

What's the Difference?

Examining the differences between Christianity & cults, Christianity & world religions, and Baptists & denominations
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On the differences between Christianity and cults

The Four Major Cults by Anthony Hoekema (1963)
Confronting the Cults by Gordon Lewis (1966)
Handbook of Today's Religions by Josh McDowell & Don Stewart (1983)
The Kingdom of the Cults by Walter Martin (1985 & 1997)
"The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error" pamphlet by Moody Press (1985)
Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Frank Mead & Samuel Hill (1995)
Mormonism: Changes, Contradictions, and Errors by John Farkas & David Reed (1995)
Charts of Cults, Sects, & Religious Movements by H. Wayne House (2000)
So What's the Difference? by Fritz Ridenour (2001)
"So What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Ken Brown (2002)
"Christianity, Cults & Religions" pamphlet by Rose Publishing (2004)

On the differences between Christianity and world religions

Handbook of Today's Religions by Josh McDowell & Don Stewart (1983)
The Kingdom of the Cults by Walter Martin (1985 & 1997)
Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Frank Mead & Samuel Hill (1995)
The Compact Guide to World Religions edited by Dean Halverson (1996)
So What's the Difference? by Fritz Ridenour (2001)
Unveiling Islam by Ergun Mehmet Caner & Emir Fethi Caner (2002)
"So What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Ken Brown (2002)
"Christianity, Cults & Religions" pamphlet by Rose Publishing (2004)

On the differences between Baptists and denominations

The Marks of a Methodist by Gerald Kennedy (1960)
The Gospel According to Rome by James McCarthy (1995)
Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Frank Mead & Samuel Hill (1995)
So What's the Difference? by Fritz Ridenour (2001)
"So What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Ken Brown (2002)
"Denominations Comparison" pamphlet by Rose Publishing (2003)
The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church by Carmen Renee Berry (2003)
"What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Ken Brown (2003)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

What's the Difference?

Part 1: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and Cults Lesson 1: What Makes a Cult a Cult?

Before we begin studying four of the more renowned American cults¹ of today (the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Christian Science, and Seventh-day Adventism), we must first answer the question, What makes a cult a cult? The aim of this lesson is to define what a cult is, identifying the characteristics that make a cult a cult.

I. Definitions and Distinctives

- A. "A cult, then, is any religious movement which claims the backing of Christ or the Bible, but distorts the central message of Christianity by (1) an additional revelation, and (2) by displacing a fundamental tenet of the faith with a secondary matter²" (Lewis, p. 4).
- B. "... [A] cult may be defined as a group of people who, though claiming to be Christian, accept one or more central tenets of belief that run contrary to historic Christianity" (House, p. 9).
- C. "A cult, then, is a group of people polarized around someone's interpretation of the Bible and is characterized by major deviations from orthodox Christianity relative to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, particularly the fact that God became man in Jesus Christ³" (Walter Martin, quoted in McDowell & Stewart, p. 19).

¹The English word "cult" comes from the Latin word for worship, *cultus*.

²Cf. Hoekema, pp. 375-376.

³"The sure mark of a cult is what it does with the person of Jesus Christ. All cults ultimately deny the fact that Jesus Christ is God the Son, second Person of the Holy Trinity, and mankind's only hope" (McDowell & Stewart, p. 25).

- D. Hoekema (pp. 377-388) identifies five "distinctive traits" of a cult: (1) an extra-Scriptural source of authority; (2) the denial of justification by grace alone; (3) the devaluation of Christ; (4) the group as the exclusive community of the saved; and (5) the group's central role in eschatology⁴
- E. Ridenour (pp. 111-112) identifies five "major characteristics" of cultists: 1) they reject the Trinity; 2) they usually believe that all Christian churches are wrong and that their group has the only real truth about God; 3) they claim to believe the Bible but they distort its teachings; 4) they deny that people can be saved by faith in Christ alone; and 5) they are skillful at using Christian terminology, but they are not talking the same language as biblical Christians
- F. McDowell & Stewart identify eleven characteristics of cults: 1) new truth; 2) new interpretations of Scripture; 3) a non-biblical source of authority; 4) another Jesus; 5) rejection of orthodox Christianity; 6) double-talk; 7) non-biblical teaching on the nature of God (Trinity); 8) changing theology; 9) strong leadership; 10) salvation by works; and 11) false prophecy
- G. My definition: A cult is a religious group that claims to be Christian but belies such a claim by vitiating the authority of Scripture through a superseding authority (whether the teachings of an individual or writing) and/or through a gross misinterpretation of cardinal biblical doctrines. Note the salient points of this definition:
 - 1. A cult is a religious group. As such, it has all the trappings of the typical religious group, such as a codified belief system, rites, corporate assembly, leadership structure, etc.
 - 2. A cult claims to be Christian. This is what makes cults so deceptive. They claim to believe Christian doctrine and even use Christian terminology. However, they reinvest such terminology with unchristian meaning.⁵

⁴Hoekema (p. 386) explains: "Though the cult may now be small and insignificant, when the final climax of history arrives, it will receive from God the place of honor it deserves as a reward for its faithfulness to His commandments."

⁵"So it is possible for a Jehovah's Witness, a Christian Scientist or a Mormon, for example, to utilize the terminology of Biblical Christianity with absolute freedom, having already redesigned these terms in a theological framework of his own making and to his own liking, but almost always at direct variance with the historically accepted meanings of the terms" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 18). "On encountering a cultist then, always remember that you are dealing with a person who is familiar with Christian terminology, and who has carefully redefined it to fit the system of thought he or she now embraces" (Martin, *ibid.*, p. 20).

3. A cult has an authority base other than the Bible. Though a cult may claim adherence to the Bible, when it comes right down to it, a cult denies the authority of the Bible by substituting another source of authority. This may come in the form of an additional source of revelation (from an individual or writing) and/or in the form of misinterpreting cardinal biblical doctrines.

H. My distinctives

1. Doctrinal: Their Message

The primary distinctive of a cult is its doctrinal deviation from orthodox Christianity, particularly in regard to cardinal doctrines, i.e., those doctrines that make Christianity distinct from other "religions." Such doctrines include the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and the Atonement.⁶

2. Psychological: Their Methods

Cults tend to be characterized by certain psychological factors. These include brainwashing techniques (repetition, isolation, dietary and dress regulations, sleep deprivation, etc.), deception, infallible authority figures, etc.

3. Sociological: Their Mannerisms

Cults also tend to be characterized by certain sociological factors. These include targeting the "down-and-outer," austere lifestyles, benevolent acts, extraordinary zeal, etc. Unfortunately, many Christians have shied away from such mannerisms for fear of being associated with the cults.

II. Distinctions

Some groups are improperly labeled with the cult tag, such as:

⁶"Most, if not all the cult systems vigorously oppose the Christian Church, particularly in the realm of Christology [the doctrine of Christ] and soteriology [the doctrine of salvation]" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 13).

- A. Comparative religions

Comparative religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism, should not be classified as cults. The difference between a comparative religion and a cult is the fact that a comparative religion does not claim to be Christian, while a cult does.⁷

- B. Certain denominations

Although such "denominations" as Catholicism and Pentecostalism would classify as cults according to my definition of a cult given above, most do not classify them as cults, probably due to the absence of the psychological and sociological factors mentioned above. While they may be "cultlike,"⁸ i.e., cults in a denotative sense, they are not "cults" in a connotative sense.

- C. Fundamentalists

Unfortunately, fundamentalism has sometimes been accused of being a cult, no doubt due to the cultlike tendencies of certain branches within the movement. Fortunately, such branches are continually being pruned from the movement.

⁷"... [A] cult claims the support of Christ and the Bible. Religions of the world which make no such claims are not Christian cults. Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Shintoists quote neither Scripture nor Christ in an authoritative manner. They may note similarities to Christianity but do not base their teachings upon a Biblical rule of faith and practice. Leaders of the cults, on the other hand, claim to follow Christ and may quote Scripture voluminously" (Lewis, p. 3).

⁸"... [W]hen a denomination of Christendom [such as Catholicism] gives so much veneration to a human teacher or group of teachers that he or they are thought to be virtually infallible, it is in this respect manifesting a trait of the cult" (Hoekema, p. 379)!

What's the Difference?

Part 1: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and Cults Lesson 2: The Jehovah's Witnesses

I. History

The cult known as the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW's for short) was started by Charles Taze Russell⁹ (hence, the JW's are sometimes referred to as "Russellites") in the late 1800's. Russell was born in what is now Pittsburgh, PA in 1852. He was raised Presbyterian, left the Presbyterian Church for the Congregational Church, then left the Congregational Church. He was then influenced by Seventh-day Adventist teaching, but parted company with such in 1879 to form his own group, Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society, which he incorporated in 1884. After Russell's death in 1916, the leadership mantle eventually fell to J. F. Rutherford.¹⁰ Rutherford was raised in a Baptist home. It was under his leadership that the name Jehovah's Witnesses (taken from Isa 43:10-12) was officially given to this sect (in 1931). Another title of this sect is "The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society." JW publications include the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*¹¹ (portions first published in 1950;

⁹To give you an idea of the kind of man Russell was, following is a quote from him regarding his *Studies in the Scriptures*: "Furthermore, not only do we find that *people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself*, but we see, also, that if anyone lays the SCRIPTURE STUDIES aside, even after he has used them for ten years--if he lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone . . . our experience shows that within two years *he goes into darkness*. On the other hand, if he had merely read the SCRIPTURE STUDIES with their references, and *had not read a page of the Bible, as such*, he would be in the *light* at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures" (quoted in Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 46; emphasis Martin's). House (p. 150) states regarding Russell: "His career was marked by legal entanglements, a widely publicized divorce, questionable business practices, and charges of perjury." According to Bruce Metzger (cited in Hoekema, p. 227), Russell's wife divorced him for "his conceit, egotism, domination, and improper conduct in relation to other women." For details regarding Russell's perjury, see pages 227-228 of Hoekema.

¹⁰Russell and Rutherford are the two key figures in the Society's history, and without them no doubt the organization would never have come into existence" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 48). It is interesting to note that neither Russell nor Rutherford had any formal theological training whatsoever.

¹¹It is interesting to note that the translation committee for the *NWT* consisted of only 7 men, none of whom had any recognized degrees in Greek or Hebrew.

entirety in 1961), *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* (*The Watchtower* for short; magazine published every other week targeting JW's)¹², and *Awake!* (magazine published every other week targeting non-JW's).¹³ Their places of worship are called "Kingdom halls" (a reflection of their emphasis on the Kingdom). "According to their 1998 report, the JW's claimed just over 1 million members in the United States and a grand total of just under 5,900,000 in 233 countries worldwide" (Ridenour, p. 114).

II. Some¹⁴ Erroneous JW Beliefs

One of the distinguishing characteristics of an ardent Jehovah's Witness is his (or her) ability to handle the Scriptures Any good Jehovah's Witness, sad to say, can cause the average Christian untold trouble in the Scriptures, though the trouble in most cases has an elementary solution" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 113).

"Unlike many other cults, the Witnesses do not subscribe to another inspired book in addition to Scripture" (Lewis, p. 18). They do, however, distort the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:16). Below are some examples:

A. Denial of the deity of Christ¹⁵

1. Christ is inferior to God.

¹²According to the July 15, 2004 issue of *The Watchtower*, the average printing of each issue of *The Watchtower* is 25,618,000 copies, encompassing 148 languages.

¹³According to the July 22, 2004 issue of *Awake!*, the average printing of each issue of *Awake!* is 22,530,000 copies, encompassing 87 languages.

¹⁴For an examination and refutation of other erroneous JW beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

¹⁵"The Deity of Jesus Christ is one of the cornerstones of Christianity, and as such has been attacked more vigorously throughout the ages than any other single doctrine of the Christian faith" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 83)

According to the *NWT*, John 1:1 reads "and the Word was a god," a gross mistranslation and a brazen denial of Christ's deity.

"The true Scriptures speak of God's Son, the Word, as 'a god.' He is a 'mighty god,' but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah" (*The Truth Shall Make You Free*, p. 47).

JW's also misinterpret John 14:28 ("the Father is greater than I") in this regard. The following (cited in Lewis, pp. 24-25) appeared in the March 22, 1957 issue of *Awake!*: "The fact is that nowhere does the Bible teach the equality of the Son with the Father, but it teaches the very opposite; it shows the Son to be in subjection and hence inferior to the Father. Thus we are told of the Son's inferior position before he came to earth, in that he was not ambitious to be equal with God, his Father (Phil. 2:6 RSV). And while on earth he continually called attention to his Father's superiority by stating that he could do nothing of his own initiative; that only the Father is good and that 'the Father is greater than I' (John 14:28 RSV). Writing long after Jesus' ascension into heaven, the apostle Paul shows that God is the head of Christ and that throughout eternity the Son will be in subjection to his Father, Jehovah God (1 Cor. 11:3; 15:28)."

2. Christ was a created being.

Misinterpreting verses such as John 1:18 and 3:16 ("only begotten"), Colossians 1:15¹⁶ ("firstborn"), and Revelation 3:14¹⁷ ("beginning"), JW's erroneously teach that Christ was the first creation of God the Father. The April 1, 1947 issue of *The Watchtower* (cited in McDowell & Stewart, p. 47) states: "... [H]is firstborn Son was the first of God's creations. Then with him as His active agent God went on to create everything else that has been brought into existence. He was the 'beginning of the creation of God,' not that he was the author of creation, but that he was the first one whom God made"

B. Denial of the Trinity

¹⁶For a thorough refutation of the JW's misinterpretation of Colossians 1:15's "firstborn of all creation," see pages 50-56 of McDowell & Stewart.

¹⁷For a thorough refutation of the JW's misinterpretation of Revelation 3:14's "beginning of the creation of God," see pages 47-49 of McDowell & Stewart. The Greek noun translated "beginning" in this verse has the idea of "source" or "origin" (see NASB marginal note). The NIV translates: "the ruler of God's creation."

Like Judaism and Unitarianism, JW's believe that God is one, both in essence and in person (Deut 6:4). "God the Son" and "God the Holy Spirit"¹⁸ are not part of the JW vocabulary.

"Satan is the originator of the trinity doctrine" (*Let God be True*, p. 101).

C. Denial of Christ's physical resurrection

Based upon a misinterpretation of 1 Peter 3:18, JW's believe that the resurrection of Christ was a "spiritual" resurrection. Christ's spirit was raised, but not His body.

"Jesus did not take his human body to heaven to be forever a man in heaven" (*Let God be True*, p. 41).

"The man Jesus is dead, forever dead" (*Studies in the Scriptures*, 5:454).

D. Denial of conscious, eternal punishment (including denial of the existence of hell and belief in annihilation of all non-JW's)

"A fiery hell is a God-dishonoring religious doctrine" (*Let God be True*, p. 68).

"The doctrine of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death cannot be true mainly for four reasons: (1) It is wholly unscriptural; (2) it is unreasonable; (3) it is contrary to God's love; and (4) it is repugnant to justice" (*Let God Be True*, p. 9).

E. Denial of Christ's physical and visible return

According to JW's, since Christ did not rise from the dead physically, neither will He return physically. Like His resurrection, His return is "spiritual." In fact, they believe that Christ secretly returned in the year 1914¹⁹ to set up His kingdom.

¹⁸JW's do not consider the Holy Spirit to be a person, but "the invisible active force of Almighty God" (*Let God Be True*, p. 108). Because JW's reject the deity of the Holy Spirit, the *NWT* does not capitalize Holy Spirit.

¹⁹"How they arrived at this arbitrary date no one can reasonably or chronologically ascertain" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 110). Hoekema (pp. 252-254) explains how, exposing the convoluted and tortured exegesis the JW's use. Ridenour (pp. 117-120) exposes the continual date changing and flip-flopping of JW leaders over the date of the end of the world/start of the Kingdom (1874 ⇒ 1914 ⇒ 1925 ⇒ 1975 ⇒ no specific date).

"Jesus thus gave up his fleshly body in sacrifice for humankind Having given up his flesh for the life of the world, Christ could never take it again and become a man once more. For that basic reason his return could never be in the human body that he sacrificed once for all time" (*You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, p. 143).
 "Christ Jesus returns, not again as a human, but as a glorious spirit person" (*Let God be True*, p. 196).

"...Christ Jesus came to the Kingdom in A.D. 1914, but unseen to men" (*The Truth Shall Make You Free*, p. 300).

"When Jesus said He would come again He did not mean He would return in the flesh visible to men on earth. He has given up that earthly life as a ransom and therefore, can not take such life back again ... The good news today is that Jesus Christ has come again, that God's Kingdom by Him has been set up and is now ruling in heaven ... all the evidence shows that Jesus took up His Kingdom power and began his reign from Heaven in the year 1914" (from JW pamphlet entitled "This Good News of the Kingdom"; cited in McDowell & Stewart, pp. 58-59).

F. Other JW beliefs

1. Refusal to pledge allegiance to the flag or to vote
2. Refusal to enlist in the military
3. Refusal to take blood transfusions
4. Refusal to celebrate birthdays or holidays
5. Only 144,000 (the "anointed class" or "little flock") will reside in Heaven. All other JW's (the "great crowd" or "other sheep") will live in "Paradise" on earth. Only members of the former, elite group can partake of communion.
6. Jesus died by being impaled on a stake (a single vertical pole), not by being crucified on a cross.

Are JW's Christians?

According to the following Scriptures, no:

1. A denial of the deity of Christ is evidence of an unregenerate heart (see John 8:24 and 2 John 9).
2. A denial of the Resurrection is evidence of an unregenerate heart (see Rom 10:9).

III. Our Response

A. Christ is God.²⁰

1. He is divine in essence.

Though inferior in *function*/position (John 14:28), Christ is equal in *essence*/person to God the Father. Both are fully and equally God (John 10:30).

a. Explicit Scriptures

- (1) John 1:1

The *NWT* mistranslates John 1:1. Properly translated, the verse should read that the Word was God.²¹

- (2) Colossians 2:9 and Hebrews 1:3

- (3) Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1²²

²⁰"The answer to Jehovah's Witnesses . . . is the Deity of Jesus Christ, and in teaching that one cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, all energy ought to be expended to the uttermost" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 113). For more on the biblical teaching of the deity of Christ, see Appendix A.

²¹The JW's point to the fact that there is no definite article preceding "God" (*theos*) in the Greek text of John 1:1. However, a rule of Greek grammar (established by Ernest Colwell; see p. 334 of Hoekema), which the JW's conveniently ignore (or are just plain ignorant of), states that a definite predicate nominative (in this case, *theos*) never takes an article when it precedes a verb of being (the Greek word order is "God was the Word"). Interestingly, the *NWT* translates *theos* as a definite in verses 6, 12, 13, and 18 (2x) of chapter 1, though none of the five have a definite article preceding *theos*. *Theos* here is an "anarthrous precopulative predicate nominative," which never indicates an indefinite noun and which 94% of the time in John's Gospel indicates the quality of the noun, as opposed to either its definiteness or indefiniteness (William Combs, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Allen Park, MI).

²²These verses represent a classic case of the Greek "Granville Sharp rule." According to this rule, if two or more singular, non-proper, personal nouns are joined by *kai* ("and") and the article precedes only the first noun, then any other nouns in the series refer to the same person.

- (4) Hebrews 1:8
- (5) 1 John 5:20

b. Christ displayed divine attributes.

For example, Christ displayed omniscience (Matt 12:25) and omnipotence (Mark 4:39).

c. Christ is given divine names.

These include Son of God (a term of equality, not inferiority) and Lord (Romans 10:9). See also the names ascribed to Christ in Isaiah 9:6.

d. Christ accepted worship.

Notice John 20:26-29.

e. Christ claimed to be God (see John 5:17-18, 8:58-59, and 10:30-33, noting especially the response of the Jews; likewise, see John 19:7; see also John 8:24 and 13:19, comparing them with Exod 3:14).

2. He is the eternal Creator (therefore, He could not have been created).

Like God the Father, God the Son is eternal. "There was never a time when He was not." See Isaiah 9:6, Micah 5:2, John 8:58, and Revelation 1:8. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:9 that there is nothing new under the sun. In 325 A.D., the Council of Nicea denounced the teaching of Arius (who taught that Christ had a beginning, being the first creation of God the Father), declaring him to be a heretic. Christ could not have been created, for He was the Creator of all things (see John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16²³).

B. There is one God in three Persons.²⁴

1. God is spoken of in the plural (Gen 1:26, 11:7, and Isa 6:8).

²³Inexplicably, the *NWT* twice inserts the word "other" in Colossians 1:16 ("by means of him all [other] things were created ... All [other] things have been created through him"). See also the *NWT* rendering of Colossians 1:17.

²⁴For more on the biblical teaching of the Trinity, see Appendix B.

- 2. All three Persons of the Godhead were present at Christ's baptism (Matt 3:16-17).
- 3. All three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned side-by-side (Matt 28:19 and 2 Cor 13:14).

Note: One reason why JW's have such a hard time with the doctrine of the Trinity is that it defies human logic. "Throughout the whole length and breadth of the Watchtower's turbulent history, one 'criterion' has been used in every era to measure the credibility of any Biblical doctrine. This 'criterion' is *reason*" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 63).²⁵ JW's would do well to remember the words of Isaiah 55:8-9 and Romans 11:33-34.

C. Christ physically rose from the dead.

Notice especially Luke 24:36-43. See also John 2:19-21, Colossians 2:9, and 1 Timothy 2:5.

D. Conscious suffering awaits those who reject Christ.

See the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. See also Matthew 18:8, 25:46, Mark 9:43, 48, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Jude 7, Revelation 14:11, 19:3, and 20:10.

E. Christ will return physically and visibly.

Note Matthew 24:27, Acts 1:9-11, and Revelation 1:7 in this regard.

Resources for Further Study:

The Kingdom of the Cults by Martin (1985: chp. 4; 1997: chp. 5).
Confronting the Cults by Lewis (chp. 2)
So What's the Difference? by Ridenour (chp. 9)
The Four Major Cults by Hoekema (chp. 5 and appendices D and E)
Handbook of Today's Religions by McDowell & Stewart (chp. 5)
Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 154-157)
Charts of Cults, Sects, & Religious Movements by House (pp. 149-164)
 "The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error" pamphlet by Moody Press
 "Christianity, Cults & Religions" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

²⁵J. K. Van Baalen (*The Chaos of the Cults*, p. 267) adds: "The fundamental error of Russellism, which continues to be promulgated by the Jehovah's Witnesses, is its stark rationalism."

What's the Difference?

Appendix A: The Deity of Christ

Of all the doctrines that comprise systematic theology, the doctrine of the deity of Christ²⁶ is arguably the most critical.²⁷ As Sir Robert Anderson in his book defending the deity of Christ, *The Lord from Heaven*, states (p. 87): "To deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is to bring Him down to the level of mere humanity; and the foundations of Christianity being thus destroyed, the whole superstructure falls to pieces." In a similar vein, Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p. 554) states: "It is no accident that throughout history those groups that have given up belief in the full deity of Christ have not remained long within the Christian faith." John Walvoord (*Jesus Christ Our Lord*, p. 109) adds: "Without question the crucial issue in biblical theology is the deity of Christ, and disregard or question of this central doctrine of the Bible leads to inevitable chaos in theology as a whole."

The doctrine of the deity of Christ is so crucial because to deny it is to condemn one's soul to eternal damnation (see John 8:24, Rom 10:9, and 2 John 9).

Scriptural Proofs for the Deity of Christ

1. The Bible explicitly declares Christ to be God.

- John 1:1c
- John 1:18
- Romans 9:5

²⁶Deity means being of the essence or substance of God. The deity of Christ means that Jesus of Nazareth is God" (Rolland McCune, "Systematic Theology II" class notes, p. 94).

²⁷The only other doctrines in systematic theology that might be more critical than the doctrine of the deity of Christ are the core doctrines of bibliology (inspiration, inerrancy, etc.). In this regard, John Walvoord (in his book, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*) states: "Since the Council of Nicaea in 325 there has been no denial of the deity and eternity of Christ which did not also deny the infallibility of Scripture" (p. 27) and "The evidence of Scripture is so complete that one who denies the deity of Christ must necessarily reject the accuracy of the Scriptures" (p. 108). Sir Robert Anderson (*The Lord From Heaven*, p. 21) concurs: "That the New Testament teaches the Deity of Christ is so indisputable that the infidel accepts the fact, and the task he sets himself is to disparage the testimony of the writers."

- Philippians 2:6²⁸
- Colossians 1:15 (cf. 2 Cor 4:4)
- Colossians 2:9 (cf. Col 1:19)
- Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1
- Hebrews 1:3
- Hebrews 1:8²⁹
- 1 John 5:20

2. The Bible implicitly declares Christ to be God.

- Matt 26:63-66, John 5:17-18, 8:58-59, 10:30-33, and 19:7. In all of these passages, the Jews sought to execute Jesus for blasphemy in accordance with Leviticus 24:16.
- John 14:9
- John 20:28

3. Christ is given divine names.

- "Mighty God" (Isa 9:6)
- "Son of God." In Hebrew, the phrase "son of x" expresses the character or essence of someone or something. An OT example is the Hebrew phrase "son of x number of years" to indicate a person's age. NT examples include James & John, the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17), and Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36). For the NT writers to say that Jesus Christ was the Son of God was tantamount to saying He was God. "The designation 'Son of God' when used of our Lord means of the order of God and is a strong and clear claim to full deity" (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 248). See John 10:36 and 19:7 (cf. John 5:18).
- "Immanuel" (Matt 1:23)
- "Lord" (Luke 2:11, Rom 10:9, Phil 2:11)
- "I am" (John 8:58; cf. Ex 3:14)

²⁸The Greek noun translated "form" in this verse refers to "the whole set of characteristics which makes something what it is" (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 689). Hence, the NIV translates: "in very nature God." This understanding of the term is verified by the parallel statement made immediately following: "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped."

²⁹Commenting on this verse, John MacArthur states on page 33 of his commentary on Hebrews: "I believe this verse gives the clearest, most powerful, emphatic, and irrefutable proof of the deity of Christ in the Bible--from the Father Himself."

4. Christ possesses divine attributes. "There is not an attribute of Deity which is not directly or indirectly ascribed to Christ" (John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* p. 31).
- Eternality (Isa 9:6, Micah 5:2, John 1:1, 8:58)
 - Omniscience (John 16:30, 21:17; cf. Matt 9:4, 12:25, Luke 6:8, 9:47, John 4:17-18, 29)
 - Omnipotence (John 20:30-31, Phil 3:21)
 - Immutability (Heb 13:8)
 - Omnipresence (John 1:48-50a)
 - Sovereignty (Dan 7:13-14, Matt 8:26-27, Rom 9:5, Phil 3:20-21, Rev 17:14, 19:16)
 - Holiness (Luke 1:35, Acts 3:14; cf. 2 Cor 5:21, Heb 4:15, 1 Pet 2:22)
 - Incomprehensibility (Judg 13:18; cf. Isa 9:6)
 - Love (Eph 3:19)
5. Christ accepted divine worship. Worship of men and angels in Scripture is consistently rejected (see Acts 10:25-26, 14:11-15, Rev 19:10, 22:8-9). Christ, however, accepted it (see Matt 14:33, 28:9, 17, and John 9:38). See also Matthew 2:11, Hebrews 1:6, and Revelation 5:6-14.
6. Christ exercised divine prerogatives. For example, in Matthew 9//Mark 2//Luke 5, Jesus exercised the divine prerogative to forgive sin, prompting the religious leaders of His day to charge Him with blasphemy. See especially Matt 9:2-3, 6//Mark 2:5-7, 10//Luke 5:20-21, 24. Another divine prerogative which Jesus exercised was the giving of life (see John 5:21).
7. Christ did things only God can do. This includes such things as creating (John 1:3, 10, Col 1:16, and Heb 1:2) and sustaining (Col 1:17 and Heb 1:3).

Throughout church history, the deity of Christ has been a favorite target of various heretics and heretical groups.³⁰ Over the past century, one of the most notorious deniers of Christ's deity have been the Jehovah's Witnesses. On page 47 of their book, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, they state: "The true Scriptures speak of God's Son, the Word, as 'a god.' He is a 'mighty god,' but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah."

³⁰“The Deity of Jesus Christ is one of the cornerstones of Christianity, and as such has been attacked more vigorously throughout the ages than any other single doctrine of the Christian faith” (Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 83).

Arius, the First JW

Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:9 that “there is nothing new under the sun.” In the 4th century A.D., a man by the name of Arius denied the deity of Christ by claiming that Christ was a created being.³¹ In 325 A.D., the Council of Nicea condemned Arianism as heretical. In spite of this, Arianism still lives on in the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who also teach that Christ was a created being.³²

Scriptures that the JW's cite in support of their position include John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, and 1 John 4:9 (“only begotten” in the KJV and NASB), Colossians 1:15 (“firstborn” in the KJV, NASB, and NIV), and Revelation 3:14 (“beginning” in the KJV and NASB).

In regards to the first series of texts, the Greek adjective translated “only begotten” is *monogenes*, from *monos*, “only” + *genos*, “kind.” The idea is that Jesus is God's special, unique, one-of-a-kind Son.³³ Hence, the NIV's translation, “one and only” (in John 1:14, 18, 3:16, and 1 John 4:9; cf. the NASB's marginal notes for John 1:14, 3:16, 18, and 1 John 4:9). Some have (in my opinion) incorrectly identified the derivative of *genes* in *monogenes* as the Greek verb *gennaō*, “to bear, beget, give birth to,” hence the rendering “only begotten.” Even if “only begotten” is the correct rendering, the doctrine being implied would be what theologians call the “eternal generation of the Son³⁴,” not the erroneous doctrine that Christ was a created being.

³¹Arius's infamous statement was: “There was a time when he [Christ] was not.” The orthodox corrective is: “There was never a time when He [Christ] was not.”

³²On page 46 of their book, *The Kingdom is at Hand*, they state: “In other words, he was the first creation of God the Father.”

³³Jesus is not God's only “son.” Angels, Adam, and believers are also called sons of God in Scripture. Jesus, however, is God's special Son (the only one being divine, like Himself). Similarly, Isaac was not Abraham's only son (Ishmael was also his son, born to Hagar), but was his special son (being the son of promise, born to Sarah). See Genesis 22:2, 12, as well as Hebrews 11:17-18. I am indebted to page 230 of Homer Kent's commentary on Hebrews for the bulk of the information contained in this footnote.

³⁴According to Dr. Rolland McCune (“Systematic Theology I” class notes, p. 131), the eternal generation of the Son is “that eternal act whereby the Father ‘communicates’ or makes common the divine essence to the Son; the eternal ‘sonning’ of the Son.”

In regards to Colossians 1:15, the term “firstborn” has the idea of first in *rank*, not first in *time* (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 697). The only time in the NT that the Greek adjective translated “firstborn” in Colossians 1:15 means first in time, rather than first in rank, is in Luke 2:7. In other words, Colossians 1:15 is asserting that Christ is preeminent over all creation.³⁵ The succeeding context verifies this: verse 16 gives the reason why (“for”) Christ is preeminent over all created things—He is the One who created them; verse 17 states that Christ is “before all things,” a Greek prepositional phrase which can indicate first in rank (cf. Jas 5:12 and 1 Pet 4:8, where the same Greek prepositional phrase is used to indicate first in rank, being translated “above all”); verse 18 speaks of Christ’s preeminence over the church, once again calling Him “firstborn” and asserting that “He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”³⁶

In regards to Revelation 3:14, notice how the NIV translates this verse, as well as the NASB’s marginal note.

The JW’s and John 1:1c

³⁵“ . . . [F]irst-born carries the idea of pre-eminence or supremacy, priority of position” (Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology II” class notes, p. 102).

³⁶The following excerpt is from a 1995 seminary paper I wrote on Colossians 1:15-20, commenting on the phrase “firstborn of all creation” in Colossians 1:15: “At first glance, one might conclude, albeit erroneously, that Paul is suggesting that Christ is the first created being. However, two factors mitigate against such an understanding. First, it does not fit the context, as Paul goes on to say in verse sixteen that Christ created all things. How can He be created if He is the Creator? Second, the word *prototokos* [the Greek adjective translated ‘firstborn] usually signifies something altogether different. Rather than denoting primogeniture in the literal sense of the term, it often indicates the right of pre-eminence bestowed upon the first male child born into a family (Deut 21:17). Furthermore, the term is often used independent of the idea of birth (Job 18:13, Isa 14:30). Speaking of David, Psalm 89:27 clearly brings out this pre-eminent sense: ‘I will appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth’ [NIV]. Thus, rather than indicating first in time, *prototokos* indicates first in priority or rank. Christ is the One to whom belongs the right and dignity of the firstborn [William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary, p. 72]. Paul goes on to indicate the realm in which Christ is the firstborn, namely, creation. The ablative *ktiseos* [the Greek noun translated “of creation”] should be considered an ablative of comparison, not a partitive ablative; Christ is pre-eminent in comparison to every created thing, not part of the created order.”

In 1950, the Jehovah’s Witnesses came out with a sectarian, to say the least, translation of the Bible called the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (the *NWT* for short). In it, they brazenly deny the deity of Christ by mistranslating the last phrase in John 1:1, translating “and the Word was a god” (cf. the *NWT* rendering of John 1:18). In defense of their translation, they point to the fact that the Greek noun translated “God” (*theos*) is anarthrous (doesn’t have an article) and should, thus, be translated as an indefinite (“a”).³⁷ However, since *theos* in John 1:1c is an “anarthrous precopulative predicate nominative³⁸,” translating *theos* as an indefinite is indefensible. The reason for this is twofold: 1) According to the Greek scholar, Colwell, a definite predicate nominative never takes a definite article when it precedes a copulative verb (Colwell’s rule); thus, the fact that *theos* does not have a definite article preceding it does not ipso facto rule out the possibility that *theos* is a definite (“the God”). However, since the preceding phrase (John 1:1b) states (literally) that “the Word was with the God,” *theos* could not be a definite, else John would be contradicting himself by stating in 1:1b that the Word was with the God and in 1:1c that the Word was the God; 2) According to Dr. William Combs (Professor of New Testament at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary), an anarthrous precopulative predicate nominative never indicates an indefinite noun; thus the indefinite option (“a god”) is ruled out. This leaves us with only one more option, translating *theos* neither as definite (“the God”) or indefinite (“a god”), but as qualitative (“God”). According to Combs, 94% of the anarthrous precopulative predicate nominatives in the gospel of John are qualitative (the other 6% definite). A final note on John 1:1c: *theos* is first in the sentence, for emphasis.³⁹

The JW’s and Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1

³⁷The *NWT*, however, fails to be consistent in this regard, even within the very chapter under consideration, John 1. In verses 6, 12, 13, and 18 (2x), *theos* lacks an article, yet each time the *NWT* translates *theos* as a definite, rather than as an indefinite.

³⁸By “anarthrous precopulative predicate nominative” is meant that *theos* is anarthrous (doesn’t have an article preceding it), precopulative (precedes the Greek copulative verb/linking verb, *eimi*, translated “was” in the imperfect tense), and a predicate nominative (renames the subject of the sentence, *logos*, “Word”; we know that *logos* is the subject of the sentence because it has a definite article preceding it, translated “the,” whereas *theos* does not).

³⁹For further study, see footnotes 12 and 13 on page 234 of Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*.

The *NWT* translates the end of Titus 2:13: “. . . of the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus” and the end of 2 Peter 1:1: “. . . by the righteousness of our God and [the] Savior Jesus Christ,” implying in both passages that God and Jesus Christ are to be viewed separately (unfortunately, the KJV rendering of these two passages is just ambiguous enough to potentially leave the same impression; the NASB and the NIV more clearly affirm the deity of Christ in these passages⁴⁰).

In both of these passages, the “Granville Sharp rule” applies. According to Sharp, a Greek scholar of the past, whenever two or more singular, non-proper, personal nouns are joined by the Greek conjunction *kai* (“and”) and the definite article precedes the first noun, but not the second, both nouns refer to the same person. Thus, both of these passages are unequivocally declaring Christ to be God.⁴¹

The JW's and Colossians 1:16-17

Notice what the *NWT* does with Colossians 1:16-17 in order to make it fit their erroneous belief that Christ was a created being: “because by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All [other] things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist.” As you might suspect, the Greek word for “other” appears nowhere in this passage; the *NWT* translators have illegitimately supplied it.

⁴⁰“Anyone who has spent a great deal of time sharing the gospel with people who deny the deity of Christ, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, knows that using a modern translation such as the NIV makes one’s work much easier” (James White, *The King James Only Controversy*, p. 196).

⁴¹For further study, see the lead article by Dr. William Combs in the Spring 1997 issue of DBTS’s *The Sentinel*, entitled “Granville Sharp and the Deity of Christ.” See also footnote 15 on page 236 of Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* and pages 267-270 of *The King James Only Controversy* by James White.

What’s the Difference?

Appendix B: The Trinity of God

When we say that God is “triune⁴²,” we mean that He is three-in-one (not three and one, at least not in the same respect). In terms of person, God is three: Father, Son, and Spirit. In terms of essence, God is one. To say that God is triune, then, is to say that the one God exists in three persons. “The tri-unity of God means that the divine essence subsists wholly and indivisibly, simultaneously and eternally, in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology I” class notes, p. 126). All three persons of the Godhead are coequal, coeternal, coinherent (John 10:38), and consubstantial (of the same substance). They are “distinguishable as persons, but one and inseparable in their being” (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 337). The persons must not be confounded, nor must the essence be divided. The Godhead exists undivided in divided persons.

The Trinity of God in Scripture

Though the triunity of God is not treated in a full and formal sense in any one passage in Scripture, it can be inferred from numerous passages in both testaments, more clearly so from texts in the New Testament.

The Trinity of God in the OT

- Texts in the OT that speak of God in terms of plurality⁴³:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen 1:26)

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:22)

⁴²Though the terms “triunity” and “trinity” are somewhat interchangeable, I am using the former term because it is more explicitly descriptive of the concept it names than is the latter term.

⁴³While these plurals may be what Hebrew grammarians refer to as “plurals of intensity,” they are certainly consistent with the doctrine of the triunity of God implicitly revealed elsewhere in Scripture.

"The LORD said, ". . . Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language . . ." (Gen 11:7)

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" (Isa 6:8a)

- Texts in the OT that mention both the Father and the Son in distinction from one another: Psalm 2:7 (cf. Acts 13:33, Heb 1:5, 5:5), 45:6-7 (cf. Heb 1:8-9), 110:1 (cf. Heb 1:13), Proverbs 30:4
- Texts in the OT that mention Father, Son, and Spirit in distinction from one another: Isaiah 48:16, 61:1 (cf. Luke 4:16-21)

The Trinity of God in the NT

- Texts in the NT that mention Father, Son, and Spirit in distinction from one another: Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19, John 14:16-17, 26, 15:26, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Ephesians 4:4-6, 1 Peter 1:2, and Jude 20-21

Note: 1 John 5:7 (in the KJV), containing the infamous "Johannine Comma," is not included in the above list because of its likely spurious origin.

The Trinity of God in Church History

According to John Feinberg (*No One Like Him*, p. 473), it was Tertullian (A.D. 160-225) who first coined the term "trinity."⁴⁴ Two famous church councils in particular addressed the issue:

The Council of Nicea (325 A.D.)

⁴⁴The term he actually used was the Latin *trinitas*, meaning "threeness."

The two antagonists at the Council of Nicea were Arius⁴⁵ and Athanasius⁴⁶. Arius taught the heresy that both God the Son and God the Spirit were created beings (the Son being created by the Father⁴⁷, and the Spirit being created by the Son), while Athanasius argued otherwise. The Council of Nicea focused particularly on the Son's relationship to the Father (the Council of Constantinople focused on the Spirit's relationship to the Father). Followers of Athanasius contended that the Son was of the *same* substance as the Father (*homoousios*), followers of Arius contended that the Son was of a *different* substance than the Father (*heteroousios*), while others, led by Eusebius of Caesarea, pushed for a mediating position, that the Son was of a *similar* substance as the Father (*homoiousios*).⁴⁸ The Council affirmed the position of Athanasius, stating that the Son was "of one substance (*homoousion*) with the Father."

The Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.)

Because the focus of the Council of Nicea was on the relationship of the Son to the Father, it did not comment on the relationship of the Spirit to the Father. Therefore, the Council of Constantinople addressed this issue, affirming that the Spirit, like the Son,

⁴⁵Arius himself was not in attendance, since he wasn't a bishop, but was represented by Eusebius of Nicodemia.

⁴⁶Athanasius was not an official member of the council, not being a bishop, but attended as secretary of Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria.

⁴⁷This tenet of Arianism is promoted today by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

⁴⁸Commenting on the significance between *homoousios* and *homoiousios*, C. Samuel Storms (*The Grandeur of God*, p. 161) states: "The difference between the two words is in a solitary letter. The difference between the two concepts of Christ is immeasurable. There are times in the history of the church when splitting theological hairs yields eternal consequences." Harold O. J. Brown (quoted in Storms, pp. 163-164) explains: "The distinction between *homo* ('same') and *homoi* ('similar') may seem trivial, but it was not so subtle that most ordinary Christians failed to grasp what is at stake. If Jesus is of the same substance as the Father, then he is truly God, and it is reasonable to think that he is able to 'save . . . to the uttermost' those who come to him (Heb 7:25). On the other hand, if he is only of similar substance, which was all that even the conservative Arians were willing to concede, then it is not evident that he necessarily possesses the divine power and authority he needs to make an atonement on behalf of the whole human race." Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, pp. 244-245) adds: "The difference between the two words was only one letter, the Greek letter iota, and some have criticized the church for allowing a doctrinal dispute over a single letter to consume so much attention for most of the fourth century A.D. Some have wondered, 'Could anything be more foolish than arguing over a single letter in a word?' But the difference between the two words was profound, and the presence or absence of the iota really did mark the difference between biblical Christianity, with a true doctrine of the Trinity, and a heresy that did not accept the full deity of Christ and therefore was nontrinitarian and ultimately destructive to the whole Christian faith."

was of the same substance as the Father. Thus, in 381 A.D., the church *officially* espoused belief in the doctrine of the trinity of God.

The Filioque Controversy

Another interesting development in church history pertaining to the doctrine of the trinity of God involved the “filioque” controversy. The Council of Constantinople had declared that the Spirit proceeded from the Father (John 15:26).⁴⁹ In 589 A.D., the Council of Toledo added that the Spirit had proceeded from the Son as well (“filioque” is Latin for “and from the Son”). The Western church agreed, while the Eastern church disagreed, a precipitating factor in the eventual Eastern-Western split of 1054 A.D.

Ontological vs. Economic

When studying the trinity of God, one crucial distinction must always be kept in mind, the distinction between what has been called the “ontological trinity” and what has been called the “economic trinity.”

The Ontological Trinity

In terms of essence, being, or nature (who They are), all three Persons of the Godhead stand on equal footing (see, for example, John 10:30). All three are fully and equally God. The Son is God (Isa 9:6, John 1:1, Col 2:9, Titus 2:13, Heb 1:3, 8, 2 Pet 1:1, 1 John 5:20). The Spirit is God (2 Cor 3:17; also compare Acts 5:3 with Acts 5:4). As if to communicate this equality of essence, the three are listed in various orders in Scripture: Father, Son, Spirit (Matt 28:19); Father, Spirit, Son (1 Pet 1:2); Son, Father, Spirit (2 Cor 13:14); Spirit, Father, Son (Jude 20-21); and Spirit, Son, Father (1 Cor 12:4-6, Eph 4:4-6).

⁴⁹This doctrine is called the eternal procession of the Spirit, “that eternal act whereby the Father and the Son make the divine essence common to the Spirit; the eternal ‘spirating’ of the Spirit” (Roland McCune, “Systematic Theology I” class notes, p. 132). In a similar vein is the doctrine called the eternal generation of the Son, “that eternal act whereby the Father ‘communicates’ or makes common the divine essence to the Son; the eternal ‘sonning’ of the Son” (ibid., p. 131). Both doctrines are reflected in the Westminster Confession’s statement regarding the trinity of God: “In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son” (quoted in Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 58). Interestingly, John Feinberg (*No One Like Him*, pp. 488-492) rejects both doctrines: “. . . the church historically has affirmed that the Son is eternally generated and the Spirit eternally proceeds. Despite their firm entrenchment in both Western and Eastern traditions, the doctrines of eternal generation and eternal procession are unclear and not required by Scripture. In saying this, I part company with a host of theologians throughout church history” (pp. 488-489).

The Economic Trinity

In terms of function (what They do), the Son (John 14:28 and 1 Cor 11:3) and the Spirit (John 14:26) are subordinate to the Father, and the Spirit is subordinate also to the Son (John 15:26, Rom 8:9, Gal 4:6). Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p. 257) likens the Father to a husband, the Son to a wife, and the Spirit to a child (all three are equal in essence, but unequal in function). The interrelationship of the roles performed by the Persons of the Godhead has been likened (by Rolland McCune) to those performed by an architect (the Father), builder (the Son), and construction worker (the Spirit).⁵⁰ The Father is the source (*from* the Father), the Son the channel (*through* the Son), the Spirit the applicator (*by* the Spirit). See 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Ephesians 2:18 in the NIV in this regard. The Father purposes, the Son secures, and the Spirit applies (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 20).

“Try to explain it [the doctrine of the trinity of God], and you’ll lose your mind; But try to deny it, and you’ll lose your soul.”
(source unknown, quoted in C. Samuel Storms, *The Grandeur of God*, p. 56)

⁵⁰The construction metaphor is an especially apt one as all three Persons of the Godhead played active roles in the “construction” of the universe (the Father in Gen 1:1; the Son in John 1:3, Col 1:16, and Heb 1:2; and the Spirit in Gen 1:2).

What's the Difference?

Part 1: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and Cults Lesson 3: Mormonism

I. History⁵¹

⁵¹“There is probably no American religious group which has had a more colorful or fascinating history than the Mormons” (Hoekema, p. 9).

“The fastest growing⁵² and most successful cult in the history of the United States, and perhaps the world” (Ridenour, p. 130), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (aka Mormonism) began in the early 1800's when a teen by the name of Joseph Smith⁵³ (whose family was Presbyterian, though Joseph himself never officially joined the church) allegedly had a series of visions (the first being an appearance of God the Father and God the Son in 1820 and the second being the appearance of an angel named Moroni in 1823⁵⁴), with the latter eventually leading to the unearthing in 1827 of a golden-plated book buried in a hillside near Palmyra, New York. This book (written in "reformed Egyptian"⁵⁵ hieroglyphics) was "translated"⁵⁶ by Smith and became the basis for the *Book of Mormon*⁵⁷, first published in 1830 (the same year the Mormon "church" was

⁵²According to House (p. 57), the Mormons claimed just over 9 million members worldwide in 1994, and, at their 1980's rate of growth, expect to have 157 million by 2050. According to the July 21, 1997 edition of *USA Today*, Mormonism is the fastest growing "denomination" in America, growing 50% each decade.

⁵³“A key to understanding Mormons is that they have absolutely unshakable faith in Joseph Smith, their first prophet. Facts do not matter. Whatever happened, Smith is still their source of divine revelation, the foundation of their entire viewpoint” (Ridenour, p. 138). To give you an idea of the kind of man Smith was, consider the following words (quoted in Farkas & Reed, p. 91), uttered by Smith a month before his death: “... I will come out on the top at last. I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I. The followers of Jesus ran away from Him; but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet”

⁵⁴For Smith's recounting of the visions, see pages 64-65 of McDowell and Stewart.

⁵⁵“Reformed Egyptian is a nonexistent language according to every leading Egyptologist and philologist ever consulted on the problem” (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 172).

⁵⁶According to one Dr. Charles Anthon, Smith "was placed behind a curtain . . . and, being thus concealed from view . . . deciphered the characters in the book, and, having committed some of them to paper, handed copies from behind the curtain, to those who stood on the outside" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 181). See also the testimony of one David Whitmer in Lewis, pp. 52-53. Smith was able to decipher the characters via a pair of "seer stones" (affixed to silver bows to look like a pair of glasses) unearthed along with the golden-plated book in 1827. Ridenour (p. 132) points out: "Using a seer stone to get information otherwise unavailable is called 'scrying' (from *descry*, 'to read'), an occult practice still popular in contemporary witchcraft."

⁵⁷The *Book of Mormon* is one of the "Four Standard Works" of Mormonism. The other three

incorporated under the name the "Church of Christ"; in 1834 the name was changed to the "Church of the Latter Day Saints" and in 1838 to the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints") and subtitled: *Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. Smith was killed in a shoot-out with a mob in Carthage, Illinois in 1844.⁵⁸ After Smith's death, the Mormon leadership mantle fell to Brigham Young.⁵⁹ Smith and Young are the two prominent names in Mormonism. There are several varieties of Mormonism (over 100, according to Farkas & Reed, p. 158), the main one being The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (based in Salt Lake City, Utah), the focus of this lesson. The largest offshoot is the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (based in Independence, Missouri; founded by Smith's wife, Emma, and their son, Joseph Smith III; always led by a descendant of Joseph Smith).⁶⁰ The name "Mormon"

comes from the man who allegedly authored the golden-plated book found by Smith.⁶¹ The primary Mormon educational institution is Brigham Young University (located in Provo, UT). Since the middle of the 19th century, the Mormons have produced the *Deseret News* (now a daily paper). Mormon congregations are called "wards"; the buildings such congregations meet in are called "chapels." Well-known Mormons include the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Stephen Covey (author of the best-selling *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*), the Osmond family (Donny, Marie, et. al.), former MI governor George Romney, current MA governor Mitt Romney, and longtime Utah senator Orrin Hatch.

are the King James Version of the Bible, the *Doctrines and Covenants* (first published in 1835), and the *Pearl of Great Price* (first published in 1851). Like the *Book of Mormon*, the latter two works are for the most part the work of Joseph Smith. Smith also published his own version of the KJV (called the *JST, Joseph Smith Translation*), in which he made several significant Mormon-friendly changes to the text. While the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints does not recognize Smith's version of the KJV, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints does. Many of the revisions made by Smith, however, were also added to the *Pearl of Great Price*, which the main church does recognize. How does the Bible stack up against the other three Mormon sacred writings in the minds of Mormons? Twentieth century Mormon president, Joseph Fielding Smith (quoted in Hoekema, p. 23), once wrote: "Guided by the *Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants*, and the Spirit of the Lord, it is not difficult for one to discern the errors in the Bible." Joseph Smith (quoted in Farkas & Reed, p. 34) once said that the *Book of Mormon* was "the most correct of any book on earth and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book." Mormon "apostle," Bruce McConkie (quoted in Farkas & Reed, p. 120), once said: "Men can get nearer to the Lord, can have more of the spirit of conversion and conformity in their hearts, can gain a better understanding of the doctrines of salvation through the Book of Mormon than they can through the Biblethere will be more people saved in the kingdom of God--ten thousand times over--because of the Book of Mormon than there will be because of the Bible." According to page 764 of *Mormon Doctrine*: "... [A]cceptance of the Bible is coupled with a reservation that it is true only insofar as translated correctly The other three [*Book of Mormon, Doctrines and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*], having been revealed in modern times in English, are accepted without qualification."

⁵⁸Mormons like to think that Smith died a martyr. However, Smith shot and killed two of his assailants in the process.

⁵⁹Mormons like to overlook the fact that Young ordered the massacre of some 120 non-Mormon immigrants in the infamous "Mountain Meadows Massacre" on September 11, 1857.

⁶⁰According to Mead & Hill (pp. 165-173), other Mormon offshoots include "Church of Christ (Temple Lot)"; "Church of Jesus Christ (Bickertonites)"; and "Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-Day Saints (Strangite)." See also chart 75 ("A Mormon Family Tree") in Robert Walton's *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*, who gives the following dates for the various Mormon groups: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints--1830; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Strang)--1844; Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints--1860; Church of Jesus Christ (Bickerton)--1862; and Church of Christ (Temple Lot)--1867.

⁶¹According to Mormons, Mormon wrote the first thirteen books of the *Book of Mormon*. His son, Moroni, the angel that allegedly appeared to Joseph Smith, wrote the last two books.

II. Some⁶² Erroneous Mormon Beliefs

A. Extrabiblical revelation

As stated in footnote 57, the Mormons claim four books to be authoritative revelations from God. Furthermore, they claim the gift of prophecy for whomever the current president of the church may be.⁶³

The *Book of Mormon* itself says in 2 Nephi 29:6, 9, and 10: "Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written."

"One of the great heresies of an apostate Christianity is the unfounded assumption that the Bible contains all of the inspired teachings now extant [known to exist] among men" (20th century Mormon "apostle," Bruce McConkie, quoted in Hoekema, p. 25).

One of the reasons (besides needing an authoritative basis for their peculiar beliefs) why the Mormons subscribe to other sacred writings is because they do not believe in the sufficiency of Scripture. Rather, as the *Book of Mormon* states in 1 Nephi 13:28, they believe: "Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God" (cf. 1 Nephi 13:26, 32, and 34).

"The words of our living prophets are also accepted as scripture. ...In addition to these four books of scripture, the inspired words of our living prophets become scripture to us. Their words come to us through conferences, Church publications, and instructions to local priesthood leaders" (*Gospel Principles*, pp. 49, 51-52).

⁶²For an examination and refutation of other erroneous Mormon beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

⁶³Joseph Smith allegedly received 135 direct revelations between 1831 and 1844 (Martin *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 174). Lewis (p. 56) writes: "Fifty-eight prophecies of Joseph Smith examined in detail by G. T. Harrison failed to come to pass. The former third generation Mormon concludes: 'A baseball player who did not have a higher rating as a ball player than Joseph Smith's average as a true prophet, could not even play on the cinderlot team. He would not even be able to catch a ball. After studied calculations we find his rating as a prophet to be: No hits. No runs. 58 errors.'" "

"Any Latter-day Saint who denounces or opposes, whether actively or otherwise, any plan or doctrine advocated by the prophets, seers, and revelators of the Church is cultivating the spirit of apostasy ... Lucifer ... wins a great victory when he can get members of the Church to speak against their leaders and to do their own thinking ... When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done. When they propose a plan--it is God's plan. When they point the way, there is no other which is safe. When they give directions, it should mark the end of the controversy" (*Improvement Era*, June 1945, p. 354).

B. Polytheism (i.e., belief in many gods)⁶⁴

Mormons believe that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three separate Gods.

"And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth" (Abraham 4:1).

"How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods" (*Journal of Discourses*, 7:333).

"I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods. If this is in accordance with the New Testament, lo and behold! we have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural; and who can contradict it? (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 370).

C. God the Father is corporeal.

Mormons believe that God the Father, like God the Son, has a body.

"We know that both the Father and the Son are in form and stature perfect men; each of them possesses a tangible body, infinitely pure and perfect and attended by transcendent glory, nevertheless a body of flesh and bones" (*Articles of Faith*, p. 42).

D. Salvation by works

"We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel" (Article 3 of the *Mormon Articles of Faith*).

"We hold that salvation from sin is obtainable only through obedience, and that while the door to the kingdom has been opened by the sacrificial death and the resurrection of our Lord the Christ, no man may enter there except by his personal and voluntary application

⁶⁴"Technically, Mormonism is not polytheism (belief in or worship of many gods). It is more accurate to say Mormonism is henotheism (worship of one God while believing in the existence of many others)" (Ridenour, p. 244).

expressed in terms of obedience to the prescribed laws and ordinances of the Gospel" (*The Philosophical Basis of Mormonism*, p. 17).
"All men by the grace of God have the power to gain eternal life. This is called salvation by grace coupled with obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel" (*What Mormons Think of Christ*, p. 28).

According to Mead & Hill (p. 167), these "laws and ordinances" include faith in Christ, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, the laying on of hands [by a Mormon priest] in order to receive the Holy Spirit, and the observance of the Lord's Supper each Sunday.

"Christians speak often of the blood of Christ and its cleansing power. Much that is believed and taught on this subject, however, is such utter nonsense and so palpably false that to believe it is to lose one's salvation. Many go so far, for instance, as to pretend and at least, to believe that if we confess Christ with our lips and avow that we accept him as our personal Savior, we are thereby saved. His blood, without other act than mere belief, they say, makes us clean" (*What the Mormons Think of Christ*, p. 27).

"Some of our old traditions teach us that a man guilty of atrocious and murderous acts may savingly repent on the scaffold; and upon his execution will hear the expression-- 'Bless God! he has gone to heaven, to be crowned in glory, through the all-redeeming merits of Christ the Lord!' This is all nonsense. Such a character will never see heaven" (*Journal of Discourses*, 8:61). In this vein, Joseph Fielding Smith (quoted in Hoekema, p. 59) once wrote: "Joseph Smith taught that there were certain sins so grievous that man may commit, that they will place the transgressors beyond the power of the atonement of Christ. If these offenses are committed, then the blood of Christ will not cleanse them from their sins even though they repent.⁶⁵ Therefore their only hope is to have their own blood shed to atone, as far as possible, in their behalf."

Not surprisingly, Mormons deny the doctrine of justification by faith. Twentieth century Mormon "apostle," James Talmage (quoted in Hoekema, p. 60), called this doctrine "pernicious" and that it had "exercised an influence for evil."

E. A continuing priesthood

"One of the unique aspects of the Mormon Church is the claimed restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods, one or the other of which is held by most male members twelve years and older" (Farkas & Reed, pp. 137-138). Access to God comes only through a duly-appointed Mormon priest.

⁶⁵Brigham Young (quoted in House, p. 76) also taught this: "It is true that the blood of the Son of God was shed for sins ... yet men can commit sins which it can never remit."

"Except men come to these legal administrators and learn of Christ and his laws as newly revealed on earth, they cannot be saved in his everlasting kingdom hereafter" (*What the Mormons Think of Christ*, p. 7).

F. The attainment of godhood

Mormons believe that men can reach the status of "exaltation" or "godhood." Mormons call this doctrine "eternal progression."

"As man is, God once was⁶⁶: as God is, man may become" (*The Gospel Through the Ages*, pp. 105-106).

"You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves" (Joseph Smith, quoted in Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 204).

"That exaltation which the saints of all ages have so devoutly sought is godhood itself. Godhood is to have the character, possess the attributes, and enjoy the perfections which the Father has. It is to do what he does, have the powers resident in him, and live as he lives" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 321).

G. Denial of the Virgin Birth

Mormons do not believe that Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, but that Mary was impregnated by God the Father (whom they believe is corporeal).

"[Jesus] was not begotten by the Holy Ghost" (*Journal of Discourses*, 1:50).

H. Other Mormon beliefs

1. Polygamy

⁶⁶Joseph Smith said in his "King Follett Discourse" (cited in McDowell & Stewart, p. 69): "God was once as we are now, and is an exalted man We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil so that you may see."

Joseph Smith received a pro-polygamy “revelation” in 1843.⁶⁷ Both Smith and Young had dozens of wives. In 1890, Mormon president Wilford Woodruff allegedly received a “revelation,” resulting in the issuing of a “manifesto” forbidding the practice of polygamy (though not retracting the previous “revelation” allowing for it). It is clear to all but Mormons that Woodruff’s action was in response to the mounting political pressure being brought to bear upon the Mormons at the time because of their practice of polygamy, a practice that was threatening Utah’s bid for statehood. According to Farkas & Reed (pp. 24 and 107), as of 1995 (the year their book was published) polygamy was still being practiced by 30,000-50,000 fundamentalist Mormons in the southwestern U.S.

According to Ridenour (p. 140), the 19th century Mormon “apostle,” Orson Pratt, strongly implied that Jesus was a polygamist, having married Mary, Martha, and the other Mary at the wedding of Cana.

2. Racism

According to the *Book of Mormon* (2 Nephi 5:21 and Alma 3:6), black skin is a curse due to sin. Joseph Smith (cited in Hoekema, p. 48) once wrote: “There is a reason why one man is born black and with other disadvantages, while another is born white with great advantages. The reason is that we once had an estate before we came here, and were obedient, more or less, to the laws that were given us there. Those who were faithful in all things there received greater blessings here, and those who were not faithful received less.” In 1978, however, under mounting political pressure, a “revelation” was given to then Mormon president, Spencer Kimball, allowing black men to enter the Mormon priesthood.

3. Refraining from coffee, tea, tobacco, and alcohol

4. Baptism for the dead (based on 1 Cor 15:29, but more so on a “revelation” received by Joseph Smith)

5. Celestial marriage

Mormon couples married in a Mormon temple will remain married

⁶⁷According to Ridenour (p. 133), this revelation “included a threat that Smith’s first wife, Emma, would be ‘destroyed’ if she resisted the idea.” Ridenour (in an endnote, p. 241) goes on to write: “Evidently Smith had been practicing polygamy long before he issued his revelation. *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 132:52 has God telling Emma to ‘receive all those who *have been given* unto my servant, Joseph’ (emphasis added).” Not surprisingly, Smith used the ruse of “God told me” to justify his courting of other women (see Farkas & Reed, pp. 102-103).

for eternity, and will bear “spirit children,” provided they attain the status of godhood.

6. Garden of Eden was located in Independence, MO⁶⁸

III. Our Response

None other than Brigham Young himself (*Journal of Discourses*, 16:46) once said: “Take up the Bible, compare the religion of the Latter-day Saints with it, and see if it will stand the test.” Let’s take Young up on his challenge.

A. The Bible is the only source of divine revelation today.⁶⁹

The canon of Scripture was closed with the writing of the book of Revelation at the end of the first century A.D. Notice Jude 3 and Revelation 22:18-19⁷⁰ in this regard. Consider also the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture (see especially 2 Tim 3:16-17 and 2 Pet 1:3, as well as Luke 16:31). Proverbs 30:6 commands us not to add to God’s words.

That the *Book of Mormon* cannot be inspired is seen by the many errors it contains. For example, Alma 7:10 says that Jesus was born in Jerusalem, instead of Bethlehem.⁷¹ Furthermore, there are scads of contradictions between the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrines and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*.⁷²

⁶⁸“The reason why the cradle of civilization later moved to the Mesopotamian area, according to Mormons, is that at the time of the Flood Noah’s ark was driven by the wind from the American continent to Asia” (Hoekema, p. 49).

⁶⁹For more on this, see Appendix C: How Do We Know the Bible is the Word of God? and Appendix D: The Canon of Scripture.

⁷⁰While these verses particularly pertain to the book of Revelation, the principle articulated can be applied to all of Scripture. As Hoekema (p. 32) states: “The question may well be asked whether these words do not, by implication, also teach the finality and inviolability of the other books of the Bible. If one may not add anything to the Book of Revelation, on what grounds is it permissible to add material to other Biblical books?”

⁷¹For more on the problems with the *Book of Mormon*, see Farkas & Reed, as well as pages 60-61 of House and Appendix 3 (“Anachronisms and Historical Inaccuracies in the Mormon Scriptures”) in *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* by Gleason Archer.

⁷²For more on the contradictions between the Mormon sacred writings, see Farkas & Reed, as

The 19th century Mormon "apostle," Orson Pratt (quoted in Hoekema, p. 86), once said: "This book [The *Book of Mormon*] must be either true or false If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever palmed upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions who would sincerely receive it as the word of God, and will suppose themselves securely built upon the rock of truth until they are plunged with their families into hopeless despair."

20th century Mormon "apostle," and later president, Joseph Fielding Smith (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:188), once said: "If Joseph Smith was a deceiver, ... then he should be exposed; his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false If his claims and declarations were built upon fraud and deceit, there would appear many errors and contradictions, which would be easy to detect."

B. There is one God in three Persons (see Appendix B: The Triunity of God).

Whereas the JW's stumble over the second half of this declaration, the Mormon's stumble over the first half. Three in person does not equal three in essence. The Bible teaches monotheism (Deut 6:4), not polytheism.

C. God is a Spirit.

See John 4:24, along with Luke 24:39 (see also 1 Tim 1:17, 6:16, and Heb 11:27, as well as John 1:18 and 5:37). "Theophany"⁷³ and "anthropomorphism"⁷⁴ are not a part of Mormon lingo.

D. Salvation is by grace alone (*sola gratia*; salvation's basis) through faith alone (*sola fides*; salvation's means) in Christ alone (*solus Christus*; salvation's object), not by works. "Laws and ordinances of the gospel" is a theological oxymoron of the highest order! The atonement of Christ is of infinite value and, thus, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of every man, no matter how godless (see John 1:29, 1 John 1:7, and 2:2).

Romans 10:2-3 is a divine commentary on the Mormons and all other such "works righteousness" religious groups. See also Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Titus 3:5 in this regard.

⁷³A "theophany" (the Greek noun *theos*, "God" + the Greek verb *phaino*, "to appear") is an OT appearance of God in physical form.

⁷⁴An "anthropomorphism" (the Greek noun *anthropos*, "man" + the Greek noun *morphe*, "form, shape, appearance") is a description of God in human terms for the sake of human understanding.

E. The individual priesthood of the believer

A human priest is not a prerequisite for access to God. See Hebrews 4:16, 1 Peter 2:5, 9, and Revelation 1:6 in this regard.

F. The Creator/creature distinction

“In Mormon theology, therefore, not only is God dragged down to the level of man, but man is at the same time exalted to potential deity. All ultimate differentiation between God and man has been done away with in this system, which now promises to its adherents what Satan, through the serpent, once promised to Eve: ‘Ye shall be as God’ (Gen. 3:5)” (Hoekema, p. 40).

God is infinite (unlimited), while man is finite (limited). The gap between the two is infinite. See especially Isaiah 55:8-9 in this regard.

G. Jesus Christ was virgin born.

See Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-20, and Luke 1:35 in this regard.

In response to Mormon’s teaching that a corporeal God the Father impregnated Mary, Hoekema (p. 56) exclaims: “One shudders to think of the revolting implications of this view, which brings into what is supposed to be ‘Christian’ theology one of the most unsavory features of ancient pagan mythology!”

Resources for Further Study:

The Kingdom of the Cults by Martin (1985: chp. 6; 1997: chp. 6)

Confronting the Cults by Lewis (chp. 3)

Mormonism: Changes, Contradictions, and Errors by Farkas & Reed

So What’s the Difference by Ridenour (chp. 10)

The Four Major Cults by Hoekema (chp. 2 and appendix A)

Handbook of Today’s Religions by McDowell & Stewart (part 1; chp. 6)

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 165-173)

Charts of Cults, Sects, & Religious Movements by House (pp. 57-77 and pp. 185-209)

“The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error” pamphlet by Moody Press

“Christianity, Cults, & Religions” pamphlet by Rose Publishing

What’s the Difference?

Appendix C: How Do We Know the Bible is the Word of God?

In trying to answer this question, many have pointed to such factors as the longevity of the Bible (in spite of repeated attempts to eradicate It⁷⁵), Its internal consistency (in spite of Its 40+ human authors), Its fulfilled prophecies⁷⁶, Its transforming power, etc. as proof of Its divine origin. The best such proofs can do, however, is establish a high degree of probability, but never absolute certainty, that the Bible is the Word of God.⁷⁷

⁷⁵“French humanist Voltaire (1694-1778) boastfully proclaimed, ‘Fifty years from now the world will hear no more of the Bible,’ Yet in the year of his boast the British Museum purchased a manuscript of the Greek New Testament from the Russian government for \$500,000, while a first edition of Voltaire’s book was selling for eight cents a copy! Fifty years after the death of Voltaire, Bibles were being printed by the Geneva Bible Society in the very house where Voltaire had lived and on his own printing presses!” (Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 81).

⁷⁶“Oxford University scholar H. P. Liddon noted that the Old Testament has 332 distinct predictions that were literally fulfilled in Christ. The probability of that number of predictions concerning one single individual coming true has been calculated as 1 out of 83 billion” (ibid., pp. 77-78). “The Old Testament contains over 300 references to the Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Computations using the science of probability on just 8 of these prophecies show the chance that someone could have fulfilled all 8 prophecies is 10¹⁷ power, or 1 in 100 quadrillion” (Ridenour, p. 28).

⁷⁷“Scholars often present an array of biblical and extra-biblical proof as a corroboration of divine inspiration. They demonstrate that the Bible is consistent with our knowledge of science and history; that the Bible has proved indestructible through the ages; that its prophecies have been fulfilled; that the information in it has transformed lives and societies; etc. While all these things are *true*, they ultimately prove nothing at all. In fact, an appeal to these ‘proofs’ can frequently do more harm than good, because they replace the Bible’s own, inherent authority with other, ‘higher’ authorities (Heb 6:13). In short, *no man has ever been convinced of the inspired nature of Scripture by external proofs alone*” (Mark Snoeberger, “Bibliology” class notes, Inter-City Baptist Bible Institute, Allen Park, MI, Fall 2000; emphasis his).

Ultimately, we know that the Bible is God's Word because God says so in His Word. Immediately, one might object that this is a classic case of circular reasoning, or arguing in a circle, a charge to which I would plead guilty. The simple fact of the matter is that everyone argues in a circle when it comes to ultimate authority.⁷⁸ The question becomes: In which circle is one reasoning? Does one start with the presupposition that the Bible is not the Word of God, interpret the Bible's claims to be the Word of God through this grid, and, thus, come to the conclusion that the Bible is not the Word of God or does one start with the presupposition that the Bible is the Word of God, interpret the Bible's claims to be the Word of God through this grid, and, thus, come to the conclusion that the Bible is the Word of God? Regeneration (the impartation of spiritual life to the spiritually dead at the moment of conversion) transfers one from the former circle to the latter circle.

This is all part of what is called the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit whereby He convinces a man of the truth and significance of Scripture. This idea is also known as the internal witness of the Spirit or the internal testimony of the Spirit.⁷⁹

⁷⁸“Someone may object that to say Scripture proves itself to be God's words is to use a circular argument: we believe that Scripture is God's Word because it claims to be that. And we believe its claims because Scripture is God's Word. And we believe that it is God's Word because it claims to be that, and so forth. It should be admitted that this is a kind of circular argument. However, that does not make its use invalid, for all arguments for an absolute authority must ultimately appeal to that authority for proof: otherwise the authority would not be an absolute or highest authority. This problem is not unique to the Christian who is arguing for the authority of the Bible. Everyone either implicitly or explicitly uses some kind of circular argument when defending his or her ultimate authority for belief. Although these circular arguments are not always made explicit and are sometimes hidden beneath lengthy discussions or are simply assumed without proof, arguments for an ultimate authority in their most basic form take on a similar circular appeal to that authority itself, as some of the following examples show:

- ‘My reason is my ultimate authority because it seems reasonable to me to make it so.’
- ‘Logical consistency is my ultimate authority because it is logical to make it so.’
- ‘The finding of human sensory experiences are the ultimate authority for discovering what is and what is not, because our human senses have never discovered anything else: thus, human sense experience tells me that my principle is true.’
- ‘I know there can be no ultimate authority because I do not know of any such ultimate authority.’

In all of these arguments for an ultimate standard of truth, an absolute authority for what to believe, there is an element of circularity involved” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 78-79).

⁷⁹“The New Testament's claim to be the Word of God is made certain to the believer by the

witness of the Spirit. This is an aspect of what is generally called the illuminating ministry of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:14; 1 John 2:20, 27; 5:6; 2 Tim 2:7). The unbeliever is hostile to God's Word, but the Holy Spirit enables the believer to see the true character of Scripture. The Spirit gives us certainty that what the Bible claims about itself (that it is the Word of God) is true. The Holy Spirit is not *revealing* anything to us, only *illuminating* our minds to see the truth which has already been revealed. Thus, when God gives his revelation, we see that he also gives to believers along with it a certainty that it is his revelation” (Dr. William Combs, from a handout entitled “The Canon and the Believer,” distributed in a class on “How We Got Our Bible,” taught in Brighton Bible Institute, summer 1998, emphasis his). “We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts” (chp. 1, para. 5 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1643-1646, cited in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 78). “The Christian believes the Bible to be the Word of God in the last analysis on the testimony which God Himself gives respecting this matter in His Word, and recognizes that Word as divine by means of the testimony of God in his heart” (Louis Berkhof, cited in Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 82).

The Scriptures are self-attesting and self-authenticating. There is no authority outside of Itself to which the Bible appeals, nor even can appeal, to verify Its claim to be the Word of God. If there was, it, rather than the Scriptures, would become the final authority.⁸⁰ See Hebrews 6:13 in this regard.

To sum: One knows that the Bible is the Word of God because the Bible says so, and God has convinced the believer that when the Bible says so, it is God saying so (see 1 Thess 2:13).⁸¹

⁸⁰“Thus, the words of Scripture are ‘self-attesting.’ They cannot be ‘proved’ to be God’s words by appeal to any higher authority. For if an appeal to some higher authority (say, historical accuracy or logical consistency) were used to prove that the Bible is God’s Word, then the Bible itself would not be our highest or absolute authority: it would be subordinate in authority to the thing to which we appealed to prove it to be God’s Word” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 78). “... the Word of God would, of necessity, have to be self-authenticating, self-attesting and self-validating, for if it needed anyone or anything else to authenticate and validate its divine character--based on the principle that the validating source is always the higher and final authority (see Heb 6:13)--it would not be the Word of God” (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 80). “How then can we know which ‘scripture’ is in reality the voice of God? We cannot, of course, appeal to some higher authority to tell us, ‘This is the voice of God’ or ‘This isn’t.’ If anyone were to make that determination, he would have to be an authority above God Himself. But this is logically impossible, if we accept the common definition of God as the Supreme Being” (Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 59).

⁸¹The foregoing has significant practical ramifications for evangelism. Does one begin by trying to convince the unbeliever that the Bible is the Word of God? No, one presupposes that the Bible is the Word of God and begins by saying, “Thus saith the Lord” What if the unbeliever doesn’t presuppose that the Bible is the Word of God (no unbeliever will)? Use it anyway. “An evangelist who used the Bible almost exclusively in his personal witnessing was once asked by his friends, ‘What do you do when an unsaved person does not accept the Bible as having any authority?’ The evangelist responded, ‘Well, if I had a fine Damascus sword with a keen double-edged blade, I would not sheathe it in a fight just because the other man said he did not believe it would cut’” (Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, and Relevance*, p. 9). It is only by using the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17; cf. Heb 4:12) that the Holy Spirit can do His illuminating work to convince the unbeliever that the Bible is the Word of God. Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p. 77, emphasis his) states in this regard: “It is important to remember that this conviction that the words of Scripture are the words of God does *not* come *apart from* the words of Scripture or *in addition to* the words of Scripture.”

What's the Difference?

Appendix D: The Canon of Scripture

The word "canon" is a transliteration of the Greek word *kanon*, meaning "rule" or "standard" (see Gal 6:16). The books that comprise the canon of Scripture are those that meet the standard--inspiration. Two related words are "canonicity" and "canonization." Canonicity is the quality a book possesses by virtue of its being inspired. Canonization is the historical process whereby God providentially guided His people to recognize which books bore the marks of canonicity and, consequently, were to be included in the canon, the collection of inspired writings. The books of the Bible were inspired/canonical the moment they were written, though they weren't canonized until later. The church did not *determine* a book's inspiration/canonicity; rather, it only *discovered* such (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 231).⁸² Canonization is human recognition of divine revelation (Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 217). "... a book is not the Word of God because it is accepted by the people of God. Rather, it was accepted by the people of God because it is the Word of God" (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 210).

⁸²“The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly he gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up” (J. I. Packer, quoted in Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 211).

How do we know that the 66 books of the Protestant Bible are inspired/canonical, while the extra "Apocryphal" books of the Catholic Bible are not?⁸³ A combination of objective (the tests of canonicity, see below) and subjective factors, with the subjective one (the internal testimony/witness of the Spirit, see below) being ultimate, yields the answer.⁸⁴

The Old Testament Canon

When it comes to the OT, there is little question regarding the confines of the canon. Christ Himself implicitly defined the limits of the OT canon on two different occasions. In Luke 24:44, He made reference to "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms." These were the three major divisions of the Hebrew OT ("the Psalms" was another name for the third major division, "the Writings"; the Writings were sometimes referred to as the Psalms because the Psalms was the first book of this division). Similarly, in Matthew 23:35 and Luke 11:51, Christ made reference to the slayings of Abel and Zechariah. The slaying of Abel is recorded in Genesis, the first book in the Hebrew OT. The slaying of Zechariah is recorded in Chronicles (2 Chron 24:20-21 in our English OT), the last book of the Hebrew OT.⁸⁵ In both instances, Christ tacitly

⁸³For faithful Roman Catholics, this is a significant question, for in 1546 the Council of Trent declared the Apocrypha to be canonical and pronounced those who did not believe so to be "anathema." This declaration was reaffirmed by Vatican I (1869-1870) and Vatican II (1962-1965). The declaration as initially made by the Council of Trent is as follows: "The Synod ... receives and venerates ... all the books (including the *Apocrypha*) both of the Old and of the New Testament--seeing that one God is the Author of both ... as having been dictated, either by Christ's own word of mouth or by the Holy Ghost ... if anyone receive not as sacred and canonical the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church ... let him be anathema" (cited in Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 274). Geisler & Nix (*ibid.*, p. 269) interpret the Council of Trent's decision with suspicion: "... the addition of books that support salvation by works and prayers for the dead at that time--only twenty-nine years after Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses--is highly suspect."

⁸⁴“In sum we might say that the grounds of canonicity are to be found in an interplay of subjective and objective factors overruled by divine providence” (David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 134).

⁸⁵“No Jew would have misunderstood our Lord's spoken warning that all the righteous blood shed from the days of Abel to Zechariah, son of Berakiah, would be visited on that generation (Matt. 23:35-36). Abel's murder was recorded in Genesis (Gen. 4:8), the first book of the Hebrew Old Testament; Zechariah's murder is reported in Chronicles (2 Chron. 24:20-22), the last book of the Hebrew Old Testament. Jesus was warning that all the guilt that had been incurred from the first to the last page of Old Testament Scripture would be visited on them. By so saying, he indicated his acceptance of the limits of the Hebrew canon” (Robert Sheehan, *The Word of Truth*, p. 58). Commenting on Luke 11:51, Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology*, pp. 107-108) likewise states: “Here the Lord said something definitive about the extent of the canon of

gave His approval to the Hebrew OT, and the 24 (or 22⁸⁶) books of the Hebrew OT are identical in content to the 39 books of the English Protestant OT.

Thus, no Apocryphal book is part of the Jewish OT canon. Nearly all the Apocryphal books (with the exception of 2 Esdras, which was written in approximately 100 A.D.) were written during the approximately 400 “silent years” between the writing of Malachi (mid-5th century B.C.) and Christ’s first advent.

The OT “Homologoumena”

The OT “Homologoumena,” a term signifying the “agreed upon” books (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 64), were those 34 OT books whose inspiration/canonicity was unquestioned.

The OT “Antilegomena”

The OT “Antilegomena,” a term signifying the “spoken against” books (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 64), were those 5 OT books whose inspiration/canonicity was questioned by some for a time.

- Esther--questioned because God's name is not mentioned in the book
- Proverbs--questioned because of an alleged contradiction (26:4 and 26:5)
- Ecclesiastes--questioned because of its skeptical nature
- Solomon--questioned because of its sensual nature
- Ezekiel--questioned because of alleged anti-Mosaic teachings

The OT “Pseudepigrapha”⁸⁷

The OT “Pseudepigrapha” are the dozens of religious books written by Jews between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. that no group recognizes as canonical. Two Pseudepigraphal writings, 1 Enoch and The Assumption of Moses, were used by Jude in the NT epistle bearing his name.

The OT “Apocrypha”⁸⁸

⁸⁶Some Jewish OT canons contain 22 books, Judges and Ruth being combined into one book and Jeremiah and Lamentations being combined into one book. The great first century Jewish historian, Josephus, espoused this 22-book (= our 39-book) OT canon, commenting thereon: “For although so great an interval of time (since they were written) has now passed, not a soul has ventured either to add or to remove or to alter a syllable; and it is the instinct of every Jew from the day of his birth to consider these books as the teaching of God, to abide by them, and, if need be, cheerfully to lay down his life for them” (quoted in David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 70-71).

⁸⁷For a brief overview of some of the Pseudepigraphal books, see Bruce Metzger, “The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” in volume 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, pp. 170-173.

the Old Testament which He accepted. In condemning the leaders of the Jewish people for killing God’s messengers throughout their history, He charged them of being guilty of shedding the blood of all the righteous from Abel to Zechariah. Now the murder of Abel is recorded in Genesis 4, and the murder of Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24 which in the arrangement of the Hebrew cannon was the last book in order (as Malachi is in our arrangement). So the Lord was saying, ‘From the first to the last murder recorded in the Old Testament.’”

The OT “Apocrypha” are the 14 (or 15) religious books written by Jews between 250-200 B.C. and 100 A.D., most of which some groups (the Roman Catholic Church⁸⁹ and the Eastern Orthodox Church⁹⁰) recognize as canonical.

“When people speak of ‘the Apocrypha’ without further specification, they are referring only to the Old Testament Apocrypha” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 69), in distinction from the New Testament Apocrypha (see below).

Some interesting points regarding the Apocrypha:

- Later editions of the Latin Vulgate (a famous Latin translation of the Bible by Jerome in the fourth century A.D.) contained the Apocrypha. Jerome himself, however, was not a fan of the Apocrypha: “Jerome (340-420), the great scholar and translator of the Latin Vulgate, rejected the Apocrypha as part of the canon ... At first Jerome refused even to translate the apocryphal books into Latin, but later he made a hurried translation of a few of them. After his death and ‘over his dead body’ the apocryphal books were brought into his Latin Vulgate directly from the Old Latin Version” (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 272-273).

⁸⁹Since the Roman Catholic Church considers what Protestants call the Apocrypha to be canonical, when Roman Catholics speak of “the Apocrypha,” they are usually referring to what Protestants call the Pseudepigrapha. “If Catholic scholars use the word ‘Apocrypha’ they mean those books that others call the Pseudepigrapha” (David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 74). There are a few Apocryphal books which the Roman Catholic Church considers subcanonical: 1 Esdras (aka 3 Esdras), 2 Esdras (aka 4 Esdras), and the Prayer of Manasseh. Norman Geisler & William Nix (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 273) suggest that the reason Catholics aren’t too high on the book of 2 Esdras is because it is against the Catholic doctrine of prayer for the dead.

⁹⁰Besides the Apocryphal books deemed canonical by the Roman Catholic Church, other books that the Eastern Orthodox Church deems canonical are 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, and Psalm 151 (most consider these three books to be Pseudepigraphal rather than Apocryphal). One edition of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), a modern English version, contains not only the Roman Catholic Apocrypha, but also these three additional books of Eastern Orthodoxy.

⁸⁸For a brief overview of each of the Apocryphal books, see Metzger, pp. 163-170.

- “During the Middle Ages [500-1500 A.D.] the apocryphal books enjoyed almost undisputed canonicity” (David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 78). This was due to the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church during this time. It was not until the Protestant Reformation [16th century A.D.] that the Apocrypha was put in its proper place (outside the canon).⁹¹
- All English Bibles prior to 1629 contained the Apocrypha (David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 79), though in so doing they were not implying canonical status for the Apocrypha. The 1611 KJV contained the Apocrypha. “In fact, one of the translators of [the] KJV, George Abbot, as Archbishop of Canterbury, issued a decree in 1615 that if any printer should dare to bind up and sell a copy of the Scriptures without the Apocrypha, he would be liable to a whole year’s imprisonment” (Bruce Metzger, “The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” in volume 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 174). “The saintly Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, one of the translators of the KJV, incorporated the greater part of the apocryphal Prayer of Manasseh in his book of *Private Devotions*” (ibid., p. 174).
- The Apocrypha has had a pervasive influence. “In English literature, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Ruskin, Longfellow, and many others borrowed, more or less freely, themes and expressions from the Apocrypha. In art, many of the old masters, as well as several modern painters, have chosen subjects from this body of literature. Almost every large gallery in Europe and America has one or more works of the old masters depicting Judith, Tobit, or Susanna. In music, such hymns as ‘Now Thank We All Our God,’ ‘O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,’ ‘It Came Upon a Midnight Clear,’ and dozens of Charles Wesley’s compositions incorporate ideas, phrases, and even whole sections from the Apocrypha. Anthems, oratorios, and more than one opera embody extensive material from these books. (Since there is not room here to document these and other examples of the pervasive influence of the Apocrypha, the reader who is interested is referred to Metzger’s *Introduction to the Apocrypha*, where all these and many other examples are discussed.)” (Bruce Metzger, “The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” in volume 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 174).

The New Testament Canon

⁹¹While Luther included the Apocrypha in his German translation of the Bible, he set them off from the rest of the OT and indicated in a foreword that, though profitable, they were not to be considered canonical (David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 78).

Unfortunately, when it comes to the NT canon, the situation is not as indisputable as it is in the OT. Based on Peter’s testimony in 2 Peter 3:16 (in which he calls all of Paul’s letters Scripture), we know that all of the NT books Paul wrote are canonical. In like manner, based on Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 5:18 (in which he quotes from Deut and Luke, calling both Scripture), we know that the gospel of Luke is canonical. What about the rest?

Tests of Canonicity

It is commonly agreed that the early church used at least three tests⁹² to help them recognize which books were inspired/canonical (the Apocryphal books fail all three⁹³):

⁹²While many writers suggest more than three, these three are the basic ones. Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology*, p. 108) gives three tests; Robert Sheehan (*The Word of Truth*, pp. 66-67) and Paul Enns (*The Moody Handbook of Theology*, pp. 172-173) give four tests; Norman Geisler & William Nix (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 223-231) give five tests; Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 65) and David Ewert (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 130-132) give six tests. The additional tests these writers give are subsets of the basic three.

⁹³For example, the Apocrypha espouses such unbiblical doctrines as purgatory (2 Maccabees 12:39-45), prayer for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:45-46), and salvation by works (Tobit 12:9). For other problems in the Apocrypha, see Norman Geisler & William Nix (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 271).

1. The test of apostolicity. Was the book written by an apostle or by one backed by an apostle (for example, Mark backed by Peter⁹⁴--see 1 Pet 5:13; Luke backed by Paul⁹⁵--see Col 4:14 and Phlm 24)? Christ authenticated the 22/24-book Hebrew/39-book English OT canon in Luke 24:44 and Matthew 23:35//Luke 11:51 (see explanation above). He pre-authenticated the NT canon (see John 14:26, 15:26-27, and 16:12-15).⁹⁶ "In a real sense, Christ is the key to the inspiration and canonization of the Scriptures. It was He who confirmed the inspiration of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament; and it was He who promised that the Holy Spirit would direct the apostles into all truth" (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 207).
2. The test of orthodoxy. Was the book doctrinally-consistent with the books already recognized as canonical?
3. The test of catholicity. Was the book universally recognized as canonical by the body of Christ? The ultimate reason why the canonical books are recognized as such by believers is due to their self-authenticating nature (cf. John 7:17⁹⁷ and John 10:27's "My sheep hear My voice"). At this point, it must be admitted that the three "objective" tests above are inherently unable to function as final arbiters of canonicity.⁹⁸ Ultimate certainty comes via the internal witness/testimony of the

Spirit, convincing the believer that the 66 books that comprise the Protestant canon (and no others) are inspired and, therefore, canonical.⁹⁹

The Culmination of Canonization in the 4th Century A.D.
Historically, it was not until the 4th century A.D. that the 27 books that comprise the Protestant NT were *officially* recognized as canonical by the church.

⁹⁴The second century apologist, Justin Martyr, spoke of the Gospel of Mark as "Peter's Memoirs" (Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 225).

⁹⁵See 1 Timothy 5:18, where Paul calls a citation from Luke's gospel "Scripture."

⁹⁶Commenting on John 14:26, Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 61) states: "Here Christ promises by implication that the Holy Spirit will oversee the production of the Gospels." Commenting on John 16:12-15, he states: "Because the apostles were not able to comprehend the significance of Christ's death at that time, here Christ promises by implication that the Holy Spirit will oversee the production of the New Testament epistles which explicate Christ's cross work. And in his declaration that the Holy Spirit 'will tell you what is yet to come,' Christ promises by implication that the Holy Spirit will oversee the writing of John's Revelation."

⁹⁷"Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that thou mayest understand" (Augustine, quoted in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 360). "They [the 27 NT books] are what Athanasius called them, 'the wellsprings of salvation' for all Christendom. And in the last analysis, the church of God can become convinced and remain assured that they are indeed the wellsprings of salvation only by drinking of them" (Martin Franzmann, quoted in Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 69).

⁹⁸The deficiencies of these tests have been pointed out by Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, pp. 65-66), Mark Snoeberger ("Bibliology" class

notes, Inter-City Baptist Bible Institute, Allen Park, MI, Fall 2000), and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, pp. 168-170).

⁹⁹"How did the people recognize that a person was a true prophet of God so that his writing was seen as the authoritative Word of God? ... the ultimate answer is that the ministry of the Holy Spirit testified to the truth of His own revelation in the hearts of those who were open to receive it" (Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 217).

In 367 A.D., Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, became the first church official (that we know of) to definitively lay claim to the 27 books of our NT as completely comprising the NT canon, when he wrote: "Again it is not tedious to speak of the books of the New Testament. These are, the four gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul [Athanasius viewed Hebrews as Pauline], written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John" (cited in Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 293). In the same letter, Athanasius wrote of the 66 books of our Bible: "In them alone is the good news of the teaching of true religion proclaimed: let no one add to them or take away anything of them" (cited in David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 128).

Various church councils in the 4th century also gave their imprimatur to the 66-book canon, such as the Council of Laodicea (363 A.D.), the Council of Hippo (393 A.D.), and the Council of Carthage (397 A.D.) (Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 172).

Some may wonder why it took so long (approximately 300 years) for the church to finally recognize the confines of the canon. Several reasons have been given: 1) It took much time (communication in that day was slow, to say the least) for the books to circulate amongst the church at large and, thereby, gain universal acceptance; 2) There was no need to *officially* define the canon until the second-century heretics, Marcion and Montanus¹⁰⁰, respectively subtracted from (Marcion's canon consisted of the gospel of Luke, which he edited, and only ten of Paul's epistles--the Pastorals excepted) and added to (not surprisingly, Montanus was what we would consider today a charismatic) the canon as commonly understood; 3) There was no need to define the canon until widespread persecution broke out under Diocletian¹⁰¹ in the early part of the fourth century and believers were forced to decide which books were canonical and, thus, worth dying for; and 4) For various reasons, the canonicity of some books (called the "Antilegomena," see below) was initially questioned by some in the church.

The NT Homologoumena

The NT Homologoumena were those 20 NT books whose inspiration/canonicity was unquestioned.

¹⁰⁰Montanus "had come to the conclusion that he was the promised Paraclete" (David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 133).

¹⁰¹Diocletian's edict in 303 A.D. that all sacred books be burned also contributed to the formal formation of the NT canon (Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 171).

The NT Antilegomena¹⁰²

The NT Antilegomena were those 7 NT books whose inspiration/canonicity was questioned by some for a time.

- Hebrews--questioned because of uncertainty as to its authorship
- James--questioned because of its alleged conflict with Paul on justification (in 2:14-26)
- 2 Peter--questioned because of the stylistic differences between it and 1 Peter
- 2 John--questioned because of its private nature and limited circulation
- 3 John--questioned because of its private nature and limited circulation
- Jude--questioned because it quotes from the Pseudepigraphal book of 1 Enoch (in vs. 14-15)
- Revelation--questioned because it teaches the doctrine of premillennialism

The NT Pseudepigrapha

The NT Pseudepigrapha are the hundreds of religious books written during the early centuries of the church that no group recognizes as canonical today.

The NT Apocrypha

The NT Apocrypha are the numerous religious books written during the early centuries of the church that received local and temporary acceptance, but which no group recognizes as canonical today.

¹⁰²See Appendix B of Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*.

What's the Difference?

Part 1: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and Cults Lesson 4: Christian Science

I. History

Christian Science (like Grape Nuts, which is neither grapes nor nuts) is neither Christian nor science. CS originated in the latter part of the 19th century (1879 to be exact) when a deranged¹⁰³ woman by the name of Mary Baker Eddy (the name Eddy came from her third husband: her first husband died, and she divorced her second husband), due largely to the influence of a man by the name of P.P. Quimby¹⁰⁴ (whose writings Eddy plagiarized), started this Mind Science/metaphysical cult.¹⁰⁵ Eddy died on December 3, 1910.¹⁰⁶ The Christian Scientist's authority is Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*¹⁰⁷,

¹⁰³Mary's own father said, "The Bible says that Mary Magdalene had seven devils, but our Mary has got ten" (quoted in Murray Downey, *The Art of Soul-Winning*, p. 155). Furthermore, when Eddy's third husband died, she accused some of her former students of *mentally* poisoning him with arsenic *mentally* administered.

¹⁰⁴As Mrs. Eddy was the mother of Christian Science, so Phineas Parkhurst Quimby was undoubtedly its father" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 127). "Mrs. Eddy became an enthusiastic follower of Quimby in 1862 after her back injury was healed by him. She wrote letters to the Portland (Maine) Evening Courier praising Quimby and comparing him to Jesus Christ" (McDowell and Stewart, p. 126).

¹⁰⁵Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 133) tells the story: "According to an authorized statement published by the Christian Science Publishing Society of Boston, Mrs. Eddy, after a fall on a slippery sidewalk February 1, 1866, was pronounced 'incurable' and given three days to live by her attending physician (Dr. Alvin M. Cushing). The third day, allegedly her last on earth, Mrs. Eddy (the statement makes out) cried for a Bible, read Matthew 9:2 and rose completely healed. Thus the statement claims 'she discovered' Christian Science. Hoekema (p. 174), however, adds the following: "Further, on February 14, 1866 (hence 13 days after the fall and 10 days after the alleged cure), Mrs. Patterson [Eddy's name by her second marriage] sent a letter to Julius Dresser, a former pupil of Phineas Quimby, asking him to come and help her since, so she said, 'I am slowly failing.' It seems quite evident that Mrs. Eddy's memory regarding this incident did not serve her very well."

¹⁰⁶According to Hoekema (p. 178), just before her death Eddy said to one of her closest associates: "If I should ever leave here, will you promise me that you will say that I was mentally murdered?"

¹⁰⁷It is interesting to note that this "key" to the Scriptures deals with only 8 (Gen 1-4, Psa 23,

first published in 1875. The Mother Church is the *First Church of Christ*¹⁰⁸, *Scientist*, located in Boston. CS publications include *The Christian Science Journal* (monthly publication), *The Christian Science Sentinel* (weekly publication), and *The Christian Science Monitor* (a daily newspaper published since 1908). "Every branch church is expected to maintain a reading room where one may read, buy, or borrow authorized Christian Science literature" (Hoekema, p. 179).

II. Some¹⁰⁹ Erroneous Christian Science Beliefs

A. Extrabiblical revelation

While not rejecting the Bible per se, CS makes another book its final authority, Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. McDowell and Stewart (p. 126) write: "Christian Science does what so many of the cults do; it has a second authority which supersedes the Bible as the final authority in solving doctrinal matters. The writings of Mrs. Eddy constitute the final word as far as Christian Scientists are concerned, with the Bible relegated to a secondary status, although she paid lip service homage to the Bible."

Mrs. Eddy (quoted in Lewis, p. 83; emphasis his) once said: "The testimony of the material senses is neither absolute nor divine. I therefore plant myself unreservedly on the teachings of Jesus, of his apostles, of the prophets, and on the testimony of the *Science of Mind*."

and Rev 10, 12, and 21) of the 1,189 chapters in the Bible. For a sample of the outlandish interpretations Eddy espouses in this work, see pages 193-194 and 198 of Hoekema.

¹⁰⁸Hoekema (p. 207; emphasis his) states regarding CS errors in the realm of Christology: "In summary, Christian Science denies the unity of the Person of Jesus Christ, Jesus' present existence, the absolute necessity for Jesus' earthly mission, the incarnation of Christ, the Virgin birth of Jesus, the sinlessness of Jesus, the full deity of Jesus, and Jesus' genuine humanity. In addition, they reject Jesus' suffering, death, physical resurrection, and ascension into heaven. By what conceivable right, therefore, do the members of this group still dare to call themselves a church of *Christ*?"

¹⁰⁹For an examination and refutation of other erroneous Christian Science beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

"In the year 1866, I discovered the Christ Science or divine laws of Life, Truth, and Love and named my discovery Christian Science. God has been graciously preparing me during many years for the reception of this final revelation of the absolute divine Principle of scientific mental healing" (*Science and Health*, p. 107).

Wrote Mrs. Eddy: "I should blush to write of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* as I have, were it of human origin, and I, apart from God, were its author. But, as I was only a scribe echoing the harmonies of heaven in divine metaphysics, I cannot be super-modest in my estimate of the Christian Science textbook" (*The First Church of Christ, Scientist and Miscellany*, p. 115).

B. An impersonal god

"What is God? Jehovah is not a person. God is Principle" (*Science and Health*, p. 169).

As Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 148) states: "The God of Christian Science is an It."

C. Denial of the Trinity

"The theory of three persons in one God suggests polytheism rather than the one, ever-present I am" (*Science and Health*, p. 256).

The CS trinity is composed of "God the Father-Mother; Christ the spiritual idea of sonship; divine Science or the Holy Comforter" (*Science and Health*, pp. 331-332).

D. Denial of Christ's deity

"Jesus Christ is not God, as Jesus himself declared, but is the Son of God" (*Science and Health*, p. 361).

"Jesus, as material manhood, was not Christ" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 84).

"Jesus is the name of the man who, more than all other men, has presented Christ" (*Science and Health*, p. 473).

To the CS, Christ is not a person, but an idea.

E. Denial of the Virgin Birth

"Jesus, the Galilean Prophet, was born of the Virgin Mary's spiritual thoughts of Life and its manifestation" (*The First Church of Christ, Scientist and Miscellany*, p. 261).

"The Virgin-mother conceived this idea of God, and gave to her ideal the name of Jesus" (*Science and Health*, p. 29).

In other words, it was all in Mary's head.

F. Denial of Christ's death

"Jesus' students . . . did not perform many wonderful works until they saw him after his crucifixion and learned that he had not died" (*Science and Health*, pp. 45-46).

Since Christ did not die, neither did He rise from the dead. Thus, CS also denies the Resurrection.¹¹⁰

G. Denial of the sufficiency and purpose of the Atonement

"One sacrifice, however great, is insufficient to pay the debt of sin. The atonement requires constant self-immolation on the sinner's part" (*Science and Health*, p. 23).

"He atoned for the terrible unreality of a supposed existence apart from God" (*No and Yes*, p. 35).

"Final deliverance from error, whereby we rejoice in immortality, boundless freedom, and sinless sense, is not reached ... by pinning one's faith without works to another's vicarious effort" (*Science and Health*, p. 22).

CS speaks of Jesus as the "way-shower."

H. Denial of the sinfulness of man

"Man is spiritual and perfect; and because he is spiritual and perfect, he must be so understood in Christian Science" (*Science and Health*, p. 475).

"Man is the ultimate of perfection and by no means the medium of imperfection" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 79).

The reasoning of the Christian Scientist is as follows: Since all is God (according to CS), all is good (including man), since God is good. Furthermore, according to CS, sin does not exist (see below).

I. Other CS beliefs

1. Pantheism

Christian Scientists believe that all is God.

¹¹⁰*Science and Health* (p. 593) defines resurrection as "spiritualization of thought; a new and higher idea of immortality, or spiritual existence; material belief yielding to spiritual understanding."

2. Denial of the reality of matter

The reasoning of the Christian Scientist is that since all is God (pantheism), and God is immaterial, all is immaterial; therefore, matter does not exist.¹¹¹

"Here also is found ... the cardinal point in Christian Science, that matter and evil (including all inharmony, sin, disease, death) are unreal" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 27). "The only reality of sin, sickness, or death is the awful fact that unrealities seem real to human, erring belief, until God strips off their disguise" (*Science and Health*, p. 472).

"There is no life, truth, intelligence, nor substance in matter. All is infinite Mind and its infinite manifestation, for God is All-in-all. Spirit is immortal Truth; matter is mortal error. Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 21).

CS believes that reality is found only in the mind; matter is unreal.¹¹² Corollaries of this belief include:

a. Belief that the cause and cure of all disease is purely mental¹¹³

"Science not only reveals the origin of all disease as wholly mental, but it also declares that all disease is cured by mind" (*Science and Health*, p. 62).

"The sick are not healed merely by declaring there is no sickness, but by knowing there is none" (*Science and Health*, p. 447).

Rather than seeking physicians for medical problems, Christian Scientists seek CS "practitioners."

¹¹¹In spite of such beliefs, "[Christian Scientists] all clothe, feed, and house the illusion . . . called their bodies and many go to dentists and surgeons for the filling of imaginary cavities and the setting of non-existent bones" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 143).

¹¹²In spite of this belief, Mrs. Eddy "thoroughly enjoyed all the material comforts derived from denying their existence" (ibid., p. 142). At death, her personal fortune exceeded three million dollars (ibid., p. 136).

¹¹³In spite of this "belief," Eddy left herself and her followers an "out": "If from an injury or from any cause, a Christian Scientist were seized with pain so violent that he could not treat himself mentally--and the Scientists had failed to relieve him, --the sufferer could call a surgeon who would give him a hypodermic injection, then, when the belief of pain was lulled, he could handle his own case mentally" (*Science and Health*, p. 464).

b. Belief that evil/sin does not exist¹¹⁴

"My system of metaphysics . . . denies the actual existence of both matter and evil . . . There was never a moment in which evil was real" (*No and Yes*, p. 24).

"Evil is but an illusion, and it has no real basis" (*Science and Health*, p. 480).

"To put down the claim of sin, you must detect it, remove the mask, point out the illusion, and thus get the victory over sin and so prove its unreality" (*Science and Health*, p. 447).

"To get rid of sin through Science, is to divest sin of any supposed mind or reality, and never to admit that sin can have intelligence or power, pain or pleasure. You conquer error by denying its verity" (*Science and Health*, p. 339).

"Christ came to destroy the belief of sin" (*Science and Health*, p. 473).

Since sin doesn't exist, the Atonement is unnecessary.

c. Belief that Hell is a state of mind

"The olden opinion that hell is fire and brimstone has yielded somewhat to the metaphysical fact that suffering is a thing of mortal mind instead of body: so, in place of material flames and odor, mental anguish is generally accepted as the penalty for sin" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 237).

CS also believes that Heaven is a state of mind: "Heaven is not a locality, but a divine state of Mind in which all the manifestations of Mind are harmonious and immortal, because sin is not there" (*Science and Health*, p. 291).

d. Belief that death is an illusion.

"DEATH. An illusion" (*Science and Health*, p. 584).

¹¹⁴The implications of this view of sin, when carried to their logical extreme, are appalling. On this basis, one could arise from the most wicked debauchery of which man's heart is capable, and simply brush off his guilt by saying, 'There is no such thing as sin!' A more dangerous weapon than this teaching was never handed to depraved mankind!" (Hoekema, p. 210).

"Any material evidence of death is false" (*Science and Health*, p. 584).

"As soldiers of the cross we must be brave, and let Science declare the immortal status of man, and deny the evidence of the material senses, which testify that man dies" (*Unity of the Good & Other Writings*, p. 39).

e. Belief that man is not corporeal

"Man is not matter; he is not made up of brain, blood, bones, and other material elements" (*Science and Health*, p. 475).

Hoekema (p. 197) makes the interesting point that CS and Mormonism draw opposite conclusions from the doctrine of the image of God in man. While both CS and Mormonism rightly contend that man is made in God's image, Mormonism wrongly infers that this means that God is corporeal (because man is), while CS wrongly implies that this means that man is incorporeal (because God is).

J. K. Van Baalen (*The Chaos of the Cults*, p. 97) has summarized CS belief this way: "Jesus was laid down, as a result of an apparent death, into a fictitious tomb, in an unreal body, to make an unnecessary atonement for sins that had never been a reality and had been committed in an imaginary body, and that He saves from non-existing evil those headed toward an imaginary hell."

III. Our Response

A. The Bible is the only source of divine revelation today.

See the lesson on Mormonism, as well as appendices C and D.

B. God is a person.

God displays such characteristics of personality as thinking (Prov 3:19-20 and Rom 11:33), acting (Isa 46:10b-11 and Eph 1:11), and feeling (Gen 6:6).

C. There is one God in three Persons.

See the lesson on the Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as appendix B.

D. Jesus Christ is God.

Contrary to Mrs. Eddy's first claim, see John 5:17-18 and 19:7. Contrary to her second claim, see John 20:31 and 1 John 2:22. See also the lesson on the Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as appendix A.

E. Jesus was virgin born.

See Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-20, and Luke 1:35, all of which imply a literal, physical conception. In response to Mrs. Eddy's view regarding the conception of Christ, perhaps the words of Murray Downey (*The Art of Soul-Winning*, p. 158) are in order: "Although Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy has published a book that purports to give us the key to the scriptures, the key only opens the door to absolute absurdity".

F. Jesus died.

See Matthew 27:50, Mark 15:44-45, John 19:31-34¹¹⁵, and 1 Corinthians 15:3.

Jesus also rose from the dead (see Matt 28:5-7, Acts 1:3, and 1 Cor 15:4).

G. Christ's death was sufficient for the sins of all mankind and reconciled man to God.

Contrary to Mrs. Eddy's first claim, see John 1:29, 1 John 1:7, and 2:2. Contrary to her second claim, see Romans 5:10 and 1 Peter 3:18. Contrary to the CS claim that Jesus is the "way-shower" are the words of Jesus in John 14:6: "I am the way."

H. Man is sinful.

See Romans 3:10-18, and 23.

¹¹⁵The flow of blood and water subsequent to the piercing of Christ's side was "an indisputable medical sign of death, indicating that the red and white blood corpuscles had separated" (Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 347).

Resources for Further Study:

The Kingdom of the Cults by Martin (1985: chp. 5; 1997: chp. 7)

Confronting the Cults by Lewis (chp. 4)

So What's the Difference by Ridenour (pp. 165-169)

The Four Major Cults by Hoekema (chp. 4)

Handbook of Today's Religions by McDowell & Stewart (part 1; chp. 14)

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 104-107)

Charts of Cults, Sects, & Religious Movements by House (pp. 165-174)

"The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error" pamphlet by Moody Press

"Christianity, Cults, & Religions" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

What's the Difference?

Appendix E: The Unity School of Christianity

I. History

The Unity School of Christianity (USC), not to be confused with the Unification Church (led by Sun Myung Moon), was begun by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore in 1889 (but not incorporated until 1914). The USC is not a church, but a school; hence, its adherents usually retain their church membership. The USC is very similar in orientation to another, more well-known metaphysical cult, Christian Science.¹¹⁶ Like Christian Science, the USC owes its origin to the influence of P.P. Quimby. It was Quimby who heavily influenced Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science. The headquarters of the USC is Unity Village, located in Lees Summit, MO (a suburb of Kansas City). Its primary publications include *Unity* magazine and the *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*. The USC is well-known for its Society of Silent Help (or "Silent Unity"), its 24-hour prayer service. It is also famous for its direct-mail endeavors.

II. Some¹¹⁷ Erroneous USC Beliefs

A. Extrabiblical revelation

Like most cults, the USC does not believe the Bible to be the only means of divine revelation today.

"Spiritual principle is embodied in the sacred books of the world's living religions. Christians hold to the Bible as the supreme exponent of spiritual principle. They believe that the Bible is the greatest and most deeply spiritual of all the Scriptures, though they realize that other Scriptures, such as the Zend-Avesta, and the Upanishads, as well as the teachings of Buddha, the Koran, and the Tao of Lao-tse and the writings of Confucius, contain expressions of eminent spiritual truths" (*What Unity Teaches*, p. 4).

¹¹⁶According to Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 282), "Unity differs primarily from Christian Science in that it admits that God is expressed in matter as well as in mind or spirit, whereas Christian Science maintains that matter is illusory and has no real experience."

¹¹⁷For an examination and refutation of other erroneous USC beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

"We see the good in all religions and we want everyone to feel free to find the Truth for himself wherever he may be led to find it" (the Fillmore's in *Modern Thought*, p. 42).

The USC is clearly syncretistic.

"Scripture may be a satisfactory authority for those who are not themselves in direct communion with the Lord" (Charles Fillmore in *Twelve Powers of Man*, p. 114).

"He who writes a creed or puts a limit to revelation is the enemy of humanity" (Charles Fillmore, quoted in Lewis, p. 133).

"Divine revelation is much more common than is understood. The Spirit of truth is revealing the hidden wisdom to thousands on every hand. Poets and writers of Truth are being inspired of the Most High. Quiet citizens in every walk of life are the recipients of the divine word" (Charles Fillmore in *The Revealing Word*, p. 170).

B. God is impersonal.

"God is the love in everybody and everything" (Charles Fillmore in *Jesus Christ Heals*, p. 27).

"God is not a . . . person God is that invisible, intangible, but very real, something we call life" (*Lessons in Truth*, p. 6).

Like Christian Science, the USC often refers to God as "Father-Mother."

C. Pantheism

Like Christian Science, the USC believes that everything is God.

"Drop from your mind the belief that God is in any way separated from you, that He occupies form or space outside of you" (*Jesus Christ Heals*, p. 28).

"Each rock, tree, animal, everything visible, is a manifestation of the one Spirit--God--differing only in degree of manifestation; and each of the numberless modes of manifestation, or individualities, however insignificant, contains the whole" (*Lessons in Truth*, p. 8).

"God is all and all is God" (*Unity*, August 1974, p. 40).

D. Reincarnation

Reincarnation (also known as "transmigration" or "rebirth") is the belief that once a person leaves this life, he is reincarnated in the form of another animate object in order to work off the bad "karma" accumulated during previous lifetimes. This process of reincarnation continues until one reaches the state of "nirvana."

"We believe that the dissolution of spirit, soul and body, caused by death, is annulled by rebirth of the same spirit and soul in another body here on earth. We believe the

repeated incarnations of man to be a merciful provision of our loving Father to the end that all may have opportunity to attain immortality through regeneration, as did Jesus" (*Unity's Statement of Faith*, Article 22).

The USC belief in reincarnation is in keeping with its rejection of eternal punishment.

Reincarnation does away with the need for the Atonement.

E. Improper hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation. The hermeneutic of the USC is clearly allegorical, resulting in some rather bizarre interpretations. For example, the twelve disciples allegedly typify the twelve faculties of the human mind: Peter represents faith, John love, James judgment, etc. (see p. 144 of Lewis for more examples).

F. Self-redemption

"We have thought that we are to be saved by Jesus' making personal petitions and sacrifices for us, but now we see that we are to be saved by using the creative principles that he developed in Himself and that He is ever ready to co-operate with us in developing in ourselves" (*Jesus Christ Heals*, p. 162).

Like many of the cults, the USC views Jesus as a man in whom the "Christ" dwelt, rather than as being the Christ Himself. This same "Christ-consciousness" lies latent within every man:

"Each of us has within him the Christ, just as Jesus had, as we must look within to recognize and realize our sonship, our divine origin and birth, even as He did. By continually unifying ourselves with the Highest by our thoughts and words, we too shall become sons of God, manifest" (Charles Fillmore in the *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*, p. 150).

G. The Holy Spirit is impersonal.

"Do not be misled by the personality of the Holy Spirit and the reference to it as 'he.' This was the bias of the Oriental mind, making God and all forms of the Deity masculine" (*Jesus Christ Heals*, p. 183).

Accordingly, Fillmore defines the Holy Spirit as "a universal urge toward perfection" (*Jesus Christ Heals*, p. 182).

H. Neo-orthodoxy

The crux of neo-orthodoxy is the belief that the Bible is not the Word of God, but *becomes* the Word of God through a personal encounter.

"We no longer care to have somebody just tell us words from the outside. We want a revelation of God as love within us" (*Lessons in Truth*, pp. 88-89).

I. The deification of man

"The gospel of Jesus is that every man can become God incarnate. It is not alone a gospel of right living, but also shows the way into dominion and power equal to and surpassing that of Jesus of Nazareth" (*The Revealing Word*, p. 88).

J. "Name it and claim it"

"Listen! 'If Thou wilt' brings no visible answer to prayer. But a definite, positive will-not-be-put-off attitude, a determined 'I will have Thy will done in this matter' is a force that always brings results into manifestation" (*God a Present Help*, p. 36).

K. Health and wealth

Consider Charles Fillmore's rendering of Psalm 23:

"The Lord is my banker; my credit is good.
He maketh me to lie down in the consciousness of omnipotent abundance; He giveth me the key to His strong-box.
He restoreth my faith in His riches,
He guideth me in the paths of prosperity for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the very shadow of debt, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy silver and gold, they secure me.
Thou preparest a way for me in the presence of the collector;
Thou fillest my wallet with plenty; my measure runneth over.
Surely, goodness and plenty will follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall do business in the name of the Lord forever" (*Prosperity*, p. 60).

III. Our Response

A. The Bible is the only source of divine revelation today.

See the lesson on Mormonism, as well as appendices C and D.

B. God is a person.

See the lesson on Christian Science.

C. God is transcendent.

Though God is immanent, He is also transcendent. In other words, He is both present within His creation (by virtue of His being omnipresent) and separate from it (by virtue of the fact that He is the Creator). See

Jeremiah 23:23, which affirms both of these truths. The pantheist overemphasizes God's immanence to the exclusion of His transcendence.

D. Resurrection, not reincarnation

To try to prove that the Bible teaches reincarnation (as the USC tries to do) is a stretch, to put it mildly. Rather than reincarnation, the Bible teaches that a person's material existence ends at death and resumes at the moment of resurrection.¹¹⁸

In response to the USC rejection of the doctrine of eternal punishment, see the lesson on Seventh-day Adventism.

Furthermore, it is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses from sin (1 John 1:7), not any alleged process of reincarnation.

E. A literary hermeneutic

The Bible should be interpreted just as any other piece of literature. It should be taken at face value. No "deeper" meaning should be sought, but only the meaning communicated by the plain sense of the words in their grammatical, historical context. "If the plain sense makes sense, then seek no other sense."

F. Salvation is "all of grace."

There is nothing anyone can do to save himself. If anyone is to be saved, God must "accomplish and apply" what is needed. He has accomplished what is needed through the Atonement. He applies what is needed through regeneration.

¹¹⁸For the church-age saint, resurrection will take place at the Rapture (see 1 Thess 4:13-18). Old Testament and Tribulation saints will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation and prior to the Millennium (see Dan 12:2 and Rev 20:4). Unbelievers of all ages will be resurrected at the end of the Millennium and prior to the eternal state (see Rev 20:11-15).

Furthermore, "Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31 and 1 John 2:22), not one in whom the "Christ" dwelt.

- G. The Holy Spirit is a person.
 - 1. The Holy Spirit displays the characteristics of personality: thinking (Rom 8:27), acting (1 Cor 12:11), and feeling (Eph 4:30).
 - 2. The Holy Spirit is referred to with personal pronouns (see John 16:13 and Acts 13:2).
- H. The Bible is God's Word objectively.
See 2 Timothy 3:16.
- I. The Creator/creature distinction
See the lesson on Mormonism.
- J. "Not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt 26:39)

God is the One calling the shots, not man. See Psalm 115:3, Isaiah 46:9-11, and Daniel 4:35.
- K. It is sometimes God's will for the believer to be ill and poor.

See Psalm 119:75, 1 Corinthians 4:9-13, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, and 1 Peter 4:19 in this regard.

Resources for Further Study:

The Kingdom of the Cults by Martin (1985: chp. 11)
Confronting the Cults by Lewis (chp. 6)
Handbook of Today's Religions by McDowell & Stewart (part 1; chp. 15)
Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 300-302)
Charts of Cults, Sects, & Religious Movements by House (pp. 165-174)
"The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error" pamphlet by Moody Press
"Christianity, Cults, & Religions" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

What's the Difference?

Part 1: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and Cults Lesson 5: **Seventh-day Adventism**

I. History

Seventh-day Adventism¹¹⁹ (SdA) originated in the middle of the nineteenth century when a man by the name of William Miller (a Baptist minister) espoused the idea that Christ would return around 1843. An exact date of October 22, 1844 was eventually established.¹²⁰ Much to the "Millerite" dismay, Christ did not return on this date. The "Great Disappointment of 1844" threatened to end the movement until one of Miller's followers, Hiram Edson, allegedly received a "revelation" which caused him to, like Miller, also improperly interpret Daniel 8:13-14.¹²¹ Instead of the "sanctuary" being earth, it was now heaven; furthermore, he taught that Christ (who initially entered the sanctuary of heaven at the Ascension) entered the inner sanctum (or holy of holies) of the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 to perform what later came to be known in SdA lore as the "investigative judgment." Millerism was the first strand of what later became SdA.¹²² A second strand was the influence of a man by the name of Joseph Bates and his Sabbatarian beliefs. A third and final strand was the influence of the one individual most often associated with SdA, Ellen White (whose family was expelled from the Methodist church after embracing the teachings of William Miller),¹²³ and her "Spirit of Prophecy" (Rev 19:10). All three of these strands eventually blended to form modern-day SdA. The denomination officially began

¹¹⁹Seventh-day Adventism derives its name from its belief in the observance of the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week (Saturday) and its belief in the imminency of the second advent (coming) of Christ.

¹²⁰Miller based his reckoning upon the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14, erroneously interpreting them to be 2,300 years. Taking 457 B.C. as a starting point (the year Artaxerxes decreed the rebuilding of Jerusalem; see Dan 9:25), he arrived at 1843, some 2,300 years later. Shrewdly, Miller gave himself a "window" of one year, teaching that Christ would return between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. His associates, however, pinpointed the date October 22, 1844. They, as well as all other "date setters," would do well to read Matthew 24:36, 42, and 25:13.

¹²¹Properly interpreted, Daniel 8:13-14 is foretelling the cleansing of the sanctuary in Jerusalem after its defilement by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B.C.

¹²²Besides SdA, other offshoots of Millerism include the Adventist Christian Church and the Church of God (Seventh Day).

¹²³"In most religious movements, one extraordinary and gifted personality dominates the scene, and so it was with Seventh-day Adventism. This dominant personality was and is today, through her writings, Ellen G. White" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 437).

in the early 1860's. SdA's are well-known for their correspondence courses. Their theological positions are set forth in *Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, published in 1957.

Is Seventh-day Adventism a Cult?

There is great debate as to whether or not SdA should be classified as a cult. On the one hand are those who say yes, while on the other hand are those who consider SdA to be evangelical.¹²⁴ In the middle are those who consider SdA to be much like Roman Catholicism, neither a cult nor evangelical. This third view seems to be the safest one.¹²⁵ At least this much can be said: it would be unfair to classify SdA as a cult in the same sense as one would consider Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, or Christian Science to be a cult.¹²⁶

¹²⁴Among the former is Hoekema (see pp. 388-403 of his *The Four Major Cults*), who writes (p. xi): "Though Seventh-day Adventism does teach a number of doctrines in common with evangelical Protestant churches, and is therefore considered by most writers on the subject to be nearer to the evangelical position than are the other three groups, it is my conviction that Seventh-day Adventism is a cult and not a branch of evangelical Christianity." Among the latter is Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 410), who states: "It is my prayer that . . . Adventism will continue to be a Christian and evangelical, albeit unique, Christian denomination." Mead and Hill (p. 38) call SdA's "evangelical conservatives." Lewis (p. 105), on the other hand, calls the attempt to regard SdA as evangelical "revolutionary." Later (p. 123), Lewis writes: "There remains reason to question, however, whether Seventh-day Adventism is evangelical in respect to an infallible source of truth in addition to Scripture (Mrs. White's writings), the doctrine of investigative judgment detracting from the completeness of Christ's atonement, and the necessity of law-keeping as a condition of justification."

¹²⁵One's view will be determined largely in part upon whom in SdA one turns to for answers. Martin, having turned solely to *Questions on Doctrine*, believes SdA to be evangelical. Others, having turned primarily to the writings of past SdA authors, have concluded SdA to be a cult. Still others, taking both into consideration, have concluded SdA to be something in-between.

¹²⁶"In all fairness it seems overly harsh to class Seventh-day Adventism with Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, and Christian Science" (Lewis, p. 123).

II. Some¹²⁷ Erroneous SdA Beliefs

A. The "Spirit of Prophecy"

SdA's believe that Ellen White (and she alone) possessed the "Spirit of Prophecy," which enabled her to make authoritative pronouncements, especially regarding matters not directly addressed in Scripture.

"The Holy Spirit opened to her [Ellen White's] mind important events and called her to give certain instructions for these last days. And inasmuch as these instructions, in our understanding, are in harmony with the Word of God, . . . we as a denomination accept them as inspired counsels from the Lord. But we have never equated them with Scripture" (*Questions on Doctrine*, p. 93).

B. The "investigative judgment"

SdA's believe that in 1844 Christ entered the inner sanctum of the heavenly sanctuary to begin the second phase of his intercessory work there. More specifically, He is in the process of judging whether or not those who have professed faith in Christ down through the ages are genuinely saved (according to some SdA's, the ultimate test of this is one's keeping of the Sabbath).

"The blotting of names out of the book of life is, we believe, a work of the investigative judgment. A complete and thorough check of all the candidates for eternal life will need to be completed before Christ comes in the clouds of heaven . . ." (*Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 438-439).

Consequently, SdA's do not hold to the doctrine of eternal security.

"... [T]he acceptance of Christ at conversion does not seal a person's destiny" (*Questions on Doctrine*, p. 420).

William Branson, SdA president from 1950-1954, once wrote regarding this SdA doctrine: "A Christian who through faith in Jesus Christ has faithfully kept the law's requirements will be acquitted; there is no condemnation, for the law finds no fault in him. If, on the other hand, it is found that one has broken even a single precept, and this transgression is unconfessed, he will be dealt with just as if he had broken all ten" (*Drama of the Ages*, p. 351).

¹²⁷For an examination and refutation of other erroneous SdA beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

In regards to this doctrine, SdA's teach that the believer's sin is forgiven at conversion, but not blotted out. The blotting out does not take place until the investigative judgment is complete. As Ellen White wrote: "All who have truly repented of sin, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice, have had pardon entered against their names in the books of heaven; as they have become partakers of the righteousness of Christ, and their characters are found to be in harmony with the law of God, their sins will be blotted out, and they themselves will be accounted worthy of eternal life (*The Great Controversy*, p. 483).

This doctrine, like so many other erroneous SdA doctrines, is ultimately based upon an alleged vision of Ellen White.

C. Soul sleep¹²⁸

SdA's believe that, upon death, the believer's soul "sleeps," i.e., is unconscious until it is reunited with the body when the latter is resurrected.

"We as Adventists have reached the definite conclusion that man rests in the tomb until the resurrection morning" (*Questions on Doctrine*, p. 520).

D. Conditional immortality

SdA's believe that only the souls of the redeemed are immortal, not those of the unbelieving. The souls of the unbelieving will eventually be annihilated. Consequently, they reject the idea of eternal torment.

"We reject the doctrine of eternal torment" (*Questions on Doctrine*, p. 543).

E. The keeping of the Sabbath¹²⁹

¹²⁸Hoekema (p. 136; emphasis his) calls the SdA position in this regard "soul extinction" rather than "soul sleep," writing: "It is therefore not quite accurate to say, as some do, that the Seventh-day Adventists teach the doctrine of *soul-sleep*, since this would imply that there is a soul which continues to exist after death, but in an unconscious state. A more precise way of characterizing their teachings on this point is to say that the Adventists teach *soul-extinction*. For, according to them, *soul* is simply another name for the entire individual; there is, therefore, no soul that survives after death. After death nothing survives; when man dies he becomes completely nonexistent."

¹²⁹Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 459) calls this "the most distinctive doctrine promulgated by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination." Interestingly, there are some Baptists who embrace this, the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference (see pp. 75-76 of Mead and Hill).

SdA's believe that Christians are still bound to the OT "moral law" (which they distinguish from the "ceremonial law"), including the Ten Commandments, placing particular emphasis upon the fourth commandment.

"... [W]e regard the observance of the Sabbath as a test of our loyalty to Christ as Creator and Redeemer" (*Questions on Doctrine*, p. 430).

"... [T]he majority of those in Christian churches still conscientiously observe Sunday. We ourselves cannot do so, for we believe God is calling for a reformation in this matter" (*Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 192-193).

"... In the last days the Sabbath test will be made plain. When this time comes anyone who does not keep the Sabbath will receive the mark of the beast and will be kept from heaven" (Ellen G. White in *The Great Controversy*, p. 449).

According to Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 472), "it was Ellen G. White's 'Vision' confirming Joseph Bates' 'Seal of the Living God' concept as set forth in his pamphlet on the Sabbath that established Sabbatarianism in Seventh-day Adventism."

F. Other SdA beliefs

1. Observance of OT dietary laws (SdA's refrain from eating what the OT considered "unclean"--pork, etc.)¹³⁰
2. Foot washing as an ordinance

III. Our Response

- A. The gift of prophecy was a temporary gift.

¹³⁰Doug Kutilek ("Adventists at 33,000 Feet," *Frontline*, Nov./Dec. 2000, p. 15) says that "Mr. Kellogg of Battle Creek, MI, an Adventist, started his cereal company to provide an alternative to the customary bacon-and-eggs breakfast of most 19th-century Americans."

Nine of the spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture were temporary in nature (see 1 Cor 13:8-10), having ceased with the passing of the apostolic age (first century A.D.). Included in these is the gift of prophecy, a revelatory gift. The canon of Scripture was closed with the writing of the book of Revelation at the end of the first century A.D., at which time the gift of prophecy ceased.¹³¹

B. The believer is eternally secure.

The moment one places his faith in Christ for salvation, his eternal destiny is forever settled. He cannot lose his salvation (see John 3:16, 6:37, 10:28-29, and Phil 1:6). In response to any so-called "investigative judgment," let it be remembered that Christ "sat down" when He ascended into Heaven following His redemptive work (Heb 1:3 and 10:12). Furthermore, all of the believer's sin (past, present, and future) is forgiven at the moment of salvation (Col 2:13); thus, there's no need for any "investigation." Rightly does Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 479) surmise: "... [M]ost are agreed that [SdA's] have created doctrines to compensate for errors in prophetic interpretation. But the very doctrines intended to solve their theological problems have in turn only increased their dilemma--a dilemma which they have yet to solve!"¹³²

For further refutation of this SdA error, see pages 144-158 of Hoekema.

C. The soul lives on in conscious existence following the death of the body.

¹³¹SdA's reply: "We know that some earnest Christians have the impression that these gifts ceased with the apostolic church. But Adventists believe that the closing of the Scripture canon did not terminate Heaven's communication with men through the gifts of the Spirit" (*Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 94-95).

¹³²In a similar vein, Hoekema (p. 145) states: "The conclusion is inescapable that Seventh-day Adventist teaching on the investigative judgment was simply a way out of an embarrassing predicament. Instead of admitting, as Miller himself did, that a very serious error had been made in Scripture interpretation, these Adventist leaders clung frantically to the date Miller had set, and gave to that date a meaning which he himself never acknowledged. The doctrine of the investigative judgment, therefore, one of the key doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism, was a doctrine built on a mistake!"

The soul of the believer is in conscious bliss immediately following death (see Luke 16:22; see also Luke 23:43¹³³, 2 Cor 5:8, and Phil 1:23), while the soul of the unbeliever is in conscious torment (see Luke 16:22-23; see also Heb 9:27). "In every instance where the word 'sleep' is used to describe death, it always refers to the *body* and cannot be applied to the soul, especially since 'sleep' is never used with reference to the soul" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 452; emphasis his).

D. The soul of the unbeliever, like that of the believer, is immortal.

Every man will live eternally somewhere. The torment of hell is eternal. See the lesson on the Jehovah's Witnesses.

E. The Christian is free from the OT law.

Christ came to fulfill the Law (see Matt 5:17-18) on our behalf. We are no longer under the Law (see Acts 15:24, Rom 6:14, 7:4-6, 10:4, Gal 3:24-25, and Col 2:14). This does not mean, however, that we are free from law (antinomianism). The Christian is under the "law of Christ" (see 1 Cor 9:21 and Gal 6:2)/"law of God" (Rom 7:25). Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT and are, thus, binding on us. The one that is not is the fourth (observance of the Sabbath). See Romans 14:5, Galatians 4:9-11, and Colossians 2:16 in this regard.

Furthermore, the early church met on the first day of the week, not the last (see Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor 16:2).

For further refutation of this particular SdA error, see Appendix C of Hoekema.

Resources For Further Study:

The Kingdom of the Cults by Martin (1985: pp. 409-500; 1997: appendix C)

Confronting the Cults by Lewis (chp. 5)

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 37-40)

The Four Major Cults by Anthony Hoekema (chp. 3 and appendices B, C, and E)

¹³³SdA's place the comma in Luke 23:43 after "today," rather than after "you." Thus, the "today" is speaking of when Christ was speaking to the repentant thief, not of when the repentant thief would be with Christ in Paradise. The Jehovah's Witnesses do the same (see the NWT rendering of Luke 23:43).

The "Branch Davidians": An Offshoot of Seventh-day Adventism

The following is from the *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (p. 82):

Largely unknown before 1993, the Branch Davidians became world famous through their 51-day standoff against federal authorities. The culmination on April 19, 1993, in the fiery death of 86 members was one of the most tragic and spectacular events of the year. The members who lived at Mt. Carmel Center, a group compound near Waco, Texas, followed their messianic leader, David Koresh, who commanded resistance against government officials and finally ignited the fire that took the lives of all still living there.

This group of radical sectarians is a subset of one offshoot of the Seventh Day Adventist movement. (It was never a part of the large church that goes by that name.) In fact, the group's actual name is "Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Association," or more properly, "Branch Seventh Day Adventists." They trace a lineage to 1930 when Victor T. Houteff, a SDA church member in Los Angeles, expounded his new divinely inspired message in a book, *The Shepherd's Rod*.

Houteff and his followers found themselves unwelcome in SDA congregations and in 1935 moved to their central Texas site. Here, they believed, the redeemed 144,000 mentioned in the biblical book of Revelation would gather temporarily while directing the establishment of the Davidic kingdom. Living there together under theocratic rule, they would await the second coming of Christ.

David Koresh assumed the mantle of leadership of that theocratic regime in 1986 and the community became ever more isolated and defensive. Reports of the acquisition of a large cache of weapons and of the mistreatment of children occasioned the U.S. government's interest. By the time the confrontation ended in disaster, the power of Koresh's control had become dramatically evident.

Two other Davidian Adventist groups remain, one near Exeter, Missouri, the other near Salem, South Carolina. They too stand in the heritage of Houteff and his vision of the restoration of the King David-like theocracy, in these cases in anticipation of Christ's return.

What's the Difference?

Part 1: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and Cults

Lesson 6: **Combating the Cults**

Having discussed what a cult is (Lesson 1) and having examined four (three if one does not consider SdA to be a cult) of the renowned American cults of today (Lessons 2-5), we conclude our examination of the differences between Christianity and cults with a lesson on combating the cults (Lesson 6). How can we combat the cults? Here are some suggestions:

I. Evangelize the Cultists.

Usually, evangelism means going to the unbeliever (see Matt 28:19). Sometimes, however, the unbeliever comes to us. It is this phenomenon that causes Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985) to entitle chapter 19 of his book, "Cult Evangelism--Mission Field on the Doorstep." When the cultist shows up at our door, we have an opportunity to get a foot in the door of the cultist's heart by giving the gospel. Rather than going into "defense mode" when the cultist comes, we ought to take the offensive. "Until now the church has been confronted by the cults; it is high time that the cults are confronted by the church" (Lewis, p. 12)!

Based upon 2 John 10, some believe that you should not witness to a cultist who comes to your door. However, if the "house" being spoken of is a house-church (see Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19, Col 4:15, and Phlm 2), then John's admonition is simply: Don't let a heretic speak in your church. Even if John is talking about a residence, his point seems to be that you shouldn't associate with a heretic, not that you shouldn't witness to him.¹³⁴ In any case, the passage certainly allows

¹³⁴Zane Hodges ("2 John" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT vol., pp. 908-909) writes: "The passage ought not to be taken beyond the writer's intent. He was thinking about false teachers actively engaged in disseminating error. In this activity they are not to be helped at all. Even a word of greeting might tend to give them a sense of acceptance that could be misconstrued. The readers were to make plain from their aloofness that they in no way condoned the activities of these men. The same must be true today. But John did not directly address the question of how efforts should be made to win such people to a recognition of the truth. Yet it is clear that any such effort must be conducted so that they are not confused with any form of approbation." Hoekema (p. 412) understands this passage as follows: "A person who teaches such a heresy, John says, is not to be received into your house: that is, is not to be shown the kind of hospitality that will enable him to use your house as a base of operations." Hoekema (ibid.) further explains: "This warning was particularly appropriate at a time when itinerant teachers usually looked for private homes which they could make their headquarters, since there were very few inns." See 3 John 5-8 in this regard.

for sharing one's faith with the cultist at the doorstep, even if it forbids inviting him inside.

As with all forms of witnessing, there is certainly an art to witnessing to a cultist.¹³⁵ Remember one important point from Lesson 1: The cultist loves to use biblical terms, but with an unbiblical meaning. Therefore, when dealing with a cultist, it's always important to define your terms ("What do you mean by ...?").¹³⁶ One other pointer: Avoid side issues. Get to the heart of the matter. This usually means dealing with the main doctrines of Scripture (such as Christ and salvation).¹³⁷

II. Master Theology.

¹³⁵See chapter 19 of Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985): "Cult Evangelism--Mission Field on the Doorstep."

¹³⁶... [O]ne of the most important keys for the understanding of cultism is to keep in mind the fact that cultists use the terminology of orthodox Christianity but pour into it a completely different meaning. ... The important lesson to be learned from this is that we may never assume, when a cultist uses a theological expression which sounds familiar, that he means by it what historic Christianity has always meant by it. One must always go beneath the word used to the concept for which it stands, if one would understand what the cultist is saying" (cf. footnote 5). For more information regarding this phenomenon, see chapter 2 of Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985): "Scaling the Language Barrier."

¹³⁷"Stick to the major doctrines; do not allow yourself to be sidetracked into discussing minor issues. After all, the difference between you and the cult is not just a matter of this doctrine or that one; it is one which involves the interpretation of the central message of the Bible: that of salvation by grace alone" (Hoekema, p. 415).

Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 398) writes: "It has been the experience of the author, based upon numerous personal contacts with cultists of all varieties, that there has yet to be born a cultist who can confuse, confound or in any way refute a Christian who has made doctrinal theology an integral part of his study of the Scriptures." Lee Belford (quoted in Martin *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 17) adds: "The problem is essentially theological where the cults are concerned. The answer of the Church must be theological and doctrinal." The best way to immediately recognize error is to intimately know the Truth. Remember the counterfeit \$ illustration.

The church's failure to stress doctrine has led some to call the cults the "unpaid bills of the church" (J. K. VanBaalen, *Chaos of the Cults*, p. 390). A former Jehovah's Witness, W. J. Schnell (quoted in Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 125), once wrote: "The Watchtower leadership sensed that within the midst of Christendom were millions of professing Christians who were not well grounded in 'the truths once delivered to the saints,' and who would rather easily be pried loose from the churches and led into a new and revitalized Watchtower organization. The Society calculated, and that rightly, that this lack of proper knowledge of God and the widespread acceptance of half-truths in Christendom would yield vast masses of men and women, if the whole matter were wisely attacked, the attack sustained and the results contained, and then used in an ever-widening circle."

Study (i.e., read a book, take a class, etc.) such topics as (systematic) theology, apologetics (how to defend your faith), and hermeneutics (how to interpret correctly), because the cults love to take Scripture out of context.¹³⁸

III. Preach the Word.

In order to combat false teachers in Ephesus, Paul instructed Timothy to preach the Truth (2 Tim 4:2-4). The light of Truth always dissipates the darkness of error.

IV. Study the Cults.

Like the military, do a little reconnaissance of the enemy. Read their books. Visit their websites. Take a class on the cults.¹³⁹ Take what you learn and teach it to

¹³⁸"Because of the frequent abuse of the Bible in the cults, one of the most helpful studies for those ministering to them is the science of biblical interpretation" (Lewis, in the preface to the 2nd ed. of his *Confronting the Cults*).

¹³⁹Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 404) bemoans the fact that less than 5% of all

others (2 Tim 2:2).

V. Be Alert.

The cults thrive on deception (see Matt 7:15 and 2 Cor 11:13-15). Besides redefining terms, the cults will avoid identifying themselves or identify themselves by their lesser-known names, leave unmarked literature, fail to reveal their sponsorship of a Bible study, etc. (see Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, pp. 375-376). Be leery of any group that uses any of the psychological tactics mentioned in Lesson 1. Be leery of an emphasis on minor doctrines, obscure passages, etc.

VI. Pray.

Spiritual warfare is no more intense than when it comes to combatting the cults. Besides wielding the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph 6:17), we must also utilize the weapon of prayer (Eph 6:18). Pray that God would open the eyes of those Satan blinds (2 Cor 4:4) and release those whom Satan binds (2 Tim 2:26).

VII. Match Their Zeal.

As discussed in Lesson 1, the cults are known for their zeal. The problem, however, is not their zeal, but the fact that they have a zeal that is not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2). We who have the Truth must not let the cults corner the zeal market. Speaking of such cults as the Mormons (who are obligated to tithe), Lewis (pp. 8-9) states: "Is it not strange that those obliged by law to give a tenth do more than those who glory in inexhaustible grace?" Horton Davies (quoted in Lewis, p. 10) states: "... [T]he Church of Christ has nothing to fear from the zeal and competition of the sects. She has, however, everything to fear from her own missionary apathy and lethargy."

Resources For Further Study:

The Kingdom of the Cults by Martin (1985: chp. 19; 1997: chp. 18)

Confronting the Cults by Lewis (chp. 1)

The Four Major Cults by Anthony Hoekema (chps. 1 and 7)

U.S. Bible institutes, colleges, and seminaries (as of 1985) required a course on comparative religions or cults.

What's the Difference?

Part 1: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and Cults

Review Quiz

Following is a list of various names, publications, beliefs, practices, etc. associated with the four cults studied in part 1 of this series. Write the name of the particular cult that goes with each item.

Jehovah's Witnesses (JW)
Mormonism (M)
Christian Science (CS)
Seventh-day Adventism (SdA)

1. _____ Meet in "kingdom halls"
2. _____ "Spirit of prophecy" given to "founder"
3. _____ *Pearl of Great Price*
4. _____ Christ a created being
5. _____ Denial of the reality of matter
6. _____ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
7. _____ God the Father has a body
8. _____ Christ entered inner sanctum of heavenly sanctuary on Oct. 22, 1844
9. _____ Translates John 1:1c "the Word was a god"
10. _____ President of church has gift of prophecy
11. _____ William Miller
12. _____ Joseph Smith
13. _____ Correspondence courses
14. _____ Jesus returned secretly in 1914
15. _____ The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society
16. _____ The "investigative judgment"
17. _____ Brigham Young
18. _____ Polygamy
19. _____ Reading rooms
20. _____ Charles Taze Russell
21. _____ Mary Baker Eddy
22. _____ Observance of Saturday as day of worship
23. _____ *Awake!* magazine
24. _____ Attainment of godhood/exaltation/eternal progression
25. _____ *The Monitor* (daily newspaper)
26. _____ *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*
27. _____ J. F. Rutherford
28. _____ Ellen White
29. _____ *Doctrines and Covenants*
30. _____ God is a principle, not a person
31. _____ *New World Translation (NWT)*

What's the Difference?

Part 2: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and World Religions

I. History

The comparative religion of Islam originated with an Arabian man named Muhammed (or Mohammed or Muhammad¹⁴⁰), born in the city of Mecca (the holy city of Islam; located in modern Saudi Arabia) in 570 A.D. (d. 632 A.D.). Muslims (or Moslems; the name given to the adherents of Islam¹⁴¹) believe that Muhammed was the prophet of Allah¹⁴², their deity.¹⁴³ Over a 23-year period (610-632 A.D.) Muhammed allegedly received revelations¹⁴⁴ from Allah via the angel Gabriel, which became the basis for the Muslim Scriptures, the Qur'an (or Koran).¹⁴⁵ Some well-known Muslims include the late Ayatollah¹⁴⁶ Khomeini (Iran), Gadhafi (Libya), Saddam Hussein (Iraq), Louis Farrakhan and his Nation

¹⁴⁰The differences in spelling are attributable to the fact that there is no standardized method of transliterating Arabic script into Roman script.

¹⁴¹"The word *Islam* is a noun which is formed from the Arabic verb meaning 'to submit, surrender or commit oneself.' *Islam* means submission or surrender *Muslim*, another noun form of the same verb, means 'the one who submits'" (McDowell & Stewart, p. 378).

¹⁴²"Allah" is Arabic for "One and Absolute" (Mead & Hill, p. 212).

¹⁴³According to Islam, Jesus was merely a prophet of Allah, one of 124,000 (though one of the most highly respected ones). According to Islam, Muhammed was the "seal" of the prophets, i.e., the ultimate, final prophet. Thus, the Qur'an is "God's" ultimate revelation, superceding all previous revelations, including the Bible.

¹⁴⁴One such revelation allowed intercession to certain idols. Muhammad later withdrew several lines of this revelation, claiming them to have been satanic in origin. The lines he withdrew became the basis for the controversial 20th century book, *Satanic Verses*, by Salman Rushdie.

¹⁴⁵The Qur'an is about one-third the length of the Bible. It is divided into 114 surahs (chapters). Parts were written (actually dictated, as Muhammed could not write) by Muhammed himself, the rest by his followers, based on their mental recollection of Muhammed's revelations. For problems with the Qur'an, see Appendix 2 ("Anachronisms and Historical Inaccuracies in the Koran") in *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* by Gleason Archer. While Muslims accept parts of the Bible: the Torah (law of Moses), the Zabur (psalms of David), and the Injil (gospel of Jesus Christ), they believe that such writings have been corrupted by Jews and Christians. Thus, when there is a discrepancy between the Qur'an and the Bible, the Qur'an is accepted, the Bible rejected. Muslims also hold to the "Hadith," a collection of other teachings by Muhammed and his early followers.

¹⁴⁶The title "Ayatollah" designates the highest ranking leader amongst Shi'ite Muslims.

of Islam¹⁴⁷, and Muhammad Ali (boxing; a former Baptist). Approximately one-fifth of the world's population is Muslim (over one billion worldwide with over six million in the United States); thus, Islam is second only to "Christianity" in number of worldwide adherents. There are three major sects in Islam, the largest (overwhelmingly so) being the Sunnites.¹⁴⁸ The most "fundamental" sect is the Shi'ite sect.¹⁴⁹ The Sufis are mystics.¹⁵⁰ The Muslim holy day is Friday. On Fridays at noon, Muslims gather at their places of worship, mosques, literally places of prostration (Caner & Caner, p. 125). The leader of each mosque is known as an "imam."

II. Some¹⁵¹ Erroneous Muslim Beliefs

A. Idolatry

The Muslim god, Allah, is not the one true and living God of the Bible.

¹⁴⁷The Nation of Islam was founded in Detroit in 1930. It is a racist, African-American Islamic group with peculiar views that are outside the mainstream of Islam. The most famous member of this group was Malcolm X.

¹⁴⁸Osama bin Laden is a follower of Wahhabism, an eighteenth century offshoot of the Sunni sect.

¹⁴⁹McDowell & Stewart (p. 382) explain the basic difference between the Sunnis and the Shi'ites: "Eventually, a power struggle developed as different factions believed their own methods of establishing a successor [to Muhammad] were better than their rivals. The major eruption came between those who believed the Caliph [the successor] should be elected by the Islamic leadership [the Sunnis] and those who believed the successor should be hereditary, through 'Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law [the Shi'ites]" For other differences between the two groups, see page 105 of Halverson.

¹⁵⁰"The Sufis are those Muslims who have most sought for direct personal experience of the Divine" (McDowell & Stewart, p. 383).

¹⁵¹For an examination and refutation of other erroneous Muslim beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

B. Denial of the Trinity

Muslims believe that God is one both in essence and in person.

"Those certainly are disbelievers who say: Allah is none but the Messiah son of Mary; whereas the Messiah himself taught: Children of Israel, worship Allah Who is my Lord and your Lord. Surely, Allah has forbidden Heaven to him who associates partners with Allah, and the Fire will be his resort. The wrongdoers shall have no helpers. Those certainly are disbelievers who say: Allah is the third of three. There is no one worthy of worship but the One God. If they desist not from that which they say, a grievous chastisement shall surely afflict those of them that disbelieve. Will they not then turn to Allah and beg His forgiveness, seeing that Allah is Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful?" (Surah 5:73-75)

C. Denial of the Deity of Christ

"In blasphemy indeed are those that say that God is Christ the son of Mary" (Surah 5:17)

"... the Christians say, 'The Messiah is the Son of God.' That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted" (Surah 9:30).

To the Muslim, Jesus was just another of the prophets.

"Christ Jesus the son of Mary was no more than a Messenger of Allah Do not say 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: Glory be to Him: far exalted is He above having a son" (Surah 4:171).

D. Denial of Christ's death

"And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger--They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain. But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise" (Surah 4:157-158).

According to many Muslims, Judas Iscariot took Jesus' place on the Cross. According to others, it was Simon of Cyrene. According to yet others, it was Satan.

According to Muslims, since Jesus did not die, neither did He rise from the dead.

E. Salvation by works

"[Jesus] knew that there was only one way to God, and that was, as Jesus said, 'Keep the commandments!'" (Ahmed Deedat, quoted in Anis Shorosh, *Islam Revealed*, p. 279).

In order to be saved, the Muslim must fulfill the "Five Pillars" of Islam. These are:

1. The daily recitation of the "Shahadah," the Islamic confession/creed: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammed is the prophet of Allah"
2. Five daily times (dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening) of prescribed prayers in Arabic in the direction of Mecca. "Each time of prayer is made up of units containing set sequences of standing, bowing, kneeling, and prostrating while reciting verses from the Quran or other prayer formulas. The sequences are repeated twice at dawn prayer, three times at sunset prayer, and four times at noon, afternoon, and evening prayers" ("Islam and Terrorism," *World*, Nov./Dec. 2001, p. 16).
3. The giving of alms (for them, one-fortieth of their income, or 2.5%)
4. Fasting during the entire month of Ramadan¹⁵² (no eating, drinking, etc. allowed from sunrise to sunset)
5. A pilgrimage to Mecca during one's lifetime (some exceptions allowed)

Muslims do not believe in original sin, i.e., they do not believe that the sin of Adam was passed on to all of his descendants. Thus, men are not sinners by nature.¹⁵³

There are no doctrines of atonement or redemption in Islam.

F. Belief that the Christian Scriptures are corrupt

"A party of them heard the Word of Allah, and perverted it knowingly after they understood it" (Surah 2:75)

G. Other Muslim beliefs

1. Polygamy

Muhammed had approximately a dozen wives (including one he married when he was in his mid-fifties and she was nine!).

According to the Qur'an, Muslim men are allowed to marry as many as four wives (Surah 4:34 reads: "And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only) or (the captives) that your right hand possesses. Thus it is more likely that ye will not do justice.")¹⁵⁴

Islam has a low view of women, to say the least.¹⁵⁵ According to Surah 4:34, men are allowed to "beat" their wives, though there is divergence of opinion amongst Muslims as to what degree a Muslim husband may do so. According to Hadith 7.62.77, Muhammed said that Muslim men are to avoid beating their wives excessively.

2. Jihad (holy war)

¹⁵⁴Muhammed was allowed more than four according to the Qur'an: "O Prophet! Lo! We have made lawful unto thee thy wives unto whom thou hast paid their dowries, and those whom thy right hand possesseth of those whom Allah hath given thee as spoils of war, and a believing woman if she give herself unto the Prophet and the Prophet desire to ask her in marriage--a privilege for thee only, not for the (rest of) believers" (Surah 33:50).

¹⁵⁵"Some Qur'an texts are a public relations nightmare in societies conditioned by the feminist movement to assume gender equality" (Caner & Caner, p. 133).

¹⁵²The ninth month of the year in the Arabic calendar, Ramadan is considered sacrosanct because Muhammed allegedly received his first revelation during this month.

¹⁵³"Without a sense of original sin, Lord Acton's idea that (among humans) power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely does not arise. A system of checks and balances seems redundant, and dictators abound" ("Islam and Terrorism," *World*, Nov./Dec. 2001, p. 19).

Allah promises salvation for all who die in a holy war (Surah 3:195 reads: "Those who have left their homes, and were driven out therefrom, and suffered harm in My Cause, and fought and were slain,--Verily, I will blot out from them their iniquities, and admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing beneath;--A reward from Allah and from Allah is the best of rewards"; Surah 4:74 reads: "Let those who fight in the way of Allah who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoso fighteth in the way of Allah, be he slain or be he victorious, on him We shall bestow a vast reward"; Surah 4:95-96 reads: "Not equal are those Believers who sit [at home], except those who are disabled. And those who strive and fight [jihad] in the cause of Allah with their goods and their persons. Allah has granted a grade higher to those who strive and fight with their goods and persons than to those who sit [at home]. Unto all [in Faith] has Allah promised good: But those who strive and fight has He distinguished above those who sit [at home] by a great reward.--Ranks specially bestowed by Him and Forgiveness and Mercy. For Allah is oft-forgiving. Most Merciful"; Surah 22:58 reads: "Those who leave their homes in the cause of God, and are then slain or die, on them will God bestow verily a goodly provision. Truly God is He who bestows the best provision").¹⁵⁶ Muhammed himself participated in scores of battles. Accordingly, Islam has been called "the religion of the sword."

"And fight with them until there is no more persecution and religion should be only for Allah" (Surah 8:39).

"Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (Surah 9:5).

"Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low" (Surah 9:29).

¹⁵⁶Similar statements are found in the Hadith. Hadith 1.35 reads: "Muhammad said, 'The person who participates in (holy battles) in Allah's cause and nothing compels him to do so except belief in Allah and His Apostles, will be recompensed by Allah either with a reward, or booty (if he survives) or will be admitted to Paradise (if he is killed in the battle as a martyr).'" Hadith 4.175 reads: "Umair said, 'Um Haram informed us that she heard the Prophet saying, 'Paradise is granted to the first batch of my followers who will undertake a naval expedition.'" Um Haram added, "I said, O Allah's Apostle! Will I be amongst them?" He replied, "You are amongst them." The Prophet then said, "The first army amongst my followers who will invade Caesar's city will be forgiven their sins.'" Hadith 9.93.555 reads: "Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said, 'Allah guarantees [to the person who carries out Jihad in His Cause and nothing compelled him to go out but Jihad in His Cause and the belief in His Word] that He will either admit him into Paradise [martyrdom] or return him with reward or booty he has earned to his residence from where he came out.'"

"Mohammad said, 'I have been ordered to fight with the people till they say, 'None has the right to be worshiped but Allah,' and whoever says, 'None has the right to be worshiped but Allah,' his life and property will be saved'" (Hadith 4.196)

"The purest joy in Islam is to kill and be killed for Allah" (Ayatollah Khomeini, quoted in Anis Shorrosh, *Islam Revealed*, p. 35).

Islamic men who die while waging jihad are guaranteed a paradise of sensual pleasures. The 9-11¹⁵⁷ hijackers were clearly motivated by this bogus belief: "The instructions some of the Sept. 11 terrorists carried with them [read in part]: '... remember all of the things that God has promised for the martyrs Know that the gardens of paradise are waiting for you in all their beauty, and the women of paradise are waiting, calling out, 'Come hither, friend of God.' They have dressed in their most beautiful clothing'" ("Islam and Terrorism," *World*, Nov./Dec. 2001, p. 24).

III. Our Response

A. The one true and living God is the God of the Bible.

See Isaiah 46:9 and Jeremiah 10:10.

B. There is one God in three Persons.

See the lesson on the Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as appendix B.

C. Jesus Christ is God.

See the lesson on the Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as appendix A.

D. Jesus Christ died.

See the lesson on Christian Science.

E. Salvation is by grace through faith.

¹⁵⁷The impetus for the 9-11 attack undoubtedly came from a February 23, 1998 "fatwa" (religious decree) signed by five Islamic caliphates (including Osama bin Laden), which read in part: "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies--civilians and military--is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it" The entire fatwa is reproduced in Caner & Caner (pp. 181-184).

See the lesson on Mormonism. In response to Deedat's statement, see John 14:6.

F. The Bible is inerrant.

See Appendix F.

Resources for Further Study:

The Kingdom of the Cults by Martin (1985: chp. 16; 1997: appendix D)

Handbook of Today's Religions by McDowell & Stewart (part 3, chp. 9)

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 211-214)

"Christianity, Cults, & Religions" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

So What's the Difference? by Ridenour (chp. 5)

The Compact Guide to World Religions by Halverson (pp. 103-120)

Unveiling Islam by Caner & Caner

"So What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Brown

What's the Difference?

Appendix F: The Inerrancy of Scripture

The doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture is a foundational one. "There is evidence that where a theologian, a school, or a movement begins by regarding biblical inerrancy as a peripheral or optional matter and abandons this doctrine, it frequently then goes on to abandon or alter other doctrines which the church has ordinarily considered quite major" (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 226).

Inerrancy has been held from the beginning. Bruce Vawter (an opponent of inerrancy; quoted in Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 194) concedes: "It would be pointless to call into question that biblical inerrancy in a rather absolute form was a common persuasion from the beginning of Christian times, and from Jewish times before that. For both the Fathers and the rabbis generally, the ascription of any error to the Bible was unthinkable; ... if the word was God's it must be true, regardless of whether it made known a mystery of divine revelation or commented on a datum of natural science, whether it derived from human observation or chronicled an event of history."

Definitions/Descriptions of Inerrancy

Inerrancy simply means that the Bible is without error. Following are some definitions/descriptions of inerrancy: "We may now state our understanding of inerrancy. The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms" (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 233-234). "[The inerrancy of Scripture] is the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all of its teachings" (ibid., p. 221). "Following the Scriptures' own language, inerrancy is best defined as 'truthfulness.' It means that the Scriptures in their original writings are true in everything that they said regarding all matters" (Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 156). "The Bible (in its original writings) properly interpreted in light of which culture and communication means had developed by the time of its composition will be completely true (and therefore not false) in all that it affirms, to the degree of precision intended by the author, in all matters relating to God and his creation" (David Dockery, quoted in ibid.). "The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. This definition focuses on the question of truthfulness and falsehood in the language of Scripture. The definition in simple terms just means that the Bible always tells the truth, and that it always tells the truth concerning everything it talks about" (Wayne Grudem,

Systematic Theology, pp. 90-91). “By ‘inerrancy’ we intend essentially the same thing as ‘infallibility,’ namely, that the Bible does not err in any of its affirmations, whether those affirmations be in the spheres of spiritual realities or morals, history or science, and is therefore incapable of teaching error” (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 70). “*Inerrant* signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions” (from the 1978 Chicago Statement on Scripture, cited in *ibid.*). “Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they teach, whether that teaching has to do with doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, or other disciplines or knowledge” (from the 1978 Chicago Statement on Scripture, cited in Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 167). “By [inerrancy] we mean that the Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to mistake, incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with the truth” (E. J. Young, quoted in *ibid.*). “... [T]he inerrancy of the Bible means simply that the Bible tells the truth. Truth can and does include approximations, free quotations, language of appearances, and different accounts of the same event as long as these do not contradict” (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 82). “The Bible is fully true in all it teaches or affirms. This extends to the areas of both history and science. It [the “complete inerrancy” position] does not hold that the Bible has a primary purpose to present exact information concerning history and science. Therefore the use of popular expressions, approximations¹⁵⁸, and phenomenal language¹⁵⁹ is acknowledged and is believed to fulfill the requirement of truthfulness. Apparent discrepancies, therefore, can and must be harmonized” (H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine*, p. 24).

Scriptural Support for Inerrancy

¹⁵⁸“Inerrancy argues for accuracy of statement and not necessarily exactness of statement” (Rolland McCune, *Systematic Theology I class notes*, p. 38).

¹⁵⁹“The use of observational, nonscientific language is not *unscientific*, it is merely *prescientific*” (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 57).

Inerrancy is taught in Scripture both implicitly and explicitly. It is taught implicitly in Matthew 22:29, where Jesus tells the Sadducees: “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.” “He [Jesus] charged that the Sadducees erred concerning the resurrection because they did not know the Scriptures (Matt 22:29), implying thereby that the Scriptures did not err” (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 45). It was the Sadducees who were in error, not the Scriptures. Inerrancy is also taught implicitly in Scripture via the following simple syllogism¹⁶⁰:

Major premise:	God is true	
	· Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth (Ps 31:5)	
	· “He who has received His testimony has set his seal to <i>this</i> , that God is true” (John 3:33)	
	· May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man <i>be found</i> a liar (Rom 3:4)	
	· in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ago (Titus 1:2; cf. Num 23:19 and Heb 6:18)	
	· The Holy Spirit is true (see John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13, and 1 John 5:6; cf. 2 Pet 1:21)	
Minor premise:		The Bible is God’s Word (2 Tim 3:16)
Conclusion:	The Bible is true	

The foregoing syllogism shows that inerrancy is a corollary of inspiration. Inerrancy is inherent to inspiration. “To deny the inerrancy of Scripture is to impugn either the integrity of God¹⁶¹ or the identity of the Bible as the Word of God” (Norman Geisler &

¹⁶⁰“Some scholars object that it is ‘too simplistic’ to argue as follows: ‘The Bible is God’s words. God never lies. Therefore the Bible never lies.’ Yet it is precisely that kind of argument that Paul uses in Titus 1:2. He refers to the promises of eternal life made ‘ages ago’ in Scripture and says the promises were made by God ‘who never lies.’ He thus calls on the truthfulness of God’s own speech to prove the truthfulness of the words of Scripture. A ‘simple’ argument this may be, but it is scriptural, and it is true. We should therefore not hesitate to accept it and use it” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 82).

¹⁶¹“For if God did in fact inspire the original writers to inscripturate his word, we reflect negatively, if not blasphemously, upon his nature as the God of truth, the ultimate Author of Scripture, if we allow for errors in the originals” (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 91).

William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 55). "If there be one falsehood in that book [the Bible], it [the Bible] did not come from the God of truth" (John Wesley, quoted in Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, pp. 203-204). "A divinely inspired error is a contradiction in terms" (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 53).

Inerrancy is taught explicitly in Scripture in the following passages:

"Now, O LORD God, You are God, and Your words are truth ..." (2 Sam 7:28a)

The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times (Ps 12:6)¹⁶²

As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless (Ps 18:30a, NIV)

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether (Ps 19:7-9)

Your word is very pure, Therefore Your servant loves it (Ps 119:140)

Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And Your law is truth (Ps 119:142)

You are near, O LORD, And all Your commandments are truth (Ps 119:151)

The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting (Ps 119:160)

"Every word of God is flawless" (Prov 30:5, NIV)

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17)¹⁶³

¹⁶²To emphasize the purity of God's Word, David wrote that it is like silver 'refined seven times' (Ps 12:6). The number seven probably expresses 'in a forceful way the concept of absolute purity, total freedom from impurity or imperfection'" (this excerpt is taken from Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 154, in which he quotes Wayne Grudem).

¹⁶³Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p. 83) states in regards to this verse: "This verse is interesting because Jesus does not use the adjectives *al_thinos* or *al_th_s* ('true'), which we might have expected, to say, 'Your word is true.' Rather, he uses a noun, *al_theia* ('truth'), to say that God's Word is not simply 'true,' but it is truth itself. The difference is significant, for

this statement encourages us to think of the Bible not simply as being 'true' in the sense that it conforms to some higher standard of truth, but rather to think of the Bible as being itself the final standard of truth. The Bible is God's Word, and God's Word is itself *truth*. Thus we are to think of the Bible as the ultimate standard of truth, the reference point by which every other claim to truthfulness is to be measured. Those assertions that conform with Scripture are 'true' while those that do not conform with Scripture are not true. What then is truth? Truth is what God says, and we have what God says (accurately but not exhaustively) in the Bible." God says true things, but what makes them true is the fact that He says them. In other words, God Himself is the standard, not some standard of truth external to Himself to which He must conform. Another significant thing about John 17:17 is that it was spoken directly by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The following statement, uttered by H. C. G. Moule (quoted in Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 107) brings out the significance: "Christ absolutely trusted the Bible; and though there are in it things inexplicable and intricate that have puzzled me so much, I am going, not in a blind sense, but reverently, to trust the Book because of Him."

a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth (Rom 2:20)

because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel (Col 1:5; cf. Eph 1:13)

Does the Human Element in Inspiration Preclude Inerrancy?

One of the arguments leveled by opponents of inerrancy is that the human element of the Bible (the fact that God used fallible men to write It) makes the Bible fallible. While it is true that the Bible is a human Book, it is more so a divine Book. The divine element of the Bible (via the miracle of inspiration) overrides the human element in such a way that the final product is infallible/inerrant. Robert Saucy (*Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 135) states in this regard: "As the Bible teaches, the writers of Scripture were not left to themselves in the process of writing God's Word. The Holy Spirit uniquely and miraculously worked in the process of inspiration to overrule their defect of sin, guiding them to say and write exactly what God desired." B. B. Warfield (in *The Inspiration & Authority of the Bible*) likewise states: "... the gift of Scripture through its human authors ... took place in a process in which the control of the Holy Spirit was too complete and pervasive to permit the human qualities of the secondary authors in any way to condition the purity of the product as the word of God" (p. 153) and "... so in the case of the production of Scripture by the conjoint action of human and Divine factors, the human factors have acted as human factors, and have left their mark on the product as such, and yet cannot have fallen into that error which we say it is human to fall into, because they have not acted apart from the Divine factors, by themselves, but only under their unerring guidance" (pp. 162-163).

Inerrancy Only of the Originals

Like inspiration, inerrancy, strictly speaking, applies only to the originals (cf. many of the definitions of inerrancy given at the beginning of this lesson). The originals are directly inerrant, while copies and translations are derivatively inerrant (i.e., to the degree that they accurately reflect the originals).¹⁶⁴ Opponents of inerrancy often "chide that no one in modern times has ever seen these 'infallible originals.' Although no one in modern times has ever seen an infallible original, it is also true that no one has ever seen a fallible one" (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 43).

Handling Discrepancies

¹⁶⁴... [T]he doctrine of inerrancy, like inspiration, is predicated only on the original manuscripts, not on any of the copies" (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 80). "The doctrine of inerrancy applies in the strict sense only to the originals, but in a derivative sense to copies and translations, that is, to the extent that they reflect the original" (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 239).

In an attempt to prove their position, opponents of inerrancy often point to the alleged discrepancies of the Bible (see chart 12, "Answers to Supposed Discrepancies in Scripture"¹⁶⁵ in H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine*, pp. 26-29; cf. chp. 14 of Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*; cf. pp. 169-181 of Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*). While it must be admitted that such discrepancies are problematic, the real issue is the conclusion one draws from them. While the opponents of inerrancy conclude that such discrepancies prove their position¹⁶⁶, proponents of inerrancy conclude otherwise. The two positions are laid out by Robert Sheehan (*The Word of Truth*, p. 77): "There are fundamentally two approaches to the difficulties which undoubtedly exist in Scripture: 1. I may begin with the problems, call them errors and decide that the phenomenon of error rules out the possibility of an inspired, infallible and inerrant Scripture. This begins with my ability to solve problems as the basis for belief. It is fundamentally humanistic. 2. I may begin with submission to the view of Scripture accepted by Christ and his apostles and conclude therefore the Scriptures are inspired, infallible and inerrant. I will seek solutions to the problems that exist and do so trusting that there must be solutions. This view does not require me to accept unsatisfactory solutions, but to wait, if necessary, for more light to clarify the correct answer."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵The best book currently available on this topic is Gleason Archer's *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*.

¹⁶⁶Robert Sheehan (*The Word of Truth*, p. 76) points out that one must distinguish between a problem and an error: "There is, after all, a difference between a problem that is not yet solved and an error. An unsolved problem has a solution. An error cannot possibly be reconciled with fact under any circumstances." In this same vein, Robert Saucy (*Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 183) states: "... [M]any of the problems of the Bible that have been raised against its truthfulness have gone by the wayside as scholarly research in history, archaeology, and linguistics has increased our knowledge of the ancient world. This fact should make anyone hesitant to assert a proven error today unless he is prepared to claim that he has the complete data related to everything that concerns a particular problem and that his interpretation of that data is infallible."

¹⁶⁷Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 71) makes a case for the second approach: "... we must not ground the case for the Bible's inerrancy or lack thereof simply in an inductive study of the Bible's phenomena alone. We must take seriously what it says didactically about itself and study its historical and scientific phenomena in the light of its didactic statements about itself, that is to say, we must approach the Scripture's phenomena not inductively but presuppositionally." Reymond (ibid.) goes on to say: "... the warrant for holding the doctrine of biblical infallibility is the didactic witness of Scripture to itself and not our ability to prove it at every point to be infallible." Paul Enns (*The Moody Handbook of Theology*, pp. 168-169), also sympathetic to the second approach, states: "In some cases the solution awaits the findings of the archaeologist's spade; in another case it awaits the linguist's research; in other cases the solution may never be discovered for other reasons. The solution to some problems must be held in abeyance. The answer, however, is never to suggest there are

The basic difference between the two positions is that in the first, one places himself above Scripture/stands in judgment over It, while in the second, one places himself under Scripture, submitting to Its/God's authority. The second is exemplified by Francis Turretin (quoted in Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 149): "[W]hatever contradictions seem to be in Scripture are apparent but not real. [They appear] only with respect to the understanding of us who are not able to perceive and grasp everywhere their harmony.' The discrepancies that are difficult to explain 'are such because of human ignorance, and not because of the problem itself, so it is better to acknowledge our ignorance than to accept any contradiction.'" Augustine (quoted in Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 226) echoes the same sentiment: "I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it."

contradictions or errors in Scripture. If the Scriptures are God-breathed they are entirely without error." Irenaeus, the second century church father (quoted in Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, & Relevance*, p. 191) was another who took this second approach: "If we cannot discover explanations of all things in Scripture ... we should leave things of that nature to God who created us, being most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit."

What's the Difference?

Part 2: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and World Religions Lesson 2: **Buddhism**

I. History

The comparative religion of Buddhism began in the 6th century B.C. with the birth of a man named Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 B.C.) in what is modern Nepal. Gautama was born into an aristocratic, Hindu¹⁶⁸ family. As legend has it, a prophecy was made concerning young Siddhartha, claiming that he would become a great king, so long as he did not see suffering. Otherwise, he would discover a way of salvation for all mankind (Ridenour, p. 98). Desiring the former, his father built a palace and sheltered him within its confines. In time, Siddhartha got married and fathered a son. One day, he left the palace and saw various forms of suffering. This experience had such a disturbing impact upon him that it led to the "Great Renunciation," wherein at the age of twenty-nine he renounced his wealth, left his family, became a monk, lived as a beggar, and began searching for a solution to the problem of suffering. After trying to find the solution in the Hindu Scriptures, then in the life of an ascetic, he realized that neither was the answer. Eventually, he made his way to the city of Bodh Gaya¹⁶⁹, where he sat down under a fig tree and began meditating. While deep in meditation, he experienced "enlightenment" (aka "nirvana"¹⁷⁰), thus becoming Buddha (meaning "the enlightened one"). He called this experience the "Middle Way," one that avoided the extremes of affluence and asceticism (Halverson, p. 55). Buddha went on to teach what came to be called the "Four Noble Truths" of Buddhism: 1) suffering; 2) the reason for suffering (desire); 3) the solution to

¹⁶⁸McDowell & Stewart (p. 304) call Buddhism a sect of Hinduism.

¹⁶⁹According to Halverson (p. 55), Bodh Gaya is the site of the holiest shrine in the Buddhist world, the Mahabodhi Temple.

¹⁷⁰Nirvana is a state of being. Ridenour (p. 99) describes it as "literally, the 'blowing out' of the flame of desire and the negation of suffering." McDowell & Stewart (p. 322) call it "a difficult, if not impossible, word to define. In Buddhism, it is basically a blissful spiritual condition where the heart extinguishes passion, hatred and delusion. It is the highest spiritual plane one person can attain." Here's how Buddha (quoted in Halverson, p. 59) himself described it: "There is a sphere which is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air, which is not the sphere of the infinity of space, nor the sphere of the infinity of consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, the sphere of perception, or non-perception, which is neither this world, nor sun nor moon. I deny that it is coming or going, enduring, death, or birth. It is only the end of suffering." Clear as mud.

suffering (eliminating desire¹⁷¹); and 4) the way to eliminate desire and, thus, end suffering (following the “Eight-fold Path” of Buddhism: right understanding, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, awareness, and meditation).

In time, Buddhism split into two major forms: Mahayana Buddhism, the more “liberal” (and most popular) of the two, and Hinayana Buddhism (better known as Theravada Buddhism), the more “conservative” of the two.¹⁷² Another significant form of Buddhism is Vajrayana Buddhism (aka Tantra), which blends Mahayana Buddhism with the ancient occult practices of Tibet (Ridenour, p. 103). Accordingly, Vajrayana Buddhism is especially predominant in Tibet. One well-known leader of Vajrayana Buddhism is the Dalai Lama, Tibet’s exiled spiritual and political leader.¹⁷³ One form of Mahayana Buddhism, Zen Buddhism¹⁷⁴, was imported to the United States from Japan in the 20th century. Well-known adherents include Tina Turner, Richard Gere, Larry Hagman, and Harrison Ford (Ridenour, p. 103); Jerry Brown, former governor of CA (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 261); and former Chicago Bulls and Los Angeles Lakers basketball coach, Phil Jackson. Zen Buddhism lays particular stress upon meditation.¹⁷⁵ Another form of Buddhism that has also gained a foothold in the U.S. is Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.¹⁷⁶

II. Some¹⁷⁷ Erroneous Buddhist Beliefs¹⁷⁸

A. Idolatry

Buddhism is essentially monistic, believing that all reality is one. In this respect, Buddhism does not really have a “god.” The “god” of Buddhism is clearly impersonal.

B. Extrabiblical revelation

The “Bible” of Theravada Buddhism is the “Tripitaka” (“the three baskets”¹⁷⁹). The Tripitaka is approximately eleven times the size of the Bible (McDowell & Stewart, p. 310).¹⁸⁰ Mahayana Buddhism believes in an open canon, a canon whose volumes presently number in the thousands.¹⁸¹

C. “Salvation” by works

¹⁷⁷For an examination and refutation of other erroneous Buddhist beliefs, one may consult the “Resources for Further Study” listed at the end of this lesson.

¹⁷⁸Trying to catalogue Buddhist belief is challenging because, unlike Islam and Judaism, which tend to be monolithic, Buddhism tends to be diverse. As McDowell & Stewart (p. 321) put it: “Another problem with Buddhism is the many forms it takes. Consequently, there is a wide variety of belief in the different sects with much that is contradictory.” John Noss (quoted in McDowell & Stewart, p. 321) likewise states: “The rather odd fact is that there ultimately developed within Buddhism so many forms of religious organization, cultus and belief, such great changes even in the fundamentals of the faith, that one must say Buddhism as a whole is really ... a family of religions rather than a single religion.”

¹⁷⁹The three baskets are the Vinaya Pitaka, Buddha’s rules for monks; the Sutta Pitaka, Buddha’s discourses; and the Abidhamma Pitaka, Buddha’s theology.

¹⁸⁰According to Halverson (p. 60), however, it is seventy times the size of the Bible.

¹⁸¹As one might imagine, the Mahayana canon is too large to be practical. Thus, as Clark Offner (quoted in McDowell & Stewart, p. 310) states: “As there are such a number and such a variety of scriptures, most Mahayana sects have chosen certain favourite ones to which they refer exclusively. The fact is that some such selection is necessary, for this extreme bulk and breadth of the scriptures make it impossible for believers to be acquainted with, let alone understand and practise, the often contradictory teachings found in them.”

¹⁷¹Halverson (p. 64; emphasis his) points out the self-defeating nature of this when he states: “Such a goal is obviously difficult to attain, since it requires *desiring* to eliminate *desire*.”

¹⁷²For some of the differences between these two forms, see Halverson (pp. 56-57, and 60) and Ridenour (pp. 102-103).

¹⁷³Halverson (p. 57) calls the Dalai Lama “probably today’s most recognizable living symbol of Buddhism.”

¹⁷⁴For more on this form, see McDowell & Stewart (pp. 317-320) and Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, chp. 9).

¹⁷⁵“Central to Zen practice is *zazen*. *Zazen* is the method of sitting in Zen meditation, which is done daily at specific times with occasional periods of intense meditation lasting one week. The goal is final enlightenment. The practice of *zazen* is done under the guiding hand of a master” (McDowell & Stewart, p. 318).

¹⁷⁶For more on this form, see McDowell & Stewart (pp. 315-317) and Rose Publishing’s “Christianity, Cults & Religions” chart.

“Salvation” in Buddhism comes by following the Eight-fold Path, leading to the “salvific experience” of enlightenment, or nirvana. Attaining this pinnacle is a matter of self-effort. In the Dhammadata (a collection of sayings attributed to Buddha), Buddha (cited in McDowell & Stewart, p. 313) says: “By meditation and perseverance, by tireless energy, the wise attain to nirvana, the supreme beatitude.”

Buddhist salvation is very self-oriented.¹⁸² Notice the following words from the Tripitaka (cited in McDowell & Stewart, p. 306), spoken by Buddha to a young monk named Ananda: “So, Ananda, you must be your own lamps, be your own refuge. Take refuge in nothing outside yourselves. Hold firm to the truth as a lamp and a refuge, and do not look for refuge to anything besides yourselves. A monk becomes his own lamp and refuge by continually looking on his body, feelings, perceptions, moods, and ideas” Zen Buddhist Robert Linnsen (quoted in Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 265) states: “We are at the same time responsible for our slavery and our freedom; the chains of our enslavement have been forged by ourselves, and only we can break them” Mahayana Buddhism is slightly less self-reliant than Theravada Buddhism, believing in “bodhisattvas” (Buddha being the ultimate one), exceptional Buddhists who have accrued extra karmic¹⁸³ merit that can be shared with other Buddhists who look to them in “faith.” A saying of Zen Buddhism is: “Look within, you are the Buddha.”

D. Reincarnation (aka “transmigration”)

One of the many beliefs brought over from Hinduism into Buddhism is belief in reincarnation. In Buddhist thought, desire perpetuates the continuous birth-suffering-death-rebirth cycle, a cycle interrupted only when one conquers desire at the point of nirvana. One moves in this direction as he accrues more good karma than bad karma, enabling him to be reborn into higher life forms. In Theravada Buddhism, the highest form is the Buddhist monk.

¹⁸²Lit-Sen-Chang (quoted in Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 268), who was saved out of Zen Buddhism, calls his former religion “a most radical form of auto-soterism” (i.e., self-salvation).

¹⁸³According to *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (10th ed., p. 638), karma is “the force generated by a person’s actions ... to perpetuate transmigration and its ethical consequences to determine the nature of the person’s next existence.”

As a corollary to their belief in reincarnation, Buddhists deny the reality of the afterlife. The “Buddhist Creed” (a 1981 document produced by Colonel H. S. Olcott; cited in McDowell & Stewart, p. 312) states: “Ignorance also begets the illusive and illogical idea that there is only one existence for man, and the other illusion that this one life is followed by states of unchangeable pleasure or torment.”

Another corollary of belief in reincarnation is a rejection of the biblical doctrines of atonement and redemption. Through reincarnation, one essentially ends up eventually saving himself; thus, he doesn’t need a redeemer to make atonement in his behalf (although the Mahayana bodhisattvas are quasi-redeemers).

E. Other Buddhist Beliefs and Practices

1. Mysticism

Mysticism is seeking for a direct, personal religious experience, bypassing the mind. While Buddhism (especially Zen Buddhism in the U.S.) has an aura of intellectualism about it, it is actually very anti-intellectual. McDowell & Stewart (p. 320) state in this regard: “Part of Zen’s attraction is that one is not required to be responsible in evaluating anything in the world or even in his own thoughts. One loses his capacity to think logically and critically. While the Bible commands Christians to test *all* things (1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22), Zen mocks critical analysis.”

2. Refusal to kill any creature (including insects)

3. Yoga

III. Our Response

A. There is one living and true God, the God of the Bible (see Isa 46:9 and Jer 10:10).

Contrary to the monism of Buddhism, God is transcendent, distinct from His creation (Gen 1:1 and Jer 23:23). He is also personal (see the lesson on Christian Science).

B. The Bible is the only source of divine revelation available today (see the lesson on Mormonism).

C. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, not by

works (see the lesson on Mormonism).

Contrary to the Buddhist belief that the cause of suffering is desire, the Bible teaches that the cause of suffering is sin.

Contrary to the Buddhist belief that desire is always wrong and, therefore, ought to be extinguished, the Bible teaches that some desires are right, most notably the desire for God¹⁸⁴ (see Psa 73:25) and the desire for righteousness (see Matt 5:6).

D. Resurrection, not reincarnation

At the point of physical death (the separation of the body from the spirit), a person's bodily existence ceases until his body is reunited with his spirit at the point of resurrection. The church age believer's resurrection will take place at the Rapture (1 Thess 4:13-17). Old Testament and Tribulation saints will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation and prior to the Millennium (Dan 12:2 and Rev 20:4). Unbelievers of all ages will be resurrected at the end of the Millennium and prior to the Eternal State (Rev 20:11-15).

Resources for Further Study:

The Kingdom of the Cults by Martin (1985: chp. 9; 1997: chp. 9)

Handbook of Today's Religions by McDowell & Stewart (part 3, chp. 3)

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 89-91)

"Christianity, Cults, & Religions" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

So What's the Difference? by Ridenour (chp. 7)

The Compact Guide to World Religions by Halverson (pp. 54-69)

What's the Difference?

Part 2: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and World Religions

Lesson 3: Hinduism

I. History

According to Ridenour (p. 89), the name Hindu comes from the Indus River, which flows through modern Pakistan. The origins of Hinduism go back as far as 2000 B.C. when the Aryans conquered the Indus Valley. In time, the Aryans recorded their religious beliefs in what came to be called the Vedas, the earliest and most authoritative of the Hindu scriptures.

Famous personages influenced by Hindu thinking include the 19th century American poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson; the 19th century American writer, Henry David Thoreau; the 20th century English writer, Aldous Huxley; and the Beatles.¹⁸⁵ Perhaps the most famous Hindu in recent memory was Indian leader Mohandas K. Gandhi. Other Hindu groups include the Hare Krishnas (aka ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness), who believe that Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu (see footnote 191), is god¹⁸⁶; Transcendental Meditation (TM)¹⁸⁷; and the Rajneeshism "cult" (followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh)¹⁸⁸. Much "New Age" thought is also rooted in Hinduism. Hinduism has spawned several other world religions, such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Hindu leaders are called swamis or gurus. According to Halverson (p. 87), "the vast majority of Hindus--some 700 million--live in India, where they account for 82% of the population" [these are 1996 figures].

¹⁸⁵One of the Beatles, George Harrison, dedicated his hit song, "My Sweet Lord," to Krishna.

¹⁸⁶For more on the Hare Krishnas, see Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, pp. 361-362), Ridenour (pp. 179-183), McDowell & Stewart (part 1, chp. 4), and Rose Publishing's "Christianity, Cults & Religions" chart.

¹⁸⁷For more on TM, see Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, pp. 362-363), McDowell & Stewart (part 1, chp. 7), and Rose Publishing's "Christianity, Cults & Religions" chart.

¹⁸⁸For more on Rajneeshism, see Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, pp. 353-361).

¹⁸⁴See John Piper's *Desiring God*.

II. Some¹⁸⁹ Erroneous Hindu Beliefs¹⁹⁰

A. Idolatry

Hinduism has a pantheon of 330 million gods. The primary ones are Brahma, Vishnu¹⁹¹, and Shiva. Like Buddhism, Hinduism tends to be monistic¹⁹², believing that everything is part of one impersonal ultimate reality, which most Hindus call Brahma.

B. Extrabiblical revelation

The earliest and most authoritative of the Hindu scriptures are called the Vedas. Though not as authoritative, the most popular and sacred of the Hindu scriptures is the Bhagavad-Gita. Another significant portion of the Hindu scriptures is called the Upanishads.

C. "Salvation" by works

¹⁸⁹For an examination and refutation of other erroneous Hindu beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

¹⁹⁰As with Buddhism (see footnote 178), Hinduism is more a family of religions than a single, monolithic religion. Thus, as with Buddhism, the attempt to identify beliefs common to all Hindus is challenging. In a similar vein, McDowell & Stewart (p. 283) state: "Hinduism is not only one of the oldest of all religious systems, it is also one of the most complex."

¹⁹¹According to devotees of Vishnu, Vishnu has become incarnate in at least ten different forms (whether animal or human) throughout history. Three of these "avatars" were Buddha, Jesus, and Krishna.

¹⁹²Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 353), however, sees Hinduism as being extremely diverse in its theism, writing: "There is no single Hindu idea of God. Hindu concepts of deity can include any of the following: monism (all existence is one substance); pantheism (all existence is divine); panentheism (God is in creation as a soul is in a body); animism (God or gods live in nonhuman objects such as trees, rocks, animals, etc.); polytheism (there are many gods); henotheism (there is one god we worship among the many that exist); and monotheism (there is only one God)." John Noss (quoted in McDowell & Stewart, p. 283) likewise states: "Hindus have an extraordinarily wide selection of beliefs and practices to choose from: they can (to use Western terms) be pantheists, polytheists, monotheists, agnostics, or even atheists."

Like Buddhism, Hinduism believes in "salvation" through the accumulation of karmic merit (more good karma than bad karma), leading to being reincarnated myriads of times¹⁹³ into successively higher life forms ("samsara"), ultimately leading to "moksha" (nirvana/enlightenment). Moksha reunites one to Brahma.

Hindus believe moksha can be achieved by taking one of three paths: 1) the path of works (dharma); 2) the path of knowledge (inana); or 3) the path of devotion (bhakti).¹⁹⁴ Hindus believe that there are many ways to God.

"But striving zealously, with sins cleansed, the disciplined man, perfected through many rebirths, then (finally) goes to the highest goal" (Bhagavad-Gita 6:45).

D. Jesus is one of many Hindu "avatars," an incarnation of the Hindu god, Vishnu.

E. Other Hindu Beliefs and Practices

1. Yoga

According to Ridenour (p. 93), yoga is "the attempt to control one's consciousness through bodily posture, breath control and concentration, to the extent that one comes to understand experientially that one's true self, one's underlying soul (atman), is identical with Brahma." Devotees of yoga are called yogis.

2. Vegetarianism (based on the Hindu doctrine of nonviolence to all life, called "ahimsa")

3. Refusal to kill any creature (presumably based upon the same doctrine of ahimsa)

4. Cows are sacred

5. Caste system

¹⁹³Ridenour (p. 96) quotes an Indian folk song: "How many births are passed, I cannot tell. How many yet to come, no man can say: But this alone I know, and know full well, that pain and grief embitter all the way."

¹⁹⁴"Salvation in Hinduism can be attained in one of three general ways: the way of knowledge, knowing one is actually a part of the ultimate Brahman and not a separate entity; the way of devotion, which is love and obedience to a particular deity; or the way of works, or following ceremonial ritual" (McDowell & Stewart, p. 293).

III. Our Response

- A. There is one (and only one) living and true God, the God of the Bible (see the lesson on Buddhism).
- B. The Bible is the only source of divine (special) revelation available today (see the lesson on Mormonism).
- C. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone¹⁹⁵, not by works (see the lesson on Mormonism).

The Bible teaches that each person lives only one life, and that following this life comes final judgment (John 5:28-29 and Heb 9:27), a judgment based on one's works during his or her one lifetime (Psa 28:4, 62:12, Prov 24:12, Matt 16:27, Rom 2:6, 2 Cor 5:10, 2 Tim 4:14, Rev 2:23, and 22:12), works that show whether one is a believer or an unbeliever (Matt 7:15-23, 12:33-37, Rom 2:7-10, 6:22, Eph 2:10, and Titus 2:14).

Salvation is based on the finished work of Christ, both His death (removing our infinite demerit) and life (providing the perfect merit God demands). Faith in Christ alone is the only faith that saves (John 14:6 and Acts 4:12). The inclusivism of Hinduism and the exclusivism of Christianity make the two mutually exclusive.¹⁹⁶

- D. Jesus is the Son of God.

¹⁹⁵Hindu Swami Prabhavananda (quoted in Ridenour, p. 95; emphasis presumably Ridenour's) has said that a Hindu "would find it easy to accept Christ as a divine incarnation and to worship Him unreservedly, exactly as he worships Krishna or another avatar ('savior') of his choice. But he cannot accept Christ as the *only* son of God." In like manner, Gandhi (quoted in *ibid.*) has said: "It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God. And that only he who believed in him would have everlasting life." Gandhi has also been quoted as saying (in Halverson, p. 97): "I ... do not take as literally true the text that Jesus is the only begotten son of God. God cannot be the exclusive Father and I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mohammed or Zoroaster."

¹⁹⁶"C.S. Lewis wisely observed that at the end of all religious quests one must choose between Hinduism and Christianity; the former absorbs all others and the latter excludes them" (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1985, p. 363).

Jesus is God's "only begotten" Son (John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18, and 1 John 4:9), meaning He is unique, one-of-a-kind, in a class by Himself (see the NASB marginal notes for John 1:14, 3:16, 18, and 1 John 4:9). He is not one among equals. He has no equal, other than the other members of the Godhead, the Father and the Spirit. The only incarnation of God is the incarnation of God the Son in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

Resources for Further Study:

The Kingdom of the Cults by Martin (1985: chp. 15; 1997: chp. 14)
Handbook of Today's Religions by McDowell & Stewart (part 1, chps. 4 & 7; part 3, chp. 1)
Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 152-154)
"Christianity, Cults, & Religions" pamphlet by Rose Publishing
So What's the Difference? by Ridenour (chp. 6 and pp. 179-183)
The Compact Guide to World Religions by Halverson (pp. 87-102)

What's the Difference?

Part 2: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and World Religions Lesson 4: Judaism

I. History

The comparative religion of Judaism had its roots with God's call in Genesis 12 of a pagan man named Abram (later renamed Abraham) in the early part of the third millennium B.C. to leave his native Ur and move to the Promised Land of Canaan. From Abraham and his wife, Sarai (later renamed Sarah), God made a great religio-political entity, the nation of Israel. The state religion of Israel was Judaism, established with the establishment of the nation of Israel at Sinai (Exod 19f) in the fifteenth century B.C. With the destruction of Solomon's temple and the 70-year captivity of the southern kingdom of Judah in the early seventh and late sixth centuries B.C. and with the destruction of the rebuilt temple in 70 A.D. came a major shift in Judaism. No longer centered around the temple in Jerusalem with priests as their leaders, Judaists congregated (as they still do to this day) in synagogues throughout the world (on Saturdays) led by rabbis.

There are three major branches of Judaism today: 1) Orthodox Judaism (the conservatives), all of Judaism until the 18th century A.D.; 2) Reform Judaism (the liberals), started in the 18th century A.D.; and 3) Conservative Judaism (the moderates), started in the 19th century A.D. Two other branches are Reconstructionist Judaism, a 20th century American offshoot of Conservative Judaism, and Hasidic Judaism, an ultra-conservative branch.

While Judaists are often equated with the Jewish people, not all Jews are Judaists (though most are), nor are all Judaists Jews (though the overwhelming majority are).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷Richard Robinson (in Halverson, p. 121) writes in this regard: "While not all Jewish people follow the religion of Judaism, when Jews choose to be religious, they generally choose some variety of Judaism rather than another religion. They consider Judaism 'our' religion, available for those Jews who choose to adhere. In contrast, most Jewish people would consider Christianity to be 'their' religion, that is, a religion appropriate for non-Jews."

While there are many similarities between Christianity and Judaism¹⁹⁸, more than there are between Christianity and any other religion, there are also many major differences.

II. Some¹⁹⁹ Erroneous Judaistic Beliefs²⁰⁰

A. Denial of the Trinity

Like Christianity, Judaism believes in the God of the Old Testament. Unlike Christianity, however, Judaism believes God is one, not only in essence, but also in person. Judaism's famous creed is the "Shema," found in Deuteronomy 6:4 ("Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!") and repeated daily by the devout Jew. Christianity, based on the implicit revelation of the trinity of God in the OT and the explicit revelation of this doctrine in the NT, believes that God is one in essence, but three in person: Father, Son, and Spirit.

B. A Truncated Canon

Unlike Christianity, Judaism believes that only the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament²⁰¹ (the "Tanakh") are God's revelation to man. Christianity, however, believes in a canon of sixty-six books, the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

¹⁹⁸Both Judaism and Christianity have their roots in the Old Testament. In this regard, Richard Robinson (in Halverson, p. 122) calls Christianity a "sister" of Judaism, rather than a "daughter."

¹⁹⁹For an examination and refutation of other erroneous Judaistic beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

²⁰⁰Richard Robinson (in Halverson, p. 123; emphasis his) has pointed out that Judaism is much more a system of behaviors than it is of beliefs: "Judaism, in all its branches, is a *religion of deed, not creed*. It is possible to be an atheist and yet an Orthodox Jew!" Robinson (ibid.) goes on to write: "...[D]octrine is not taught in Judaism as it is in Christianity, and one may easily adhere to a particular branch without adopting the doctrines of that branch." It should also be pointed out that in this lesson I am interacting with the beliefs of Orthodox Judaism. The beliefs of other Judaists (Reformed, Conservative, etc.) may be quite diverse from those presented in this lesson.

²⁰¹Richard Robinson (in Halverson, p. 130) makes the point that "some Jewish people prefer the term the 'Hebrew Bible' so as not to imply that they accord any validity to the idea of a 'new' covenant in contrast to an 'old' one."

While believing all of the Old Testament to be inspired, Judaists give special prominence to the Pentateuch/the Torah/the Law, the first five books of the Old Testament (Gen-Deut).

While not deemed as authoritative as the Old Testament, the Talmud, an explanation of the Old Testament written by rabbis during the second to fifth centuries A.D., is held in high esteem by Judaists.

C. Denial of original sin

According to Judaism, men are not sinners by state or nature. They are sinners only by action whenever they break the Law.

D. "Salvation"²⁰² by works

Because Judaism denies original sin, it is not surprising that it espouses salvation by works through the keeping of the Law. Christianity, however, believes that man is so pervasively sinful (not just in act, but, more foundationally, in state and nature) that he is unable to extricate himself from his sin and its ultimate consequence (eternal separation from God in hell) and is, therefore, in desperate need of the only One who can save him, the Lord Jesus Christ.

E. Jesus Christ is not the Messiah.²⁰³

Judaism is still looking for the Messiah, one who is more a political than a spiritual savior.

²⁰²...“Salvation” is not considered to be a Jewish concept, inasmuch as Jewish people presume a standing with God” (Richard Robinson, in Halverson, p.126). Jews do not speak of ‘salvation,’ for there is nothing to be saved from. If there is a God, then Jewish people already have a relationship with Him. Jesus is superfluous for Jews” (ibid., p. 131).

²⁰³...“It is on the question of Jesus Christ--who was this man?--that most Jews and Christians divide” (Ridenour, p. 70).

F. Peculiar Judaistic Practices

1. Dietary restrictions

Judaists refrain from eating pork products (based on Lev 11:7). They also refrain from eating meat and milk together (based on Exod 23:19). They eat only foods that are “kosher.”

2. Observance of the Sabbath (sundown Friday through sundown Saturday) (based on Exod 20:8-11)

3. Circumcision of male children when eight days old (based on Gen 17:12)

4. Observance of numerous holy days/holidays or feasts/festivals

See the chart on pages 128-130 of Halverson.

5. Bar mitzvah, the coming-of-age ceremony for boys when they turn thirteen (the corresponding ceremony for girls, of fairly recent origin, is called a bat mitzvah)

III. Our Response

A. There is one God in three Persons.

See the lesson on the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

B. The canon of Scripture is sixty-six books long, not thirty-nine.

See Appendices C and D.

There is a continuity between the Testaments. The New is in the Old concealed, while the Old is in the New revealed; the New is in the Old contained, while the Old is in the New explained.

C. The sin of Adam was passed on to all of his descendants, making all men sinners in state (Rom 5:12-21) and nature (Psa 51:5), not just in action.

D. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

See the lesson on Mormonism.

E. Jesus Christ is the Messiah.

See Matthew 16:15-17, John 4:25-26, and 20:31.

Scores of OT prophecies concerning the coming Messiah were literally fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. See Appendix G.²⁰⁴

- F. We are in the church age, and the church age believer is no longer under the Law. Therefore, observance of OT dietary restrictions, the OT Sabbath, circumcision, and OT holy days are passé.

See the lesson on Seventh-day Adventism.

Resources for Further Study:

Handbook of Today's Religions by McDowell & Stewart (part 3, chp. 8)

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 157-165)

"Christianity, Cults, & Religions" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

So What's the Difference? by Ridenour (chp. 4)

The Compact Guide to World Religions by Halverson (pp. 121-143)

²⁰⁴See also chart 32 (pp. 60-61) of *Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine* by H. Wayne House, as well as the chart in Halverson (pp. 137-138).

What's the Difference?

Appendix G: Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus Christ

When Jesus walked on the road to Emmaus with two of His disciples on the day of His resurrection, "beginning with Moses [Gen-Deut] and with all the prophets [Josh, Judg, 1 & 2 Sam, 1 & 2 Kgs, Isa, Jer, Ezek, Hos-Mal], He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures [the OT]" (Luke 24:27). Within an hour (Luke 24:33), the resurrected Christ reappeared to these two disciples, along with all the others, and told them, among other things, that "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses [Gen-Deut] and the Prophets [Josh, Judg, 1 & 2 Sam, 1 & 2 Kgs, Isa, Jer, Ezek, Hos-Mal] and the Psalms²⁰⁵ [Psa, Prov, Job, Sol, Ruth, Lam, Eccl, Esth, Dan, Ezra, Neh, 1 & 2 Chron] must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).²⁰⁶ Most of what was written concerning Christ in the Old Testament is found in the realm of prophecy.

Since an in-depth and exhaustive analysis²⁰⁷ of every OT prophecy concerning Christ is beyond the purview of this lesson, this lesson will simply seek to "scratch the surface" of some of the OT prophecies concerning Christ, first describing the content of the prophecy itself, then giving the occasion for its fulfillment.

Prophecy: Genesis 3:15

Content: In the midst of pronouncing a curse upon the serpent, God says that the seed of Eve will bruise the head of the serpent, while the serpent will bruise the heel of Eve's seed.

²⁰⁵The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into 3 major sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Writings are called "the Psalms" in Luke 24:44 because Psalms was the first book in the Writings.

²⁰⁶Similarly, Jesus said in John 5:39 that the Scriptures [the OT] testified about Him and in John 5:46 that Moses [Gen-Deut] wrote about Him. See also Luke 18:31.

²⁰⁷For a more in-depth and exhaustive analysis, consult chapter 5 of *Jesus Christ Our Lord* by John Walvoord and chapter 3 of *Immanuel* by John Witmer, as well as commentaries on the passages in which the prophecies are found and fulfilled.

Fulfillment: Implicit in this prophecy is both the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth. Jesus Christ would be the seed of Eve, a human being, thus implying the Incarnation. Furthermore, Jesus Christ would be the seed of Eve, not of Adam and Eve, thus implying the Virgin Birth (cf. Gal 4:4). The more explicit point of this prophecy is that Satan would bruise Jesus Christ's heel (heel indicating a relatively insignificant blow) via the Crucifixion, but that Jesus Christ would bruise Satan's head (head indicating a devastating blow)²⁰⁸, triumphing initially (and paradoxically) via the Crucifixion (cf. Col 2:15) and ultimately in the eschaton (cf. Rev 20:10).

Prophecy: Deuteronomy 18:15, 18
 Content: God through Moses promises the Israelites that He will one day raise up a prophet like Moses from amongst the Jews.
 Fulfillment: Some of the Jews in Jesus' day asked John the Baptist if he was "the Prophet" prophesied in Deuteronomy 18 (see John 1:21, 25), which John denied. Some realized that Christ was the One of whom Moses spoke (see John 6:14 and 7:40).

Prophecy: Psalm 16:10
 Content: David speaks of One who will neither be abandoned to Sheol, nor suffer decay.
 Fulfillment: Both Peter (see Acts 2:24-32) and Paul (see Acts 13:33-37) appeal to this text, making it clear that the One David was speaking of was not himself, but Jesus Christ. Specifically, David is speaking of Christ's resurrection (cf. Acts 17:3 and 26:22-23).

Prophecy: Psalm 22
 Content: The 22nd psalm, like many other psalms (such as psalms 2, 45, 72, and 110), is commonly categorized as "messianic," owing to its many statements which, though immediately fulfilled by David, were ultimately fulfilled by the consummate Davidic king, Jesus Christ. Of particular interest are the following statements within the psalm: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (v. 1); "All who see me sneer at me; They

²⁰⁸The difference in severity of blow is seen in the NIV rendering of this verse: "' . . . he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'"

separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 'Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him'" (vs. 7-8); "They pierced my hands and my feet" (v. 16c); and "They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots" (v. 18).

Fulfillment: All of the above prophecies pertain to Jesus' death. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" was the 4th of Jesus' 7 sayings on the cross (see Matt 27:46//Mark 15:34). The sneering and jeering of the onlookers took place in Matthew 27:39-43 (cf. Mark 15:29-32 and Luke 23:35-37). The piercing of the hands and feet were a common crucifixion procedure (cf. Luke 24:39-40). The dividing of Jesus' outer garments (His sandals, turban, cloak, and sash) and the casting of lots for His undergarment, the tunic, took place in Matthew 27:35 (cf. Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, and John 19:23-24).

Prophecy: Psalm 34:20
 Content: In Psalm 34, David speaks of God's protection of the righteous, stating in verse 20: "He [the LORD] keeps all his [the righteous] bones, Not one of them is broken."
 Fulfillment: In order to hasten the death of one being crucified, it was common for the crucified's legs to be broken, preventing inhalation and causing asphyxiation.²⁰⁹ The soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus (John 19:32), but did not break Jesus' legs (John 19:33), fulfilling Psalm 34:20 (John 19:36).

Prophecy: Psalm 69:21
 Content: In Psalm 69, David seeks divine deliverance from his enemies. One of his points of contention is that his enemies "put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst" (v. 21, NIV).
 Fulfillment: While on the cross, Jesus was offered a wine-myrrh/gall mixture, a sedative designed to dull the pain of crucifixion, which Jesus refused (Matt 27:34//Mark 15:23). Later, He was given "sour wine," which He accepted (Matt 27:48//Mark 15:36//John 19:29-30; cf. Luke 23:36).

Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14

²⁰⁹The soles of the feet of one crucified would rest on a peg, giving a leverage point for pushing the entire body upward to fill the lungs with air to inhale. Once the legs were broken, however, such pushing became impossible, thus causing death by asphyxiation.

Content: In Isaiah 7, God through Isaiah promised Ahaz, king of Judah, “a virtually unlimited miracle” (Rolland McCune, Systematic Theology II class notes, p. 87) as confirmation that He could and would deliver Judah from those threatening her at the time, Israel and Syria. Ahaz refused God’s offer. In response to Ahaz’s refusal, God promised to one day give Judah (the “you” in Isa 7:14 is plural) a sign of unprecedented proportions that would confirm His ability to deliver her: “Therefore, the LORD Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel” (Isa 7:14²¹⁰). To me, a “double fulfillment” (i.e., a virgin conception and birth in Isaiah’s day and a second such conception and birth in the far future) of this prophecy was highly unlikely (if so, a sinless human being would have also been conceived and born in Isaiah’s day); if so, the only referent is Christ. The New Testament explicitly states that the virgin birth of Christ fulfilled this prophecy (see Matt 1:22-23).²¹¹ The crucial term in Isaiah 7:14 is the Hebrew noun translated “virgin.” Though “young woman” and “virgin” are legitimate translations of the Hebrew word, Matthew 1:23’s use of the unambiguous Greek word for virgin decisively tips the scales of Isaiah 7:14 in favor of “virgin.”

Fulfillment: Jesus was virgin conceived and virgin born (see Matt 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38).

Prophecy: Isaiah 9:6-7

Content: Through the prophet Isaiah, God promises Israel that He will one day give them a special King to rule over the Davidic kingdom, a King who would be both human (“child” and “son”; cf. Isa 7:14) and divine (“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace”).

Fulfillment: The Incarnation produced the unique theanthropic King predicted by Isaiah. The predicted reign will take place during the millennial kingdom.

Prophecy: Isaiah 53

Content: God through Isaiah speaks of the “Suffering Servant.”

²¹⁰For an overview of this text, one may consult “The Interpretation of Old Testament Prophecy” by J. Randolph Jaeggli on pp. 3-17 of the Fall 1997 issue of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*.

²¹¹Jaeggli (ibid., p. 16) ties the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 to its fulfillment in the virgin birth of Christ with this thread: just as God was seeking to save His people physically when the prophecy was given (Isa 7), so He was seeking to save them spiritually when the prophecy was fulfilled (Matt 1:21).

Fulfillment: Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant” is Jesus Christ. The suffering Isaiah describes is the suffering Jesus experienced in connection with His crucifixion (cf. Isa 50:6, Acts 3:18, 17:3, 26:22-23, and 1 Pet 1:11). Notice especially the following: “Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (v. 1; fulfilled in John 12:37-38); “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried” (v. 4; fulfilled in a physical sense in Matt 8:14-17); “He did not open His mouth” (v. 7; fulfilled in Matt 26:62-63//Mark 14:60-61, in Matt 27:12-14//Mark 15:3-5, in Luke 23:8-9, and in John 19:8-10)²¹²; “He was with a rich man in His death” (v. 9; fulfilled when Jesus was laid in a tomb belonging to a rich disciple named Joseph of Arimathea in Matt 27:57-60); “was numbered with the transgressors” (v. 12; fulfilled when Jesus was crucified between two thieves in Mark 15:27-28; cf. Luke 22:37). It was from verses 7 & 8 of Isaiah 53 that Philip was able to lead the Ethiopian eunuch to the Lord (see Acts 8:26-35).

Prophecy: Daniel 9:25-26

Content: The angel Gabriel reveals to Daniel that 483 years (69 x 7) would pass from the time of “a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince” (v. 25) and that after the 483 years, “the Messiah will be cut off” (v. 26).

Fulfillment: It is generally agreed that the “cutting off” of the Messiah is a reference to Jesus’ crucifixion. The debate is over the precise decree being spoken of and the reckoning of the chronology so as to arrive at the exact year in which Christ was crucified.

Prophecy: Micah 5:2

Content: God through the prophet Micah says that from Bethlehem “One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.”

Fulfillment: This is a prophecy regarding Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. When Herod asked the chief priests and scribes about the birthplace of the Messiah (Matt 2:4), they quickly replied by quoting this prophecy: “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL” (Matt 2:5-6).

Prophecy: Zechariah 12:10

Content: God through the prophet Zechariah speaks of a future day when the Israelites will “look on Me whom they have pierced.”

Fulfillment: The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy awaits the eschaton (see Rev

²¹²Though Jesus remained silent at several critical junctures during His various trials, He did not remain completely silent, as an examination of His trials clearly reveals..

1:7). When a soldier pierced Christ's side while He was hanging on the cross (John 19:34), John says he did so in partial fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy (John 19:36a, 37).

Some of the Other Christological Prophecies in the OT

OT Prophecy	Propesied Event	NT Fulfillment
Ps 35:19 & 69:4	Jesus hated without cause	John 15:24-25
Ps 41:9	Jesus betrayed by close friend	John 13:18
Ps 78:2	Jesus speaks in parables	Matt 13:34-35
Isa 6:10	Faithless response to Jesus' teaching	John 12:37, 39-40
Isa 9:1-2	Jesus' Galilean ministry	Matt 4:12-16
Hos 11:1	The Flight to Egypt	Matt 2:13-15
Zech 9:9	The Triumphal Entry	Matt 21:1-5
Zech 13:7	Jesus abandoned at His crucifixion	Matt 26:31

What's the Difference?

Part 2: Examining the Differences Between Christianity and World Religions Review Quiz

Following is a list of various names, publications, beliefs, practices, etc. associated with the four world religions studied in part 2 of this series. Write the name of the particular religion that goes with each item.

Islam (I)
Buddhism (B)
Hinduism (H)
Judaism (J)

1. _____ Dalai Lama
2. _____ Jihad
3. _____ Recite the "Shema"
4. _____ Siddhartha Gautama
5. _____ Polygamists
6. _____ Consider cows to be sacred
7. _____ Has a popular form in America called Zen
8. _____ A "sister" of Christianity
9. _____ Muhammed
10. _____ An offshoot of Hinduism
11. _____ Worship in synagogues
12. _____ Worship in mosques
13. _____ Believes in reincarnation/transmigration
14. _____ Say that Judas Iscariot, Simon of Cyrene, or Satan took Jesus' place on the Cross
15. _____ Transcendental Meditation (TM)
16. _____ Salvation comes by attaining enlightenment/nirvana
17. _____ Salvation comes by fulfilling the "Five Pillars"
18. _____ Salvation comes by following the "Eight-fold Path"
19. _____ Salvation comes by keeping the OT Law
20. _____ Mecca
21. _____ Leaders are called rabbis
22. _____ Leaders are called imams
23. _____ Leaders are called gurus or swamis
24. _____ The Talmud

25. _____ Refuse to kill any creature, including insects
26. _____ Still looking for the Messiah
27. _____ Muslim
28. _____ Gandhi
29. _____ Refrain from eating pork
30. _____ Practice yoga
31. _____ Adherents pray 5 times a day
32. _____ Observe Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah, and Passover
33. _____ Allah
34. _____ Ramadan
35. _____ Religion the Beatles promoted
36. _____ Hare Krishnas
37. _____ Qur'an
38. _____ The Vedas
39. _____ Holy day is Saturday
40. _____ Holy day is Friday

What's the Difference?

Part 3: Examining the Differences Between Baptists and Denominations²¹³

Lesson 1: Catholicism

I. History

²¹³I am using the designation "denomination" in a very loose sense. Berry (p. 24) defines a denomination as "a single legal and administrative body overseeing a number of local congregations." Not every group discussed in the third part of this series are denominations in the strict sense of the term. Berry (p. 24) points out that both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church eschew the label "denomination" because they each view themselves as the church. Baptists, in keeping with their belief in the autonomy of the local church, also resist the denominational tag. It should also be pointed out that those groups we might call denominations in the true sense of the term usually consist of several separate, albeit similar, denominations. For example, according to Berry (p. 28), there are 250 different Lutheran denominations. Thus, it must be kept in mind that there are not only differences between Baptists and the "denominations" discussed in this part of the series, but also between the denominations within each of these "denominations."

The Catholic Church, though it traces its own roots back to the time of the apostles (believing Peter to have been the first pope), originated in the fourth century A.D. In 313 A.D. the Roman emperor, Constantine, issued the Edict of Milan, making Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire. This, along with subsequent edicts by Constantine, made the church universal²¹⁴ a visible, political entity. Over the years, the Catholic Church evolved into the massive organizational web that it is today. Significant councils in Catholic Church history include the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Forgettable moments in Catholic history include the various Inquisitions; the Crusades (seven separate ones from the late eleventh through the mid-thirteenth centuries A.D.); and the "Great Schism" (three different popes at the same time during the early fifteenth century A.D.). The Catholic version of the Bible in English for Americans is the NAB (New American Bible), which replaced the Douay Rheims Version in the twentieth century. Besides the Catholic Bible, a second significant source of authority in modern Catholicism is the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (published in English in 1994).²¹⁵ The Catholic form of church government is monarchical (rule by one) with the pope as the head of the church.²¹⁶ The current pope is Pope John Paul II, who came to office in 1978.²¹⁷ Other offices in Catholicism (in descending order of authority) are cardinal, archbishop, bishop, priest, and deacon²¹⁸. To these can be added brother and sister (or nun). Besides the various popes, influential Catholics throughout history have included such scholars as Augustine (354-430), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536). Well-known Catholic higher educational institutions include the University of Notre Dame (South Bend, IN), Georgetown University (Washington D.C.), Boston College, Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI), St. John's University (New York City), and the University of Villanova (Philadelphia, PA). Each Catholic church is part of a parish, with each parish

²¹⁴The term "catholic" is the transliteration of a Greek word meaning "general" or "universal."

²¹⁵This was the first officially published catechism of the Catholic Church in over four hundred years.

²¹⁶Pope Boniface VIII in his Bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302) declared: "Furthermore, that every human creature is subject to the Roman Pontiff,--this we declare, say, define, and pronounce to be altogether necessary to salvation." The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) states that the pope "as Vicar of Christ and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered."

²¹⁷Pope John Paul II is the first non-Italian pope since the 1520s (Mead & Hill, p. 275). You may recall that he survived an assassination attempt in 1981.

²¹⁸In the Catholic Church, deacons "are most often married men who support themselves outside the church. Deacons are allowed to preach, baptize, assist with Holy Communion, and conduct weddings" (Berry, p. 143).

being part of a diocese and each diocese part of an archdiocese. The seat of the church is in Rome.²¹⁹ There are approximately one billion Catholics worldwide, making it by far the largest “Christian” group in the world (it is also the largest in the U.S.).

II. Some²²⁰ Erroneous Catholic Beliefs

A. Extrabiblical revelation

The Council of Trent (sixteenth century A.D.) declared the Apocrypha²²¹ to be canonical²²², a belief still held by Catholicism today. Hence, Catholic Bibles contain most of the Apocrypha.

B. Authority in sources other than the Bible

²²⁰For an examination and refutation of other erroneous Catholic beliefs, one may consult the “Resources for Further Study” listed at the end of this lesson.

²²¹The Apocrypha is a collection of fourteen or fifteen religious books written by Jews between 250-200 B.C. and 100 A. D. (for the most part, during the 400 “silent years” between the OT and the NT). The Catholic Church believes most of them to be canonical and, thus, includes them in the Catholic Bible. Such peculiar Catholic doctrines as belief in purgatory (2 Maccabees 12:39-45), prayer for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:45-46), and salvation by works (Tobit 12:9) come from the Apocrypha.

²²²The declaration as initially made by the Council of Trent (sixteenth century A.D.) is as follows: “The Synod ... receives and venerates ... all the books (including the *Apocrypha*) both of the Old and of the New Testament-- seeing that one God is the Author of both ... as having been dictated, either by Christ’s own word of mouth or by the Holy Ghost ... if anyone receive not as sacred and canonical the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church ... let him be anathema” (cited in Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 274). Geisler & Nix (*ibid.*, p. 269) interpret the Council of Trent’s decision with suspicion: “... [T]he addition of books that support salvation by works and prayers for the dead at that time--only twenty-nine years after Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses--is highly suspect.”

²¹⁹Vatican City is an independent state within the city of Rome. As such, it is the smallest sovereign nation in the world.

Catholicism espouses three sources of authority: 1) the Bible; 2) Catholic Church tradition; and 3) the magisterium, the official teaching arm of the Catholic Church (the collective decisions of the bishops and the pronouncements of the pope²²³). Ultimately, ultimate authority for Catholicism resides in the third.²²⁴

"Further, all those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the Word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church, either by solemn judgment or by her ordinary teaching (magisterium), proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed" (First Vatican Council; emphasis mine).

"The Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence" (Second Vatican Council; emphasis mine).

C. Salvation by works

According to Catholicism, salvation (in the sense of initial or positional sanctification) is not a one-time event, but a process that begins at baptism and continues beyond the grave²²⁵ (hence, the development of

²²³The doctrine of papal infallibility was canonized by the Catholic Church at the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). This doctrine states that whenever the pope speaks "ex cathedra" (literally "from the chair") regarding faith, practice, and morals, he speaks infallibly, essentially making such pronouncements inspired. The declaration read as follows: "... [W]e teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith and morals to be held by the universal Church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals; and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church." It goes on to warn: "But if anyone--which may God avert-- presume to contradict this our definition: let him be anathema--This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and salvation."

²²⁴This is clearly seen in the words of Catholic apologist Karl Keating, who, while discussing the Catholic doctrine of the assumption of Mary, writes in his book, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*: "Still, fundamentalists ask, where is the proof from Scripture? Strictly, there is none. It was the Catholic Church that was commissioned by Christ to teach all nations and to teach them infallibly. The mere fact that the Church teaches the doctrine of the Assumption as something definitely true is a guarantee that it is true." It is also seen in the following excerpt: "... [T]he teaching office of the Church is more important than the Bible: only an infallible Church can tell us what books belong to Scripture, and only an infallible Church can interpret the true meaning of Sacred Scripture; no one can do this for himself. Thus the Catholic can read only one Bible, the Bible which is published by the Church. In other words: The immediate and highest rule of faith is the living office of the Church" (*Dogmatic Theology for the Laity*, p. 29).

²²⁵In this regard Brown ("So What's the Difference?", p. 42) calls the Catholic sacramental system "a comprehensive structure of works that encompasses the whole of life, from cradle to grave and beyond."

the doctrine of purgatory). Key to Catholic salvation is observance of the sacraments (esp. baptism, the Eucharist, and penance). Historically, Catholicism has taught that salvation is impossible outside the Catholic Church (the Second Vatican Council declared: "Hence they could not be saved who . . . would refuse either to enter it [the Catholic Church], or to remain in it").²²⁶

"To those who work well right to the end and keep their trust in God, eternal life should be held out . . . for their good works and merits" (Council of Trent; emphasis mine).

²²⁶However, the same Council also left the door open for salvation outside the Catholic Church by calling baptized non-Catholics "separated brethren."

"If anyone says that the faith which justifies is nothing else but trust in the divine mercy, which pardons sins because of Christ; or that it is that trust alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema" (Council of Trent).

"If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning thereby that no other cooperation is required for him to obtain the grace of justification, and that in no sense is it necessary for him to make preparation and be disposed by a movement of his own will: let him be anathema" (Council of Trent).

"Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for . . . the attainment of eternal life" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2010).

"It is a universally accepted dogma of the Catholic Church that man . . . must merit heaven by his good works We can actually merit heaven as our reward Heaven must be fought for; we have to earn heaven" (*Dogmatic Theology for the Laity*, p. 262).

"The sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must 'make satisfaction for' or 'expiate' his sins. This satisfaction is called 'penance'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1459).

Bottom line: In Catholicism, the sinner must pay for his own sin via penance. He may also need the help of others to "spring" him from purgatory.

D. Baptismal regeneration

Catholicism teaches that baptism (primarily via "modes" other than immersion) washes away original sin (the sin of Adam imputed to all his descendants) and imparts "sanctifying grace," placing one in a state of righteousness, not only in the case of an adult, but also in the case of an infant ("christening").

"If any one saith, that baptism is free, that is, not necessary unto salvation: let him be anathema" (Council of Trent)

"Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1213).

E. Idolatry

The Catholic veneration of Mary (called "hyperdulia"; based on such passages as Luke 1:28 and 42) and of other "saints"²²⁷ (called "dulia"), as well as for various religious objects²²⁸, is idolatrous. Catholicism teaches

the perpetual virginity of Mary (officially adopted in 553), her immaculate conception (officially adopted in 1854)²²⁹, and her assumption (officially adopted in 1950).²³⁰ In fact, Catholicism goes so far as to consider Mary to be a co-mediator²³¹ and co-redeemer with Christ.²³² "Indeed, Mary as defined by the Roman Catholic Church is virtually indistinguishable from the Son of God Himself" (McCarthy, p. 223).²³³

F. The Eucharist

²²⁹Pope Pius IX's Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854) reads: "We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God . . . was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful." Consequently, the Church teaches that Mary remained "free of every personal sin her whole life long" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 493). The *Ineffabilis Deus* goes on to warn: "Therefore, if some should presume to think in their hearts otherwise than we have defined (which God forbid), they shall know and thoroughly understand that they are by their own judgment condemned, have made shipwreck concerning the faith, and fallen away from the unity of the Church."

²³⁰Pope Pius XII's Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950) reads: "We pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." This declaration goes on to warn: "Hence, if anyone, which God forbid, should dare willfully to deny or call into doubt that which we have defined, let him know that he has fallen away completely from the divine and Catholic faith It is forbidden to any man to change this, Our declaration, pronouncement, and definition or, by rash attempt, to oppose and counter it. If any man should presume to make such an attempt, let him know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul."

²³¹Pope Leo XIII (in 1891) declared: "As no man goeth to the Father but by the Son, so no man goeth to Christ but by His mother."

²³²Pope Benedict XV's Bull *Inter Sodalicia* (early twentieth century A.D.) reads in part: "So we may well say that she with Christ redeemed mankind." The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) declared that "by her manifold acts of intercession [Mary] continues to win for us gifts of eternal salvation." Pope John Paul II's Bull *Salvifici Doloris* (late twentieth century A.D.) reads: "It was on Calvary that Mary's suffering . . . reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view but which was mysteriously and supernaturally fruitful for the Redemption of the world."

²³³For even more convincing evidence of this point, see pages 223-225 of McCarthy.

²²⁷See pages 194-195 of McCarthy for a listing of various Catholic saints.

²²⁸The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) declared that "all the faithful ought to show to this most holy sacrament [the Eucharist] the worship which is due to the true God."

During each Catholic Mass, the Eucharist is observed. According to Catholicism, when the priest consecrates the elements, they change substance (transubstantiation), becoming the actual body and blood of Christ²³⁴, though continuing to look, feel, smell, and taste like bread and wine. Every time the Eucharist is observed, Christ is re-presented (not represented) as an "unbloody immolation" (immolation is the sacrificial killing of a victim). *The Roman Catechism* (p. 255) calls the Mass "a perpetual sacrifice." Catholicism (based upon a "gross" misinterpretation of John 6:53) teaches that receiving the elements of the Eucharist are a means of salvation.

"If any one saith, that the sacrifice of the mass is only a sacrifice of praise and of thanksgiving; or, that it is a bare commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the cross, but not a propitiatory sacrifice ... let him be anathema" (Council of Trent)

G. No eternal security

There is no such thing as "once saved, always saved" in Catholicism, the Catholic doctrines of penance and purgatory bearing witness to this fact.

"No one, not even the Pope, can know for certain what his eternal destiny will be" (McCarthy, p. 106).

H. A continuing priesthood

According to Catholicism, access to God comes only through a Catholic priest.

"The form of the sacrament of penance, in which its effectiveness chiefly lies, is expressed in those words of the minister, 'I absolve you from your sins'" (Council of Trent).

"All that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God" (Second Vatican Council)

III. Our Response²³⁵

- A. The Bible (the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon) is the only source of divine revelation available today.

See the lesson on Mormonism, as well as Appendix D.

Is the Apocrypha Part of the Canon?

McCarthy (pp. 338-339) gives five reasons why the Apocrypha is not canonical:

1. The Apocrypha itself does not claim to be inspired.
2. The Jews never accepted the Apocrypha as part of the canon.
3. There is not a single quotation from the Apocrypha in the New Testament.
4. The early church did not accept the Apocrypha as inspired.
5. The Catholic Church itself did not officially declare the Apocrypha to be inspired until the Council of Trent (sixteenth century A.D.), which was a reaction to the Protestant Reformation's rejection of the Apocrypha.

- B. The Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice.

²³⁴The Council of Trent (sixteenth century A.D.) declared: "... [T]herefore has it ever been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy Synod doth now declare it anew, that, by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called Transubstantiation." The Council went on to warn: "If any one denieth, that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ; but saith that he is only therein as in a sign, or in a figure, or virtue; let him be anathema."

²³⁵For a side-by-side comparison of Catholic teaching vs. biblical teaching, see pages 118-121, 175-177, 227-228, and 308-309 of McCarthy.

Since the Bible is the only source of divine revelation available today, only It is authoritative/infalible (Matt 5:18 and John 10:34-36). *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) was one of the battle cries of the Protestant Reformation. No human interpretation of Scripture, whether that of Catholic tradition, the Catholic magisterium, or the Catholic pope, is inherently infalible. The foundation upon which this Catholic belief rests, the Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16:16-19, is a questionable one, to say the least.²³⁶ It is one thing to say that Peter was the “rock”; it is quite another to say that he was the first pope and that the bishop of Rome is his perpetual successor (this latter doctrine wasn’t proposed until Pope Leo I did so in the fifth century A.D.).²³⁷ Peter was not superior to the other apostles, but was one among equals (see 1 Pet 5:1). The Bible is sufficient (2 Tim 3:16-17 and 2 Pet 1:3); It is, in and of Itself, all that is needed to save and to sanctify.

Arguing against the Catholic belief of papal infalibility is the fact that Peter “stood condemned” (Gal 2:11) and that Pope Honorius (pope from 625-638) was condemned as a heretic by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681), by two succeeding Ecumenical Councils, and by every pope up through the eleventh century A.D. upon taking the oath of papal office (Brown, “So What’s the Difference?”, p. 33).²³⁸

²³⁶Brown (“So What’s the Difference?”, p. 39) cites a study by the Catholic scholar, Launoy, in which he surveyed the interpretations of the church fathers on this passage and found that only 20% espoused the view that the “rock” in Matthew 16:18 was Peter.

²³⁷This doctrine was made explicit by the First Vatican Council (1869-1870): “If, then, any should deny that it is by institution of Christ the Lord, or by divine right, that blessed Peter should have a perpetual line of successors in the Primacy over the universal Church, or that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema.” Bolstering Catholic conviction regarding papal supremacy were the writings of perhaps the most revered Catholic theologian of all, Thomas Aquinas. However, as Brown (“What’s the Difference?”, pp. 40-46) thoroughly documents, the writings of Aquinas regarding this issue were based on several (unbeknownst to Aquinas at the time) forged documents (the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*, *The Donation of Constantine*, and the *Liber Pontificalis*), documents apparently written to provide the legal justification for papal supremacy that was otherwise lacking in the historical records.

²³⁸Catholic historian Charles Joseph Hefele (quoted in Brown, “So What’s the Difference?”, p. 33) wrote: “It is in the highest degree startling, even scarcely credible, that an Ecumenical Council should punish with anathema a Pope as a heretic! ... That, however, the sixth Ecumenical Council Synod actually condemned Honorius on account of heresy, is clear beyond all doubt” Johann Joseph Ignaz von Dollinger, the leading Catholic historian of the nineteenth century (quoted in *ibid.*, p. 35), draws an inescapable conclusion: “This one fact, that a Great Council, universally received afterwards without hesitation throughout the Church, and presided over by Papal legates, pronounced the dogmatic decision of a Pope heretical, and anathematized him by name as a heretic is a proof, clear as the sun at noonday, that the notion of any peculiar enlightenment or inerrancy of the Popes was then utterly unknown to the whole

C. Salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ alone, not by works.

See the lesson on Mormonism. *Sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola fides* (faith alone), and *solus Christus* (Christ alone) were three more battle cries of the Protestant Reformation. In response to the Catholic idea that grace comes through works, such as partaking of the sacraments, see Romans 11:6.

Church.”

- D. Baptism is a consequence of salvation, not a cause of salvation.

See Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:41, 8:12, 16:14-15, and 18:8. If salvation comes via baptism, why did Jesus tell the thief on the cross, who had no hope of being baptized, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43)? Salvation is not by works (Eph 2:9), and baptism is a work.

The only proper "mode" of baptism is immersion (the Greek verb for baptize is *baptizo*, which literally means to immerse, dip, or plunge). The only proper subjects of baptism are believers. Infants cannot exercise saving faith and are, therefore, not proper subjects of baptism.

- E. God alone is to be worshiped, and He is to be worshiped in spirit.

See the Second Commandment (Exod 20:4-5) and John 4:24. In response to the Catholic veneration of Mary, Luke 1:42 says "among women," not "above women," while Matthew 25:34 says that all believers are "blessed" (see also Jesus' response in Luke 11:28 to one woman's "veneration" of Mary in Luke 11:27). In response to the Catholic concept of sainthood, it can be said that all believers are saints (see 1 Cor 1:2 and Eph 1:1). In response to the Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, it can be said that Mary had other children via Joseph (see Matt 13:55-56). In response to the Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary, it can be said that Mary was a sinner in need of a Savior (see Luke 1:47). In response to the Catholic doctrine that Mary and Christ are co-mediators, it can be said that there is only one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5; see also John 14:6).

- F. Christ offered Himself once for all for the salvation of mankind.

In response to the alleged miracle of transubstantiation, McCarthy (p. 134) makes this salient point: "Neither is there a biblical precedent for a miracle in which God expects the faithful to believe that something supernatural has occurred when in fact all outward evidence indicates that nothing at all has occurred." In response to the continual re-presentation of Christ that the Mass portrays, see Romans 6:10, the entire book of Hebrews (especially 1:3, 7:27, 9:12, 26, 28, 10:10, 12, 14, and 18), and 1 Peter 3:18. "It is finished" (John 19:30)! Partaking of blood was forbidden by God and abhorrent to Jews (see Gen 9:4, Lev 3:17, 7:26-27, 17:10-14, Deut 12:23, and Acts 15:29). "This is my body" (Matt 26:26) and "This is my blood" (Matt 26:28) are to be understood metaphorically (as is John 6:53-54; compare John 6:54 with John 6:40). Christ's body could not be both before the disciples and in Christ's hands at the same time.

- G. The believer is eternally secure.

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The moment one places his faith in Christ for salvation, his eternal destiny is forever settled. See especially John 10:28-29 and 1 Peter 1:3-5 in this regard. You can know you are saved (1 John 5:13).

- H. The individual priesthood of the believer

See the lesson on Mormonism. Confession is to God (see Ezra 10:11 and Psa 32:5), not to a priest. Only God can forgive sin (see Mark 2:7).

A Word Concerning "Evangelicals and Catholics Together"

On March 29, 1994, an historic document was published entitled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." Signed by such notable evangelicals as Charles Colson, Pat Robertson, J.I. Packer, and the late Bill Bright, the accord (which has been lauded by ecumenics, but denounced by fundamentalists) downplays the doctrinal differences between Protestants and Catholics. In fact, it even goes so far as to say that "evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ." In spite of this new rapprochement between the two groups, the differences are insuperable. "The difference is so great as to constitute two wholly distinct religions" (John MacArthur in the Foreword to McCarthy's book, p. 8). For a good analysis of ECT, see chapter five of MacArthur's book, *Reckless Faith*, and Ernest Pickering's booklet, *Holding Hands with the Pope*. Since the initial 1994 ECT document, several other related documents have been put forth by the same group, restating and refining the original document, but retaining the same underlying errors.

Resources for Further Study:

The Gospel According to Rome by McCarthy

So What's the Difference? by Ridenour (chp. 2)

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 267-275)

"Denominations Comparison" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

"So What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Brown

"What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Brown

The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church by Berry (chp. 5)

What's the Difference?

Part 3: Examining the Differences Between Baptists and Denominations

Lesson 2: **Orthodoxy**

Amongst "Christians" (in the very broad sense of the term; vis-à-vis world religions), there are three major branches: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. Orthodoxy

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split from Catholicism in the middle of the eleventh century A.D. Protestantism split from Catholicism in the early sixteenth century A.D. The previous lesson in this series examined the differences between Baptists and Catholicism. This lesson will examine the differences between Baptists and Orthodoxy. The remaining lessons will examine the differences between Baptists and other Protestant groups.

I. History

Though the Orthodox²³⁹ Church (aka the Eastern Orthodox Church²⁴⁰), like the Catholic Church, traces its roots to the beginning of the church in the first century A.D., its origins as a distinct entity began in the eleventh century A.D. when it severed ties with the Church in the West (the Catholic Church). For the first millennia of church history, the church in the East and the church in the West, though not without their differences, remained unified (hence, the many similarities between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church). Due to several key issues and events, however, the differences eventually became insuperable. One such issue was the eventual claim of the church in the West that the bishop of Rome (the pope) had supremacy over the entire Church, both East and West. One such event was the decision of the Roman Emperor, Constantine, in 330 A.D. to move the seat of the Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium (modern Istanbul, Turkey), which he renamed Constantinople. This essentially created a rivalry between the bishop of Rome in the West and the patriarch of Constantinople in the East. Another such event was the unilateral addition of the “filioque clause²⁴¹” into the Nicene Creed by the church in the West, a move denounced by the church in the East.²⁴² Another such event, and the one usually considered the watershed one, was the “Great Schism” of 1054

²³⁹The name “Orthodox” literally means “right teaching,” indicative of the belief of the Orthodox Church that they are the only Church that has perpetuated the teaching of the early church unadulterated.

²⁴⁰Ridenour (p. 52) prefers the designation, “Orthodoxy” over the designation, “Eastern Orthodoxy,” because this Church has now spread to the West. Case in point: The formation of the OCA (Orthodox Church in America) in 1970.

²⁴¹The word *filioque* is Latin for “and from the son.” According to the original Nicene Creed (adopted in 325 A. D.), the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father only. The church in the West expanded on this at the Council of Toledo in 589 A.D. by declaring that the Spirit proceeded from the Father *and from the Son*.

²⁴²“To this day, the Eastern church remains astounded at the casualness with which the West added the word *filioque* to the Nicene Creed” (Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, p. 136).

A.D. in which the bishop of Rome and the patriarch of Constantinople excommunicated each another. A final event that made the breach irreparable was the Fourth Crusade²⁴³ (early thirteenth century A.D.) in which the invaders from the West turned their sights away from their objective of recapturing Jerusalem from the Muslims and instead ransacked Constantinople.²⁴⁴ In recent years, some attempts at reconciliation have been made.²⁴⁵

Surprisingly, recent years have also witnessed a disturbing trend: evangelicals converting to Orthodoxy. Case in point: The founding of the Evangelical Orthodox Church in 1986. The most notable evangelical to convert to Orthodoxy is Frank Schaeffer²⁴⁶, son of the late Francis Schaeffer.

²⁴³“The Fourth Crusade of 1202-4 was a special disaster that so deeply poisoned relations between East and West that it would be justified to see it, rather than the events of 1054, as the final break between the two great traditions in the church” (ibid., p. 140).

²⁴⁴“Even though Constantinople was a ‘Christian’ city and had originally asked for military support, the Roman Catholic Crusaders ripped the city apart. Orthodox churches were plundered, with an enormous amount of religious art stolen and taken to the West. Libraries that included irreplaceable sacred documents were destroyed. The devastation of the most cherished aspects of the Orthodox Church at the hands of Roman Catholic Christians was the last straw. The break between the two churches was complete and lasting” (Berry, p. 100).

²⁴⁵For example, the mutual excommunications of 1054 were officially revoked in 1965. Also, in 1987 Pope John Paul II and Orthodox Patriarch Demetrios I met in Rome and together recited the Nicene Creed ... without the filioque clause (Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, p. 147).

²⁴⁶In 1994, Frank Schaeffer published *Dancing Alone: The Quest for Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religions*.

The Orthodox Church, more than any other “denomination” (see footnote 213), is organized according to nationalities. Thus, we have the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, etc.

The highest office in the Orthodox Church is that of patriarch (or archbishop or “metropolitan”). Each patriarch is the head of an “autocephalous” (i.e., independent and self-governing) church. Presently, there are fifteen such autocephalous Orthodox churches in the world²⁴⁷, with the church of Constantinople (and hence, the patriarch of Constantinople) having the primacy of honor (but not power). Beneath the office of patriarch (in descending order of authority) are the offices of bishop, priest (head of a local Orthodox church), and deacon²⁴⁸. Patriarchs and bishops must be celibate. Priests and deacons may marry prior to, but not after, ordination.

The Orthodox Church is known for being the most liturgical of all churches. Berry (p. 114) says that “Orthodox Churches are about as ‘high’ church as you can get” Mead & Hill (p. 227) likewise state: “[Orthodox] Church services are brilliantly and elaborately ritualistic.”

II. Some²⁴⁹ Erroneous Orthodoxy Beliefs

²⁴⁷The fifteen are: the Church of Constantinople, the Church of Alexandria, the Church of Antioch, the Church of Jerusalem, the Church of Russia, the Church of Georgia, the Church of Serbia, the Church of Romania, the Church of Bulgaria, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, the Church of Albania, the Church of Poland, the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, and the Orthodox Church in America. In addition to these fifteen “autocephalous” churches, there are several “autonomous” churches (Finland, Japan, China, etc.).

²⁴⁸According to Mead & Hill (p. 227), the Orthodox Church deacon assists in parish work and in administering the sacraments.

²⁴⁹For an examination and refutation of other erroneous Orthodoxy beliefs, one may consult the “Resources for Further Study” listed at the end of this lesson.

A. Extrabiblical revelation

The canon (of Scripture) of the Orthodox Church, like the Roman Catholic canon, contains more than the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon. Besides containing the Apocryphal books found in the Catholic canon, the Orthodox canon contains a few more such books (3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, and Psalm 151).

B. Authority in a source other than the Bible

Like Catholicism, Orthodoxy (based on John 21:25) believes that church tradition is equal in authority to the Bible. For the Orthodox, such tradition particularly includes the writings of the Fathers and the pronouncements of the seven Ecumenical Councils.²⁵⁰ “A standard Orthodox view is that the Bible gets its authority from the Church, not vice versa” (Ridenour, p. 55).

“Eternal truths are expressed in the Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition, both of which are equal and are represented pure and unadulterated by the true Church established by Christ to continue His mission: man’s salvation” (*The 1962 Almanac of the Greek Archdiocese of North and South America*; emphasis mine)

“The teachings of the [Orthodox] Church are derived from two sources: Holy Scripture, and Sacred Tradition, within which the Scriptures came to be, and within which they are interpreted” (www.orthodox.org)

C. Salvation by works

While not as pronounced as in Catholicism, Orthodoxy ultimately teaches salvation by works. Accordingly, like Catholicism, Orthodoxy rejects the Protestant understanding of the doctrine of justification.

“Justification is a word used in the Scriptures to mean that in Christ we are forgiven and actually made righteous in our living. Justification is not a once-for-all, instantaneous pronouncement Neither is it merely a legal declaration that an unrighteous person is righteous” (www.orthodox.org)

D. Baptismal regeneration

²⁵⁰“Aware that God has spoken through the Ecumenical Councils, the Orthodox Church looks particularly to them for authoritative teaching in regard to the faith and practice of the Church” (www.orthodox.org). The seven Ecumenical Councils are: the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.), the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.), the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.), the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), the Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.), the Council of Constantinople (680 A.D.), and the Council of Nicea (787 A.D.).

Orthodoxy practices the same seven sacraments as Catholicism does (with minor variations).²⁵¹ While Orthodoxy practices the proper “mode” of baptism (immersion), it errs in baptizing infants and in teaching that baptism saves (based upon a misinterpretation of John 3:5).

“The experience of salvation is initiated in the waters of baptism ... Currently, some consider baptism to be only an ‘outward sign’ of belief in Christ. This innovation has no historical or biblical precedent. Others reduce it to a mere perfunctory obedience to Christ’s command (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). Still others, ignoring the Bible completely, reject baptism as a vital factor in salvation. Orthodoxy maintains that these contemporary innovations rob sincere people of the most important assurances that baptism provides--namely that they have been united to Christ and are part of His Church” (www.orthodox.org)

E. Idolatry

“Orthodoxy is unusually sight oriented, creating for worship a variety of icons meant to represent the reality of God, which make the setting quite elaborate in color, shape, and brightness” (Mead & Hill, p. 224). While the Orthodox are careful to make a distinction between worship and veneration, their practice of venerating icons²⁵² (pictures of revered

²⁵¹In regards to the Eucharist, Orthodoxy, like Catholicism, believes in transubstantiation. Also like Catholicism, it believes that the Eucharist is a means of saving grace: “Early Christians began calling the Eucharist ‘the medicine of immortality’ because they recognized the great grace of God that was received in it” (www.orthodox.org).

²⁵²This practice was the subject of the “iconoclastic controversy” during the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. The “iconoclasts” (those who opposed the veneration of icons) within the Church in the East agitated for an end to the practice. For a time, they won the day, leading to severe persecution against those who defended the practice. Eventually, the controversy came to an end and the practice continued, albeit in a curtailed form (statues were no longer allowed to be venerated).

events and/or persons) as an aid to worshipping God violates the Second Commandment.

While certainly not doing so to the degree Catholicism does, Orthodoxy venerates Mary. Like Catholicism, Orthodoxy holds to the perpetual virginity of Mary and to the assumption of Mary. Similar to Catholicism’s teaching on the immaculate conception of Mary, Orthodoxy believes that Mary was permanently cleansed of all her sin when the angel Gabriel appeared to her in Luke 1.

“It is bewildering to Orthodox Christians that many professing Christians who claim to believe the Bible never call Mary blessed nor honor her who bore and raised God the Son in His human flesh” (www.orthodox.org)

F. A continuing priesthood

While not as pronounced a doctrine as in Catholicism, Orthodoxy (based on Jas 5:16) teaches that a priest is still needed when confessing one’s sin.

“The Orthodox Church has always followed the New Testament practices of confession before a priest as well as private confession to the Lord” (www.orthodox.org)

Very much like Catholicism, Orthodoxy frowns upon the thought of the individual believer interpreting Scripture.

III. Our Response

A. The Bible (the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon) is the only source of divine revelation available today.

See the lesson on Mormonism, Appendix D, and the lesson on Catholicism (“Is the Apocrypha Part of the Canon?”).

B. The Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice.

See the lesson on Catholicism.

C. Salvation/justification is by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fides*) in Christ alone (*solus Christus*), not by works.

See the lesson on Mormonism.

D. Baptism is a consequence of salvation, not a cause of salvation.

See the lesson on Catholicism.

E. God alone is to be venerated, and He is to be venerated in spirit.

In response to the Orthodox veneration of icons, see the Second Commandment (Exod 20:4-5) and John 4:24. In response to the Orthodox veneration of Mary, see my response to the Catholic veneration of Mary (under III. E.) in the lesson on Catholicism.

F. The individual priesthood of the believer

See the lesson on Mormonism and the lesson on Catholicism.

Resources for Further Study:

So What's the Difference? by Ridenour (chp. 3)

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 223-237)

"Denominations Comparison" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

"What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Brown

The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church by Berry (chp. 4)

<http://www.orthodox.org>

What's the Difference?

Part 3: Examining the Differences Between Baptists and Denominations

Lesson 3: **Anglicanism/Episcopalianism**

I. History

The Anglican Church was one of the many churches that came forth from the womb of the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the sixteenth century A.D. Whereas the Reformation gave birth to the Lutheran Church in Germany, the Reformed Church in Switzerland, and the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, it gave birth to the Anglican Church in England. Unlike these other churches, however, the Anglican Church was not conceived out of religious conviction, but out of political convenience. King Henry VIII's obsession to have a son to inherit the throne and the inability of his wife (Katherine of Aragon, daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain) to produce one, coupled with Henry's budding interest in a younger woman named Anne Boleyn, drove him to pressure the Catholic hierarchy in England to grant him a divorce to Katherine so he could marry Anne. When the pope refused to grant the divorce, Henry named Thomas Cranmer the Archbishop of Canterbury (Canterbury is a city in southeastern England). Cranmer in turn granted Henry the annulment he sought, paving the way for Henry and Anne to marry in 1533 (In a few short years, Henry had Anne executed because she also failed to give birth to a son). Consequently, the pope

excommunicated Henry. Henry responded by breaking ties with the Catholic Church by starting his own, the Church of England. The 1534 Act of Supremacy declared Henry to be "the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England." While the Anglican Church temporarily fell under Catholic control for five years in the mid-1500's under the reign of Henry's daughter (by his first wife, Katherine), Mary Tudor (aka "Bloody Mary"), it quickly returned to its nascent independence under Mary's half-sister, Elizabeth (Henry's daughter by his second wife, Anne Boleyn).

Anglicanism spread to the American colonies²⁵³ and flourished for a time.²⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, however, the War of Independence dealt a crippling (and nearly fatal) blow to Anglicanism's existence in the United States. In spite of the blow, the Anglican Church in America rose to its feet by forming the Protestant Episcopal Church (PEC) in 1783.²⁵⁵ Impressively, the PEC was the only major American denomination that did not split during the Civil War era. In 1967 the name of the PEC was changed to The Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA). This is the main episcopalian body in the U.S. It is upon the beliefs and practices of this body that the differences discussed in this lesson are based.

The head of the Anglican Church is the archbishop of Canterbury. The head of the Episcopal Church (more or less the American wing of the Anglican Church,

²⁵³Two of the most famous groups to migrate to America in the early seventeenth century (the Pilgrims in the 1620's and the Puritans in the 1630's) came seeking the religious freedom denied them by the Church of England.

²⁵⁴Many of America's most renowned early leaders were Anglican/Episcopalian, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry. Early American Anglicans established William and Mary College in 1693.

²⁵⁵Over the years, several groups split from the Protestant Episcopal Church, such as the Reformed Episcopal Church (in 1873), the African Orthodox Church (in 1919), and the Anglican Orthodox Church (in 1963). Two groups that split from this last group are the American Episcopal Church (in 1968) and the Anglican Episcopal Church of North America (in 1972). Of particular interest is the Reformed Episcopal Church, which rejects many of the unbiblical beliefs of traditional episcopalianism (see p. 167 of Berry for a listing) and is a member of the NAE (National Association of Evangelicals).

one of thirty-eight such wings worldwide) is called the presiding bishop.²⁵⁶ Under him are numerous bishops. Each bishop oversees a diocese consisting of several parishes (i.e., local churches), with each parish being led by a priest (aka a “rector”). Each parish also has deacons.

Though viewed by most as Protestants, Anglicanism/Episcopalianism views itself as a happy medium between Catholicism and Protestantism: “Anglicans and Episcopalians practice a faith that is liturgically and theologically a bridge between Catholicism and Protestant traditions” (www.episcopalchurch.org); “Anglicanism reflects the balance and compromise of the ‘via media,’ or middle way, of the Elizabethan settlement between Protestant and Catholic principles” (www.episcopalchurch.org).

As have other formal/liturgical/“high church”²⁵⁷ traditions (such as Catholicism and Orthodoxy), so has Anglicanism/Episcopalianism in recent years gained sheep that were once in the evangelical fold.²⁵⁸

Several decades ago, the Episcopal Church made provision for women deacons (in 1970) and women priests (in 1976). The first female bishop was consecrated in 1988. In more recent days, the fabric of the Episcopal Church has been torn over the issue of homosexuality²⁵⁹, sparked by the 2003 ordination of homosexual Gene Robinson in New Hampshire. Consequently, many ECUSA churches have placed themselves under the jurisdiction of conservative, third world bishops opposed to the ordination of homosexuals.

II. Some²⁶⁰ Erroneous Anglican/Episcopalian Beliefs

A. Authority in sources other than the Bible

Like Catholicism and Orthodoxy, so Anglicanism/Episcopalianism sees the Bible as one of several sources of authority. Other such authorities would include *The Book of Common Prayer* (first produced by Thomas Cranmer

²⁵⁷Berry (p. 172) describes Episcopalianism as “a high church experience with an English-American twist.”

²⁵⁸Perhaps the most notable example is Robert Webber, onetime professor at Wheaton College (Wheaton, IL), who in 1985 wrote the book, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*.

²⁵⁹Much of the blame can be placed at the feet of the extremely liberal and now retired Episcopalian bishop of Newark, NJ, John Spong. Spong, raised in a fundamentalist home in North Carolina, is author of *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalists*. He has been a leading proponent within the Episcopal Church for the ordination of women and for gay marriage. He is also a proponent of euthanasia.

²⁶⁰For an examination of other Anglican/Episcopalian beliefs, one may consult the “Resources for Further Study” listed at the end of this lesson.

²⁵⁶While each of the thirty-eight archbishops that oversee these thirty-eight wings are equal in authority, each wing being autonomous, the archbishop of Canterbury has the place of honor, as the Anglican Church was first led (at least in a clerical sense) by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury.

in 1545) and the Thirty-Nine Articles (first adopted in 1571).

"Anglicans and Episcopalians value a balance of scripture, reason, and tradition"
(www.episcopalchurch.org)
"Anglicanism also reflects balance in its devotion to scripture, tradition, and reason as sources of authority" (www.episcopalchurch.org)

Berry (p. 169) writes: "While most Protestant churches give minimal or no credence to tradition or human reason, Episcopalians are more like Roman Catholics in what sources inform their faith." With each "denomination" she analyzes in her book, Berry gives what she calls a "Clout Continuum." For the Episcopal Church, she gives first place to Anglican tradition, second place to personal experience through sacraments, and third place to Scripture (p. 170).

B. Baptismal regeneration

While not all Anglicans/Episcopalians hold to baptismal regeneration, many do.

Anglicans/Episcopalians utilize all three "modes" of baptism: immersion, sprinkling, and pouring. They observe the same seven sacraments as Catholicism and Orthodoxy. While they believe that the body and blood of Christ are present in the Eucharist, they do not take a clear and definitive position as to how.²⁶¹

C. Apostolic succession

Like Catholicism and Orthodoxy, so Anglicanism/Episcopalianism believes that there has been a direct succession of bishops from the original apostles to today, with such bishops wielding much of the same authority the Twelve did. This authority is passed on from one Anglican/Episcopalian cleric to another via the consecration of the latter by the former.

D. The episcopalian form of church government

Like Catholicism and Orthodoxy, so Anglicanism/Episcopalianism believes in and practices an episcopalian form of church government (hence, the name Episcopal). This form of church government first developed in the early second century A.D. with the formation of the extrabiblical (unbiblical?) office of monarchical bishop, i.e., a bishop over several churches.²⁶²

III. Our Response

A. The Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice.

See the lesson on Catholicism.

B. Baptism is a consequence of salvation, not a cause of salvation.

See the lesson on Catholicism.

C. The apostles were foundational (Eph 2:20).

The apostles were crucial to the church's founding, giving it the guidance it so desperately needed during its formative years. Once the canon of Scripture was completed (end of first century A.D.), however, the apostles were no longer needed and, accordingly, passed from the scene (as did also their revelation-confirming miracles). As Brown ("What's the Difference?", p. 37) puts it:

"... [T]he apostles were a select group of men, chosen for a select purpose (establish the Church) and time." There was no need for, nor is there any biblical evidence of, apostolic successors in the episcopalian sense.

D. The congregational form of church government

Ultimate authority resides in each local congregation. This is seen by the fact that the local church is the ultimate judicatory in matters of church discipline (Matt 18:15-17, 1 Cor 5:12-13, and 2 Cor 2:6). It is also seen by the fact that churches made their own decisions, rather than having such decisions made for them by outside authorities (Acts 6:3, 5, 11:22, 15:3, 22, 1 Cor 16:3, and 2 Cor 8:19). Each and every local church is

²⁶¹Mead and Hill (p. 128) call the Anglican/Episcopal Church "distinctive in leaving undefined the exact nature of the Communion bread and wine, regarded as a spiritual mystery." Berry (p. 171) adds: "Without going into theological detail, the Episcopal Church believes that Christ's presence resides in the elements of the Lord's Supper--not quite as defined as the Roman Catholic tradition and not as 'symbolic' as most Protestants."

²⁶²Brown ("What's the Difference?", p. 37) gives four reasons for the rise of the monarchical bishop: 1) the natural tendency of one of any group to become a "first among equals"; 2) the need to centralize the church's authority for administrative purposes; 3) the need for leaders to speak and act on behalf of the church in response to persecution; and 4) heresy required authoritative leaders to uphold sound doctrine.

autonomous/self-governing.
The episcopal form of church government is extrabiblical at best.²⁶³

A bishop (aka an elder or a pastor) is a leader of a local congregation, not one who oversees several congregations. For biblical evidence that a bishop is an elder is a pastor, see such passages as Acts 20:17-38 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. Thus, there is no biblical warrant for making the office of bishop separate from and over the office of pastor.

Resources for Further Study:

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 128-138)

"Denominations Comparison" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

"What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Brown

The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church by Berry (chp. 7)

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org>

²⁶³It is acknowledged even by its advocates that the episcopal or prelatic form of church government is nowhere mentioned in the New Testament" (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 905).

What's the Difference?

Part 3: Examining the Differences Between Baptists and Denominations

Lesson 4: Lutheranism

I. History

As mentioned at the start of the last lesson (Anglicanism/Episcopalianism), the Protestant Reformation (16th century A.D.) inaugurated a new era in church history, spawning several new denominations throughout the European continent: Anglicanism in England, Lutheranism in Germany, the Reformed Church in Switzerland, and Presbyterianism in Scotland. The most notable of these was the Lutheran Church in Germany, due to the man after whom this denomination is named, Martin Luther.²⁶⁴ Luther, professor of biblical theology at the University of Wittenberg in Wittenberg, Germany, was converted in 1515 after coming to a correct understanding of Romans 1:17. Two years later, on October 31, 1517, Luther, still a Catholic, affixed a list of "95 Theses" to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church, requesting that the Catholic Church debate its practice of selling indulgences to raise money for the building of St. Peter's basilica in Rome.²⁶⁵ Though this debate never took place, what Luther did that day is viewed by many as the official start of the Protestant Reformation. When Luther was excommunicated by the Catholic Church (in 1521) and refused to recant his beliefs at the Diet (assembly) of Worms (a town in Germany) later that same year, he had no choice but to start a new church. Besides Germany, Lutheranism also gained a firm foothold in the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and Finland). From these lands, it spread to the New World.

²⁶⁴Berry (p. 147) calls Martin Luther "the granddaddy of all things Protestant." The name "Lutheran" was a derogatory one given to the followers of Luther by their enemies.

²⁶⁵Thesis 27 read: "There is no divine authority for preaching that the soul flies out of the purgatory immediately the money clinks in the bottom of the chest" (this thesis is in response to the famous jingle attributed to Catholic monk, John Tetzel: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs"). Thesis 36 read: "Any Christian whatsoever, who is truly repentant, enjoys plenary [full] remission from penalty and guilt, and this is given him without letters of indulgence." Thesis 82 read: "They ask, e.g. [for example]: Why does not the pope liberate everyone from purgatory for the sake of love (a most holy thing) and because of the supreme necessity of their souls? This would be morally the best of all reasons. Meanwhile he redeems innumerable souls for money, a most perishable thing, with which to build St. Peter's church, a very minor purpose." Thesis 86 read: "Again: since the pope's income to-day is larger than that of the wealthiest of wealthy men, why does he not build this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of indigent [impoverished] believers?"

Early on, Lutheranism in America consisted of a myriad of ethnically-distinct denominations. Over the years, however, many of these denominations merged.²⁶⁶ Today, there are three primary American Lutheran denominations. The largest is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (the ELCA). The ELCA can best be described as moderate. It ordains women, refuses to take a stand against abortion, and holds to limited inerrancy²⁶⁷ (i.e., the belief that the Bible is in error in certain areas). In August of this year (2005), the ELCA's biennial (once every two years) Churchwide Assembly will take up the issue of homosexuality (whether or not to sanction same-sex marriages, ordain homosexual clergy, etc.).²⁶⁸ The ELCA has an ecumenical orientation, having formed alliances with several other Protestant denominations, such as the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church of America, the Presbyterian Church--USA, and the Episcopal Church. The ELCA publishes a monthly magazine, *The Lutheran* and has as its primary publishing house Augsburg Fortress. The second largest American Lutheran denomination is the Lutheran Church-Missouri²⁶⁹ Synod (the LCMS). The LCMS can best be described as conservative. The LCMS produces the radio program, "The Lutheran Hour" (since 1930) and has as its primary publishing house Concordia (which publishes the renowned Arch Book Series for children). It also boasts the largest Protestant elementary school system in the U.S. The third largest American Lutheran denomination is the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (the WELS). Together, these three denominations comprised 95% of all Lutherans in the U.S. (Mead & Hill, p. 178).

²⁶⁶As mentioned in a previous lesson (see footnote 213), there are approximately 250 different Lutheran denominations worldwide. While this number seems ridiculously high, due to mergers it is actually lower than it once was. Mead & Hill (p. 177) write in this regard: "Non-Lutherans are often critical of the divisions among Lutherans, but actually they are not as divided as they may seem. At one time there were 150 Lutheran bodies in the U.S.; consolidation, unification, and federation have now reduced that number to nine."

²⁶⁷In 1976, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (the AELC) was formed by those who split from the LCMS over the LCMS's insistence on complete inerrancy. The AELC was one of three Lutheran denominations that united to form the ELCA in 1988.

²⁶⁸The 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly commissioned a task force (chaired by the Bishop of the ELCA New England Synod, a woman from Worcester, MA) to study the homosexuality issue and draft a report. The task force essentially "punted." For example, the recently-released report reads at one point: "Many people have asked for a simple answer to the question: Does the Bible say that sexual activity between two people of the same sex is always a sin? ... In this matter the ELCA needs to continue in prayerful study of Scripture with one another" (www.elca.org). Bottom line: The task force is recommending that homosexuals be allowed to carve out a place in the ELCA and that each local congregation be allowed to decide how to handle the issue.

²⁶⁹"*Missouri* is included in the name because the denomination was founded in that state by German immigrants in 1847" (Mead & Hill, p. 183).

The ELCA essentially has an episcopalian form of church government, being led by a "presiding bishop" with sixty-five bishops under him or her. The LCMS, whose polity is described by LCMS writer, Samuel Nafzger²⁷⁰ as "a modified congregational structure," is led by a "president."

II. Some²⁷¹ Erroneous Lutheran Beliefs

A. Baptismal aberrations, such as baptizing infants (paedobaptism), baptizing other than by immersion (sprinkling), and baptismal regeneration (?)

"Baptism, we believe, is one of the miraculous means of grace (together with God's written and spoken Word) through which God creates and/or strengthens the gift of faith in a person's heart ... Although we do not claim to understand how this happens or how it is possible, we believe (because of what the Bible says about Baptism) that when an infant is baptized God creates faith in the heart of that infant. This faith cannot yet, of course, be expressed or articulated, yet it is real and present all the same ... The LCMS does not believe that baptism is ABSOLUTELY necessary for salvation. The thief on the cross was saved (apparently without baptism), as were all true believers in the Old Testament era. Mark 16:16 implies that it is not the absence of baptism that condemns a person but the absence of faith, and there are clearly other ways of coming to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit (reading or hearing the Word of God). Still, baptism dare not be despised or willfully neglected, since it is explicitly commanded by God and has his precious promises attached to it. It is not a mere ritual' or 'symbol,' but a powerful means of grace by which God grants faith and the forgiveness of sins" (www.lcms.org).

²⁷⁰Nafzger, likely making a swipe at the ELCA, writes: "Distinctions among those holding this office (between pastors and bishops, for example) are of human, not divine, origin. The historic episcopate, therefore, while permissible and perhaps even helpful, is not divinely mandated" (www.lcms.org).

²⁷¹For an examination of other Lutheran beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

"According to the Bible, baptism ... is God's gracious way of washing away our sins--even the sins of infants ... [Scripture] describe[s] baptism as a gracious and powerful work of God through which He miraculously (though through very 'ordinary' means) washes away our sins by applying to us the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection (Acts 2:38-39; Acts 22:16), gives us a new birth in which we 'cooperate' just as little as we did in our first birth (John 3:5-7), clothes us in Christ's righteousness (Gal. 3:26-27), gives us the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5-6), saves us (1 Peter 3:21), buries us and raises us up with Christ as new creatures (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:11-12), makes us holy in God's sight (Eph. 5: 25-26) and incorporates us into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13)" (www.lcms.org).

"The Christian church is made up of those who have been baptized and thus have received Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world" (www.elca.org).

B. Communion aberrations, such as "consubstantiation" and communion as a sacrament/means of grace, rather than as a symbol/memorial of grace

"For what purpose, then, do we approach the Lord's Table? We approach the Lord's Table--A. Chiefly to receive forgiveness of our sins" (*Luther's Small Catechism*, question #315).

"How, then, does the Sacrament impart such forgiveness of sins? By His words 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins' Christ has placed the forgiveness of sins into the Sacrament, and there He offers, gives, and seals it to all communicants. These words, therefore, are the chief thing in the Sacrament" (*Luther's Small Catechism*, question #317).

"If by 'remembrance' of Jesus one would understand that through the sacrament Christ is present for us for the forgiveness of our sins and for the strengthening of our faith, then such understanding would be in keeping with what the Lutheran confessional writings understand the Scriptures to mean. If, however, 'remembrance' of Jesus were understood as a simple 'memorial' or mental 'recall' of Jesus and His work, such understanding would not be in keeping with Scriptural teaching" (www.lcms.org).

"There is no scriptural reference which will ever satisfy our human minds regarding the fact that in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we eat bread and drink wine and through that receive the body and blood of our Lord" (www.lcms.org).

"... [W]e have concluded that while we eat bread and drink wine in the sacrament we--in, with, and under²⁷² these forms--receive the body and blood of our Lord. How? That is the mystery. As the hymn says:

²⁷²The Lutheran belief that the literal body and blood of Jesus are present "in, with, and under" the elements is called "consubstantiation" (lit. "with the substance"). While Catholicism teaches that the elements become the body and blood of Jesus ("transubstantiation," change of substance), Lutherans teach that the elements contain His body and blood.

Thy body and thy blood once slain and shed for me Are taken here with mouth and soul in blest reality. Search not how this takes place - this wondrous mystery. God can accomplish vastly more than seemeth plain to thee" (www.lcms.org).

"The Gospel and the Sacraments, including the Lord's Supper, are the divinely ordained ways in which the merits of Christ are revealed, offered, and imparted to us. The words of institution in the Lord's Supper, then, are God's way of saying to us: 'Your sins have been forgiven already, and again I am giving you anew this wonderful blessing. Be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven.' In this way we can go our way with a clear conscience and a renewed heart" (www.lcms.org).

C. Sources of authority other than the Bible (?)

Lutherans are often called "confessing," meaning that they adhere to the standard Lutheran confessions of faith, most notably those contained in the Book of Concord²⁷³ (first published in 1580), such as Luther's Catechisms, both Large and Small (1529), the Augsburg Confession (1530)²⁷⁴ and the Smalcald Articles²⁷⁵ (1537). While confessions of faith are useful tools, Lutherans tend to so revere their confessions that they elevate them to a level of authority equal to that of Scripture, their insistence on *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) notwithstanding.²⁷⁶

²⁷³According to onetime LCMS President, A. L. Barry, a Lutheran is "a person who believes, teaches and confesses the truths of God's Word as they are summarized and confessed in the Book of Concord" (www.lcms.org).

²⁷⁴The Augsburg Confession was the work of the other key figure in early Lutheranism, Philipp Melancthon, a colleague of Luther at the University of Wittenberg.

²⁷⁵The Smalcald Articles was a confession of faith written by Luther and presented to a group of Lutheran rulers meeting in Smalcald, Germany.

"The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod accepts the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, and subscribes unconditionally to all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God. We accept the Confessions because they are drawn from the Word of God and on that account regard their doctrinal content as a true and binding exposition of Holy Scripture and as authoritative for all pastors, congregations and other rostered church workers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod" (www.lcms.org).

"The LCMS has a tremendous opportunity to make it very clear, both to our own members, as well as to the world at large, what it means to remain committed to the full truth of the Holy Scriptures and the historic confessions of the Lutheran church" (former LCMS President, A. L. Barry; emphasis mine)

"The LCMS binds itself to the entire doctrinal content of the 16th-century Lutheran confessional writings. We agree with the confessions of our church not merely *insofar* as they agree with the Bible (a position which would allow individual members to reject certain doctrines), but *because* these confessional statements are in complete harmony with God's inspired and inerrant Word. We therefore accept without reservation all the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, normative also for the church today" (ibid; emphasis Barry's).

III. Our Response

- A. Baptism is for believers (it is not for infants²⁷⁷), is by immersion, and is a consequence, not a cause of salvation.

See the lesson on Catholicism.

Lutherans make the mistake of taking passages that are talking about Spirit baptism (such as 1 Cor 12:13), which is contemporaneous with conversion, to be talking about water baptism, which is subsequent to conversion.

- B. The Lord's Supper is an ordinance (not a sacrament), with the elements symbolizing and memorializing Christ's death. It is not a means of grace, at least not in the Lutheran sense.

"This is my body" (Matt 26:26) and "This is my blood" (Matt 26:28) are metaphors (see the lesson on Catholicism), with the bread symbolizing Jesus' body and the wine His blood.

At the first Lord's Supper, Jesus Himself said: "Do this in remembrance of [i.e., in memory of] Me" (Luke 22:19; cf. 1 Cor 11:24 and 25).

The Lutheran understanding of baptism and communion certainly call their commitment to *sola gratia* (grace alone) and *sola fides* (faith alone) into question.

²⁷⁶Berry (p. 154) states in this regard: "I see a tension between stating that Scripture is one's sole authority and then extending that 'sole' authority to additional documents."

²⁷⁷Baptizing of infants has always opened the door to an unregenerate church membership. In this regard, the ELCA website reports that only 30.15% of its baptized members attend worship each week.

C. The Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice.

See the lesson on Catholicism.

Resources for Further Study:

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 174-186)

"Denominations Comparison" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

"What's the Difference?" Sunday School series by Brown

The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church by Berry (chp. 6)

<http://www.elca.org> (website for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)

<http://www.lcms.org> (website for the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod)

What's the Difference?

Part 3: Examining the Differences Between Baptists and Denominations

Lesson 5: **Presbyterianism** (and Reformed Churches)

I. History

The sixteenth century Protestant Reformation not only gave birth to the Anglican Church in England and the Lutheran Church in Germany, but also to two churches quite similar in doctrine and practice, the Reformed Church in Switzerland and the Presbyterian Church in Scotland.

In Switzerland, the Reformation was first led by Ulrich Zwingli (in Zurich), then by John Calvin (in Geneva). Calvin was the key figure in the founding of the Reformed Church. His influence was also integral to the subsequent founding of the Presbyterian Church under John Knox in Scotland.²⁷⁸

Both the Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church champion "Reformed" theology, the primary feature of which is a Calvinistic soteriology (doctrine of salvation).²⁷⁹ These churches are also marked by a presbyterian form of church government. They also are covenant theologians, rather than dispensationalists (hence, their practice of infant baptism, even though they reject the doctrine of baptismal regeneration).

²⁷⁸ "Strictly speaking, John Calvin did not found Presbyterianism; he merely laid the foundations upon which it was constructed" (Mead & Hill, p. 248). Calvin's influence extended far beyond just these two churches. According to Berry (p. 175), Calvin's doctrine was the foundation for the Puritan, Congregationalist, and Baptist movements in England, the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, the Huguenots in France, and the Reformed Church throughout Europe, especially in Holland and Germany.

²⁷⁹ Reformed soteriology/Calvinism has been summarized in five points (the so-called "five points of Calvinism"), using the acrostic TULIP: T--Total depravity; U--Unconditional Election; L--Limited Atonement (aka "particular redemption"); I--Irresistible Grace (aka "invincible grace"); P--Perseverance of the Saints.

There are currently two major branches of the Reformed Church in the United States, and both are roughly the same in size. One is the Reformed Church in America (the RCA)²⁸⁰. The second is the Christian Reformed Church in North America (the CRC)²⁸¹, which in 1857 split from what is now the RCA. Of the two, the RCA is the more moderate, the CRC the more conservative.²⁸² A much smaller, but more conservative (than even the CRC) branch of the Reformed Church is the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, a 1926 split from the CRC.

There are many branches of Presbyterianism in the United States.²⁸³ The largest branch is the Presbyterian Church (USA) or the PCUSA. The second largest branch is the Presbyterian Church in America or the PCA.²⁸⁴ Of the two, the PCUSA is the more moderate, the PCA the more conservative.²⁸⁵ Two-thirds of the PCA is located in the Southeastern U.S. Other significant Presbyterian bodies in the U.S. include the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (the EPC)²⁸⁶, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (the OPC)²⁸⁷, and the Bible Presbyterian Church (the BPC)²⁸⁸.

Both Presbyterian and Reformed churches place a lot of stock in the 17th century Westminster Confession of Faith.²⁸⁹ Perhaps the most well-know Presbyterian

²⁸³Berry (p. 205) begins her discussion of some of the Presbyterian bodies in the U.S. by saying: "I'm not including all of the factions of the Presbyterian Church in the States because it's too cumbersome. Even with my simplified version, it's easy to get confused, especially since it seems that each new group used a lot of the same names but in a different order. If I drew the chart accurately, it would look more like a plate of spaghetti than a timeline"

²⁸⁴The PCA sponsors Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO.

²⁸⁵For example, the PCUSA ordains women, while the PCA does not. The difference is also seen by the fact that in 1973 the PCA originated as a split from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (which in 1983 would unite with the United Presbyterian Church, USA to form the PCUSA) over the theological liberalism creeping into the PCUS. The PCA website states that the PCA "separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) in opposition to the long-developing theological liberalism which denied the deity of Jesus Christ and the inerrancy and authority of Scripture." The PCUSA is also opposed to capital punishment and allows for abortion. In regards to the latter, the PCUSA website states: "The considered decision of a woman to terminate a pregnancy can be a morally acceptable, though certainly not the only or required, decision. Possible justifying circumstances would include medical indications of severe physical or mental deformity, conception as a result of rape or incest, or conditions under which the physical or mental health of either woman or child would be greatly threatened."

²⁸⁶The EPC was started in the early 1980's and is conservative in orientation. However, according to its website, it does allow for the ordination of women and for the belief that the miraculous spiritual gifts (speaking in tongues, etc.) are still operative today.

²⁸⁷The OPC, led by "fundamentalist" J. Gresham Machen (Machen himself disavowed the "fundamentalist" label), split from the then PCUSA in 1936.

²⁸⁸The BPC, led by fundamentalist Carl McIntire, split from the OPC in 1938. One of the precipitating factors was the OPC's refusal to espouse a total abstinence position in regards to the consumption of alcohol.

²⁸⁹Berry (p. 205), in describing the construction of this confession, writes: "Instructed to eliminate anything that was Arminian or Catholic, the authors constructed a confession that is essentially Calvinistic in doctrine and presbyterian in church structure."

²⁸⁰The RCA boasts of having "the oldest evangelical church in North America with a continuous ministry," the Collegiate Reformed Church in New York City, which was started in 1628 (Berry, p. 183). The RCA sponsors Hope College in Holland, MI.

²⁸¹The CRC sponsors Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI.

²⁸²However, Berry (p. 193) states: "The CRC is historically a conservative denomination that is currently in transition toward a more moderate stance on issues of social justice, the ordination of women, and issues of faith."

institution of higher learning is Princeton.²⁹⁰ Two outstanding 20th century OPC theologians were Cornelius Van Til and John Murray.

II. Some²⁹¹ Erroneous Presbyterian (and Reformed Church) Beliefs

A. Baptismal aberrations, such as baptizing infants (paedobaptism) and baptizing by sprinkling and pouring, in addition to by immersion

The reason Presbyterians baptize infants is not due to a belief in baptismal regeneration²⁹², but due to their belief in covenant theology. Accordingly, they view baptism as the NT equivalent to circumcision in the OT.

²⁹⁰In 1929, a group of fundamentalists, led by J. Gresham Machen, resigned from the faculty of Princeton's seminary to form Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

²⁹¹For an examination of other Presbyterian (and Reformed) beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

²⁹²The PCUSA website does, however, read at one point: "Being washed with the water of Baptism, Christians received new life in Christ and presented their bodies to be living sacrifices to God." At another point, it reads: "The Spirit ... claims us in the waters of baptism."

Robert Reymond, a modern Presbyterian theologian (in his 1998 *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 936), writes: "It is clear therefore that both antipaedobaptists and paedobaptists argue by way of inference from more fundamental theological premises, focused largely on the relationship between the testaments, with the former stressing a dispensational discontinuity at this point in the covenant of grace, the latter stressing the continuity of the covenant of grace respecting this matter." Reymond (p. 937) goes on to cite John Murray: "The basic premise of the argument for infant baptism is that the New Testament economy is the unfolding and fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham and that the necessary implication is the unity and continuity of the church." Being the covenant theologian that he is, Reymond (p. 945) concludes: "To summarize, because little children, even babes in arms, of covenant parents are covenant children, they are not to be excluded from the church as the kingdom of Christ. And just as the sign of the covenant of grace [circumcision] was placed upon male children of covenant parents in Old Testament times, so also the covenant sign, which is now baptism, should be administered to male and female infants and young children of covenant parents under the New Testament administration of the same covenant."

"Baptism distinguishes children of those who believe in God's redemptive power from children of nonbelievers. The water that is used symbolizes three accounts from the Bible's Old Testament: The waters of creation, the flood described in the story of Noah, and the Hebrews' escape from slavery in Egypt by crossing the Red Sea. All three stories link humanity to God's goodness through water" (www.pcusa.org).

"We believe that God is gracious and faithful to His people not simply as individuals but as families in successive generations according to His Covenant promises" (www.pcanet.org).

According to its website, the PCUSA allows for baptism by pouring, sprinkling, or immersion.

"Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person" (Westminster Confession of Faith).

B. Communion aberrations, such as belief in the spiritual presence of Christ in the elements.

"As the body and blood are not corporally or carnally present in, with, or under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, and yet are spiritually present to the faith of the receiver, no less truly and really than the elements themselves are to their outward senses; so they that worthily communicate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, do therein feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal and carnal, but in a spiritual manner, yet truly and really, while by faith they receive and apply unto themselves Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death" (Larger Westminster Catechism)

"In preparing to receive Christ in this Sacrament [Communion], the believer" (www.pcusa.org).

"Eating bread and drinking wine they [Christians] received the sustaining presence of Christ" (www.pcusa.org).

C. The presbyterian form of church government

The designation, “Presbyterian”²⁹³ signifies the polity/form of church government found in the Presbyterian Church (and in the Reformed Church). Each local Presbyterian church is governed by a “session” (a “consistory” in the Reformed Church), a body of elders consisting of teaching elders (clergy) and ruling elders (laity).²⁹⁴ Several sessions in a geographical area comprise a “presbytery” (a “classis” in the Reformed Church). Several presbyteries comprise a “synod.” All the synods comprise the “General Assembly” (“General Synod” in the Reformed Church).

III. Our Response

- A. Baptism is for believers (it is not for infants) and is by immersion (not sprinkling or pouring).

See the lesson on Catholicism.

Covenant theology fails to make a thorough-enough distinction between the OT and the NT. Dispensationalism²⁹⁵ teaches a fundamental distinction between OT Israel and the NT church and, accordingly, sees no need for infant baptism.

- B. Christ is not present in the Communion elements.

See the lesson on Lutheranism.

While certainly closer to the mark than either the Roman Catholic (transubstantiation) or Lutheran (consubstantiation) view that Christ is physically present in the Communion elements, the Reformed view that Christ is spiritually present in the elements still misses the mark.

While there is certainly a spiritual dynamic in the observance of the Lord’s Supper, it is quite another thing to say that Christ is spiritually present in the elements themselves. Zwingli, though Reformed/Presbyterian, correctly taught that the elements symbolize the body and blood of Christ.²⁹⁶ Thus, one might say that the presence of Christ in the elements is neither physical nor spiritual, but symbolic.

- C. The congregational form of church government

See the lesson on Anglicanism/Episcopalianism.

There is no distinction between “teaching elders” and “ruling elders.” Every elder both teaches and rules (see especially 1 Tim 2:12 and 5:17 in this regard; compare also 1 Tim 3:2’s “apt to teach” with 1 Tim 3:4’s “ruleth” and 1 Tim 3:5’s “rule” in the KJV). One cannot separate teaching from ruling, for the elder does his leading primarily through his feeding (1 Thess 5:12 and Heb 13:7).

Resources for Further Study:

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 246-261 and 261-267)
“Denominations Comparison” pamphlet by Rose Publishing
“What’s the Difference?” Sunday School series by Brown
The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church by Berry (chps. 8 and 9)
<http://www.pcanet.org> (website for the Presbyterian Church in America)
<http://www.pcusa.org> (website for the Presbyterian Church (USA))
<http://www.epc.org> (website for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church)
<http://www.opc.org> (website for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church)

²⁹³“Presbyterian” comes from the Greek word for elder, *presbuteros*.

²⁹⁴There are also deacons in Presbyterian churches. As in Baptist churches, deacons in Presbyterian churches are functionally subordinate to elders.

²⁹⁵The OPC website calls dispensationalism a “serious error.”

²⁹⁶At the 1529 Marburg Colloquy, Luther and Zwingli agreed on fourteen of fifteen points, the only point of difference being the significance of the elements in the Lord’s Supper.

What's the Difference?

Appendix H: The Church Ordinance of Baptism

One of the "Baptist distinctives" is the belief that the Bible prescribes two, and only two, "ordinances," baptism and the Lord's Supper. This lesson will deal with the ordinance of baptism. Before discussing the ordinance of baptism, however, one must first discuss what an ordinance is.

What is an Ordinance?

An ordinance has been defined as "an outward rite instituted by Christ to be administered in the church as a visible sign of the saving truth of the Christian faith" (Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p. 323).²⁹⁷ According to Rolland McCune ("Systematic Theology III" class notes, p. 126) there are four "ingredients" (i.e., criteria) that make an ordinance an ordinance:

- 1) Sovereign authorization by the Lord Jesus Christ²⁹⁸
- 2) Symbolism of saving truth
- 3) Specific command for perpetuation in the Gospels and/or the Epistles
- 4) Biblical evidence of historical fulfillment or practice; confirmation in the Book of Acts basically

Only baptism and the Lord's Supper meet these criteria.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷Other definitions include the following: "By the ordinances, we mean those outward rites which Christ has appointed in his church as visible signs of the saving truth of the Gospel" (A. H. Strong, quoted in Rolland McCune, "Systematic Theology III" class notes, p. 126); an ordinance is a "visible symbol of theological truth instituted by Christ for perpetual observation in the church" (Mark Snoeberger, "Doctrines 5: Ecclesiology and Angelology" class notes, p. 37); and "a Christian ordinance is a ceremony that the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded to be permanently practiced by the church" (Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church*, p. 135).

²⁹⁸In a sense, this is the essence of an ordinance. As Robert Saucy (*The Church in God's Program*, p. 191) states: "Coming from the Latin *ordo*, meaning 'a row, an order,' ordinance emphasizes the fact that these rites were ordained by the Lord"

²⁹⁹Some groups add other ordinances, most notably foot washing (based on John 13:14-15). However, because foot washing was not practiced by the early church, most groups do not consider it to be an ordinance. As Donald Whitney (*Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church*, p. 136) states: "They [ordinances] are also ceremonies that were practiced by churches in the New Testament. That is why most churches today do not consider foot-washing to be an ordinance, even though Jesus washed the apostles' feet and said, 'You also ought to wash one another's

feet' (John 13:14). Since we do not read of this being repeated regularly as a specific practice by the New Testament churches, we believe the apostles understood it to be a living example of the humble, loving service Christians should give to others." In like manner, Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 920) states: "John 13:15 ... should not be construed to mean that foot washing should be a third sacrament observed by the church. Only in the most general way does our Lord's washing his disciples' feet signify his redemptive activity. It is much more likely that his washing of his disciples' feet was intended as an example of humility to teach them (and us) that Christians should be ready, in lifelong service to him, to perform the most menial service for others."

Other words used for ordinance include "rite," "ceremony," and, most commonly, "sacrament." Because of its connotation (due especially to the Roman Catholic understanding of the word), it is best to avoid calling baptism and the Lord's Supper "sacraments."³⁰⁰

The Ordinance of Baptism

That baptism is an ordinance is seen by the fact that it meets the four criteria mentioned above:

- 1) Baptism was authorized by Christ (Matt 28:19).
- 2) Baptism symbolizes a saving truth (Rom 6:3-4).

³⁰⁰The Roman Catholic Church observes seven "sacraments" (see Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine*, chart 63, p. 103). According to Catholicism, sacraments in and of themselves convey saving grace. The phrase Catholics use to communicate this concept is *ex opere operato*. "The phrase *ex opere operato* represents an essential part of Roman Catholic teaching on the sacraments. This Latin phrase literally means 'by work performed,' and it means that the sacraments work in virtue of the actual activity done, and that the power of the sacraments does not depend on any subjective attitude of faith in the people participating in them" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 972). According to Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology*, p. 421), the Council of Trent [middle 16th century A.D.] defined a sacrament as "something presented to the sense, which has the power, by divine institution, not only of signifying, but also of efficiently conveying grace." The Council of Trent went even further with this idea, declaring anyone who believed otherwise to be "anathema." Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 920) cites the Council's eighth Canon on the Sacraments in General: "If anyone says that by the sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred *ex opere operato* [i.e., by the outward rite itself], but that faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace, let him be anathema." Reymond (*ibid.*, p. 919) also cites the Council's first Canon on the Sacraments in General: "If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ; or that there are more or less than seven ... or that any one of these seven is not truly and intrinsically a sacrament, let him be anathema."

- 3) Baptism was given a command for perpetuation (Matt 28:19).
- 4) Baptism was practiced by the early church (Acts 2:41, et. al.).

Who is to be Baptized? (the subjects of baptism)

There are basically two schools of thought as to the subjects of baptism. Baptists believe in "believers' baptism," i.e., only those who are believers are to be baptized. While not necessarily denying believers' baptism, other groups also practice "pedobaptism" (or "paedobaptism"), i.e., infant baptism. Groups that practice infant baptism include Roman Catholics ("christening"), Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians³⁰¹, and Methodists, as well as (according to Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 983) some Evangelical Free Churches.

As a general rule, dispensationalists reject infant baptism, while covenant theologians espouse it.³⁰²

Paedobaptists build their belief on two premises: 1) NT baptism is a continuation of OT circumcision³⁰³ (using Col 2:11-12 as a proof text); and 2) The NT speaks of entire households being baptized (Acts 16:15, 33, 18:8, and 1 Cor 1:16), the implication being that there were infants in these households.

³⁰¹The Westminster Confession of Faith (cited in Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 923) states in this regard: "Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized."

³⁰²As Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 936) states: "It is clear therefore that both antipaedobaptists and paedobaptists argue by way of inference from more fundamental theological premises, focused largely on the relationship between the covenants, with the former stressing a dispensational discontinuity at this point in the covenant of grace, the latter stressing the continuity of the covenant of grace respecting this matter." Reymond (*ibid.*, p. 937) goes on to cite John Murray: "The basic premise of the argument for infant baptism is that the New Testament economy is the unfolding and fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham and that the necessary implication is the unity and continuity of the church." Being the covenant theologian that he is, Reymond (*ibid.*, p. 945) concludes: "To summarize, because little children, even babes in arms, of covenant parents are covenant children, they are not to be excluded from the church as the kingdom of Christ. And just as the sign of the covenant of grace [circumcision] was placed upon male children of covenant parents in Old Testament times, so also the covenant sign, which is now baptism, should be administered to male and female infants and young children of covenant parents under the New Testament administration of the same covenant."

³⁰³Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 952) calls baptism "circumcision's sacramental successor."

In regards to the first premise, it can be said that paedobaptists read their covenant theology into Colossians 2:11-12, a passage that does not teach that NT baptism corresponds to OT circumcision in the way covenant theologians view the correspondence. In regards to the second premise, it can be said that when households were baptized, those in the households who were baptized first exercised saving faith (see, for example, Acts 16:14-15, 31-34, and 18:8), something infants are constitutionally incapable of doing. Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology*, p. 423) states in this regard: "... the age of children is never mentioned in any passage that mentions household baptism. But it is said that all who were baptized in those households believed. This, then, would exclude infants from being included in the baptisms."

Believers' baptism is taught in the following Scriptures: Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:41, 8:12, 16:14-15, 31-34, and 18:8. Furthermore, believers' baptism is consistent with the truths baptism signifies (see below under "What Does Baptism Accomplish?"), while paedobaptism is not. Though admittedly not a decisive argument in favor of believers' baptism and against paedobaptism, Robert Saucy (*The Church in God's Program*, p. 203) claims: "Unambiguous testimony for the baptism of infants emerges only about the middle of the first half of the third century."

How is Baptism to be Done? (the "mode" of baptism)

There are basically three schools of thought as to the "mode" of baptism: sprinkling (aka aspersion), pouring (aka affusion), and immersion.³⁰⁴

The evidence for immersion as the "mode" of baptism includes the following:

³⁰⁴The Westminster Confession of Faith (cited in Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 923), essentially a Presbyterian creed, states in regards to the mode of baptism: "Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person."

1. The Greek word that our English translations transliterate (rather than translate), *baptizo*, has as its primary meaning to immerse, dip, or plunge.³⁰⁵ In this regard, when we speak of the "mode" of baptism, we should not think in terms of sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, since the mode (immersion) is inherent in the very meaning of the word. Rather, when we speak of mode of baptism, we should probably think more in terms of such things as location, posture, etc. (Mark Snoeberger, "Doctrines 5: Ecclesiology and Angelology" class notes, p. 42).³⁰⁶ If NT baptism was by sprinkling or pouring, the NT writers had such Greek verbs at their disposal. As Robert Saucy (*The Church in God's Program*, p. 210) states: "It is significant that the Greek language had terms for sprinkling, *rantidz_* and pouring, *epiche_* and *proschusis*. All of these are employed in the New Testament, but never for the act of baptism" (cf. Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 424).
2. The baptisms described in the NT seem to imply immersion. See, for example, Matthew 3:6's "in the Jordan River" (cf. Mark 1:5, and 9); Mark 1:10's "coming up out of the water" (cf. Matt 3:16); John 3:23's "much water there"; Acts 8:38's "went down into the water"; and Acts 8:39's "came up out of the water."
3. Immersion most clearly pictures what baptism signifies (see below under "What Does Baptism Accomplish?").
4. The practice of the early church was immersion. "The unanimous testimony of ancient history reveals that immersion was the normal mode of baptism in the early church" (Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, pp. 211-212). "The practice of baptism in the New Testament was carried out in one way: the person being baptized was *immersed* or put completely under the water and then brought back up again" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 967; emphasis his).³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵According to BAGD (p. 131), in the active voice *baptizo* means "dip, immerse," and in the middle voice "dip oneself, wash." BAGD is an acronym for the leading Greek lexicon (≈ dictionary), the work of men named Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker. According to another leading Greek lexicon, *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* (p. 94), *baptizo* means "to dip repeatedly, to immerge, submerge"; "to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water"; and (metaphorically) "to overwhelm."

³⁰⁶One such mode is what is called "trine immersion." According to Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology*, p. 425), "Trine immersion is the immersion of the candidate three times (usually forward) to symbolize the association with the Trine God."

³⁰⁷Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 935), a Presbyterian, strongly disagrees: "The fact is that *there is not a single recorded instance of a baptism in the entire New Testament where immersion followed by emersion is the mode of baptism*" (emphasis his).

According to Henry Thiessen (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p. 325), “Pouring and sprinkling came about because of water shortages and as a convenience for the aged and infirm.”

What Does Baptism Accomplish? (the significance of baptism)

There are basically three schools of thought as to the significance of baptism: baptism saves, baptism incorporates one into the covenant of grace, and baptism is a symbol. The belief that baptism saves is known as “baptismal regeneration.” Groups that espouse this belief include Roman Catholics, the Churches of Christ, some Lutherans, and some Episcopalians (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 981). Those who believe in baptismal regeneration point to such NT passages as Mark 16:16³⁰⁸, Acts 2:38³⁰⁹, 22:16, and 1 Peter 3:21 to support their position. However, interpreting such verses to teach baptismal regeneration flies in the face of the clear teaching throughout Scripture that salvation is through faith, not works (see, for example, Gal 2:16 and Eph 2:8-9). Therefore, such verses must be interpreted in light of this foundational soteriological truth. Baptism is not essential to salvation, the believing thief crucified with Jesus being a prime example of one who was saved without ever being baptized (Luke 23:43). However, the importance of baptism should not be depreciated by this fact.³¹⁰ “The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the NT” (F. F. Bruce, quoted in Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p. 324).

The belief that baptism incorporates one into the covenant of grace is the teaching of

³⁰⁸A few points can be made in regards to this verse: 1) Its textual basis is highly suspect. Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, pp. 950-951) states in this regard: “It must be noted that this verse appears in the so-called longer ending of the Gospel (16:9-20), which is supported by the Textus Receptus and some other late witnesses but not by the most reliable early manuscripts ... Its text-critical precariousness, therefore, makes the verse shaky ground for the advocacy of any form of baptismal salvation”; and 2) Even if the verse is original, notice that the last half of the verse reads: “but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned,” not “but he who has disbelieved and has not been baptized shall be condemned.”

³⁰⁹In regards to this verse, Henry Thiessen (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, pp. 324-325) states: “John’s statement, ‘I baptize you in water for repentance’ (Matt. 3:11) is the same Greek construction as Peter’s ‘Be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins’ (Acts 2:38). Surely John assumed repentance came first; likewise, forgiveness comes before baptism.” For a more thorough treatment of this verse, especially in regards to the issue of baptismal regeneration, see “Water Baptism and the Forgiveness of Sins in Acts 2:38” by R. Bruce Compton in the Fall 1999 issue of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* (pp. 3-32).

³¹⁰“Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it” (Westminster Confession of Faith, cited in Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 923).

covenant theology (see above under “Who is to be Baptized?”) and is, therefore, rightly rejected by dispensationalists.

Baptism symbolizes the believer’s identification³¹¹/union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Immersion is the “mode” that best pictures the death (immersion), burial³¹² (submersion), and resurrection (emersion) of Christ, and the corresponding spiritual realities in the life of the believer, dying to sin and being made alive to righteousness. See Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12 in this regard. Water baptism also symbolizes the washing away of sins that takes place at conversion. See Acts 22:16 and 1 Peter 3:21 in this regard. Though baptism is a symbol (*vis-à-vis* a “sacrament”), this does not imply that there is no spiritual benefit mediated through its observance. As Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p. 954; emphasis his) states: “Although we must avoid the Roman Catholic teaching that grace is imparted even *apart from* the faith of the person being baptized, we must not react so strongly to this error that we say that there is no spiritual benefit at all that comes from baptism, that the Holy Spirit *does not* work through it and that it is *merely symbolic*. It is better to say that where there is genuine faith on the part of the person being baptized, and where the faith of the church that watches the baptism is stirred up and encouraged by this ceremony, then the Holy Spirit certainly does work through baptism, and it becomes a ‘means of grace’ through which the Holy Spirit brings blessing to the person being baptized and to the church as well.” See also Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology*, p. 421) and Henry Thiessen (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p. 323) in this regard.

Who is to Do the Baptizing? (the administrator of baptism)

The ordinances are given to the local church. Therefore, their only proper observance is under the auspices of a local church. Rolland McCune (“Systematic Theology III” class notes, p. 132) states in this regard: “The local church is the custodian of the ordinances and it alone can arrange for baptism. This is against non-church, private baptisms in backyard pools, or para-church organizations like camps, etc., that baptize at the close of a camping session.”

Because the local church is the “custodian of the ordinances,” it has the right to authorize any one of its members to officiate a baptism. Thus, if a church is without a pastor, it can continue to baptize.

³¹¹“Theologically, baptism may be defined as an act of association or identification with someone, some group, some message, or some event” (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 422).

³¹²It must be granted that Jesus’s body was not buried under the ground, but in a tomb (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, footnote 43, p. 934).

What's the Difference?

Appendix I: The Church Ordinance of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is so named because it is so called in 1 Corinthians 11:20.³¹³ It is also known by other names, such as "communion"³¹⁴ (based on the KJV rendering of 1 Cor 10:16), "the Lord's Table" ("the table of the Lord," 1 Cor 10:21), "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42; cf. 1 Cor 10:16), and "the Eucharist."³¹⁵

The institution of the Lord's Supper is found in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, and Luke 22:14-20 (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23-30).³¹⁶ Its observance by the early church is alluded to in Acts 2:42 (Jerusalem) and 20:6-7 (Troas).

The Lord's Supper: An Ordinance

That the Lord's Supper is an ordinance is seen by the fact that it meets the four criteria for an ordinance suggested by Rolland McCune ("Systematic Theology III" class notes, p. 126):

- 5) The Lord's Supper was authorized by Christ (Matt 26:26-29).
- 6) The Lord's Supper symbolizes a saving truth (1 Cor 11:26).
- 7) The Lord's Supper was given a command for perpetuation (Luke 22:19).

³¹³Technically, the "Lord's Supper" referred to in 1 Corinthians 11:20 is the "agape [love] feast" (1 Cor 11:17-34 and Jude 12), of which the observance of the ordinance was a part. In time, the feast faded (in the 4th century A.D.; Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 427). Consequently, most churches today observe the ordinance in and of itself. "The fact that Paul could counsel its [the feast's] suspension in the church [in 1 Cor 11:22 and 34] excludes it from being an ordinance" (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 427).

³¹⁴In this regard, A. H. Strong (quoted in Rolland McCune, "Systematic Theology III" class notes, p. 135) states that the Lord's Supper is "the highest expression of church fellowship."

³¹⁵The term "eucharist" is derived from the Greek verb *eucharisteo* ("I give thanks"), found in Matthew 26:27, Mark 14:23, Luke 22:17, 19, and 1 Corinthians 11:24. Because of the connotation of the term (due especially to the Roman Catholic use and understanding of it; see below), it is best to avoid calling the Lord's Supper the "Eucharist."

³¹⁶The Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper "in the night in which He was betrayed" (1 Cor 11:23), "Maundy Thursday." The reason why this day is called "Maundy" Thursday is due to the fact that it was on this day that Jesus told His disciples that He was giving them a "new commandment" (John 13:34), and the Latin word for commandment is *mandatum*.

- 8) The Lord's Supper was practiced by the early church (Acts 2:42, et. al.).
The Lord's Supper: The Elements

The elements used in the Lord's Supper are two: 1) the "bread" (Matt 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, and 1 Cor 11:23f) and 2) the "fruit of the vine" (Matt 26:29, Mark 14:25, and Luke 22:18)/the "cup" (Matt 26:27, Mark 14:23, Luke 22:17, 20, and 1 Cor 11:25f). The (unleavened) bread (most Baptist churches use unleavened crackers) represents the body of the Lord Jesus (Matt 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:24, 27, and 29), while the (unfermented)³¹⁷ "fruit of the vine"/"cup" (most Baptist churches use grape juice) represents His blood (Matt 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25, and 27).

The Lord's Supper: Its Frequency

According to 1 Corinthians 11:25 and 26, the Lord's Supper is to be observed "often." This begs the question, How often? Some (based on Acts 2:46³¹⁸) suggest a daily observance. Others (based on Acts 20:7) suggest a weekly observance.³¹⁹ Ultimately, the frequency of observance is at the discretion of each individual local church. The Lord's Supper should be observed often enough that its significance is not forgotten (Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor 11:24-25), but no so often that it loses its significance.

The Lord's Supper: Its Administrator

Like baptism, the Lord's Supper is a local church ordinance. Therefore, its only proper observance is under the auspices of a local church.³²⁰

³¹⁷Even if the "fruit of the vine" used by Christ at the institution of the Lord's Supper was fermented, it was so diluted with water as to render it non-intoxicating. Thus, the use of modern-day wine (which is so undiluted as to render it intoxicating) in the observance of the Lord's Supper should be avoided in either case.

³¹⁸In the opinion of this writer, Acts 2:46 is speaking of a common meal, not the observance of the Lord's Supper (as in Acts 2:42). Notice the presence of the definite article in Acts 2:42 ("the breaking of bread") compared to its absence in Acts 2:46 ("breaking bread"). Furthermore, notice the accompanying words in verse 46: "they were taking their meals together."

³¹⁹"In actuality it has been the practice of most of the churches throughout its history to celebrate the Lord's Supper every week when believers gather" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 999).

³²⁰"Since the local church is the only Biblically recognized group in charge of the stewardship of spiritual things, Baptists have always contended that this ordinance should be administered by a church and not by schools, conferences or individuals" (Paul Jackson, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church*, p. 73). "It [the Lord's Supper] is to be celebrated by the assembled church. It is not a solitary observance on the part of individuals. No 'showing forth' [1 Cor 11:26] is possible except in company" (A. H. Strong, quoted in Rolland McCune, "Systematic Theology III" class notes, p. 140). Robert Saucy (*The Church in God's Program*, p.

Because the local church is the “custodian of the ordinances” (Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology III” class notes, p. 132), it has the right to authorize any one of its members to officiate the Lord’s Supper. Thus, if a church is without a pastor, it can continue to observe the Lord’s Supper. Furthermore, a local church can authorize the private serving of the ordinance to one of its members (a “shut-in,” one convalescing, etc.). In the opinion of this writer, however, such a practice should be discouraged.³²¹

The Lord’s Supper: Its Participants

Who should be allowed to participate in the observance of the Lord’s Supper? Based on Acts 2:41-42 and 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, the prerequisites to observing the Lord’s Supper appear to be four (cf. Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology III” class notes, pp. 137-138):

1. Those who have been saved (“those who had received his word” in Acts 2:41 preceding “They were continually devoting themselves ... to the breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42)
2. Those who have been baptized (“were baptized” in Acts 2:41 preceding “They were continually devoting themselves ... to the breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42)³²²

³²¹So also Paul Jackson (*The Doctrine and Administration of the Church*, p. 73): “The pastor should not carry the communion to individuals and administer it personally. This cannot help but lead to looseness of administration and even to schism.”

³²²... [A]s union with Christ [symbolized by baptism] precedes communion with Him [symbolized by the Lord’s Supper], so the symbols of these blessed facts belong in that logical order” (Paul Jackson, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church*, p. 73). “... [M]any Protestants would argue from the meaning of baptism and the meaning of the Lord’s Supper that, ordinarily, *only those who have been baptized* should participate in the Lord’s Supper. This is because baptism is so clearly a symbol of *beginning* the Christian life, while the Lord’s Supper is clearly a symbol of *continuing* the Christian life” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 996; emphasis his; Grudem himself, however, rejects baptism as a prerequisite).

231) wrongly (in the opinion of this writer) leaves room for observance of the Lord’s Supper outside the auspices of the local church: “While its normal celebration is for the established church, this does not seem to preclude its observance under other conditions. Christ instituted it for the disciples before the church was inaugurated, and surely the promise of His presence in the midst of two or three (Mt 18:20) may be appropriated in the case of the supper when necessary. The experience of unity of the body, however, is best served in the larger gathering of the church.”

3. Those who have united in membership with the serving church (“were added about three thousand souls” in Acts 2:41 preceding “They were continually devoting themselves ... to the breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42)
4. Those who are not living in sin or are not under church discipline (1 Cor 11:27-32)

Ultimately, each local church determines whom it invites to participate in its observance of the Lord’s Supper. Amongst Bible-believing churches, three views predominate:

1. Open communion--any believer present may participate
2. Close communion--any member of the serving church, as well as any member of a church of like faith and practice, may participate³²³
3. Closed communion--only members of the serving church may participate

While “open” (pun intended) to the close view, this writer is more comfortable with the closed view.³²⁴

³²³“Most Baptist churches today accept the word of the potential participant that he is indeed a member in good standing of a sister church of like faith and practice; historically, Baptists have required letters of recommendation from the sister church before extending communion as a courtesy to transient believers. The latter is probably the best alternative, but is unlikely ever to be revived since it would require a policy shift by several churches simultaneously in order to be effective” (Mark Snoeberger, “Doctrines 5: Ecclesiology and Angelology” class notes, p. 47).

³²⁴The following citations, while not implying endorsement of the closed position by those being cited, nevertheless appear (in the opinion of this writer) to lead to such a position. “Should visitors be excluded if they are believers? Not necessarily. As a courtesy they could participate. But since discipline by a local church and fellowship within a local church are related to the Supper, then normally only those who are clearly associated with that local church should partake of the Supper in that group” (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 426). “Strictly speaking, ... the privileges of a Church are coextensive with the authority of the Church. A right to the communion, therefore, is limited to those over whom the Church exercises the right of discipline; that is, its own members. Consequently, if the members of sister churches are invited to partake, it is an act of courtesy proffered, and not a right allowed. This rule would of itself forbid a general, open, or free communion, since that would bring in persons whose characters the Church could not know, and whom, if they were unworthy, the Church could not discipline or exclude” (Edward T. Hiscox, quoted in Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology III” class notes, p. 140). “First Corinthians 5:11 also seems to indicate that the enforcement of church discipline (clearly a church function in verses 2, 13; cf. also Matt 18:17; 2 Cor 2:6) includes the withholding of fellowship and specifically of *eating*. Whether this is a precise reference to the Lord’s Table is disputed, but it certainly *includes* the Lord’s Table. A survey of Baptist manuals shows that Baptists have historically taken this understanding with extraordinary seriousness. One of the most frequent occasions for church discipline in early Baptist history was the failure to attend the church’s celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Failure to attend was interpreted as either (a) an attitude of disgruntledness or disharmony that constituted schism, or (b) an attempt to avoid accountability to the church. Communion and church discipline are integrally related in the life of the church. See especially Mark Dever, ed., *Polity* (Washington DC: Center for

Church Reform, 2002)” (Mark Snoeberger, “Doctrines 5: Ecclesiology and Angelology” class notes, p. 45; emphasis his). “Communion is the God-ordained means for the church to police and correct the conduct of her members” (ibid., p. 47). “In principle this practice [closed communion] is valid: a church cannot evaluate the behavior of strangers or exercise discipline on them (1 Cor 5:13)--it is possible to abet an estranged member who is fleeing accountability to his own church by serving him communion” (ibid.).

The Lord's Supper: Its Significance

Throughout church history, there have been four basic views as to the significance of the Lord's Supper, particularly in relation to the presence of Christ in the elements. Millard Erickson (*Christian Theology*, p. 1113; emphasis his) nicely summarizes the four views (cf. Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 362; and Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine*, chart 80, pp. 124-125):

1. The bread and wine *are* the physical body and blood of Christ.
2. The bread and wine *contain* the physical body and blood.
3. The bread and wine *contain spiritually* the body and blood.
4. They *represent* the body and blood.

Transubstantiation: The Roman Catholic View

During the "Mass"³²⁵, Roman Catholics observe the "Eucharist." At the point in the Eucharist when the priest "consecrates" the elements³²⁶, they allegedly change substance, becoming the actual body and blood of Christ, though continuing to look, feel, smell, and taste like bread and wine. This view is called "transubstantiation"³²⁷, which means "a change of substance" (Enns, p. 360).

The problems with this view are many:

1. It misinterprets Christ's words, "This is My body" (Matt 26:26, et. al.) and "This is my blood" (Matt 26:28, et. al.) in a crassly literal way, rather than in the metaphorical way they were intended to be understood (cf. "I am the door of the sheep" in John 10:7 and "I am the true vine" in John 15:1).³²⁸

³²⁵The name "Mass" is derived from the Latin word *missa*, from the Latin verb *mittere*, "to dismiss." This is taken from the Latin phrase, *ite, missa est*, meaning "Go, you are dismissed," uttered by the priest at the conclusion of the service (Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, p. 213).

³²⁶The priest consecrates the body with the words, "This is my body" (Latin: *Hoc est corpus meum*).

³²⁷Robert Saucy (*The Church in God's Program*, p. 221) cites the Council of Trent's 1551 declaration in this regard: "But since Christ our Redeemer declared that to be truly His own body which He offered under the form of bread, it has, therefore, always been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy council now declares it anew, that by the consecration of the bread and wine a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This change the holy Catholic Church properly and appropriately calls transubstantiation."

³²⁸Roman Catholic interpreters make the same error in their interpretation of Jesus' Bread of Life Discourse in John 6, taking Christ's words in verses 50-58 literally for eating and drinking, instead of metaphorically for believing (see esp. v. 35).

2. Christ's body (and the blood circulating within it), being a human body, could only be in one place at one time. Therefore, it could not be both before the disciples and in Christ's hands at the same time. Neither can it presently be both in heaven and in every place the Catholic Mass is celebrated.³²⁹
3. Contrary to all other miracles performed by Christ and others in the NT, which were visible, the "miracle" of transubstantiation is invisible (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 959).
4. Partaking of blood was forbidden by God and abhorrent to Jews (see Gen 9:4, Lev 3:17, 7:26-27, 17:10-14, Deut 12:23, and Acts 15:29).

³²⁹Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 960) rightly states: "Both the Roman Catholic view and the Lutheran view contend that the communicant is actually feeding upon the physical body and blood of Christ. But since both views advocate that Christ is physically present in the elements, grave theological problems arise relative to the nature of Christ's humanity since both must ascribe the attribute of ubiquity ('everywhere-ness') to his humanity. But this is to destroy the true humanity of Christ and to forsake Chalcedon's Christology."

5. According to Catholic dogma, the Eucharist is a re-presentation (rather than a representation) of the body and blood of Christ/a re-enactment (rather than a remembrance) of the death of Christ, a teaching that flies in the face of such Scriptures as John 19:30 ("It is finished!"), Romans 6:10, Hebrews 1:3, 9:25-26, and 10:10-14.³³⁰

Consubstantiation: The Lutheran View

Similar to the Roman Catholic view and fraught with many of the same problems is the view championed by Martin Luther, commonly called "consubstantiation" (lit. "with the substance"). According to Luther, the literal body and blood of Christ are present "in, with, and under" the elements served in the Lord's Supper. "The example sometimes given is to say that Christ's body is present in the bread as water is present in a sponge--the water is not the sponge, but is present "in, with, and under" a sponge, and is present wherever the sponge is present" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 994). Thus, the elements do not become the body and blood of Christ (as in transubstantiation), but contain the body and blood of Christ.

The Reformed or "Dynamic" View

Championed by John Calvin, the Reformed or Dynamic View, like the two previous views, alleges that Christ is truly present in the elements. Unlike the two previous views, however, the presence is not physical, but spiritual. The Larger Westminster Catechism (cited in Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 966) puts it this way: "As the body and blood are not corporally or carnally present in, with, or under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, and yet are spiritually present to the faith of the receiver, no less truly and really than the elements themselves are to their outward senses; so they that worthily communicate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, do therein feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal and carnal, but in a spiritual manner, yet truly and really, while by faith they receive and apply unto themselves Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death."

³³⁰Significantly, there were no seats upon which the priests could sit, either in the Tabernacle or in the Temple. The priests, thus, had to stand (Heb 10:11). When Jesus, however, entered the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 8:2, 9:11, 24), He sat down, signifying that the work of redemption was complete (Heb 10:12). As Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p. 618) states: ". . . [S]itting at God's right hand is a dramatic indication of the completion of Christ's work of redemption. Just as a human being will sit down at the completion of a large task to enjoy the satisfaction of having accomplished it, so Jesus sat at the right hand of God, visibly demonstrating that his work of redemption was complete."

The "Symbolic" View

Championed by Ulrich Zwingli, the Symbolic View understands the elements in the Lord's Supper to be mere symbols of the body and blood of Christ. This is the view of most Baptists. While certainly closer to the Reformed View than either of the other two views, this view goes one step further than the former by arguing for a symbolic, rather than spiritual, presence of Christ in the elements³³¹ (this is not to say that the Symbolic View denies any spiritual dynamic to the ordinance). Millard Erickson (*Christian Theology*, p. 1121) nicely distinguishes the Reformed View from the Symbolic View: "We might say, then, that it is not so much that the sacrament brings Christ to the communicant [the Reformed View] as that the believer's faith brings Christ to the sacrament [the Symbolic View]." Charles Spurgeon (quoted in Wayne Mack & David Swavely, *Life in the Father's House*, p. 108; emphasis Spurgeon's) explains the symbolic view this way: "Never mind that bread and wine, unless you can use them as folks often use their spectacles. What do they use them for? To look at? No, to look *through* them. So, use the bread and wine as a pair of spectacles. Look through them, and do not be satisfied until you can say, 'Yes, yes, I can see the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'"

³³¹"In this regard it is significant that Paul's account of the Lord's Supper says nothing about the presence of Christ" (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 1122).

What's the Difference?

Appendix J: Church Government

How is the local church to be governed? Can one discern a definitive pattern in the New Testament? If so, is such a pattern merely descriptive (telling us what they did), or is it also prescriptive (telling us what we must also do)? Is there one form of church government clearly taught in Scripture, or a blend of several forms? Is the form mandated? If not, may each church choose its own form, based upon the principle of expediency? This lesson will seek to provide some help in answering these questions.

Forms of Church Government

There are three general forms³³² of church government currently in use, with the different forms constituting one of the differences between denominations.³³³

1. Monarchical Forms of Church Government

In the monarchical (rule by one) form of church government, ultimate authority resides in one individual. This is the form utilized by Catholicism, Episcopalianism, et. al.³³⁴ Monarchialism in its purest form is found in Catholicism, in which ultimate authority over the entire church resides in the bishop of Rome (the pope). In Episcopalianism, ultimate authority resides in the archbishop. In distinction from the Roman Catholic pope, who rules over the entire church, each Episcopalian archbishop only rules over a certain geographic segment of the church.

³³²Millard Erickson (*Christian Theology*, p. 1086) summarizes the difference between the three: "We may think of the episcopal system as a structuring of the church along monarchical or imperial lines. The presbyterian form is like a representative democracy, the congregational a direct democracy."

³³³... [T]he advocates of the various forms of church government agree that God is (or has) the ultimate authority. Where they differ is in their conceptions of how or through whom he expresses or exercises it" (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 1069).

³³⁴Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 904) lists the churches that utilize this form of government: the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox Churches, the Church of England, the Episcopalian Church in the United States, and the United Methodist Church in the United States.

2. Oligarchical Forms of Church Government

In the oligarchical (rule by few) form of church government, ultimate authority resides in a few individuals. This is the form utilized by Presbyterianism, et. al.

3. Democratic Forms of Church Government

In the democratic (rule by all) form of church government (aka congregationalism), ultimate authority resides equally in every individual in the church. This is the form utilized by Baptists, et. al.

A fourth form of church government is "Erastianism"³³⁵ (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 907). In this form, the church is governed by the state. Erastianism is found in the Lutheran Church in Germany and in the Church of England (the Anglican Church), with the latter also incorporating the Episcopalian form of government.

There are some groups that advocate no official, formal, set form of church government, such as the Quakers and the Plymouth Brethren.

Which Form is the Most Biblical?

³³⁵Named after its proponent, 16th century Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus.

Being a Baptist, it should come as no surprise that this writer espouses the democratic/congregational form of church government. That ultimate authority resides in the congregation is seen by the fact that the local church is the ultimate judicatory in matters of church discipline (Matt 18:15-17, 1 Cor 5:12-13, and 2 Cor 2:6). It is also seen by the fact that churches made their own decisions, rather than having such decisions made for them by an outside individual or group of individuals (Acts 6:3, 5, 11:22, 15:3, 22, 1 Cor 16:3, and 2 Cor 8:19). The monarchical forms of church government are arguably extrabiblical, arising not out of the New Testament, but out of postbiblical church history.³³⁶ Robert Saucy (*The Church in God's Program*, p. 108) gives some of the historical reasons for the rise of the extrabiblical office of interchurch (vis-à-vis intrachurch) bishop. While the oligarchical forms of church government appear to have some limited, biblical warrant³³⁷, in the opinion of this writer, the democratic forms have more.

While, in one sense, authority in the local church resides in the congregation (via its prerogative to elect and eject a senior pastor), in another sense it resides in the senior pastor by virtue of the nature of his office. A local church exercises authority by selecting a senior pastor. Once that senior pastor is installed and as long as he holds office, he exercises authority over the local church he pastors. This authority ends when he exits the office, at which time the congregation exercises authority by selecting another senior pastor.³³⁸

³³⁶It is acknowledged even by its advocates that the episcopal or prelatic form of church government is nowhere mentioned in the New Testament" (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 905). This fact does not preclude proponents of the monarchical forms of church government from pointing to Scripture in support of their position, citing such passages as Matthew 16:18-19, Acts 14:23, and Titus 1:5. In regards to Acts 14:23, proponents of democratic forms of church government point out that the Greek verb translated "appointed" by the NASB can also mean "to vote by stretching out the hand" or "to create or appoint by vote" (*The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 668). In regards to this, see Rolland McCune ("Systematic Theology III" class notes, p. 102), Henry Thiessen (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p. 322), Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology*, p. 408), and Robert Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 897, footnote 3).

³³⁷It can safely be said that elements of both the presbyterian and congregational forms of church government find support in Scripture" (Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 359). In a similar way, Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology*, p. 411) states: "The New Testament picture seems to include a blend of congregational and federal government, limited to the local level." Besides Scriptures which speak of elders (plural), such as Acts 20:17 and James 5:14, another passage proponents of the oligarchic forms of church government point to is 1 Timothy 4:14.

³³⁸It is evident, therefore, that the Lord has designed the church with internal, interlocking powers and responsibilities. The church is to be subject to the pastor. Yet the pastor is subject to the church, in another sense, for he is called by them and may be disciplined by them" (Paul

Admittedly, these parameters are theoretical and, therefore, somewhat static. In practice, the interplay between congregational and pastoral authority is much more dynamic, with continual give-and-take. As the pastor lovingly leads (i.e., acts in the best interests of the congregation) and as the congregation sweetly submits to his leadership, the church functions as the unified body God desires. "There is no problem here except for those who will not be subject to the Head of the church. It is not difficult for a Bible-taught church to be subject to the overseer or pastor that God has sent. Neither is it difficult for a faithful pastor to be sensitive to the will of God's people. What a lovely and delightful relationship exists between pastor, deacons and people when all are subject to Christ the Head" (Paul Jackson, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church*, p. 48).

Jackson, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church*, p. 48).

A Few Corollaries and Caveats

One corollary of the congregational form of church government is that each local church is autonomous, or self-governing. No individual (such as a pope, archbishop, bishop, or any denominational official) or group of individuals (such as a church council³³⁹) outside the local church has any authority over any local church. For this reason, Baptist churches have tended to be independent/anti-denominational. While still maintaining its autonomy (since it makes the choice), a local church can choose to fellowship with any other church or group of churches it desires. Such interchurch fellowship is found in the New Testament (the Acts 15 “Jerusalem Council”; the offering for the church in Jerusalem: Rom 15:25-26 and 2 Cor 8:19).

Another corollary of the congregational form of church government is that there is to be a separation between the church and the state. A key verse in this regard is Matthew 22:21, wherein Christ said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

The Baptist distinctive of the priesthood of the believer, the fact that each believer has direct access to God, is sometimes used to support a purely democratic form of church government (see Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 1080). However, equal access to God does not necessarily demand equal authority in the church (see Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 409).

What’s the Difference?

Part 3: Examining the Differences Between Baptists and Denominations Lesson 6: **Methodism**

I. History

Methodism got its start as a reform movement within the Anglican Church in eighteenth century England. Its beginnings can be traced to 1729 when a group of Oxford University students formed a religious club on campus. Members of the club were soon dubbed “Methodists” because they were so methodical in their activities (Berry, p. 269). These activities included stated times of prayer and Bible reading (Mead & Hill, p. 194). The leader of the club was John Wesley, the son of an Anglican clergyman. Other members of the club included John’s younger brother, Charles³⁴⁰ and the legendary George Whitefield. In spite of their outward piety, all three were unregenerate until God saved each of them over the course of the next decade.³⁴¹ After being snubbed by the Anglican Church, the three traveled across the countryside, preaching the Word. God mightily used them to spark a great revival, not only in their native England, but also in America, a revival known as the First Great Awakening. In the opinion of many historians, this Methodist-led revival was the key factor in preventing England from succumbing to the kind of revolution that nearly destroyed France at the time. During his lifetime, John Wesley encouraged the formation of Methodist “societies” within the Church of England. Shortly after his death in 1791, however, the Methodists broke away from the Anglican Church to form their own church.

³⁴⁰Charles Wesley is best known for writing over 7,500 hymns, including “And Can It Be?”; “O for a Thousand Tongues”; “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing”; “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”; and “Rejoice, the Lord is King!”

³⁴¹John Wesley was converted at approximately 8:45 p.m. on May 24, 1738 at a meeting of Moravians on Aldersgate Street in London while the preacher was reading from the preface of Martin Luther’s commentary on Romans. Wesley’s testified: “... I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death” (cited in Ken Curtis, et. al., *The 100 Most Important Events in Christian History*, p. 137; emphasis his). Charles Wesley was converted three days prior to John.

³³⁹However, see Acts 16:4.

Like other denominations born in western Europe, so Methodism came to the shores of America, where its spread was widespread due to many circuit-riding Methodist ministers.³⁴² The key figure in early American Methodism was a man by the name of Francis Asbury.³⁴³ The most well-known Methodist in fundamentalist history was Bob Jones, Sr., evangelist and founder of Bob Jones University.

Methodism spawned many other groups, which together are sometimes referred to as "holiness churches," due to their emphasis on piety/holiness. These other groups include the Wesleyan Church (which split from the Methodist Church in the middle of the nineteenth century over slavery); the Church of the Nazarene (which split from the Methodist Church in the early part of the twentieth century); and the Salvation Army (started by Methodist minister, William Booth in England at the end of the nineteenth century).

As with the other major denominations, so Methodism has many denominations within its denomination. The mainline denomination is the United Methodist Church (the UMC³⁴⁴), which was formed in 1968 as the result of a merger between the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Another major branch is the African Methodist Episcopal Church (the AME), which split from the main line in 1816 over alleged racism within the Methodist Episcopal Church. A conservative branch is the Free Methodist Church.

II. Some³⁴⁵ Erroneous Methodist Beliefs

A. Episcopal form of church government

This is one of the things Methodism retained from its Anglican heritage.

³⁴²According to Berry (p. 270), John Wesley traveled an average of 4,000 miles per year in itinerant ministry, with most of the miles coming on horseback. During his lifetime, he preached over 40,000 sermons (ibid.).

³⁴³Francis Asbury became the most important figure in early American Methodism. His energetic devotion to the principles of Wesleyan theology, ministry, and organization shaped Methodism in America in a way unmatched by any other individual" (www.umc.org).

³⁴⁴The UMC is theologically moderate at best. It also ordains women.

³⁴⁵For an examination of other Methodist beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

B. Baptismal aberrations, such as baptizing infants (paedobaptism) and baptizing by sprinkling.

The following statement from the UMC's website appears to espouse baptismal regeneration: "We are initiated and incorporated into this community of faith [Christ's universal church] by Baptism, receiving the promise of the Spirit that re-creates and transforms us."

C. Pietism

In a classic case of "getting the cart before the horse," the UMC website states: "Theology is the servant of piety." It goes on to state: "Devising formal definitions of doctrine has been less pressing for United Methodists than summoning people to faith and nurturing them in the knowledge and love of God."

While it is certainly biblical to be pious/holy, piety must flow from the foundation of sound doctrine (a point especially found in the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus). Many of the American mainline denominations succumbed to theological liberalism/modernism a century ago because they misguidedly elevated piety over theology. Their subsequent neglect of theology caused their theological foundations to crumble and, with them, true piety. Gerald Priest ("Church History III" class notes, p. 101) avers that the first evangelical denomination in America to succumb to apostasy was the Methodist Episcopal Church.

D. Arminianism

Methodism is Arminianistic in its soteriology (doctrine of salvation).³⁴⁶ Arminianism, named after a sixteenth century theologian named Arminius, is essentially a man-centered system. Because Arminianism is synergistic (salvation is the work of both God and man), it denies or misunderstands such doctrines as the total depravity of man, the unconditionality of election, the (ultimate) irresistibility of God's saving grace, and the perseverance of the saints. In keeping with its Arminianistic bent, Methodism teaches the extrabiblical doctrine of prevenient grace³⁴⁷ and the unbiblical doctrine that one can lose his or her salvation.

³⁴⁶George Whitefield, however, was Calvinistic.

³⁴⁷While the grace of God is undivided, it precedes salvation as 'prevenient grace,' continues in 'justifying grace,' and is brought to fruition in 'sanctifying grace' (www.umc.org). Prevenient grace is an alleged endowment given by God to every sinner, neutralizing the sinner's anti-God predisposition and making the sinner capable of coming to Christ of his or her own volition apart from any special work of God's Spirit.

E. Second Work of Grace

Methodism, like many other “holiness” groups, teaches that the believer should seek a post-conversion sanctification experience. John Wesley taught that this second work of grace brought the believer into a state of “perfection,” though his definition of perfection, being free from voluntary transgression of known law, was deficient.³⁴⁸

III. Our Response

A. The congregational form of church government

See the lesson on Anglicanism/Episcopalianism, as well as Appendix J.

B. Baptism is for believers (it is not for infants) and is by immersion (not sprinkling).

See the lesson on Catholicism, as well as Appendix H.

C. Doctrine determines behavior.

While the Wesleys, et. al. were intent on correcting the lack of spiritual vitality in the Anglican Church of their day, they, and especially their followers, overcorrected. Their deprecation of doctrine sowed the seeds that have taken root and produced rotten fruit within Methodism.

D. Calvinism

In contrast to the man-centered soteriological system of Arminianism is the God-centered soteriological system commonly known as Calvinism (named after sixteenth century theologian, John Calvin), a system that is monergistic (salvation is solely God’s doing, though man does participate) and affirms the biblical doctrines of the total depravity of man, the unconditionality of election, the (ultimate) irresistibility of saving grace, and the perseverance of the saints (in faith and in faithfulness). While Calvin himself had his problems and while some (hyper-Calvinists) have taken Calvinism to an unbiblical extreme, Calvinism does a much better job than Arminianism (in the estimation of this writer) of being faithful to the biblical witness to the doctrines of salvation. Furthermore, Calvinism makes God, rather than man, the Hero in the drama of redemption.

Prevenient grace is not only an extrabiblical doctrine, but it is also an unbiblical doctrine. Salvation cannot be lost (see the lesson on Catholicism).

E. One Work of Grace (with three aspects: justification, sanctification, and glorification)

Sanctification is a process that begins the moment a person is converted and continues unabated until the moment a person is glorified. It does not begin with a punctiliar/point-in-time event subsequent to salvation. The believer should not seek a second work of grace. Per Philippians 1:6, the (one) work of grace has already commenced (justification), is continuing (sanctification), and will be completed (glorification). Sanctification is simply a matter of daily (2 Cor 4:16) and diligently (2 Pet 1:5) adding to one’s faith (2 Pet 1:5-7) by utilizing the means of sanctification God has prescribed (Bible intake, prayer, local church involvement, etc.).

The doctrine that one can reach a state of perfection (in the true sense of the word) this side of glory is an unbiblical doctrine (see 1 John 1:8 and 10; cf. Phil 3:12f).

Resources for Further Study:

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 194-207)
“Denominations Comparison” pamphlet by Rose Publishing
“What’s the Difference?” Sunday School series by Brown
The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church by Berry (chp. 12)
The Marks of a Methodist by Gerald Kennedy (1960)
<http://www.umc.org> (website for the United Methodist Church)

³⁴⁸According to Bruce Demarest (*The Cross and Salvation*, p. 392), “Wesley held the seemingly contradictory statement that Christian perfection admits of degrees and is capable of increase or decrease.” According to the UMC website, by perfectionism John Wesley meant having a heart “habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor” and “having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked.” According to Kennedy (p. 54), John Wesley “said that men could be perfect in their love and their motives” and that “if a man becomes single-minded, then so far as his love is concerned, he has reached perfection.” Kennedy (p. 59) goes on to confess: “This mark of a Methodist [perfection] ... is difficult to define.”

What's the Difference?

Part 3: Examining the Differences Between Baptists and Denominations Lesson 7: Pentecostalism (including the charismatic movement)

I. History

The Pentecostal/charismatic³⁴⁹ movement is one that permeates many facets of Christendom. It is second only to Catholicism in number of worldwide adherents. The most well-known Pentecostal/charismatic group is the Assemblies of God denomination (the largest denomination in the NAE, the National Association of Evangelicals³⁵⁰). Other Pentecostal/charismatic groups include the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel³⁵¹, Calvary Chapel churches, and Vineyard churches³⁵². Respected

³⁴⁹The designation, "Pentecostal" comes from the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit manifested through glossolalia (speaking in tongues) on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The designation, "charismatic" comes from the Greek word for spiritual gifts, *charismata*. Technically, there is a difference between these two designations. "Pentecostal" would be the more traditional, specific, denominational, and doctrinally-descriptive term, while "charismatic" would be the more modern, general, transdenominational, and experientially-descriptive term. Pentecostalism began around 1900, emerging from Methodism (Berry, p. 303), while the charismatic movement (sometimes dubbed "neo-pentecostalism") began around 1960. The so-called "third wave" (aka the "signs and wonders" movement) began in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

³⁵⁰While evangelicalism has embraced the Pentecostal/charismatic movement, fundamentalism has rightly rejected it. "By 1928, fundamentalist churches formally 'disfellowshipped' all Pentecostals from their ranks" (Berry, p. 302).

³⁵¹The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel was started in the late 1910s/early 1920s by Pentecostal evangelist, Aimee Semple McPherson, who was quite a colorful figure, to say the least (see Berry, pp. 313-315). The designation, "foursquare gospel" came from McPherson's "four major cornerstones of Christian doctrine: Christ as Savior, Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, Great Physician, and Soon-Coming King" (Berry, p. 308).

³⁵²A Vineyard/"third wave" church that caused too many waves was one near the Toronto airport, a recipient of the so-called "laughing revival" of the 1990s. Due to its excesses, this vine was removed from the Vineyard. For critiques of the laughing revival, see chapter 4 of *Counterfeit Revival* by Hank Hanegraaff and chapter 6 of *Reckless Faith* by John MacArthur.

Pentecostal/charismatic scholars include Gordon Fee (NT commentator) and Wayne Grudem³⁵³ (theologian). Other noteworthy Pentecostals/charismatics of recent days include Pat Robertson (of "700 Club" fame), James Ryle³⁵⁴ (Promise Keepers leader), C. Peter Wagner (church growth guru), Chuck Smith (founder of the original Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, CA), and the late John Wimber³⁵⁵ (founder of the Vineyard movement). The leading Pentecostal/charismatic magazine is called *Charisma*.

II. Some³⁵⁶ Erroneous Pentecostal/Charismatic Beliefs

A. Extrabiblical revelation

Pentecostals/charismatics believe that God is still giving revelation today through such revelatory spiritual gifts as prophecy and glossolalia (speaking in tongues). Rightly has it been said that the Bible of a Pentecostal/charismatic has no back cover.

B. The continuation of the miraculous gifts

Pentecostals/charismatics believe that such miraculous spiritual gifts as healing are still operational today.

According to the Assemblies of God website, belief that "divine healing of the sick is a privilege for Christians today" is number twelve of the "sixteen fundamental truths" of the Assemblies of God.

³⁵³One of the eight people to whom Grudem dedicates his *Systematic Theology* is John Wimber, who, along with Harald Bredesen, "more than anyone else, taught me about the power and work of the Holy Spirit."

³⁵⁴God allegedly revealed to Ryle that He had anointed the Beatles to usher in a charismatic revival. The "four lads from Liverpool" refused the anointing; therefore, God is getting ready to give the anointing to contemporary Christian musicians instead.

³⁵⁵Here's what Wimber once said about the pope: "The pope . . . by the way is very responsive to the charismatic movement, and is himself a born-again evangelical. If you've read any of his texts concerning salvation, you'd know he is preaching the gospel as clear as anybody is preaching it in the world today" (quoted in John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 180).

³⁵⁶For an examination of other Pentecostal/charismatic beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

C. The baptism of the Spirit

Pentecostals/charismatics believe that Spirit baptism is experienced by the believer at a point in time subsequent to salvation. Thus, they call this the "doctrine of subsequence." The visible manifestation of being baptized by the Spirit is speaking in tongues. Like the Methodists to whom they trace their roots, Pentecostals/charismatics believe in a second work of grace essential to sanctification, with Spirit baptism being the second work.

According to the Assemblies of God website, belief that "the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a special experience following salvation" is number seven of the "sixteen fundamental truths" of the Assemblies of God. Belief that "the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is 'speaking in tongues'" is number eight.

D. Experientialism

Experientialism is the belief that personal experience is the ultimate arbiter of truth.³⁵⁷ "There is little doubt that most charismatics, if they are honest with themselves, would have to acknowledge that personal experience--and not Scripture--is the foundation of their belief system" (John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp. 25-26). Berry, in her "clout continuum" for each of the three Pentecostal/charismatic groups she examines: Assemblies of God (p. 305), International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (p. 308), and VineyardUSA (p. 311), places personal experience first and Scripture second.

"Many of us also had convinced ourselves that prophecy ended with the New Testament period . . . until suddenly through the dynamic thrust of the Holy Spirit prophecy comes alive again. Now we wonder how we could have misread the New Testament for so long" (J. Rodman Williams in *The Era of the Spirit*, pp. 27-28).

"What brought about the change? How did I turn 180 degrees? The process took about fifteen years. First, in the later sixties, I had an unforgettable experience" (C. Peter Wagner in *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, p. 22).

E. Mysticism

Mysticism is the "belief" that God works independent of the human intellect; rather, He works through gut feelings, intuitions, hunches, premonitions, etc.³⁵⁸ Mystics seek for a direct, personal religious experience apart from the mind. In its extreme form, this philosophy leads to the idea that the more illogical something is, the more godly it is. The Pentecostal/charismatic movement is rife with this ideology: "The entire movement has absorbed the erroneous notion that whatever is truly spiritual must transcend or bypass people's rational senses" (John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 185). Pentecostals/charismatics have a disdain for theology, and it shows.³⁵⁹ Arthur Johnson (*Faith Misguided: Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism*, p. 113) has called the Pentecostal/charismatic movement "the zenith of mysticism."

F. Arminianism

Like the Methodists to whom they trace their roots, most Pentecostals/charismatics are Arminian, rather than Calvinistic, in their soteriology (doctrine of salvation).

G. Women Preachers

While more and more groups are allowing for women ministers, most Pentecostal/charismatic groups always have.

III. Our Response

A. The revelatory gifts were temporary.

³⁵⁸Mead & Hill (p. 321) define mysticism as "knowledge of God by immediate experience; a direct and intimate consciousness of divine reality."

³⁵⁹Rene Pache represents the Pentecostal/charismatic sentiment well when he states: "Why be tied to a Book out of the past when one can communicate every day with the living God?" (*The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, p. 319).

³⁵⁷For a good analysis of this philosophy, see chapter 4 of *Christian Apologetics* by Norman Geisler.

According to 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, revelatory spiritual gifts such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, and knowledge were temporary, ceasing with the completion of the canon of Scripture (v. 10's "the perfect") at the end of the first century A.D.³⁶⁰ Once the NT was complete, there was no longer any need for the gift of prophecy.³⁶¹ Accordingly, according to Chrysostom and Augustine (two of the most renowned figures in the early centuries of the church), tongues had ceased by their day (John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp. 284-285).

- B. The miraculous gifts, being revelatory-confirming, were also temporary.

The purpose of the miraculous spiritual gifts was to authenticate the communicators of divine revelation (see 1 Kgs 17:24, John 20:30-31, Acts 2:22, 14:3, 2 Cor 12:12, and Heb 2:3-4). Not surprisingly, there were three (and only three) historic periods during which miracles took place: the time of Moses and Joshua, the time of Elijah and Elisha, and the time of Christ and the apostles, all three of which were periods of revelatory activity. Since special revelation ceased with the close of the canon of Scripture at the end of the first century A.D., so did the miraculous sign gifts.

"Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the Apostolic Church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic age in revelation; and when this revelation period closed, the period of miracle-working had passed by also, as a mere matter of course Therefore it is that the miraculous working which is but the sign of God's revealing power, cannot be expected to continue, and in point of fact does not continue, after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment has been completed" (B.B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, pp. 25-27).

³⁶⁰This "cessationist" interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 is thoroughly and exceptionally argued by R. Bruce Compton, "1 Corinthians 13:8-13 and the Cessation of Miraculous Gifts," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 2004, pp. 97-144.

³⁶¹Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, pp. 1049-1061) argues for a continuation of the gift of prophecy to the present day. An excellent refutation of Grudem's position can be found in Appendix 1 (pp. 127-139) of *The Word of Truth: Scripture--Its Origin, Sufficiency and Relevance* by Robert Sheehan.

Are Miracles Still Happening Today?

In my opinion, no. This is not to say that God is no longer *capable* of performing miracles, only that He has *chosen* not to. The primary rationale for this position is the seemingly inseparable relationship between miracles, special revelation, and the divinely-authorized conduits of special revelation, the OT prophets and the NT apostles. Biblically, one of the primary purposes of miracles was to accredit the divinely-authorized messengers through whom special revelation was mediated, thereby authenticating their revelations as being from God (see 1 Kgs 17:24, John 20:30-31, Acts 2:22, 14:3, 2 Cor 12:12, and Heb 2:3-4). Since such messengers passed from the scene by the end of the first century A.D. with the death of the apostle John (according to Eph 2:20, the apostles were intended to be foundational; hence, once the foundation had been laid, the office of apostle ceased), both special revelation (the canon of Scripture was closed with the writing of the book of Revelation at the end of the first century A.D.) and miracles ceased. Since God is no longer giving special revelation, He is no longer performing miracles. Though God may still do the supernatural, because we do not have an infallible, divinely-appointed interpreter, we cannot with absolute certainty and authority label any alleged supernatural occurrence a "miracle" (in the biblical sense of the term). Accordingly, Rolland McCune ("Systematic Theology I" class notes, p. 76) states: "Since no one is receiving direct revelation today, it is all the more impossible for this channel to be in operation today. There would be no infallible interpreter." Without such an interpreter, how are we to know whether a supernatural occurrence is from God or Satan (2 Thess 2:9 speaks of Satan's "false wonders"; cf. Matt 24:24/Mark 13:22)? Supernatural phenomena can easily be misinterpreted without a supernaturally-endowed interpreter (see, for example, John 12:28-29).

- C. Spirit baptism is positional, not experiential.

Spirit baptism is the judicial placement of each and every believer into the body of Christ (the church) at the moment of salvation (see 1 Cor 12:13). It is not an experience. "It is a fact, not a feeling" (John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 231). Furthermore, the Bible teaches one work of grace, not two (see the lesson on Methodism).

- D. Doctrine interprets experience.

"[God's] word [not experience] is truth" (John 17:17). The Scriptures admonish us to test everything, including every experience, in light of

God's Word (see Acts 17:11, 1 Thess 5:21a, and 1 John 4:1), not vice versa. Experience can be too easily misinterpreted (see, for example, John 12:28-29). It is the power of God's Word that saves (Rom 1:16), not experience, no matter how extraordinary (see Luke 16:31).³⁶²

- E. "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD ... WITH ALL YOUR MIND" (Mark 12:30).

God never bypasses the intellect. Spiritual growth comes through diligent study (see 2 Tim 2:15). There are no shortcuts to spirituality.³⁶³

- H. Calvinism

See the lesson on Methodism.

- I. Only men are to be ministers.

Only masculines are used in the pastoral qualification lists in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. A pastor is to be a husband of one wife (1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:9), not a wife of one husband. Women are not allowed to teach men in the church and thereby exercise authority over them (1 Tim 2:12). Interestingly, the Pentecostal/charismatic theologian, Grudem argues against women ministers (see pp. 937-945 of his *Systematic Theology*, as well as *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, which he co-edited with John Piper).

Resources for Further Study:

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 237-243)

"Denominations Comparison" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church by Berry (chp. 13)

<http://www.ag.org> (website for the Assemblies of God)

³⁶²This point also flies in the face of so-called "power evangelism," the belief prevalent in Pentecostal/charismatic circles that signs and wonders are essential to evangelism. According to Scripture, it is Scripture (Rom 1:16 and 10:17), not signs and wonders (Matt 11:20, Luke 16:31, and John 12:37), that brings about conversion.

³⁶³John MacArthur (*Charismatic Chaos*, p. 304) states: "From the beginning, the charismatic movement has flourished primarily because it promises a shortcut to spiritual maturity It offers believers power, understanding, and spirituality immediately through an experience--without the time, pains, and struggles that are a natural part of any growth process."

What's the Difference?

Appendix K: The Faith Movement

- I. History

Essentially a spin-off of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement, the "Faith Movement" (FM) is a relatively recent phenomenon, though its roots can be traced back several hundreds of years. The "father" of this movement was a man by the name of E.W. Kenyon. Other prominent names in the movement in recent decades include Benny Hinn (Orlando Christian Center)³⁶⁴, Kenneth & Gloria Copeland (*Believer's Voice of Victory* magazine and radio program), Morris Cerullo, Oral Roberts (Oral Roberts University), Kenneth Hagin (Rhema Bible Training Center and *Word of Faith* magazine)³⁶⁵, Paul & Jan Crouch (Trinity Broadcasting Network)³⁶⁶, John Avanzini, Robert Tilton (Word of Faith Family Church & World Outreach Center in Dallas), Marilyn Hickey (*Outpouring* magazine), and Fred Price (Crenshaw Christian Center in Los Angeles). The primary media outlet of the FM is the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN). Though not a denomination per se, the FM is organizationally united via the International Convention of Faith Churches and Ministers.

³⁶⁴Hinn once responded to his opponents on a TBN broadcast by saying: "Somebody's attacking me because of something I'm teaching. Let me tell you something, brother: You watch it! . . . You know, I've looked for one verse in the Bible; I just can't seem to find it. One verse that said 'If you don't like them, kill them.' I really wish I could find it! . . . You stink, frankly--that's the way I think about it! . . . Sometimes I wish God will give me a Holy Ghost machine gun; I'll blow your head off" (Nov. 8, 1990 "Praise-a-thon" broadcast).

³⁶⁵Affectionately referred to as "Dad Hagin," Kenneth Hagin has been the key figure in the FM over the years.

³⁶⁶Paul Crouch once said this of his critics on a TBN broadcast: "I say, To [blazes] with you! Get out of my life! Get out of the way! . . . Get out of God's way; quit blocking God's bridges, or God's going to shoot you if I don't Get out of my life! I don't want to even talk to you or hear you! I don't want to see your ugly face! Get out of my face in Jesus' name" (Apr. 2, 1991 "Praise-a-Thon" broadcast).

II. Some³⁶⁷ Erroneous Faith Movement Beliefs

A. Extrabiblical revelation

FM teachers claim to be the recipients of "revelation knowledge."

"Don't think OCC [Orlando Christian Center] is here to repeat something you heard for the last fifty years. If God called me to repeat things you heard, I shouldn't be here. If we quit giving you new revelations, we're dead" (Benny Hinn, "Benny Hinn" broadcast, Dec. 15, 1991).

B. The deification of man³⁶⁸

"You're not looking at Morris Cerullo--you're looking at God" (quoted in Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, p. 11).

"When you say, 'I am a Christian,' you are saying, 'I am mashiach' in the Hebrew. I am a little messiah walking on earth, in other words. That is a shocking revelation May I say it like this? You are a little god on earth running around" (Benny Hinn, "Praise-a-Thon" broadcast, Nov. 6, 1990).

"Man was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority" (Kenneth Hagin, quoted in Hanegraaff, p. 11).

"When I read in the Bible where He says, 'I Am,' I just smile and say, 'Yes, I Am, too'" (Kenneth Copeland, "The Believer's Voice of Victory" broadcast, July 9, 1987).

"You don't have a god in you, you are one" (Kenneth Copeland, quoted in Hanegraaff, p. 110).

"I am a little god. Critics, be gone!" (Paul Crouch, "Praise the Lord" broadcast, July 7, 1986)

C. Deprecation of God's sovereignty

"The sovereignty of God is the first casualty in the cultic theology of the Faith movement" (Hanegraaff, p. 56).

³⁶⁷For an examination and refutation of other erroneous Faith Movement beliefs, one may consult the "Resources for Further Study" listed at the end of this lesson.

³⁶⁸Listen to these chilling words from the lips of Jim Jones of Jonestown fame: "It is written that ye are gods. I'm a god and you're a god. And I'm a god, and I'm gonna stay a god until you recognize that you're a god. And when you recognize that you're a god, I shall go back into principle and will not appear as a personality. But until I see all of you knowing who you are, I'm gonna be very much what I am--God, almighty God" (NPR broadcast, Apr. 23, 1981).

According to FM adherents, God is not the one calling the shots--man is.

"God has to be given permission to work in this earth realm on behalf of man Yes! You are in control! So, if man has control, who no longer has it? God" (Fred Price, *The Word Study Bible*, p. 1178).

Not only is God not sovereign, but He is also a failure:

"I was shocked when I found out who the biggest failure in the Bible actually is The biggest one in the whole Bible is God" (Kenneth Copeland, "Praise-a-Thon" broadcast, Apr. 1988).

D. The "force of faith"

This concept is seen in such expressions as "making positive or negative confessions," "name it and claim it," "blab it and grab it," or "ask, believe, and receive."

Describing this concept, Hanegraaff (pp. 94-95) says: "Jesus is the MasterCard which will allow you to charge to your heart's content. Your only credit limit is the extent of your own faith."

The idea is that if you say the right words and have enough faith, God is duty-bound to do what you tell Him to do.

E. Denial of the deity of Christ

Christ allegedly told Kenneth Copeland: "I didn't claim I was God; I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in Me" (*Believer's Voice of Victory*, Feb. 1987, p. 9).

F. Trinitarian heresies³⁶⁹

Benny Hinn once went so far as to claim: "God the Father is a person, God the Son is a person, God the Holy Ghost is a person. But each one of them is a triune being by Himself. If I can shock you--and maybe I should--there's nine of them" ("Benny Hinn" broadcast, Oct. 3, 1990).

G. Mysticism

³⁶⁹In light of the prominent role of TBN in the FM, Hanegraaff (p. 39) states: "It is indeed ironic that a broadcasting network called 'Trinity' would promote anti-trinitarian doctrine."

Mysticism is the "belief" that God works independent of the human intellect; rather, He works through gut feelings, intuitions, hunches, premonitions, etc. Mystics seek for a direct, personal religious experience apart from the mind. In its extreme form, this philosophy leads to the idea that the more illogical something is, the more godly it is. The FM, like its parent, the Pentecostal/charismatic movement, is steeped in this ideology. The FM's aversion to the intellect is well-documented. Consider the following quotes:

"You said, 'Well, that's heresy.' No, that's your crazy brain saying that" (Benny Hinn, quoted in Hanegraaff, p. 131).

"Theologians don't get their prayers answered" (John Avanzini, "Praise-a-Thon" broadcast, Apr. 10, 1992).

"The mind is something that might trip you and cause you to fall" (Kenneth Hagin, quoted in Michael Scott Horton, *The Agony of Deceit*, p. 51).

"Believers are not supposed to be led by logic. We are not even to be led by good sense. . . . The ministry of Jesus was never governed by logic or reason" (Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Faith*, p. 10).

H. Deprecation of the church and church tradition

"Here's where we're gonna depart from ordinary church" (Kenneth Copeland, quoted in Hanegraaff, p. 141).

"Now follow me in this and don't let your tradition trip you up" (Kenneth Copeland, quoted in Hanegraaff, p. 172).

I. Deprecation of the Atonement

"Do you think that the punishment for our sin was to die on a cross? If that were the case, the two thieves could have paid your price" (Fred Price, *Ever Increasing Faith Messenger*, June 1980, p. 7).

"Jesus' death on the cross was only the beginning of the complete work of redemption" (Kenneth Copeland, *Believer's Voice of Victory*, Apr. 1982, p. 3).

J. Health and wealth

According to proponents of the FM, it is God's will that every believer be healthy and wealthy.

"God intends for every believer to live completely free from sickness and disease" (Kenneth Copeland, *Welcome to the Family*, p. 25).

"God's greatest desire for the church of Jesus Christ . . . is that we be in total and perfect health" (Benny Hinn, *Rise & Be Healed!*, p. 65).

"I believe that it is the plan of God our Father that no believer should ever be sick It is not--I state boldly--it is not the will of God my Father that we should suffer with cancer and other dread diseases which bring pain and anguish" (Kenneth Hagin, *Word of Faith*, Aug. 1977, p. 9).

"Being poor is a sin" (Robert Tilton, "Success-N-Life" broadcast, Dec. 27, 1990).

According to the FM, the means to financial prosperity is "seed-faith," in which the individual reveals the authenticity of his or her faith by planting a seed in the form of a cash donation to the ministry of an FM teacher. The one who does so is guaranteed to reap an abundant material harvest.

III. Our Response

A. The revelatory gifts have ceased.

See the lesson on Pentecostalism.

To give an idea of the kind of dilemma a belief in continuing revelation can get one in, consider the case of Benny Hinn. After claiming that God had revealed to him that there were actually nine persons in the Trinity (see quote above), he later retracted this claim, calling it a "very dumb statement." This begs the question: Can God make a "dumb" statement?

B. The Creator/creature distinction.

God is infinite (unlimited), while man is finite (limited). The gap between the two is infinite.

See Isaiah 43:10, 44:6, 45:5, and 22.

C. God is sovereign.

See Psalm 115:3, Isaiah 46:9-10, and Daniel 4:35.

D. Faith is objective, not subjective.

In the FM, faith is subjective, that is, it is dependent upon its subject. According to the Bible, however, faith is objective, that is, it is dependent upon its object. Whereas the FM espouses faith in faith, the Bible espouses faith in God and His Word.

E. Christ is God.

Contrary to the claim of Copeland, Christ claimed to be God (see John 5:17-18, 8:58-59, and 10:30-33, noting especially the response of the Jews; likewise, see John 19:7; see also John 8:24 and 13:19, comparing them with Exod 3:14). For more, see the lesson on the Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as Appendix A.

F. There is one God in three Persons.

See the lesson on Mormonism, as well as Appendix B.

G. "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD ... WITH ALL YOUR MIND" (Mark 12:30).

See the lesson on Pentecostalism.

While there may be some things in Scripture that are suprational, i.e., above and beyond the ability of the finite, human intellect to fully grasp, there are none that are irrational, i.e., contrary to reason.

H. The church is central in God's program.

See especially 1 Timothy 3:15 in this regard.

I. Christ's death was the only sufficient payment for the sin of mankind.

In response to Copeland's comment, see John 19:30.

J. It is sometimes God's will for the believer to be ill and poor.

See Psalm 119:75, 1 Corinthians 4:9-13, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, and 1 Peter 4:19 in this regard.

"The old covenant was a covenant of prosperity. The new covenant is a covenant of adversity" (Charles Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 11:537).

A big part of the FM is healing. It is interesting to note that the healings performed by Jesus and the apostles were for the most part public, immediate, thorough, and permanent. "Miracles" performed by FM "faith healers," by contrast, are usually private³⁷⁰, gradual, partial, and temporary. Also, consider the following questions: Why didn't Paul heal himself (2 Cor

³⁷⁰The healers rarely if ever come out of their tents, their tabernacles, or their television studios. They always seem to exercise their gift only in a controlled environment, staged their way, run according to their schedule" (John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 247).

12:7-10), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-27), or Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20)? Why are the miraculous sign gifts mentioned in earlier spiritual gift lists (1 Cor 12:8-10 and 12:28-30), but not in later lists (Rom 12:6-8 and Eph 4:11)? "Why is it that so many of the leading advocates of faith healing are themselves in need of healing?" (John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 240). Why don't faith healers empty out hospitals? Why did Oral Roberts University even have a hospital?

Resources for Further Study:

Christianity in Crisis by Hank Hanegraaff

The Agony of Deceit, edited by Michael Horton

Charismatic Chaos by John MacArthur

What's the Difference?

Part 3: Examining the Differences Between Baptists and Denominations

Lesson 8: **Baptists**

II. History

While some (such as J. M. Carroll, author of the booklet, *The Trail of Blood*, which

was first published in 1931) contend that Baptists can trace their origins back to the time of the apostles, most modern church historians (including DBTS's church history professor, Dr. Gerald Priest) trace the origin of Baptists to early seventeenth century A.D. England.³⁷¹ Accordingly, most historians trace the origins of the first Baptist church to an early seventeenth century Englishman named John Smyth. Around 1606 A.D., Smyth led a group of English Separatists (those who separated from the Anglican Church/Church of England) to start a church. Due to Anglican opposition, however, the congregation soon fled to Holland (around 1608 AD), where Smyth met and was influenced by a group of Mennonites (an Anabaptist group³⁷²). Consequently, Smyth baptized (albeit by affusion or pouring) himself and forty other adults in 1609. When Smyth tried to merge his congregation with the Mennonite group, ten of his members so strongly opposed the merger that they returned to England and started the first Baptist church on English soil in 1611 or 1612 (under the leadership of a man named Thomas Helwys). These first Baptists came to be known as General Baptists because they believed in a general atonement (Christ died for all men; accordingly, they were more Arminian in their soteriology).³⁷³ Another group of Baptists formed in England in the 1630s A.D. Unlike the General Baptists, whose roots can be traced to the English Separatists, this second group, which came to be known as Particular Baptists because they believed in a particular atonement (Christ died only for the elect; accordingly, they were more Calvinistic in their soteriology), sprouted from the roots of English Puritanism (the Puritans sought to

purify the Church of England from within). The first Baptist church on American soil, started by a man named Roger Williams in Providence, Rhode Island in 1638, was a Particular Baptist church. Particular Baptists in America came to be known as Regular Baptists. Most of the Baptist churches in America could be considered Particular or Regular Baptist/Calvinistic.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹This does not imply, however, that Baptist beliefs are not of ancient origin. As church historian, H. Leon McBeth (quoted in Gerald Priest, "Baptist History" class notes, Brighton Bible Institute, spring 2001, p. 8) has said: "The most reliable historical evidence confirms that the Baptist denomination, as it is known today, originated in the early seventeenth century. This does not mean, however, that Baptist *viewpoints* did not exist before that time. Those who hold the Baptist faith believe their distinctive doctrines, such as salvation by grace through faith, a 'gathered church,' believer's baptism, authority of Scripture, and religious liberty, reflect the doctrines of New Testament Christianity. The seventeenth-century Baptists did not *invent* these doctrines; they *rediscovered* and articulated them afresh for a new era." In like manner, Mead & Hill (p. 49) write: "It is often heard among them [Baptists] ... that Baptists have been preaching and practicing from the days of John the Baptist. This is true in a limited sense; men and women then certainly held what have come to be considered distinctly Baptist principles. But organized Baptist churches first appeared in Holland and England."

³⁷²While Anabaptists and Baptists share many similar beliefs, their dissimilarities are enough to make them two distinct groups (the 1644 AD London Confession was written to distinguish Baptists from Anabaptists). Anabaptists (1525 AD) preceded Baptists (1610 AD) by about eighty-five years. Today, Anabaptist groups include the Mennonites, the Hutterites, the Amish, and the Brethren.

³⁷³The Free Will Baptists are perhaps the most prominent General Baptists in America today.

³⁷⁴... [I]t [Calvinism] is the theological standard of many, if not most, Baptists in the U.S. today" (Mead & Hill, p. 51). "The majority of Baptist churches in the U.S. are Calvinistic in doctrine" (Berry, p. 252).

In 1814, Baptists in America united to form the Triennial Convention³⁷⁵ for inter-church evangelistic and missionary endeavors. Like nearly all American religious groups, so the Baptists split over the issue of slavery in the middle of the nineteenth century. When the Triennial Convention refused to ordain slave owners as missionaries, Baptists in the South withdrew in 1845 to form the Southern Baptist Convention, which is today the largest Protestant denomination in the United States.³⁷⁶ In 1907, the Triennial Convention was renamed the Northern Baptist Convention. The NBC was renamed the American Baptist Convention in 1950. In 1972, the name was changed to the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. Over the years, the SBC has been the more conservative of the two bodies (e.g., the ABC ordains women³⁷⁷, while the SBC does not³⁷⁸; also, the ABC is part of the ecumenical National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches, while the SBC is not).³⁷⁹

Famous Baptists throughout history have included John Bunyan (17th century AD English Particular Baptist preacher; author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, which he wrote during his twelve-year imprisonment for preaching the gospel without a license), William Carey (late 18th and early 19th century AD English Particular Baptist missionary to India), Adoniram Judson³⁸⁰ (19th century AD American missionary to Burma), Charles Haddon Spurgeon³⁸¹ (19th century AD English Particular Baptist preacher; nicknamed "The Prince of Preachers"), Augustus Hopkins Strong (late 19th and early 20th century Northern Baptist theologian), Billy Graham

³⁸⁰Judson's father was a Congregationalist pastor and, thus, had Adoniram baptized as an infant and rejected the Baptist belief of believers' baptism by immersion. Furthermore, Judson was ordained as a Congregationalist minister in 1812, just days prior to departing for the mission field. Knowing that he would cross paths with Baptist missionary, William Carey in India while on his way to Burma, Judson studied the subject of baptism on the voyage to India, becoming convinced that the Baptist position was Scriptural. Hence, he (along with his wife, Ann) was baptized by Carey upon arriving in India. Judson (*Adoniram Judson on Christian Baptism*, p. 107) testified: "... [A]nd it follows inevitably, that I, who was christened in infancy, on the faith of my parents, have never yet received Christian baptism. Must I, then, forsake my parents, the church with which I stand connected, the society under whose patronage I have come out, the companions of my missionary undertaking? Must I forfeit the good opinion of all my friends in my native land, occasioning grief to some, and provoking others to anger, and be regarded henceforth, by all my former dear acquaintance, as a weak, despicable Baptist, who has not sense enough to comprehend the connection between the Abrahamian and the Christian systems? All this was mortifying; it was hard to flesh and blood. But I thought again--It is better to be guided by the opinion of Christ, who is the truth, than by the opinion of men, however good, whom I know to be in an error. The praise of Christ is better than the praise of men. Let me cleave to Christ at all events, and prefer his favor above my chief joy." Judson eventually won his father over to the Baptist position and, as a result, his father was relieved of his Congregationalist pastorate.

³⁸¹Spurgeon's father and grandfather were Congregationalist pastors and, thus, had Charles baptized as an infant and rejected the Baptist belief of believers' baptism by immersion. Convinced that believers' baptism by immersion was the teaching of Scripture, Spurgeon was baptized by immersion shortly after his conversion at the age of fifteen. He later wrote (on p. 38 of vol. 1 of his autobiography): "Having been brought up among Congregationalists, I had never looked at the matter in my life. I had thought myself to have been baptized as an infant; and so, when I was confronted with the question, 'What is required of persons to be baptized?'" and I found that repentance and faith were required, I said to myself, 'Then I have not been baptized; that infant sprinkling of mine was a mistake; and please God that I ever have repentance and faith, I will be properly baptized.'" With the wit for which he was renowned, Spurgeon once said (*ibid.*, p. 45): "My mother said to me, one day, 'Ah, Charles! I often prayed the Lord to make you a Christian, but I never asked that you might become a Baptist.' I could not resist the temptation to reply, 'Ah, mother! the Lord has answered your prayer with His usual bounty, and given you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or thought.'"

³⁷⁵While Baptists, due to their belief in the autonomy of the local church, reject denominationalism, they do allow for churches to unite in conventions, associations, and fellowships. Such ecclesiastical bodies, however, do not exercise authority over an individual church. Each individual church remains autonomous, or self-governing.

³⁷⁶Baptists are the largest Protestant group in the United States. According to Berry (p. 252), "nearly 20 percent of all Americans identify themselves as Baptist of one variety or another."

³⁷⁷According to Berry (p. 257), "as of May 2001, women made up approximately 13 percent of American Baptist clergy."

³⁷⁸In 1991, a group calling itself the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship "split" from the SBC. The CBF is more moderate than the SBC (e.g., it allows for the ordination of women).

³⁷⁹Several fundamental groups split from the NBC due to the increasing modernism/theological liberalism plaguing the parent group. The Fundamentalist Fellowship split from the NBC in 1920 (the FF became the Conservative Baptist Fellowship in the 1940s; however, when the Conservative Baptist movement became new evangelical, in 1967 the fundamentalist-controlled CBF renamed itself the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship, which today is the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International). The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches split from the NBC in 1932. One notable fundamentalist-led split from the SBC was what came to be called the World Baptist Fellowship, which split from the parent group in 1928 (the Baptist Bible Fellowship International split from the WBF in the early 1950s).

(20th century Southern Baptist evangelist), Martin Luther King, Jr.³⁸² (20th century civil rights leader), and John Piper (late 20th and early 21st century Baptist General Conference pastor and author).

II. Some Erroneous Baptist Beliefs³⁸³

III. Baptist Beliefs/Distinctives

While other groups espouse some of the following Baptist beliefs/distinctives, Baptists are the only group to hold to all of them. These beliefs/distinctives have been neatly summarized with the following acrostic:

³⁸²Martin Luther King, Jr. was part of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, which in 1961 split from the National Baptist Convention USA (which Berry, p. 261 calls “the largest African-American coalition in the United States”) over the latter’s anti-activist stance regarding the civil rights movement.

³⁸³This section is intended to be conspicuously blank. After all, I am a Baptist 😊. Twentieth century fundamental Baptist leader, B. Myron Cedarholm allegedly was once asked what he would be if he wasn’t a Baptist. His reply? “Ashamed.”

B--Bible as sole authority for faith & practice/*sola Scriptura* (2 Tim 3:16-17)³⁸⁴

See the lesson on Catholicism. While Baptists have crafted some exceptional confessions of faith³⁸⁵, they have been careful not to elevate these confessions to a level equal to or superior to Scripture.

By contrast, nearly all other “denominations” vest authority in sources besides the Bible: Catholicism--church tradition and the magisterium (the teaching arm of the Catholic church, including papal pronouncements); Orthodoxy--church tradition (the writings of the Fathers and the pronouncements of the seven Ecumenical Councils; Anglicanism/Episcopalianism--tradition and reason; Lutheranism--Book of Concord; Pentecostalism--revelatory spiritual gifts (prophecy and speaking in tongues) and personal experience.

A--Autonomy of the local church (Matt 18:17 and 1 Cor 6:1-6)

See Appendix J. Baptists believe that each local church is autonomous, i.e., self-governing (the Greek pronoun, *autos*, meaning “self” + the Greek noun, *nomos*, meaning “law”). There is no individual or group of individuals outside a local church to whom a local church must submit.

By contrast, most other “denominations” have authorities to which a local church must submit: Catholicism--bishop, archbishop, cardinal, pope; Orthodoxy--bishop, patriarch; Anglicanism/Episcopalianism--bishop, archbishop; Lutheranism (ELCA)--bishop, presiding bishop; Presbyterianism--presbytery, synod, General Assembly; Methodism--bishop.

P--Priesthood of the believer (Heb 4:16, 1 Pet 2:5, 9, and Rev 1:6)

Every believer has direct access to God. There is no need for a human mediator for the confession of sin, etc.

³⁸⁴Baptists hold to the 66-book Protestant canon of Scripture. By contrast, Catholicism and Orthodoxy hold to an enlarged canon, believing the Apocrypha to be part of Scripture. See Appendix D.

³⁸⁵For example, the London Confession (1644 AD; produced by Particular Baptists), the Second London Confession (1689 AD; also produced by Particular Baptists), the Philadelphia Confession (1742 AD; printed by none other than Ben Franklin; an American version of the Second London Confession), and the New Hampshire Confession (1833 AD; a shortened, less-Calvinistic version of the Philadelphia Confession; the basis for fellowship in the Independent Fundamental Baptist Association of Michigan).

By contrast, Catholicism and Orthodoxy insist that access to God comes only via a duly-appointed human priest.

T--Two ordinances: water baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41-42)

In contrast to Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Anglicanism/Episcopalianism (all of whom practices seven sacraments/ordinances), Baptists practice two ordinances.

Baptists believe that baptism is for believers only and that its only proper "mode" is immersion. See appendix H. In contrast to the Baptist practice of baptism for believers only, nearly all other "denominations" also practice paedobaptism (infant baptism), such as Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Anglicanism/Episcopalianism, Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, and Methodism. In contrast to the Baptist practice of baptism by immersion only, nearly all other "denominations" practice other "modes" (whether sprinkling and/or pouring), such as Catholicism, Anglicanism/Episcopalianism, Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, and Methodism. While Baptists reject baptismal regeneration (the belief that baptism saves), Catholicism, Orthodoxy, some Anglicans/Episcopalians, possibly some Lutherans, possibly some Presbyterians, and possibly some Methodists espouse it.

Baptists believe that the elements of the Lord's Supper symbolize the body and blood of Christ. See Appendix I. By contrast, Catholicism and Orthodoxy teaches that the elements physically become the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation), Lutheranism teaches that the elements physically contain the body and blood of Christ (consubstantiation). Presbyterianism teaches that the elements spiritually contain the body and blood of Christ (the Reformed or "Dynamic" view).

I--Individual soul liberty (Rom 14:5, 12, and Gal 2:3-4)

Baptists believe that faith and practice is the prerogative of the individual and, therefore, cannot be coerced by governmental authority.

S--Saved church membership (Acts 2:41 and 47)

Baptists believe that the visible church is to be comprised only of those who have personally professed faith in Christ. This is in contrast to nearly all other "denominations," which allow unbelievers to enter into membership via paedobaptism.

T--Two offices: pastor and deacon (Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:1-13)

Baptists believe in only two church offices, both of which are limited to the local church. This is in contrast to nearly all other "denominations," which have church

officials (bishops, archbishops, etc.) outside of and over the local church.

S--Separation of church and state (Matt 22:21//Mark 12:17//Luke 20:25)

Baptists reject the concept of a theocracy/state church. Though both the church and the state (Rom 13:1-7) are God-ordained institutions, they have separate realms of responsibility.

Resources for Further Study:

Handbook of Denominations in the United States (10th ed.) by Mead & Hill (pp. 49-80)

"Denominations Comparison" pamphlet by Rose Publishing

The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church by Berry (chp. 11)

What's the Difference?

Part 3: Examining the Differences Between Baptists and Denominations
Review Quiz

Following is a list of various names, publications, beliefs, practices, etc. associated with the eight “denominations” (see footnote 213) studied in part 3 of this series. Write the name(s) of the denomination(s) that go(es) with each item.

Catholicism (C) **Orthodoxy (O)** **Anglicanism / Episcopalianism (A/E)**
Lutheranism (L) **Presbyterianism** (and Reformed Churches) **(P/r)**
Methodism (M) **Pentecostalism** (including the charismatic movement) **(P/c)**
Baptists (B)

- _____ Spiritual gifts like prophecy, speaking in tongues, and healing still operative today
- _____ Practices paedobaptism (infant baptism)
- _____ Arminian (man-centered) in soteriology (doctrine of salvation)
- _____ *New American Bible* (NAB)
- _____ Largest “Christian” group in the world
- _____ Second largest “Christian” group in the world
- _____ Frank Schaeffer
- _____ John Knox
- _____ Believe Apocrypha to be part of Scripture
- _____ Ulrich Zwingli
- _____ Started by King Henry VIII’s desire for a divorce
- _____ Practices the monarchical/episcopalian (rule by one) form of church government
- _____ Practices the oligarchical/presbyterian (rule by few) form of church government
- _____ Practices the democratic/congregational (rule by all) form of church government
- _____ Highest office is that of “patriarch”
- _____ Spawned such groups as Wesleyans, Nazarenes, Salvation Army, and Pentecostals
- _____ Baptismal regeneration (baptism saves)
- _____ Assemblies of God
- _____ Split from the Anglican Church in the seventeenth century A.D.
- _____ Split from the Anglican Church in the eighteenth century A.D.
- _____ Head of church is called “pope”
- _____ Baptism by immersion
- _____ Archbishop of Canterbury leading figure
- _____ John and Charles Wesley
- _____ Believers’ baptism
- _____ Second work of grace
- _____ Westminster Confession of Faith
- _____ Martin Luther
- _____ Sources of authority: Bible, tradition, and magisterium
- _____ Offspring of Protestant Reformation in England
- _____ Offspring of Protestant Reformation in Germany
- _____ Offspring of Protestant Reformation in Scotland (and Switzerland)
- _____ Communion elements physically *become* body & blood of Christ (transubstantiation)
- _____ Communion elements physically *contain* body & blood of Christ (consubstantiation)
- _____ Communion elements *spiritually* contain body & blood of Christ
- _____ Communion elements *represent* body & blood of Christ
- _____ Split from Catholicism in eleventh century A.D.
- _____ Split from Catholicism in the sixteenth century A.D.
- _____ The most liturgical/“high church” of all churches

What’s the Difference?

Appendix L: Review of Key Doctrines Covered in This Course

Throughout this course, we have periodically reviewed the following four doctrines, four doctrines the knowledge of which is crucial to clearly demarcating the differences between Christianity and cults and between Christianity and world religions. A proper understanding of the third and fourth doctrines helps distinguish Baptists from non-Protestants (Catholicism and Orthodoxy). A proper application of the third doctrine (particularly in the realm of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church) helps distinguish Baptists, not only from non-Protestants, but also from all other Protestants.

4. **The deity of Christ** (Jesus Christ is God)

See Appendix A.

In the beginning was the Word [the Word is Jesus Christ, John 1:14], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1)

For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form (Col 2:9)

And He [God the Son] is the radiance of His [God the Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His [God the Father’s] nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3)

But of the Son *He* [God the Father] says, “YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM” (Heb 1:8)

5. **The trinity of God** (there is one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)

See Appendix B.

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him, and behold, a voice [the voice of God the Father] out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matt 3:16-17)

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God [the Father], and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all (2 Cor 13:14)
 whom [the Holy Spirit] He [God the Father] poured out upon us richly through

Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:6)

God the Son is God (see #1 above). God the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4).

6. **Inspiration** (the Bible is God's Word)

See Appendix C.

All Scripture is inspired by God [lit. God-breathed] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16)

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (1 Thess 2:13)

Note: The only way one will ultimately be convinced that the Bible is God's Word is through the supernatural, Holy Spirit-wrought work of illumination that occurs at conversion.

7. **Salvation is by grace alone** (*sola gratia*) **through faith alone** (*sola fides*) **in Christ alone** (*solus Christus*), **not by works.**

because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20)

nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified (Gal 2:16)

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph 2:8-9)

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)

Note: Salvation cannot possibly be by works, because there are no works a depraved sinner can do to merit God's favor. All of an unregenerate man's "good" works are tainted by sin (Isa 64:6), because they are never done for the right motive, to glorify God (Rom 3:23). Salvation is not based upon what a sinner can do (there is nothing he can), but upon exclusive faith in what Christ has already done, living (positively providing the perfect righteousness God requires) and dying (negatively nullifying sin's penalty, separation from God) in the sinner's place (Rom 5:19b and 2 Cor 5:21).