the Lord Jesus to reveal to us an eternal triune God consisting of coequal persons. Concerning God's essence, the Bible simply tells us that God is one and that He is Spirit (Deut 6:4; Jn 4:24). It does not reveal to us an eternal existence of "persons" within the Godhead. Imposing a trinitarian model upon the eternal God is going beyond the teachings of the Scriptures.

3. We must admit that all theories about God's being fail to accurately explain God. It is not wise to define God with human concepts and put Him neatly into a model because in so doing, we easily step beyond and sometimes contradict God's self-revelation through the Scriptures. For example, the belief that Jesus Christ is not the Father or the Holy Spirit contradicts certain passages in the Bible. Such misconception has led to teachings that do away with baptism in the name of Jesus Christ or restricting believers to praying to the Father alone but not to the Lord Jesus.

14.1

Do you believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the same person?

- ◆ We do not like to apply the word "person" to God because it is misleading. We believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God and one Spirit.

14.2

Do you believe that the Son is the Father and the Holy Spirit?

- ◆ We believe that the Spirit of the Son is also the Spirit of the Father and the Holy Spirit based on the following reasons:
1. There is only one God, and Scripture does not say that the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit.
 2. The fullness of God is found in Christ (Col 1:19; 2:9). The Lord Jesus also said that the Father was in Him (Jn 10:38; 14:10,11).
 3. Jesus Christ, the Son of God is to be identified with the Father (Isa 9:6; Jn 10:30; 14:9).
 4. The Lord Jesus indirectly identified Himself as the Holy Spirit. When referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus said, “I will come to you” (Jn 14:18) and “a little while, and you will see Me” (Jn 16:17). The Bible also states, “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:17).
 5. The disciples baptized in the name of Jesus even though they were commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Salvation is found in no one else than Jesus, and there is no other name than the name of Jesus by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).
 6. The Bible calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7; Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11). The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of the Father (Mt 10:20), the Spirit of God (Mt 3:16; Rom 8:9; 8:13,14; 1 Cor 2:11; 3:16; 6:11; 12:3; Phil 3:3; 1 Jn 4:13; 3:24), or the Holy Spirit of God (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 4:8). So the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Son and the Spirit of the Father.

7. The work of Jesus is often attributed to the Father or the Spirit, and vice versa. For example, the Holy Spirit that lives in believers is also called the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9–11); The resurrection of Jesus Christ by the Father (Gal 1:1) is also done by Christ Himself (Jn 2:19). Jesus answers prayers (Jn 14:14) and the Father answers prayers (Jn 15:16). The Holy Spirit will speak for the believers (Mk 13:11) and this Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father (Mt 10:20) and Jesus Himself (Lk 21:15).

14.3

The Trinitarian formula in the New Testament proves that Jesus is not the Father nor the Spirit.

- ◆ The New Testament does distinguish between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit by mentioning them side by side and in relation to one another. The Father sends and works through the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the Bible never says that Jesus is not the Father nor the Holy Spirit, and we should not assume so simply because Jesus is mentioned alongside the Father and the Spirit. By the same token, although Jesus is often mentioned alongside and in relation to God (e.g Acts 2:32; 1 Tim 5:21), we cannot conclude from this that Jesus is not God.
- ◆ When we think of God in terms of “persons,” there is always a tendency to assume that one person cannot be another, the way one human being cannot be another human being. We should not place such restrictions on God when the Bible does not.

- ◆ The Bible often emphasizes the oneness of God (Deut 6:4; Mal 2:10; Mk 12:29; Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:4,6; Gal 3:20; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Jas 2:19). We never read about God's "threeness." It is not wise to fit God into a trinitarian formula when the Bible does not speak of such a formula. In fact, the Bible pairs the Son and the Father (Jn 14:1; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2,3; Gal 1:1,3; Eph 1:2,3; Rev 5:13; etc) or the Son and the Spirit (Mt 4:1; Lk 4:1; 1 Cor 6:11; Rom 15:30; Heb 10:29) much more frequently than it puts the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit together. Does this somehow suggest a "twoness" within the "threeness" of God? By no means. When we begin to think of God as "three," which the Bible does not do, we tend to conclude that one is not the other. Such a conclusion already goes beyond biblical revelation.
- ◆ Philip, who probably concluded that Jesus was not the Father, asked the Lord to show them the Father. Jesus replied, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works" (Jn 14:9–10). Once again, the oneness is emphasized, not the distinction.
- ◆ The fact that the Bible sometimes speaks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit interchangeably makes the notion that one is not the other all the more questionable.

14.4

Jesus Christ is always called the Son; never once was Jesus called the Father or the Spirit in the New Testament.⁶

- ◆ As God who has humbled Himself to become flesh (Phil 2:6–8) and as the anointed (Christ) of God, Jesus is called the Son of God. Jesus also identified Himself as the Son and acknowledged God as His Father. So it is not surprising that Jesus was never identified as the Father.
- ◆ The disciples also understood the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19) to be the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). If the name “Jesus” were exclusively for the Son, and not for the Father or the Holy Spirit, the disciples would have failed to completely carry out the Lord’s command in Matthew because they would have been only baptizing believers in the Son’s name.
- ◆ Jesus also did not say specifically, “I am God.” But this does not mean that He is not God.

14.5

If Jesus is the Father and the Son, why did He always say “My Father,” and never “My Son”?

- ◆ Jesus did not assume the position of the Father. As God who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (Phil 2:6–8) and who shared our humanity (Heb 2:14), Jesus identified Himself as the Son and called God His Father. But we should not go beyond the Bible and say that He is not the Father.

14.6

Why does the Bible not make it clear that Jesus is the Father but always calls Him the Son of God?⁸ Why didn't Jesus simply say, "I am the Father"?

- ◆ The Bible has made clear that there is one God. So we should ask instead, "If Jesus is not the Father, as the doctrine of trinity holds, why doesn't the Bible say so clearly so that there is no confusion?" Why didn't Jesus say, "I am not the Father" when He said "I and My Father are one" (Jn 10:30)?

14.7

The fact that Jesus always spoke of Himself in relation to the Father presupposes that He is not the Father, or else, all the things He said about Him and the Father would make no sense at all. When He prayed to the Father, He would have been praying to Himself.

- ◆ It is tempting to think that since the Father is mentioned in relation to Jesus, Jesus must not be the Father. For example, we may say, "If we substitute Father with 'I', He would have meant I and I are one, I am greater than Me, or I thank Myself." It is easy to conclude from this simplistic substitution that it is absurd to think of Jesus as also the Father. But this is thinking in human terms, which does not work on God, who is spirit. When Jesus was crucified on the cross, He cried out "my God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Mt 27:46). Does this mean that Jesus could not be God because He was addressing God? By no means!

- ◆ We must acknowledge that the relationship between the Father and the Son is beyond human reason, and we do not need to devise a theory so that God's self-revelation would "make sense."

14.8

We should not pray to the Lord Jesus but only to the Father. Jesus is the mediator (1 Tim 2:5) and intercessor (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25) through whom we have access to the Father (Eph 2:18).

- ◆ On many occasions during Jesus' ministry, people would come to Him and asked for mercy and healing. The criminal on the cross also asked the Lord to remember him, and his request was answered (Lk 23:42,43).
- ◆ Stephen prayed to the Lord Jesus (Acts 7:59). Paul gave thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim 1:12) and prayed to the Lord to take away the thorn in his flesh (2 Cor 12:8). Peter called the one who spoke to him in his prayer "Lord" (Acts 10:9–14; the designation "Lord" in the New Testament usually referred to Jesus).
- ◆ When the disciples worshiped the Lord Jesus, the Lord did not refuse their worship (Mt 14:33; 28:9,17; Lk 24:52). The believers in Antioch also worshiped the Lord with fasting (Acts 13:2).
- ◆ The Lord Jesus promised that He will answer us when we pray in His name (Jn 14:14).
- ◆ The notion that we can pray to the Father but not to the Lord Jesus is based on the mistaken assumption that Jesus is not the Father.

NOTES

1. Gregory A. Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992) 88.
2. *Ibid.*, p 128.
3. *Ibid.*, p 129.
4. *Ibid.*, p 173.
5. *Ibid.*, p 172.
6. *Ibid.*, p 68.
7. *Ibid.*, pp 68–69.
8. *Ibid.*, p 70.

Abbreviations of Bible Books

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen	2 Chronicles	2 Chr	Daniel	Dan
Exodus	Ex	Ezra	Ezra	Hosea	Hos
Leviticus	Lev	Nehemiah	Neh	Joel	Joel
Numbers	Num	Esther	Est	Amos	Amos
Deuteronomy	Deut	Job	Job	Obadiah	Obad
Joshua	Josh	Psalms	Ps	Jonah	Jon
Judges	Judg	Proverbs	Prov	Micah	Mic
Ruth	Ruth	Ecclesiastes	Eccl	Nahum	Nah
1 Samuel	1 Sam	Song of Solomon	Song	Habakkuk	Hab
2 Samuel	2 Sam	Isaiah	Isa	Zephaniah	Zeph
1 Kings	1 Kgs	Jeremiah	Jer	Haggai	Hag
2 Kings	2 Kgs	Lamentations	Lam	Zechariah	Zech
1 Chronicles	1 Chr	Ezekiel	Ezek	Malachi	Mal

New Testament

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

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5. McCallum, Dennis. *Christianity, the Faith that Makes Sense.* Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1992.
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10. Poole, Michael. *A Guide to Science and Belief.* Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1990.
11. Sproul, R.C. *Reasons to Believe.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982.

