
Understanding Doctrine

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This was originally designed to complement our 42-part+ study into the book of Romans. This study "Understanding Doctrine" comes from years of careful inductive analyses, research and word studies.

Introduction on how to use the Into Thy Word Bible Studies:

These Bible studies are designed so that you can roll out of bed and lead a Bible study; all the hard work is done for you! They can in turn teach you how to understand theology and His Word. This series can also be used to develop your own studies, how to better prepare your outlining and teaching and of course to glorify Him. They are for the beginner and for the seasoned pastor. They can also be easily converted into a sermon series, thus you can use them for your Bible study, sermons in personal devotions, church and group use. See our online resources for more Bible studies and articles on "How to lead Bible Studies" and sermon preparations.

**"Religion is man's search for God; the Gospel is God's search for man.
There are many religions, but only one Gospel!"**

Are you curious about doctrine is all about? Where does it come from? Is it important? Is it from the Bible or is it all made up by churches? Are you searching for truth? Then this primer is paramount! It is essential to be an effective pastor to understand God's Truth using faith and reason! You may not agree with everything we say. That is OK! We are trying our best to say as clearly as possible what the Bible has to say theology by examining passages in their literary and historical context using sound logic and reason. We do not add anything to God's Word or try to take away anything it does not say! We encourage you to examine the Scriptures and listen to the Spirit. Do not seek your presumptions or own ideas, rather seek His (John 3:30)!

If you are wondering about the theology at Into Thy Word, it is conservative and Biblical! We add nothing to the Word that is not there, nor do we read into it what is not there! We are Conservative Reformed Evangelicals who hold to the inerrancy of the Bible! Please see our Statement of Faith on the About Channel. Most of our people are in the Reformed Churches while others are with Assemblies of God, Presbyterian, Calvary Chapel, Non-Denominational, Charismatic churches plus many more, we share a passion for the Word and a heart for pastors!

Why is Theology Important?

Many Christians today are proclaiming that theology is not important or needed; all we need to do is to love Jesus. We have a big problem in the church today as doctrine disappears from the pulpit and the airways, and is replaced by what "feels

good” or what we feel is needed. When theology disappears from the church and its leaders, we will have a “free for all” of what we think is truth. All that will accomplish is dishonesty, and an erosion of His conviction. The situation will be created where God takes a backseat to the god of the self as the central focus of our faith, and that will carve a road to hell. We as a church, or as a single practicing Christian, will be unable to think wisely about our culture, who we are in Christ, or who He is and what He did. Instead, we will take in what feels good, leaving God and His ways behind us. We will be reveling in the irrational, while Christ stands at the door and knocks. Because of the noise of our Will, we will not open the door!

So, is it true all we have to do is love Jesus? Who is Jesus? Once you ask the question, “who is God,” you have ventured into theology. As Christians, we are not to start our faith as theologians, nor replace faith with theology. We do not start out as Calvinists or Armenians, whatever theological system of the day or of your church. We must start with accepting God as Lord and Savior. In so doing, we accept God’s Word. Through His Word, we divine His truth and means. This is what theology is! It is not the necessary, the starting, or the ending. It is the understanding and the application of His truth. If you say theology is not important, then God is not important, because theology is studying and knowing and understanding God, who He is, His attributes, and such. To deny theology necessitates denying God too!

Remember, Paul wrote the Gospel of Romans under the interspersion and directive of God to proclaim the truth of who Christ was and is. In so doing, he explained the plan of salvation, the role of the church, the inclusion of the Gentile world, and the importance of sharing our faith. Thus, our study of this book is very important as the foundation for our knowledge of doctrine and truth. This is theology! Understanding the Bible is theology!

A church without theology is a church without God, as theology is about knowing who God is and what He has done for us! A theology without a sovereign God is simply not an option for the church or our daily faith, because we will replace Him with idols, (anything that takes the place of God, from a totem pole to money, is an idol) or ourselves!

Therefore, theology, good theology, is a logical system of truth that is rationally defused from what the Scriptures clearly teach. We are never to read in what is not there or just believe in something because that is how we grew up or have been taught. We begin as Bible believing Christians who crave to put the Bible first and above all desires, feelings, or schemes of thought.

Over the years, through many years of learning and struggle, I have slowly accepted the Calvinistic teachings on the five points of T.U.L.I.P as Biblical and therefore true. I did not start out that way. I was firmly an Armenian and Holiness for many years, even through seminary. Only after years of study, especially in the book of Romans, have I yielded to the Reformed Method of understanding. Not because I grew up in it, which I did, not because I went to a Reformed seminary, which I did, but

because of coming face to face with truth by deepening my conviction, and by careful study of God's Word. This quest has not been without fellow truth seekers, others of diverse backgrounds who sought the truth and came to the same conclusion. These include Augustine, Luther, Tyndale, Latimer, Knox, Wishart, Perkins, Rutherford, Bunyan, Owen, Charnock, Goodwin, Flavel, Watson, Henry, Watts, Edwards, Whitefield, Newton, Spurgeon, and of course Calvin. For more information, see my article on "Calvinism from the Critics."

Is theology perfect? It is as perfect as our ability to understand. God is way beyond our human ability to comprehend. So, He reveals Himself in order for us in our ability to understand. Perfection comes when we squeeze out all of our preconceived ideas, interests, wants, and desires, and yield ourselves over to Him, so that we are following His purpose, which is perfect, and not our own, which is flawed. To be God's servant allows Him to be glorified from your walk in Him. To rely on His plan, which is more creative, and has better options than we could ever conceive should be our goal.

What about fate and Philosophy? Fate is looking at what must be, what has been decreed by whoever is in charge. But doctrine is what God has revealed for us to understand, not because it must be, but because this is what is best for us on our behalf! And since it is the best, then it should and must be. Philosophy tells us that faith is blind; however, doctrine has the eyes of love. Faith is without care and love and understanding. Doctrine is the care and the love and the kindness that abounds. Because He first loved us! Fate and predestination are also the voluntary choices by the sanctified Christian, because God is working!

All that you do in life must be a reflection of a life surrendered to Christ. If you are so self-willed there can be no room for the living Christ, this may mean that others will use you, take advantage of you, get mad at you, ignore you, go around you, ridicule you, and persecute you! However, what they do to you, they do to Him! Make sure you are not the one persecuting the Lord!

Why do we cause divisions? Why are there so many disagreements within the Christian faith about theology?

Is not the Holy Spirit giving all Christians the same truth? Yes, the Holy Spirit is giving us the same truth, so, He is not the problem. We are! For the most part most Christians and Denominations are in agreement with over 99% in the essentials and 90% on most points of doctrine. Various groups will try to redefine terms so our fight is over the semantics of the argument and not the substance or the processes of it. Such as with baptism, most Christians will agree that we are to be baptized and agree that it is an identification with Christ, but will disagree on the subject how to baptize. I once believed that the many different beliefs in the Christian faith demonstrated that it was not true. After all, how could there be so many disagreements about something that was supposed to be true? Over the years, I have found that the cause is although we have more in common than not, we tend to focus on the negative distinctions and not our unity. According to the late Dr. Walter Martin of the Christian Research Institute, who

spent a lifetime in research, even radically different denominations such as Catholics and Seventh Day Adventists have over 90% of their theologies in agreement and 99% of what is essential.

For example, Christians agree that all are sinful. Thus, as long as sin remains, it is going to influence how we handle knowledge and truth, even the truth of God's Word. Additionally, nearly all of the divisions among Christians are the result of pride. Furthermore, all Christians believe that we humans are limited in our abilities to understand what God has told us, and in effectively, clearly communicating what God is teaching. This is demonstrated by the people who are against the Reformed teachings (T.U.L.I.P.), mainly because they were not explained logically or clearly. All through Seminary, I denied "Limited Atonement" because my professors never clearly explained it. Since I did not understand it, I denied it. This is the same reasoning as Christians use when they disagree over such things as the method of baptism; who should be baptized, Believers or infants; what is taking place during this sacrament; Consubstantiation versus Transubstantiation, versus Substantial, etc.

We contradict each other because Scripture teaches us to baptize and gives some examples, but it does not actually provide any kind of specific formula. Thus, we come to different conclusions based on our limited insight and our own determination (what we like over what God desires us to do). These differences are going to multiply if no control is enforced on individuals and churches, which is exactly what has happened. That is why your Church Order Manual and or "Articles" are so important. The Reformation encouraged all people to read the Bible. Prior to that movement, the common person was not allowed to do so. Thus, many interpretations have arisen over the centuries, both minor and cultic. All these various reasonings have combined with traditions and expectations. These all focus on what we do versus what God calls us to do.

What is important is the agreement that remains over the basics of Christianity by those who believe that the Bible is true. (There are individuals and churches that claim to be Christian and reject what the Bible says. I'm not talking about them, just look up the word "reprobate", and read Romans 1). Most committed Christians, regardless of denomination, who believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God have more in common than not. There is a great deal of unity in the midst of our diversity.

We all believe that God is our Creator; that He created us without sin, but that we have all fallen into sin; that our sin separates us from God and we cannot make up this gap; that Jesus Christ is God's Son who died for us that we may receive forgiveness for sin; that He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven; that we embrace salvation only by our faith in Jesus Christ; that the Holy Spirit is the One who gives us understanding about Jesus and salvation; that Jesus will return some day in glory. We also all agree concerning the virgin birth, the Trinity, Christ's Atonement and Deity, the nature and attributes of God, and the Fall, to name a few. These chief beliefs are the essentials that have withstood the test of time and the misinterpretations of sinful people. For me, the many different denominations have increased my appreciation for

the gospel, and at the same time have given me a passion to teach correct theology, and to reach the lost.

What are the primary reasons Christians disagree on many points?

First, we may make many “LOGICAL” errors, misinterpret and/or take a passage(s) out of context, or rush through it. We look at one ambiguous text and ignore scores of others that are clear. Christians are not perfect and are subject to fallacies in reasoning and judgment. Even the greatest scientific minds disagree for these same reasons! This is why there are so many theories in science, and why they are always changing.

Second, we are limited by the education and knowledge we possess, by the information at our disposal, and by knowing how to use that information! Our perspectives are limited and we do not always see the big picture, thus our interpretations are sometimes flawed, or else adequate work and effort was not put into it.

Third, one of the biggest causes of errors is our prejudices. These are our preconceived ideas and biases that cloud our thinking, such as believing in a particular mode of baptism or end time theory. We may grow up in a church that practices “believers baptism” or “infant baptism” only, thus, we are unwilling to look deeper into other theological views.

People tend to rationalize their faulty beliefs instead of researching and discovering the facts for themselves. Either they do not want to know or grow beyond their limited experience, or they base decisions on emotions and do not seriously see the logic.

Fourth, we are still full of sin and fall way short, thus we are susceptible to the influences of Satan and are unable to reason with true perfection!

For example in John 1:1 the Jehovah’s Witnesses believe Jesus is not God, but “a god,” as Lucifer too is a god in their theology. In 1 Corinthians 15:29, the Mormons believe it is OK to baptize people who have already died. In Mark 16:18, some American Appalachian sects handle poisonous snakes to prove their faith. Some Bible teachers on TV use 3 John 2 as an excuse to teach the “health and wealth” gospel. Yet, when you examine these texts, they do not teach any of those things! These are classic cases of bad interpretation for the reasons fore mentioned.

- The Bible does not teach what we please.
- The Bible cannot mean something else from what it does say.
- The Bible cannot mean what it never meant!

Consider your neighbor, the person you work with, a close friend, a relative, or acquaintance that does not know Him. Will your attitude of “my way or no way” keep

you from being a witness or friend? Scripture is clear on what we are called to do, are you clear in your understanding, purpose, and response? From the Episcopal Church practice of burning incense in worship to the fundamentalist church that renounces any form of liturgy, we all still bow the knee to our Lord (John 14:6).

Following Jesus means we do not just ask the question of what would Jesus do, but what He will have me do. We know this by following His character and teachings to all parts of our life even when it is inconvenient, or has considerable expense, or goes against our family and society.

So what is your direction and source of inspiration?

Most of us will look to our creeds and confessions for that answer and for good reason. But I want to go deeper in our personal responsibility. That is, how do I take my faith so seriously that it becomes more personal, so it becomes more real, so all my thoughts, ideas, directions, goals, and inspirations are in the direction of serving our Lord? To take your faith to a deeper level, so it is yours and personal and not just because this is what your family is and does, not just because you are part of a good church and school or work. That your faith is solely because of what Christ has done for you and nothing else. This is the work of the Holy Spirit! But we have a responsibility to respond and to grow and build on what we are given! It takes trust, faith and surrender of your will, surrender of your dreams, surrender of your ideas to the LORDSHIP of Christ. That you acknowledge He is Lord over you by His love for you and that His ways are better than ours: (Heb. 2:14-18; Titus 2:11-14). Christ is our King, so let us live our lives in response to what He did for us!

Christian Maturity

Maturity is the starting point to really commit to learn, understand and grow in Christ and our understanding of Him! One of the clearest evidences of being a mature Christian is an increased awareness and knowledge for the need to be in Christ, and not to be to ourselves. When we have an increased need that goes beyond our self, an increasing need that goes beyond our self-confidence, so confidence is in our Lord and the Holy Spirit; then our self-confidence becomes rooted and dependent in Christ working through us. So we are not self-driven but Christ driven (II Cor. 4:16-18; II Tim. 2:15-24; I Pet. 5). Thus resulting in our will to be in total surrender to God's will as the driving force for our existence (John 3:5, 30). For us to grow we must surrender our will, desires, plans upon our Lord Jesus Christ. The municipal center of the Christian life is Jesus Christ (Col. 3:4).

- We must have a firm, forward and moving commitment and trust in His work (Rom.12:1; Gal. 2:20, Phil.1:20-21).
- The believer has support from other mature believers (Matt. 28:20; John 15:5)

- Has purpose, direction, and is filled with Christ's power (Eph. 3:20; Phil. 4:13; Rom.12:1-2).
- Is disciplined in the gifts of the spirit (I Cor.12).
- All in: Word of God (Matt. 4:4; I Pet. 2:2).
- Prayer and praise (Phil. 4:4-7; Col. 3:16-17).
- Love (I Cor.13; Mark 12:28-34; John 3:16).
- And Fellowship (John 13:34-35; I Cor.12:12-21; Eph. 4:15-16).
- In Christ, all that comes to us is for God's glory, purpose, and our good. (Rom. 8:28).
- He seeks to bring us closer to Himself by His love, joy, and peace (Rom. 5:1-5) that we may share His love with those around us to convey God's purpose for His people (John 17:20-24; Acts 2:24; 44-47).

Basic Christian Doctrine

1. There is only one God - Isaiah 43:10; 44:6,8; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:5-6; Gal. 4:8-9
2. God is a Trinity - 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2
3. There are no Gods before or after God - Isaiah 43:10
4. God knows all things - 1 John 3:20
5. God is all powerful - Psalm 115:3
6. God is everywhere - Jer. 23:23,24
7. God is sovereign - Zech. 9:14; 1 Tim. 6:15-16
8. God is spirit - John 4:24
9. God created all that exists - Gen. 1:1; Isaiah 44:24
10. Spirit does not have a body of flesh and bones - Luke 24:39
11. God is eternal, He has always been God - Psalm 90:2
12. Jesus is God - John 1:1,14; 10:30-33; 20:28; Col. 2:9; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 1:8
13. Jesus became a man - Phil. 2:5-8
14. Jesus has two natures: divine and human - Col. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:5
15. Jesus led a sinless life - 1 Pet. 2:22
16. Jesus is the only way to God the Father - John 14:6; Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22
17. The Holy Spirit is God - Acts 5:3-4
18. The Holy Spirit is not a force. He is a Person and alive - Acts 13:2
19. The Bible is inspired by God - 2 Tim. 3:16
20. All people have sinned - Rom. 3:23, 5:12
21. Man did not evolve, he was created - Gen. 1:26
22. Adam and Eve were real people - Gen. 3:20; 5:1; 1 Tim. 2:13
23. Death entered the world because of Adam's sin - Rom. 5:12-15

24. Sin separates us from God - Isaiah 59:2
25. Jesus died for all our sins - 1 John 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Pet. 2:24
26. Jesus' sacrifice was a substitution, for us - 1 Pet. 2:24
27. Jesus rose from the dead in His physical body - John 2:19-21
28. Those who reject Jesus will go to Hell - Rev. 20:11-15
29. Hell is a place of fiery punishment - Matt. 25:41; Rev. 19:20
30. Hell is eternal - Matt. 25:46
31. The unsaved go to hell forever - Rev. 21:8
32. Salvation is a free gift of God - Rom. 4:5; 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9
33. The Bible is the Word of God - 2 Tim. 3:16
34. Jesus will return visibly to earth - Acts 1:11
35. Christians will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns - 1 Thess. 4:14-17
36. There will be a rapture (being caught up into the clouds with Jesus) - 1 Thess. 4:14-17
37. There will be a final judgment - 2 Pet. 3:7
38. The damned will be thrown into a lake of fire - Rev. 20:15
39. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire - Rev. 20:10
40. There will be a new heavens and a new earth - 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1

Who is God?

- God Is One - Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4
- God Is Truth - Psalm 117:2; Jer. 10:10
- God is Light - 1 John 1:5
- God is Love - 1 John 4:8,16
- God Is Infinite - Jer. 23:24; Psalm 147:5
- God is All Knowing - 1 John 3:20
- God is Everywhere - Psalm 139:7-12
- God is All Powerful - Jer. 32:17,27
- God is Unequaled - Isaiah 40:13-25
- God Is Perfect - 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139
- God Is A Most Pure Spirit - John 4:24
- God Is Invisible - 1 Tim. 1:17
- God Does Not Have A Human Body - Luke 24:39; Deut. 4:15-16
- God Does Not Change - Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17
- God Is Without Limit - 1 Kings 8:27; Jer. 23:23-24
- God Is Eternal - Psalm 90:2; 1 Tim. 1:17
- God Is Incomprehensible - Rom. 11:33; Psalm 145:3
- God Is The Almighty One - Rev. 1:8, 4:8
- God Is Most Wise - Rom. 16:27; Jude 25
- God Is Most Holy - Isaiah 6:3; Rev. 4:8
- God Is Most Free - Psalm 115:3
- God Is Most Absolute - Isaiah 44:6; Acts 17:24-25
- God Works According To His Will - Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:28

- God Receives Glory - Rom. 8:36; Rev. 4:11
- God Is Most Loving - 1 John 4:8-10
- God Is Gracious - Exodus 33:19; 1 Pet. 2:3
- God Is Merciful - Exodus 34:6; Psalm 67:1; James 5:11
- God Is Long-suffering - Psalm 86:15; 2 Pet. 3:15
- God Abounds In Goodness - Psalm 31:19; 52:1; Rom. 11:22
- God Is Forgiving - Dan. 9:9; Eph. 1:7; Psalm 86:5
- God Rewards Those Who Seek Him - Heb. 11:6
- God Is Just In All His Judgments - Neh. 9:32-33; 2 Thess. 1:6
- God Hates Sin - Psalm 5:5-6; Hab. 1:13
- God Is the Creator - Isaiah 40:12,22,26
- God Is Shepherd - Gen. 49:24

Doctrines of Grace

The Sovereignty of God is clearly spelled out in Romans"; yet, Paul is poured out and sorrowful, and in (Rom. 10:1) is worshiping and in (Rom. 11:33-36) is praying. Calvin spends more time speaking on the responsibility of men and prayer than anything else in the acronym of TULIP! The big picture is God is totally Sovereign, and we have free will and responsibility! God's sovereignty does not nullify our responsibility and calls! Free will and sovereignty go together like roots and leaves, they may not need each other from God's perspective, but they do from ours. Spurgeon says they are friends; Augustine says, "we must work and do as it all depends on us, and pray and trust as it all depended on God". The God who ordains the ends (from creation to salvation) and numbers our hairs, also ordains the means to the ends: That our prayers, witness and free will is God's foreordained decree which is far beyond our feeble understanding and choices we make. God is sovereign and we have free will, the Bible teaches both, we may not fully understand it, but there it is. We are the elect and chosen, which we must know we have no right to it. Thus, our responsibility and call must be directive and purpose driven, His purpose! To sit and hide behind theology is a coward's and reprobate's way out!

The Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ: Most Study Bibles have notes which give references to the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here is what the "Scofield Study Bible" Notes say (Into Thy Word does not necessary endorse this Study Bible, but at places it does have good notes, but you have to be discerning!):

(1) In the intimations and explicit predictions of the O.T. (a) The "theophanies" intimate the appearance of God in human form, and His ministry thus to man (Gen. 16:7-13; 18:2-23. especially v. 17; 32. 28 with Hos. 12:3-5; Ex. 3:2-14). (b) The Messiah is expressly declared to be the Son of God (Psa. 2:2-9), and God (Psa. 45:6, 7 with Heb. 1:8,9; Psa. 110. with Mt. 22:44; Acts 2:34 and Heb. 1:13; Psa. 110.4 with Heb. 5:6; 6. 20:7. 17-21; and Zech. 6:13). (c) His virgin birth was foretold as the means through which God could be "Immanuel," God with us (Isa. 7:13, 14 with Mt. 1:22, 23). (d) The

Messiah is expressly invested with the divine names (Isa. 9:6, 7). (e) In a prophecy of His death He is called Jehovah's "fellow" (Zech. 13:7 with Mt. 26:31). (f) His eternal being is declared (Mic. 5:2 with Mt. 2:6; John 7:42).

(2) Christ Himself affirmed His deity. (a) He applied to Himself the Jeho-vistic I AM. (The pronoun "he" is not in the Greek; cf. John 8:24; John 8:56-58. The Jews correctly understood this to be our Lord's claim to full deity "v. 59". See, also, John 10:33; 18:4-6, where, also "he" is not in the original.) (b) He claimed to be the Adonai of the O.T. (Mt. 22:42-45. See Gen. 15:2, note). (c) He asserted His identity with the Father (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 14:62; John 10:30; that the Jews so understood Him is shown by vs. 31, 32; John 14:8, 9; 17. 5). (d) He exercised the chief prerogative of God (Mk. 2:5-7; Lk. 7:48-50). (e) He asserted omnipresence (Mt. 18:20; John 3:13); omniscience (John 11:11-14, when Jesus was fifty miles away; Mk. 11:6-8); omnipotence (Mt. 28:18; Lk. 7:14; John 5:21-23); mastery over nature, and creative power (Lk. 9:16. 17; John 2:9, 10:28). (f) He received and approved human worship (Mt. 14:33; 28: 9, John 20: 28, 29).

(3) The N.T. writers ascribe divine titles to Christ (John 1:1; 20. 28; Acts 20:28; Rom. 1:4; 9:5; 2 Thess. 1:12; 1 Tim. 3:16; Tit. 2:23; Heb. 1:8; 1 John 5:20).

(4) The N.T. writers ascribe divine perfections and attributes to Christ (e.g. Mt. 11:28; 18:20, 28:20; John 1:2, 2:23-25; 3:13; 5:17; 21:17; Heb. 1:3, 11, 12 with Heb. 13:8; Rev. 1:8,17,18; 2:23; 11, 17; 22:13).

(5) The N.T. writers ascribe divine works to Christ (John 1:3. 16:17, Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:3).

(6) The N.T. writers teach that supreme worship should be paid to Christ (Acts 7:59, 60; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 13:14, Phil. 2:9, 10; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5, 6; 5. 12, 13).

(7) The holiness and resurrection of Christ prove His deity (John 8:46; Rom. 1:4).

Philippians 2 is the great Chapter on the **kenosis** or self-emptying of the Lord Jesus Christ when He became a man. His equality with the Father as the Son of God is stated here.

Note also John 5:18 "This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God."

A well-known NT passage is Romans 9:5 "...to them (the Jewish race) belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Messiah (who is) God who is over all, blessed for ever. Amen."

The role and Person and work of the Holy Spirit: He is a person. (John 14:16-17); He is our advocate (John 14:16, 1 John 2:1); He imparts new life (John 3:3-6); He pleads

our case before God the Father (Romans 8:26-27); He bears witness and glorifies Christ (Romans 8:14, Galatians 4:6); He pours God's love in our hearts (Romans 5:4-5, Galatians 5:22-23); He is always with us (Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5-6); He indwells within us (John 14:17, Ephesians 3:16-17); He is powerful and able to do the will of the Father through us (Acts 1:8, 4:31, 10:45); He is essential for our salvation (John 3:5, I Corinthians 12:3); He is essential for our sanctification (Romans 7:21-25, II Corinthians 3:18); He is essential for our service and sharing of faith (Acts 1:8); He is Lord, loving, and available to us (I Corinthians 6:19-20); It is our duty as Christians to recognize the role of the Holy Spirit to find out our gifts that all have been given. Then we must be disciplined in those gifts and use our gifts to glorify His Kingdom. In doing this, we become obedient and we receive and we rely and trust in his role. (Acts 19:1-2, Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 5:13-26, Revelations 3:20, Ephesians 3:17, and Luke 11:13).

Hope is our forward outlook to be in Christ forever. This produces Joy. Heb. 11:1, "the substance of things hoped for." Hope is our future in Christ in glory, in Heaven. When we keep focused on our circumstances, we will see little or no hope. We can only attain hope by being in Christ, and having our eyes focused upon Him. Christ is to be our anchor, our hope (Luke 12:15-21; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1 Cor. 4:8-13; 2 Cor. 4:7-18; 5:6-8; Rom. 15:13; Phil. 1:21-24; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Heb. 6:18-19). Hope calls us to patience and confidence for service in adversity, to endure suffering, and to continue in His call (Rom. 5:1-5; 8: 18, 25). Hope must be our focus to us, and to others. It must never be faked or depressed (1 John 3:3; 4:18)! Hope is the effect of obedience and trust in our Lord (Heb. 6:18.) If you have no hope, then you have no vision and purpose, no trust in the One who loves. Hope allows you to live with the perspective of eternity, so you are not bogged down in your dire circumstances.

Our life on here earth is not our ultimate hope and reality. This is mainly a place to learn and grow. Thus, what we do or do not do here will echo throughout eternity and determine our place in the future with rewards or condemnation! Do not let the lust of your flesh rule your heart and rob you of your future. Seek forgiveness, and safeguard your future actions!

The Trinity: A dangerous trend is creeping its way into the church, and that is the devaluing of solid Biblical doctrine. Some say all we need is Jesus, and we do not need doctrine. Jesus is love and doctrine divides. These statements are ridiculous. Just think it through. The Gospels clearly record that Jesus divides! Once you answer the question, "Who is Jesus," you have doctrine. You cannot have Jesus without a definition of who He is, and that is the realm of doctrine! The Trinity is one of the doctrines people try to get rid of, saying it is not in the Bible, and so we do not need to believe in it. See for yourself if the Trinity is not in the Bible.

The word comes from the Latin, "trinitas" which means three or three ness. The word is not found in Scripture. However, the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, depicts God as being triune in nature. He has three forms or three ways of revealing Himself!

We find proof of this ranging from the third person case in Gen. 1 and 2 to a more exacting form such as in Romans 15:17-20! Yet, the Old Testament proclaims One God only (Deut 6:3-5; Ex. 20; Isa. 40; 44-45), and so does the New Testament (Mark 12:29-30; I Cor. 8:4; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5) and we read of grave consequences for not adhering to it!

A lot of argumentation over the centuries from the first early church counsel to present day TV preachers has occurred from misrepresenting God. Why? Because, God is beyond the confines of our limited knowledge of the universe, beyond space and time, and definitely beyond our comprehension! Thus, God reveals Himself to us, as we are able to understand and comprehend Him. We tend to throw our own spin and sin into the works and create the arguments ourselves, when God's Word clearly spells out His nature! This doctrine may be hard for most people to understand. Nevertheless, it is true and essential if we are to know the One True God.

One God reveals Himself in three personalities. In theology, they are called "Substances."

God the Father (Gen 1-2; 6:5-7; Ex. 20; 32:9-14; 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 90; 102:25-27; 145:18; Isa. 40:12-31; 66:1; Mal. 3:6; Matt. 10:29-30; John 4:24; 5:26; Acts 4:34-35; 17:23-25; Eph. 1:11; 2 Pet. 3:8; Rev. 4:10).

God the Son (John 1:18; 20:28-31; Acts 7:59; Rom. 9:5; 10:9-13; 2 Cor. 12:7-9; Phil. 2:5-6; Col. 1:15-17; 2:9; Heb. 1:1-12; 1 Pet. 3:15).

God the Spirit (John 14:16,26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15; Acts 5:3-4).

All three are proclaimed together in Matt. 28:19; Rom. 8; 15:17-29; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4-5). They are not separate Gods, for this would be "Tritheism." They are not one God acting out three roles, for this would be "Modalism." Even though the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, the concept and essence is clearly stated. Furthermore, the concept is of one God with three conversing distinct ways to reveal Himself --"Personalities," or "Substances," if you will. They are co-equal, co-eternal, and possessing full divinity, yet each is a distinct Person requiring equal devotion and worship. They are not three, but One in purpose and unity.

Incarnation

The incarnation simply means God came to be a man. He was fully man while remaining fully God. That way He could identify with our plight in life. As He lived a normal human existence for over 30 years, He experienced all that we experienced, including all the emotions, relationships, and temptations.

He drove nails as He worked with His earthly father. He obeyed His earthly mother when she asked Him to take out the trash. He played, He worked, and He lived the life of a man, a human being, with all that we have in our makeup that makes us human.

He went to sleep at night, and awoke to a normal life with all of the stresses and opportunities a human could have in the first century.

Therefore, we can never say to Him, *Hey, God, You do not understand my situation or me!* He does indeed understand. He has indeed been where we are. He may not have gone to high school in Burbank, driven a car, programmed a VCR, or held a job in a cubical with an annoying boss, but He has experienced all that is important in life that we experience and wonder about!

We need to have a grasp on who we are in Christ, and who Christ is. This is the foundation of being a Christian. Who is He? What did He do for me? What is my role and purpose? These themes stand out as we celebrate Christmas, because Christmas is the celebration of what we call the *incarnation*, that is, that Christ, being fully God Who created the universe, Who always existed, *chose* to come down to us, to be one of us.

Consider what you may have learned in school, especially in science, since science demands that every event must have a cause. Science demands the classic if/then statement in logic and reasoning. *If* it is raining, *then* it must be cloudy. *If* you are a Christian, *then* you have been saved. That event had a cause. *If* you sinned and you are saved, *then* you received some kind of a miracle. The cause of sin itself (original sin as well as our willful disobedience) creates the ultimate need of our salvation.

Then comes the other cause of our being a Christian, and that is a Redeemer Who was necessary to save us. God, Who was one of us, lived in this world and in its sin. Yet, Christ remained sinless. He did not concede to the temptation thereby enabling us to be saved so that we would not be lost forever. Then, comes the *if* of the logical equation of we humans in temptation, and sin, which is in need. The *if* is the presence of a sinless man in the midst of a universally sinful human race. It all comes down to the cause for which we celebrate, which is the Christmas miracle. That miracle happened, the incarnation happened, for our salvation. So, why have the Incarnation? Why have a Virgin Birth?

Because such a person as Jesus Christ demanded it! This was a special birth that, as the Gospels record, showed us His Divine nature. The HOW of the birth becomes believable when the WHO of the birth is taken into account. We, as humans, are all born into, and with, original sin. By skipping the original sin, Christ became the second Adam (more precisely the first, since He is preexistent). As Adam represented all of humanity in the fall, Christ represented all of humanity in the redemption. Christ needed to be isolated from the original sin so it would not affect Him, so He could do what Adam could not do which was to remain sinless. If this had not been so, then the unique Jesus, who was born as one of us, would have created an unapproachable hurdle without the Virgin Birth. He would be unable, as we know it, to overcome the original sin that plagues us all. Would not the pre-existence of Christ necessitate such a miracle birth? Perhaps He could have come in some other way. We just do not know all of the options. But, if He had, then He would not have been one of us!

However, if we do not accept that Jesus was born special and unique, then we cannot accept that He is God. The incarnate Son of God is pure and holy and thus cannot touch sin. If He did, then He would be corrupted and unable to take our place by living a sin free life. He would be unable to save us. Thus, the Virgin Birth becomes logically inevitable and necessary. Who could be the Father of the Son of God but God Himself?

This doctrine was accepted by the early church and is included in all of the great Christian creeds. Justin Martyr included it among the cardinal items of Christian belief. The apologist Aristides accepted it. Ignatius, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Luther insisted on it. So, how about you (Isaiah 7:10-16; Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:34-37; John 1:1-18; Rom. 1:3-4; I Cor. 15:45-49, Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 1:1-14; 2:14-18; 4:15)?

Virgin Birth

What does the term, *Virgin Birth*, mean? Jesus was born by the result of what we call the *Miraculous Conception*. His mother, Mary, who did not have sexual relations with His earthy stepfather Joseph, conceived our Lord in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then Mary gave birth to Jesus without a human father. (why Mary is not the poster women for women's rights and liberation groups, I will never know!) The Virgin Birth does not imply that Jesus was *born* in a manner different from any other child. He was born in exactly the same way as you and I. Nor, does it suggest that there was merely a *Miraculous Conception* as in the case of Sara or Elizabeth who were past age. Mary was a young woman, perhaps in her late teens, as was the custom then. It does not mean *Immaculate Conception* as taught by the Roman Catholic Church, for that dogma asserts that Mary was also conceived and born without original sin, a claim for which there is not a scintilla of Biblical evidence!

Jesus came into this world as a baby, with all of the human weaknesses, needs and desires. He had to be fed, changed, cared for, nurtured, educated, protected and loved, just as one of us. Yet, it was a virgin conception, an event entirely without parallel! Yet, He was still fully god Creator and Sustainer of all things. Modern science with test tube babies, artificial fertilization, and insemination still requires the seed of a man and the egg of a woman. Even in the case of cloning, the building blocks of the human geneo are already in place, for God created them. Science does nothing but rearrange the "Legos" that God created. Contrary to the course of nature, Jesus was miraculously conceived in the womb of Mary. She was the host or segregate, as the Spirit *overshadowed* her. To which percentage of her DNA did God use, 100%, 50%, 10%, or 0%? We do not know. So, our Lord and Savior could not only be identified as humanity's own, as one of us, but also still be able to save us.

The normal process of original sin was short circuited so He could be the Adam who did not sin, so He could take our place in life and in death, so He could live for us in the perfection that we could not, and take the punishment of God's wrath that we

deserved, not Him! All this was possible because of the Virgin Birth. The transmission of humanities sinful nature and heritage was interrupted by this miraculous conception. Yes, Christ was one of us, He was fully human born without corruption, and yet, He was also, and still is, and forever will be, fully God. Was He still able to sin? Yes. Although this may be debated theologically, the Biblical evidence is that He was able to fall, but He did not! That was what His temptation in the wilderness was all about; yet He remained steadfast as our Protectorate and Savior.

Alternatives to the Virgin Birth

It is argued by liberal thinking people that the Bible does not insist on our believing in the virgin birth as a requirement for salvation. It is further argued that the virgin birth did not even take place, but that Believers added it later. Many pastors and denominations dismiss the supernatural aspects of the Bible and cut the virgin birth from their beliefs. So, does a belief in the virgin birth require our obedience? The Bible plainly teaches the fact of the virgin birth. If you believe the Bible to be true, then the virgin birth must be true also. And, Jesus has to be God for us to be saved. Is it possible for a person to be saved without knowing the details of the process? I believe so. Just as babies are born without any knowledge of embryology or just as I type this article into my computer without knowing all the details of how a computer works, the process continues. It is the integrity of the fact of whom Christ is, not our knowledge of every detail that lays the basis for our salvation.

Let us consider the alternatives, and ask if this doctrine is fact or fiction.

If the Virgin Birth did not happen, then...

- 1....The New Testament narratives are proven false and the Bible's authority is raided. Thus, it is also inaccurate in other matters.
- 2....Mary, instead of being blessed among women, is a fornicator, an adulteress, and must be branded as unchaste, for Joseph asserted that Jesus was not his son.
- 3....Jesus becomes the ordinary child of sinful parents with the corruption of original sin, and is not the result of incarnation. Thus, His preexistence did not happen, and thus He not only is not God, but also, He is not able to redeem us, and is not worthy of our worship and adoration.
- 4....We no longer have a sufficient explanation of His unique character, if He had one. Thus, He did not have a sinless life, and was unable to take our place in life, living the sinless life that we could not live. He was unable to pay the price of our sin and appease God's wrath for us.
- 5....He was begotten of a human father. This could be the only alternative to the virgin birth. He was just a man, a good teacher, maybe a prophet. Jesus Christ could not be the Second Person of the Trinity as He claimed, and therefore has no power to forgive our sin.
- 6....The miracle of *Miraculous Conception* is refuted and nullified. We no longer have a Savior, thus there is no need to "do" church.

7....Logically, we should deny all miracles, as they do not nor cannot happen. The question we should be asking and seeking is, *are we willing to accept the supernaturalistic claims of Scripture or not?*

The *virgin birth* is the starting point of knowing who Christ is. It points to His humanity, as He became one of us, and His Godhood, as the One Who came to save us. When we deny this essential doctrine, we deny Scripture. We set ourselves up, as fallen humans, to be the ultimate authority. We say in essence that God is irrelevant and perhaps even non-existent in our lives. We say there is no sin, which even the daily newspapers testify to be a false statement. We make the claim for ourselves that we have no need to be saved. What extreme arrogance and hopelessness we would have.

It should be stated that this doctrine is at variance with nothing taught elsewhere in the New Testament. But, on the other hand, it positively correlates the pre-existence of Christ and His incarnation (Isaiah 7:10-16; Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:34-37; John 1:1-18; Rom. 1:3-4; I Cor. 15:45-49, Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 1:1-14; 2:14-18; 4:15).

Pride and Propitiation! The world may see pride as a sign of respect and dignity, a sign that our worth as human beings is supreme, that we deserve respect and even worship for ourselves. The world may take pleasure and satisfaction with pride as it represents achievements that we have accomplished. But, our conceit is the source of pride. When we are filled with conceit, we have a vastly exaggerated opinion of ourselves. Pride is a delusion!

Our self-esteem must come from who we are in Christ and what Christ has done for us. This should give us an enormous satisfaction and sense of worth. The King and Creator of the universe cares for us and loves us. He is living within, guiding, loving, and holding us! There is no adequate substitution for that! But, it is sad that we try so hard to substitute the wonders of the truth of what Christ did for us with stupid insignificant lies. It would be like giving up living on the Queen Mary to live on a rowboat. We think our pride, not Christ, is the answer. Christ is calling us from an over-exaggerated opinion of ourselves, calling us from our vanity and from our delusions of conceit. Christ calls us out of conceit, which is faith in ourselves, and into Himself.

The practical application of pride is if, when we go to church, we see someone strut around the place like a rooster in a hen house, full of themselves and swimming in their delusions. When a non-Christian visits the church, or even when a Christian has a confrontation with Mr. & Mrs. "Puff Up," the result is hurt and disillusionment with the church. This Mr. & Mrs. "Puff Up" are full of themselves and not full of Christ, so the comments of arrogance and the attitude of condescension flows from their words and actions. I cannot count how many times I've seen this played out in churches and it hurts me so much. Imagine how it must hurt our Lord!

Atonement means to "cover" and to reconcile two opposing parties with an offering or gift that is sacrificial in nature. For us to God, which was done through Christ, who made amends to "cover us" and please God's wrath on our behalf. Everyone has sinned and everyone needs atonement (Lev. 17:11; Job 15:14-16; Psalm 5:4-6; Isa. 53:4-6; 64:6; Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13; Matt. 27:37; Luke 22:37; John 2:2; 4:10; Rom.10: 2-3; Gal. 3:13; 4:4; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14-22; 2:14; Heb. 2:17; 9:11-15; Rev. 1:5) Thus, our redemption is through Christ's blood and suffering which was our sacrifice to bind us in good relation back to our Creator and Lord.

God's Covering Protects: God is not in the business of gossip, hypocrisy, or legalism. Neither are the angels and hosts of heaven. They look down at us from heaven and know all of our deepest innermost secrets. The angels see them in plain view, but do they act on this knowledge? Are they talking among themselves on how bad and wicked we can be now? NO! God creates a blanket that covers us, nurtures, and protects us from ourselves. This covering also protects God from our wicked nature. God is Holy and cannot be corrupted by our sin, so His grace covers us. In theology, this is called propitiation. God's wrath is pleased by the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf. Our response for this covering must be the response of modeling God's character. We model Him when we look and respond to each other, Christian or non-Christian, with love, care and respect. The question is, do we go around and uncover each other's blankets, reviewing the wickedness into...well, we do! But, God's desire is for us to model His character. When we are modeling His character, we do not go around slandering one another with hypocrisy or legislating rules to make ourselves feel good.

Let us not fall into the trap of putting on a performance, of acting out the Christian life. Let us not play a Christian, but let us be a Christian. Let our actions be in response to the transformation of Christ's grace by living honest lives. We must allow Christ's amazing grace to root out all the evil within us, especially the hypocrisy that causes so much destruction.

The Law: The Reformation and the Protestant church were founded on grace, and a lot of Christians think the law has been voided. However this is not the teaching of Scripture (Psalm 19; 119: 9-16; Rom. 7:7-25; 8:3-4; I Cor. 7:19; Gal. 3:24). The law has three purposes according to Calvin. 1. To be a mirror, to show us our depravity and need for a Savior. While at the same to show us His holiness. 2. The law is the restraint to protect good people from evil by the "dread of punishment", "to be the schoolmaster", and show God's justice to people. 3. To show us what pleases God, and what is offensive. So we know how to worship and respond to Him. We as Christians are to love, obey, and serve Him, and the law reveals the way (John 14:15). Our freedom is redemption, which means we do not have to fear the curse or God's wrath and punishment from our mistakes. So that through our justification we can obey Him, and His moral law (Duet. 5:1-22; 10:1214; 11:1).

Reconciliation: We are at peace with God because of “Reconciliation”, we are not enemies of God, thus we need not fear His wrath and punishment. Since we are at peace, we are no longer at war with God if we are believers; the world is still at war (2 Cor.5:18-21; Eph.2:16; Col. 1:20-22).

Baptism what is it and what does it mean?

Baptism has caused quite a stir amongst believers since the founding of the church. The main reason why we have so arguments surrounding this as there are as many different modes and practices of baptism is because the Bible does not give us a clear pronouncement on the mode or way of doing it. The Bible and God’s truth is more concerned with the idea and motives behind it and not the exercise of it. So we cloud the meaning with our limited understanding placing the emphases on the mode and not the reason. The importance is why we are being baptized and what it represents not how or even who for the most part we baptize.

Baptism means a ceremonial cleansing and purification: a sign that tells God that we have repented and seek His forgiveness and desire to accept a new life. The word literally means to be immersed and when you put in the context of the passages it means to be immersed in the identification and obedience of Christ, not just the water, which is a symbol (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13; Eph. 1:13-14; I5: 25-27; Col. 2:11-12; Titus 3:5).

- It is a symbol of our union and covenant with our Lord (1 John 5:11-12).
- It is a sign of our commitment to be His disciple (Matt. 28:19).
- It is a work of our Lord that we participate by contributing our faith and obedience (Rom 6: 3-11; Col 2:9-13)!
- If baptism was essential for salvation, why do you suppose that Jesus did not baptize anyone?

Christian adult/ believer’s baptism is the public profession that a changed occurred in you by the way of repentance! We cannot have salvation without repentance. Grace is free, but grace cannot come in a heart where it is not welcomed, and being unrepentant means we will not welcome His grace! Baptism is not a magic "get into Heaven card" or to receive His blessings and riches, nor is it even mandatory; hence why some Christian groups do not practice it (Salvation Army).

Baptism does not have a specific mode, such as to say baptism in the name of Jesus, or in the Trinity, or to immerse, dunk, sprinkle, hose off in the parking lot, or my favorite hold them down until they really repent (kidding). Baptism means to be cleansed, and Christians have no basis to fight over which mode (yet we do any way), since no specific mode is required or even taught in Scripture. We are just commanded to do it! The “modes” come from various passages in Acts and in church history, when they were not near water they sprinkled, when they were near water they immersed (simple), and that transitioned into tradition for various groups.

A lot of people think baptism is necessary for salvation and quote John 3:4-7; however they miss the point of the passage about Nicodemus and baptism in general. Thinking it is essential for our salvation. It is essential in that we are commanded to do it, but it is not essential for salvation, because we are saved by what Christ has done period. Justification by faith alone through His grace alone, and not by any work of ourselves (Eph. 2:8-9). The water in the Nicodemus passage is not referring to baptism, but to natural birth, notice the word flesh in verse 6 that makes this clear. When a person is born the mother's water breaks and it is time to give birth, "being born of water".

Salvation is from Christ through our faith, by His grace. Baptism is the sign and acknowledgement we do to show it. It is our identification and public proclamation, but Scripture does not teach we need baptism to be saved. It is a ceremony. The Scriptures that people use to make this point are taken out of their context and clear meaning (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6: 3-8; 2 Thes. 1:19; 1 Peter 3:21). Marriage is also a ceremony that shows the marriage commitment to the public, but the ceremony does not marry you, it is the license from the court that does! Christ is our license, the baptism is the ceremony. We of course are commanded to obey and be baptized, but again baptism does in no way contribute to our salvation.

If you have not been baptized we encourage you to do so. You should find a good church to be apart of (if not so already), where the Word is taught and you can be involved. Then seek the pastor to be baptized. If you think your baptism contributed to your salvation, then please carefully examine the Scriptures and get your thinking aligned with His truth. If you have already been baptized as an infant it is not necessary to be re-baptized, as long as you proclaim the faith.

Baptism is not necessary for your salvation, but we are called to do it as a sign of our regeneration, our acceptance of His grace.

Infant Baptism

The Bible neither explicitly commands the practice of baptizing infant children of believing parents or prohibits it. Most mainline churches practice infant baptism, only the Baptists and recently in the 20th century the Fundamental, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches have refused to do so. The Catholic Church teaches that infant baptism washes away original sin and is regenerative, however nowhere does the Bible teach this! In Protestant and Reformed churches, infant baptism is not regenerative but covenantal and validated through the believing parent(s), and sealed only if they accept Christ as an adult. The baptism looks forward to the consummation of the person as an adult or of age making a public profession of their faith. This seals and completes the baptism as a believer. When the adult does not make a profession of their faith the baptism becomes null and void, as it has not been consummated. God lives outside of space and time, so to Him the timing is not important, the obedience is.

There are no clear accounts of infant baptism in the Bible. However, it cannot be completely disqualified as a possibility given that entire households were baptized including children and infants. (Rom. 7:12-14 see carefully verse 14!) Although most baptisms in the NT and the early church were Adults only (Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8)! The early church practiced infant baptism without controversy until the second century.

There are good Biblical arguments against this practice by godly people, who see baptism as a seal of accepting Christ. Thus an infant is unable to accept, as they are not cognitively aware of what is happening. So a baptism should not be given until after faith is presented. Again they are right! But they often do not take into account the public profession of faith, which is the purpose of the baptism, to publicly proclaim Christ as Lord. Which infant baptism looks too. And it acts as a covenant to bring the child up in the faith to be taught and nurtured.

Most Evangelical churches practice infant dedication as a substitute. Under careful study (this is my opinion and not shared by most Reformed or Evangelical theologians) I believe it is semantics that separate the Reformed perspective from the Evangelical one (as I have served in churches that practice either or both), as both teach it is the proclamation of faith as an adult that accepts Christ's work. Both see it as a process of faith and duty of the parents to rear their child in a godly way teaching them the facts about the faith. Both see it as a form of circumcision looking to the OT command, and both do not believe baptism saves us. Only the Catholic Church would be in disagreement and some Fundamental groups.

Do I personally baptize infants? Yes and no. I never have, but if a parent would like me too, I would, just after 20 years, no one has asked me too, only dedications. (Gen. 17:1-14; Acts 2:38-39; 16:25-34) I personally prefer to baptize people in a large natural body of water, but again the method is not important!

Jesus and John's Baptism (Isa. 40:3; Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:1-5; II Cor. 5:21)

The baptism that John gave may seem similar to a Christian baptism, but remember that they were preformed before the sacrament was called for by Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). Johns' baptism was identified by the OT covenant as a requirement to be prepared as John preached that the kingdom of God was at hand as the herald for the Messiah. In the OT, gentiles were required to repent and under go a purification rite before becoming Jews. So John's baptism was a means of purification and preparation. John was getting people ready for the Christ. The Jewish leaders objected to John's baptism because he was treating fellow Jews, as they were gentiles, which the leaders believed Jews did not need purification, which of course they did.

Jesus baptism was not for the cleansing of sin or purification. John objected to baptize Jesus because he knew Jesus was sinless. But John did not realize that even though Jesus did not need it, for Him to be the Messiah He had to submit to every aspect of the Law in our place. Thus, He submitted Himself to the law on our behalf and identified Himself as a fully sinful human (even though He was not sinful) and fully God. He was anointed (ordained - called and set apart) by the Spirit for the ministry of

redeeming us. His name means the anointed one so it climaxed with His baptism (Isa. 61:1).

“Sin”: is to miss the mark that our Lord has for us. Sin is a violation against God and His people. It was a Greek archery term. The mark or target is God's righteousness, that because of sin we can never achieve/hit the target, there is no "Robin Hood" that can ever hit God's target. Thus all humans are sinners, we all have failed His law, either by direct transgression "commission", deliberately disobeying such as adultery. And failure to conform to His standard "omission", even if we are not aware of that aspect of law. As with the CHP, ignorance is no excuse. Every time we sin we incur greater guilt and punishment. (Gen. 3:1-24; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 2:1-11; 3:10-26; 5:12-19; Titus 1:15; James 1:12-15; I John 1:8-10) Original Sin is explained in the fall, it was not the first sin, but the term refers to the result of sin, that everything has become corrupted.

“The Fall”: Up until the Fall, humanity drew their support and substance directly from God, in perfect relation, and when they fell it was all gone. Paul reaffirms that all of human kind is separated from God due to the act of sin, by the first created humans; Adam & Eve. Thus we are all under the curse, or "guilt" of sin and are incapable of rejoining God in our once perfect state on our own (vs. 1:18-19; 3:9; 19; 5:12-17; 21; Gen 3; Acts 17:26; I Cor. 15:22). God's judgment and wrath are now with us. So, this is not fair, right? Adam and Eve represented all of humanity, the decisions they made, you and I would have made too! Thus we are all to blame! We as humans have a perversity to go our own way, which is the wrong way paved with undeserving pride and arrogance!

So, was it fair for one Man/God who was guiltless to pay our penalty that He did not deserve? Not fair indeed (vs. 5:15-19; 8:29-30; 9:22-26)! God gave Adam and Eve true happiness and perfection, with only one rule, "do not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge.." (Gen 2:17). Adam and Eve had to decide who makes the rules and determine what is good or bad, so they sought themselves over God, to be their own god. They also decided to be swayed and misled, when they already had the correct knowledge; first by Satan, then by each other (Gen 3; II Cor. 11:3; 14; Rev. 12:9). Thus, the selfish, self-centered mindset entered humanity and sin was birthed. Sin then corrupted everything, people, animals, the Earth, and all of creation (Gen. 6:5; Rom. 3:9-20). As a result we inherited the guilt and shame of being apart from our Creator, and either we try to seek Him in vain attempts, or push our self-interests to the exclusion of God and His glory. God was not without mercy, for His first act was to cover them with garments! And then promise a Savior!

“General Revelation” means we have no excuse. That God's influence, glory and presence is all around us, "mediated revelation". This is not pantheism, which teaches that everything is God, that creation itself is God. G.R. means that God is all present, "omnipresent", and we have no escape from Him, and His presence is revealed to us in His creation. G.R. also means that we as humans are religious by nature and seek a

higher purpose and order. And God uses that nature to make himself known, "immediate revelation", that God plants an innate sense of who He is, even without the Word or missions. (Psalm 19; Isa. 44:9-20; Acts 14:8-19; 17: 16:34; Rom. 1:18-23; 2:14-15; Col. 3:5) Special Revelation is the Bible. That God directly inspired and is the ultimate source and superintendent of the original manuscripts without any error. He used humans as the author and as a tool, a word processor. S.R. is His will for our faith and practice of life and duty, law and grace, His plan and our purpose. (Psalm 119; John 17:17; I Thess. 2:13; II Tim. 3:15-17; II Pet. 1:20-21)

T.U. L I. P (This is further explained in the next section on Calvin)

Total depravity the T in T.U. L I. P. This is a doctrine of grace. It means all people have been 'effected' by sin. It does not mean we are as bad as we could be, because the Holy Spirit is the great restrainer. Thus nothing good can come from us to please God. This is also called 'original sin'. (1 Cor. 15:42-49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:10) Growing in faith, education and commitment will prevent sin's practice, but it is still there. When we reject this essential doctrine what we are doing is in fact saying we have no need for a Savior. This is what the Universalist and Unitarian Churches believe. Calvin speaks a lot on the 'civil good', that is our good deeds; however, this cannot please God, it is by what Christ has done through faith that pleases Him. We cannot seek God either, thus "seekers" is not a Biblical term, God seeks us.

Unconditional Election, For more information on what 'TUPLIP' is please visit our new Doctrine page. The "U" in TULIP: Puts the emphasis on our depravity. People do not want to think of themselves as worthless, and unredeemable by their own merit, this is un-American, yet it is very Biblical. We are unable and unwilling to seek God on our own, thus we need divine intervention. This is the role of the Holy Spirit. This is God's choosing for God's purpose, in His incredible love, He seeks us!!! Election is no excuse to sit and do nothing in service and witness to others! All Christian groups who use the Bible teach election, the division is in its meaning and purpose, which God has not fully revealed to us, we can only speculate. We only know what He has revealed, that He does elect, our call is to trust and obey (1 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil.1:6; 1 Thess. 1:3-6; 5:23-24; II Tim. 1-12; 4:18; II Pet. 1:10) We know He elects for His purpose and plan which is perfect, beyond our feeble understanding of justice. We do not earn it or deserve it! Our purpose is not to argue over this, but to accept His amazing grace.

Election means to select or to chose, that God chose us by His purpose, period, by nothing else, either by our means or His foreknowledge (Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9-10;) We cannot fathom this true implication, meaning or reasoning, we have to trust that God is God and we are not, thus we have no idea of His plan or purpose.

This doctrine is God's love and grace shed out for us. Because without this essential doctrine we would have a works based salvation that we could never achieve. People who deny this doctrine generally fall into two categories. 1. They do not understand it, as I once did. Or 2. They are full of pride thinking they must have had

something to do with God saving them! Friends we have NOTHING to do with God saving us. He does not just look down the corridor of time to see if we would accept Him. If He did (of course God is omniscience and does indeed see our choosing, but the emphases in The Epistles is His purpose not our future choosing) it would mean we somehow earned it, and thus grace was not sufficient or not needed for our salvation. God's grace is greatly needed and sufficient as Scripture so clearly articulates. Our salvation is because of His choosing for His glory, because of His love and His grace!

Limited Atonement, the "L" in T.U.L.I.P. Christ's atonement in no way was or is restrictive, or has a limited value, or only powerful enough for just a few people. Hence, there is a lot of misleading theology by a misunderstanding of this term. Christ's sacrifice was, and continues to be, limitless in its scope and value and power. It is fully enough to save all who ever lived. But the focus is not the power and ability, but the purpose. Traditional reformed thinking is that Christ's sacrifice was for only those who the father has selected (Election). And that He bore our place in suffering and wrath and in taking God's judgment upon Himself for us. Thus this term "Limited Atonement" should be "Specific Redemption". Note that all Christian faith's teach this doctrine! Even Arminianism. The difference is Arminius taught that, because of God's "fore-knowledge", Calvin said because of God's "Purpose". Romans says the latter.

Irresistible Grace: the "I" in T.U.L.I.P. Greek, "charis" meaning undeserving act of kindness. This is one of the most enduring actions of love that could ever be conceived (Gen. 6:8; Psalm 45:2; 84:11; Zech. 12:10; Luke 2:40; John 1:17; Acts 4:33; Rom. 1:7; 5:17; 11:6; 16:20; II Cor. 8:9; 13:14; Gal. 5:4; Eph. 1:7; 3:2; 4:7; 6:24; Heb. 12:28; James 4:6; ! This means that our salvation is a gift, that can not be earned or purchased (Hos. 14:4; John 1:16; 10:4; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 2:8-9; I Pet. 1:2; 5:12 II Pet. 3:18). "Sola Gratia", by Grace Alone, the sounding proclamation of the reformation. What this means in reformed theology is that Jesus knows His sheep, that He reveals Himself in such a way that we will respond. He does not force us, nor coerce us to follow Him. He creates the work to allow us to be willing to be lead and purchased by His blood. The "irresistible" part means we will put up a fight against Him naturally, being resistant! If we are left out on our own, we would never accept His precious gift. Thus, it is by Christ's work first, then we respond, that He creates the "irresistible" aspect. We do not respond first, because we are unable to do so. God is the one who regenerates us, creating a new will to allow the work of the Spirit. His Grace is sufficient, "effectual", meaning it will overcome our sin, to accomplish God's purpose.

Perseverance of the Saints The "P" in TULIP: That we are preserved in faith by the strength of Christ, our salvation is secure and cannot be lost. God is the one who perseveres, we are its recipients. Faith is our entire being in a right relationship with Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 11:6). We can continue in the faith for the long run because of His work and not our sanctification or growth. This is the proof of our election (Gal. 5). Our growth is a result, and effect and not the cause. Those who truly are regenerative are secure, and if they fall into sin there is forgiveness and consequence. Those who are not regenerative have no hope. (John 6:37-40; 10:28-29; 17:2-24; Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8; 9:1; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:32 Tim. 1:12; 4:18)

However, our desire and response to regeneration is to be humble, knowledgeable and repentive, and always seeking God.

The term "**Reprobation**" refers to His decision "to elect and to others He choose not to elect". Also God allows us to stay in our sin as a form of judgment (vs. 1:24-26; 9:14-24; 11:25) God in His reasoning, which is perfect and holy, does not select some, and/or allow them to stay in sin. This does not mean He chose them to go to hell. This is "Hyper Calvinism" or "Double Predestination" and this is not Biblical doctrine (Psalm 81:12; 1 Pet 2:8)!

Calvin saw a danger in the Reformed faith, which a tendency could crop up to just place God as sovereign and us as the elect to do nothing with our faith and call. Thus Calvin spent most of his writing to promote our responsibility in life and duty, as well as prayer. Calvin knew that our human faulty thinking would lead to theologians to misuse the reformed principles to cover their laziness or fear to work and exercise their will for God's glory. Such as to do no evangelism, thinking that is purely the role of the Holy Spirit, yes it is, but we are still commanded to do it!

Hyper-Calvinism, is a false doctrine that emphasizes divine sovereignty "to the exclusion" of human responsibility (Calvin taught more on our responsibility than any other subject!). To call it "hyper-Calvinism" is something of a misnomer. It is actually a rejection of historic Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism entails a denial of what is taught in both Scripture and the landmark Calvinistic creeds. This is minimizing the moral and spiritual responsibility of sinners. It emphasizes irresistible grace to such an extent that there appears to be no real need to evangelize; that Christ may be offered only to the elect. It has 5 aspects associated with it: 1. Denies that the call of the gospel "applies" to all who hear, OR 2. Denies that faith is the duty of every sinner, OR 3. Denies that the gospel makes any "offer" of Christ, salvation, or mercy to the non-elect, "denies that the offer of divine mercy is free and universal", OR 4. Denies that there is such a thing as "common grace," OR 5. Denies that God has any sort of love for the non-elect.

Sanctification is the growth we have and do, in Christ, in our trust and obedience. That He provides this is not saving action, it is a response action where we become more like Christ's character. True Sanctification (His Part) is surrendering ourselves entirely to the Holy Spirit, to have His way working in us. Consecration (our part) is being (Gal. 6:14) dedicated to God's service! A bold determination to be interested in only what God is interested in! Usually total surrender requires a crisis to unbalance our lives because we tend to be hardheaded and not yield to God's leading. God will bring us to the point that He requires of us and if we ignore His subtle nudges, be aware; He will use a more severe means to get our attention. So, what do we do? Well, it is simple, or so it seems, to rely on Christ absolutely first and foremost in your life. When Christ takes hold of your life, the course changes to match His will, or so it should. Our life is no longer our own for He is LORD. What this means is our will and desires must be put off and surrendered to Christ! And the biggest and best most fantastic journey will unfold in

your life. I personally cannot imagine living any other way. (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:1-10; Luke 24:26; John 15; 17:2; Phil. 3:10; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 2:10).

Are you willing to reduce yourself down to merely "ME"? Are you determined enough to strip yourself of all that you are in the world, in your career, ministry, church, including what your friends think of you, and what you think of yourself? Are you willing and determined to hand over your true self, your simple naked self to God? Once you are, then He can begin to work greater in you and in others through you. Christ will immediately sanctify you completely, and your life will be free from being distracted from His character and precepts. To be determined and persistent toward glorifying God, Christ as our Lord (I Thess. 5:23-24)! You can start by surrendering to Him in prayer (Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 1:6; 3:10), "Lord, show me what sanctification means for help me live as my life is yours." He will show you! Sanctification means being made one with Jesus. Sanctification is not something Jesus puts in you it is Himself in us (II Cor. 1:39).

Kingdom of God: Throughout recorded human history, humanity has gathered with one another for trade, and protection, as well as organization for gathering food, hunting, and relationships within a structure which translates into control and government. Kingdom means government; it is our need to be organized for purpose and direction. Some people strive to obey, while others lead, and some seek to destroy it. That is our criminal element. Nevertheless, we need leadership and direction to succeed in building a society. Biblically, we are called to have a civil government and obey it within the parameters that there is actually only one true government and leader-God. It refers to the exercise of our God's "Lordship," that He is our King. Hence, comes the name "Kingdom of God." He is sovereign; He is the absolute monarch of the universe. His rule is absolute. When we refuse to be governed and controlled, we will revert in our sinful nature to anarchy and chaos, causing others harm (Rom. 1:21). Thus, it is our responsibility to obey God and man (Rom 13:1-7).

This theme is found throughout Scripture, and links the two Testaments. It is what is now with God's reign of His people and what will come in the future (Psalm 10:16--18; Dan. 2:44; 4:34; Isa. 9:6-7; Matt 3:1-12; 4:23; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 11:20; 16:16; 17:21; 22:16-30; John 18:36; Acts 20:25; 28:23-31; Col. 1:13; 28-29; Gal. 3:16; 26-29; Eph. 2:11-18; 3:6-15; Heb. 1:8-14; Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9; 17:14; 19:16).

John the Baptist announced the Kingdom to us with a sense of urgency and at the inauguration of Jesus' ministry on earth. It is now in its beginning and will be fulfilled, as Jesus said, in the future. Thus, it is already running, and there is more to come with Christ's second coming. Exactly what, we do not know, we only have a glimpse that it will be consummated.

Jesus preached the 'Kingdom of Heaven', which is here and is to come (Matt. 3:2; 4:23; 5:3,10,19-20; 6:10; 33; 7:21; 10:7; 13:24-47). The term the Kingdom of Heaven in Mathew is the same thing as the 'Kingdom of God' in the other 3 Gospels. They both mean God's rule and sovereignty. They point to our eternal future and the

church today. Matthew used the expression "Kingdom of Heaven" almost exclusively, whereas the other gospels use the term "kingdom of God" The distinction is who the audience was, to the Jew who Matthew wrote too were reluctant to say the name of God because of their high reverence to His name. To the gentiles and Greeks it did not matter. The kingdom of heaven will culminate with our Lord's second coming with a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:13-14; Rev. 21-22).

Our task in the church is to proclaim Christ as Lord, His character, righteousness, peace, and joy, all by the Holy Spirit. The "Coming of the Kingdom" in the O.T. meant that a new stage in God's redemptive plan was coming, CHRIST. The meaning for us is our personal identification/relationship to our Lord and Savior! This is our need, to bow to His Lordship for our betterment and growth!

The Son of Man: This is Jesus' most common title for Himself. It is used eighty-one times in the Gospels, and it is never used by anyone else but Jesus. It is used three times outside of the Gospels (Acts 7:56; Rev. 1:13; 14:14). It means He is Lord and King! This does not mean He is just a man, or His identification of being among humanity, even though He is identified with us. Rather, it is one of His Messianic titles. It is a reference from the book of Daniel (Dan. 7:13-14) as a picture of a heavenly body who in the end times is entrusted by God with full authority, glory, and sovereign power, who is to be worshiped. He will judge the world (Matt. 24:30-26:64). It is also a picture, showing us that Jesus must suffer on our behalf (Isa. 52:13-53:12; Matt. 26:24-64; Mark 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33-34; 14:21, 41), and one of His sovereign Lordship and glory (Rev. 1:13; 14:14). Jesus may have preferred this term to Messiah, because most people had a skewed view of who and what a Messiah would be. They wanted a military or political leader, not what God had promised and sent--a Savior from our sin.

Repent and be saved!! We often hear this phrase, but have you considered its origins? Is this in the Bible? Surprise...NO! It is not! We may say it with genuine good intentions, for both ends of this phrase are very biblical and essential. We need to repent and we need to be saved. However, this phrase is backwards! It should read, "be saved and then repent!"

Repentance is the result of the acknowledgment of what Christ has done for us, and not the cause of Christ giving you grace. If the latter were true, we would not need a Savior, as our ability alone would be sufficient. However, we do not have anything to do with our salvation other than to accept it, and live it by faith. We do not initiate or cause it, or just receive it in some way alone. Something else happened to cause it, that being what Christ did on our behalf on the cross. His righteousness transferred onto us. We then receive His salvation, and the proof of that receiving is our repentance. Our receipt of His purchase of our soul is in our repentance. Thus, repentance does not save us. It is the proof that we have been saved, and only Christ saves us.

Repentance in Scripture (Psalm 51; Jer. 23:22; 25:4-5; Zech. 1:3-6; Mark 6:12; Matt. 4:17; Luke 13:1-8; 3:8; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 26:20; Rev. 2: 5-22) means to under go a complete and great change, a 180 degree turn, that changes our heart and mind, such as turning from sin to Christ. Repentance does not save us. Repentance is only the realization of our salvation.

Repentance is not just sorrow or regret of what we have done, or even to change our minds, but it is the change of all we are, our goals, aspirations, values, and behaviors. We turn a complete 180 degrees from the way we were (2 Cor. 7:9-10). Repentance is never remorse without the resolve to change (Psalm 51; Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20)! Repentance is a life that has been changed! Grace is the gift He gives by His choosing (Election), because God is pure and His decisions are just, and way beyond our understanding.

Most Christians misunderstand this and say, because I have repented and prayed a special prayer, I am saved. Maybe they are, maybe not. It is God who judges. However, this quick prayer is "cheap grace," and is not found in Scripture. (An evangelist named Finney in the late 19th century, who had good intentions but very bad theology started this.) Repentance and conversion are two different things (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 20:21). Repentance is our response to who Christ is and what He did on the cross. Conversion is our salvation given to us by grace (Eph. 2:8-9)--not by our efforts, but by the Holy Spirit. They go together as the Spirit gives us our salvation and we respond to it. We then turn from sin and to God, and then follows, a changed life! Yes, repentance is necessary for salvation, and will entail full confession, restitution, and the will to turn and not burn! Again, repentance does not cause our salvation! Know that people do respond to evangelism with prayer, with repentance that is genuine. Remember, it is not of our doing, our repentance, or even prayer. It is of Him alone.

We are still to witness, prayer, evangelize, do missions, and put forth every effort we can to expedite His Word. We as a Church are called to preach, as Christ did, on Repentance to all nations (Matt. 3:8; 28: 18-20; Luke 24:46-47; Ac 26:20; 17:30). It is as needed today, if not more so, than in Jesus' time! In addition, as a Christian saved by His grace, we have to remember we still need to repent, even though He paid it all, because we love Him and want to obey His decree. Repentance will be to our Lord's glory, as we turn away from our wicked ways to His best (Matt. 1:16; 3:19-23)!

Are the pagans lost? Paul (vs. 2:12) intelligibly states that those without the law will yet "perish" without the law. So how can a person be justly condemned if he has never heard the gospel? Paul answers, every man has a conscience, and no one has ever lived up to what he knows to be right (General Revaluation). Every person knows they shall do certain "moral" things, and not do certain "wrong" things. This is tested to be true every time people pass judgment on the actions of others (Rom. 2:1). Yet, no one can honestly claim that they have lived up to what they believe they should! Because of this, God can judge all of humanity, and find them lacking, because none has ever lived up to the light of their own conscience. So is God being fair?

Scripture teaches that God is absolutely "just" (Gen. 18:25; Luke 12:47-48; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 2:6), and will reward everyone according to their works, and there will be degrees of punishment. So a question will arise in mission and evangelism committees in most churches, "would it be safer not to preach the gospel to the lost in fear if they who reject the gospel, they would be lost forever." (This is "Hyper Calvinism") If a person could be saved without hearing the gospel, simply because he has not heard, then it would logically be safer not to preach the gospel, so that no one would hear, and all would be saved! The church for centuries did little to no evangelism for this reason! But what did our Lord teach? Even today with the modern mission movements behind us leading the way a lot of churches still do not participate in evangelism and missions. They reason there is no rationale for any evangelism or missionary endeavors. The point is that Christ commands every Christian to preach the gospel to every creature (Matt. 28), because only through faith in Christ can one have salvation. The Bible does not teach that most people will be saved; rather, Jesus Himself said most will be lost, and only a few saved (Matt.7:14)

The Human Conscience: The conscience is our moral center that monitors our actions from preset values instilled by God (Luke 11:39-44; Rom. 2:12-16; 14:23; Titus 1:15). It is the microprocessor that monitors and controls our thoughts into actions. That gives us the awareness of right and wrong. It keeps us in moral check and also monitors those around us (where our judgments and judgmentalism comes into play). It tells us what we deserve and what others need to do. Who needs to be punished, and who needs to be praised. And how we are to apply rules and procedures to events and life. This sets our values and standards for life. Jiminy Cricket almost had it right, "let your conscience be your guide". However, since we are sinful, this is not always a good idea. Our conscience gets corrupted when we combine our limited knowledge and experience to right over God's source code of values. So what is good becomes bad and what is bad becomes good (I Tim. 4:2).

We rationalize our values so they are relative to societies precepts and not God's. Then an out of control conscience can produce shame and guilt, which is designed for conviction of sin. But take sin out of the equation and you have neurosis. Only the power of our Lord and what He did for us on the cross can free our guilt and empower our conscience in the right way. Scripture must be our guide and all of our experience, thinking, feelings, and emotions must yield to it. Thus our conscience only works well when we are governed by our Lord. Why the first step in AA is to let God help you, because we cannot!

Faith: We are committed to Christ by faith. Thus, we as Christians must live by faith (1 Cor. 1:22-30)! Christianity is not based on fairy tales or superstition. Faith is based on knowledge given by God. Our faith is based on historical evidence, logical reasoning, and valid testimonies. We have a wide body of knowledge, 66 books written over a 2000-year period of time by dozens of authors all inspired by the Holy Spirit. There are

millions of personal testimonies and thousands of volumes of works by gifted authors and teachers. Faith is not just simple trust, and faith is not blind trust because we know the One who is leading! Faith is still trusting what is not seen and believing our God (1 Cor. 1:16-32; 5:1-11; 10:14-17; Gal. 3:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; James 2:14-26)! Faith provides the "substance" of our relationship with our Lord, looks to our future and is our hope. Faith is a two way street. We receive it from God and reciprocate it back as trust. It is like a lake, which has a source and an outlet. If we only have an outlet, we will dry up. If we just have a source, we become like the Dead Sea, lifeless and void.

Justification by Faith Alone: (Acts 13:38-39; Rom.1:17; 3:31- 5:21; II Cor. 5:13-21; Gal. 2:15- 5:1; Phil. 3:4-14; I John 1:9) This was the rallying cry of the Reformation. The main point that caused Luther and Calvin to challenge the Catholic Church and its teachings. This is also the cornerstone of protestant theology that Christ through His work gave us a 'pardon'. This pardon is from the penalty of death through sin, and there is nothing we could ever do to earn this pardon. It is purely by His acceptance of us that we are saved (Eph. 2:8-9). There is nothing that we can add to it, such as good works or clean living. Justification means that God's righteousness is covering us from His wrath and punishment as a blanket! It is like getting a speeding ticket; going to court and having the judge declare you innocent, even though you were speeding. To God you are clean, covered by what Christ has done for you. This creates our Reconciliation to God, that we were in perfect relationship to Him before the fall, and now we are again in harmony.

God has a righteous basis for our justification through the sacrifice of His Son, for our sins. Grace was not cheap for God. Christ paid a great debt by pleasing God's wrath, both in metaphysical pain and human pain of the crucifixion (Lev. 16; Psalm 103:12). Our independence is a slap in His face, and He can do nothing in us until it is removed (John 3:5)! Let us pray to be cleansed by the atoning death of our Savior, who bore our punishment and lived out the law on our behalf.

Some Jews take issue with this saying it is umbilical that God cannot over rule His own law sighting Duet. 25:1 and Prov. 17:15; however they do not realize that Jesus Himself is the righteous One and He lived a perfect life in our place, as a designated hitter.

The Catholic Church taught that justification was a process through the sacraments and church, and that faith contributed to it as well as works. The reformers said this act was done at once at our acceptance of His gift of grace. The Catholic Church at the time of the reformation was even 'selling indulgences' granting people a spot in Heaven for money regardless of faith or even the church. They did this to pay for the cathedrals they were building, and you thought bingo was bad! Although Catholic apologists say this was never an 'official act' of the church. Nevertheless history clearly states this was a wide problem.

Faith is the instrument and not the cause, Christ is the cause. It is based on the faithfulness of our Lord, and not of our goodness. Just as animal sacrifice in the O.T.

was a means of forgiveness and surrendered attitude because of a loss of something precious, but not the cause (Gal 2:15-16; 3:24; Heb. 9:11-15; 10:1-4). The reformers called this 'meritorious ground for our justification, explaining it as the soil that the seed of justification is planted into. And that Christ was that soil too. As we give our lives to Christ in faith, He in turn gives us His righteousness.

"Fate & Philosophy vs. Doctrine" Fate is looking at what must be, what has been decreed by whoever is in charge. But doctrine is what God has revealed for us to understand, not because it must be, but because this is what is best for us on our behalf! And since it is the best, then it should and must be. Philosophy tells us that faith is blind; however, doctrine has the eyes of love. Fate is without care and love and understanding. Doctrine is the care and the love and the kindness that abounds. Because He first loved us!

Faith and predestination are also the voluntary choices by the sanctified Christian, because God is working and foreordained it. This is not contradiction, as it transcends normal thinking!

Suffering? As we look at church history, especially in the lives of many Christian saints throughout time, one key theme runs through it all. From the first century Christians to modern China, that theme is suffering. Oswald Chambers wrote, "You cannot help suffering; it is a true and needful training for the soul that dares to be true to God." Suffering is an essential aspect of our Christian growth, whether it is mental, physical, financial, or spiritual. It is the main connection that enables the batteries to power us to be the best Christian possible. It is the link between the Holy Spirit and God's perfect plan working in us. Without this vital connection, the power source of our Lord will not be able to prime us for His service. We may have the ability and the power of the Spirit, but the vital link between them is missing. A spark of truth and service may pass between them so we think we are working and doing fine. But there can be so much more! So when that connection is firmly in place, the power will flow the most, so our walk in Him becomes our best. That is why we are encouraged in the Word to hold on tight and be tough to the end. In other words perseverance is knowing that our future is in His Hands, in His control and whatever the consequences we may face, we are to look to the rewards to come. Our hope and purpose is to be with Christ in eternity everlasting.

The path into following God's will is not always an easy path; it is a path filled with potholes and highwaymen. Yet the modern church considers suffering negative, because it does not line up with happiness, peace, and joy. Some even teach that suffering is a sign that you are out of God's will and have unredeemed sin. However, this is not Biblical. It is a difficult journey but take heart; our sufferings are very temporary in the scheme of our eternal existence. Check out John 16:33; Romans 8:18 and I Peter 4:19.

Why, why, why we ask! Yet, it is not so much a question of how we answer the problem of suffering, the why it has happened to me. It is not about how we can get an answer, seeking the 'why' from God, the why this has happened to me. The why is not important as Job found out. Rather it is about how we live our lives regardless of our circumstances. God understands that even though we may have buried a loved one, we cannot bury our feelings. We need time to mourn and vent—and even inventing ways of coping with the loss in our lives. (Hence why there are so many conflicting theories in psychology!) God records in His Word that people in biblical days were in no hurry to rush through the process of grief. But, they did eventually get on with their lives! "a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build", (Ecc. 3:3). The 'why' is not the solo quest we are to seek. 'Why' is not the place we are to live our lives and concentrate our devotions too. By dwelling on the 'Why' will keep us away from learning, takes our eyes off Him, it even interferes in His healing grace, because we are so full of 'whys' there is no room for Christ!

Remain faithful and enjoy the ride of life even when you hit a pothole and bump your head. Suffering has 5 main themes to it: 1. Our God is good, thus our pain allows us to identify with our Lord who suffered for our sin's in our place without fault or being deserving of the suffering. So why should we expect better? It draws us closer and more intimate. God will actually enter into the pain with us, so if there is no healing, He is just working harder in us! 2. God will use our suffering for the greater good, that is His purpose. Consider it fertilizer to the garden of life. It will allow us to grow in greater depth spiritually, when we give it to God through prayer, as Paul did. 3. Remember God is working even when we do not feel it! The chief purpose of God's will for us is to grow us closer to Him! Not our bodies, or work, or anything else! This will perfect our character to be more Christ like. 4. Suffering is not being a martyr; rather it is value for our living as we learn to surrender all to Him. Never force suffering on yourself for attention, this does not glorify God, only yourself! 5. When we are filled with joy, even in the midst of suffering, we show the world the mirror and character of and to Christ. The main theme of suffering is not how we answer the way's and why's, but how we live our lives to still give God the glory! How do we allow Him to use us and then take our experiences for the benefit of others, such as people like "Joni Erickson Tada"! Some comforting verses: Psalm 31:9; Psalm 119:50; Isaiah 41:10; Rom 8:18; 28-29; 35-37; James 1:2-3;12; John 14:1; I Pet 4:12-19 ; Rev. 21:4!

"The Holy Spirit longs to reveal to you the deeper things of God. He longs love through you. He longs to work through you. Through the blessed Holy Spirit you may have: strength for every duty, wisdom for every problem, comfort in every sorrow, joy in His overflowing service." T.J. Bach

The bondage of the will Perhaps it was Jonathan Edwards who coined this phrase, but its grasp is clearly taught in Scripture. In a nutshell we have free will to choose, this in reformed theology is called "free agency". (The degree of our freedom is debated by theologians in the reformed camp and outside in Dispensationalism and Arminianism. The reasons are too long and complicated; however virtually all agree that we do have

it, and the Bible clearly teaches it. And Calvin himself spent more time on our responsibility than any other subject except prayer.) This means we make our own decisions and reap our own consequences. We have the ability to see the all the options of a decision or situation and the virtue that can come from them or the destruction they can cause. Because of the fall we no longer have the desire to seek God first, thus the need for the Holy Spirit to intercede on our behalf through what Christ did. We have a conscience which knows who God is as revealed in our hearts even without the Word (Rom. 1; Psalm 15; Isa. 40). And this will is at war with the desires of our freedom, our sinful nature to rebel as Adam first did. The bondage is that our hearts are captured by sin, thus our choices are bent toward sin and rebellion. The only way to gain true freedom is by accepting what Christ has done. It is He that sets the will free. And once free we will chose to be surrendered to Him as His bondservant. Which is the ultimate freedom! Then we will have the will that will be inclined to seek His face and live a life pleasing to our Lord. (John 8:34-36; Rom. 6:16-23; 2:20; Gal. 5:1-13)

BLAME SHIFTING (Gen 3:12-17) As soon as man sinned, he quickly commenced to blame others. One of the effects of sin is the refusal to take responsibility for our actions. This is the favorite manner in which most people handle guilt, that is they blame others. They do this for two reasons: First they do not want to live with guilt. Second: they do not want to suffer the consequences of their actions. Blaming others is an escape mechanism, which helps us avoid the consequences. This fly's in the face of the Gospel. It is unjust and serves only to increase the guilt and the problems we incur with others in our relationships. This becomes a pattern of dysfunctional behavior that is an endless loop of a hopeless cycle. We must learn that God does not allow us to avoid the consequences of our actions by blaming others. In fact we are held responsible for blaming others! (Romans 14:12-13). On the Day of Judgment, there will be no opportunities for blame shifting.

Religion is man's search for God; the Gospel is God's search for man. There are many religions, but only one Gospel! Our ability to be good and holy is only because of the "effect" of redemption (what Christ did for me on the cross, which we did not deserve) not the "cause," (the cause is how we are, receiving grace and forgiveness) never confuse the two or you will have pride and arrogance because you will think you deserved it.

Righteousness! The word Righteousness appears 35 times in this book. It is defined in Romans as conformity to God's Law, both from our heart and deeds, inside and outside. No one can attain it apart from perfect adherence to the law; Christ was the only one in all of human history to do it. No one can attain it without Divine intervention; righteousness to please God must come from God Himself. Because we all are corrupted by sin, and unable to live according to God's perfect standards. Thus it must be a gift from God! Even though some people are better than others, your neighbor versus Stalin, both are guilty in view of God's perspective. (vs. 1: 10; 17). Our only hope is in the Person and Work of our Lord.

Replacement Theology: There is a popular teaching snaking its way into Internet and churches. This new teaching is propagating that the church has replaced Israel as the sole blessing of God. That the church of the Christian has inherited every promise of God that the Jews once had and the Jews now have been set aside as irrelevant waist. This may sound good and logical at the surface, but a closer look will reveal its fallacy. They believe that every promise found in Scripture that has been given to the nation and people of Israel has now been given to the church. They replace the word 'Israel' in the Bible with 'church,' even in the Old Testament. God's blessing and redemption has been taken away from the Jews. To believe in this teaching you would have to throw not only the Jews out of God's redemptive plan, but also a good part of the New Testament. You cannot believe in "replacement theology" and an honest interpretation of the Bible, they greatly contradict and are opposed to each other!

They teach this doctrine because Israel rejected the Messiah and as a result, God turned His grace to the Gentiles, this is partly true; the gentiles have been graded in. But they do not take into account of what God says in Romans and Revelation. That God has promised a full reconciliation for an earthly kingdom for Israel. Scripture tells us that the nation of Israel will realize their mistake, and that Jesus was and is their Messiah. We see this today in small tastes such as "Jews for Jesus". They will call on Christ to forgive and return to their promise and our Lord will allow forgiveness and redemption to come to pass. We do not know who, how many and so forth, as we do not know who really is saved in the church today, except maybe what is shown from Galatians 5 (because evil people with smiles and good works as wolves in sheep's clothing can disguise themselves to infiltrate the church and its leadership for evil gain, and we may not realize it!).

Satan's motivation is to destroy the nation of Israel, which is why the world is against them and all of the problems in the Middle East. But we as Christians are not to buy into that lie, yet many do! Another aspect of this teaching is that the church will rule in the Millennium rein in place of Christ, or in the authority of Christ; "The lion will lie down with the lamb, they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and Christ (Not the church in His place!!!) will rule on earth for 1,000 years. "Our God is a truthful and faithful God. He will complete His plan for His people, Israel and the grafted church. In His timing! We cannot rush this or force it to happen just because we cannot wait, just because we want to see the "Kingdom Now." "We have been "grafted into the vine" (Rom. 11), but that does not mean we can extort from Israel the kingdom which God promised them, nor seize their place in God's plan. It will happen only in God's timing. The idea that the church can perform actions that will "bring back the King," is incompatible with the Word of God!

This teaching is also full of Anti-Semitism. The Catholic Church teaches, as do some Protestants, they have replaced the Jews as God's chosen people. The land of Israel, promised by God to the descendants of Abraham now belongs to the church (Hence the Crusades). We can avoid such confusion over doctrine and its anguish, and the temptation to seek unbiblical solutions if we would just understand that Israel is

Israel, and the church is the church. If we can just read the Bible in its context and quit reading into it what is not there, or reading beside today's newspaper and again reading into it what is not there. Then we will have a church built upon solid doctrine. The people who proclaim replacement theology need to read Zechariah 2:8.

We do not want to be in the position to oppose God and His redemptive plan and replace it with whimsical ideas and pride. (Dut. 4:30-31; Isa. 2:2-4, 11:1-9, 65:17-25, Micah 4:1-5, Ps 72, Jer 31:31-34; Zec 12:10; Hosea 3:5, :15- 6:3; 14:45; Matt 23:37-39; Acts 3:12, 19-21; Rom 11:25-26; Rev 20:1-6; 11:15)

Dispensationalism A dispensation is "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God" (Darby). Another view of Dispensationalism says that God uses different means of administering His Will and Grace to His people in different times and people groups in the area of Conscience, Law, and Grace (Scofield). C.I. Scofield (1843-1921) said there are seven dispensations: innocence, conscience, civil government, promise, law, grace, and the coming kingdom. They claim that the 'Dispensations' are not ages, but stewardships. No matter what label you give it, they are rooted in specific periods. Dispensationalists interpret the Bible using these periods as their primary template and filter. Thus, they tend to skew Biblical principles and make their views by taking those principles out of context.

Dispensationalism is not necessarily heretical, nor does it move a Christian outside excepted Biblical Christianity or the "scope of orthodoxy." In addition, it is not essential for us to know or deny. It will, however, give misleading and wrong interpretations and promote a limited sovereignty view of God, such as He can only do certain things in certain times with only certain people. Of course, any Bible student must realize God is not limited and is totally sovereign! Sometimes Dispensationalism is compared to "Covenant Theology" and is divided by semantics. Other times it is divided by bad hermeneutics (bad interpretations).

Dispensationalism finds its popularity and modern roots in the Scofield Reference Bible of the late 19th century, which has been revised and is still very popular. There is an online version on our Bible Tools channel. This reference Bible has influenced the doctrinal beliefs of many churches, including the Baptist church, Fundamentalists, the Bible churches, and many non-denominational evangelical churches and seminaries including Dallas Seminary. Although Scofield did not come up with it, he built on what was founded, developed, and propagated by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) in his writings and commentary of the Bible. There is an online version of this on our Bible Tools channel also.

Dispensationalism also believes in a big distinction between God's plan for Israel and God's plan for the Church. Thus, the church did not start until Pentecost. And some say that the Jews have no role today. An honest reading of Hebrews and Revelation would clear that up! They also see and interpret any Scripture that would otherwise

refute their view, as referring to another "division" of Scripture. As a result, Scripture is not interpreted in its context or as a whole, but as fragmented divisions that applied only to certain times and places. It is difficult to argue with them since their premise of Biblical interpretation is flawed, and they rule out any passage that disagrees with their position, stating that it does not apply.

Covenant Theology. A more proper Biblical understanding on what Dispensationalism is trying to communicate can be found in Covenant Theology. This is a system of theology that views God's dealings with man in reverence and reference to Covenants (contacts) rather than dispensations (periods of time). The two main covenants are between God and Adam (the start of the law, fully realized under Moses), and the "Covenant of Grace" between the Father and the Son (Heb. 13:20), where the Father gives to the Son the elect, and the Son must redeem us. Both of these covenants were made before the world and humanity began. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. Covenants, according to the earliest Middle Eastern traditions, had five parts to them:

1. Stating and recognizing the parties involved.
2. A chronological introduction on why the contact was established.
3. The circumstances and principles of the contract.
4. The rewards and punishments in keeping or breaking the contract.
5. Distribution of the contract where each party receives a copy of the agreement (much the same as we have today).

The quintessential covenant in Scripture is the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments! The purpose of the covenants that God has made with us through time is to establish who He is, our responsibility toward Him and others around us, and to convey His promises, of which we are the ultimate beneficiaries. We receive eternal promises and blessings through His covenants of grace. (Gen. 2:16-17; 9:1-17; 15:18; 26:3-5; Gal. 3:16-18; Luke 1:68-79; Heb. 13:20) Other covenants can be found in Scripture between God and Noah, God and Abraham, and God and Moses.

All Biblical theologians will recognize that God works differently through the Law than through Grace. That is how Dispensationalism came in. Even Jonathan Edwards makes these distinctions. Many Dispensationalists see him as their father, but Edwards spoke of covenants, not Dispensationalism. The responsibilities given to humanity by God were different during the periods of Adam and Eve, the Law, and the Cross. The Jews were to show their faith by doing what God had commanded (Deut. 6). When they could not keep the Law, God allowed the sacrificial system for atonement. Salvation came to the Jews, not by keeping the law, because none of them could do it. Salvation came because they understood its true purpose of revealing sin, pointing toward the Cross to come, and their turning to God.

Unfortunately, many good Bible teachers, seminaries, and churches adhere to Dispensationalism out of ignorance, tradition, or bad mentoring. Most are just confused over the semantics of covenant verses dispensation, while others go overboard to the

point of saying Spiritual Gifts are not for modern Christians and some even deny the role of Baptism, saying it was for the early church only. Again, as this is not essential salvation-based theological stuff, we can agree to disagree. Just make sure you base your theology on what the Scriptures actually say, and not what you think they should say!

Signs and wonders refers to the miracles produced by the Holy Spirit through the apostles, especially Paul, as a testimony to God's power and glory (Ex. 7:3; Duet. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; Isa. 8:18; Dan. 6:27; book of Acts).

1. The Bible gives no indication that the Signs and Wonders have stopped! They may be rare, but nonetheless they are here and working.
2. When we do see them, we are to be discerning and seek scientific and psychological reasons before we jump to conclusions. If we do not, we get ourselves in trouble by falling prey to shysters and manipulators using cheap magician tricks to distract us away from God's truth.
3. Remember the purpose of Signs and Wonders was to glorify Christ, not put on a show! When the manifestations become center stage, we miss the point of them, placing the focus on the delivery of the message, and ignoring the message!

It is often debated as to the normative aspect and whether or not it continues today. Some scholars propose that miracles are no longer a function of the church, and were just a part of "redemptive history." However, there is no Scriptural support for that position! Miracles may be rare, but to say they do not happen puts a limit on God's sovereignty. God has no limits; hence, why "process theology" (God is evolving, such as evolution) or "dispensationalism" (God is limited by time periods and contracts) is not rooted in Scripture, only in the minds of men.

God had different covenants and periods in which he chose to work in "**redemptive history**," such as the O.T. period of law, our N.T. period of grace, the covenant of creation with Adam, and the Great Commission of our Lord. The problem with dispensationalism is when we say God is constrictive or limited, we are violating one of the most dearest and precious and truest doctrines, that of the sovereignty of God. If we just live our lives with the attitude of how things affect "me" rather than "others," then we are living with the devil, and not with God!

Liberation and Free Will: Like driving a car in a strange, unfamiliar area, with Christ as a passenger, we, as human beings, spend most of our time arguing, complaining, and debating the destination. Therefore, we end up going nowhere and we end up hating the journey. In addition, we do not have a clue to our destination. If we allow Christ to get into the driver's seat, He will be able to take us where we could never have gone on our own. The journey of argumentation becomes the road trip of a lifetime, filled with wonder and excitement. Even when we hit those potholes, the ride is a joy. Moreover, if we will sign over the "pink slip" of our will to our Lord Jesus Christ, He will take us to

places that our wildest imaginations could never fathom. Our ultimate freedom is found in His service and glorification. There is no better way of life!

As far as “free will” goes, of course we have “free will!” Calvin spent most of his writings discussing this fact. He taught that we have responsibility, and duty to faith and prayer, three areas that require free Will. The doctrine of “faith alone” is a demonstration of our Will to choose, and we do choose to accept His amazing gift of grace (to what extent is a matter of debate in Reformed circles). However, we cannot choose it if we do not know about it, and that is the point of this doctrine. Sin, by the way of our false presumptions and pride, or what we think is fun and inviting, is in the way of our choosing. Yet, if we allow His work to continue in us, the Holy Spirit will lift our sin and our Will out of the way. Therefore, we can be saved by God’s predestined decree (Grace Alone), and by what Christ has done (Christ Alone). We accept Salvation (Faith Alone), which is revealed by the Word (The Scriptures Alone), for God’s glory (Glory to God Alone). (Slogans from the Reformation adhered by Calvinist and Lutherans.)

As Spurgeon said, free will and God’s sovereignty are friends. His preordained decrees are also our free choices working out. Hard to understand? Well, remember, God is beyond the confines of time and space, and is infinitely beyond our understanding. He is beyond how He revealed Himself to us, so accept His precepts and trust Him for the joy ride of life!

God's Will: Finding God’s will is not about programs or methods, it is about a person who is God, who wants us! A living and loving relationship! Finding God’s will is not just about whom I will marry, or what career, or what decision I need to make, but how we are to live to please Him. Our heart and lifestyle are paramount over what we do, so it can change what we do! Asking the question, what does God want me to do, is the starting point, and the focus of the will of God. Matt 6:33-34 “Seek first the kingdom of God” The will of God has more to do with controlling our hearts, than what we do in our planning and ideas (I Pet. 5)!! We must be a servant of Christ, to let Him mold and shape us to His Glory and purpose, and remain in this relationship! To know the will of God more intimately takes trust and patience, He will reveal it, as we grow close in our experience with Him! So relax, as long as you are living for Him and your will is controlled by the Word and Spirit, you are in His will. So enjoy the ride of life, make the most of your opportunities, relationships: to live, learn, pass on the Truth and have fun doing it too!

The three types of God's will:

1. REVEALED WILL: God’s laws concerning lifestyle and righteous living for all Christians (it is not God’s will to ever leave your spouse or start a cult).
2. DETERMINED WILL: That cannot be thwarted or stopped by anything (predestination, it will happen!!!)
3. SPECIFIC WILL: God’s special plan for each believer (whom we marry, career, and education, etc.).

Remember we are never to separate theology from practice. Theology is the 'who' and 'why' that translates in to the 'do' and 'be' of life. "Providence" in Scripture means that God is in total control, and thus we can trust our Lord completely, whatever unfolds before us. The ultimate love of God is that He laid down His life for His enemies!

The Paradox: Scripture is filled with wonders and insights that seem to contradict one another, and sometimes they blow our minds. We need to know that theological concepts are glimpses of God's character and power revealed to us so we can understand Him and worship Him better. For us to understand God would be like a one cell amoeba trying to understand us. All God can do is to bring His truths down to us on our level of understanding while remaining true. Augustine once saw a small boy gathering water with a seashell from the ocean to put on a sandcastle. The boy said he was going to empty the ocean on his sandcastle. This caused Augustine to wonder about that boy's understanding and his understating of what God has revealed about Himself. Such reasoning causes us to strain our brain with such concepts as the Trinity and the Virgin Birth. They seem so far off to so many, yet they are true. This brings us to thinking beyond our capability. One way to see these truths is what is called the paradox.

Paradox is from the Greek, "to seem to appear." For example, Matt. 10:39 says, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." On the surface, it seems to be a contradiction, but careful study reveals that it means, in one sense, you will lose your will. In another sense, it means you will gain freedom. Logically, finding and losing are two different senses, thus are not a contradiction. A paradox is an apparent contradiction that under careful study reveals a deeper truth. The theologian Gordon Clark said, "It is a charley horse between the ears." A true paradox will be logically true on some level and not be nonsense, even though we may not always be able to understand it.

A paradox differs from mysticism, as mysticism will attempt to draw a deeper truth from something simple and declare it to be profound; such as taking every day occurrences and draw out what is not there. Consider an example from "Eastern Mysticism," such as the sound of one hand clapping. It sounds profound, but under careful study, there is no real deep truth there. Thus, you have to read in what you want it to mean, whereas a paradox already has the truth in it, we just have to find a way to understand it. In Scripture, the paradox or "Mystery" is the deeper insight. Found under careful study, it does not contradict other Scriptures (Matt. 13:11; 16:25; Rom. 16:25-27; 1 Cor. 2:7; 14:33).

Alternatively, it can mean something we just do not know now, but will be revealed to us in time, such as the timing of the "Second Coming." You can understand a mystery, but not a contradiction. A contradiction is two opposing views that cannot be resolved with careful study. Solid Reformed Christianity can be vulnerable to such

thinking. As irrational ideas creep into the church that seem good on the surface, but under scrutiny are nonsense, a thin line divides a paradox and a contradiction. We must be well versed in Scripture and study it diligently to determine the truth, or we will have TV preacher theology in the church!

Mary, Mary quite contrary: Very little is said of Mary in the Scriptures, thus many people draw from extra sources to fill in the gaps. These sources come from tradition and proclamations, but are not rooted in any historical account of the time and certainly not Scripture. Such traditions include that Mary was born without sin herself so she could conceive a sinless Son, that she is a perpetual virgin and thus had no other children and so forth. She is so revered that you can pray to her and then she will give your prayers to Jesus, neutering His position as sole redeemer and bridge between the Father's wrath and our sin. These traditions have snowballed to the point some are calling Mary "co-redemptrus," that she is able to bare our sins in conjunction with her Son Christ. There have been many high level discussions in the Catholic Church regarding this, but fortunately clearer thinking has prevailed so far.

So what does the Word of God say of Mary? We know of the birth account of Jesus in Matthew and Luke, how she was chosen of God and told by the Angel Gabriel that she was to bare God's Son. She nurtured and raised Jesus, and she had other sons and daughters. (Which would disprove any other views of her virginity. Of course the other response was the brothers and daughters were Joseph's kids from a previous marriage, perhaps they watch too many sitcoms on TV, and the language in Greek is very clear they were Mary's and Joseph's kids. You would have to do massive Scripture slaughter to say otherwise (First born Son, means more are to come, or in the Greek we would have the ebullient of "Only Son"! Luke 2:7), but such thinking takes into account tradition as on par with the Word of God, so the arguments just end up in circles.) Mary was there during Jesus Ministry at His crucifixion, and was a leader in the early church.

So does she deserve our adoration? Yes she does, as she is blessed of women, queen of mothers that deserves our respect, honor and we are to admire her, after all she is the 'mother' of our Savior! And no we are not to worship, pray or concenter her anything other than a great woman that is most blessed. Just concenter her anxiety and the faith to overcome it, from angelic visitations, being pregnant without relationships, then the family and possible public ridicule, then to see her Son die the most heinous death conceivable. All too often as an overreaction, Protestant groups have 'thrown the baby out with the bath water', as a reaction to Mary, we tend to ignore her all together, this is wrong thinking too. (Matt. 1-3; 12:46; 13:55-56; Mark 3:31; 6:3; Luke 1-2; 8:19; John 19:25-27; Acts 1:4)

Do not take me wrong, I'm not Catholic bashing! Many, many Catholics are our brothers and sisters in the Lord and they are a legitimate Christian Denomination holding with the core essential Doctrines of faith that we all believe and adhere too. I have visited Catholic parishes that preached the Word and were solid as could be considering their over zealous and unbiblical traditions, and I have visited and consulted

protestant churches that I felt I had to cry out, run do not walk to the nearest exit!
Conversely, I will decisively disagree with any view from any source that contradicts Scripture!

For more information on the Virgin Birth see our December 2001 article on the The Incarnation of Christ!

Communion: We are to Celebrate the Lord's Supper/Communion (Isa. 52:15; 53:12; Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:20-25)!

This was instituted by Jesus on the night before His Crucifixion. He told the Disciples that the cup of wine (most Protestants now use grape juice; however, the type of element is irrelevant to the obedience of the statute) represented His own blood, shed to establish a new covenant between God and humanity. The bread represented His body, broken on our behalf. Thus, when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we meet Christ and become present with Him (Omnipresence of God) in remembrance of His atoning death and sacrifice on our behalf, and look to the fullness and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. Calvin said, "We are given a taste of Heaven."

There is debate amongst denominations as to whether the elements of bread and wine are actually Christ's body and blood (Catholics call it *transubstantiation*), physically added in to the elements (Lutherans call it *consubstantiation*). Christ is not physically present because His body is in Heaven; however, beliefs are that He still is really present (Calvin-Reformed), or partially present, or, it is just a memorial (Zwingli-Baptists).

The Lord's Supper also pointed toward the consummation of the Kingdom of God. At first, the Communion was a part of a gathering for a meal in private homes (1 Cor. 11:17). Over time, it became a part of the Sunday worship of the local church. To the Catholics, this became the focal point of the service, observed toward the end. The first parts were the reading of the Word, prayers, singing of psalms/hymns, intercessions, and a *homily* (the Reformers switched to the sermon as the focal point).

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Providence (Genesis 50:20; Job. 38:1-41:34; Psalm 103: 19; Daniel 4:34-35; Acts 2:22-24; 14:16; Romans 1:26-32; 11:33-36; James 1:13-17)

Providence is the doctrine that gives us the knowledge and comfort that God is sovereign, and thus, He is in control. We are not mere rats in a meaningless maze, where there is no divine plan or purpose.

God, indeed, is in control. He does, indeed, have a plan; there is no stray molecule in the universe that does not have His hand of control over it. Jesus tells us that God knows when even a sparrow falls to the ground. He knows the number of hairs on our head--or the number of hairs we do not have. Therefore there is no chance, no luck, no gambling, no fate, in the worldly sense, to *what if* or *what may have been* or *what is*, as all things happen according to His plan.

At the same time, we have free choice, and also determination. Somehow, beyond our capacity to reason, these two seemingly conflicting sets of reason come *together as friends* (St. Augustine and Spurgeon). In theological terms, this is called *Concurrence*. This is the *coterminous* relationship between God's decree and our free choice that somehow are shared in our journey through life, that our free will and choices work into His foreordained degrees without assault to our decisions.

Thus, if we do not receive His Grace and Salvation, even though His election exists, it is because we choose to not accept Him, which He sees by His foreknowledge, and applied to His purpose. To what extent this occurs is a matter of hot debate amongst theologians. But, is safe to say, He is ultimately in charge. (Yes, this will "blow out mind:" i.e. your thinking ability!) Even Calvin spent more time defending and explaining human responsibility and our duty to prayer more than any other subject in his writings. So, it is all in His hands, and it is up to us to get to work, trusting and obeying Him.

Providence refers to God's foreknowledge. That means that God sees beforehand, and provides. It is a word we do not see much of today, but it has a rich history amongst the Puritans and Reformers as the great comfort that God is God and LORD over all. God is no clockmaker who made the world, set it in motion, then left it, as the Deists proclaimed. God has ultimate authority and sovereignty over all the affairs of humanity. He is directing, involved, and working through it all, giving us mercy and guidance. He creates, He sustains. The universe is dependent upon His involvement, moment upon moment.

Providence gives us the comfort that He is in charge; there are no accidents or mistakes. If you feel you married the wrong person, well, you did not! Or, you may feel you have made a lot of bad decisions. Well, you have--we all have—but God is still working things out for good (Rom. 8). Therefore, we have no need to dwell upon the past, complain, or play the *what if* games.

Ultimately, we do not have control over life or death. We make decisions, and we are called to seek Him first (Matt. 6:33). He is our ultimate safety net and security, both in life and eternity. Worry should not even come to our minds, because He is in charge (Matt. 6:25-34). We are in God's provision, and nobody else has ultimate control. All power and authority is His by both direct and indirect means.

So, we need to see our life as being in His hands of love and comfort, that He does have a wonderful plan for our lives, and everything happens for a reason and a

purpose. We need to look beyond logic, reason, and scientific explanations that change completely every few years. His truth remains the same. We have to see all that happens in our life--sufferings, tragedies, good times, and all--as opportunities to learn, grow, develop character, and mature. If not, we miss out on what is important in life, causing it to be meaningless!

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The Son of Man: This is Jesus' most common title for Himself. It is used eighty-one times in the Gospels, and it is never used by anyone else but Jesus. It is used three times outside of the Gospels (Acts 7:56; Rev. 1:13; 14:14). It means *He is Lord and King!* This does not mean He is just a man, or His identification of being among humanity, even though He is identified with us. Rather, it is one of His Messianic titles. It is a reference from the book of Daniel (Dan. 7:13-14) as a picture of a heavenly body who in the end times is entrusted by God with full authority, glory, and sovereign power, who is to be worshiped. He will judge the world (Matt. 24:30-26:64). It is also a picture, showing us that Jesus must suffer on our behalf (Isa. 52:13-53:12; Matt. 26:24-64; Mark 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33-34; 14:21, 41), and one of His sovereign Lordship and glory (Rev. 1:13; 14:14). Jesus may have preferred this term to *Messiah*, because most people had a skewed view of who and what a Messiah would be. They wanted a military or political leader, not what God had promised and sent--a Savior from our sin.

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The final Judgment: refers to the righteous judgment of God, that is still to come at the end of human history as we know it (Duet. 30:19; Luke 13:24; Phil. 2:10-11). This is not to judge our salvation as believers, it has already been done. It will be to judge our works and motivations! And then we will receive our place in eternity, our reward. For the non-Christian this is God's justice, His anger and fury to sin (John 3:36; Rom. 2:5; 5:9; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; Rev. 6:17; 19:15), will prevail, that all people in all times will be judged, and all will give an account to God for there actions in life on earth (Psalm 62:12; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12). As believers, Christ will save us from the anger of God (Matt. 12:33-37; I Thess. 1:10), and allow us to reveal our works, the fruits and gratitude for our salvation. Beware you the "reprobate", the carnal Christian, your hypocrisy will be revealed (Matt. 7:21-23; 18:23-35; 25:34-46; I Cor. 4:5; James 2:14-26). Christ is both judge, jury, prosecutor, and defense attorney, and the only one who can pardon (Matt. 13:40-43; 25:41-46; John 5:22-30; Acts 10:42; II Cor. 5:10; II Tim. 4:1; Heb. 9:27; 10:25-31; 12:23; II Pet. 3:7; Jude 6-7; Rev. 20:11-15). This final judgment will answer and reveal His plan and reasons to all (Psalm 50:16-21; Acts 14:16; Rev. 6:10; 16:5-7; 19:1-5).

HOLINESS

Exodus. 3:1-6; I Samuel 2:2; Psalm 99:1-9; Isaiah 6:1-12; and Revelation 4:1-11

How do you feel about your relationship to God at this moment? If you are doing well, or if you are feeling "down," knowing about Holiness will greatly help you!

Sadly, most of the churches in America will never preach on sin or Holiness for fear of offending someone's sensibility or bringing conviction on someone who does not want to be convicted. Thus, in an age of exaggerated political correctness, many pastors and church leaders will play it safe, seeking not to offend anyone, thinking this will prevent them from causing division. They think they are safe if they tiptoe around such subjects rather than attacking them head-on, and presenting a challenge for people to live by. The result of *playing it safe* has created much more division than could possibly be known. It has left many people in the church suspended in a fog of ambiguity and relativism, alienated from a deeper, more complete knowledge of our Lord.

This attitude has led countless people in the church into that bog, and has even filtered into secular society, causing misunderstandings and suspensions that lead away from Truth. One cannot know truth if one has convinced oneself not to see it, or has prevented others from seeing it. People are left not knowing, or not even desiring to know, the great truths of the Christian faith. Rather, they are seeking only what is interesting and exiting in the moment of the *now*.

In these new belief systems, God is placed in a nice box, removing the knowledge of His majesty, wrath, and judgment from us. In so doing, we have placed God in a bog of indistinctness, preventing ourselves from the realization of who He is, and what He has done for us. When this happens, the average person in the pew will fail to see Holiness as relative, so, they will live life based on what feels good, and what they desire. With these ideas, they will fail to grow in maturity and faith, and they will not be able to take His call to the next level of action, as He collectively calls on us to do.

Why do we fear Holiness and conviction? Most secular people, and even some Christians, perceive Holiness in the wrong way. They see it as a set of rules and judgments, not the majesty and awe of God. They fail to see the benefits of seeking and knowing Holiness that, in turn, produces character, maturity, and growth. They fail to see the harsh reality and destructive nature of sin, how much they need to be forgiven, and how much Christ is willing to forgive.

God calls us, not to conform to the world, but to Him. This requires conviction, and the willingness to persevere through difficult times and people who have opposing ideas. We do this because we desire to because of what He has done for us, not because we feel obligated, or forced. Holiness is also a trust that many do not see, a trust that He is there, and that we can have comfort and confidence in Him in all aspects of life. Otherwise, we remain chained to the despair of loneliness and self-destruction.

When I was a small child, my grandma taught me to say grace before each meal. She taught me these effortless, easy to remember, yet profound words, "*God is great, God is good, and thank You for this food!*" It was a very simple and uncomplicated prayer, but it had an insightful, reflective meaning and depth to it.

Even though, as a child, I did not comprehend the depth, this effortless prayer did help me understand, at a young age, that God was different. I was able to see that God was not only my Provider, who gave me the food I was about to eat, but also that He is different from me. He was not like my father or grandfather, or that pastor who scared me. He had an awesome-ness to Him that mere people did not have. Yes, He provided, but this was not what He was all about. This prayer meant to me that there is much more to God than the food that was in front of me.

Sadly, most people seem to seek God only for what they can get from Him. They see only the food, not from whence it came. If all we seek is a divine vending machine, we will not see much in God, nor will we respond much with what He does give. We have to understand who He is before we can understand and respond to what He does, what He did for us. I did not fully comprehend this prayer of grace until my seminary days when I started to learn more about Holiness. I realized further that by knowing who God is, I would come to appreciate Him more, and would strive harder to make my life more pleasing to Him.

This prayer is about whom God is, that He is Great and Good. In His greatness is purity, Holiness, and, of course, righteousness. These are some of the things that describe His character. These give us, within our ability to comprehend and understand, glimpses of who He is. God, in being, transcends space and time. He is omnipresent (all present everywhere), and omniscient (all knowing all of the time). He is unknowable to our limited and finite being and understanding. It is just as we are unknowable to a worm, or to the bacteria that resides within us.

So, how can we know Him? By what and how He has revealed Himself to us. These revelations are coupled to and filtered through our limited human understanding. Because He has sought us, and revealed Himself to us, we can now comprehend Him in a limited way. And, what we need to know about His character and attributes is His Holiness.

Holiness is the fundamental aspect and essence of the core nature of who God is, that He is all pure and perfect, sinless. God is unique and unapproachable by anything that is not pure itself. Because He is so perfect, and we are so sinful, He is the object of dread and fear to us! Just as He awes us, He also terrifies us. He is great! His pureness cannot tolerate any form of sin (Isa. 6:5; Hab. 1:13). Therefore, we cannot approach Him. That is why as Christ lived in perfection, without sin, His purity and sinless state was imputed upon us. He took our place of wrath with His perfect life, so we can be seen as pure, covered by His nature so we can commune with Him.

Because He is holy, He is also just in all that He does, including His judgments (Gen. 18:25; Psalm 7:11; 96:13; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5-16; 7:12; Rev. 16:5-7; 19:1-4). He is good! We can trust that He always makes the right choice in bestowing the call upon our hearts. He has what is best for us in mind. Even when bad things happen, we can trust in His providence, and that He will bring us through. The primary attribute of His character that is given to us is His Holiness. Holiness means *pure* righteousness, right actions, and right being. Because He is *set apart*, far beyond us, He is the *Object* of awe to us.

There is a profound difference between God, humanity, and creation. God is transcendent and majestic, which causes an imposing barrier. This runs the range from *adoration* to *dread*. He is ultimately perfect, and we are ultimately sinful, in need of His love and forgiveness. Thus, we can see how important this subject is, as it will show us how we really are, filled with sin, and in need of a Savior. Even in God's pure state, He is filled with love, forgiveness, and compassion, when we turn our hearts to Him (Isa. 51:5-6; 56:1; 63:1; Rom. 3:25-26; 1 John 1:9). He is of more *good* than we can ever imagine! Our punishment has already taken place. Christ is the One who took it on our behalf.

Holiness also means being *set apart*, because pure holiness cannot be in contact with that which is not, thus God is *set apart* (sometimes put theologically as *apartness* and *otherness*) from us, and from all that is sin. Thus, we can have no direct contact with Him. The Fall caused a great partition that we could not bridge, and it separated us from God. God is greater than we could ever imagine! This attribute of Holiness shows us we are set before a God who is transcendent, with pure, moral perfection. His virtue surpasses not only our understanding, but also our ability to mimic it. This majesty is more than just a word in a praise song; it is a picture of God's ultimate superiority. He is God. There is only one God, and, guess what? You are not HE! If you get this point, you will be light-years ahead of most people who live, and believe, that the universe orbits around them, and where God is an afterthought, or a scheduled appointment on Sundays at 9am, when there is time.

Holiness equals Pureness; this refers to the God who does what is right, always, and continually, even if, and when we do not understand it. God's nature is Holy, which means He is great and His actions are holy; this means He is good (James 1:17). Holiness is what makes Him great and good. This is very hard for us to understand, especially in the event of the loss of a loved one, and most especially, a child. Knowing that God never does what is wrong helps us to trust and rely on Him, and the deeper aspects of the faith are manifested as we start to yield our lives over to Him.

When tragedy happens, we are quick to blame God. Yet, we have to take comfort in the thought that there is no evil in God, thus there can be no malevolent action against us. He may allow things to come to pass that are caused by our sin, or the sin of others, but He continues to work things out, even to our benefit and good, further proving His goodness (Rom. 8:28-39).

Because of His perfection and purity He cannot tolerate any form of sin (Hab. 1:13)! He is absolutely just in His ability to judge, and is the ultimate *Promise Keeper* (Gen. 18:25; Psalm 7:11; 96:13; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5-16; 7:12; Rev. 16:5-7; 19:1-4). This means we have to be perfect. Now, how many of you have ever tried to be perfect for an hour, let alone for a lifetime? You may think you are, but your spouse or parent would have a very different tale to tell—Huh? This means we are in a state of subjugation before Him. It is not a pleasant way to exist.

Yet, this also means He is the ultimate Pardoner of sin, counteracting that hopeless state we should be in because of sin! This may seem like a contradiction--and it is, in our logic, but remember, God is beyond logic. Because God is just, He is active in saving His people from the various covenants and law of the OT and makes possible the state of Grace we enjoy today (Isa. 51:5-6; 56:1; 63:1; 1 John 1:9). So, when God justifies us, He is rescuing us by paying the cost for that sin, which our Lord Jesus Christ did on our behalf. We become justified by our faith in Christ! So, Holiness and Justification are connected, and justice is done (Rom. 3:25-26)!

There is also a call for us to heed and to respond to Holiness. In His majesty are pure love, glory, and goodness, that seek us out, bridging the chasm dug out by our sin, and which divided all of humanity. *Majesty* calls for worship, honor, reverence, and adoration. As John said, *He is Love* and *He is Light*, there is no darkness or reason to fear Him, other than the *fear* of awe, reverence, and respect (Prov. 3:5).

When you get God's goodness you should have no problem to be willing to surrender all to Him (Gal. 2:20-21)!

Holiness and Glory means He alone is worthy to be praised. We are to seek to please Him over and against our pride and personal agendas. This includes anything God has touched. When Moses approached God, the ground was holy, and he had to remove his sandals. God's presence and being there made it holy--set apart for His purpose and reason.

The objects for the Temple were also set apart for use in order to honor and worship God (Ex. 25-28). Thus, these, too, were Holy, in the sense that they were put aside for the purpose and reason to glorify God. Some of the ordinary objects, as well as the ground we use and walk on, were made to glorify Him, yet the rest of the objects and ground were normal. Another picture of God; He is majesty, and set apart. We are normal, needing His love and approval.

We are called to be Holy! This means we are different from other people. We are not better; we are saved by His Grace, and set apart for His service and glory. We are to do our best to understand and learn about Jesus so we can be more like Him in our character and behaviors. This does not mean we share in His divine nature, for He is still the One and only God and we are still human, but now we have a place in eternity and fellowship in Him!

There are two categories of God's nature and character: communicable and incommunicable. The incommunicable are the types of God's character we do not share nor can we emulate, such as His omnipresence, as we cannot be everywhere all at once let alone two places at a time. The communicable is what we can share, that God asks us to emulate in the practice of our lives, such as goodness and holiness.

Our Holiness is to reflect our gratitude and love for what He has given us, for His rescue of our soul. This is a response to His great gift of atonement and salvation. Because He saved us, we should live a life pleasing to Him. This does not mean we are perfect, but we can strive our best to be our best for His glory!

The work and cross of Christ is so essential for us. Without Jesus, we could never know God, because He covers our sin and replaces that separation with an intimate relationship. This is called *Atonement*; Christ covered us so we can come before God as clean and pure. Our responsibility is to persevere in Holiness by living a righteous life, which will reflect what Christ has done for us!

Being a receiver of Holiness as a Christian is freedom, because of the bond we have by being in Christ. *Bond* means we have been grafted in Him, and the Holy Spirit is living in us. We do not have the freedom to do whatever we desire, thus sinning and breaking God's moral law. We must surrender, and yield ourselves to Him to obtain true freedom (Rom. 6:1-14) (*Instruments* in v. 13 refers to a weapon, as soldiers presenting arms to their Sergeant!) Pursuing holiness means we live with the knowledge that our sin is covered (Atonement) and must remain dead (Gal. 2:20; 3:20).

There is only one kind of people--sinners--and one kind of Holiness--Jesus! God places His Holiness in us. We are not to be copies, but real, as Christ is exhibited in us, and to be filled with His fullness (Eph. 3:19), not ours. We must see our sin and weakness, and be humble before the Holiness of God. We may not be able to overcome all of our sins, but our desire must be to go in the right direction.

Our response is to pursue Holiness to the best of our ability, to be communicable in our faith, as in infectious. We can do this by growing in character and living righteously by Christ's example. Our concern and pursuit is to learn and grow in Him in maturity and faith through obedience and the practice of the Christian walk (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Heb. 12:10-17; 1 John 1:5-2:1). We may not be able to be perfect as He is perfect, but we can strive our best in receiving His Spirit and Word, and applying it in all aspects of our lives.

Holiness does not mean we set ourselves apart from others whom we do not like, or whom we consider sinful, because we are all sinful. Remember, Jesus Himself had direct contact with the sinners of life, and called the worst sinners, like Paul, to spread His Gospel. Yet, we are not to yield to or undertake their sins and temptations. Being salt without losing our saltiness, or being light not hidden under a bowl means being there in love and care without becoming like the world (Matt. 5:13-16). As A Christian,

we all called to reach out and be effective to those around us, so our salt will remain salty and our light can shine (Duet. 30:1-10; Matt. 5-6; Eph. 4:17-5:14; 1 Pet. 1:13-22).

Our human tendency is to try to persuade others to agree with our views. God's purpose is to get us in line with His views. Yet, so many Christians spend all of their time as pursuers of arguments, not pursuers of Holiness! There are times when we need to take a stand for correct doctrine and virtue with His Word, and there are times we need to separate childish, petty things from real things. For example, I love the KJV Bible, but thinking that the KJV is the only true version of God's Word is just plain stupidity, and goes against Hebrews 4:11-16. Yet, so many fight for this belief, and do not pursue what they are called to do! So, all of our church energies are put into conflict and not into perusing Holiness and His call!

What effect will Holiness have on me? When we grasp the incredible Holiness of God, and start to realize the inconceivable magnitude of the forgiveness we have received by what Christ has done, it takes hold and our lives are changed forever (Eph. 3:18)! We are humbled, and motivated to yield our will to His, causing us to hate sin, and preparing us to take our faith seriously with more conviction and passion, as we have a deeper sense of reverence for God. It helps conform our character to His standards and we begin virtuous living, embracing the beauty of the holy life. It allows us to proclaim His glory to others with excitement and confidence. We will realize that we are called to be of noble character, set apart for His purpose. We are no longer of this world; neither do we desire its distractions or causing others to be distracted from perusing Christ (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Heb. 12:10-17; 1 John 1:5-2:1).

The result of pursuing Holiness in the Christian life is realizing the importance of passion and conviction so we are determined in our faith. We have a deeper and more unwavering trust and belief for our Lord that gives us more faith; so all aspects of our life are transformed. Holiness will help us cultivate a life long pursuit of knowing and making known our Lord Jesus Christ. Being pursuers of righteousness, seeking His knowledge through His Word, as well as seeking growth and maturity in our faith development, put into action, will cause a *fire* we do not nor cannot put out.

So, let us go out and live as if our life belongs to our Lord, as it does, and be Holy!

More Scriptures to mediate upon: Exodus. 3:1-6; Lev. 11:44-45; Deut. 30:1-10; Josh. 24:19; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 99:1-9; Isaiah. 1:4; 5:18-19, 24; 6:1-12; 30:8-11; 31:1; 41:14-20; 45; 9-12; 57:15; Ezekiel 39:7; Amos 4:2; John 17:11; Acts 5:3-4; 32; Eph. 4:17-5:14; 1 Pet. 1:13-22; Revelation. 4:1-11; 15:4

Calvinism From the Critics

Calvinism and the Reformed faith find their roots in the teachings of the French Protestant reformer John Calvin. (1509-1564) Although there were other prominent Reformers such as Luther, the Anabaptists and Zwingli, who challenged the *status quo*

of the Catholic Church, it is a fact that the Reformed church, including the various Presbyterian denominations, CRC, URC, RCA, Dutch Reformed, parts of Anglicism in their 39 Articles, and many others, look to Calvin as their father.

The Five Points of Calvinism in the acronym of T.U.L.I.P. is system of theology that came a generation after Calvin in the Synod of Dordt in Holland in 1619. This was a response to the five points presented by the Arminians in 1610. Both of these doctrines sought to define how we go to God through salvation. Both claim that the formula of salvation is presented and contained only in the Holy Scriptures. For the most part, in all the essential Doctrines of the Christian faith, there is agreement. Thus, we have far more in common with one other than we have disagreements. Most of the controversies and disagreements between Christian groups center upon the misunderstanding of key terms, and the focusing on one aspect of a Scripture verse rather than the whole teaching in context.

According to Calvinism, our salvation comes from the almighty power of the Triune God. The Father chose us; the Son died for us; and the Holy Spirit makes all this known to us. Without the intervention of the Spirit, we could not know Christ's death. Thus, our response by faith and repentance could not happen because of the clouding of our sin that blinds us to His Word and call. Without the power and intervention of the Spirit, we could not become Christians, because we could not obey the Gospel. Therefore, the entire process of our election, redemption, and regeneration is solely by the work of God. It is by grace alone, through our faith alone. Thus God, not we, determines who will be recipients of the gift of salvation.

What most people and pastors do not realize is this is plainly taught in Scripture and even Arminius taught this. The Catholic Church and all Christian denominations have this as their core theology, because this is what Scripture clearly teaches. So, what is the fuss and debate about? It is the "why" and "how." The "what" is agreed. The "what" is God elects us. One would have to throw out most of the NT to disagree with this. However, the hot debate is the "why" and "how" God chooses us. Calvin said it is by God's divine decree and purpose. The Armenians say it is by God's foreknowledge, that God knows that we will chose Him so He saves us in advance.

So what does Scripture say? Well see for yourself:

John 3:16-18; (**Eph. 1:3-14; 2:10; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9-10**); 1 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil.1: 6; 1 Thess. 1:3-6; 5:23-24; 2 Tim. 1-12; 4:18; 1 Peter 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:10

These Scriptures clearly state that God chooses us by His purpose through the Holy Spirit. So, how can there be an argument against this position? The Arminians say the Reformed people twist Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4-5 and 1 Peter 1:1-2 to say that salvation is by our choosing which God foresees.

Therefore, you may look them up for yourself. What do they say? Romans says both! It says that God foreknows *and* that He predestined, which supports their part of

their position. Ephesians says, “*God chose us in Him,*” which the Armenians say means God sees our faith beforehand, thus His choosing is based solely on that. However, they have to read this into the Scripture, because it is not there in the Greek or the English. At the end of the passage it says, “*according to the good pleasure of His will.*” This clearly contradicts their position and supports the Calvinism position.

To the average Christian this may seem like arguing about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, which was the biggest debate in Christendom for centuries during the Middle Ages, and is totally silly! Perhaps on some level they are right. The argument is based on semantics and also placing the emphasis on one aspect and ignoring the other. Both groups do this. Again, perhaps they are right. God is all knowing and all-powerful, so He clearly knows beforehand that we will chose Him. Calvin taught that also! As you can see in these passages, Scripture teaches that!

Calvin placed the emphases on God’s purpose. The Armenians place the emphasis on our choosing and God’s foreknowledge. I certainly will not solve this debate. Both points are valid to a degree, so we can agree to disagree. But, I challenge you to carefully read and study those Scriptures. I grew up in Reformed churches (Episcopal, Lutheran and Presbyterian) and went to a Reformed Seminary, yet for years I rejected four of the five points. The reason was that I refused to see the evidence, instead, choosing to believe my feelings and interpretation along with popular Evangelical thinking. I also did not read Calvin myself. I knew only what others said of him, and, as we will see, most people do a very good job of misrepresenting Calvin! It wasn’t until through a Seminary buddy (Michael Horton), who kept pestering me to examine the evidence, did I finally and surely come to the logical and clear reformed perspective. My presumptions were in the way, as were my sources, which were plainly wrong.

So, lets look at each point of TULIP briefly from what the doctrine says, then from the critic’s point of view, and then from what Calvin and Scripture actually taught. May I say upfront that this doctrine of TULIP is an English translation from the Dutch, with which I will not bore you. Therefore, in order to keep the acronym, the language of the titles had to be stretched. In addition, when this was translated it made more sense, but, time goes on and our interpretation and definition of words change. In the Dutch, TULIP makes perfect sense and is thoroughly and theologically sound, but in English the exact meaning of the titles get skewed, especially over the nearly 400 years of the language barrier. Therefore, many people, including myself, might get the wrong idea from it and reject it outright, without any real investigation. Therefore, my purpose here is to clear up the meaning and to challenge you to see for yourself.

The Five Points of Calvinism from the acrostic TULIP:

T “**Total depravity**”: Total Depravity, or perhaps better called, “Total Inability,” is a doctrine of God’s amazing grace as seen in John 3:16. This is the most misunderstood principle of Reformed theology! Calvinists are stating that all people have been *affected* by sin. Sin has invaded every aspect of our personality and being including our thinking,

our emotions, and our will. Thus, we have no means to go to God ourselves, either by choosing or by good works.

The critic says: “This is the false doctrine that man is so depraved that he cannot see his sinful condition and call upon God for salvation. It is true that all men are natural- born sinners (Ps. 51:5 Rom. 3:23; 5:12;), but it is also true that God COMMANDS all men to repent and receive Christ (Acts 17:30-31; Luke 13:3; 1 John 3:23). Man is indeed depraved, but he is not so depraved that he has no free will of his own (Ex. 35:5, 21, 22, 29; Jos. 24:15; John. 1:12; 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:9). Total Depravity is heresy.”

What Calvin is saying: It does not mean we are as bad as we could be, that we are “extremely sinful,” because the Holy Spirit is the great restrainer. Yes, God does command us to repent and be saved, but there is something else that the Armenians ignore. The fact is Scripture also says we are fallen and corrupted by sin (Romans 5:12), which blinds us from knowing Him (Mark 4:11f). If we were able to go to God just by our own choosing, then what is Christ for? That is why Christ came, to liberate us. Sin is still in the way, so it is the Holy Spirit’s role to unveil Christ to us. There is nothing good that can come from us with which to please God. Christ paid that debt so we can please God through Him. This is also called “original sin.” (I Cor. 15:42-49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:10)

As far as “free will” goes, of course we have “free will!” Calvin spent most of his writings discussing this fact. He taught that we have *responsibility*, and duty to *faith* and *prayer*, three areas that require free Will. The doctrine of “faith alone” is a demonstration of our Will to choose, and we do choose to accept His amazing gift of grace (to what extent is a matter of debate in Reformed circles). However, we cannot choose it if we do not know about it, and that is the point of this doctrine. Sin is in the way of our choosing, so the Holy Spirit lifts our sin and our Will out of the way. Therefore, we can be saved by God’s predestined decree (Grace Alone), and by what Christ has done (Christ Alone). We accept Salvation (Faith Alone), which is revealed by the Word (The Scriptures Alone), for God’s glory (Glory to God Alone). (Slogans from the Reformation adhered by Calvinist and Lutherans.)

Christ did not remove sin; rather He covered it, which is what is meant by the word, *Atonement*. In God’s eyes, we are white as snow because the work of Christ is covering it up. Nevertheless, as you know from your personal experience, we are not actually clean. Just ask a spouse! Growing in faith, education and commitment will prevent sin’s practice, but it is still there. When we reject this essential doctrine, we are saying that we have no need for a Savior. This is what the Universalists and Unitarian Churches believe. Without Total Depravity we have no sin, which needs no redemption.

Calvin speaks a lot on the “civil good,” that is, our *good deeds*. However, these cannot please God. It is by what Christ has done through faith that pleases Him. We cannot seek God either, thus “seekers” is not a Biblical term. God seeks us. The person without any knowledge of God will never come to saving faith in God without the

revelation the Spirit gives, making them alive through Christ. (Ephesians 2:1-5) **Total Depravity is NOT heresy!**

U "Unconditional Election" means to select or to choose. God chose us by His purpose. PERIOD. It was by nothing else, neither by our means nor His foreknowledge. (Romans 9:15,21; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9-10) This doctrine states that God chose those with whom He is pleased to bring to them knowledge of Himself. This is not based upon any merit by anyone. Thus, the object of His grace is not based upon looking down the corridor of time to discover who would accept the offer of the Gospel of Christ. God has elected us based solely upon the His own Will for us, to do good works, which do not save us. (Ephesians 2:10; 1 Peter 2:10)

The critic says: "This is a heresy derived from perverting verses like Romans 8:29 and Ephesians 1:4-5. The Calvinists believe that God predestinated everyone way back before Genesis 1:1, totally ignoring their free Will to choose for themselves. That is, He supposedly decided who would go to Heaven and who would go to Hell long before anyone was even born. If you will read Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:1-2 you will see that God's election is based on FOREKNOWLEDGE. He did not elect to save or damn anyone against his or her free Will. God knew all along who would choose Christ and who would not, and He made His 'elections' based on that information."

What Calvin is saying: This doctrine does not rule out our responsibility to accept, trust, have faith, and believe in the redeeming work of Christ. (John 3:16-18) The objection by the Armenians is based on a misunderstanding of the term. They believe the Reformed position rejects people's responsibility, which is not so. They also ignore the sovereignty of God! Who is better qualified and more trustworthy to determine Salvation, the greatest gift--our fallen reasoning, or the Holiness and Purity of God?

We cannot fathom the true implication of meaning or reasoning. We have to trust that God is God and we are not. Thus, we have no idea of His plan or purpose. All Christian groups who use the Bible teach Election. The division is in the meaning and purpose, which God has not revealed to us. We can only speculate. We know only what He has revealed, that He does elect, and that Election is to His glory and purpose. There is a balancing act between God's sovereignty and our responsibility. Thus, neither Calvin nor anyone else has been able to resolve this tension. This is why there is so much debate.

Our call is to trust and obey. (1 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil.1:6; 1 Thess. 1:3-6; 5:23-24; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:10). Our purpose is not to argue over this, but to accept His amazing Grace. God, in His reasoning, which is perfect and holy, does not select some, and/or allows them to stay in sin. This does not mean that He chooses that they should go to hell. This is "Hyper Calvinism" or "Double Predestination" and this is not Biblical doctrine! (Psalm 81:12; 1 Pet 2:8)

The doctrine of "Unconditional Election" puts the emphasis on our depravity. People do not want to think of themselves as worthless and unredeemable by their own

merit. Although this is un-American, it is very Biblical. We are unable and unwilling to seek God on our own, thus we need Divine Intervention. This is the role of the Holy Spirit. This is God choosing for God's purpose. In His incredible love, He seeks us!!! Wow, we have to see the incredible blessing and wonder of this!

Election is no excuse to sit and do nothing in service and witnessing to others! Some Reformed groups over the centuries have refused to do missions or evangelism. This is in direct opposition to the Lord's Great Commission (Matt. 28), and the teachings of Calvin. It is based on laziness and has given the Reformed church a needless bad reputation and an unnecessary black eye.

L "**Limited Atonement**," or better-said, "Specific Redemption," refers to the Atonement of Christ. It answers the question, "who did Christ atone for?" Is it for everyone or just for some? This doctrine teaches that Christ died for the world, for those whom God so loved. Yet, only some will come. Others will not. (Matthew 26:28; John 3:16f; 6:37; 17:9; Ephesians 5:25). Christ died for the world, but not all will come. If this were not so, we would have universal Salvation. He died for all those who will become "Christian".

The critic says: "Then we have the "L" for LIMITED ATONEMENT. This is the belief that only a limited number of people can be washed from their sins in the precious blood of Christ because only "the elect" will be saved anyhow. The idea is that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, (Eph. 5:25), so the blood of Christ was only shed for the Church. This is foolishness. 1 Timothy 2:6 says that Christ gave Himself a ransom for ALL, not just the elect. ALL have sinned. (Rom. 3:23) So, He died for ALL, and He saves "as many as" receive Him."

What Calvin is saying: Again we see a major misunderstanding of this Doctrine! This Doctrine in no way was, or is, restrictive. It does not have a limited value on what Christ did. It does not say that Christ's death was powerful enough only for a few people. Hence, there is a lot of misleading theology by the misunderstanding of this term. Christ's sacrifice was, and continues to be, limitless in its scope and value and power. It is fully enough to save all who ever lived. However, the focus is not the *power* and *ability*, but the *purpose*. Therefore, the power of the Atonement could have saved all, but He did not atone for all because obviously all people are not saved.

Another criticism with this doctrine is that evangelism is nurtured. However, this is not the case. The responsibility to evangelize the world is still an imperative because we do not know who will accept or who will not. Evangelism is actually promoted because Christ died for all sinners, even though not all will accept Christ. He will not lose any of those for whom He died! In addition, Calvin said it is the responsibly of the Christian to proclaim the Gospel to everyone, just as Christ commanded.

Note that all Christian faiths teach this Doctrine, the Atonement part! The argument is in the semantics and purpose, of "who" is atoned and "why." The difference is that Armenians taught that Atonement was for everyone and we chose to reject it.

Traditional Reformed thinking is that Christ's sacrifice was for only those who the Father has selected (Election), and that He bore our place in suffering and wrath and in taking God's judgment upon Himself. Thus, this term "Limited Atonement" should be "Specific Redemption."

"Irresistible Grace:" Grace, or "*charis*" in Greek, means *an undeserving act of kindness*. This is one of the most enduring actions of love that could ever be conceived! (Gen. 6:8; Psalm 45:2; 84:11; Zech. 12:10; Luke 2:40; John 1:17; 6:37, 44; Acts 4:33; Rom. 1:7; 5:17; 8:14; 11:6; 16:20; 2 Cor. 8:9; 13:14; Gal. 5:4; Eph. 1:7; 3:2; 4:7; 6:24; Heb. 12:28; James 4:6) This means that our salvation is a gift, which cannot be earned or purchased. (Hos. 14:4; John 1:16; 10:4; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:2; 5:10-12; 2 Pet. 3:18.) "*Sola Gratia*," or *By Grace Alone*, was the sounding proclamation of the Reformation. What this means in reformed theology is that Jesus knows His sheep, that He reveals Himself in such a way that we will respond to evangelism and find it irresistible through the gracious inward call of the Holy Spirit. This is an incredible comfort, that the Gospel of Christ will penetrate our hardened and sinful hearts and save us!

The critic says: "The "I" stands for IRRESISTIBLE GRACE, which is also false doctrine. This teaching says that God the Holy Spirit overpowers the sinner and grants him the New Birth without his submission or positive response. As we've already seen, man DOES have a free will and no one is saved without CHOOSING to believe on Christ as Lord and Savior. There is no such thing as irresistible grace. God has given us all the ability to resist anyone or anything we choose. (Acts 7:51; 2 Tim. 3:8; Jas. 4:7) There are times when the convicting power of the Holy Spirit is so strong and real that a sinner sees no choice but to give in to God and receive Christ as Savior. However, the sinner always has a choice. No one is saved against his will, and no one is saved without first choosing to receive Christ."

What Calvin is saying: Reformed theology does not deny choice/ Free Will at all! God does not force us, nor coerce us to follow Him. This is not found in the teachings of Calvin or in the Bible, although some Reformed pastors have made such statements out of their own misunderstanding. What this doctrine means is that God creates the work to allow us to be willing to be lead and purchased by His blood. The "irresistible" part means we will put up a fight against Him naturally, being resistant, because of our sin and Will! If we were left out on our own, we would never accept His precious gift. Thus, it is by Christ's work first, and then we respond. He creates the "irresistible" aspect. We do not respond first, because we are unable to do so. God is the one who regenerates us, creating a new Will to allow the work of the Spirit. His Grace is sufficient, "effectual," meaning it will overcome our sin to accomplish God's purpose.

P "Perseverance of the Saints" This doctrine teaches that when we become Christians we will remain in God's hand until He comes back or until we are glorified and brought to Him in Heaven. (Romans 8:28-39) It teaches that we are preserved in faith by the strength of Christ. Our salvation is secure and cannot be lost. God is the one who perseveres and we are its recipients. Faith is our entire being in a right relationship with Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Heb. 11: 6) We can continue in the faith for

the long run because of His work and not our sanctification or growth. This is the proof of our election. (Gal. 5) Our growth is a result and effect, and not the cause. Those who truly are regenerative are secure, and if they fall into sin there will be consequences but also forgiveness. Those who are not regenerated have no hope. (John 6:37-40; 10:28-29; 17:2-24; Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8; 9:1; 1Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:32; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18)

The critic says: "The last letter is "P," which represents the PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS. This is the only point in "T.U.L.I.P" which is scripturally sound. Once a sinner receives Christ, he is predestined to be conformed to Christ's image. (Rom. 8:29) That is, as Christians, we are eternally secure and cannot lose the Salvation which God has freely given us."

What Calvin is saying: What can I say? There had to be at least one thing we could agree upon! Actually there is little debate on this point. Virtually all Evangelical, Calvinistic and Protestant Christians in general agree upon this because there is not a scant of Scriptural support otherwise. Every now and then, you will hear people arguing that we can lose our salvation. Just ask for the Scriptures and read them in their context, and you will see that if a person is genuinely a Christian they will stay a Christian. What gets people mixed up is that people fall away from the church. There are many reasons for that, so they seek an answer in theology and not in the behavior sciences. In theology, Jesus answers the question in the Parable of the Sower, (Matt. 13:1-23). Sometimes people who leave may not have been a true Believer, or are backsliding or have been hurt and are afraid to come back.

The purpose of this doctrine is the work of Sanctification. This means the God who has elected us will continue with us until we reach fulfillment in the Life to come. (John 6:39; Phil. 1:6) The Christian must stand upon the Word of God, trust in Christ's promise, and model Christ's character. This is done so that we can fulfill the Will of the Father in our good works and personal spiritual growth. Thus, our desire, and response to regeneration is gratitude. /This leads to our being humble, knowledgeable, and repentive, always reaching out and always seeking God.

Here you have a basic presentation on the Reformed faith, which most Protestant Denominations have as their roots. I realize that not every Calvinist will agree with every statement I have made. There is debate among Reformed groups on these definitions and there are the debates on the Supralapsarian and Sublapsarian views (which I will not bore you with), and the influence of Armeniaus, who was a Calvinist but objected to the deterministic logic of the second generational Calvinists. His followers took further issues that lead to the debates we have today.

As you can see we have more in common, than we have in disunity, once we see the explanations clearly. I believe most Evangelical people who are against TULIP or Calvinism genuinely do not know what it entails, because it has been so badly misrepresented. There is also a lot of misunderstanding out there on semantics, which comes from reading ideas into the titles that are not intended. Also, there is the *pride* issue. Many times doctrine, good or bad, can be propagated by people refusing to look

at the evidence of Scripture or just by their going on their presumptions and not on sound reasoning.

So let us focus on God's Word. Look at it carefully in its context and lift up the blood of Christ as our final Lord and Mediator.

© 1992, 2001 R.J. Krejcir, Into Thy Word. Preparation for this article was done by rereading the "Institutes" by Calvin in a new and wonderful translation. (I wish I had done this while still in seminary.) It will be posted soon on the Doctrine Channel). Notes from theology classes as well as old fashion research were also used.

Please see the articles on our Doctrine Channel.

"Hyper-Calvinism" and "Why are there so many disagreements within the Christian faith?"

"Hyper-Calvinism"

"Be aware of the misrepresentations," a seminary professor told me years ago. Many people claim to be Calvinists, but few will actually read and adhere to what he taught. They have no concern what Scripture teaches, but only for their bloodlines and suppositions. We have to be aware that Hyper-Calvinism can be much more than a mere threat or distraction. In fact, it is more dangerous than Armenianism or any other variant Theological System could ever be. People will get the wrong impression of Biblical Calvinism and will fall away to doctrines that have roots in human trends and not in God's most precious Word. This can come about just because of misrepresented ideas or from arrogance and pride.

Hyper-Calvinism is the misrepresenting of the teachings of John Calvin, which are a logical and systematic look into what Scripture reveals to us. Calvin, a French reformer in the 16th century, called the church away from idolatry and corruption to adhere to the Word of God for all faith and practice. Yet, Calvinists started virtually every revival of Calvinism, such as the First and Second Great Awakenings in the US along with the great writings of the Puritan era. They were then taken over by other theological systems that claimed them as their own while misrepresenting what great thinkers, theologians, and pastors such as Bunyan, Edwards, Spurgeon, Aquinas, and the great Augustine taught.

Even this term, "Hyper-Calvinism," is misrepresented as critics unthinkingly slap this label on any variety of Calvinism that is higher than they think it should be. Armenians like to associate all five-point Calvinists as "hyper," as do many Evangelicals who do not know what Calvinism is really all about. (See article on "Calvinism from the Critics")

The main aspect of "Hyper-Calvinism" is that it is a false doctrine. It emphasizes Divine Sovereignty and excludes human responsibility. (Calvin taught more on our

responsibility than any other subject!) To call it "Hyper-Calvinism" is something of a misnomer. It is actually a rejection of historic Calvinism. "Hyper-Calvinism" entails a denial of what is taught in both Scripture and the landmark Calvinistic creeds such as the Westminster and Heidelberg Catechisms. This is minimizing the moral and spiritual responsibility of sinners. It emphasizes Irresistible Grace to such an extent that there appears to be no real need to evangelize, because Christ may be offered only to the elect. It has five aspects associated with it:

1. A denial of the call of the Gospel. They say that it does not apply to all who hear it. They deny that the gospel calls *all* sinners to repentance and faith. The Gospel Call, the invitation to come to Christ for salvation as proclaimed by the pastor, evangelist, or lay person and interceded by the Holy Spirit even before the Earth was made (now we get into temporal physics), is muted to anyone except the "elect," so only certain people have the *dog ears* to hear the message and understand it. (Isa. 45:22; 55:1-7; Matt. 11:28-29; Rev. 22:17).
2. The denial that faith is the duty of every sinner. This is the denial of *Faith Alone*, the hallmark creed of the Reformation. It says unbelievers are incapable of faith or even love apart from "enabling grace." They even believe that Christ must never be presented to them. This is a copout. They ignore the Great Commission! (Matt. 28)
3. The denial that the Gospel makes any "offer" of Christ, Salvation, or Mercy to the non-elect, and "denies that the offer of divine mercy is free and universal."
4. The denial of such a thing as "common grace." (There go the Epistles out the window!)
5. The denial that God has any sort of love for the non-elect. (They ignore John 3:16)

All five varieties of Hyper-Calvinism undermine evangelism and missions and twist the gospel message so it seems to be only for those already in the church. Those holding this position go to great lengths to deny that faith is ever presented in Scripture. They must not read it well, or with a "cut and delete" attitude. Scripture twisting is crucial if one would come up with such a doctrine that directly countermands what Christ taught, what He commanded! I believe it is to justify laziness by rationalizing reasons why we do not have to reach out to the community and the world!

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Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Numbers 11; Joel 2:28-29; John 7:37-39; Acts 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1; 14:26-33

Does Jesus call the church to *speak in tongues* to be saved?

Has anyone ever approached you and asked if you have received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit? Or, perhaps they challenged you further by saying that unless you have spoken in *tongues*, you are not a real Christian. There are many people today who believe and teach that you have to speak in *tongues* to be saved or at least have received what they call the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. But, what is this type of Baptism? Is it Biblical, or is it just discerned from feelings and opinions? Does the Bible actually teach this? And, the main question we need to ask is, how are we to understand to what Christ calls us--based on experience, or on His Word?

My goal in this article is to show how this idea has been birthed, and to examine the Scriptures to find out what the Bible really says about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. I know this will be very controversial, so I challenge you to see for yourself what the Scriptures are saying--in context--and do not rely just on what you think you know from experience, or what you may have heard. I do not wish to put anyone down--denominations, movements, or experiences. My intent is to give a clear understanding from Biblical truth, to give education and understanding to one of the greatest wonders of the universe--God working in us!

The concept, *Baptism of the Holy Spirit*, clearly has its roots in Scripture as the invisible energy of God, trusted upon many of the Old Testament personalities. This included artists, (Gen. 41:38; Ex. 31:2-5; Nub. 11; Judges 3:9-10; 1 Sam. 19:20-23; Mica 3:8) prophets, (Isa. 11:1-2; 61:1-3; Ezek. 36:25-29) and was given for specific tasks, endowing and empowering them with divine intervention with gifts, abilities, and powers to accomplish a work or task meant to glorify God. The actual term or phrase 'baptize in (or with) the Holy Spirit' first appeared in the words of John the Baptist, *I have baptized you with water, but He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). This is referred elsewhere with the phrase, *baptize with the Spirit*, (Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). However, the Greek syntax indicates, as Luke writes (who wrote Acts, inspired by God), this phrase referring to being *filled* with the Spirit, (which I will explain later in the article) as the first introductory experience of the spread of Holy Spirit. Paul uses this term for the understanding of how our regeneration, or conversion, comes. We will see, from a careful look into Scripture, that we can derive a clear understanding that the Holy Spirit works once for our salvation, and continues to dwell in us for our ministry empowerment. He does not come and go like a cat, even though that is how He seemed to work in the O.T.

The modern interpretation of this subject has been one of the most controversial teachings, and the cause of countless divisions in the church, in the 20th century. This new understanding (new, meaning less than 100 years, as opposed to 2000 years of consistent understanding from all the denominations, Catholicism to Reformed) finds its start during the turn of the 20th century from several tent revival meetings throughout the United States. These were led by uneducated, undiscerning, and self-proclaimed Bible teachers. Most of these teachers were kicked out of their churches and denominations

for heresy. During this time, a paradigm shift of understanding was initiated on how the invisible energy of God took place and was used in a believer. From this new theological model came the declaration of a new teaching for the church. (When you ever hear there is a new teaching, it is best to run and not walk to the nearest exit, because God's Word is clear, we are to add nothing to it or take away what is not there. Hence there are no new teachings! The Bible contains all the essential truth we need, we may get a better and deeper understanding as we grow and mature in the faith or we may find new and creative ways to apply God's truth; however, these will never be 'new' as in contradicting what is already revealed to us in Scripture (Rev. 22:18-19!) This new teaching was from the renderings of men, and not distilled from the Word of God. It had first started in, and was confined to, the *Charismatic* movement, and the various Pentecostal denominations. The mainline churches, as well as many of the Reformed churches, have opposed this 'new' thinking for decades. Over the last twenty years, this thinking has migrated into mainline Evangelical circles, and has touched the thinking of virtually every denomination, from Reformed, to Catholicism.

This phenomenon has its main roots in a particular revival in Los Angeles at the turn of the 20th century. The infamous event was called the *Azusa Street Revival*. This brief moment of church history has influenced tens of thousands of Christians, both positively and negatively. On the positive side, they awakened the Church to awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit. Up to this time, most Christian groups had ignored the work of the Spirit. In addition, several denominations, including the *Assemblies of God*, were birthed here. However, the cost has been high, and has produced a negative approach to Biblical understanding. This new understanding, as opposed to centuries of solid Biblical scholarship, continues to cause divisions between those who seek truth from the Word, and those who seek something new from experience. Thus, this new understanding and movement has also brought some false, misleading doctrines, based on experiences and not on sound Biblical interpretations. (If you are getting mad, hold on, read on, and you will see what they say versus what Scripture says.)

This revival attracted thousands of people who came seeking miracles, healings, new teachings, and glimpses of hope they needed for their lives in harsh, changing, and troubled times. But, under careful historical research and evidence, there was no *real* revival. Many prominent Christians, who came to check it out first hand, testified this at the time. These included theologians, and people from just about every denomination and walk of life at the time. Most of these did not go there to squash it, but to embrace it. After hearing the false teachings, and wild, uncontrolled hysteria, they were very disappointed. So since the dawn of the 20th century many Christians have embarked on historical revisionism, changing the history books to fit their current thinking. (This is changing historical facts and reading in events and interpretations of those events that did not take place to fit a political or personal agenda. This practice is very popular in secular historiography, but should never be sought by those who seek God's truth!) An event called *Azusa Street* did occur, but what really happened is quite different from what many people today think happened, including this writer. What actually took place was an over-emotional hysteria, similar to the *Toronto Blessing* phenomena a few years

back, that proved to be a *counterfeit* or fake revival. Both groups were induced by an overly emotional frenzy, coupled with zealous grandstanding by its leaders.

I am trying to be careful here in what I say, as ministering in the LA area for over 15 years has given me an ear-full from all sides of the issue. I have served on staff of charismatic churches, and I honestly believed that the *Azusa Street Revival*, was fact, and real. I even purchased one of the original advertising posters to decorate a youth room. On the other hand, professors in seminary were telling me it was a false revival, and that no historical evidence existed to show that it ever took place. Therefore, I set out to prove them wrong. After all, I had the poster! I did an extensive research report and checked out all of the local newspapers, denominational statements, and facts I could find, to prove that the revival did, in fact, take place. After months of careful research, personally checking every first-hand written account I could find, I was dismayed, as I did not find any support for my position--no evidence whatsoever! There was no collaboration from any source outside the current Pentecostal denominations, that looked to it as their birthplace. There were many support materials, but none of them were firsthand accounts; they were from articles written many years later. Yes, a meeting did occur, but the witnesses said the people were crazy, making up prophecies that did not come true, and claiming doctrine contrary to Scripture. It is extremely important to understand that if a prophecy is proclaimed, and it does not come true, this is a sure sign that it is not from God (Duet. 13:1-5; 18:15-22). Coupled with that, if it contradicts the Bible, then you know your proof is not from God!

Yet, somehow, it seems that God took this work of craziness and turned it for His glory, as we saw the birth of many denominations. There came an awareness that the Holy Spirit is alive, well, and working, even though it did not happen there at Azusa Street. Today, we can see how the *Toronto Blessing*, which had such extreme false teachings, had awoken most of the churches in the *Vineyard* denomination from their years of apostasy and blatant heresy in those false doctrines. Most of these, produced by self-proclaimed evangelists and teachers were leading people astray and away from the Bible, now many of them have saw their folly and have returned to the Word, the truth of Scripture.

I thought, *perhaps there are many reasons for these negative reports of Azusa Street; maybe it was too harsh of an experience, and people just could not accept it. Perhaps their belief systems could not handle it; or, as one person suggested to me, perhaps Satan worked hard to cover it up.* Since I was not there, I could not say for certain what really happened.

All I can do is research this well, and do an honest assessment based on facts, not merely what I want to find, or what the popular opinion is. I do know a meeting at Azusa Street took place, and it was called a Revival (it said so on my poster). There were many countless others during that time, all over the county. (By the way, according to church history, a real revival has never taken place as a result of our planning or declaring them to happen. Revival comes when God chooses to use us, when mature believers gather, who are surrendered in prayer and who seek His Will

and Truth! So, do not put a “Revival” sign on your church door, and proceed to go gather people. Search the Word and pray instead; then Revival may come!) Thus, I had to rely on what evidence was at hand. I have no “ax to grind” against any of the denominations who claim its validity. In fact, we have, at ITW, many Assemblies of God people working for this ministry who are wonderful and godly people (and they may be quite mad at me for this article). However, I can only tell you the facts, and what the Bible has to say. Even if it did take place, as many people claim, and as I once did, the main issue for us is, *how does that measure up with Scripture over and against any historical evidence*. Why the history lesson? Because, the popular understanding of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit traces its roots to Los Angeles and the fabled Azusa Street Revival. If its roots are in error, perhaps this way of thinking is in error, too.

Does this mean that because it had a *counterfeit birth*, so to speak, there is no such thing as a Baptism of the Holy Spirit? Contrary to what some fundamental groups teach, historically, and doctrinally, every church denomination over the last 2000 years has had the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in their doctrine, because it is clearly pronounced in the Bible. So, even with a *counterfeit birth* -*for its popular understanding, there really is such a thing! However, how we understand this, and when it appears, are at the root of the controversy.

The popular understanding in most Evangelical churches today about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is that it comes sometime after we have been converted. This understanding has changed drastically since the Azusa Street. Previously, all of the denominations held to views originating from the Reformation, where the Baptism of the Holy Spirit referred to the beginning of the Spirit’s constant, and continual presence, and work. Prior to the time of Pentecost, He only came now and then as revealed to us in the Old Testament. Many pastors and speakers today are basing their understanding of the Spirit’s working on their own experiences, as well as those of others, and not on a sound study in the Word--just as the leaders and people did at Azusa Street, and again at Toronto!

This popular teaching says that when someone becomes a Christian, they do not get all of the Holy Spirit--rather only a part of it, or, perhaps even none. The percentages and when and how the Spirit comes and empowers the believer depending on who is proclaiming this. These varying degrees are a matter of debate in Pentecostal circles. Then, sometime later, a Christian will have more of the Holy Spirit, Who comes upon them in greater power and authority, which is testified and confirmed by various ‘signs’ that manifest themselves in the Christian. Many teach that the most prevalent and important sign is *speaking in tongues*. So, the *when*, and *how much*, of the Holy Spirit we get becomes the great debate.

The Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements make two distinctions of how the Holy Spirit works. First, most of them teach that not everyone receives the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Although it is available to all who have enough faith, it is not ‘appropriated’ by all. In other words, it does not happen automatically for all Christians. Secondly, they further teach there is a time gap between a person’s conversion and

their receiving the Holy Spirit. This means there is a second work of Grace that is distinct and subsequent, which we need in order to be saved, because the first one was not sufficient. So, Grace alone, Christ's work, was not sufficient to save us! In addition, the only way to be sure you are saved is in the manifestation of a signed gift, such as prophecy or tongues.

Now, you should start to get alarmed. I need to point out that not all Charismatics and Pentecostals teach this, but it is becoming a more prevalent view. So, where do they get this? They get it from the Book of Acts. They make these statements because of the Christians in Acts who were already Christians, then, after a time gap, received the Holy Spirit. The confirmation was that they *spoke in tongues*. So, we have to ask, *Is this normative in redemptive history? Is this how the Spirit works in us today? In all ages? In all parts of the book of Acts? Does this have support in other New Testament books, or in the early church?* Then, we have Christians who make such claims as, *I was a Christian for so and so many years, then I got the power of the Spirit*. Scripture and experience seem to testify to their position. Or does it?

If this is taught in Scripture, and is so clear, as they say, why is there so much controversy? It is a basic misunderstanding and breaking of the rules on how to study and interpret Scripture, taking passages out of their historical context. We will explore the *how* and *why* later. Let us keep digging.

Even though the popular understanding is that He comes later, the Bible clearly proclaims the Holy Spirit comes before, in fact, way before! One of His roles, His essential role is actually to reveal and make known God to us through what Christ has done, which is called *Divine Illumination*. He works to save, and sanctify us. This work of the Spirit becomes complete when we invite Christ into our lives (John 3:3-6; 16: 13-15; Romans 5:4-5; 8: 14; 26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16; 12:3; Galatians 4:6; 2 Pet. 1:21). The Baptism of the Holy Spirit means that when we become Christians, the Spirit indwells in us, and empowers us for ministry, whereas in the Old Testament Covenant, they only had Him indeterminately and intermittently. We now by what Christ has done have Him constantly!

These misunderstandings, from the popular perception, are compounded further as people compare their experiences and feelings to those of one another, rather than searching the Scriptures, as we are called to do (Acts 17:10-12). Therefore, when people claim the Spirit comes later, their ideas come from false or misunderstood teachings, and over-enthusiasm, which is compounded further by relating it to their own experiences; thus, causing the misunderstanding and propagation of this view.

I need to point out here that we can never discredit the experience of a person in his/her growth in Christ, since the Holy Spirit is indeed active in the growing Believer's life; He is at work, but we can give a proper understanding of what this means from the teachings of the Word, not from our experiences alone. All too often, we confuse our excitement and experience with fact, and read into them what is just not there. Therefore, emotional experience in a church service is confused with more power from

the Spirit, not considering that a similar, even identical emotional experience can be seen at a sporting event. Furthermore, any good stage magician or hypnotist can easily duplicate the manifestations they claim to experience. Just go to Las Vegas. These experiences are often elevated in believability over Scripture. In addition, when Christians *feel* more of the Spirit working in them to a greater or lesser degree, it is because they are either more receptive, yielding, and open to Him, or they have previously closed themselves off to Him. He was there all along in the same power and authority, but was blocked by pride and busyness. So, does that mean there is no extra outpouring of the Spirit on us after we become a Christian? Well, hold on, and we will get there.

In light of all this, what does the book of Acts really teach? Our Pentecostal friends are somewhat correct! There is a distinction between our Regeneration (God saving us from our sins through Christ's work of Grace, giving us our new life) and the work of the Spirit in our Sanctification (John 15:26; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Gal. 4:6; Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). Both are works of the Spirit. But the second work is not about grace or salvation, nor is the evidence of the signed gifts necessary as confirmation.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is often misrepresented or confused as being only extra power for our salvation after proclaiming our faith before. They do not see what is clearly revealed in Scripture that we already have Him at work in us when we accept Christ by faith alone. Scripture does teach us that the Holy Spirit can, and does, for God's timing and purpose, give us extra empowering for working in His service and glory. But, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not always that extra empowerment; it is He, Who is already at work in us. How wonderful that we have Him; we need not wait for some special outpouring. He is already here amongst us, seeking for us to grow in faith and maturity, enabling us to glorify Christ and proclaim His Word! This should excite us!

We need to understand that in Biblical interpretation, we must never *assume* that a specific phrase such as the *Baptism of the Holy Spirit* means precisely the same thing every place in which it occurs. Good interpretation lets a word or phrase mean whatever the context indicates. Remember, Greek is the most precise language ever conceived. So, the words, grammar, and what comes before and after, the context, gives us a very 'precise' meaning that may not be as clear in English, a very 'imprecise' language. It is important, for proper understanding of Scripture, not to try to make the same phrase mean the same thing everywhere, but rather dig deep in the language and context to see if it has the same meaning. What is the authentic meaning or expression of that phrase? Romans and Acts do not use the exact phrase, *baptized with the Spirit* for the same meaning (1 Corinthians 12:12,13). The Gospels use it as the promise of His coming; Acts uses it to show us how He comes, and Paul uses it to show how He unifies all who believe. These are stages in His coming; first, the prophecy; second, His coming; and thirdly, the unity we have in Him since Pentecost.

A common question arises from this: Does this mean that some Christians have more of the Spirit than others? This is of debate amongst Reformed theologians. But, the confusion is derived from that fact that some Christians become more mature and viable because they are responding and yielding to the Spirit, whereas other Christians

ignore His illuminations and remain *pew sitters*. Both groups have the same Spirit and power availed to them. One group responds to Him, while the other ignores Him! In saying that, Scripture also teaches God can and does, for His purpose and glory, give us extra Spirit empowerment for specific, temporary tasks that will serve and glorify Him.

Now, for what everyone has been writing in and asking for: Is there one word in Acts that tells us that the popular understating of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is normative? Do we receive the Spirit as a second work of Grace, after becoming Christians? The answer is, No! Read the passages in their historical context. This argument comes because of silence on the subject in the first few chapters in Acts, but more pronounced in other NT passages. So, what does this tell us?

All these various ways recounting the coming of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts originate from six main stories. In every one of them, the coming of the Spirit is with signs or effects. We also see, in these passages, an outpouring from one people group to another as the Spirit spreads about, from His first manifestation to the early church of Jews in Acts 1:8, to the Gentile world in a step by step manner. Previously, before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was not available to all, nor was He omnipresent, or 'everywhere'(Psalm 51:11; Isa 63:10-11). He, being fully God, was obviously capable of being omnipresent, but He chose only to be available when the need arose (see our article on the *Trinity* in the Doctrine channel). He came when God directed. Now, as a Christian we receive Him, and continually have Him living within us!

1. The early Christians were led to Christ by Christ, Himself, or His disciples. Christ had His disciples wait for the Spirit, and did not give the Spirit until Pentecost.
2. Acts tells us that the Jews received the Spirit first (Acts 2).
3. We see three more episodes of the Pentecost (coming of the Spirit), with the Samaritans (Acts 8), the Cornelius household (Acts 10), and then the Ephesians (Acts 19). It starts with the 'chosen ones,' the Jews, who held the responsibility of being evangelists to the world (Gen 12:1-3). Next, the God fearing Greeks, then the Samaritans, and the rest of the Gentile world.

Take a careful look in Scripture for more proof:

1. Luke 24:47-49 tells us that Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Spirit. The Spirit would give them power to be Christ's witnesses. The point and reason for being empowered was to serve Jesus, not to bring attention and glory to themselves.
2. Acts 1:4-5 tells us that the early Christians needed verification that Jesus was really alive and victorious over death, so God caused His Spirit's inaugural commission to come first upon the disciples in His holy city of Jerusalem. Pentecost was the event of the first introduction of the permanence of the Holy

Spirit for all Believers. It also took place to give them further instructions about serving in the kingdom of God. This was their *baptism by the Holy Spirit* as promised by John the Baptist and the OT prophets (Judges 3:10; 1 Sam. 10:6; Psalm 51:11; Isa. 11:2; 63:10-11; Luke 3:3-6). It refers to the coming and staying of the Spirit in Believer's lives. No longer do we have Him coming and going; we have Him continually!

3. Acts 2:1-12 tells us that a *rush of a mighty wind filled all the house*. The disciples were all gathered together. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in 'other tongues,' that is, languages they did not previously know, so that the other people around could understand what was being said (Ex. 3:2; 13:21; 24:17; 40:38; 1 Kings 19:11-13; Ez. 37:9-13; John 3:8).
4. Acts 2:13-21 tells us that the early Christians were mocked because they appeared to be in a drunken frenzy. Peter, in verse 14, gives an explanation of what was happening, that it was the baptism with the Holy Spirit, by quoting Joel (Joel 2:28-32; 3:1-5).
5. People quickly point out 1 Corinthians 12:13 as their proof that there is a separation between conversion and receiving the Spirit, but this is not the same thing as what is happening here in Acts. The 1 Corinthians passage refers to the unity of all Believers, through circumcision that unites them to Christ. This includes us today, as we are part of His body and with Him for eternal life.
6. Acts 1 and 2 do not tell us that the Baptism of the Spirit is a conversion or some kind of rebirth (John 13:10; 15:3; Romans 8:9; John 3:5)! Rather, the focus was on the promise in Joel 2. The central point, reason, and purpose for us to have the Spirit working in us, is to be empowered for ministry. That is what is described as a *FILLING*. This is always associated, in Scripture, with extraordinary power for ministry, doing something to further the Gospel and cause of Christ. It is never meant to draw attention to us or to put on some kind of show!

The popular understanding of being *Baptized with the Holy Spirit* is when a person, who is already a Believer, receives the Spirit again, or for the first time. However, this view is not normative in Scripture. We can be given more extraordinary spiritual power intended for Christ-centered ministry that exalts Him, and not ourselves. But, we receive the Spirit when we proclaim our faith in Christ as Lord. So, when you feel there might be more of Him working in you, *Great! Praise God!* However, He does not come upon you more. Rather, you become more aware and yielding to Him. You are more aware of His presence in you as you become more mature in the faith through the Spiritual disciplines of Scripture, worship, and prayer. Furthermore, there is ample Scriptural evidence that He can give you extra spiritual gifts and more power for specific tasks as you grow and become more faithful. However, remember, these are to glorify Him and are not part of your salvation or for your personal edification. When you become a

Christian, you already have the Spirit (unless you were in the early church and He had not come yet; if so, you would be very old today!)

More Scriptures on which to meditate:

1. Acts 4:8 –13 tells us that Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit to the point that the Jewish leaders were amazed at his boldness.
2. Acts 4:31 tells us that the disciples were praying, and the place where they were was shaken, and they were all *filled* with the Holy Spirit. The result was, they spoke the Word of God with extraordinary boldness and Christ-exalting power, so that others could understand, each in his own language. *Tongues* are never to give you, or even your church, glory; their purpose is to allow others to understand, and the occurrences are very rare (the real ones that is; many people fake it!). There is no other purpose in Scripture for *tongues* except for a form of special prayer between the Spirit in you and God, that you do not utter by yourself (Acts 2:3-11; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 12:10; 12:28-30; 13:1; 8; 14:5 –6; 14:18-14:23; 14:39; Rev. 16:10)!
3. Acts 6 tells us how Stephen, who was full of faith and the Holy Spirit, manifested power, and did signs and wonders among the people. We also see that when he spoke, the leaders could not resist his wisdom from the Spirit. He was an example of having a fullness that gave him extraordinary power for glorifying Christ. Notice Stephen was not glorified; he even died!
4. Acts 9:17-22; 13:9-11 tells us that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit at his conversion, and immediately spoke to proclaim Christ as Lord with such astonishing power, that, later, the Jews of Damascus were confounded, because before this, Paul had them imprisoned and killed. A few years later, Paul was filled again with the Holy Spirit when he spoke to Elymas, the magician, and God gave him the power to blind Elymas.
5. Acts 11:24 tells us that Barnabas was filled with the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people responded and were *added to the Lord*.

As we can see clearly from Scripture, being baptized with the Holy Spirit refers to our receiving the Spirit when we become a Christian. In addition, it can refer to extra empowerment for ministry, not a second work of Grace. For the first few Christians in Acts, the Spirit was not given yet, so they received Him later. That does not mean we do the same, since He was given over 2000 years ago. Also, the Spirit comes upon the Believer when a committed Christian is filled with the Holy Spirit, thus receives extraordinary power for ministry that witnesses to and glorifies Christ as Lord to all the nations (Luke 24:49). As you can see, it can easily be confusing if you do not read the passages in their context. Many Bible teachers say the Spirit comes later for us, too, thus causing confusion of the issue.

The Spirit is never used in Scripture as a tool to glorify self or to grandstand! His purpose is for ministry, and empowering the mature Believer with more ability to get the job done. Not all Christians will receive His extra empowerment, nor does it last continually. These extra empowerments have nothing to do with our saving faith. Christians who receive them are no better than those who do not, as we all are His children. We all have the same Spirit working in us, unifying, and helping us to be sanctified.

The Pentecostal understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a definite second experience, after conversion, that contributes to, or is our saving Grace (depending on whom you follow), is not normative for us since Pentecost. They further say that we are to seek it, and enjoy it as a blessing and anointing, manifested by *speaking in tongues*. This understanding is not necessarily so either (Acts 8:14-17)! Yes, this is found in Scripture, but always remember the context. If you grew up Pentecostal or are part of a denomination that teaches this, you are probably getting mad at me, but take your mind to God's Word, not the words of men! Here are further Scriptures to consider:

6. Acts 8:4-8; 14-19, tells us that the Samaritans were already converted to Christianity, then there was a second experience of the Holy Spirit that they did not have before. So, the point in this passage is that Spirit had not *fallen on them* before they *received* Christ. How do we know they were Believers? Because it is inferred by this text as well as in other passages (Acts 8:39; 16:14; 19:5).
7. Acts 11:16-18; Acts 19:2 tells us that this passage is a quote of John's baptism, foretelling the Spirit that was to come (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). However, many people proclaim these passages as normative for us today--to have the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second experience after conversion. However, they do not see the text plainly!
8. At Paul's conversion, there was amazing boldness and empowering given to him to change 180 degrees--from a fighter of Christ, to a proclaimer, and a witness of Christ to people right there on the spot (9:17 - 22)! This is an example of the Spirit's extra empowering remember Paul had already accepted the Lord, and already had the Spirit in him.
9. Ephesians 5:18 tells us that we need to be filled with the Spirit. So, what does this mean? Being filled with the Spirit basically means having great joy from our commitment to God (Nehemiah 8:10). It also means we are to seek His power with joy, for the overcoming of our sins, for the courage to witness, and for the job of ministry, even to people we do not like. This joy means *radiant joy*, meaning we can be filled up with the joy that flows among the Persons of the Holy Trinity. That is the very love God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit (One God with three personalities or manifestations, not three Gods) have for one another. This Joy will overflow from us to the others around us! This Joy becomes sealed in us as we mature in the faith and as we are filled with His Word (John 14:16-26; 16:12-15; 17:17; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Col. 3:15-16). It is the

power to enjoy Him in worship, as a lifestyle that will affect all aspects of our life as well as the others around us, and then will empower us for His service, for His glory. This is what we are to seek so it can be repeatable; we are not to seek it for our betterment or attention, rather for Christ's sake! We are to be filled with Joy, by being in His Word, because we are in Christ! This is the extra power He gives us to glorify and serve Him!

Again, I need to point out that all of these passages can be confusing. You must read them in their context! Do not read into them what is not there, or take away what is there (Rev. 22:18-19). Commit to see what the Word says, and not what you think it should say, or what others have told you it says. Scripture is plainly true. It means what it says, and says what it means (95% of the time, parts of Revelation and Daniel are an exception). There are no hidden meanings, no new teachings, no codes, and no deeper truths, other than our ability to comprehend and understand further as we grow and mature in Christ!

To understand this further, allow me to give you a general overview of:

How the Holy Spirit works in Acts

1. The Holy Spirit endows Believers with the power to spread the Gospel of Christ (Acts 1:8).
2. The Holy Spirit is given to all Believers as a gift (Acts 2:38; 5:32; 8:18-20; 10:45; 11:17; 11:17; 15:8).
3. The Holy Spirit falls upon people in consecutive people groups starting with, and pointing back to Pentecost (Acts 1:8; 2:38; 8:15-17; 10:44-47; 11:15; 19:6).
 - a. The Holy Spirit is poured out on the Jews (Acts 2:4-21).
 - b. The Samaritans (Acts 8).
 - c. The Gentiles through Cornelius' household (Acts 10:45-48; 11:16).
 - d. The Ephesians (Acts 19).
4. *Speaking in tongues* coincides with praising and glorifying God as an extra ability and power to witness to others in their own language (Acts 1:8; 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6).
5. Acts 5:29-32 makes it clear that obedience to God is a mark of His presence, not tongues!

So, the Holy Spirit comes into this world permanently, starting with the Chosen Ones, the Jews, who held the promise that would be shared to the rest of the world, and who also held the responsibility to be evangelists to the world (Gen 12:1-3). Then, He went to the God-fearing Greeks, then to the Samaritans, and then to the rest of the

Gentile world. (Yes, this is the third time I have said this, but most people still do not get it!)

What we see in the book of Acts are diagrams, or illustrations, of what the Spirit's power looks like as it comes upon different groups. It comes with *speaking in tongues* for some, but not all (2:4; 10:46; 19:6), and always for a purpose for non-believers, or to help others understand in their own language. (Again I cannot emphasize this more: *Tongues* are never said in Scripture to be in and for itself, such as being a sign of blessing for a church, or that a person has a special insight or message directly from God that is not contained in the Bible. When this happens, this is not of God, but of human pride and grandstanding (or a work of Satan!) The Spirit comes with the gift of prophecy for some, but not all (2:17; 19:6; cf. 10:46). He comes with overflowing praise of God's glory and greatness (2:11; 10:46), never to lift people up, or to distract from Christ. He comes with a call for obedience and the formation of our character to follow God's will (5:32). He comes, giving us courage and boldness to witness and serve (2:14-36; 9:17-22). And, He brings us the power through various gifts, (Heb. 2:4) miracles, (Gal. 3:5) signs, and wonders, (Acts 6:8) that point to Him and give God the glory.

How the Holy Spirit works in the rest of the New Testament:

1. The Holy Spirit is our support (Mark 4:37-41; Matt. 14:28-33; John 20:19-22).
2. The Holy Spirit imparts new life to us, is essential to our salvation, and sensitizes us to God (John 3:3-6; 16; 1 Cor. 12:3).
3. The Holy Spirit is our companion, and always indwells in us (John 14: 1-3; 15-17; 23; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 3:16-17; Heb. 13:5-6).
4. The Holy Spirit is our Advocate (John 14:16-17).
5. The Holy Spirit declares the truth about Christ (John 16:13-14).
6. The Holy Spirit enables us to minister and witness (Acts 1:8).
7. The Holy Spirit is God, and powerful. He is able to act in power and strength through us to do what is needed (Acts 1:8; 4:31; 10:45).
8. The Holy Spirit pours out God's Love to us (Rom. 5:4-5; Gal. 5:22-23).
9. The Holy Spirit is essential for our sanctification, growth in maturity, and faith in Christ (Rom. 7:21-21; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Thess. 2:23).
10. The Holy Spirit indwells (Rom. 8:9-11).
11. The Holy Spirit bears inner witness that we are His children (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 4:6).
12. The Holy Spirit intercedes and pleads for us, in our weakness, in our behalf, before God. (Rom. 8:26).
13. The Holy Spirit gives us gifts to use in His service to glorify Christ, to build His church, and to spread the Gospel (1 Cor. 12:4-11).
14. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to exhibit godly character (Gal. 5:22-23).
15. The Holy Spirit enables us to give God the glory (Eph. 3:16).
16. The Holy Spirit regenerates the Christian (Titus 3:5)
17. The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21).

The Spirit initiates our salvation, as that is His role; this is the true Baptism of the Holy Spirit! The Spirit can also call a person who is already a Christian, but has been relaxed or distant in the faith, to wake up. This is called rededication. The Holy Spirit empowers us for ministry with gifts that can grow as we grow in the faith. Also, we can be renewed in our faith, be enlarged in our faith. This is called *sanctification*. It is these last three aspects that people misinterpret as a Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Maybe it is semantics; maybe it can be a total disregard of true Biblical understanding, depending on what the person believes. But, the fact is, there is no gap between conversion and the Baptism of the Spirit. The only gap that may be is that we are called before the foundation of the world, and then we make a profession of faith. So, actually, the Spirit comes first, then the conversion!

Allow me to make this clear. There is no place in the book of Acts, or any place in Scripture that tells us that when we receive the Spirit, we all will speak in tongues or prophesy. Paul makes this very clear in 1 Corinthians 12 -14! The point in Acts 1:8 is that when the Spirit comes upon us, we will receive His power; and His power will enable us to serve Him in evangelizing the whole world. That is the main point. Unfortunately, people get so wrapped up in the *tongues* and the *Spirit baptism* thing, they forget the main call we are given, and they forget what it is all about! Satan gets us so riled up over nothing and we are so busy fighting amongst ourselves, we have no time or energy to do what God has called us to do!

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is real, and is for us today. It is His empowerment for us to do ministry. He was the inaugural endowment of the Church in permanence and unity. That is, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was the initiation of the Spirit to come upon and stay with the universal body of Christ. The Spirit in the early church empowered the disciples and Christians for ministry, just as He does today. He also has many other roles that we have seen.

So, to answer the question, "Did you receive the Baptism of the Spirit when you became a Christian?" you first need to ask the person what they mean by the term, *Baptism of the Spirit*. "Yes," is the answer, as you have received the Spirit even before you accepted Christ by faith (John 3:3-6; 16; 16:13-14; 1 Cor. 12:3). Because the Spirit introduces us to Christ's work before we are even evangelized, so we are able and willing to believe and except. And yes He may give you extra gifts and power for His glory in ministry when God deems it necessary, when you yield yourself to Him, and when you are mature enough to handle it. If you are not sure if He is at work in you, if you feel there has been some kind of delay or a blockage in the manifestation of God's fullness in your life, then you need to seek for His fullness through prayer. Perhaps sin or your refusing to surrender has blocked your awareness. Seek His character (See our articles on *Drawing near to the Heart of God*, *Are you a Character* and *What is Discipleship*) to help you grow. If you feel you are growing in maturity, maybe you just do not realize He is at work in you, doing more in your life than you think.

Numbers 11; Joel 2:28-29; John 7:37-39; Acts 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1;14:26-33

The popular understanding of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit has its roots in mythical history as well as in Scriptural passages that have been used out of context. People who hold to these views cause confusion for others, and lead them to rely on experiences rather than on the Scriptures. We also saw that the Spirit is indeed at work in us. He indwells Believers, who do not have to wait on or seek Him. There is no *second outpouring* contributing to our salvation or sanctification. When we receive Christ, we also receive His Spirit.

The confusion comes from the teaching of some that we have to wait for the Baptism of the Spirit, and that it comes when Christians *feel* more of the Spirit working in them. As the Spirit works to a greater or lesser degree, it is because one is more receptive to Him, yielding, open to Him, or because one is closing himself off from Him. He is there all along, but is often blockaded when our pride and busyness close Him from our view. When we, as Christians become more mature and viable, the Spirit is stronger from our perspective because we are responding and yielding to the Spirit. It is like saying the sun rises and sets, when, in fact, the earth orbits around it. The Spirit is weak, from our perspective, when we see Christians ignore His illuminations and remain *pew sitters*. Both groups have the same Spirit and power available to them. One group responds to Him, while the other ignores Him!

My purpose in this article is to help guide you in a further understanding of how to apply His Spirit in your life for living and ministry. I will also attempt to answer some of the questions that have come forth concerning this subject, and give further clarification from last month's article. My purpose in this article is to help guide you in a better understanding of the Holy Spirit!

Is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit found in Scripture?

Yes, it is Biblical, but, unfortunately, many people today have misrepresented what it means. Popular understanding is that it is discerned from feelings and opinions, and not from the Word!

To further clarify last month's article, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit does occur in the New Testament, and it is for us today. However, the concept itself occurs very infrequently. There are only three references to it in the Gospels. In Matt. 3:11 and the parallels, John the Baptist announces that Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit *and with fire*. It is referred to in Acts 1:4-8, where our Lord promises the disciples they will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Additionally, in 1 Cor. 12:13, Paul affirms that all Christians were baptized *by one Spirit*. This means the Baptism of the Holy Spirit refers to the initiation of the Spirit to empower the church and indwell the Believers. It can also refer to God's giving extra power for ministry and service, for His glory. Remember, these are not for self-gratification, but rather for further empowerment for ministry. Remember this important point also; we all, as Christians, already have the Spirit. There is no second outpouring for us today following our salvation; this occurs only in the account in the book of Acts, when He first came in permanence.

So, by inference, we learn that all of the Believers in Acts received the Holy Spirit, from one people group to another (Acts 1:8; 2:38; 8:15-17; 10:44-47; 11:15; 19:6). We also see concentric circles of the outpouring of God's Grace from group to group, as the Gospel was testified to that group! The biggest debate in the early Church was who could be a Christian! They first thought only the Jews could receive Christ. God intervened to say that everyone could, so Peter was challenged, and Paul was sent out to the Gentiles. And, we see this with the Samaritans, since they are half-Jews. After that, the Gentiles were reached. God then outpoured His Spirit to all of God's people--all cultures and lands.

We do not see a connection in Scripture, after the first spreading of the Spirit, that teaches that after we become Christians, there is a gap until sometime later, and if we are lucky, or pious, we may receive the Spirit. When we become Christians, we instantaneously receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. It does not come later. Often we receive an emotional response, and misinterpret it as being the Spirit. Yes, the Spirit can be working in you hard and fast, but that does not mean you did not have Him before, unless you just received your faith and accepted Christ in you. It would be like buying a car, driving it around for a few years, and then getting a tune-up. When you notice that it is running better, you say, *Hey I never had an engine before now!* Silly isn't it? So is misrepresenting the Word.

Why is this only a new phenomenon, and why did the church ignore this before?

Until the first part of the 20th century, most theologians, beside Jonathon Edwards, paid little attention to the term the *Baptism of the Holy Spirit*. The so-called *neglect* the church, as a whole, has taken, has some very good Biblical reasons. The *Baptism of Holy Spirit* is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as He first appeared for His permanent reign. The *Baptism of the Holy Spirit* is only one of several designations and works of the Spirit, and is perhaps the least important work, referring to His extra empowerment versus the important work of our salvation. So, there are many more important works of the Spirit that should take our attention.

Is Charismatic and Pentecostal theology wrong?

Any theory or theology that is not rooted in Scripture in a clear and logical way is wrong! We are all Christians, in union with Christ, as long as we hold to the main tenets of the faith (see our statement of faith on the **About** channel). So, in the Christian community, we have differing opinions (see why Christians disagree in our **Doctrine** Channel). The main contention is the theologians who place the emphasis on Scripture, and not on experience. Reformed and Conservative Evangelicals say that Pentecostal theology misses that we are saved by faith alone, and when this happens, we receive the Spirit, not later on. The Spirit's all-important work is when He initiates our salvation, then comes to reside in us as we become Believers. Because they are misrepresenting the Spirit by placing the emphasis on experience, and miss His vital role in our conversion, the result is that many are led to believe in false doctrines as a result

Christians are looking to personalities to lead them, not relying on their own study, and solid, historical, Biblically true, doctrine.

Pentecostal theology insists that our initial conversion is not good enough to save us and we need a second experience. They teach (again not all teach this, and it is in hot debate depending on whom you read, and to whom you listen) that it is possible for a person to have been Born Again, and not have ever received the Holy Spirit, while other Charismatic groups teach that some Christians will never receive the Spirit! There is, of course, much debate in Charismatic circles as to when and to what extent the Spirit is given. Some teach that the disciples before Pentecost had *received the Holy Spirit already, but they yet needed the baptism in the Holy Spirit*, which flies in the face of the actual reading of the passage.

Then, we have the confusion in some Reformed circles that say, "The New Testament teaches that all Believers experience Holy Spirit baptism," thus there is no extra empowerment for ministry. They do this by confusing the coming of the permanence of the Spirit, as foretold in Joel 2:28-32, with the extra empowerment that God gives us for ministry as stated in other passages in Acts that we looked at last month. The universality of the gift of the Spirit was one of the main points in the prophesy of Joel (as well as what will happen in the last days), and Moses' longing (Num. 11:29), which was fulfilled at Pentecost. In the Old Testament, the Spirit and His gift were distributed only to chosen individuals for God's work and glory. The Spirit would be poured out on all Believers. The Spirit would come not only on the leaders, but also on the servants, the every-day folks. Thus, all of the people of God would be His prophets, speaking forth to His glory and wonderful works.

Then the Dispensationalists take it further, cutting God's power and sovereignty into pieces. Now that I have *ticked off* two-thirds of the Christian community, just go through the passages for yourself that were listed in last month's article. Look to Scripture, and see for yourselves what is taught. It is much better for you to seek God's truth, rather than reading into the Bible your own presumptions, your own thoughts, or what you have heard, and then not do careful exegeses of what is actually true of the Word.

However, with that said, what the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have done positively is open our minds to the power and works of the Holy Spirit that we too often have ignored. Edwards has a masterful work on the subject that I have drawn from to produce this article, which is the quintessential work on the subject We can take the ideas of renouncing all sin, obeying all of God's commands, passionately thirsting for the Spirit, and then ask, and really expect, God to work, because these are in Scripture. So, make sure you adhere to what Scripture teaches, both on these things, and all things!

Why do the Charismatic and Pentecostal teach their aberrant Theology?

I have no idea. I guess people are not comfortable just to take God's Word for it; they have to, for ego sake, add in their two cents worth. Soon, another person comes to do the same, and this builds to the point that people are quoting one another; their loyalty goes to the wisdom of man and not to God. But, this phenomenon (bad teaching) is not limited to the Charismatic and Pentecostals. All Christians do this to an extent, even the Reformed denominations, because pride and positioning caters to our whims, not to solid reasoning and the search of the Word. I also want to make this clear; I am not putting the Charismatic and Pentecostal *down*. It is only when there are teachings and proclamations that are not from Scripture (from anyone!) and are proclaimed as if it is from Scripture, that it is wrong!

What does the Bible say about Tongues?

This gift is a matter of hot dispute among many theologians in the Charismatic and Reformed camps. So, all I can do is show you what the Word has to say, not what people think it should say! A Biblical definition of *tongues* is, *speaking in a language that you do not know, that you have not learned, so that another person can hear the gospel or message from God through you in their language. Tongues can also be in the form of a prophecy, where another person will interpret through God's empowerment what the speaker of the proclamation said, and the message will never ever contradict Scripture!* Scripture also tells us that only one to three people will speak in *tongues*, never more than that. If it is any different, it is not from God, so beware! There is no indication from Scripture that this gift has ended, even though many fundamental and dispensational groups believe that.

The New Testament does not convey any instances of *tongues* being used to evangelize, although this is one of its roles. There is also no indication that the 3,000 converts at Pentecost received the gift of *tongues*. Biblical *tongues* will never be said without an interpretation, nor will they ever glorify the speaker! Not all people will speak in *tongues*. It is the least of the gifts. Paul lists *tongues* twice with the other Spiritual Gifts, and places *tongues* and their interpretation at the very bottom of the scale of need and importance, which makes you wonder why people are so zealous about it (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30)!

Paul rebuked the Corinthians' teaching, which is the same as the modern Pentecostal view, as an improper interpretation due to their over-zealous desire to peruse *tongues* and not the Word. As both groups looked to *tongues* and experiences over and even against what the Scriptures have to say. In so doing they carefully studied *tongues* and not the Word. Most Charismatic and Pentecostal commentators teach that the Corinthian *tongues* were not the same as the *tongues* at Pentecost. They believe that the Corinthians *tongues* were *overjoyed* outbursts of prayer and praise that were out of control. Paul attacks the misuse of *tongues* when they become unorganized and incoherent. Ironically, these *utterances* often become strange and incoherent emotional hysteria in the very churches who say this. The irony continues with the speaker's or leader's own grandstanding manipulations.

The word *tongues*, in the Greek language--a very clear, real, and stable language--is not ecstatic speech (a dead language, understood by no one except God, and that comes with extra emotionalism and hysteria to make it more real) as many teach today. The argument can be made for speaking in *tongues* to God, so that only He understands, but Paul warns us not to lean or dwell on this (1 Cor. 14:26-33). Also, Paul cites its use in Romans (Rom. 8:26), as more of the Spirit strengthening us, not necessarily giving us the words to give to God. Yes, in 1 Corinthians 14:2, Paul explains it as a communication to God, but also notice his emphasis on its orderly use! Order is the key, and the emphasis to glorify God is essential for worship. To have the view that *tongues* are essential for the Christian is to perform *made-up-in-the-mind* exegesis.

Too many Bible commentators like to pull from Scripture what is not there. God's Word is crystal clear in these passages. Also, the word, *mysterious*, refers to the speaker of the *tongues* not knowing the language, not that the language itself is mysterious! Paul also uses the word, *mysterious*, to proclaim divine truth not yet disclosed to us, which is in the context of prophecy in First Corinthians. Some argue that Paul refers to an intimate prayer between the Spirit and God. If that were so, then you would not utter it, since you are not the Spirit, or God! However, the Greek is clear that it refers to human languages that are known, not dead, or mysterious. And, of course, God is the principle audience, especially in worship!

When *tongues* become incomprehensible to the speaker or the audience, then it is the result of misplaced and uncontrolled emotionalism only, and not of God (1 Cor. 14:4-14). Remember, God is a God of order and unity (1 Cor. 14:26-33)! Thus, the gift of *tongues* should not be sought. However, if it comes, welcome it, seek its interpretation, and search the Scriptures (Isa. 28:11; Joel 2:28-30; Acts 2:3-36; 4:31; 8:17; 9:17-18; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 12:10; 12:28-30; 13:1; 8; 14:5-6; 14:1-39; 14:39; Rev. 16:10)!

What about being slain in the Spirit?

This has no Biblical reference other than with Ananias and Sapphira, and I do not think you want to line up for that. This practice originates in the kingdom of the cults, and any good hypnotist can easily do this. People are succumbed by social and psychological manipulation!

How can we get a proper view of receiving the Spirit from God's Word?

I have to begin this by saying; *there is nothing we can do to earn favor with Christ. If that were so, the cross would have been unnecessary.* But, after saying that, and to remove any confusion that we do not earn our salvation or receiving His Spirit, we are still to respond to His call and leading. Not because we have to, but because of a prime desire to do so, out of a response of gratitude for what Christ has done for us. Because of what Christ has done, we should be seeking, listening to His Word, and applying His character in our lives. Then, perhaps, if it is His will and purpose, we will receive more empowerment of the Holy Spirit for ministry. Thus, we can earn more

favor to be better used by God through our faith, trust and obedience, but we cannot earn more of His love or our salvation.

Pentecostal and Charismatic theologies place conditions on receiving the Spirit. That is, if we wish to partake in all of the blessings of the Christian life and what we have been promised, faith alone is not enough! This is in direct opposition to the teachings of the Reformers, and most importantly the Word of God. So, to seek God's power in their view, we have to renounce all sin, obey all of God's commands, passionately thirst for the Spirit, then ask, and really expect. If it does not happen, it is because we did not have enough faith. Now, you may wonder and say, *Hey! Wait up! These seem good! We should do all those!* You would be correct. We should! However, it should not be done to gain more grace, salvation, or to get a special blessing, because that has already been given to us. It should rather be as a response of gratitude. Because of what Christ has done, I will lead my life to please Him, not just to get something, even if it is more ministry power.

Do not take the radical departure from *sola fide*, that we are saved by faith alone, by Christ's work alone. We do not need to seek special anointing or Holy Spirit baptisms as a means of Grace, because we already have it. So do not teach *if you do not speak in tongues you are not a real Christian!* This thinking is rooted in imagination, not in the Word! If you are a Bible teacher, your responsibility is to teach truth from careful study, not jump to conclusions or onto the latest bandwagon of false doctrines! You are to represent Christ, not promote yourself!

What this means for us, the role of the Spirit, and the main things you need to concern yourself with and ask:

1. Is the Spirit at work in my life, helping me to produce obedience and faith?
2. Is the Spirit at work in my life, helping me to subdue sin, and moving me to produce more character? Is He removing from me what is in Galatians 5:19-21 and producing what is in Galatians 5:22-26? These are the Fruits of the Spirit, which are the evidence of the Spirit at work, happening in me! Notice what is missing! *Tongues!*
3. Is the Spirit at work in my life, helping me produce praise in all aspects and moments of my life, not just on Sundays from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.? Is my life filled with Him, modeling His character so my heart, mind, and mouth worship Jesus Christ?
4. Is the Spirit at work in my life, helping me produce courage, so that I am overcoming my fears--even taking risks for the cause of Christ?
5. Is the Spirit at work in my life, helping me produce an attitude of what is really important? Am I seeing that speaking in *tongues*, and the gift of prophecy are not significant, as compared to Galatians 5:22-26, that growing in maturity and

character is important, and that we should not even seek *tongues* (1 Cor. 14)? Yes, *tongues* are still for today, and are a sign of God's grace. However, the other gifts are much more precious and pleasing to Christ, and are real evidence that the power of God is working in us! If *tongues* happen, then embrace it, as called for in Scripture. Just do not go out and seek it!

Here is what you need to do as outlined by Scripture to receive His empowerment for ministry:

Step 1: Accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior!

Sounds like, *duh!* But, remember, you cannot accomplish anything in the Kingdom of God without God working in you (Rom. 10:5-13)! You have to be the people of God to do the work of God. This is the first, essential step towards receiving His Spirit; you have to be right with God! You have to have accepted, by faith, the work of Christ on your behalf, His atoning death for you, that saves you from your sins. This cannot be just an intellectual exercise; it has to be rooted in your heart and Will so that it affects all aspects of your existential life and being! He is Lord. His Will is supreme (Gal 2:20-21; Phil. 3:10). The fullness of the Spirit will be withheld from you if this has not transpired because your pride will block your mind from seeing Him. Remember, before you came to the Lord, the Holy Spirit was already at work in you illuminating you, and then became complete in you by His saving Grace. Thus, you must have already received the Holy Spirit before you can be given the baptism of the Holy Spirit as an empowerment for ministry. In Reformed understanding, by Faith alone you have received Christ (*Sola Fide*), and you have also received the Spirit (John. 16:16f; Col. 2:10). Christ is present wherever the Spirit is present, as there is one God! Hence, there is no second work of Grace; just more power for ministry!

Step 2: You must renounce all of your Sins!

This means removing what is in Galatians 5:19-21, and producing what is in Galatians 5:22-26, the Fruits of the Spirit, which are the evidence of the Spirit at work, happening in us! We must make a clear-cut choice between the Holy Spirit and unholy sin. Which will rule our hearts, minds, and Will? At the same time, we must be aware of our ever-present sinful nature. Although it is covered by Christ's atonement, we must make the commitment to fight it and remove it through confession, prayer, and being held accountable (1 John. 1:8). This is accomplished by our confession and repentance, which means we turn away from the sin and do not do it again. This is the indispensable aspect of the Christian life that is so ignored today. It is not only the opening into the life of maturity, faith development, and further outgrowth of real discipleship, but also what God expects of every Christian! Christ centered confession is to be constantly surrendering fully to God and renouncing all of our sin. We will then grow in maturity and faith, and receive the blessing of the Spirit of more empowerment for ministry. This is not confession about us; it is seeking His Lordship, with our focus upon Christ. This

will be a struggle. But, remember, He gives us the power to even overcome our sins--not that we have renounced sin, but that Christ saves us from it (Heb. 4:14-16)!

Step 3: Commit to a life of Obedience!

Acts 5:32 tells us, *The Holy Spirit whom God has given to them that obey him.* 1 John 3:23, *This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another.* The goal of the Christian life is to obtain perfect surrender of our Will to His as the primer work of Sanctification. This is the result of having what Christ has done for us impact all aspects of our life. Obedience is a result of our trust and commitment that forms out of gratitude for what He has done for us. The Holy Spirit is given to all those who are in Christ. The Baptism of the Spirit is given to help us in ministry to glorify God, and that gift is given, as we see from Scripture, to those who obey Him. Through your faith, obedience, and through His purpose, He will impact you so He can impact others through you.

Step 4: Thirsting after Christ

We always need to understand we can do nothing to be meritorious in receiving His Grace or favor. But, out of our response of gratitude, we can receive His blessings and empowerment for further service. The Spirit is alive and well in our lives as Christians, from the start of our new life to eternity to come. We must realize that our receptivity is blocked by our refusal to yield and surrender, as well as by our pride and busyness. His strength and power remain the same. It is we who change, so He can work in us more. He can also impart to us extra power, but this is rare. This translates into our Sanctification and growth in Him, and we should see a yearning for more--more of Him in our Life, more of Him working through us to the lives of others. This is the thirst after His righteousness and the willingness for Christ to do a work in us (John. 7:37-f.). The key is your desire to be pure after His heart, and not your own, to be so for the glory of God, and not for your own. You must desire the baptism with the Holy Spirit for becoming more mature in the faith, for being more open for Him to work in you so that you may honor God with more effective service. If you are seeking it to get a new power or a new influence on others, you are serving yourself, not God! The whole purpose of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is to point to Christ's work, and to help others understand and apply it to their lives.

Step 5: Ask Christ for it!

If you feel you have the first four steps down and nothing is happening, did you ask why (Luke 11:13; James 4:2)? Through faithful prayer, ask Christ to allow you to grow close to Him, and become humble so to be receptive. **But beware: when you ask God for this, He will give it to you!** Be specific in your prayers. Do you see a need, and a way that God could use you? Then ask for the ability and help to do it. Be open to other areas of need you may not yet have considered. Through prayer, seek His blessing. If it does not come, do not fret. It may not be time, or His Will. Be patient. He is in charge! We already have His indwelling; you seek empowerment for ministry, and this

is recurring, so, pray constantly. As new situations and needs come up, so will be the need to go to Him for extra power. Seek this urgently, fervently, importantly, and purely! Remember, the focus is on preparing yourself, not just trying to get a quick fix from God. You must have His glory and ministry in mind before He will use you effectively.

The Holy Spirit's ministry is greatly needed in the world today. So, we need to seek it in all of its fullness. It is for the church today, and it is for you. In many situations, it is a matter of survival. As you ask for His empowerment, expect to receive it, not because you are special or worthy, but because of the urgency of the need, and the certainty of His promise. At the same time, do not be disappointed if it does not happen. Sometimes it does not happen. We can fail; we can die. We are to seek Him, and keep our focus on our Lord. Remember, you are still in Him, and in His plan!

Step 6: Faith

Why is faith listed last? Should it not be first? The definition of faith is, *trusting in Christ who was crucified for you*; it is not, *expecting God to give you whatever you ask!* He is not a divine bellhop! It is last because it is inferred in Step One, and when we go through all of the steps, we come full circle. It is by faith we are to pray definitely and earnestly to be willing and open for Christ to use us. At the same time, we have to have the awareness to confidently expect Christ to use us. He does not use every Believer in the way each would like to be used. His plans are better. Rely on faith to tell you that your confidence is in Him, and not what He gives or does for or through you. If you do not get what you want, praise God, because it probably was not good for you! Our confidence is that God has promised and has given His Spirit to all who believe, which is far more than we deserve or could even imagine! The confidence to expect a blessing must be rooted in the true seeking of His Will and purpose, not what we think or desire.

Sometimes, those of us who grew up in non-Pentecostal denominations may not be sensitive to the Spirit, or may not have been taught to recognize the work of God. How do I discern the Spirit? How can I be filled with the Spirit? By trusting that the God of hope really reigns (Matthew 10:29). Pray, declare your faith to the Lord with passion and conviction. Then, prepare yourself to be yielding and receptive to His leading, which is the fullness and outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your life. Ask Him for the ability to discern His Spirit!

We need to understand that even as a mature disciple, we will not stay 'full' of the Spirit all the time just from our feelings and receptivity, nor will we stay joyful and submissive to God, and empowered for service all of the time. However, He stays the same. It is we who are up and down in our spiritual journey, in our awareness and maturity. This is because our sinful nature is still there, as is Satan and our emotions--all competing for dominance. However, our goal to be mature in Christ is to seek His outpouring as our great longing. *As a dear pants for the flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God* (Psalm 42:1,2-5, 11; 43:5). In order to quench that thirst, we must be willing to persevere, and fight the fight of faith.

The power of the Holy Spirit will empower us to be His witness, not the desire for show or for personal benefit! We cannot let our experiences replace truth, so, we must interpret our experiences in light of the Scriptures, not the other way around!

We can thank the Pentecostal movement for opening our eyes to the awareness of the Spirit's work within us! We are to seek Him and His power!

Theological terms and definitions

Some of these are grouped in categories. But most of the terms and explanations are listed in alphabetical order.

Apostle- Sent out one, specifically chosen by Christ. There were 2 main categories and as many as 5. Those who were with Jesus from the time of John the baptist and witnessed his resurrection. (Acts 1:21-26) Another were seeing the risen Christ as in the case of Paul and others who were sent out as church missionaries.

Bible- Biblios (scroll or book) Scripture-The Old Testament consists of the law (revealed by God through his servant Moses, the prophets and the writings. Which are written in Hebrew with few parts in Aramaic.

The law (revealed by God through Moses from Mt. Sinai that consisted of 613 commands as the whole body of precepts and ordinances. The 10 are the first installment. The O T consists of 49 books written over 1,600 years

The **N T**. consists of the gospel accounts, epistles and letters written in koine (common) Greek . these were written from approximately A.D 40 to 95 by eyewitnesses or one who interviewed an eyewitness (Luke). 27 books in all by 9 different authors. Christ had risen approximately 30-32 Ad , they waited for 10 years because they anticipated his return. Once the Church was being persecuted it became necessary to write the accounts down. Letters were then written to where the church met and were read aloud. They were then copied and shared by circulation. This copying protected them from being lost. They were copied in hearing rooms and were checked. If a parchment wore out it was destroyed.

Literary content

Gospels are biographical accounts each having a specific theme- written to both unbelievers and believers.

Matthew-Jesus the Messiah the king of the Jews

Mark- Jesus the Messiah the Servant of Yahweh

Luke- Jesus the Messiah the Son of Man

John- Jesus the Messiah the Son of God

Book of the Acts of the Apostles is Church history (following specifically Peter to the Jews, and Paul to the gentiles). It is the deeds of the apostles as they conduct Church government and spread the message of the gospel. Written to believers, to those who have already heard so they can have a fuller understanding of the truth.

Epistles letters- Consists of doctrinal teachings and practices and refuting error.

All other letters are personal- 1 and 2 Timothy, Philemon, 2nd & 3rd John.

Both the OT and NT are 66 books written spanning over 60 generations from 6 different parts of the world. Written by people from all walks of life. Kings, priests, prophets, soldiers, shepherds, fisherman, doctor, tax collector, a tent maker and farmer, all which are in agreement on who God is and the nature of man.

The scripture is diverse literary forms. Historical, narratives, biographical, in poetry, drama, songs, and letters.

Revelation –Is apocalyptic written in symbolism describing literal events. Much of what is spoken of in the O T for Israel and the tribulation are found as its theme from revelation 6-19 It reveals Christ and the end of the age .

“Q”-Quelle- which means source. A hypothetical document that is believed to be the common source for the gospels.

Three terms used to describe the gathering together of the canon (Scripture)

Homologumena= all books accepted by the entire church (the Pauline epistles next were the 4 gospels in one work, then Acts 1 Pt., 1 Jn., Revelation all these were accepted in both the East and the West).

Antilogumena= books accepted by some of the church (James and Jude, 2nd and 3rd John, 2nd Peter, Hebrews which were disputed books because they were not familiar with them these 6 books were accepted later).

Notha= writings claiming inspiration but were false. Their were false books circulating by authors who claimed to be an apostle or penned an apostles name. They were considered false because it contradicted the writings previously delivered Ex: The 1st miracle of Jesus was that he did miracles as a boy .

Bible- John Wycliff in 1400 AD., made the bible in the language of the people in England. The Guttenburg press ran the Bible as the first book ever printed. In 1550

Robert Stephens divided the scriptures into chapter and verses. The Geneva bible was the first Bible in 1580 with a completed work of chapter and verses.

Voltaire the French philosopher boldly declared, 50 years from now the world will hear no more about the bible. Exactly 50 years later the Geneva bible society used his house and the same printing press to print bibles. Over 7 billion copies have been printed in 1808 languages and dialects.

Church- Who owns the Church 2 Thess 2:7 It is called the church of Christ Mt.16:16 , church of God 1 Cor. 1:2, body Eph. 1:23 Assembly of Christ. There is the church universal body but rather to a plurality of local churches--Rom. 16:16 Scripturally we find the church is not Israel but a separate entity under an entirely new covenant. Israel is called the wife of Jehovah while the church is called the bride of Christ showing distinctions in how God relates to each.No matter where anyone is in the world, those who confess Jesus as Lord, God the Son and Savior, become part of the Church, which is an invisible living organism of which Christ is the head.The true church is built on the confession of who Jesus is,Mt.16:16-18 .

Covenants- A covenant is an agreement between 2 parties, one is God the other man. There are two different types of agreements in scripture. Conditional and unconditional.

Conditional – base on man keeping the agreement by cooperation. If you will I will.

Unconditional.—Is based on Gods promise by him fulfilling his part. I will even if you disobey .

Covenants in sequential order (most recognize there are only two basic covenants, the mosaic and the New covenant)

Edenic covenant conditional Gen.2:15-17 resulted in spiritual death.

Adamic covenant-conditional Gen.3:14-21 resulted in physical death.

Noahic covenant-Unconditional Gen.9:1-19 still in effect resulted in worldwide flood.rainbow as the seal or token.

Abrahamic covenant- Unconditional Gen.12:1-3 to Abraham for Israel seal of the covenant Gen.15:1-21 circumcision as seal Gen.17:1-29.

Mosaic covenant-Conditional Ex.19:3-8 Between God and Israel only. Sign and seal of Cov. Ex.24:1-11 Sabbath as the seal.

Land covenant-Unconditional Deut.29:10-15 30:11-20 God gave to Israel the title deed to the land, still in effect.

Davidic covenant-Unconditional 2 Sam.7:4-17 seed of David. 1 Chron. 17 : 10-1,4 still in effect.

New covenant – Jer.31:31 - Karnei Diatheke the last will and testament. based on the blood of Christ .The revelation of the holiness of God in the righteous son who empowers those who receive him to become sons of God Jn.1:12 Heb.8:7 Gal.3:19 'until the seed should come' which is Christ.

The Cross- First known practice of crucifixion was by the Persians. Alexander and his generals brought it back to the Mediterranean world - to Egypt and Carthage. The Romans apparently learned the practice from Carthaginians. There were 4 different crosses used by the Romans. There was the upright pole a stake as well as an x shaped, which was rarely used outside Italy. The two common forms used in Our Lord's day was the Tau cross (shaped like the Greek letter Tau or like our T with the titulus, the crime written on the plate below his feet or above). The upright portion of the cross (or stipes) could have the cross-arm (or patibulum) attached two or three feet below its top known today as the classical form of the cross with the titulus, or small sign, with the victim's crime written above it

In the summer of 1968 a team of archaeologists discovered four Jewish tombs near Jerusalem, where there was an ossuary containing the only extant bones of a (young) crucified man, dating from probably between 7 and 66 AD, surmised from the Herodian pottery found there. Roman historical accounts, and experimental work have shown the nails, were driven between the small bones of the wrists and not through the palms. The young man's arms (not his hands) were nailed to the patibulum, the cross-beam, which might indicate that Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:20, 25, 27 should be translated 'arms'. The weight of the body was probably borne by a plank (sedecula) nailed to the simplex, the upright beam, as a support for the buttocks. The legs had been bent at the knees and twisted back so that the calves were parallel to the patibulum or cross-bar, with the ankles under the buttocks. One iron nail (still in situ) had been driven through both his heels together, with his right foot above the left. A fragment shows that the cross was of olive wood. His legs had both been broken, presumably by a forcible blow, like those of Jesus' two companions in Jn. 19:32.

Decree- Gods eternal purpose according to the council of his will, whereby for his own glory he foreordained what is to come to pass. Some things God proposes to do others he decrees. Permitting them to be done he affects good and permits evil. So he is in control of both yet he is not the author of evil.

Disciple- a learner or follower of Christ (not always a believer) Jn.6, Jesus wanted saved disciples, to pick up their cross and follow in his footsteps.

Doctrine- The teachings of scripture 1 Tim.4:13-16 2 Tim.3:16 (fundamentals, practices of)

Effacious- Gods sovereign work to effectively call people to salvation through the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Glorification- to become like Jesus at either the rapture of the Church, or at preceding resurrections. (to become immortal and incorruptible in a permanent state) Rom.8:17; Phil.3:20-21; 1 Cor.15:42-44,49-54

God- One true God, eternal transcendent apart from anything made. Has plurality within his nature as 3 identities simultaneously existing (persons) who are united in the one essence that is God.

The **Gospel-**means good news referring to the message of reconciliation to God for those who are sinners. Rom.10 1 Cor.15:1-4

Grace- The undeserved favor bestowed upon sinners, a gift from God giving us Christ's riches which we do not deserve nor can earn. Eph.2:8-10

Hypostatic union- The dual nature of Christ being both 100% God and 100% man dwelling together as one person. Jn.1:14,18 Phil.2:6-8, Isa.9:6 Heb.4, Col.2:9

Incarnation- God becoming flesh the eternal Son who is God (the word) becoming the son of man through the virgin conception. Mt.1:21-23; Isa.7:14

Impute- To place on ones account Christ's righteousness in exchange for our sin.

Scriptural Interpretations

Exegesis- to draw out extracting what is in the text the way it was written. Finding the true meaning and explain the passages of scripture from their context

figurative language- the moon turns to blood (meaning red). look for the literal meaning first before attempting to interpret it as symbolic.

Hermeneutics- The science of interpreting the written word, to find what the text actually meant. What God originally meant it to say. Eliminating what it never could have meant. This includes the whole field of interpretation. The use of tools such as a different bibles (word for word translations and paraphrase), bible dictionaries, interlinear, Greek word pictures and tenses, Concordance, etc.

Hyperbole- Ps.119:20 My soul is crushed with longing. Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." An exaggeration or overstatement not to be taken literally but used to express another meaning.

Idiom- an expression of language or dialect of a people that is not understood outside its culture. A special terminology.

Isogesis-Reading into a text what isn't there. Interpreting it by different rules than a consistent understanding from the Bible. Using a presupposition to arrive at the meaning, by ignoring the language and culture it was used in.

Metaphor- Jn.6:48 I am the bread of life or eat my body and drink my blood- a figure of speech in which one object is likened to another by speaking of it as if it were the other but in fact is not.

Parable- A figure of speech in a story setting to illustrate a moral or spiritual or heavenly truth. Taken from the peoples everyday experiences. Mt.13 The disciples asked why do you speak in parables. It has been told to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given . The principle is (Isa. 6:9-10) to reveal to those who are soft in heart seeking truth , they will continue to be given more . For those who are hard of heart it is hidden until they repent. In Mk.4:13 Jesus explains In understanding this first parable of the sower is the key to understanding them all.

Simile- Rev.1:14 "His eyes were like flames of fire." A figure of speech expressing comparison or likeness, terms such as like, as ,so. _____

Inerrant- the teaching of the Scriptures which are free without error, in doctrine, historicity, geographical and science, etc. God breathed C. Hodge- the language expressed the thought God intended to convey with infallible accuracy so that the words as well as the thoughts are Gods revelation to us.

Inspiration-The activity of the Holy Spirit which superintended the writers of scripture to convey what God has said. Using their personalities and styles. Theopneustos-God breathed. 2 Tim.3:16 God's authoritative self-revelation through man.

Israel- Was found in Gen.12:2-3.beginning with Abraham "And I will make of thee [Abraham] a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed . From Jacob came the 12 tribes Hebrew tribes, descended from 12 sons of the patriarch Jacob: Asher, Benjamin, Dan, Gad, Issachar, Joseph, Judah, Levi, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon, Zebulun.

The word Israel is always descriptive of the physical descendants of Abraham, Issac and Jacob. It was Jacob who's name was changed to Israel and had 12 sons that became that nation. In the N.T. we have three terms used, Israel, Gentiles and the church. The church consists of both believing Gentiles and Jews while it is clear Israel is in unbelief as are the Gentiles. The church and Israel are two distinct groups and God has a different program for each. While there is no difference in salvation for both, Gods plans are different for each. In the book of acts Israel and the church exist alongside each other. The church is never called spiritual Israel or is a new Israel replacing the old. Nor does it say gentile believers become Jews. They are grafted into the covenant with them because of Israel's unbelief Rom.11.

Jewish-Jew comes from Judah meaning to praise. One who is descended from the fathers line Hebrew means crossed over from the other side from the root eber.

A **Hellenistic** Jew followed the Greek culture. More modern meanings attribute it to members of the Hebrew tribe of Judah, the ancient territory of which was organized as the Roman province of Judaea in AD 6. The land is called Israel because of the people God gave it to.

Justice- Getting what you deserve from Gods hands, a righteous perfect judgement, rewards and punishments. 2Cor.5:10; Rev.20:11-12

Justification- a legal declaration giving one right standing before God pronouncing a sinner righteous because of Christ's merit,(not making them righteous)Ro.5:1,18
Isa.53:11 Rom.4:5

Kenosis- The voluntary emptying of Christ by him taking on an additional nature while not setting aside his divine nature and attributes became a servant obedient to the Father. Phil.2:5-8; Jn.1:14

Law of Moses- Considered a unit of 613 laws. civil, ceremonial, moral all interconnected. Its purpose was to reveal God's holiness; The law was made to increase sin Rom. 7:9-11. 1 Cor.15: the strength of sin is the law." To expose the sinfulness of man and to make man sin more Rom. 5:20. It brought wrath Rom.4:15 , To reveal the Messiah and bring one to faith in him to be saved. (Gal.3:23 -25, Rom.8:1-4). The law was temporary = Gal 3:19 .

Man- A direct creation of God. Made in his image to express God nature and bring glory to his creator. Specifically to have a relationship with God as a child to its parent.Created in holiness knowing only what is good until the fall, then gained knowledge of what is contrary to God.

Masoretic text- Before 1947 the oldest Hebrew manuscript was the Masoretic dating to 900 AD. The Dead sea scrolls were found at least one piece preserved from every OT book except Esther dating back to 100B.C. In Isaiah only one word was changed.

Mercy-Is withheld punishment for judgement,Gods mercy provides the need for sinful man in Jesus sacrifice.

Millennialism

Millenium- A literal 1,000 years of Christ reigning on earth.(Gr. Chiliasm=1,000 years, mentioned 6 times) The church was pre millennial the first three centuries of the church. His return was considered imminent.

Amillennialism- Teaches there is no literal millennium before or after Christ returns to earth. Uses an allegorical or symbolic approach to prophecy. (major proponents are Covenant theologians)

Dispensational pre-millennialism- The 2nd coming occurs in two stages first the rapture of the church then after 7 years Christ returns with his church to rule on earth. Uses a literal interpretation of prophecy. (used by pretribulationists)

Historic pre-millennialism-The rapture and the 2nd coming are simultaneous events as Christ returns to earth, before the millennium.

Post millennialism-Christ returns after the millennium, there is no distinction between the rapture and 2nd coming, it is one event. _____

Motif- The underlying theme or the main element in a literary work.(held by many covenant theologians and reconstructionists)

Pharisees-keepers of the written law. They believed in angels demons and the afterlife Mt.7 They were the pious and added many laws to God's law giving priority to their laws over what God had said.

Providence- God working all things to the purpose of his will Isa.40:28; Ps.139:13; Rom.8:28

The Rapture- The resurrection of the saints and those who are alive when Christ comes for his church are simultaneously taken up and changed to immortality.1 Cor.15:51-52 ;1 Thess.4:16-17

Redemption- to buy back out of slavery of sin. One is liberated from sin being their master because of the complete payment of Christ's blood. Gal.3:3; Eph.1:1;Rom.3:24-25

Reconciliation-To make man who was once an enemy of God have peace through Christ's atoning death . A change of relationship between God to man from hostility to harmony. Reconciliation does not necessarily equate salvation, it renders all men savable. Rom.5:11; Col.1:20-21; 2 Cor.5:18

Regeneration-the new birth by the Spirit-implanting of the divine nature by the word of God, and will of God and Spirit of God through faith 1 Pt.1:23; Titus 3:4, Jn.3:5; Rom.10:17; Eph.3:17.

Sadducees'- A group of Jews that held to a strict literal interpretation of the laws of Moses and used only the first 5 books of Moses. They rejected the supernatural, angels and demons and the afterlife. They had control of the temple and the priesthood in Jesus day. Mt.22:23-33

Sanctification- (to be set apart) holy-Anything set apart for Gods use can be sanctified Days.Gen.2:3, places and things. The progressive work of the holy Spirit in a (saints)believers life conforming them to the image of the son . 2 Thess.2:13 Phil.2:13 . sanctify is used in numerous forms in the O.T. 106 times and 31 times in the N.T.. Holy is used 12 times in the N.T of believers. The word saint is used of Israel 50 times and 62 times of believers. Everyone who experiences the new birth is a saint . The father, the Son and the holy Spirit are involved in the sanctification process. The Father 1 Thess.5:23 the Son Eph.5:26, Heb.2:11;9:12.The Spirit Rom.15:16 2 Thess.10:36

Salvation-To believe the Gospel by faith and be born a new by a spiritual birth Jn.3:5-8; Eph.1:13,3:17 ; Rom.8:2; Eph.2:8-10

Sanhedrin- A group of 70 men who were a religious political body for Israel (a Jewish supreme Court) made up if 24 chief priests (Saducess) 24 elders (Pharisees) 22 scribes and one high priest overall (71).religious men who dictated how people were to worship God and practice Judaism

Scribes- copiers of the law (a branch of the Pharisees. They were responsible for safeguarding and copying the scripture. They wrote mainly on parchment which consisted of dried up and polished skins of calves and sheep rolled up into scrolls. They had a meticulous Job of cross-checking the letters for any mistakes. Each letter was to be a hair breath away from the next. They would have counters to count all the words to see if there were any mistakes.If they found an error the scroll was completely destroyed. They had memorized immense portions of the O.T. scripture and often argued with Jesus on its meaning.

Shekinah glory- A physical manifestation of God as a cloud, light, fire or darkness . It is not God himself, but when it appeared, he would often be within it. Ex.3:5, 13:21-22, 19:16-20, Lev.9: 6-7, 23, Acts 9:3-8

Sin- Transgression of the law, to violate Gods perfect standard or a command given. A moral inclination to do evil to go against ones conscience. The source of sin is inside us, our fallen nature Rom. 5:13-14 explains sin was in man and the world before the commandments.

Theophany- A physical manifestation of God as a person or messenger (angel) a pre incarnate appearance of Christ in human form, called "the Angel of the Lord." Gen.16:13, 17:1-3,18:1, 32:30; Ex.3:2

Eschatology

The Great Tribulation-The time Jesus warned of as Jacobs trouble Jer.30:7, the ending of the age. Book of Revelation 6-19 and part of Mt.24and 25.70th week of Daniel Dan.9:27,day of the Lord.1 Thess.5:2.

Preterism-fulfilled eschatology- belief that the date 70 AD all was fulfilled that Jesus spoke of in Mt.24

The Tribulation teaching is in reference to the rapture and resurrection of the saints

Pretribulationist- believe that the Church will not go through the tribulation but will be raptured away to heaven and the tribulation is specifically to break the will of Israel and save them as a nation .also to have the world repent in the judgements found in the book of Revelation.

Mid- tribulation- a mid 70th week rapture. The church will be taken out before the great tribulation occurs which is when the antichrist goes into the temple and declares himself God approximately 1,260 days before Christ comes back.

Partial rapture-Only those who are watching and waiting, making themselves prepared will go.

Pre- wrath- A $\frac{3}{4}$ view which has the church go through much of the tribulation to purify and perfect the bride.

Post-tribulation- Christ comes back at the end of the tribulation and those who are alive through it are raptured. There are 4 views within this position as well. Classic, semi-classic, futurist, dispensational.

Vicarious- to take a place of another as a substitution. Jesus took the place of sinners place vicariously on the cross. Mt.20:28

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Extra Insights:

Are there any hidden codes in the Bible?

By John Macarthur

One of the foundational qualities of the Bible is its clarity (sometimes called perspicuity). That means Scripture's main teachings are plain enough to be understood without the need of special expertise or church-sanctioned interpretations.

The Bible frequently speaks about its own clarity. Psalm 119:130 says, “The unfolding of Thy words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” The average person who humbly reads the Bible can say, “I have more insight than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation” (Psalm 119:99). Psalm 19:7 teaches, “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”

The idea of hidden codes in the Bible contradicts all of that by limiting accessibility to the real message of the Bible to so-called experts who can decipher the cryptic messages God “hid” in the Scriptures. But such “experts” aren’t needed because the Bible contains no hidden codes.

One hidden-code theory works like a common word-search puzzle—hidden messages are supposedly embedded diagonally within the Hebrew text. But that’s as foolish as turning your daily newspaper into a word-search puzzle and expecting to find meaningful stories hidden in it. Newspapers aren’t written to convey messages in secret code, and neither was the Bible. Both should be read using ordinary rules of language.

Of course there are concepts in the Bible that are hard to understand—even the apostle Peter admitted that (2 Peter 3:15). But the way to discover the meaning of those hard passages is not by seeking out hidden messages, but by engaging in diligent study that accurately handles the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Take heart! The Bible is clear and even the most untrained reader can understand it. God wants you to understand the Bible, and He has provided the Holy Spirit as a guide (John 16:13). After all, “man does not live by bread alone, but ... by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Taken from notes from a sermon preached by Pastor John MacArthur

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