Appendix 1. Life in the Age to Come

The Greek phrase that we translate “life in the Age to come” is *zōē aiōnios* (#2222 ζωή; #166 αἰώνιος). The word *zōē* is the noun, “life,” while *aiōnios* is the adjective, “Age.” (Occasionally the phrase occurs as *aiōnios zōē*, with the noun last; John 17:3; Acts 13:46, but that is the exception, and there is no difference in meaning).

English Bibles usually translate the phrase *zōē aiōnios* as “eternal life” or “everlasting life,” but we feel that most of the time that is not a good translation, and can even be confusing. The phrase *zōē aiōnios* (“Age life”) refers to everlasting life which begins in the Messianic Age, also known as the “Millennial Kingdom” (cf. Rev. 20:1-6).

Translating *zōē aiōnios* as “everlasting life” in verses such as John 3:16 causes a couple of problems. One problem is that the phrase “everlasting life” places the emphasis on “How long will I live” (answer: “Forever”), instead of “When will I live forever” (answer: “In the Messianic Age”). Many verses attest to the fact that the Messianic Age will never end (cf. Ps. 89:29, 37; Isa. 9:7; 65:18; Jer. 17:25; Ezek. 37:25-28; Dan. 2:44; 7:18; Mic. 4:7), and so from both those verses, and the duration of time that is implied in the word *aiōnios*, it is understood that those people who have *zōē aiōnios* will never die once they are raised from the dead. However, as we will see from the study below, *zōē aiōnios* usually places the emphasis on the “Age” when people will live more than how long they will live.

A second problem that occurs if *zōē aiōnios* is translated “everlasting life” or “eternal life” is that most English readers take that translation at face value and think they have everlasting life right now. Thus, translating *zōē aiōnios* as “everlasting life” has contributed to the general misunderstanding held by most Christians that when a righteous person dies, only his body dies, while his soul (or spirit) does not die, but lives on in heaven; and when an unsaved person dies, his soul lives on in “hell.” Actually, no one has “everlasting life” right now. Believers have the promise of everlasting life, which will be fulfilled at the Rapture or their resurrection from the dead.

The well-respected biblical scholar F. F. Bruce states what we feel is the correct understanding of *zōē aiōnios*, and that it does not mean “eternal life.” He writes:

“While ‘eternal life’ (*zōē aiōnios*) etymologically might mean simply life of indefinite or perpetual duration, it appears from its NT usage to mean more precisely ‘the life of the Age to Come,’ i.e., resurrection life.” (see Geoffrey Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Age,” 1:67, by F. F. Bruce).

C. H. Dodd agrees, and writes, “…*zōē aiōnios* is used in John with reference to the Jewish idea of the life of the Age to Come.” (see C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 146). Craig Keener writes, “Jewish sources traditionally applied the phrase ‘eternal life’ to mean the ‘life of the world to come,’ which (according to Jewish teaching) was to be inaugurated by the future resurrection of the dead” (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, note on Titus 1:2-3, 626).

To understand the phrase *zōē aiōnios*, we must know some background information on the subject of death, resurrection, and the Age to Come. Scripture teaches that when a person dies, he is dead in every sense of the word, and he stays dead until he is raised by Jesus Christ, either at the Rapture of the Church, or at one of the resurrections (see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead,” and *Is There Death After Life?* by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit).

Until the Church Epistles stated that the Christian Church would be taken up to heaven from the earth in an event that many theologians refer to as “the Rapture,” (1 Thess. 4:16-18), the Bible had only revealed that there would be two resurrections. The first resurrection is called, “The first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5, 6); “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29); and “the resurrection of the Righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15). The first resurrection will occur at the beginning of the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah. The second resurrection is called “the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29 ESV), and the resurrection of the “unrighteous” (Acts 24:15), because most of the people who are raised at that time will be judged to be unrighteous. This second resurrection will occur after the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom is over (Rev. 20:4-13). There are some verses in the Bible that refer to both of these resurrections in the same verse or context, and these include: Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; and Revelation 20:4-13.

[For more on the Rapture and the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

The “Messianic Age” has two parts, and those people who are in the first resurrection will participate in both parts. The first part lasts 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4), and so it is known as the “Millennial Kingdom” (from the Latin word *mille*, “thousand”). In the Millennial Kingdom the earth will be similar to the earth we know now, but it will be mostly restored to a pristine state (Matt. 19:28). After the Millennial Kingdom, there will be a war with Satan, then the second resurrection and the White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:7-15). Then the second part of the Messianic Age begins, which lasts forever, so it can be referred to as the “Eternal Kingdom” (Rev. 21:1ff). At the start of the Eternal Kingdom a huge gold city comes down from heaven to earth, complete with walls made of precious stones and streets made of gold (Rev. 21:10-21).

Although the book of Revelation shows us that the Messianic Age is broken into two parts, the Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal Kingdom, that is new light shed upon the subject by the book of Revelation. As far as anyone in the Old Testament or Gospels knew, the “Messianic Age” was one continuous everlasting wonderful future age when the Messiah would rule the earth from Jerusalem, there would be no sickness or hunger, and righteousness and peace would last forever. The fact that the two distinct stages of the Messianic Age were unknown before the book of Revelation was written explains why the Jewish rabbis and most of the New Testament speak only of two ages, the present evil age and the wonderful Messianic Age to Come

[For more on the Rapture, the two resurrections, the Millennial Kingdom, and the Eternal Kingdom, see, Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*.]

People who are saved begin their everlasting life after they are raised from the dead. Mark 10:30 and Luke 18:30 show this to be true.

Mark 10:29, 30 (NIV)

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

Mark 10:30 is one of the verses that clearly shows Jesus talking about the two ages: this present age and the age to come. He said that anyone who gave things up for his sake would “receive a hundred times as much in this present age” and also, in the Age to Come, “eternal life” (*zōē aiōnios*). There are two very important things we must understand when we read this verse. The first is that Jesus taught in terms of two “ages,” the present age, and the Age to Come. The second is that Jesus taught that a person’s “eternal life” begins in the Age to Come, not immediately.

That the Jews in the time of Jesus recognized that there were two “ages” is clearly portrayed in Scripture. For example, Christ said people who blaspheme the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven “either in this age or in the Age to Come” (Matt. 12:32). Many versions translate *aiōn* as “world” in this verse but that is misleading. First, the “world” does not come to an end; it is restored to a pristine condition by Christ. It is this evil “age” that ends. Second, by translating *aiōn* as “world” here and in many other places, the English reader never really understands the important biblical teaching of the two ages. For example, in the King James Version, there are about 30 places where *aiōn* is translated “world” where “age” would have been more accurate and more helpful in communicating to people the teaching of the New Testament. Ephesians 1:21 also speaks of both the present and future age, telling us that Christ is far above all rule and authority, not only “in the present age but also in the one to come.”

While the verses noted above speak of both the present age and the future age in one verse, there are many verses that only mention one of the two ages. For example, Matthew 13:22 speaks of the cares of “this age,” and Romans 12:2 says not to be conformed to “this age.” Other verses that mention this age include Mark 4:19; 1 Corinthians 2:6; 3:18; Galatians 1:4; 1 Timothy 6:17; 2 Timothy 4:10; and Titus 2:12. The “children of this age” are people whose character reflects the character of this age (Luke 16:8), and the “god of this age” is the Devil (2 Cor. 4:4).

The Bible makes it clear that this age will come to an end. For example, the disciples came to Jesus while he sat on the Mount of Olives. They asked him about his coming and “the end of the age.” (Matt. 24:3). Other verses that speak of the end of the age are: Matthew 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and Hebrews 9:26.

After this age ends, the Age to Come, the wonderful Messianic Age, will begin, and it will be a time of great blessing and joy, but only the righteous will attain it. Jesus talked about that when he spoke about “those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead…” (Luke 20:35). Other verses that speak of the Age to Come include Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Ephesians 2:7; and Hebrews 6:5. David Hill writes about how *zōē aiōnios* emphasizes the concept of the Age to Come.

“Now it is well-known that in discussions of the New Testament use of *zōē aiōnios* it is generally assumed that the adjective [*aiōnios*] refers to the ‘Age to Come’ and that the phrase means ‘the life of the Age to Come,’ explicable in terms of the Jewish doctrine of the Two Ages. ...It would appear therefore to be legitimate and right to interpret *zōē aiōnios* to mean ‘life of the Age to Come.’ To do so, however, does not mean that the idea of duration is absent. The future Age is brought in and established by God’s action, and in so far as it is his age it is enduring and eternal: those who experience it share in ‘life’ which is infinitely prolonged. In other words, *zōē aiōnios* in the New Testament contains a temporal reference but stresses the qualitative reference.” (David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, 186-188.)

In light of the fact that *zōē aiōnios* refers to the life of the Age to Come, and those who attain that Age then live forever, there are some verses, such as John 3:16, where the phrase might legitimately be translated expansively as “everlasting life in the Age to come.” Furthermore, as Hill pointed out, although *aiōnios* generally emphasizes the Age to Come, it does have a temporal, durative meaning, and there are some verses where that temporal meaning is emphasized.

The difficulty in properly understanding the phrase *zōē aiōnios* is exacerbated by the fact that Christian commentators and lexicographers tend to see the definition of words in light of what they believe is true, and have often oversimplified the definitions they put in their study helps. This can make it difficult to accurately study the subject, particularly if one’s research library is very limited. For example, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, by Spiros Zodhiates, gives the following definitions for *aiōnios*: “eternal, perpetual, belonging to the *aiōn*, to time in its duration, constant, abiding.” Similarly, Thayer’s Lexicon defines it as “without beginning, without end.” While those definitions can be correct in the sense that *aiōnios* can refer to something that is everlasting, that is not the only definition of the word, and is not even the best definition to apply to many verses. It would help people understand the Bible if the scholars who write the lexicons and other resource books would give the full meaning of words used in the Bible, and not just part of the meaning.

The adjective *aiōnios* is derived from the word *aiōn*, “age,” and gets much of its meaning from it, so if we are going to understand *aiōnios* it is important that we understand the meaning of *aiōn*. The Liddell and Scott *Greek-English Lexicon* shows that *aiōn*, “age,” from which the adjective *aiōnios* is derived, does not always mean an “everlasting age.” It gives the following four definitions for *aiōn*: “1. One’s lifetime, life. 2. An age, generation. 3. A long space of time, an age, of old, for ages, for ever. 4. A definite space of time, an era, epoch, age, period; ‘This present world’ (New Testament).” (H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexico*n, s.v. “*aiōn*.”)

Once we understand that *aiōn* can refer to different durations of time, we can see why in the Septuagint it is the word that is most often chosen to translate the Hebrew word “*olam*.” In fact, understanding *olam* can help us understand *aiōn*. Like *aiōn*, *olam* does not always mean “forever.” The Hebrew word *olam* (#05769 עוֹלָם), generally refers to a long period of time or an indefinite period of time. It occurs over 400 times in the Hebrew Old Testament and exactly what it means, or how long a period of time it refers to, must be determined from the context and from the scope of Scripture.

*Olam* can mean a long time with no specific end in sight. C. H. Dodd correctly and succinctly states: “The word עוֹלָם [*olam*; #5769], with αἰών [#165 *aiōn* ] as its equivalent, denotes properly a period of time of which the beginning or the end are both out of sight, an indefinitely long, rather than strictly an infinite period.” (C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 144).

For example, in 2 Chronicles 33:7 God says He would put His name in the Temple in Jerusalem “forever” (*olam*) but we know that in the Eternal City that comes from heaven there will not even be a Temple (Rev. 21:22). At the time it was written that the Temple would last “forever,” the statement was accurate because there was no specific end in sight for the Temple even though at some point the Temple would be no more. Translating *olam* and *aiōn* is very difficult because English really does not have any word that is equivalent to them. The English word “forever,” is not a good translation, because “forever” has no end, whereas *olam* and *aiōn* can come to an end—the end is just out of sight, a long time away. There does not seem to be a very good English word for *olam*, so “forever” gets used most of the time, even though it is misleading. Some translations might be: “age-abiding,” “age-long,” “for ages,” “for eons,” etc. Some other times *olam* refers to a long period of time include Psalm 143:3 and Lamentations 3:6, referring to people who have been dead a long time.

*Olam* can also refer to a long period of time that is now over. For example, Isaiah 63:9 refers to God carrying Israel “in the day of old” (*olam*). It would be wrong to translate *olam* as “forever” in that verse, because then the verse would not be accurate. (Other verses that have that meaning for *olam* include Deut. 32:7; Isa. 44:7; 63:11; Amos 9:11; Mic. 5:1; 7:14; Mal. 3:4).

*Olam* can be used to define a specific period of time that does not have a definite end. For example, a human life. According to the Law, a person who volunteered to be a bondslave would be a slave “forever” (*olam*), meaning the life of the person, however long that ended up being (Deut. 15:17; cf. Exod. 21:6; 1 Sam. 1:22; 27:12; Job 41:4.

*Olam* can be used to define things that will seem to last indefinitely, and some, like God, will indeed last “forever.” God is forever (Gen. 21:33; Isa. 40:28).

[For a more complete definition with more examples, see *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*.]

Seeing the different periods of time that *olam* can refer to, and realizing that it was translated by the word *aiōn*, shows us that the word *aiōn* (from which we get the English word, “aeon” or “eon”), can refer to different durations of time—something that can be easily seen in both the Bible and Greek literature. If we count the uses of *aiōn* in both the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the Greek New Testament, it occurs more than 750 times. In Exodus 21:6 it refers to the duration of someone’s life. In Exodus 40:15 it refers to the priesthood of Aaron, which, while lasting a long time, is not “forever.” In Leviticus 25:46 it refers to the time a slave serves, which would be for their lifetime at the longest, certainly not “forever.” In Joshua 4:7 it refers to a heap of stones that were to be a memorial but are gone today and therefore not “forever.” In 1 Samuel 1:22, it refers to the term of Samuel’s service at the Tabernacle.

We also need to be aware that the word *aiōn* refers to more than just a period of time itself, i.e., a passage of years. One reason that *aiōn* is sometimes translated “world” in many versions of the New Testament is because the meaning of *aiōn* often included both the period of time itself and the characteristics of that period (cf. the KJV in Matt. 12:32; Mark 4:19; Luke 16:8; John 9:32; Acts 15:18; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 6:12). The BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* lists “world” as one of the meanings of *aiōn*, while Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon says *aiōn* is used figuratively, with “age” meaning “world” by the figure of speech metonymy of the container for the contained…i.e., the aggregate of things contained in time.”

A helpful way of thinking of “age” as referring to the characteristics of the age would be to think of a restaurant trying to create a specific “atmosphere.” A Mexican restaurant might be in downtown Indianapolis, IN, but the owners want you to feel as if you are in Mexico when you go inside. They create an “atmosphere” by having characteristics of the country designed into the restaurant, including architecture, colors, and decorations. Thus “atmosphere,” which normally refers to the mass of air surrounding the earth, also refers to the characteristics and influences in the immediate environment. In a similar way, *aiōn*, age, not only refers to the period of time but also to the characteristics of the age. Sometimes the characteristics of the age are specifically spelled out, such as when the Bible speaks of the “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Richard Trench writes about *aiōn*, age, referring to the characteristics of the age, that the word *aiōn* includes:

“All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale—all this is included in *aiōn…”* (Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, 217-218.)

Scholars acknowledge that by the time between the Old and New Testaments, there was rabbinic teaching that there were at least two ages: the present evil age and a glorious Age to Come that was associated with the advent of the Messiah. Joachim Guhrt writes in his article on “time” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*:

“…in the rabbinic Judaism at the turn of the era and in the apocalyptic of the 1st century AD…one finds a quite new use of *olam* [the Hebrew word usually translated ‘age’ or ‘everlasting’] which exhibits a spatial significance as well as a temporal one. …Old Testament statements concerning primal and final time (Isa. 24-27; Joel 2) are here systematized into a doctrine of the two worlds (aeons)…. From the Book of Daniel onwards, ‘eternal life’ is an expression of the longed-for eschatological blessings of salvation, life in the Age to come (cf. Dan. 12:2).” (Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “Time,” 3:829-833)

It is important to notice that Guhrt referenced Daniel 12:2. The NIV is a typical translation.

Daniel 12:2 (NIV)

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

The phrase the NIV translates as “everlasting life” is the Greek phrase *zōē aiōnios* in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text that was made about 250 BC. As Guhrt pointed out, the rabbis recognized that it did not so much refer to a duration of time as an independent age, i.e., the Messianic Age they were expecting. Thought of in those terms, a possible translation of Daniel 12:2 from the Septuagint could be: “And the multitude of those sleeping in the dust of the earth will awake, some to life in the Age to come, and some to shame; to contempt in the Age to Come.” In his article on “Age, Ages,” G. E. Ladd writes:

“Theologically the most important usage of *aiōn* in the NT is that which designates two distinct periods of time: this age and the age to come. …This age will come to its end with the *parousia* [coming] of Christ (Matt. 24:3). …The age to come is the age of eternal life (Mark 10:30), when the righteous will ‘shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father’ (Matt. 13:43). Mark 10:24, 30 equate the age to come with both eternal life and the Kingdom of God; and in Matt. 25:34, 46, the righteous inherit the Kingdom of God and enter into eternal life when the Son of man comes in his glory (Matt. 25:31) at the end of this age (Matt. 25:41).” (Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Age, Ages,” 19-20.)

Like the noun *aiōn*, the adjective *aiōnios* can refer to a period of time and also to the characteristics or qualities of that period. As was stated above, while we can understand why Christian lexicographers see *aiōnios* in light of their theology and define it in terms of “eternal” or “everlasting,” that is not the full meaning of the word. Alan Richardson writes:

“The fact is that in the New Testament, *zōē* or more fully *zōē aiōnios* is an eschatological conception [connected with the future times]; it is one of the characteristic marks of the Age to Come, like glory, light, etc. In the contemporary rabbinic conception, The Age to Come…as distinct from this age, was to be characterized by *zōē*, that is *zōē aiōnios*, the life of the (coming) age. Thus, what appears in the English versions as ‘eternal life’ or ‘life everlasting’ really means ‘the life of the Age to Come.’ The phrase *zōē aiōnios* need not necessarily imply ever-lasting life (e.g., Enoch 10:10), but the usual meaning is life after death indefinitely prolonged in the World to Come (Dan. 12:12…). Throughout the NT, *zōē aiōnios* means ‘the life of the World to Come.’” (Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 73, 74.)

Nigel Turner also wrote that the Greek words *aiōn* and *aiōnios* referred not just to a duration of time, but specifically to an “age,” and points out that “eternal life” is an imprecise translation of *zōē aiōnios*.

“But a peculiar meaning appears in Jewish and Christian Greek, and *aiōn* becomes one of the seven ‘ages’ or ‘dispensations’ which make up the world’s history according to some contemporary Jewish thought. …Sometimes the number of dispensations was simplified to two: ‘this *aiōn*’ and ‘the *aiōn* to come,’…In the NT, *aiōn* indicates not only this present period in which we live, but also a coming age of ‘eternal’ life which we strive to be worthy to obtain (Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 16:8; 18:30; 20:35). The life of the Coming Age is often described as ‘eternal’ life, but it must not be understood thereby that time and eternity are set in contrast, as if time was a quality of the present Age and ‘eternity’ was a quality of the future Age…. It would be…misleading to translate the *aiōn* as ‘eternity,’ for the *aiōn* is still a period of time. It is no less imprecise to render ‘*aiōnios* life’ as ‘eternal life’.

“If the noun *aiōn*, then, acquired new significance in biblical Greek, so did the adjective, *aiōnios*. …it changed its meaning in Jewish and Biblical circles. …The dispensation intended in this special sense was that of the future, the Kingdom of Christ, the reign of the Messiah. *Aiōnios* has a new meaning, and the ‘*aiōnios* Gospel’ is not therefore in Christian language the ‘everlasting Gospel.’ …it is the Gospel of, or concerning, the Kingdom-age (Rev. 14:6). …We read more than forty times of ‘*aiōnios* life,’ which is the life to come…. The expression stands primarily for the quality of life. We read of habitations belonging to the Messianic Age—*aiōnios* habitations (Luke 16:9; 2 Cor. 5:1). …The expression *aiōnios* life appears in the OT, both in the LXX and Theodotion’s version of Daniel (12:2), and later Jews continued the idea in the rabbinic phrase, ‘life of the Coming *olam*.’ …To denote the characteristic of everlastingness, there is a separate adjective in Christian Greek, *aidios*….” (Nigel Turner, Christian Words, s.v. “αἰών,” “αἰώνιον,” 449-457.)

Turner makes a good point when he says there is another Greek word that can mean “everlasting” or “eternal” in a temporal sense, *aidios*, and it is used of God’s power in Romans 1:20. J. Louw and E. Nida, in the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, write:

“The most frequent use of *aiōnios* in the NT is with *zōē*, ‘life….’ In combination with *zōē* there is evidently not only a temporal element, but also a qualitative distinction. …If one translates ‘eternal life’ as simply ‘never dying,’ there may be serious misunderstandings….” (J. Louw and E. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, s.v. “*aiōnios*.”)

We agree wholeheartedly with the conclusion of Louw and Nida that simply translating *zōē aiōnios* as “eternal life” can cause “serious misunderstandings,” and one of them, as we stated above, was that based on that translation, some people conclude that when a person believes, his “eternal life” starts right then instead of at the resurrection and start of the Age to Come. William Barclay writes that if we just think of *aiōnios* as “eternal” life we oversimplify what it means.

“Simply to take the word , *aiōnios*, when it refers to blessings and punishment, to mean *lasting for ever* is to oversimplify, and indeed to misunderstand, the word altogether. It means far more than that.” (William Barclay, *New Testament Words*, 37.)

The Greek word *aiōnios* is an adjective modifying the noun *zōē*, so a very literal translation of the Greek would be “Age Life,” and we considered using that translation in the REV. However, many Christians could be confused by “Age Life,” and competent scholars such as F. F. Bruce show that the meaning of the phrase is indeed “Life in the Age to come,” so the REV uses that translation. Saved people do not have “everlasting life” now, as if they could not die, but rather they are promised “Age Life,” that is, life in the wonderful Messianic Age to Come.

Edward Fudge devotes an entire chapter of his book, *The Fire that Consumes*, to the word *aiōnios*. He points out that there is an impressive list of scholars who weigh in on the meaning of *aiōnios*, and their opinions vary from *aiōnios* always referring to a duration of time and never the quality of an age; to it always referring in a qualitative sense to an age, and never to duration of time; to it having both meanings. Thus he points out, “How the Bible uses a word is far more crucial for understanding a passage of Scripture than all the historians of any language.” (Edward Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 39.) We have already seen many verses that refer to the Age to come, and have seen that verses such as Mark 10:30 show that everlasting life is a quality of the Age to come, not this age. Other verses confirm this. John 6:40 connects *zōē aiōnios* with the resurrection, not with the time someone believes in Jesus Christ, and so does John 6:54. In Titus 1:2, Paul refers to having “hope” of *zōē aiōnios*, but Romans 8:24 makes it clear that no one hopes for something he already has. Titus 1:2 is exactly correct, what we have now is hope for life in the Age to come, a hope that is based upon the promises of God and the mercy of Jesus Christ (Jude 1:21).

In closing, we have seen that, of the two ages, the present evil age and the Age to come, *zōē aiōnios* refers to the Age to come. We have also seen that there is a temporal meaning to *aiōnios*, and it is certainly true that people who have life in the Age to come will live forever. Those who are resurrected to “life in the Age” never die again. In that light, most places that the REV has “life in the Age to come,” we could have put, “everlasting life in the Age to come” but that conflation was thought too much for most contexts. Most people should quickly come to know that “life in the Age to come,” will last forever.

Appendix 2. “Faith” is “Trust”

**Part One: “Faith” and “Trust”**

**“Trust” is a Better Translation than “Faith”**

The purpose of this appendix is to explain why “trust” is a much better English translation of the Greek word *pistis* than “faith” is, and also to show that “faith” is so misunderstood and misused that in most cases we feel it is no longer a good translation to put in the English Bible. Where the Revised English Version reads “trust,” almost all English versions say “faith.” But “trust” is the better translation. There is a lot of confusion among Christians about faith, so it is important to demystify it and become clear on what it is.

In the New Testament, “faith” is most often translated from the Greek noun *pistis* (#4102 πίστις), which, like many other Greek words, has several meanings, including “trust” (Rom. 3:28; 1 Cor. 15:14); “faithfulness, reliability” (Prov. 12:22 LXX; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 3:3; Gal. 5:22); “oath, troth” (3 Macc. 3:10 LXX); and “proof, pledge” (Acts 17:31). Also, in the New Testament and later Christian writings, *pistis* was used as a designation for the entire scope of religious practices and beliefs of the followers of Jesus, as in “the Christian Faith” (Gal. 1:23). As it was used in the everyday Greek-speaking world, “faithfulness” and “trust” were both very common meaning of *pistis*. However, in the New Testament, *pistis* means “trust” much more than it does “faithfulness,” and when *pistis* is translated “faith” in phrases like “faith in God,” “faith in Christ,” or “have faith,” it means “trust,” “confidence,” or “assurance.”

The early Christians would have readily perceived the meaning of *pistis* as “trust” or “confidence,” and that meaning can be easily confirmed by checking any good biblical lexicon or Bible dictionary. For example, *pistis* has been defined as:

* “With the predominant idea of trust (or confidence)” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*);
* “Firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).
* “Firm persuasion” (*A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* by E.W. Bullinger).
* “State of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted; *trust,* confidence” (*A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, W. Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich, 2000; usually abbreviated “BDAG”).
* “It is the attitude of complete trust in Christ...” (*The New Bible Dictionary*).
* “In the New Testament, ‘faith’ is used in a number of ways, but primarily with the meaning ‘trust’ or ‘confidence’ in God” (*Holman Bible Dictionary*).

These few examples could be multiplied manyfold, but the point should be clear: the biblical meaning of *pistis* in phrases like “*pistis* in God” is “trust.”

Hebrews 11:1 also defines what *pistis* is: “Now faith [*pistis*] is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (NIV2011). The NASB uses slightly different vocabulary but gives the same message: “Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” So the Bible itself defines *pistis* as assurance or confidence in something, and a good way to express that in English is by the word “trust.”

**“Trust” is a Simple Concept**

“Faith” has been defined and explained so many different ways that it is a difficult concept to grasp. In contrast, “trust” is simple to understand. The lexical sources listed above defined it when they defined *pistis*: it is confidence, a firm persuasion, a conviction based on the reliability, or trustworthiness, of the person or thing that is trusted. Also, trust has to have an object; something that is trusted. The human mind cannot “just trust.” We have to trust something. It can be God, our spouse, our friend, or even that the sun will come up tomorrow, but trust requires an object; we have to trust some trustworthy thing.

Lastly, our trust does not make, or force, anything to happen. We trust the sun will come up, but that does not make it come up. We trust that our so-far-always-reliable car will start when we turn the key, but that does not make it start. We trust our friend will help us in a pinch, but that does not force him to help. We trust God loves us, but that does not make Him help us in any given situation. *Pistis* (trust; faith) is not a force. It does not make things happen.

**Where the Word “Faith” Came From**

It is easy to see why *pistis*, which means “trust” or “confidence,” came to be translated “faith” in our English Bibles. When the New Testament was translated into Latin, the Latin word *fides* (pronounced 'fee-dace), which means “trust,” was often used to translate the Greek word *pistis*. And *fides* was a good translation because just as the Greek word *pistis* meant “trust, confidence,” so did the Latin word *fides*. As the English language developed many centuries later, the Latin word *fides* became the root of the English word “faith” (also “fidelity,” “fiduciary,” etc.). In contrast to the Latin root *fides*, the English word “trust” has Indo-European roots and came into our language via the Old Norse. The English language was built over time from many different word roots, which is a major reason why modern English has so many different words that seem to mean the same thing.

**“Take It by Faith” is Not Biblical**

The statement “take it by faith” has echoed throughout Christianity for centuries, but it never occurs in the Bible and is not a biblical concept. Why not? Because we cannot make ourselves trust something that is untrustworthy or that we do not understand. This concept is not well understood. It is often said, “I don’t understand electricity but I trust it.” That statement is not actually correct. What most people trust about electricity is that it works: the light always comes on when they flip the light switch and they always get shocked if they touch the “hot” wire. That is not “trusting electricity,” it is trusting that electricity reliably does certain things—and they do understand, and thus trust, that part.

Translating *pistis* as “faith” instead of “trust” has obscured the simple truth that we don’t trust what we don’t understand. Most people are not really sure of what “faith” is, so they accept the Church teaching that they can have faith in something they don’t understand. We can “accept” something and not argue about it even if we don’t understand it, but “accepting” something is not “trust.”

Once we realize that *pistis* means “trust,” we can see that the phrase “take it by faith” is equivalent to “just trust me.” When a salesperson says “Just trust me,” we become suspicious and are inclined not to trust them. Similarly, we should think twice when someone is talking about a biblical subject and says to “just take it by faith.” If we are ever told to “take it by faith,” that is a signal that the person teaching us cannot explain the doctrine he or she is teaching, and/or that the doctrine is untrustworthy.

**“Faith” Changed Meaning—Twice!**

We have seen that the biblical meaning of the Greek word *pistis* is “trust,” but that is not its primary meaning “on the street” today. Many Christians, and most non-Christians, think “faith” means “firm belief in something for which there is no proof” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition, 2004). Often that definition has been used to ridicule Christians, and admittedly, “believing in something for which there is no proof” seems like a questionable practice. So how did that non-biblical definition of “faith” develop?

Over the centuries, doctrines were brought into Christianity that were not biblically sound, and some that were not even logical. When those doctrines were questioned, since there was no proper biblical answer, the answer often given by the church authorities was simply, “take it by faith.” Sadly, the history of the Christian Church is replete with examples of wonderful Christians who were pressured or tortured into taking things “by faith” that did not make sense to them. Thus, over time, “faith” changed meanings. It came to mean belief in something for which there is no proof. The average Christian is not enough of a linguist to know that the commonly accepted definition of faith is not the actual biblical definition of the Greek and Latin text, so they wrongly think that “belief in something for which there is no proof” is a biblical definition of “faith.”

In the twentieth century, the meaning of faith changed again for many Christians, although the meaning of “belief in something for which there is no proof” has remained alongside the newer meaning. In what is now called “the Word of Faith Movement,” the word “faith” has come to denote a power or force of the mind that can appropriate things; that can force God or “the universe” to bring things to pass. Although many denominations reject the teaching of the Word of Faith Movement, for millions of Christians, “faith” has come to refer to a power of the mind that can bring material things into one’s life, move mountains, produce healing, bring financial wealth, and more. But biblically, “faith” is not a force or a power of the mind. In the next section, we will examine why many people have come to think that “faith” is a force that can affect the physical world.

**Part Two: Why “Faith” Sometimes Seems to Work**

**Many Different Reasons**

The unbiblical teaching of the Word of Faith Movement is that “faith” is a power or force that can control things. But if that is not what the Bible says, why does “faith” sometimes seem to work? There are many reasons that come together to give the impression that “faith” appropriates things, and these have been used to support the Word of Faith doctrine. They include the manifestation of faith, prayer, grace, humility, the operation of a gift ministry, and even occasional help from demonic sources.

**The Manifestation of Faith**

One of the biggest reasons “faith” sometimes seems to bring things to pass is that “regular faith” (trust) gets confused with the “manifestation of trust.” The “manifestation of trust,” more popularly known as the “manifestation of faith” or even “the gift of faith,” is one of the nine manifestations (sometimes called “gifts”) of the holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-9).

“Regular trust” occurs when there is a trustworthy object to trust. In contrast, the “manifestation of faith” occurs when God or the Lord Jesus Christ gives a specific revelation to a Christian. That revelation is God’s “green light,” and gives the Christian the authority to do what he cannot do by his own human power. If God gives a Christian the revelation to heal a person, then the Christian can operate the manifestations of faith (trust) and healing, and bring about healing. In Acts 3:4-8 Peter got revelation to heal a lame man. Peter commanded the healing, and the man was healed. But Peter was not merely employing regular “faith” (trust), he was operating manifestations of holy spirit: the manifestation of faith (trust) and the manifestation of healing.

The person doing the healing, in that case, Peter, needs revelation from God for the healing to come to pass. The revelation is God’s indication that He will supply the power for the healing. If healing was done by a person’s own human power, then logically, he or she could simply go out and heal everyone. After all, if faith is simply a power that can be operated, and a person had the faith to heal one person, then he should have the power to heal everyone. But this is obviously not the way faith works.

Someone defending the Faith Movement might respond, “But the person being healed needs faith, too.” That is not always true; there are many examples in the Bible and in life where the one healed did not have faith. Dead people have been raised, babies have been healed, and people have been healed who were unbelievers or who did not expect it. So the question remains: why can a person with faith heal some people and not others? The answer is simple: faith is not a force that accomplishes tasks. God is the force; He is the power. The reason we need “faith” (“trust”) is so that when God gives us the revelation to do a miracle or healing, we trust that He will do it. No matter how impossible something seems, if God gives you the revelation to do something, if you trust Him, you can. That is the “manifestation of trust” (1 Cor. 12:9).

Confusing “regular faith” (“trust”) with the “manifestation of faith” (trust) misleads people into thinking that the great miracles and healings in the Bible were done simply because the person who did them had great “faith.” Actually, the miracles and healings in the Bible were done by the manifestation of faith and God exerting His power. “Faith” is “trust,” and when God makes a promise, we trust it, but it is God who brings His promise to pass; not our trust. We understand this perfectly in the physical world, and it works the same way in the spiritual world.

Let’s say you have a friend whose car is being fixed, so you offer to give him a ride to work. He trusts you will actually show up and give him the ride, so he accepts. Then, because you are trustworthy, you keep your promise and give him the ride. But did his trust in you somehow force you give him the ride? Of course not. His trust gave him the confidence to be ready to be picked up at an appointed time, but it was your power that supplied the ride. Furthermore, you did not have to offer him the ride in the first place even though he was a trusting friend. At no point did the fact that he trusted you force you to act on his behalf.

Biblical trust works the same way. We trust that God can heal, but that does not force Him to heal. Furthermore, our trust does not give us the power to heal without God. The fact that our trust in God does not “make” things happen explains why “faith” seems to fail so often. However, when God does tell us to heal—by giving us the revelation to do it—then we can trust His “Yes” and command a healing.

[For more information on the manifestation of faith, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:9.]

**God Answers Prayers**

Another reason why “faith” sometimes seems to appropriate things in the material world is because answered prayer gets confused with the “power of faith.” The Bible tells us that God answers prayer and that we are to pray for the things we need or desire. Sometimes when people are trying to have “faith” for something, they ask God for it over and over; but praying over and over for something is one of the things God tells us to do to get our prayers answered (Luke 11:5-10; 18:1-8). So sometimes if someone gets what he has been consistently praying for, it is due to God answering his prayer, not because his human mind and “faith” somehow brought what he wanted to him.

God answering prayers also helps to explain why “faith” seems to fail so often, or takes so long to work. If we really were getting what we wanted due to the power of our faith, then we should be able to get anything that is available, and get it quickly. After all, if we have the faith to get one thing we want, then our faith should build and we should have even more faith to get more things we want. But people’s experience is that they do not always get what they “have faith for,” and often when they do get what they want, it takes a long time. This is consistent with what the Bible says about God answering prayers.

God often answers prayers, especially those prayed fervently over a period of time, but there are also lots of reasons people do not get what they pray for, including asking with the wrong motives (James 4:3), the spiritual battle (Dan. 10:10-13), the fallen nature of the world (Heb. 9:27), and other realities and laws God has to honor, such as the law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7). But the point is that sometimes when people get what they want it is due to their prayers and God’s decision to answer them, not to their “faith.”

**Grace and Humility**

Sometimes receiving what we want is simply God giving us grace. God is God, and He has plans and purposes that He will accomplish. Additionally, in our personal lives, sometimes receiving God’s grace is due to our humility. The Bible is clear that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Prov. 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). There are clearly occasions when believers get what they need or want from God simply because He loves them and gives them grace. A good example is John the Baptist’s mother, Elizabeth, getting pregnant. She had wanted to get pregnant for years without success, but because of God’s purposes and plans He gave her grace and she was able to get pregnant (Luke 1:5-25). It is because these occasions are due to God’s grace and His plans that they are not repeatable at our will. That people do not repeatedly get what they want even when they are trying hard to have “faith,” is good evidence that it is not our “faith” that brings us things, but sometimes is simply due to God’s love and grace.

**Having a Positive Attitude**

Another reason that “faith” may appear to work at times is that people are taught that if they have faith, they are to act and speak in a positive and confident manner, as if they have already received what they were having “faith” for. But psychological studies show that people who are happy and have a positive attitude almost always do better in life than those who don’t. Happy, positive people are more successful than sad, doubtful, disillusioned people. One reason is that they typically work harder and are more productive.

But the fact that people who are positive thinkers are generally more successful than those who see the world in a negative light does not make “faith” into a force or law. Plenty of positive people do not have what they would like to have. In fact, some of the happiest and most trusting people on earth are very disadvantaged mentally, physically, and/or materially.

Also, having a happy, positive outlook on life is extremely effective when it comes to our physical health. A person’s mind cannot generate a faith-force that appropriates things outside his body, but the Bible is clear that the way a person thinks powerfully affects his own body (Prov. 3:7, 8; 4:20-22; 12:4; 14:30; 15:13; 16:24; 17:22; 18:14). If we trust in God, think positive thoughts, and maintain a godly environment, we will be much healthier than if we do not. So it is that many times when sick people are healed, it is due to them getting rest, having loving people care for them, getting away from the worries and bustle of life, and taking time to think, pray, and perhaps read the Bible or inspiring literature. The Bible says, “A merry heart doeth good *like* a medicine” (Prov. 17:22), and many times when people are healed it is due to their being relaxed and “merry,” not due to their “faith.”

**God Honors the Gift Ministries**

Another reason “faith” seems to work for some people is that God honors the gift ministries He has given. If a person has a gift ministry in an area, then success in that area tends to come as well. Thus, if a person has a ministry in miracles or healing, he may have great success in that area, but may wrongly attribute that success to his personal faith rather than God honoring the special gift He has given him. The Bible tells us that God gives some individuals the ministry of healing, miracles, giving, and more (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:28).

There are times when Christian healers start ministering without consciously receiving revelation, and either the revelation comes during the ministering, or the person is healed anyway, seemingly without revelation. Those cases are quite common and are due to things such as we just discussed, including prayer, humility, grace, and God honoring a gift ministry.

**Satan’s Deceitful Help**

An important reason why people believe there is a law that allows them to control things and bring success to themselves is that the Devil wants people to think they can control their lives and destiny without God. Sometimes when “faith,” or mental power, seems to work in helping people get what they want, it is because the Devil maneuvers situations and circumstances to make it seem like people are receiving things they have “faith” for. The Devil is constantly seeking to lead people away from God and truth, so he will sometimes help people acquire material things if it accomplishes his greater goal.

A good explanation of how the Devil helps people was written many decades ago in the book, *Think and Grow Rich*, by Napoleon Hill. Hill is still considered a guru of financial self-help, and in his book, as the title suggests, he gives principles of the mind that supposedly allow people to acquire wealth. However, by the end of the book, he reveals the real secret to his success: getting help from a demon. Of course, Hill does not come out and say his helper is a demon, and he might not have fully understood it himself, although he did know he was getting outside help from the spirit realm and not just from the power of his mind.

Hill calls his helper a “guardian angel,” but the fact that he calls it an angel does not make it one; the Bible tells us that “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14 HCSB). In the second-to-last chapter of *Think and Grow Rich*, Hill writes:

This much the author [Napoleon Hill] does know—there is a power, or a First Cause, or an Intelligence, which permeates every atom of matter, and embraces every unit of energy perceptible to man…This Intelligence may, through the principles of this philosophy, be induced to aid in transmuting DESIRES into concrete, or material, form. The author has this knowledge, because he has experimented with it—and has EXPERIENCED IT. …There comes to your aid, and to do your bidding, with the development of the sixth sense, a “guardian angel” who will open to you at all times the door to the Temple of Wisdom.” [Napoleon Hill, *Think and Grow Rich*; eBook, 1937 edition, Chapter 14, “The Sixth Sense: The Door to the Temple of Wisdom” (emphasis the author’s). See also, *Outwitting the Devil*, p. 48, 49].

By the end of his book it is clear that Hill is saying that if you get to the point that your focus in life is on material things, then a “guardian angel” will come into your life, do your bidding, and help you get what you want. That worked for Napoleon Hill, and he and many others say it can work for anyone. Actually, although in 1937 Hill used the term “guardian angel” for his spiritual helper, in 1938 he wrote the book, *Outwitting the Devil*, in which he described meeting the Devil himself. Although some people have tried to say that Hill only used the Devil as a literary device, that is not what Hill himself says:

I have had experience with enough of the principles mentioned by the Devil to assure me that they will do exactly what he says they will. That is enough for me. …I believe the Devil is exactly who he claims to be. (*Outwitting the Devil: The Secret to Freedom and Success*; Sterling, New York, 1938, printed and annotated 2011; p. 56).

For centuries there has been a kind of folk belief—usually made fun of—that you can “sell your soul to the Devil” to get what you want in this life. As with most long-standing beliefs, there is some truth in it. The Devil is willing to help people acquire material success, especially since he can do it in a way that excludes God. One reason for this is that people who focus on material success usually do not turn to God for help or salvation, and so they will perish in the Lake of Fire along with the Devil instead of living forever with Jesus. Even if the person is a Christian when he starts his “success by faith” journey, he is taught that “his faith” is his source of supply, not God, and so finding the will of God becomes less important than figuring out how to build his faith and gain success in life.

Not everyone who gets help from the Devil recognizes the true source of the help—even Napoleon Hill apparently did not for a while. But just because someone does not realize he is getting help from demonic sources does not mean he is not, especially if he is directly opposing God in asking for that help, such as making wealth or power a dominant motive in his life. One way we can tell that Hill was not getting help from God is his confident assertion based on his experience that the “guardian angel” comes “to do your bidding.” Anyone who has a personal relationship with the Lord knows that “doing our bidding” is not what God and Jesus are about. We are to do their bidding.

**Is There Really a “Law?”**

That the Devil sometimes helps people gain worldly success explains why there are non-Christian groups that believe that the power of the mind taps into a “law” that works for both believers and unbelievers. In fact, when the “law” of faith is examined, there is really not much difference between what Word of Faith teachers say about the power of “faith,” and what non-believers say about the power of the mind.

The book, *The Secret*, by Rhonda Byrne, which came out in 2006 and received great publicity, speaks of the “Secret” being the “law of attraction” (p. 25). Byrne, who says the “law of attraction” works for anybody, writes: “The Secret gives you anything you want; happiness, health, and wealth” (p. 1). “If you can think about what you want in your mind, and make that your dominant thought, you will bring it into your life” (p. 9). “Nothing can come into your life unless you summon it through persistent thoughts” (p. 43). “The law of attraction is a law of nature. It is as impartial as the law of gravity” (p. 43).

Byrne and others who believe in the power of the mind do not include God in their teaching, but still say the principles they operate are in the New Testament. Byrne writes: “The Creative Process used in The Secret, which was taken from the New Testament in the Bible, is an easy guideline for you to create what you want in three simple steps” (*The Secret*, p. 47). The steps she then outlines are: ask, believe, and receive.

So in the final analysis, Word of Faith Christian ministers and power of the mind unbelievers both believe in a law based on the power of the mind that gets people what they want. Sometimes this law seems to work, often it does not. However, when it seems to work, it does not mean that there really is such a “law” or that the mind is somehow affecting the physical world. If people get what they want, it is often due to things like prayer or grace, or in some cases may even be due to help from the Adversary.

**Part Three: Errors with the Faith Movement**

**It’s Not About You**

One of the problems with the doctrine of the Word of Faith Movement and non-Christian groups that teach about the power of the mind is that it puts the emphasis on the individual—*you*. Since most of these groups teach that it is a “law” that if you have faith, you can bring into your life whatever you want, it is clear that the pressure is on “you.” Kenneth Hagin, a Word of Faith minister, writes: “That’s what you’ve got to learn to do to get things from God: Have faith in your faith” (*Having Faith in Your Faith*, p. 5). Hagin says Jesus appeared to him in a vision and told him: “If anybody, anywhere, will…put these four principles into operation, he will always receive whatever he wants from Me or from God the Father” (eBook: *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God,* Chapter 1).

E. W. Kenyon, one of the founders of the Faith Movement, wrote in his book, *The Two Kinds of Faith*, “Faith in your own faith is the law of success in the realm of the spirit” (p. 36). Kenneth Copeland wrote, “Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force. It will move things. …Faith is a spiritual force” (*The Force of Faith* p. 13). Victor Paul Wierwille called this “law” the “law of believing,” and wrote: “The law of believing is the greatest law in the Word of God. As a matter of fact, is it not only the greatest law in The Word, it is the greatest law in the whole world. Believing works for saint and sinner alike” (*Power for Abundant Living*, 1971, p. 32). So if this “law” is not working in your life, then Word of Faith ministers say that the problem is “you.”

We need to become clear that “having faith in your faith” is nothing more than having faith in yourself. But that is not what Jesus said to do to accomplish God’s will in your life. In Mark 11, Jesus cursed a fig tree that died overnight. When the apostles pointed the dead tree out to Jesus, he said to them: “Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22 NIV84; “Have trust in God” REV). If we want to do miracles like Jesus did, we have to do what Jesus said to do: trust God. When we look in the Bible, people who wanted miracles trusted God and His Son, Jesus. The centurion whose servant was healed trusted Jesus (Matt. 8:8-11). So did the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (Matt. 9:21); the Synagogue ruler whose daughter was raised from the dead (Matt. 9:18); the blind men who were healed (Matt. 9:28); and Peter when he walked on water (Matt. 14:28-30).

But if the people in the Bible who accomplished and/or received great miracles trusted God, why did Jesus say to the woman healed of bleeding, “Your faith has healed you?” (Mark 5:34 NIV84). He said it because although it was God’s will to heal the woman and He supplied the power for the healing, the woman still had to trust that God would heal her. The woman’s faith was a reason she was healed; not the ultimate reason, but an important one. The woman’s faith (trust) in God did not force God to heal her, but in that situation, God made healing available to her, and she had to then trust God to receive it. Certainly, God can act without people trusting Him; Lazarus was dead but was healed and given life. But in many cases, God has chosen to work in concert with His people. He gives the “green light,” the revelation to act; then we trust and act; then God supplies the power and does what He said He would do. Our faith does not make things happen, but it is an important part of the process that God has set up so that things do happen.

Word of Faith ministers teach that you can make things happen in the physical world by your faith, so it is common to hear them use the phrase “have faith for” (or “believe for”). Many Christians are surprised to learn that no phrase like “have faith for” occurs in the Bible. The reason is simple: we don’t have the power to make things happen. God has the power. That is why the phrase that is in the Bible is “pray for.” We can’t “believe for” things and make them happen, but we can “pray for” things and let God make them happen.

The Bible instructs us to “believe in,” but not to “believe for.” The Bible says that we are to “believe in” God, Jesus, and the Gospel, but to “believe in” something is simply to have a firm conviction about it. But that’s the point. If we have a firm conviction about God (we believe in Him and trust Him), then we ask Him for things in prayer. However, we don’t have the power to get what we want on our own: we need Him to accomplish what we are praying for. That takes the pressure off of “us” to “believe for” what we want, and allows God, whom we “believe in,” to graciously answer our prayers.

**Stealing God’s Glory**

The flip side of making material success about “faith” and “you” is that it takes the glory away from the One who really deserves it: God. If our success is really due to us tapping into a “law” that works for believers and unbelievers, then God is almost irrelevant (unbelievers would say He is definitely irrelevant). God is squeezed out of the picture. His plans and purposes for us don’t really matter that much. God (or some Power) becomes a convenient vending machine who is at the beck and call of anyone who has faith, whether he is a saint or sinner. In general, ministers in the Word of Faith Movement get around that argument by saying God wants everyone healthy, wealthy, and happy, and those things are ours for the taking if we have faith. While we agree that it is a general principle that God wants people healthy and blessed, it is also true that there are important reasons that not all of God’s people have those things now.

We are not in a position to understand the specific reasons for what happens on earth—for example, why one person is healed and another is not. The reasons are complex and involve the broken nature of the fallen world we live in; the spiritual battle that is raging between Good and Evil; a person’s individual situation and circumstances; and other factors as well. What happens in our individual lives is an intricate interplay between our will, the will of the Adversary, and the will of God. But we know that God loves us and has a plan to defeat evil and completely redeem His people, and He occasionally energizes miracles and healings that work to accomplish that plan.

The so-called “law” of faith is not a law at all, it is a false teaching. It is praiseworthy to trust God, but it should not be those who trust Him who get the glory, it should be God, because He is the One who is trustworthy. God knows when, where, and how to help, and He supplies the power that does the miracles and healings. The Hero is God, not us.

**Lack of Peace**

As we have seen, one of the consequences of believing that a person’s faith determines what happens to him is that it puts the pressure on the individual. That pressure tends to make people unpeaceful. One of the great blessings of the Bible is that we can trust God and rest in Him, and therefore have peace of mind (Ps. 119:165; John 14:27; Phil. 4:7-9; 2 Thess. 3:16). But people who feel their faith is responsible for what happens to them tend to spend a lot of time focusing on how much faith they have and what they can do to build more faith in order to get more of what they want. Despite the teaching of Word of Faith ministers, focusing on “faith” does not actually build more faith (trust); in fact, it can build more doubt because it fails so often. Once we realize there is no law of faith but that “faith” is trust, we can refocus our lives and spend time dwelling upon God’s goodness and willingness to help us, which is what helps our trust in God to increase.

**Unscriptural Expectations**

A big problem with the “faith brings success” claim, also known as “prosperity theology” or the “Prosperity Gospel,” is that it gives sincere but inexperienced Christians an unscriptural and unrealistic expectation about the Christian life and God’s will for them. The “faith brings success” teaching encourages people to have ungodly desires for material things, including money and power, and this can be very harmful. Admittedly, the “Faith Movement” theology fits well with the modern, self-centered, “what’s-in-it-for-me,” “I want it now” culture, and thus brings some people to Christ who otherwise might not come. However, at some point, all of those people will find out that “faith” does not solve their problems, and then the reason they embraced Christ in the first place is no longer there.

People who believe their faith will bring them success in life eventually encounter circumstances that cause them to doubt their faith. They may get a sickness that does not easily heal; they may be afflicted by a natural disaster such as a tornado, flood, or drought; they may lose their job or have a huge financial loss, etc. Life is full of setbacks and tragedies that are not fixed by “faith,” and people who cannot fix the setbacks in their lives by “faith” will eventually begin to doubt themselves. They lose their “faith in their faith,” and sadly, if they continue to hold to the “faith brings success” ideology, they become confused and feel helpless and hopeless. Some of those people mature into simply accepting that they can only seem to solve a few of their problems by faith, although they don’t understand why it is only a few and not all. But unfortunately, other people abandon Christianity, feel betrayed, and become hurt and bitter about their Christian experience. Those people who become so disillusioned that they stop walking with or believing in Christ are badly hurt in other ways; for example, because they have given up the Christian life, they may lose rewards in the Messianic Kingdom.

[For more on rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

[For a biblical and historical examination of the modern Faith Movement, see, D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel.*]

**Misunderstanding the Scriptures**

There are many scriptures that Word of Faith ministers and Christians who subscribe to the teaching of “believe and receive” use to support their teaching. However, they wrongly understand and apply those scriptures. This does two things at once: it obscures the true meaning of the verses themselves, and also, people are led astray into false teaching based on the false interpretations of the verses.

A typical verse that is used to support the Word of Faith position is Mark 11:23, which says that if you tell a mountain to move, and do not doubt in your heart, it will move. That is true, but the context and scope of Scripture show us that it is the manifestation of faith that moves mountains, not regular “faith.” Although no one moved a mountain in Scripture, great miracles like splitting oceans, stopping rivers, and causing great city walls to fall down did happen—but all by the manifestation of faith.

There are many verses that tell us it is God’s desire for us to be successful and healthy. The Bible says, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health” (3 John 1:2 KJV). Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10 KJV). God does want us healthy, successful, and blessed. But that does not mean we acquire those things “by faith.” There are many biblical keys and principles, including trusting God and living wisely, that work together so that believers can be healthy and successful. For example, Proverbs tells us that some great keys for being successful are saving money over time instead of spending all you make, working hard, and not making risky business deals (cf. Prov. 6:6-11; 10:4; 11:15; 12:27; 13:4; 19:15; 21:17). Similarly, staying healthy involves obeying God, being cheerful, and controlling our feelings and emotions (Prov. 3:8; 14:30; 17:22). Every verse that Word of Faith ministers interpret in a way that supports the “law of faith” has other interpretations that do not endorse that doctrine.

It is God’s desire that His people be blessed and seek His wisdom (Prov. 1:7; Ps. 115:13). His wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs. If we listen to Wisdom, we are blessed, but if we do not, we will be in trouble and may end up “eating the fruit of our way.”

**Proverbs 1:20-33 (NIV84 Abridged by author)**

Wisdom calls aloud in the street, ‘How long will fools hate knowledge? If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you, But since you rejected me when I called and since you ignored all my advice, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways. For the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease.’

In this section of Scripture, Wisdom is highlighting the principle of reaping and sowing, and pointing out that if a person sows foolishly throughout his life, when distress and trouble come, God may not simply undo the results of years of unwise decisions.

The “faith brings success” teaching has caused many Christians to miss the true message of Scripture: life is difficult, even for believers, and “faith” is not meant to change your circumstances but rather to help you persevere through them. This truth is supported by the examples of godly believers in both the Bible and history who experienced terrible difficulties. Could it really be true that the prophets and apostles—the most notable believers in the Bible—could have had such little faith that they seemed to face nothing but problems? This alone should tell us that the message of the Word of Faith Movement is false. The true doctrine is that life is difficult and we need to trust God and stay faithful to Him and He will give us strength to endure.

**Does “Faith” Bring Financial Success?**

It is a standard teaching of the Word of Faith ministers that faith brings financial success, but verses such as James 2:5 directly contradict that teaching. James 2:5 (NASB) says, “Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom…?” What James says, we can see for ourselves if we take a look at Christians around the world: there are many who are very materially poor but are rich in faith. It is not hard to find people like that, but if the Word of Faith message is true, Christians who are “rich in faith” should also be rich in the world. Those Christians who are rich in faith but poor by the world’s standards should not condemn themselves for being poor, but rather commend themselves for trusting in God’s promises even though their life is difficult. They will be rewarded.

**Compassion and the Faith Movement**

Another hurtful consequence of believing that what happens in life is based on a person’s faith is that it discourages having genuine compassion toward others who are experiencing problems. The Bible commands us to have compassion for others, but it can be hard to be compassionate when we think people are causing their own troubles. We see this in the book of Job: Job’s “friends” could not console him because they thought his problems were his own fault. Their misguided appeals to Job to repent of the sin that he had supposedly committed hurt them by damaging their friendship with Job, and hurt Job by compounding his grief. Similarly, when those in the Word of Faith Movement try to help someone who has suffered a tragedy by telling them to have more faith, it can hurt the friendship and cause frustration and despair in the person who is already suffering. The Bible says that “no temptation has taken hold of you that is not common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13 REV). When we understand that “faith” is “trust,” and that what happens to us in life is not always our fault, then it becomes easier to have compassion for others who are having problems.

**Is “Trust” an Inappropriate Translation?**

In the Word of Faith Movement, the wrong doctrine about “faith” has obscured the right doctrine about “trust.” The teaching of the Word of Faith Movement has infiltrated so much of Christian thinking that, for many Christians, “trust” is not a good translation of *pistis*. Many Christians think: “Faith is much bigger than trust.” But that’s a serious problem. *Pistis* is not “bigger than trust;” *pistis* is “trust.” No ancient Greek speaker would have thought *pistis* referred to a power or force of the mind, and they would not have thought that their own mind could tap into a spiritual “law” such that they could just have *pistis* and then the universe would have to respond to them. But to people who buy into the modern teaching on the great power of faith, the translation “trust” seems pretty anemic and impotent.

The reality is, however, that on our own we humans are quite impotent. We are mortal and weak. Without God, we would have no hope. But God stepped into our lives and helped us. He sent His Son to die for us so we could live forever and He even sometimes gives us revelation according to His purposes so we can bring His power to bear on earth and perform healings and miracles. And what’s our part in all this greatness? We trust Him. “Trust” is an honest and accurate translation of *pistis*. It magnifies God and it clarifies the part that we play in God’s plan.

**The Plans and Purposes of God**

A terrible consequence of the Word of Faith teaching is that the plans and purposes of God lose their great importance. God’s plans and purposes are the most important reason for the great miracles and healings we see in the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, we see many great miracles: Moses splitting the Sea, Joshua making the walls of Jericho fall, Elijah calling fire down from heaven, Shadrach and his two companions staying alive in a furnace of fire, Daniel being delivered from the lion’s den, and many more. Faith ministers say these miracles were done by “faith,” but is that true? Some of them were done by the manifestation of faith, which is dependent on specific revelation from God, which further depends on His plans and purposes. But also, some of the miracles were just God acting in power to fulfill His purposes without any human interaction. Shadrach and his companions staying alive in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace seems to be one of those cases. According to what they said in Daniel 3:18, they were not sure God would rescue them.

The miracles and healings in the Bible are all part of God’s grand plan, and that explains why “regular faith” (trust) can’t reliably bring them to pass at our discretion or repeat them whenever we desire. If Joshua knocked the walls of Jericho down by his faith (Josh. 6:1-21), why didn’t he conquer all the cities in Canaan the same way? If Samuel could make it rain during the dry season in Israel (1 Sam. 12:17), why couldn’t other great believers, like Abraham and David, make it rain during famines? If Elisha could feed many prophets by multiplying food (2 Kings 4:42-44), why could he not do the same thing when there was a famine in Samaria (2 Kings 6:24-7:20)? If Peter could raise Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-42), why couldn’t he raise others, such as Stephen? Those great miracles were done by the manifestation of faith and were according to God’s purposes and plans.

That God energizes miracles and healings according to His plans and purposes explains Jesus’ healings and miracles. God knew certain Messianic prophecies and foreshadowings had to be fulfilled. Thus, in some cases, like the time Jesus fed the 5,000, He also energized healing for everyone who needed healing (Matt. 14:14; Luke 9:11). But there were other times when Jesus healed only one person. For example, at the Pool of Bethesda there was a crowd of sick people, but Jesus only healed one man (John 5:1-9). It is unreasonable to think that at the feeding of the 5,000, every single person in that huge crowd had faith for healing, but at Bethesda, a pool where people went to be healed, only one person had faith. Like the other great miracles in the Bible, the miracles Jesus did were according to the purposes of God, and God gave the revelation for them to be done. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing” (John 5:19).

It is because God works healings and miracles in a way that fits His plans and glorifies Him that there is no “formula” for healing or miracles. Christians who pray for miracles and healings are well aware of the fact that there is no formula for success. The factors that are involved in a healing or miracle vary from case to case. We certainly see this in the life of Jesus. Sometimes Jesus just spoke and a miracle or healing happened. Sometimes he used something physical, like putting mud in a blind man’s eye. Sometimes he healed in front of a crowd, while at other times he took the person aside alone. Sometimes he asked if the person believed in him, sometimes he didn’t.

Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, it has been God’s plan and purpose to rescue mankind from sin and death. To do that, many things had to be accomplished, such as the Exodus from Egypt; the conquest of Canaan; the establishment of the kingdom of Israel; the return from Babylon; and the birth, death, and resurrection of the Christ. In order to accomplish His great purposes, God had to energize many specific miracles and healings. God chose to work many of those miracles in concert with people who operated the manifestation of faith, but it was because of God’s plans and purposes that He gave the revelation to do the miracles in the first place; they did not happen just because someone had “faith.” If, when we read the Bible, we look for how a miracle or healing fits into the plan of God, we will see the glory of God in a way we may never have seen it before.

**“But I Want It To Work!”**

Another consequence of the Word of Faith/Power of the Mind teaching is that it allows people to avoid engaging in the true situation in which we all live: that we are not ultimately in control of our lives. The Bible speaks of this in many different verses, and it is confirmed by experience. People face unexpected tragedy on a daily basis. But it is so important for some people to think that they are in control, or that they can have what they want in life, that they willingly ignore the plain evidence of the world around them and push forward with their beliefs. Thus, it is the case that millions of people follow the teachings of the Word of Faith Movement even though they do not reliably work and the people do not have what they “believe for.”

The standard response of the Word of Faith ministers to this problem is to say, “Well, those people didn’t have faith.” But is the massive failure of the Word of Faith message that easy to explain? We say, “No.” The real reason that the teaching of the Word of Faith movement seems to fail so often is because it is a false teaching.

**Part Four: Trusting and Pleasing God**

**Trusting God is Important**

Hebrews 11:6 is a hugely important verse: “And without faith it is impossible to please God…” (NIV84). The REV says, “And without trust it is impossible to please *him*….” Why is it impossible to please God if we don’t trust Him? God created us, loves us, and wants the best for us. If we doubt that, we will doubt Him and not act on His commands or live the life He desires for us. We see this occurring every day in the lives of Christians who believe in God but who do not trust Him enough to overcome the fear or hesitation they have concerning His commands, and who consequently stop short of obeying Him. For example, when it comes to prayer, many Christians know God commands us to pray, but they don’t pray. They don’t trust God enough to obey Him rather than their feelings. Although this can be due to negligence or selfishness, it is often a trust issue.

If we do not trust God, we will doubt salvation through Jesus Christ, and we will not be able to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength as He commands us to. It is not strange that God is not pleased with those who don’t trust Him. After all, He has proven Himself to be trustworthy. We should understand God’s point of view. He created us in His image, and we are not happy when people do not trust us—similarly, He is not happy when people don’t trust Him.

**Belief in God is Not Trust in God**

It is possible to believe in God without trusting Him. James 2:19 (REV) shows the difference: “You believe that there is one God. You do well. The demons also believe—and shudder.” Demons know God exists, but they don’t trust Him. That can happen to Christians too, so we should do what it takes so that our belief in God becomes trust in God. Trust develops because we come to believe the person is trustworthy and are convinced that they are reliable. This almost always comes from having a personal relationship.

There is nothing magical about trust. Trust is built over time. Personal relationships can start with a certain level of trust, but eventually, the trust will have to grow from more and more personal interactions or understanding. Every relationship comes to the point where further trust is built by personal experience. God knows that we need to trust Him to please Him, and thus, He does things that help build our trust in Him. God acts to draw us near to Him. He is trustworthy and faithful in all His ways, and as we study His Word and obey it, and enter into a personal relationship with Him, our trust in Him naturally grows.

**Trust is Easily Destroyed**

Although trust is typically built slowly over time, it can be destroyed very quickly. Someone can lie to us or hurt us in some way, or even just be unreliable or do things that do not make sense to us, and our trust in them is weakened or destroyed. That is why in most ancient religions the people were not required to trust their gods. For example, the Greek and Roman gods were not trustworthy and did not demand that people trust them; they were deceitful, jealous, unpredictable, cruel, and even rapists and murderers. They were powerful and lived by the rule of “might makes right,” so they demanded worship—including cruel things like human sacrifice—and if they did not get it, they sought vengeance against those who spurned them.

The God of the Bible is totally different from the gods of other religions. One of His great attributes is that He is trustworthy, so there are many verses that tell us to trust God. Psalm 4:5 (KJV) says, “Put your trust in the LORD.” Furthermore, since God is trustworthy, He keeps His promises. In fact, our God is unique among other gods because He makes specific promises and then is faithful to keep them.

**Satan’s Attack on Trusting God**

Satan knows how important it is that believers trust God and how harmful it is when they do not. God is a “team player” and desires for us to partner with Him in laboring for His kingdom. He has decided to do much of what He accomplishes on earth by working with people who trust Him. Satan knows that, so he uses many different strategies and wages a continual war to make God seem untrustworthy. Satan knows that if he can get a person to think God is untrustworthy, then the battle is won. If a person believes God is evil or unreliable, then he will not trust God.

God is loving and good, and any so-called doctrine that makes Him seem otherwise is misrepresenting the biblical depiction of the Almighty God and should be closely examined.

[For more on Satan’s influence in the world today, see commentary on 1 John 5:19. For more on how mistranslated verses can paint God in a bad light, see commentary on Rom. 8:28. For more on God not causing sickness, death, and disasters on earth, see *Don’t Blame God*, published by Spirit & Truth Fellowship.]

**Pleasing God is the Goal**

Material success should not be the goal of our lives—finding the will of God for our lives must be of supreme importance. One of the reasons it is vital that Christians learn the Bible well is that we have to be careful what we ask for. If we set our hearts on getting things that are against the will of God for us, we may end up in frustration and doubt, or sometimes a demon will bring us what God will not, but it will bring lots of other consequences and baggage as well.

God wants us to have our needs met, but that is different from having wealth and power. God knows if we persistently ask wrongly it can leave us disillusioned or even allow a demon into our lives, so He warns us over and over against setting our hearts on material things.

* **Prov. 23:4 (NIV84)**: “Do not wear yourself out to become rich; be wise enough to restrain yourself.”
* **Prov. 28:20 (NIV84)**: “A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.”
* **Luke 12:15 (REV)**: “…be on guard against every *form of* greediness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses.”
* **1 Tim. 6:8-10 (REV)**: “…if we have food and covering, we will be content with that. But those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, which some, reaching out for *it*, have been led astray from the Faith and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”
* **Heb. 13:5 (REV)**: “Keep your life free from the love of money, *and* be content with what you have.”

Certainly there will be wealthy Christians, just as Abraham, Joseph, David, and Solomon were wealthy. God has no problem with wealth. In fact, God helps some people get wealth just so they can help others (Rom. 12:8). But God does have a problem with people who ignore the real plan of God for their lives and instead set their heart on material things. God promises to give crown rewards in the future, and He specifically mentions five in His Word. There is the incorruptible crown for exercising self-control and doing our best for God (1 Cor. 9:25 KJV). The crown of rejoicing is for winning others to Christ (1 Thess. 2:19 KJV). The crown of righteousness is to those who love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8 KJV). God will give the crown of life to those who endure under trial (James 1:12). Lastly, the crown of glory is for those who faithfully shepherd His flock (1 Pet. 5:4 KJV). Sometimes the people who engage in these activities will be wealthy, but often focusing on the call of God in your life means you will not gain great wealth. But standing in the Everlasting Future with a gold crown on your head will far surpass the value of any earthly wealth. We should never labor to be wealthy, we labor to live wisely and do the will of God.

**Conclusion**

As stated at the beginning of this appendix, *pistis* is a common Greek word and in phrases such as “*pistis* in Christ,” it means “trust.” The word “faith” has been so misused in the Church and in culture that it may take some time for our minds to adjust to the idea that a proper translation of *pistis* is “trust,” but we will understand the Bible much better when we think in terms of “trust,” not “faith.” When we properly understand that our part is to trust God, not to “make” things happen by our “faith,” many good things happen.

* God becomes our Hero because He is the One who makes things happen—not us.
* We become more peaceful because we are not worried about how much “faith” we have or getting more faith to get more of what we want.
* We focus on our personal relationship with God because trust builds as the relationship deepens (and an unexpected blessing: we find that when we really focus on God, we become so enthralled with Him in our daily interaction with Him that we have no time or desire to “focus” on trust).
* We pray more because God says to “pray for” what we need and want.
* We become more thankful for the miracles and healings we do see instead of defeated about the ones we don’t see, because we know they are due to God’s love and grace.
* We accept, and strive to endure through, our trials and tribulations, knowing that God, who does not lie, said we would have troubles in this fallen world.
* We hold the Hope of the Next Life more brightly in our hearts because we know that it will be much better than this life.

God is trustworthy, so we trust Him. Our trust does nothing in and of itself; the power to do mighty things comes from God. God keeps His promises and does what He says He will do. He is the Hero.

Appendix 3. The Dead are Dead

The Bible teaches that when a person dies, they are totally without life, dead in every way, and will not be alive again until they are raised from the dead at the Rapture or a resurrection. Death is a huge topic, and many books have been written about it. This short appendix will attempt to enlighten the reader on the Scriptures and basic topics regarding the state of the dead.

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Introduction

When a man or woman dies, they are dead in every way: body, soul, and spirit. They are not alive in heaven or the Lake of Fire, which is often wrongly referred to as “hell.” Although right now every dead person is totally dead, in the future God will raise the dead. Each person will be raised either at the Rapture or one of the resurrections, depending on when they lived and whether or not they were saved. Then, when the person is raised from the dead they will be judged by Jesus Christ (John 5:22-27; Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10). Knowing that when a person dies, they are dead in every way is very helpful in understanding the Bible and life properly.

Knowing that dead people are truly dead:

* Affirms the value of life over death and shows why death is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). If the soul is immortal and good people go immediately to heaven, then death is not such a bad thing after all.
* Shows why resurrection is so important.
* Exposes the Devil as a liar when he contradicted God and told Eve that she would not die (Gen. 2:17 vs. Gen. 3:4).
* Exposes the appearances of dead people as demonic manifestations and shows why trying to contact dead people is an abomination to God (Deut. 18:9-14).
* Keeps people from being deceived by the advice given by demons pretending to be dead people and “spirit guides” that manifest themselves in séances and such.
* Helps us understand the Bible when it says things like dead people are in Sheol and there is no knowledge in the grave.
* Shifts people’s belief about the timing of when saved people are reunited with their dead family and friends from the time of a person’s death to the time of the Lord’s return, and thus magnifies the Hope of the Lord’s return and the restoration of the heavens and the earth.
* Explains why the Bible says Christians are eagerly awaiting the coming of the Lord instead of the day of their death (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 5:7, 8; Rev. 22:12, 20).

Vocabulary

If we are going to understand the Bible, we must understand the vocabulary it uses. Sadly, many biblical words such as Hades or Gehenna have been misunderstood, and so the biblical definition must be set forth and understood.

* **“Dead, Death.”** “Dead” means “without life,” and when a person dies, they are without life. This simple concept has been badly twisted due to traditional teachings such as the “immortal soul,” and as a result, most Christians do not believe a person is dead when they die. This appendix briefly sets forth that when the Bible says a person dies they are indeed “without life” of any kind.
* **“Gehenna.”** The word “Gehenna” came to be used for the Lake of Fire into which the unsaved are thrown after they are judged. The unsaved eventually burn up in the Lake of Fire. [For more on Gehenna, see commentary on Matt. 5:22, “Gehenna.”]
* **“Hades.”** (pronounced 'hay-dees). Although in colloquial English “Hades” is just another name for hell, in the New Testament it is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Sheol*, the state of being dead. It is translated “the grave” in the REV. [For more information on Hades, see commentary on Rev. 20:13, “the grave.”]
* **“Hell.”** In orthodox Christianity, “hell” is a very hot and fiery place where the Devil and his demons live and where the souls of unsaved people go to be tormented forever. There is no such place. The word “hell” can be confusing in English versions, especially the older ones. For example, in the King James Version, the word “hell” is used to translate four different words: *Sheol*, *Gehenna*, *Hades*, and *Tartarus*. Furthermore, the word “hell” has so many inaccuracies associated with it that it is better not to use it at all, but use the proper biblical vocabulary. However, although “hell” is not used in the REV Bible, it is used in this appendix because it is so prevalent in Christian thought.
* **“Sheol.”** Sheol is the Hebrew word for the state of being dead. People who die are “in Sheol,” that is, they are in the state of being dead, and they are not alive in any way or form. [For more on Sheol, see commentary on Rev. 20:13, “the grave”].
* **“Soul.”** The word “soul” is mainly used in the Bible for a person or for the natural life force that animates a body and dies when the body dies. Neither the phrase “immortal soul” nor the concept of an “immortal soul” is in the Bible, it comes from Greek mythology. [For more information on the soul, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]
* **“Spirit.”** The word “spirit” is used in a number of different ways in the Bible. Sometimes it is used as another word for “soul” because soul is a type of spirit. The Hebrew and Greek words translated “spirit” have many different meanings. [For more information on “spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

In the Beginning…The Devil’s Lie

The belief that when a person dies they are not totally dead started in the Garden of Eden when the Devil lied to Adam and Eve. God told Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die (Gen. 2:17), but the Devil said that he would not die (Gen. 3:4). Who was correct, God or the Devil? According to traditional Christianity, God was wrong and the Devil was right! If there is an “immortal soul,” like so many churches teach, then people do not ever die. Their body dies, but “they” go on living in an immaterial state in heaven or hell.

Today many people believe that when a person “dies,” only the body dies but the person’s soul or spirit lives on. If we take the time to study the idea that people live on after they die, we can see why the Devil and demons promote that people go on living after their body dies. One reason is that it waters down the value of being alive. If we are actually alive but just in another form after we “die,” then dying is not that bad after all. But death is that bad! There is nothing more precious than life, and the Devil knows that and wants us to treat this life lightly and give it up cheaply. The Bible says death is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). It is hard to see how death could be an enemy if it sent us to a better place and allowed us to be with Jesus and those who have gone before us.

Another reason the Devil promotes that people are actually alive as a soul or spirit after they die is that if people are alive, they can speak to us. The Devil and his demons do a very good job of impersonating dead people in séances and various types of appearances, and they use those appearances and similar strategies to feed untrue and even harmful information to people. There are a lot of people who knowingly or unknowingly disobey God’s command in Deuteronomy 18:11 and try to contact the dead even though it is specifically stated to be an abomination to God. Since dead people are dead, it is only demons impersonating the dead that ever answer those who are seeking advice from dead friends or relatives. The truth is that even if the dead were alive, they would never disobey God and contact the living.

The Origin of Christian Tradition…The Immortal Soul

One way the Devil has been successful in fooling people into believing the dead are actually alive is by promoting the belief in an “immortal soul.” According to the teaching on the “immortal soul,” the soul of a person is immortal and lives on after the person dies. The soul is not immortal.

* The phrase “immortal soul” does not appear in the Bible.
* The Bible says the soul can die and be destroyed (cf. Matt. 10:28).
* The souls of dead people are not in heaven or hell now, they are dead, lifeless, “in Sheol” (Job 14:13; Ps. 6:5; 31:17; Eccl. 9:10).

This appendix can only give an abbreviated history of how the Christian tradition began that souls were immortal, but certainly, a major way that tradition started was with the Greeks. Historians have documented that the concept of people being alive in Sheol started at least as early as the Babylonian Captivity (c. 586 BC), but it was Greek influence that inculcated the belief among many Jews and then the Christians. The Greeks believed in an “immortal soul” and that no one actually died. According to Greek mythology, people live on as disembodied souls after their body dies. In that sense, the ancient Greeks believed exactly what most modern Christians do.

In 332 BC, Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, which had a huge population of Jews, and the people in Egypt began speaking Greek, even the Jews there. Many of those Jews took on the beliefs of the Greeks, including the immortal soul, and when the Jews in Egypt translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek, making the version we know today as the Septuagint, they translated the Hebrew word *Sheol,* where everyone was dead, as *Hadēs*, where everyone was alive. Thus, by a translator’s decision the Jewish translators in Egypt made the dead people in *Sheol* alive in *Hadēs*.

The Septuagint said that dead people were in *Hadēs*, where according to Greek beliefs those souls were alive. So the Septuagint, along with Greek cultural influence, became major reasons that by the time of Christ many Jews, including the Pharisees, believed that a person’s soul lived on after they died. Then, soon after the death of Christ, many Greeks were converted to Christianity and they brought their mythology about the dead being alive with them into the Church. These new Greek converts were supported in their belief that the souls of the dead were alive by the Septuagint they were reading and also by the fact that as New Testament books were written, the word *Hadēs* was used to describe the state of being dead like it was in the Greek Old Testament. Eventually, the Greeks and the Greek-speaking Jews who were converting to Christianity dominated the Church to the point that it became Christian tradition that the “immortal soul” lived on after the body died, and that is still the teaching today in spite of the fact that it is not what the Bible actually teaches.

The Bible Teaches the Dead are Dead

Many verses of Scripture show that the dead are not alive now, but dead in the grave awaiting the resurrection. A selection of them is below:

**Job 7:21 (ESV):** “Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be.” [Job did not think he would be with God after he died, instead, he said he would “not be”].

**Job 10:20-22 (ESV):** 20“Are not my days few? Then cease and leave me alone so that I may find a little cheer 21before I go—and I shall not return—to the land of darkness and deep shadow, 22the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order, where light is as thick darkness.” [Job was a godly man, but he certainly did not believe he would go to a “good place” after he died. He would be in the “thick darkness” of death].

**Job 14:12 (ESV):** “so a man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep.” [The resurrection will not occur until this present evil age is over and there is a renewed heaven and earth, cf. Isa. 65:17].

**Psalm 6:5 (ESV):** “For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?” [The dead do not remember or praise God, they are “in Sheol,” that is, in the state of being dead].

**Psalm 30:9 (ESV):** “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?” [The “pit” was an idiom for the grave and death. The person who dies turns to dust and does not praise God].

**Psalm 49:12 (ESV):** “Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish.” [When it comes to living and dying, people are like animals—we age and die. Unlike animals, people will be resurrected and judged].

**Psalm 49:15 (ESV):** “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah.” [When a person dies, his “soul” is in Sheol, the state of being dead, but one day God will raise the dead and judge them. Righteous people will be ransomed from death by the blood of Christ and will live forever].

**Psalm 88:11, 12 (ESV):** “Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?” [Death is called “the land of forgetfulness” because the dead know nothing].

**Psalm 94:17 (ESV):** “If the LORD had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.” [Death is called “the land of silence” because there is no activity and no noise].

**Psalm 115:17 (ESV):** “The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence.”

**Ecclesiastes 9:4-6 (ESV):** 4“But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 6Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.” [Dead people “know nothing” because they are dead, and they will not share in what is done “under the sun” because the dead are not raised until this present evil age is over and the next age begins].

**Ecclesiastes 9:10 (ESV):** “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”

**Isaiah 26:19 (ESV):** “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” [The dead are now in the dust and awaiting the resurrection].

**Isaiah 38:18 (ESV):** “For Sheol does not thank you; death does not praise you; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness.” [The dead do not praise God and they do not hope].

**Ezekiel 37:12 (ESV):** “Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel.” [“People,” not just bodies, get up from the dead].

**Daniel 12:2 (ESV):** “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” [It is the “people” who are dead in the dust now, not just their bodies].

**Daniel 12:13 (ESV):** “But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.” [Daniel would die and have no consciousness until his resurrection, at which time he would receive his reward].

**John 5:28, 29 (ESV):** 28“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” [At the resurrection, the people who are now dead will get up and be judged].

Death is the absence of life

Death is the absence of life. When the Bible says that people die and are dead, it does not mean that only the body is dead, the whole person is dead in every way. In the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would “die” (Gen. 2:17). Adam and Eve would have lived forever had they not sinned, but because they disobeyed God they died.

God did not say to Adam and Eve, “If you can keep from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil then you will live here in Eden forever in your human bodies, but if you eat of that tree you will still live forever but it will be either in a good place (heaven) or a bad place (hell).” God said they would die, be lifeless, and that is what happened, but they are not dead if they are alive somewhere.

Is death just separation from God?

It is sometimes taught that “death” means “separation,” and that people who are dead are not “lifeless,” but are separated from God. That teaching is not biblically correct. First, it is wrong to assert that the words for “death” in Hebrew or Greek just refer to separation. “Dead” means “dead.” Death does have an aspect of separation to it because when a person dies, they are indeed “separated” from God as well as everything else in life. But the word “dead” does not mean “separated.” Instead, when a person is dead, they are separated from God and life by virtue of the fact they are dead. It is just as Scripture says, “The dead do not praise the LORD” (Ps. 115:17 ESV).

The Bible uses the same Hebrew and Greek words for the “death” of humans as for the death of animals. There is no special word for the “death” of people that means “separation,” and a different word for the death of animals that means “death.” Thus, there is no factual basis for saying that the word “death” means “separation” when referring to a person but actual “death” when referring to an animal; death is the same for all of them (Ps. 49:12; Eccl. 3:18-21). “Death” is the total absence of life for humans and animals.

Dead people are indeed “lifeless.”

The Bible has many verses that show that when a person dies, they are dead in every sense of the word and not alive in any form. Living people can think, but dead people “know nothing” (Eccl. 9:5; Ps. 146:4). In fact, “their love and their hate and their envy have already perished” (Eccl. 9:6). Thus, death is referred to as “the land of oblivion” (Ps. 88:12; cf. HCSB). Living people have hope, while dead people know nothing and have no hope. That is why the Bible says “a living dog is better than a dead lion” (Eccl. 9:4). In death, “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom” (Eccl. 9:10; cf. Ps. 6:5). There is no profit in the death of a believer because when a believer dies, they are no longer able to praise God or testify about Him (Psalm 30:9; 88:10; 115:17; Isa. 38:18). The dead person has no consciousness and the body decays and disappears, so Job correctly said that when he died, “I shall lie in the earth; you [God] will seek me, but I shall not be” (Job 7:21). People die just as animals do (Ps. 49:12-14), but God promises that people will be raised from the dead. In fact, the reason people have to be raised from the dead is that they are dead, not alive. If they were alive, why have a resurrection?

When we believe verses like those just pointed out above, that dead people have no knowledge in the grave and do not praise God, it helps us understand what happens to the “soul” or “spirit” of a person when they die. The soul (which is sometimes referred to as “spirit”) is not alive apart from the body, it is not a ghost-like thing, it is the life force that God created for humans and animals. The body needs soul to animate it, but when the body dies, the soul, the life force, is gone (for more on soul, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul’”).

Understanding “spirit” is more complicated than understanding “soul” because “spirit” is used both of the “soul” (because “soul” is a type of spirit) and of the gift of spirit that is born in Christians when Christians are born again. But the conclusion is the same: God never designed “spirit” to be alive without the human body. It is not a living ghost-thing. When used of the gift of spirit, “spirit” gives spiritual life to the believer and when the believer dies the spirit simply goes away, back to God who gave it. The spirit given to the believer was not alive as an immaterial ghost-like thing before God gave it, and it does not change into one when the believer dies. It just “goes back to God” just like it came from Him (for more on “spirit” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”).

Death is like “sleep”

“Sleep” is a common biblical euphemism and metaphor for death, and the Bible compares death to sleep many times (cf. Dan. 12:2; John 11:11-14; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 7:39, 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20; 1 Thess. 4:13). For example, Psalm 13:3 says, “Consider, *and* answer me, O Yahweh, my God. Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.” Job said, “But man dies and is laid low. Yes, man breathes his last *breath*, and where is he? …so a man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no more they will not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep” (Job 14:10, 12).

It can be very comforting to believers to realize that in death, just like in deep sleep, there is no awareness of the passage of time. When a believer dies, “falls asleep,” the next thing they will see is Jesus and other believers. Tradition teaches that when a person dies, “they go to be with Jesus.” While it is not true from a time perspective that the believer is with Jesus the moment they die, from the perspective of the person who died, the instant they close their eyes in death is the instant they see Jesus. The dead person is not aware of the time that passes between their death and their resurrection. There is no netherworld, no purgatory, nothing like that, so to the person who died, there is just death and then immediate resurrection.

Thus, the experience of people who die is different from the experience of the people who are alive. The experience of the family, friends, and other people who are alive on earth is that the person who died and is buried in the ground is dead, asleep, and is no longer afflicted by the troubles of life, while the living struggle on in day-to-day life. In contrast, the experience of the people who die is that they close their eyes in death and are instantly awake in the resurrection. The dead person has no awareness of time or the struggles of the living. Believers close their eyes in death and instantly see Jesus. They may have been dead thousands of years, but to them, the instant they die is the instant they see Jesus.

Imagine the joy of the resurrection! For example, an elderly, sick person who has been troubled throughout life closes their eyes in the sleep of death and then to them they are instantly awake with Jesus in a wonderful new body like Jesus’ body (Phil. 3:21). The person’s old body was corrupt but they are raised in “incorruption,” they died in “dishonor” but they are raised in “glory,” they died in “weakness” but will be raised in “power” (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Promises like these are why believers need not fear death.

Death is like sleep in many ways, which is one reason the Bible uses the term “sleep” to describe death. Nevertheless, even though death is called “sleep,” that metaphor, like all metaphors, is imperfect. There are similarities between death and sleep, but there are also big differences. We will examine the similarities first.

1. Both death and sleep are overpowering forces. People cannot prevent their death, and they cannot help falling asleep when they are tired. Even if people try to force themselves to stay awake, eventually sleep will overpower them.
2. There is no awareness of time in either death or deep sleep; time passes without the person being aware of it.
3. No productive work can be done by the person when they are dead or asleep.
4. In both death and sleep, there is a continuity of the person. When a person falls asleep, they are the same person when they wake up. The process of sleep did not change the person into somebody else. Similarly, the person who dies and is resurrected is the same person. At the resurrection, people will remember who they are and what they did in this life. Jesus Christ is our best example of someone having continuity of being after his resurrection. Jesus was the same person after his resurrection as he was before it, he just had a different body and more capabilities. But he knew who he was and he knew his friends and family, and everyone who is resurrected from the dead will know those things too.
5. Both death and sleep come to an end. A person’s state of death ends when they are resurrected, just as their sleep ends when they wake up.

Now that we have seen the similarities between sleep and death it is important to note the differences. In sleep, the person’s bodily functions continue, and they will wake up on their own when their body is rested. In contrast, when a person dies, their body is dead and their soul and spirit are gone. The person cannot wake up on their own but stays dead until the resurrection when God gets them up from the dead.

The sleep of death is sometimes referred to as “soul sleep.” However, it is not the “soul” that “sleeps,” according to the Bible it is the “person” who sleeps. The phrase “soul sleep” is not in the Bible but was a term that was popularized by John Calvin (1509-1564), who used it in a pejorative way, criticizing the belief. Calvin believed that the soul lived on after a person died. Due to the pejorative nature of the term “soul sleep,” people who believe the soul ceased to exist when the body died generally refer to their belief in other ways, including “materialism,” “conditional immortality,” and since the 1970s, “Christian mortalism.” Some of the great people of Christianity believed the soul did not live on after a person died, including William Tyndale, John Wycliffe, and Martin Luther.

Could anyone go to heaven before Jesus died on the cross?

It is often taught that Enoch, Moses, and Elijah went to heaven to be with God. However, that cannot be true. First, the Bible never says they went to God’s heaven. That is an assumption. Although 2 Kings 2:11 says that Elijah went by a whirlwind into “heaven,” a whirlwind cannot reach God’s heaven; the “heaven” that Elijah was carried into was the air, the same “heaven” as in phrases such as “the birds of heaven” (Job 12:7), or “the rain of heaven” (Deut. 11:11). Hebrew uses the word “heaven” of both God’s heaven and the air above us. But more to the point is that no one—no one—could go to heaven before Jesus Christ died and paid for their sins.

If even one person could go to heaven without having Jesus pay for their sins, then anyone could go to heaven without having Jesus pay for their sins because God is not a respecter of persons; He does not play favorites. The simple fact is that the only reason believers can go to heaven and be in the presence of God is that they have had their sins paid for by Jesus Christ, so no one went to heaven before Jesus died on the cross, and that included Enoch, Moses, and Elijah, and no one is in heaven now because the resurrections have not occurred yet.

It is sometimes taught that some people do not go to heaven or hell when they die but go to a different place, for example, some people believe some of the dead go to purgatory. However, there is no biblical evidence for any of those places. The biblical truth is both clear and simple: dead people go “to Sheol,” the state of being dead. They then stay dead until they are raised in a resurrection and at that time they are judged and either receive everlasting life and live forever with Christ or they are thrown into the Lake of Fire and are eventually consumed (Rev. 20:11-15).

Is anyone in heaven now?

Although the Bible specifically mentions a large number of people who die, not one of them is said to be in heaven except Jesus Christ who was taken to heaven. The biblical evidence is that even by the time that the Gospel of John was written no one was in heaven but Jesus. John 3:13, which was not spoken by Jesus but was written down by the apostle John (see commentary on John 3:13), says, “And no one has gone up to heaven, but he who came down from heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.” The Gospel of John was written no earlier than AD 50, but the evidence more strongly supports that John was written between AD 70 and AD 100. In any case, by the time John was written some of the early Christians had died, including Stephen and the apostle James (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6). Surely if saved people went to heaven when they died then John 3:13 should say that, and not say that no one was in heaven but Jesus. The reason that John 3:13 says no one is in heaven but Jesus is that every person who has lived and died is still dead and awaiting the Rapture or a resurrection.

There is not one person in the Bible who is clearly said to have gone to heaven, hell, or any other place except into the grave when they died. There is not one verse that says, for example, “And David died and went to heaven.” Not one verse.

Hundreds, even thousands, of people died in the Bible, so for the Bible to not even say that one of them went to heaven or the Lake of Fire when they died is quite strong evidence that the people do not go to those places when they die. Instead, people go to Sheol, the state of being dead, when they die just like the Bible says. People die and remain lifeless until God raises them from the dead at a resurrection, and it is at that point that each person will be judged and then granted everlasting life or everlasting death. In fact, when we look at what the Bible says about the great men and women who died, the universal testimony is that they are dead and awaiting the resurrection.

The Bible’s testimony about people: they die and are dead.

The most common statement in the Bible about people whose lives come to an end is that they just “die.” Nothing is said about them, or their “soul” or “spirit” going to heaven or hell or someplace else and continuing to live there after they die. No verse says that any person in the Bible went to heaven or hell when they died, they die and are dead.

If the Bible teaches that people die and are dead then it makes perfect sense that it would just simply say that people “die.” But if the Christian tradition that people live on after they die was true, then it does not make sense that the Bible never specifically says that (the parable of Lazarus and the rich man is a parable and is explained in the commentary on Luke 16:19). If tradition is true, then to comfort us it would seem that the Bible would at least name some people who died and went to heaven. But it does not. The Bible just says that a person dies because that is the end of their life until God raises them from the dead.

**The “meeting house” of death (Job 3:11-19):** Job 30:23 says that death is the meeting house for all the living. Everyone dies and goes to Sheol, the state of death, and awaits their resurrection and Judgment, so death is rightly referred to as the meeting house for everyone. Job said a similar thing in Job 3:11-19. In Job chapter 3, Job was in intense grief over the loss of his children, servants, and wealth, and in great pain from the sores on his body. He wished to die and mentions all the people who have gone before him into death and are now resting, sleeping, and at peace in death. Job mentions all the people who are together in death: kings, counselors, leaders, stillborn babies, the wicked, the weary, prisoners, and slaves, and then says, “the small and the great are there.” What Job said is certainly accurate if everyone is dead and lifeless when they die. However, if some people go to a good place and others go to “hell” when they die, then what Job said is not correct, for many evil kings, leaders, prisoners, and slaves, and certainly “the wicked” would not be asleep and in peace but would be suffering in the Lake of Fire.

**Adam and others:** People die and are dead when they die, so it makes sense that when people die the Bible often just says that and adds no more. Adam “died,” Seth “died,” Enosh “died,” Kenan “died,” Mahalalel “died,” Jared “died” Enoch died (Heb. 11:13); Methuselah “died,” and Lamech “died” (Gen. 5:5-31). This list could be expanded multifold through the Bible, but the point is that God simply says the people “died” because that is what they did. They died and then were dead. No verse says anything like, “Adam died and went to heaven” because that is not what happened. Adam died and was dead.

**Job:** Job spoke a lot about his death, and never indicated that he would go to a good place such as heaven or to a bad place such as hell when he died, instead, he said in different ways that he would be dead. He said he would be “lying down” in death and be sleeping (Job 3:13). He said that when he died, “I will not be,” which would be true; Job would be dead and as a living being “he would not be.” Furthermore, he spoke of going to Sheol, the state of being dead (Job 7:8-9), and that Sheol would be the “house,” where he was (Job 17:13). He also said to God, “I know that you will bring me to death, to the meeting house for all the living” (Job 30:23). Furthermore, Job stated that everyone would be together in death when they died (Job 3:13-19; 14:12). That statement would not be true if some people went to heaven and others went to “hell.” At the end of his life, the Bible just says, “So Job died.” Job is now where he said he would be, “in Sheol,” the state of being dead, waiting for the resurrection.

**Abraham:** As great as Abraham was, at the end of his life the Bible just says that he died and was “gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:8). The phrase “gathered to his people” means he died and joined his ancestors, and that phrase is significant in the study of what happens at death. For one thing, the phrase “gathered to his people” shows that the Bible is consistent in saying that all people, good or bad, are in the same place when they die. Abraham’s ancestors, and thus the “people” he was gathered to be with, worshiped gods other than Yahweh (Josh. 24:2). Because Abraham’s ancestors were idol worshipers, it is likely that on Judgment Day some of them will be saved while others will not be. But where could all of Abraham’s ancestors be together such that Abraham could be gathered to them? There is only one place where all of Abraham’s ancestors, good or bad, will be, and that place is the grave, Sheol, the state of being dead. Abraham is not alive somewhere. He is dead along with his ancestors, and all of them are awaiting the resurrection.

The phrase “gathered to his people” also often had the connotation that there was a family tomb or family grave site of some sort. For example, when Jacob died he was “gathered to his people” and buried in the same burial cave as Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and his wife Leah (Gen. 49:29-33). Also, the phrase “gathered to your fathers” was used of dying as well as the phrase “gathered to his people” (cf. Judg. 2:10; 2 Kings 22:20; 2 Chron. 34:28).

**Jacob:** When Jacob was told by his sons that Joseph was dead, he said, “I will go down to Sheol to my son [Joseph], mourning” (Gen. 37:35). So, Jacob acknowledged that Joseph was in Sheol and he would go there too when he died. Jacob did not think he was going to go to heaven or any other place than death. He said, “when I sleep with my fathers, you are to carry me out of Egypt and bury me.” Jacob did not speak of being alive after death. He said, when “I” sleep and bury “me.” When he died he was “gathered to his people” (Gen. 49:33). Then, when Joseph died, the Bible simply says that he died (Gen. 50:26; Exod. 1:6).

**Hezekiah:** When the great Judean king, Hezekiah, was dying from a sickness, he did not talk about going to heaven or to a good place. He said, “I must enter the gates of Sheol. …I will not see Yah…you [God] will make an end of me” (Isa. 38:10-13). Then, when Hezekiah was healed he said, “You [God] have delivered my soul from the pit of oblivion,” and he praised God saying, “For Sheol cannot praise you. Death cannot celebrate you. Those who go down into the pit cannot have hope for your faithfulness. The living *person*, the living *person*, he gives you thanks, as I do this day” (Isa. 38:17-19). Hezekiah knew that if he died he would be in Sheol, the state of being dead; he had no delusions about going to a good place. He called death “oblivion,” and when he did not die but was healed he praised God for it. When Hezekiah eventually died the Bible simply says that he “slept with his fathers” (2 Kings 20:21; 2 Chron. 32:33).

**Daniel:** The last verse in the book of Daniel records the angel talking to Daniel about his death, and the angel says, “But you, go *your way* until the end; and you will rest, then you will stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.” (Dan. 12:13). The angel did not tell Daniel he would go to heaven or any other place, just that he would “rest,” which is a word associated with resting in death (cf. Job 3:13, 17).

**Lazarus:** When Lazarus died, Jesus simply said, “Lazarus is dead” (John 11:14). No one—not Jesus, Martha, or Mary—indicated in any way that Lazarus was in a good place or alive in any way. In fact, when Jesus spoke to Martha about raising Lazarus, she said, “I know that he will rise up in the resurrection at the last day.” Martha knew the simple truth that Lazarus was dead and would not be alive again until the resurrection.

**Jonah:** Jonah was a prophet of God who tried to protect Israel by running from God (see commentary on Jonah 1:3). But when he was thrown into the sea, and thought he would die, he said, “I have been banished from your [God’s] sight, yet I will look again toward your holy Temple.” Jonah did not think he would die and be in heaven or hell, he thought he would be dead and out of God’s sight until God raised him from the dead, at which time he would again see the Temple.

**Jesus Christ:** When Jesus appeared to John many years after his resurrection, he said, “Do not be afraid! I am the first and the last, and the Living One, and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever” (Rev. 1:17-18; cf. Rev. 2:8). Jesus’ statement that he was dead but now was alive would be nonsensical—even disingenuous—if Jesus never really died, but only his body died. If that was the case, then Jesus’ statement, “I was dead,” was not true. The fact that Jesus was dead, dead in every sense of the word “dead,” but now was alive forever is what shows Christians that they need not fear death. Like Jesus, they may be dead someday, but they will be raised and be alive forever.

Raising people up from the dead: the resurrections

The orthodox Christian tradition is that the body dies but the soul (or “spirit”) lives on and goes to heaven or hell. But the Bible teaches that “people,” not just “bodies,” are dead. When a person dies, they die in every way, body, soul, and spirit, and are not alive in any form or place. Then, at the resurrection, the person, not just their physical body, comes to life. It is because dead people are totally dead that 1 Corinthians 15:18 says that if there is no resurrection, the people have “perished,” that is, they have come to an end and exist no more. The Bible does not say that if there is no resurrection the person’s “body” has perished, it says the “person” has perished, and that is because without a resurrection the person would stay dead forever. The reason there has to be a resurrection at all is that all the people who died are dead; they are not alive in any form, so they have to be raised from the dead in order to be judged and then either given everlasting life or sentenced to everlasting death.

Many verses speak of the resurrections, and it is at that time that dead people will be given life again and raised from the ground. Isaiah 26:19 speaks of the earth giving birth to her dead. Daniel 12:2 speaks of the dead people who are now sleeping in the dust of the earth awakening to the Judgment. Revelation 20:4 speaks of the first resurrection and says of the dead, “they came to life.” Psalm 49:15 says that God will redeem people from the grave. Ezekiel says that the people of Israel, not just their bodies, come up out of the grave (Ezek. 37:9-14). Jesus taught that the people in the grave would hear his voice and get up (John 5:28, 29). There is not one single verse that says at the resurrection only the “body” gets up and then it rejoins the soul at that time.

In his vision of the future, the apostle John saw the second resurrection and saw that “the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged” (Rev. 20:13). The dead people John saw were not in heaven or hell, they were in the grave and in the sea—many people have died at sea and their bodies have never been recovered—and all of those people were resurrected to life and then were judged for what they had done.

There are three major resurrection events in the Bible: the Rapture of Christians, the First Resurrection, and the Second Resurrection. The Rapture occurs before the other two resurrections, and then the first and second resurrections are separated by 1,000 years (cf. Rev. 20:4-7).

The Rapture applies only to the Christian Church and so it is not mentioned in the Old Testament or Gospels. At the Rapture, dead Christians are raised from the dead and meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The First Resurrection comes after the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-20:5), and it is called “the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5-6), “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29), and “the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15). In the First Resurrection, all the righteous people who died from the time of Adam and Eve through the Battle of Armageddon will be raised from the dead except for Christians because they will have already been Raptured to be with the Lord. Then after 1,000 years comes the second resurrection, which is called “the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29 ESV), and “the resurrection of the unrighteous” (Acts 24:15) because most of the people who are raised at that time will be judged and found to be unrighteous. This second resurrection is described in Revelation 20:11-15.

For the purpose of this appendix, the important thing to notice about the Rapture, the resurrection and people getting up from the dead is that it is “people” who get up from the dead. The Bible never describes a human body being raised and then reuniting with the person’s soul that has been alive during the time the body was dead. The “people” are dead and God raises them from the dead. Furthermore, the people come up out of the grave in their physical bodies; the future resurrection is not a “spirit” resurrection, it is living bodies that come up from the grave (cf. Job. 19:25-27; Ps. 71:20; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2; Hos. 13:14; Matt. 12:42; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:20-22, 42-49, 52; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 20:4-5, 12-14).

After Resurrection Comes the Judgment

It is because people are dead and not alive in any form that we eagerly await the coming of Jesus, who will raise the dead. Also, it is because people are dead and will be raised at either the Rapture or the first or second resurrection that the Bible speaks of “the Day of Judgment” (cf. Matt. 10:15; 11:22; 12:36; 2 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 4:17). God will raise large categories of people all at the same time—first the Christians in the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18), then the righteous in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6), then the unrighteous, along with some righteous people who died during the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:11-15). There will be a literal “Day of Judgment” for each category of people.

When God raises people from the dead they are judged for everlasting life and rewards. The most basic and important thing people are judged for is whether they are saved and get to live forever, or whether they are condemned to the Lake of Fire (cf. Rev. 20:15).

According to Christian tradition, people go immediately to heaven or hell when they die. But that would mean that each person is judged right when they die. The fact that a person would “go to heaven” or “go to hell” when they die means they have already been judged and given the sentence of life or death. But if people are judged right when they die, then there would be thousands of individual judgments occurring each day because across the globe thousands of people die every day. But the Bible never teaches that. The Bible teaches there is a Day of Judgment for the different groups of people: the righteous and the unrighteous.

Jesus said, “the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have practiced evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29). Note that Jesus said the dead are in the grave now, and they will all come out and be judged at that time when he calls them to come out. People are not judged when they die; they are judged when they are raised from the dead at the resurrection they are in.

Similarly, when Jesus was speaking about the sign of Jonah to the unbelieving Jews, he taught that there is a day of judgment coming in the future. He said, “The men of Nineveh will stand up at the Judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, *someone* greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up at the Judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, *someone* greater than Solomon is here” (Matt. 12:41-42). The people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South (the Queen of Sheba) had been dead for many hundreds of years but they had not yet been judged—that will happen at the resurrection. Furthermore, the generation Jesus was speaking to, “this generation,” would soon die, but they too will not be judged until their resurrection and Judgment Day. At that time they will all be resurrected and judged.

The book of Revelation says Judgment Day is in the future. It says when this present evil age comes to an end, it will be “the time for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to give the rewards to your servants the prophets and to the holy ones” (Rev. 11:18). Right now people who have died are in the ground and awaiting resurrection, but at some point in the future will come “Judgment Day,” and it will be “the time for the dead to be judged.” Some people laugh at the idea of a judgment day, but Judgment Day is coming, the Bible guarantees it.

Why people think the dead are alive – ghosts and apparitions

One of the reasons many Christians do not believe that the dead are actually dead is that sometimes “dead people” appear to people. We call these encounters “apparitions” or “ghosts,” and while it might be possible for God to make a vision of a dead person appear or the voice of a dead person to be heard, this would only occur on the rarest of occasions because God was the One who forbade us to speak to the dead (Deut. 18:10-13).

However, demons can and do impersonate the dead to further the Devil’s teaching that dead people are actually alive. Demons can affect the environment and cause noise or movement, cold or hot spots, or “hauntings,” and in basically that same way they can cause “ghosts” of different clarity to appear, including impersonations of dead people. Examples of this in the Bible include Job 4:15 and 1 Samuel 28:13-19 (what appeared to the medium at En-dor was not Samuel, but a demon. A medium cannot make a godly man come from the dead and speak to the living in disobedience to God. The demon is called “Samuel” because it impersonated him so well).

So many people have seen ghosts or apparitions that a 2009 Pew Research Center survey showed that 18% of U.S. Americans claim to have seen a ghost, and a 2013 Harris poll showed that 42% of U.S. Americans believe in ghosts, and in many countries of the world these figures would be much higher. Although some sightings are not legitimate, many are by people who are credible witnesses who had no reason or desire to see a ghost. Demons have an agenda to make people believe that death is not really death, so they appear to people as ghosts or apparitions, or they make things happen that cause people to believe dead people are alive. Seeing ghosts or experiencing paranormal spiritual occurrences is a major reason many people believe that humans live on in some form after they die.

Why people think the dead are alive – near-death experiences

Another reason people believe that the soul or spirit goes on living after a person dies is because of what is referred to as “near-death” experiences. In these experiences, people who have clinically “died,” or been close to death, have seen what they report as the afterlife. There are a number of explanations why this could happen, and near-death visions can come from God, demons, or our own minds.

God can and does raise the dead, and although there is no record of a “near-death” experience in the Bible, it is possible that a person would die and God both raise him from the dead and give him a vision of part of our glorious future life. God has given people visions of the life to come. Abraham, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Paul, and John are some of the people who were given extraordinary information or visions about the future life. So, it is quite possible that some of the people who have had “near-death experiences” have had God-given visions of the next life to help them and others overcome their fear of dying and encourage them concerning the Hope. The mistake these people make is that they assume they would go to this future place right away. But the vision of God never promises that. The vision John had of the future that he wrote in the book of Revelation seemed very real to him, but he did not experience it the moment he died, John is dead and his vision is still future.

Another reason people could have “near-death” experiences is due to demonic visions. Demons can give people hallucinations and visions, and it makes perfect sense that they would do that as part of their overall agenda to promote that people are not actually dead when they die. Also, part of the Devil’s agenda is to make God seem cruel and thus cause people to misunderstand God, or be afraid of Him, or even ignore the things of God altogether. Some of the more terrifying visions of hell that some people claim to have seen clearly contradict the loving nature of God. The Bible describes Gehenna as a lake of fire into which the unsaved are thrown and then burn up, not as a multi-level torture chamber.

Still another reason some people have “near-death” experiences is simply due to how the mind works. We are all familiar with the “dream-like” state that can occur to a person just before they fall asleep or just when they are waking up, at which time the mind can blend thoughts and dreams, and thought-images can seem very real and yet not be. Most people have ideas about the next life that have been implanted in their minds from their religion or movies, books, or just the culture they live in, and it is reasonable that many times these would surface if the body was close to death or the mind thought death was imminent. We have instruments that can measure the activity of life in a person, the electricity the body produces, brain wave activity, etc., but no scientist would say that our instruments are sensitive enough to pick up the exact moment of death—they are not that sensitive. So, a third cause of “near-death” experiences is simply the mind imagining those things at a time when it is not fully capable of separating fact from fiction, imagination from reality.

It is also important to note that not one person in the Bible who was raised from the dead said anything about the afterlife. This includes people who had been dead for hours or days such as the Shunammite woman’s son (2 Kings 4:35), the man from Nain (Luke 7:15), the synagogue leader’s daughter (Mark 5:42), or Lazarus, who had been dead four days (John 11:39, 44). If they experienced anything good or bad after they died, it surely seems they would have talked about it. The fact that they did not talk about what they experienced, combined with the fact that no one asked them about it, is good biblical evidence that nothing happens in death—no thoughts or experiences—there is just the absence of life (Eccl. 9:10).

Trust the Bible

The Bible is full of examples of people, like Eve, who trusted what they thought and felt more than they trusted God’s Word, with disastrous results. God has made it clear in His Word that when a person dies, they are dead. We dare not abandon the clear teaching of Scripture because of what we see in the physical world, especially when the Devil has such a clear agenda to get people to believe that people do not really die when their body dies. There are godly explanations for what we see, including near-death experiences.

**Verses that are not written about in this appendix**

There are verses in the Bible that are important to the study of the state of the dead that are not covered in this appendix. For more information read the commentary in the REV that is associated with those individual verses.

[For information about the translations “Hell” and “Hades,” see commentary on Rev. 20:13. For information on people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not burning forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on the soul not being immortal and not being like a “ghost” inside the human body, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’” For more on what happens to “spirit” when a person dies, see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’” For more on necromancy, communicating with the dead, and why it is an abomination to God, see commentary on Deut. 18:10 and 18:11. For more on a person’s death being really death and not just partial death, see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:20. For information on Jesus’ not having to be God to die for the sins of mankind, see commentary on Matt. 27:50.]

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Appendix 4. Annihilation in the Lake of Fire

One of the most powerful truths about God in the Bible is “God is love,” but some Christians teach that God tortures the unsaved in the flames of hell for all eternity. How could that be love? Thankfully, God does not do that. The Bible says that the saved will live forever and the unsaved will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire. There is no “eternal torment” in the Bible.

There are a number of important reasons why many people have had difficulty believing that God would torture people eternally. One reason that we have just seen is that God is love and torturing people forever is not love. Another reason is that God is righteous, it is not logical that someone could commit sin in one short lifetime that would be justly recompensed by being tormented forever. How could everlasting torture be just or righteous? Also, the doctrine of eternal torture makes saved people seem very cold-hearted. Could it really be that the saved are rejoicing forever while hearing the screams of people being tortured forever? And frankly, even if the saved could not hear the cries of the damned, would that make such a big difference? Just knowing that people were being tortured forever would seem to make everlasting life hard to enjoy. Civilized people will not even torture their worst enemies here on earth; does that change when the saved are perfected? Unsaved people are not tortured forever, and the teaching that they are contradicts many clear and simple scriptures.

**1. The Old Testament says the wicked will be destroyed.**

When studying whether the wicked are annihilated or live forever in torment, the most natural place to start is in the Old Testament. When we read it, we see that it says over and over in many different ways that the wicked will be annihilated and be gone forever. They will:

* “be no more” (Ps. 37:10; Prov. 10:25)
* “be forever destroyed” (Ps. 92:7; cf. Ps. 73:17-19; cf. Ps. 145:20; Prov. 14:11)
* “die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20; 33:13-16)
* “perish” (Ps. 1:6; 37:20; Isa. 41:11)
* “perish forever (Job 20:7)
* “be as nothing” (Isa. 41:12)
* be brought “to ruin forever” (Ps. 52:5)

The Old Testament also says that moths will eat them up like a garment, and worms devour them like they devour wool (Isa. 51:8), which are both illustrations showing nothing will be left of them. It also says that wicked people will fly away like a dream and be found no more (Job 20:8). They will “be consumed like dry stubble” (Isa. 1:28, 31; 29:20); and will “vanish like smoke” (Ps. 37:20) because “his [God’s] fire will consume them” (Ps. 21:9). Their names will be written in the dirt (Jer. 17:13), and just like names in dirt soon disappear, they will eventually disappear and be gone forever. No one will see them any more (Job 20:9). People with no understanding (unsaved people) are like animals that “perish,” they do not live forever anywhere (Ps. 49:20).

The illustrations in the above verses do not portray eternal torment, but total destruction. And there is even more support for annihilation of the wicked than what we have just seen. Notice the way Malachi refers to the future of the wicked.

**Malachi 4:1.** “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble; and the day that is coming will burn them up, says Yahweh of Armies, that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

Like the other Old Testament verses we have seen above, Malachi does not give us a picture of eternal torment, but of total destruction. Nothing, no part of them, not one “root or branch,” will be left to the wicked, which means they will be totally consumed, totally gone. Later on in Malachi, the same picture of total destruction is put a different way: “You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I am preparing, says Yahweh of Armies.” (Mal. 4:3). The wicked are not pictured as being tortured forever, but eventually will become “ashes.”

Still another way God portrays the destruction of the wicked is by saying they will be “cut off.” The phrase “cut off” is used in several different ways in the Old Testament. It is used of physical death (1 Sam. 24:21; 1 Kings 18:4; Isa. 53:8; thus some versions have “killed”), and it is also used of people who will be “cut off” in the next life (Ps. 12:3; 37:9, 22; Nah. 1:15). Just as when a person was cut off in his first life and ceased to live, so when he is cut off after the Judgment he will cease to live, and then cannot “live” in torment. In contrast to these clear verses that say the wicked will be destroyed and be no more, there is not one clear and indisputable Old Testament verse that shows the wicked living forever in torment.

**2. The New Testament says the wicked will be destroyed.**

Having now seen more than a dozen different ways the Old Testament says that wicked people will eventually be destroyed and cease to exist, we will see that the New Testament continues the same idea, saying that the wicked are totally consumed and become nonexistent.

John the Baptist compared the wicked with chaff that is burned (Matt. 3:12). Jesus compared the unsaved to trees that do not produce fruit and so are cut down and burned (Matt. 7:19); to weeds that are gathered and burned (Matt. 13:40); and to vine branches that do not produce fruit and so are cut off and burned (John 15:6). None of these illustrations give the impression that the burning lasts forever. Instead, they all convey the simple truth that was well-known in the biblical culture: chaff, weeds, or wood that is thrown into a fire burn for a short time and then are completely consumed. If John or Jesus knew that people burned forever in the Lake of Fire, they should have used illustrations that made that point, or added some comments to make their illustration clear. However, it surely seems that John and Jesus both knew exactly what their illustrations conveyed—the total destruction of the wicked—and chose their illustrations on purpose to make that exact point and fit with the rest of Scripture. Just as the chaff, weeds, and wood burn for a time in the fire and then are consumed and gone forever, the wicked suffer some retribution in the Lake of Fire and then die and are burned up completely.

Another New Testament illustration that teaches the ungodly will be destroyed is the comparison of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to the destruction of the wicked. The book of 2 Peter says that God, “by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly” (2 Pet. 2:6 ESV). Sodom and Gomorrah were not tormented forever, but burned to ashes and became “extinct,” and the Bible says that is exactly what will happen to wicked people.

**3. The vocabulary of the New Testament shows us the wicked will be destroyed.**

As well as illustrations and comparisons about the destruction of the unsaved such as those we have seen above with trees, weeds, or Sodom and Gomorrah, the New Testament uses more than half a dozen Greek words to describe what will happen to the unsaved, and they each refer to death and destruction, not continued life in torment. If we are going to arrive at the true meaning of Scripture, we must pay careful attention to the vocabulary it uses because God chooses His vocabulary carefully. When it comes to the total annihilation of the wicked, God uses many different Greek words to make the point again and again that the wicked will be destroyed.

The best way to study this subject is by studying the individual Greek words themselves. For one thing, usually a Greek word will be translated as several different English words depending on the context. For another thing, different Greek words will sometimes be translated by the same English word. This makes trying to do biblical research by studying the English words confusing and can lead to false conclusions. For example, *apollumi* is translated “destroy,” “perish,” “lose,” etc., depending on the context, but there are also other Greek words (cf. *apōleia* and *olethros*) that are sometimes translated “destruction.” If we follow the Greek words and understand their meanings, we can arrive at truth no matter how the translators brought the Greek into English. Below is a list of Greek words God uses to portray the destruction of the wicked.

1. ***Apōleia*** (#684 ἀπώλεια). *Apōleia* means “the destruction that one experiences; annihilation” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Arndt and Gingrich; abbreviated as “BDAG”). Jesus said that the road is narrow and the gate small that leads to “life,” while the broad road and broad gate leads to “destruction” (Matt. 7:13, 14; *apōleia*). Philippians 3:19 and 2 Peter 3:7 say the end of ungodly men and the enemies of God is “destruction,” and Romans 9:22 speaks of vessels (i.e., people) prepared for “destruction.” Hebrews 10:39 (KJV) says that believing results in the “saving of the soul,” while unbelief results in “destruction,” i.e., annihilation. To contrast *apōleia* with other words that mean destruction or total destruction, perhaps “annihilation” would be a clear translation. So *apōleia* is just one word that shows us the end of the unsaved is annihilation, not eternal torment.

Something that will help us understand that most of the words in this study, like *apōleia* (destruction), refer to total annihilation is to remember that some words are inherently telic (they have an endpoint), while other words are inherently atelic (they do not have an endpoint). Words like “torture,” “pain,” and “suffering” are atelic; the words themselves do not have an endpoint. Torture and suffering may go on for a minute, a month, a year, or forever. The vocabulary word itself does not have an inherent boundary—it may go on forever. In contrast, words such as “destruction,” “annihilation,” and “extinction” are telic, they have an inherent endpoint. If nothing is ever finally destroyed, then what happened was not “destruction.” The same is true with “annihilation.” If in the end, nothing is “annihilated,” then the process was not “annihilation.” Similarly “extinction” is not “extinction” if in the end, something is not “extinct.” It is important to understand the difference between telic and atelic words because the vocabulary God uses when it comes to the wicked is telic. They are destroyed, annihilated, and extinct. They no longer exist.

A closing comment on *apōleia* is appropriate: We should pay attention to the fact that Jesus contrasted “life” with “destruction” (Matt. 7:13, 14). That clearly implies that “life” is not “destruction,” that is, those who are alive are not destroyed, and those who are destroyed are not alive. Jesus did not say that there was “life” for both the good and wicked, and the only difference between them was the quality of their life (joy or torment). We contend that Jesus chose his words carefully and accurately, and taught the great truth that the wicked are annihilated in the Lake of Fire.

2. ***Apollumi*** (#622 ἀπόλλυμι). *Apollumi* means “to cause or experience destruction” (BDAG). The Gospel of Matthew says that we are to fear God, who is the one who can “destroy both soul and body” in Gehenna (Matt. 10:28), and John 3:16, using the same Greek word, says that the unsaved will “perish,” but those who believe will have everlasting life. Romans 2:12 also says the unsaved will “perish.” These verses give more evidence that the fate of the wicked is everlasting destruction, not everlasting torment.

3. ***Esthiō*** (#2068 ἐσθίω; in some lexicons it is listed as the unused root, *phagō*, #5315 φάγω). *Esthiō* means “eat,” and thus by extension, it also came to mean “to do away with completely; consume; devour” (BDAG). James 5:3, speaking of wicked people, says their gold and silver will “eat [*esthiō*; consume] your flesh like fire,” meaning that the greed and possessions of the wicked will be the cause of them being consumed after the Judgment. Hebrews 10:27 speaks of a “fire that will consume [*esthiō*] the enemies of God.” Hebrews 12:29 says God is a “consuming fire,” but in this verse the Greek word for “consuming” is *katanaliskō* (#2654 καταναλίσκω), which means “consume” (BDAG), to do away with completely. That is exactly what fire does to things, it burns them up until they are totally consumed. The translation of Hebrews 10:27 in many versions, that a fire will “consume” the enemies of God is simple, clear, and accurate. There is no “eternal torment,” but there is everlasting death, the unsaved are consumed in the Lake of Fire.

4. ***Exolethreuō*** (#1842 ἐξολεθρεύω). This is an amplification of *olethros* (2 Thess. 1:9) below, and means to destroy completely. Peter used it in Acts 3:23 (quoting Deut. 18:19) to show that anyone who did not listen to the prophet who was foretold to come (i.e., the Messiah), would be completely destroyed and not be part of the people of God. *Exolethreuō* is used frequently (over 200 times) in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was made around 250 BC, and it sometimes refers to a person’s destruction in this life, and sometimes refers to their complete destruction in the next. That is certainly the way Peter used it in Acts 3:23, and an example of the total and everlasting destruction of the wicked in the Old Testament is Psalm 37:9.

5. ***Katastrophē*** (#2692 καταστροφή). 2 Peter 2:6 says that God reduced Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes as an example of what would happen to ungodly people. Some Greek texts include the word *katastrophē*, which means “condition of total destruction” (BDAG), which is why the ESV reads that God “condemned them to extinction….” The ESV has chosen a good English word, “extinction,” to separate *katastrophē* from other Greek words that mean destruction. “Extinction” exactly describes the fate of the unsaved, they are not tormented forever.

6. ***Olethros*** (#3639 ὄλεθρος). *Olethros* means “a state of destruction, destruction, ruin, death” (BDAG). 2 Thessalonians 1:9 says that people who do not obey God will be punished with everlasting “destruction” [*olethros*]. Perhaps simply to distinguish *olethros* from other Greek words that mean destroy, it might be helpful to use “destroy completely” a definition that can be found in Friberg’s Greek Lexicon.

7. ***Phthora*** (#5356, φθορά). *Phthora* means the “total destruction of an entity” (BDAG). 2 Peter 2:12 says that the wicked will be caught and “destroyed.” Galatians 6:8 uses the same Greek word and says that people who sow to the flesh reap “corruption,” while people who sow to the Spirit reap everlasting life. Since *phthora* means “total destruction,” and in Galatians is contrasted with everlasting life, “total destruction” would be a good translation of *phthora* in both 2 Peter 2:12 (the wicked are totally destroyed) and in Galatians 6:8 (the wicked reap total destruction). Also, again we see that “total destruction” is contrasted with everlasting life. The Scripture consistently contrasts life with death, not life in a good place with life in a bad place.

8. ***Thanatos*** (#2288 θάνατος). *Thanatos* means “death; the termination of physical life” (BDAG). Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is “death” in contrast with the gift of God, which is “life.” The choice God gives people is the choice between life and death, not between “everlasting life in pleasure” and “everlasting life in pain.” Each person is given the choice between everlasting life and everlasting death. The end of people’s first life is “death”—no life, no body, no consciousness—until the resurrection. At the resurrection, God raises the body from the dead and reanimates it with life. At that point, saved people go on and live forever, but the unsaved are thrown into the Lake of Fire which is called the “second death” precisely because it is like the first death; people burn to the point they have no life at all; they are annihilated. The second death is mentioned four times in Revelation (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; and 21:8). Since the Bible cannot contradict itself, it cannot say that the Lke of Fire is the second death and also say people live forever in torment. One category of those statements would have to be figurative, and we are seeing that the figurative verses are the few that seem to say people will burn forever; they are the figure of speech hyperbole, which is exaggeration.

**4. Death is really death.**

In response to the Bible teaching that people will “die,” some Bible teachers say that “death” is not really death (the total absence of life), but just “separation from God.” Although there are times when the word “death” is used in a limited way, such as when describing the “spiritual death” of an unsaved person (Eph. 2:1), the word “death” still means something is dead. For example, when a person is referred to as spiritually “dead,” their spiritual life is not just separated from God, it is “dead.”

The way to see whether the word “death” is used in a limited sense or has its standard meaning is to study the whole scope of Scripture on the subject. In this case, the many clear verses that say the wicked will be destroyed lets us know that when God says the unsaved will die a second “death,” He is using “death” in the standard way, meaning there is no life at all. God said in many different ways the wicked would be annihilated, and by saying they are “dead” He is further explaining what eventually happens to the wicked.

Another way we can tell that “death” does not mean “alive but separated from God,” is that the same Hebrew and Greek words that are used for the death of plants and animals are used for the death of humans. Dead plants and dead animals are not just “separated from God,” they are dead; totally dead. No part of them is alive anywhere once they die. Furthermore, there are no unique words for “dead” that apply only to humans but not to other things that die. The same words for “dead” that are used for humans are used for animals. But if humans “died” in a unique way that applied only to them—that is, if parts of them died, but some part of them lived on in the Lake of Fire even though the Bible said the person was “dead”—then there would have to be some unique vocabulary for humans that would describe their unique kind of “death.” If part of a human lived on when they were “dead,” but no part of a plant or animal lived on when they were “dead,” then we would expect that a special word for “death” would exist that described human death differently from animal death. But no such vocabulary word exists. The fact that the same vocabulary exists for the death of people and animals shows that the state of death is the same for all of them: “death” means “no life.” Ecclesiastes speaks of the death of humans and animals: “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. (Eccl. 3:19-20 KJV).

**5. “Gehenna” was the name of the garbage dump south of Jerusalem, and no one expected the garbage to burn forever.**

*Gehenna* was the Greek word for the garbage dump just south of Jerusalem where the garbage was burned. Gehenna gets translated (actually mistranslated) as “hell” in verses such as Matthew 5:22 and 10:28 in many English versions (cf. ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NRSV). *Gehenna* is a Greek word that is a transliteration from the Hebrew *ge Hinnom*, which is the name of a valley (the Hebrew word *ge* means “valley,” and *Hinnom* was the name of the man who owned the valley). In the Old Testament, the valley is known both as the Valley of Hinnom (*Ge Hinnom*; Neh. 11:30; and some Hebrew texts of Josh. 15:8) and also as the “Valley of the sons of Hinnom” (*Ge ben Hinnom*; Josh. 18:16; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31). The Hebrew *ge Hinnom* was transliterated into Greek as the word “*Gehenna*.”

In large part because of the sins committed there, especially child sacrifice (Jer. 7:31; 32:35), the Valley of Hinnom was considered unclean and came to be used as the garbage dump by the people of Jerusalem. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would carry their garbage, including dead animals, bones, and other waste, outside the south gate of the city (still to this day the gate going down to the Valley of Hinnom is called “the dung gate”), down the hill and into the Valley of Hinnom. The waste that was dumped there was then either burned up in the fires that usually burned there, or it rotted away, being eaten by maggots and worms. The people Jesus taught knew Gehenna very well, and a large percentage of them had probably thrown garbage there. They understood Jesus’ teaching that if a person was wicked before God, then at the judgment he would not be let into the kingdom, but like the garbage, would be thrown out and destroyed. The Greek word Gehenna came to be used for the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:13-15), and Jesus said that unsaved people would be thrown into Gehenna, meaning the Lake of Fire (Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; Mark 9:43, 45, 47). The reason that Jesus said people would be thrown into the Valley of Hinnom (the Gehenna) was clear and simple: garbage thrown into Gehenna was completely destroyed and people thrown into the Lake of Fire will be completely destroyed. Given that fact, it was appropriate to refer to the Lake of Fire as Gehenna.

When we put ourselves in the place of Jesus’ audience we can see Jesus’ simple teaching. Things thrown into Gehenna were destroyed. The wicked would be thrown there on the Day of Judgment, so they would be destroyed too. If Jesus were trying to teach that the wicked would burn forever, then he would have had to add that detail to his teaching about Gehenna, but he never did. Why? The answer is simple and biblical: the unsaved do not burn forever, but like the garbage in the Valley of Hinnom, are totally destroyed.

The Greeks transliterated the Hebrew words *Ge Hinnom* into *Gehenna*, but sadly, many English translators did not transliterate *Gehenna* into our English versions, but translated it as “Hell.” But that totally loses the simple truth that Jesus was speaking of a literal valley where garbage was thrown. Then, to make matters worse, many erroneous ideas were attached to what Jesus supposedly said about “hell,” including that he was speaking of a place of eternal torment. He was not. He was speaking of the simple concept that the wicked and unsaved will be totally destroyed, just like the garbage in the Valley of Hinnom was.

[For more on Gehenna, see commentary on Matt. 5:22.]

**6. The “immortal soul” is not biblical; the Bible never says the soul is immortal.**

Most orthodox theologians acknowledge that a sinner’s body is destroyed after he dies, but they assert that it is the “immortal soul” of a sinner that remains in torment forever. The concept of the “immortal soul” came mainly from Greek philosophy, and entered into Christian teaching mainly through two different pathways. The first way was from Jews who converted to Christianity. After Alexander the Great conquered Israel and Egypt in 332 BC, many of the Jews who lived there came to accept Greek beliefs as true, and when they converted to Christianity they brought those Greek beliefs (myths) with them. The second way the belief in the immortal soul entered Christianity was from the Greeks who converted to Christianity as the Christian Faith began to grow and spread.

It is widely believed that the “immortal soul” is a biblical concept, but it is never mentioned in the Bible. Much has been written showing the soul is not immortal, but it is too much information to expound in this commentary article. (See Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit*, Is There Death After Life?*, pp. 17-28; Edward Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, pp. 65-76; Leroy E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, pp.529- 802; Anthony Buzzard, *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven*, pp. 208-225.)

The most common use of “soul” in the Bible is its being used to mean a person, an individual, such as when Acts 27:37 says there were 276 “souls” on board the ship (KJV). This is true both in the Old Testament, where “soul” is a translation of the Hebrew word *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ, pronounced 'nĕ-fesh), and the New Testament, where it is the translation of the Greek word *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay). However, due to the common belief that the “soul” lives on after the body dies, it is important that we highlight some verses that show that the soul, as well as the body, is destroyed.

The clearest verse that shows the soul can be destroyed is Matthew 10:28. Jesus was teaching people not to be afraid of people, but to “be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna].” This clear teaching by Jesus should have settled the point that both the body and the soul are “destroyed” in the Lake of Fire. The soul does not live on forever in torment. Ezekiel 18:20 says that soul that sins will die (KJV). Hebrews 10:39 mentions people who “believe to the saving of the soul” (KJV; the word “soul” is in the Greek text, but not translated as “soul” in many versions). It contrasts those saved souls with the people who draw back from God resulting in destruction (annihilation; The Greek is *apōleia*; see **#**1 above).

Jesus also taught, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matt. 16:25). In this verse, the word “life” is “soul” in the Greek text, and the word “lose” and “loses” is the Greek word *apollumi*, which was covered above and refers to destruction. So although it is not clear in most English translations, when the Greek text is more literally translated the meaning of the verse becomes clear: “For whoever wants to save his soul will destroy it….” Thus this verse too shows that the “soul” can be destroyed. James 5:20 says the person who “converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death…” (KJV). Although “soul” in this verse seems to mean “person,” it includes the life of the person, the soul, which it says without salvation will die.

The verses above all show that the soul is not immortal, but can be destroyed, and more verses could be added from the Old Testament, such as those that say the “soul” of sinners will be “cut off” (Lev. 7:20; 18:29; Num. 15:30, 31). In concluding this point we need to restate that there is no such thing as the “immortal soul” in the Bible, and many Scriptures, and especially the teaching of Jesus, show us the “soul” can be destroyed.

**7. “Spirit” is not necessarily immortal**

It is sometimes claimed that since God made man in His image, and since God is an eternal spirit, all humans must have an eternal spirit. But there are serious problems with that belief. For example, the belief that spirit cannot die is a traditional belief, but it is not a biblical belief. Like the belief in the “immortal soul,” the belief that “spirit” lives forever is not biblical; there is simply no verse to support it. No verse says, “spirit is immortal,” or “spirit lives forever.” On the contrary, “soul” is a kind of “spirit” like “oak” is a kind of tree and soul can be destroyed. So we know that at least some kinds of spirit can be destroyed. Further evidence for that fact is that animals have spirit: “Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?” (Eccl. 3:21 ESV). This fact is corroborated because the Hebrew word *ruach* (“spirit” “breath” or “wind”) is used of animals on several different occasions (cf. Gen. 6:17; 7:15; 7:22; Ps. 104:29; Eccl. 3:19). Although each of these could be rendered “breath,” they could as easily be rendered “spirit,” and the fact that animals have both a *ruach* (“spirit”) and *nephesh* (“soul”) shows that “spirit” and “soul” can indeed be destroyed. Given that fact, in order to be able to say that the “spirit” in man cannot be destroyed we would have to have a verse that expressly states that fact, but there is no such verse.

[See Appendix 15: “Usages of “Spirit.’”]

[See Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Furthermore, there are many unprovable assumptions in the claim that since God made Adam in His image then Adam and the human race must have an eternal spirit like God does. For one thing, although God is eternal spirit, that does not mean that when God created Adam “in His image” that the image of God in Adam was eternal spirit. The simple fact is that there is no verse that says the “image of God” is spirit. God has many attributes, and the image of God can be rational thought, the desire to create, the desire to love and be loved, the desire for interpersonal connection, etc., and many scholars have argued that those kinds of things are the image of God (for more on the image of God, see commentary on Gen. 1:27).

However, even if part of God’s image was spirit, that could not mean that humans are “eternal” in the same way God is, because God existed in eternity past and humans did not, so the “spirit” of humans is different from the “spirit” of God, and there is no verse that says that God created everlasting spirit in Adam and all other humans. But there are lots of verses that say that people can “perish,” “be destroyed,” “die,” etc., as we saw in the list of verses above that speak of the death and destruction of the wicked, including John 3:16, which says people either have everlasting life or “perish.” Furthermore, when verses such as John 3:16 or Romans 6:23 contrast “everlasting life” with “perishing” or “death,” there is not a single verse that says only part of the person perishes, dies, or is destroyed. It is always the “person” who dies, and the “person” is the whole person. So, while no verse of Scripture plainly states that all humans have eternal life spirit, many verses testify that unsaved people will “die,” “perish,” and “be destroyed.”

**8. The Hebrew word *sheol* shows us dead people are dead.**

More evidence that the soul can be destroyed comes from studying the Hebrew word *sheol*. The Old Testament made it clear that when a person died, he went to *sheol*. Neither Greek or English has a good equivalent word for *sheol*, because it is not a “physical place” where dead people go, like the grave, but rather it is a “state of being;” it is the state of being dead (cf. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*; under “hell”). Perhaps a good English equivalent of *sheol* would be “grave-dom,” the “reign of the grave.” That *sheol* is the state of being dead can be easily confirmed by examining the uses of *sheol* in the Old Testament. It is undisputed that when a person dies, his body disintegrates and ceases to exist. But not only does the body cease to exist, the life (sometimes called “soul”) of the person does too. Thus, a person who is dead is dead in every way, not alive in heaven or “Hell.”

There are many verses that show that when the body died, the person, both body and soul, was totally dead. Death and being in *sheol* is compared to sleep in many verses (Job 7:21; 14:12-14; Ps. 13:3; 90:5; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:14; 5:10). The comparison is valid because just as there is no consciousness in sleep, there is none in death. Once a person dies, he does not remember God (Ps. 6:5). In fact, dead people “know nothing” (Eccl. 9:5). They cannot praise God or speak of His goodness (Ps. 30:9; 115:17; Isa. 38:18), they cannot thank God or hope in Him (Isa. 38:18), and they have no knowledge or wisdom (Eccl. 9:10). Obviously, these dead people are not rejoicing in heaven or suffering in “Hell.”

When a person dies he goes to *sheol*, which, as we have just seen, is the state of being dead where there is no knowledge, wisdom, memory, praise, or hope. Similarly, when a person dies in the Lake of Fire and experiences the “second death,” he will again be in *sheol* and have total nonexistence. In that light, it is important that we notice that Psalm 9:17 (ESV) says, “The wicked shall return to *Sheol*, all the nations that forget God.” Although this verse may have a couple of different meanings included in it, and may refer to the first death as well as the second death, the ESV translation is certainly correct that the verse does include the idea of the wicked making a “return” to *sheol*. Wicked people die the first time and are in *sheol*, then are resurrected to the Judgment. If they are judged unworthy of everlasting life, they are cast into the Lake of Fire and die again, thus returning to *sheol*, the state of death. Thus Psalm 9:17 is another verse that teaches the wicked do not suffer forever in the Lake of Fire. Eventually the wicked return to *sheol* and are totally dead.

One of the ways that some Jews came to believe in the “immortal soul” is that when the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek in the version we call the Septuagint (done about 250 BC, a few generations after Alexander conquered Egypt), the Hebrew word *sheol* was translated as the Greek word *hadēs*. This created a huge error to occur among the Greek-speaking Jews, because in *sheol* everyone was dead, but in the Greek *hadēs*, everyone was alive. The Greek language, like English, had no word for “the state of being dead.” Given that fact, the Jews who translated the Septuagint should have transliterated *sheol* into Greek, like they did for *Gehenna*. Instead, they translated the Hebrew word *sheol* as the Greek word *hadēs*, and by doing that they gave life to the dead. Then, after that time, the Jews who read the Septuagint naturally thought that the dead were alive, a belief that the Pharisees held at the time of Christ, and many of them brought their belief that the dead were alive into Christianity when they converted.

**9. The figure of speech hyperbole.**

Saying that the Devil and some of the very wicked people will be tormented “forever and ever” is the figure of speech hyperbole, or exaggeration. Hyperbole was common in the biblical culture, just as it is common in our culture today. Common hyperboles in Western culture are when we are hungry but we say, “I’m starving,” or when we are cold but we say “I’m freezing.” The hyperbole communicates both the intensity of the feeling and the emotion of discomfort that goes with the physical feeling itself. In his book, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, E.W. Bullinger has six pages of examples of hyperboles found in the Bible, and there are many he did not list.

There are other examples of hyperbole that are associated with the Devil, the Last Days, and the Judgment. For example, by hyperbole, the Devil is said to be accusing Christians before God “day and night.” Of course, this is not literal, because there are times when the Devil is on earth and leaves God’s presence (Job 1:12; 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:8). Also, Jesus used hyperbole to good effect when he taught about avoiding Gehenna. He said, “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away” (Matt. 5:29). Jesus did not expect anyone to literally obey him, but the hyperbole effectively communicates that, although we should not gouge out our eye, we should not be complacent about the sin in our lives but should take drastic action to cleanse ourselves of sin. The hyperbole in Revelation 20:10, “to the ages of the ages” accomplishes two things. First, it graphically makes the point that the torment will go on for a long time and second, it elicits emotions such as horror, or perhaps satisfaction, that accompany the retribution that has come upon the wicked.

Perhaps another reason for God’s use of hyperbole was the inability of the Greek and Latin languages to express a very large number. The roman numerals used in biblical times had an “I” for ones, a “V” for fives, an “X” for tens, an “L” for 50, a “C” for 100, a “D” for 500, and an “M” for 1,000, but nothing larger than that. Thus numbers in the billions could not be easily expressed in writing, or for that matter in oral communication, and numbers in the trillions, quadrillions, etc., did not exist in the everyday world and so there was not much need to figure out a way to express them. We today just add zeros to a number to make it larger: 10, 100, 1,000, 10,000, etc., but the Romans did not have a zero placeholder, which was developed in the Arabic number system which did not become in general use in Europe until the 1,200s and 1,300s AD. If we postulate that the Devil will burn only one year for every life he has ruined, the number would be in the billions, far too much to express in Roman numerals and put in the Bible. This put the biblical writers in a bind. They had no way to express how long the Devil would actually burn! Thus, the use of hyperbole here is a very fitting way to say that the Devil will be tormented longer than could be easily expressed, but we can see from the scope of Scripture that it was not forever.

How can we be sure that verses such as Revelation 20:10 are hyperbole? One of the best-known principles of biblical exegesis is that God’s Word is internally consistent, i.e., verses cannot contradict each other. If verses appear to contradict, any unclear verse must be interpreted in harmony with the clear verses on the subject. The Bible says in many different ways and in many places that the unsaved will be totally destroyed. In contrast, there are only a few verses that seem to say the unsaved will not be destroyed. So we can safely conclude that the unsaved will be destroyed. Furthermore, when we closely examine the few verses that seem to say the unsaved will burn forever, each of them can be explained from grammar or customs in a way that is consistent with the clear verses.

**10. People will be punished in proportion to their sin.**

Scripture says people will receive punishment for what they have done, and that the punishment will be in proportion to the sin they have committed. Romans 2:5 says of stubborn people, “you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath.” Just as godly people by their good works store up treasure for the life to come, wicked people store up wrath for themselves. It would make no sense to say that a person “stored up wrath for themselves” if every person got the same “wrath,” that is, eternal torment.

Jesus taught that people would be tortured “until” they paid back what they owed for their sin (Matt. 18:32-35). Theologians who believe in eternal torment claim that no one can ever pay for their sin, but no Scripture says that, in fact, Scripture is clear that sin can be paid for, and that is exactly what Jesus taught in Matthew 18:34 and what verses such as Romans 2:5 indicate.

The clear message of Scripture is that unless people get forgiveness for their sins they will receive punishment for the evil they have done, but never does Scripture say the people deserve being punished forever (Ps. 62:12; Eccl. 11:9; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23). Beings such as the Devil and his demons have stored up much wrath for themselves and will be punished for a very long time before they are destroyed. God metes out two different types of justice: corrective justice and retributive justice. Corrective justice is punishment that is meant to correct a behavior, while retributive justice is retribution, or repayment, for something that the person did (see commentary on 2 Thess. 1:8). Torment and then destruction in the Lake of Fire is not corrective, it is retributive; it is a righteous repayment for harm done. The demons knew this justice was coming, and so they said to Jesus, “Have you come to destroy us?” (Mark 1:24).

Some theologians have argued against annihilation because they say it would not make sense for God to resurrect someone from the dead only to kill them again. That misses the fact that God’s annihilation in the Lake of Fire is a judgment, a retribution, a fulfillment of a promise, and a lesson to those still living. We can assume many evil people, the Pharisees are a good example, have died in complete confidence that they will be saved, and as rich and powerful people, often died in the comfort of their own homes, well-fed and cared for. Not only do wicked people such as those Pharisees need to be judged and fulfill the promise that “every knee will bow,” but their annihilation is not immediate. The wicked are annihilated after a period of suffering, and that period of suffering fulfills the Word of God and the justice of God. It seems clear that not every sinner spends equal time suffering, but the more wicked a person is, the more severe the punishment, fulfilling the Scripture that they have stored up wrath for the Day of Wrath. It is God’s just retribution that those who have ignored God and caused pain and suffering on earth will suffer in proportion to the evil they have done.

Also, the suffering of the wicked before they are annihilated will show those who have everlasting life that God is truly just. God, through Jesus Christ, offered to pay for the sins of anyone who wished to accept that payment. Those people who rejected God’s offer, and thereby decided by default to pay for their own sins, had to make good their decision, and pay for their sins with suffering and death, just as Scripture said: “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

[For more about people being punished in Gehenna in proportion to their sin, see the commentary on Rom. 2:5.]

**In conclusion**, the verses above are very descriptive of the final end of the wicked, which is total annihilation. It is not good biblical exegesis to use the very few unclear verses that can seem to say that evil people will suffer forever to overturn the dozens of different verses and illustrations that tell us the wicked will be totally destroyed. The overwhelming biblical evidence in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is that wicked people are not tormented forever but are destroyed in the Lake of Fire, which is the second death.

[For information on the fact that dead people are dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead Are Dead.” For more on the punishment of the wicked being in proportion to the wrong they have done, see commentary on Rom. 2:5. For more on Gehenna not being a place of eternal torment see commentary on Matt. 5:22. For information on how to be saved and live forever instead of dying unsaved and being annihilated, see commentary on Rom. 10:9.]

Appendix 5. Christ’s Future Kingdom On Earth

“The Millennial Kingdom”

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Saved People Will Live on Earth Forever

Jesus made a very plain and simple statement in Matthew 5:5: “The meek will inherit the earth.” Jesus did not invent that statement; he quoted Psalm 37:11. Many of the Jews of Jesus’ time had lost sight of the hope that Israel would be restored on earth, and the situation is the same today. The simple meaning of Matthew 5:5 has been lost due to the traditional teaching that saved people live in heaven forever after they die. Actually, what the Bible teaches is that Jesus Christ will come down from heaven to the earth, fight and win the Battle of Armageddon, and set up his kingdom on earth, which will fill the whole earth (Ps. 2:8; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35; 7:14; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10; Rev. 2:8; 19:11-21). He will set up his palace in the newly rebuilt Jerusalem, and for 1,000 years reign over all the earth. All the people who have been saved will be there because they will have been raised from the dead. Many scholars refer to this 1,000-year kingdom as the “Millennial Kingdom.” It is the first 1,000 years of the “Kingdom” that Jesus spoke about so often when he taught about “the Kingdom of God.” After the 1,000 years are over there will be a great war (Rev. 20:7-10). Then there will be the second resurrection, and after that the Everlasting City will come down from heaven to earth, and all the saved people of all time will live in it forever (Rev. 21:1-4). Thus, the future reign of Christ on earth is divided into two parts, the Millennial Kingdom, which will last 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-7), and the Everlasting Kingdom, which will last forever (Rev. 21-22).

Matthew 5:5 speaks of the “meek,” and those are the people who have not been self-willed or selfish, but instead have believed and obeyed God and thus gotten saved. The meek people will “inherit the earth,” meaning they will get to live forever on earth, which makes sense because God’s original plan was that people would live on the earth. God created Adam and Eve, put them on earth in Eden, and told them to multiply. God’s intent was that humankind would fill the earth. The Fall from Eden ruined the earth, but it did not change God’s plan, which will be fulfilled in the future when Jesus comes down from heaven and sets up his kingdom on earth. After Jesus fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth there will be the Resurrection of the Righteous, when righteous people like Abraham, Moses, David, Miriam, Deborah, and Ruth, will get up from the dead, and they will be a large part of the people who then populate the earth.

Everlasting Life on Earth is Not a New Doctrine

When Jesus said, “The meek will inherit the earth,” he was not teaching new doctrine. He was confirming and reestablishing for his day and time the clear teaching of the Old Testament that had been lost—and sadly is still lost today for most Christians. The Old Testament said that God will destroy the wicked, but the righteous will inherit the earth.

* **Psalm 37:9-11 (abridged):** For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will **inherit the land**. A little while and the wicked will be no more...But **the meek will inherit the land** and enjoy great peace.
* **Isaiah 57:13:** The man who makes me his refuge will **inherit the land.**
* **Ezekiel 37:12 (abridged):** “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; **I will bring you back to the land of Israel**.”
* **Revelation 5:9-10:** “And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and **they will reign on the earth**.”

These verses are a small sampling from among the many verses in the Bible that indicate the everlasting home of Israel and of all the saved people will be the earth. The Bible expresses in many different ways the fact that the everlasting home of saved people will be on earth. Some verses specifically speak about being on earth, such as Psalm 37:9, 11, 29. Other verses are wishes for the future, such as the psalmist’s cry, “May sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more” (Ps. 104:35). Some verses mention the attributes of the future earth, such as Isaiah 41:18, which speaks of places that are now deserts becoming places with springs and pools of water. Others speak specifically of the Kingdom on earth, such as Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. In the dream, the rock that smashed all the other kingdoms will “fill the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35). Others are prophecies of the future that speak of things such as each person having his own vine and fig tree and of swords being made into plow blades, which are then used to cultivate the earth (Mic. 4:3-4). All these prophecies are visions and prophecies of the earth, not of “heaven.” In contrast to these clear prophecies about a future life on earth, there are no prophecies about life in heaven in the Bible, and the reason for that is simple and profound: we will not spend eternity in heaven, we will be on earth.

God Promised to Give the Land to Abraham “Forever”

God blessed Abraham by promising him that his descendants would get the land forever. In fact, the reason that the land of Israel is commonly called “the promised land” is that God “promised” it to Abraham and his descendants (cf. Gen. 13:15; 15:18; 17:8). God does not lie (Titus 1:2), so one day His promises must be fulfilled. Since Abraham is dead, the only way that God’s promise to him and his descendants can be fulfilled is that God will give the Promised Land to them after they are resurrected, and that is what the Bible says will happen (Ezek. 37:12-14). Similarly, God stated many times that His king, the Messiah, would reign on earth from Jerusalem on Mount Zion (cf. Ps. 2:6-8; 110:1-2; Isa. 2:1-4; 9:6-7; 24:23; 28:16; Jer. 3:17; Mic. 4:1-3; Zech. 8:3), but Jesus never ruled as king in his natural life on earth. Nevertheless, God’s promises will not fail and Christ will come back to earth, conquer it, and reign as king from Jerusalem just as the prophecies say.

Israelites Will be Regathered to the Land of Israel

There are many verses stating that, in the future, God’s people Israel will be gathered to the land of Israel (cf. Isa. 11:11-12; 27:13; 54:7; 56:8; 66:20; Jer. 12:15; 15:15-17; 23:3-8; 29:14; 30:3-10; 31:8; 32:37-38, 42-44; 33:10-13; 46:27; Ezek. 11:17; 28:25; 34:11-13; 36:24; 37:21; 39:28; Hos. 1:11; Amos 9:14-15; Mic. 2:12; Zeph. 3:18-20; Zech. 8:7-8; 10:6; John 11:52). Although some of historical Israel had been given to the Jews, not all of it has, and furthermore, the Jews have not yet been gathered back to Israel, although there are now, and have been for some time now, some Jews moving to the land of Israel. That will happen in the future when dead Jews are raised and brought to Israel (Ezek. 37:11-14), and living Jews are brought there also. Also, Gentiles will be resurrected and fill the earth: “Do you not know that the saints [the believers] will [one day] judge *and* govern the world?” (1 Cor. 6:2, Amplified Bible). So, in the future, resurrected believers will again inhabit the land. At that time, what both the Psalmist and Jesus Christ said will be fulfilled: “The meek will inherit the earth.”

Prophecies Relating to a Future Life on Earth

Another reason to believe that everlasting life will be on earth is that all the prophecies relating to the activities of Israel in the future are tied specifically to the earth. These include:

* The wolf lying down with the lamb and the lion eating grass like cattle (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25).
* The land healed and the deserts blooming (Isa. 32:15; 35:1, 2, 7; 51:3).
* Israel becoming the glory of the earth (Isa. 60).
* The country of Israel being divided among the twelve tribes (Ezek. 47:13-48:29).
* The Messiah getting his own land area (Ezek. 45:7; 48:21, 22).
* A new Temple will be built in Jerusalem (Ezek. 40-44; cf. Isa. 56:5, 7; 60:7, 13; Joel 3:18; Mic. 4:2; Hag. 2:6-9; Zech. 6:12-15).
* A river flowing out of the Temple and healing the land (Ezek. 47:8-10; cf. Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8).
* The law going forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-3; Mic. 4:1, 2).
* People living in secure homes (Isa. 32:18).
* Each family having its own vine and fig tree (Mic. 4:4).

Not only is the earth going to be the home of believers, it is going to be their home *forever*. Psalm 37:29: “The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.” The first 1,000 years of that “forever” will be in the Millennial Kingdom, the rest of it will be spent on earth in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). Since the earth is going to be restored to its Paradise state, and be the home of so many people, it is natural for people to think that eventually the Millennial Kingdom of Christ will, like this earth, degenerate into being a polluted and politically corrupt place with poverty, hunger, and misery. It will not. Jesus will rule the earth with a “rod of iron” to make sure that does not happen (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15; 20:4, 5 KJV).

Wonderful Promises about the Future Earth

The Bible has many wonderful promises about the future life on earth that saved people will enjoy. Many of these are listed below:

* There will be justice on earth (Isa. 2:4; 9:6, 7; 11:1-5; 32:1-2, 5, 16, 17; 42:3-4; 51:5; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15). “He [The Messiah] will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isa. 9:7). Jesus will reign as king, and he will appoint judges and rulers to help him rule. For example, the twelve apostles will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28), and there will be other judges as well (cf. Jer. 23:4, also Jer. 3:15; 33:26; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26-27).
* There will be no war (Isa. 2:4; 9:4-7; 60:18; Hos. 2:18; Mic. 4:3, 4; Zech. 9:9, 10). In Christ’s Kingdom on earth, “nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” Furthermore, the rulers that Jesus will set up as administrators and governors under him will be wonderful, godly people and are described in prophecy as being “like a shelter from the wind,” like “a refuge from the storm,” “like streams of water in a dry land, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa. 32:2).
* The resurrected believers and Christians (who were in the Rapture) will enjoy perfect health (Isa. 29:18; 32:3, 4; 33:24; 35:5, 6; 57:19; Jer. 33:6; Mal. 4:2). “No one living in Zion will say, ‘I am ill’” (Isa. 33:24).
* People will live safely on the earth (Isa. 11:6-9; 32:18; 54:14-17; 60:11, 17, 8; 65:17-25; Jer. 23:4; 30:10; 32:37; 33:6; Ezek. 28:26; 34:25-31; Mic. 5:4, 5; Zeph. 3:13-17). “They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD (Isa. 11:9).
* There will be no hunger because the land will be healed (Isa. 25:6; 30:23-26; 32:15; 35:1-7; 41:18-20; 44:3; 51:3; Jer. 31:5, 11-14; Ezek. 47:1-12; Hos. 2:21, 22; Joel 2:18-26; Amos 9:13). “Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs” (Isa. 35:6-7).
* Theological arguments and bickering will come to an end. The house of Israel will know God (Isa. 29:23, 24; Jer. 31:33, 34; Ezek. 11:18-20), and Christians will “know fully” (1 Cor. 13:12). “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). In fact, idolatry will cease and Yahweh will be the only God worshiped (Zech. 14:9).
* The people will be holy and blessed, and there will be joy (Isa. 4:2-5; 35:10; 51:3, 11; 60:1-22; 61:4-11; 62:1-12; 65:17-25; Jer. 30:18, 19; 31:4, 12-14; Luke 6:21). “The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isa. 51:11).
* People from other nations will worship God, and even come to Jerusalem to worship, and foreigners will be allowed to sacrifice at the Temple (Ps. 102:15: Isa. 2:2-4; 14:1; 19:18-25; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:3-8; 60:3, 9, 14; 66:18-21; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 2:11; 8:20-23; 14:16). “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:7).

Jobs that Will Exist on the Future Earth

Still more evidence that the Kingdom will be on earth is that the jobs that are described in the Kingdom are jobs that we are familiar with on earth. Even as resurrected believers, there will still be work to do on earth. Jesus himself will rule as a king and serve as the High Priest, and everyone else will have jobs to do as well. The Bible specifically mentions many jobs in Christ’s worldwide Kingdom, some having more honor, some having less. These include:

* leaders and judges (Isa. 1:26; 32:1; Jer. 3:15; 23:3-4; Ezek. 44:24; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26).
* builders (Isa. 54:12; 60:10, 61:4; Jer. 30:18; Ezek. 36:10, 33; Amos 9:14).
* farmers (Isa. 30:23-24; 32:20; 61:5; 62:9; Ezek. 36:9, 34; 48:19; Amos 9:13).
* herdsmen (Isa. 30:23-24, 60:6-7; 61:5; Jer. 31:12).
* vinedressers and vintners (Isa. 25:6; 62:8; Jer. 31:5; Amos 9:13).
* metalworkers (Isa. 2:4; 60:17; Mic. 4:3).
* fishermen (Ezek. 47:10).
* landscapers (Isa. 60:13).
* servants (Isa. 14:2).
* cleanup duties and gravediggers (Isa. 9:5; Ezek. 39:14, 15). [There will be death in the Millennial Kingdom because there will be “natural people” there who survived the Tribulation, and whom Christ allowed into the Kingdom at the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46; Isa. 65:20)].

The Bible does not name every job in the future Kingdom of Christ. Enough are named to show us that the kingdom will be similar in diversity and needs to earthly kingdoms and nations of today.

Different Names of the Millennial Kingdom

The Millennial Kingdom is referred to by many different names in Scripture. This is not unusual; many people and places are called by different names. For example, Jerusalem is called “the city of David” (2 Sam. 5:7, 9), “the city of God” (Ps. 46:4), “Salem” (Ps. 76:2), “Zion” (Ps. 76:2), “the Lord our Righteousness” (Jer. 33:16), “Sodom” (Ezek. 16:46), “the city of the great king” (Ps. 48:2; Matt. 5:35), “Ariel” (Isa. 29:1, 2, 7), “the City of Truth” (Zech. 8:3), and more. The different names emphasize different points that God is trying to make about the person or place. The Millennial Kingdom is also called by many names and the most common ones are listed below; a study of the context where they are used shows they all refer to the Millennial Kingdom.

* The Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). God is the planner and the One who brings to pass His promises and He is the Ultimate Ruler of the kingdom, so it is rightly called “the Kingdom of God.” God sets His appointed ruler, Jesus Christ, as king over the earth (e.g. Dan. 7:13-14).
* The Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 4:17; the phrase, “The Kingdom of Heaven” might be being used because the Kingdom was of heavenly origin or quality, or it could be used as a circumlocution for “The Kingdom of God” because the Jews often avoided saying the name of God).
* Your [God’s] kingdom (Matt. 6:10).
* The kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:43; “their” being the righteous people who will live there).
* The kingdom of our father David (Mark 11:10; Christ’s Kingdom is an extension of David’s kingdom and fulfills the prophecies that Christ would reign on David’s throne).
* My kingdom (Luke 22:30; spoken by Jesus who will be King).
* Paradise (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7; “Paradise” was the Greek name for the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8), and so when Christ sets up his kingdom on earth and restores the planet to an Eden-like state, the Kingdom will be called “Paradise.” [For more on Paradise, see commentary on Luke 23:43.]
* The kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:5).
* The kingdom of the Son He loves (Col. 1:13).
* His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18).

Conclusion and Further Reference

Understanding that “the Kingdom of God” is the kingdom that Christ will establish and rule on earth when he comes and conquers the earth clarifies many scriptures that are otherwise unclear, and thus understanding what the Kingdom of God is will greatly help Christians understand the Bible.

[For more on rewards in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10. For more on inheritance in the Kingdom, see commentary on Acts 7:5. For more on the order of events immediately before and after the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the three general types of people in the Millennial Kingdom—Christians, resurrected Old Testament believers, and natural humans in their natural bodies—see commentary on Matt. 25:34. For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1. For much more complete information about the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on Earth as well as the Everlasting Kingdom of Revelation 21-22 (which is the City that has streets of gold), see John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul.*]

Appendix 6. Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son

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Introduction

The Bible teaches that there is one God, the Father, and one Messiah and Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the divinely conceived Son of God. Those are very important truths, and this appendix will give evidence that supports them. In doing so, this appendix will also show that Jesus Christ is the fully human “Son of God,” and not “God the Son,” and thus it will also give evidence that shows that the Bible does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity.

For clarity’s sake, it is helpful to understand what the Trinity is. The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity (i.e., the generally accepted doctrine) is that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the “Holy Spirit” is God, and the three of them are co-equal, co-eternal, and share the same essence, and that together those three individual “Persons” are one triune God; also, Jesus is both 100% God and 100% man, and both Jesus’ divine nature and his human nature live together in his flesh body. The doctrine of the Trinity, though widely believed, is never stated in the Bible.

In contrast to belief in the Trinity, Biblical Unitarians believe that there is only one God—the Father. The Father had a Son, conceived and born about 2,000 years ago; he is the begotten Son of God and we know him as Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is fully human, like the rest of humankind. We do not present this appendix to antagonize or attack anyone, but rather because we believe an honest and rigorous examination of the biblical evidence will support that the Father alone is God and Jesus is His created Son. Furthermore, we think it is important for Christians to know the truth about God, Jesus, and the holy spirit.

[To more fully understand the holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

There is value in truth, and God and Jesus deserve to be known for who they really are. There is one God, the Father. He is not triune and thus He does not share His identity with two other “Persons.” That the Father alone is God elevates Him to His rightful position as the one God of the Bible, the Creator of the universe, and the One who we love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Similarly, knowing that the Lord Jesus is who Peter said he was, “a man approved of God” (Acts 2:22 KJV), elevates him to his rightful position. He is the only begotten Son of God, who loved so much that he lived a sinless, obedient life and died on the cross for us. God raised him from the dead and he now stands at God’s right hand as God’s second in command, administering the things of God.

Something that is openly admitted by theologians but not known by many Christians is that the doctrine of the Trinity is not stated in the Bible. It is “built” by piecing together statements that are said to support it. But since most Christians believe that the Trinity is a mystery and no one can understand it, doctrinal discussions about it are often avoided or brushed aside and ignored. Worse, the teaching that the Trinity is a “mystery” has been used as a club to beat down doubters and dissenters, and those doubters are often branded as “heretics” and their role in Christianity minimized (the idea the Trinity is a mystery is covered in section 20 below).

Thus, the Trinity stands as an unchallengeable but never-understood fortress in the center of Christianity. But Christians should get their doctrine from the Bible. What if a careful examination of the Bible showed that there was no Trinity? What if careful study showed that Yahweh was the one God of the Bible, and Jesus was who Peter said he was, “a man approved of God” and not a “God-man”? What if the “mystery” of the Trinity was not a mystery at all, but an erroneous doctrine that was formulated over time? This study will show that Jesus was indeed a fully human man approved by God.

This short appendix can only summarize some of the major points about who God and Jesus Christ really are. For further study, a bibliography of some of the books on the subject is included at the end of this appendix. Also, it is not the intention of this appendix to explain the verses that are traditionally used to support the doctrine of the Trinity, such as John 10:30 or John 8:58. Each of those verses can be understood in a way that supports the Biblical Unitarian position, and they are covered in the REV commentary on those individual verses.

1) Basic Problems with the Doctrine of the Trinity

The word “Trinity” is not in the Bible. Although that does not rule out the possible existence of the Trinity, it is supporting evidence that the doctrine is unbiblical.

Trinitarians differ, sometimes greatly, in their definitions of the Trinity. The Eastern Orthodox Church differs from the Western Church on the relation of the “Holy Spirit” to the Father and the Son. Also, Trinitarians who hold to the “classic” definition of the Trinity, that Jesus was 100% God and 100% man while on earth, believe differently from Kenotic Trinitarians, who believe that Jesus set aside his godhood while he was a man on earth. Oneness Pentecostals say the classic formula of the Trinity is completely wrong. Yet all these claim that Christ is God and that the Bible supports their position.

A study of the history of the Christian Church shows a definite development in the doctrine of the Trinity over the centuries. For example, the early form of the Apostles’ Creed, believed to date back to shortly after the time of the apostles themselves, does not mention the Trinity or the dual nature of Christ. Furthermore, it only states, “I believe in ‘the holy spirit,’” which could just as easily refer to the gift of holy spirit as it could to a third “Person” in the Trinity. The Nicene Creed, written in AD 325 and modified later, added the material about Jesus Christ being “eternally begotten” and “true God,” and about the Holy Spirit being “Lord.” But it was the Athanasian Creed, most likely composed in the late 400s or early 500s AD, that was the first creed to explicitly state the doctrine of the Trinity, and it includes that if a person does not believe it, he is not saved but will perish everlastingly. Yet saying that a person who does not believe in the Trinity is not saved contradicts the Bible. For example, when Peter addressed the Jews on the Day of Pentecost he did not mention the Trinity or that Jesus was God in the flesh, yet about 3,000 people in the audience were saved (Acts 2:41).

One of the most convincing arguments for Biblical Unitarianism is that God is never described as being composed of “three.” Not “three,” “three-in-one,” “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” or three Persons making up one God. Many Trinitarians point to Matthew 28:19 which lists the Father, Son, and holy spirit, but it does not call the three of them “God.” Matthew 28:19 is not defining God, it is stating the authority by which disciples will baptize: by the authority of God, of Christ, and by the power of the holy spirit. Simply mentioning three things together does not make them “God.” For example, if Matthew 28:19 read, “Baptize them in the ‘name’ (i.e., authority) of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” that would not make those three people “one Person.”

Also, the two natures of Jesus (him being fully God and fully man) are completely, absent from the Scriptures. Jesus is never said to have two natures, two personalities, two minds, or two spirits within him. He is always viewed as one person with one mind.

Trinitarians say the “Threeness” of the Trinity is just as vital as his Oneness, but never once does the Bible mention God’s “Threeness,” whereas it mentions His Oneness many times (e.g., Deut. 4:35; 6:4; Isa. 44:6, 8; John 5:44; 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:6).

* There are no verses that define God as being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
* There are no verses that define God as three, three in one, or a multiple.
* There are no verses that say that Jesus has two natures or two minds.
* There are no verses that say Jesus is a God-man, or that he is fully God and fully man.
* There are no verses that call Jesus “eternally begotten;” the bible says he was begotten or “born” by Mary

It seems that if the doctrine of the Trinity was genuine and central to Christian belief as almost all Trinitarians claim, and especially if belief in it was necessary for salvation as many Trinitarians teach, it would have been clearly stated in the Bible and in the earliest Christian creeds. The Trinity is not “hidden,” and it is not a “mystery,” it simply isn’t there.

2) There is no Trinity in the Old Testament

God gave the Scriptures to the Jewish people, and the Jewish religion and worship that comes from that revelation do not contain any reference to, or teachings about, a triune God. Since God gave the Old Testament to the Jews, surely they were qualified to read and understand it, but they never saw the doctrine of the Trinity in it; in fact, quite the opposite. Throughout their history, the Jews fiercely defended the fact that there was only one God.

Jesus himself tied the greatest commandment in the Law together with there being only one God. An expert in Old Testament law asked Jesus which of the commandments was the most important one. Jesus said to him, “The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God….” (Mark 12:29-30 KJV). The Jewish scholar, in accordance with the teachings of the Rabbis and the revelation and practices given to the Jews, would have believed that Yahweh was the only true God. But Jesus never corrected him or tried to modify his beliefs, he simply reinforced what this man already believed—that only Yahweh was God.

Furthermore, the pronouns in the Bible that refer to “God” are singular, and there are lots of them. “The Hebrew Bible and the New Testament contain well over twenty thousand pronouns and verbs describing the One God” (Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-inflicted Wound*, International Scholars Publications, New York, 1998, p. 17). Singular pronouns include “I,” “my,” and “he.”

We would expect that the pronouns that refer to the “Father,” to Jesus, and to “the Holy Spirit” would be singular if there were a Trinity, but since the Trinity teaches that “God” is triune and consists of three “Persons,” that the pronouns associated with “God” would be plural. This is especially the case because according to Trinitarian doctrine, each “Person” in the triune God is individually omnipresent, individually all-knowing; individually all-powerful, and each individually has his own will, his own mind (which is why Jesus could say to the Father, “not my will but yours be done”). John 3:16 (REV) reads, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have life in the age *to come.”* But if “God” were composed of three co-equal beings who each had their own mind and together agreed to send Christ, we would expect it to say, “For God so loved the world that they gave the Father’s only begotten Son….” The fact that the pronouns in the Bible refer to “God” as a singular being is evidence that there is no Trinity.

3) The Old Testament foretold that Jesus would be a human being.

The Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah foretold that he would be a human being. If we understand and believe that, it clears up a lot of misconceptions about Jesus. For example, if he was fully human and not part human and part God, then he had a beginning, which was the time when he was conceived (see Matt. 1:20 and section 9 below). Furthermore, he could not have existed before he was conceived; human beings do not exist before they are conceived, and this means that Jesus did not exist in the Old Testament except in the mind of God and in the expectation of people. According to the Old Testament prophecies, the Messiah would be the offspring of Eve (Gen. 3:15); a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18), a descendant of Judah (Gen. 49:10); a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15); a son of David (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Isa. 11:1); a king ruling under Yahweh (Ps. 110:1); and a ruler from among the people of Israel (Jer. 30:21). That explains why the people were all expecting a human Messiah.

Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, was expecting a human Messiah and did not know how she could give birth to the Messiah without having sex with a man (Luke 1:34-35). Although some Trinitarians claim that there are a few Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 9:6 and Micah 5:2 that show that Jesus is God, it’s important to note that the ancient Jews, to whom those prophecies were given, never understood them to mean that their Messiah would be both God and human. Those few prophecies can be translated and understood in a Biblical Unitarian way.

[For more information see the REV commentaries on Isa. 9:6 and Mic. 5:2.]

Psalm 110:1 merits special attention because it is especially clear but has been misunderstood and misrepresented. Most English versions read like the ESV: “The LORD says to my Lord….” The word “LORD” is Yahweh, but then many Trinitarian commentators argue that “my Lord” in this verse is the Hebrew word *adonai*, another name for God, and is therefore, proof of the divinity of the Messiah. But the Hebrew text does not use *adonai*, it uses *adoni* (pronounced a-do-'nee), which is always used in Scripture to describe human masters and lords, but *never* God.

The Hebrew words *adoni* and *adonai* have the same root, *adon*, and that is the word listed in the concordances and most lexicons, which is one reason that we must use the actual Hebrew text to see what Psalm 110:1 is saying. The difference between *adon* (the “root” word), *adoni* (“lord,” always used of men or angels), and *adonai* (which is used of God and sometimes written *adonay*) is critical to the understanding of Psalm 110:1. The fact that the Hebrew text uses the word *adoni* of the Messiah in Psalm 110 is good supporting evidence that the Messiah is not God, and is one reason the Jews were expecting the Messiah to be a human ruler like the other kings who ruled under Yahweh.

The Old Testament also refers to the Messiah as “one like a son of man.” The phrase “son of man” was a Semitic idiom for a human being and it is used that way throughout the Old Testament. But when Daniel referred to the Messiah as “one like a son of man” (Dan. 7:13), the phrase “son of man” also became a title of the Messiah. That explains why Jesus called himself “the son of man” many times (cf. Matt. 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 40; 13:41; 16:13, 27, 28; etc.). The use of “son of man” in reference to the Messiah is one more piece of evidence that Jesus was fully human and one more reason that people were expecting the Messiah to be human.

4) The New Testament teaches that Jesus was a man

The New Testament teaches that Jesus was a man. For one thing, Jesus himself said so. For example, in John 8:40, Jesus said he was “a **man** who has told you the truth” (emphasis ours). Jesus was not being disingenuous and hiding his “divine nature.” He was making a factual statement that reinforced what the Jews were expecting of the Messiah—that he would be a fully human man.

The apostles also taught that Jesus was a man. For example, in his sermon to the crowds gathered on the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter made a very clear declaration that Jesus was a man approved of God: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you…” (Acts 2:22 KJV). Here Peter clearly taught that Jesus was a man, and that God did miracles “by him.”

It seems if the Trinity did exist, that when Peter had thousands of devout Jews gathered together on the Day of Pentecost would have been a good time to introduce it to them. But instead, Peter told the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah they had been expecting: a man approved of God.

Like Peter, Paul also taught that Jesus was a man. For example, when he was in Athens, Paul taught a crowd of unsaved Gentiles about Jesus Christ and said that God would judge the world “by the man whom He has appointed” (Acts 17:31). Paul never said or implied that Jesus was anything but a “man.” But especially since Paul’s Greek audience was polytheistic, it seems that if there was a Trinity, Paul would have taught it to the crowd. Whereas the Jews would have likely been very upset if someone taught there was a Trinity, these polytheistic Greeks would almost certainly not have been upset, so this would have been a perfect time to introduce the subject to people. But instead, Paul said that Jesus was a man appointed by God.

There are a number of other New Testament verses that state that Jesus was a man. For example, Romans says that a man, Adam, caused sin to enter into the world, and also that a man would have to redeem it from sin. Romans 5:15 (ESV) says, “For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.” Some theologians teach that only God could pay for the sins of mankind, but the Bible specifically says that a man must do it. The book of Corinthians makes the same point Romans does. It says, “For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:21 NASB).

1 Timothy 2:5 says that it is Jesus, the man, who was the mediator between God and men. 1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV) says, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” This verse calls Jesus Christ a “man” even after his resurrection.

Trinitarian doctrine tries to explain the verses that say Jesus was a man by saying that he was a man, but he was also 100% God at the same time. But there are problems with that. One is that there is no single verse that says Jesus was both God and man. The God-man doctrine is built from many verses. Furthermore, scholars admit that there are only about eight verses in the entire New Testament that can be understood to say that Jesus is God, and every one of them can either be translated in a way that supports the Biblical Unitarian position, or disputed textually, or can be explained from the use of the word “God” in the culture. In contrast, the clear verses where Jesus is said to be a “man,” such as when Peter or Paul taught their audiences that Jesus was a man appointed by God, are not disputed and in the context, there does not seem to be any good reason those men would not have said that Jesus was a God-man if in fact, that is what he is.

Actually, the book of Hebrews seems to clear up the subject when it says that when Jesus was on earth, he was made like us in every way: “Therefore he [Jesus] had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God” (Heb. 2:17 ESV). This verse shows that Jesus was not both fully human and fully God at the same time. If he were, he would not be like us in every respect. If we believe that Jesus was a fully human man, this verse can be seen to be completely true, but if Jesus is fully God and fully human, it is confusing at best. None of us would have the doubts, worries, and fears, that we do if we were God. Saying that Jesus was made like us in every way is the Bible saying in a very straightforward way that Jesus was not “both God and human.”

5) Jesus was like Adam

Adam, the first man, was fully human and by his sin brought sin into the world. Jesus is called the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), but it seems that designation would not be appropriate if Jesus was not fully human in the same way that Adam was. Also, Adam is called a “type” of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:14). The word translated as “type” in many English versions is the translation of the Greek word *tupos* (#5179 τύπος), which can be defined as “a type, pattern, model, or example of something else.” Although the KJV translates *tupos* as “figure,” most of the more modern versions say “pattern” (NIV), “prototype” (HCSB), or “type” (ESV, NAB, NASB). Adam was a type, prototype, or pattern of Christ because he was fully human and began without a sin nature—and Jesus was the same: fully human and made without a sin nature. The reason that no other human male after Adam could be a “type” of Christ is that we are all born with a sin nature. But if Jesus was 100% man and 100% God, then Adam could not be a “type” of Christ, because Adam did not have a “God-nature.”

6) Jesus has a God

The Bible says in many verses that there is only one God, and “God” does not have a God. For example, in Isaiah 44:6, God says, “…there is no God besides me,” and Ephesians 4:6 identifies the one God with the Father and says there is “one God and Father of all, who is over all.” In contrast to “God” who alone is God and does not have a God, Jesus has a God.

Before his death and resurrection, when he was on the cross, Jesus called out, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me**?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). Later, after his resurrection, he spoke of his God to Mary Magdalene, saying, “…I ascend to my Father and your Father, and **my God** and your God” (John 20:17). Then, after his ascension into heaven when he was standing at the right hand of God, Jesus still called God, “my God.” Jesus said about those who are victorious that he will “write on him the name of **my God**” and “the name of the city of **my God**” that comes down out of heaven from “**my God**.” (Rev. 3:12). Revelation 1:5-6 also says that Jesus is a faithful witness and ruler and has made us priests to “**his God**.” In the Old Testament, the prophet spoke of the coming Messiah and said he would shepherd the people “in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God” (Mic. 5:4).

Also, there are verses in the New Testament that clearly speak of “God” being the “God” of Jesus Christ. Romans 15:6 says, “...you can, with one mouth, glorify **the God** and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 1:3, Ephesians 1:3, and 1 Peter 1:3 all say, “Blessed *be* **the God** and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Hebrews 1:9 speaks of how God blessed Jesus: “**Therefore God, your God,** has anointed you [Jesus] with the oil of gladness.” 2 Corinthians 11:31 says, “**The God** and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.”

Who is the “God” of the Lord Jesus Christ? The New Testament makes it clear: “**the God** of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory” (Eph. 1:17), and “and [Jesus] has made us to be a kingdom, as priests **to his God** and Father. So the “one God and Father” (Eph. 4:6) is the God of Jesus Christ. In contrast to Jesus, who both Scripture and Jesus himself testify that Jesus has a God, the “one God” of the Bible never says He has a God. He is God, the Father, the Creator, “the Most High God,” and He has no equals. Jesus is not “God,” he is a man, the Last Adam, the created Son of God, and Jesus’ God is God the Father.

7) Jesus called God “the only true God.”

Jesus called the Father “the only God” (John 5:44 ESV). The New American Standard Bible goes so far as to translate it as “the *one and* only God.” The straightforward reading of this verse is that Jesus did not think of himself as God.

Similarly, on the night he was arrested, Jesus prayed to God that people would “know you, the only true God” (John 17:3). It seems disingenuous, or at least confusing, that Jesus would refer to his Father as “the only true God” if he knew that both he and “the Holy Spirit” were also “Persons” in a triune God, and that the Father shared His position as “God” with them. It seems much more likely that Jesus spoke the simple truth when he called his Father “the only true God.”

Furthermore, Jesus called God the “Lord of heaven and earth.” Luke 10:21 says, “In that same hour he [Jesus] was full of joy in the holy spirit, and said, ‘I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, because this was well-pleasing in your sight.’” If the Trinity was true and Jesus was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father he would not have addressed him as “Lord of heaven and earth.” That is not the way equals address each other. Also, if the Holy Spirit was a third member of the Trinity and thus also “Lord of heaven and earth,” it seems that Jesus would not have left him out of his prayer, which was to the Father.

8) Jesus was part of God’s creation

Colossians 1:15 (ESV) calls Jesus “the firstborn of all creation.” Scholars disagree on what this phrase means, but that is primarily because the doctrine of the Trinity obscures its simple meaning. Trinitarian doctrine states that Jesus is “eternal,” but if that is true then he cannot be the firstborn “of all creation,” because that would make him part of the creation—Jesus would be a created being. But the simple reading of Colossians 1:15 seems clear: Jesus is a created being. The BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* [entry under “creation”] explains the Greek word translated “creation” as “that which is created…of individual things or beings created, *creature*.” Not only was Jesus a created being, he is also called the “firstborn” from the dead because he was the first one in God’s creation who was raised from the dead to everlasting life—a point that is also made in Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5.

9) God is eternal, but Jesus had a beginning

God was not born; He is eternal. In contrast to the eternal God, Christ is “begotten,” that is, born. Jesus Christ had a beginning. Jesus is never called “God the Son” in the Bible, but he is called the “Son of God” more than 50 times, and a “son” has a beginning. The very fact that Jesus is the “Son of God” shows he had a beginning. Trinitarian doctrine denies this and invents the phrase “eternally begotten.” But “eternally begotten” is not in the Bible, it was invented to help explain the Trinity but is actually a nonsensical phrase; the words are placed together but they cancel each other out. “Eternal” means without beginning or end, whereas something that is “begotten,” by definition, has a beginning.

We cannot approach the Bible with wisdom and “reason together” with God (Isa. 1:18) if we must invent and use non-biblical phrases to support our theology. Also, additional evidence that Jesus had a beginning is provided in verses such as Matthew 1:18, which speaks of the “beginning” of Jesus Christ (see the commentary on Matt. 1:18), and Colossians 1:15 (covered above), which says that Jesus is part of God’s creation. The Bible calls Jesus the “Son” of God for the simple reason that he had a beginning. Jesus had been part of God’s plan since the foundation of the world, but he began his actual life when God “fathered” him and Mary conceived him in her womb.

Once we understand that Jesus had a beginning, it is logical to ask when that beginning occurred. Jesus was foretold to come from early Genesis (Gen. 3:15; and we know Abraham knew about his coming (John 8:56; Heb. 11:17-19). but he did not actually exist as a genuine person until he was conceived in the womb of Mary (see commentary on Matt. 1:20; and for Jesus being an actual human being, see section 3 above, that Jesus would be fully human).

10) The Bible teaches that Jesus and God are two distinct beings.

There are many verses where Jesus and God are portrayed as two separate beings. There are too many examples to list, but for example, in Mark 10:18, Jesus told the rich young ruler that he was not good, but “God” was good; in Luke 2:52, Jesus grew in favor with “God” and with men; Jesus said to the Jews that he was “a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God” (John 8:40 ESV); and he told his disciples, “Believe in God; believe also in me” (John 14:1 ESV).

Also, the Church Epistles were authored by both God *and* Christ. For example, 1 Corinthians 1:3 (ESV) says, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The book of Revelation shows both God and “the Lamb” ruling in the eternal city (Rev. 22:1, 3). In all these examples, Jesus is shown to be separate and distinct from “God,” which is what the people of the time believed and expected.

The Trinitarian explanation of these verses is that Jesus is God, so when Jesus speaks of himself and “God,” then “God” means “the Father.” But the Bible never says that. It is only because Trinitarian doctrine asserts that Jesus is God that the assumption is made that when Jesus and God appear together, “God” means “the Father.” But the simple and straightforward reading of Scripture is that there is Jesus and there is “God,” so Jesus is not God.

Jesus and God have separate wills. Jesus prayed to God, “not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42 ESV; cf. John 5:30). If Jesus and the Father are the same “one God,” then they would have one will. Trinitarian doctrine claims that Luke is referring to Jesus’ human will, not his divine will, but that is problematic. For one thing, the Bible never says anything like that, it is an invented explanation. It would also mean that Jesus had two wills in conflict with each other inside him, one human and one divine. But that surely cannot be the case: Jesus himself taught that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand (Mark 3:24).

The Bible says that Jesus is an “heir” of God (Heb. 1:2), and a “joint heir” with us (Rom. 8:17). But if Christ is a co-eternal “Person” in the “Godhead,” then he cannot be an heir “of God” because, being God, he would be full owner of everything and there is nothing he could “inherit.” Jesus cannot be God and an heir of God at the same time.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ is the “image of God” (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4). But if Christ is the image of God, then He cannot be God, because a person cannot be himself and an image of himself at the same time. Jesus can be called the “image” of God because he always did the will of God and acted like God Himself would act. The fact that Jesus was the image of God is why Jesus could say that if you had seen him, you had seen the Father.

Ephesians 4:4-6 is recognized by many Christians as listing seven of the most essential doctrines of the Christian Faith. It says there is one God and one Lord and one spirit. This verse teaches exactly what the Jews expected based on the Old Testament, and what Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others taught: that there was one God, one Lord, the Messiah, and one spirit of God. There are three separate things being spoken about here, but not “one God” composed of both Jesus and God, and “the Holy Spirit” as well.

[See Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

11) The Bible teaches that the Father is God

The Bible says that the proper name of God is “Yahweh” (Exodus 3:15), and “Yahweh” is used over 5,000 times in the Old Testament. Furthermore, “Yahweh” is clearly said to be “God” in over 1,100 verses in the Old Testament, which can be seen by anyone with a good concordance (e.g., Gen. 17:1; 21:33; 24:3; Exod. 5:3; 20:2; 34:14; Lev. 19:2; Num. 15:41; Deut. 4:35; 10:17; Josh. 22:22; 2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 18:31; 33:12; 88:1; 99:5; 100:3; Isa. 43:3). Also, Yahweh is said to be the “father” (e.g. Deut. 32:6; Ps. 2:7; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Mal. 1:6; cf. Ps. 103:13; Prov. 3:12). Also, the Bible says in many verses that “Yahweh” is the only God, and there is no God besides Him (e.g., Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kings 8:60; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 17:20; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 18:31; 86:10; Isa. 37:16; 43:10; 44:6, 8; 45:5, 21; 46:9; Hos. 13:4; Joel 2:27; Zech. 14:9). So clearly in the Old Testament “God” is Yahweh, the Father, and He is the only God, “there is no other” (Deut. 4:39).

Given those clear scriptures, there would have to be very clear scriptures in the New Testament that say Jesus is also God, but those scriptures do not exist.

Jesus called God “the only true God” (John 17:3) and called Him “my God” (Matt. 27:46; John 20:17; Rev. 3:2, 12).

1 Corinthians 8:6 (ESV) says, “for us there is one God, the Father…and one Lord, Jesus Christ.” This simple and straightforward language elucidates that the Father is God and the Son is “Lord,” making a clear differentiation between the two. Furthermore, that distinction is even clearer when we consider that in the Greek culture the word “God”—although it was used more loosely than we do in English and was used of pagan gods and even human rulers—was used in a more restricted manner than was the word “Lord,” which was used of many different kinds of people in authority.

1 Corinthians 8:6 starts out, “for us there is one God,” and if the doctrine of the Trinity were true, we would expect it to finish in a typically Trinitarian fashion, such as, “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” We would certainly not expect it to name only the Father as “God” and omit “the Holy Spirit” altogether. There are a number of verses that clearly indicate that the Father alone is God (e.g., Deut. 4:35, 39; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kings 8:60; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 17:20; Neh. 9:6; Psalm 18:31; 86:10; Isa. 37:16-20; 45:5, 21; 46:9; Joel 2:27; John 17:3; Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:4-5; Gal. 3:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2:5; James 2:19).

12) God is greater than Christ

Jesus said: “…the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28 ESV). He also said, “My father...is greater than all” (John 10:29). In contrast, the orthodox formula of the Trinity says that the Father and the Son are “co-equal.” We see no reason not to believe Jesus’ simple statement.

God is greater than Christ, just as Christ is greater than we are. 1 Corinthians 3:23 (KJV) says, “And ye are Christ’s; and Christ *is* God’s.” When the Bible says, “you are Christ’s,” it is saying, “you belong to Christ” and many English versions say exactly that (i.e., CJB, HCSB, NASB, NET, NJB, NLT). So the verse is saying, “and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God” (NASB). It seems apparent that Jesus cannot be God and belong to God at the same time.

The Bible teaches that God is the “head” of Christ, that is, He is Christ’s leader: “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3 ESV). The Trinitarian explanation of this verse is that God was the head of Christ only while he was on earth, but the Bible never says that. In fact, the Bible shows us the opposite: God is still the head of Christ and directing him even after he ascended into heaven, and will be for eternity (1 Cor. 15:28; Rev. 1:1; 14:14-15).

God can be seen to be greater than the Messiah in Psalm 2. In that Psalm, God’s Messiah is called “his anointed” (Ps. 2:2), and God says, “I have set **my King** on Zion, my holy hill” (Ps. 2:6 ESV, emphasis ours). The Messiah is not being shown to be a co-equal ruler with God, but God’s under-ruler. Furthermore, God says He fathered the Messiah: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (Ps. 2:7 ESV). Although commentators argue about which day “today” refers to, it is clear that the Messiah is begotten at a specific time in history, he is not “eternally begotten.”

God “made” Jesus Lord. In Peter’s teaching to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, he taught that “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36 ESV). In order to make Jesus Lord, God must have greater authority than Jesus. Furthermore, if Christ was God, then he was already “Lord”—in which case God would not need to “make” him Lord.

It has also been taught that because Jesus is called “Lord,” he must be God. But “Lord” (the Greek word is *kurios*) is a masculine title of respect and nobility, and many others besides God and Jesus are called “Lord,” However, that can be hard to see in English Bibles because many times *kurios* is not translated as “Lord,” and that confuses the issue.

1. property owners are called Lord (Matt. 20:8, *kurios* is “owner” in NIV)
2. heads of households were called Lord (Mark 13:35, owner=*kurios*).
3. slave owners were called Lord (Matt. 10:24, master=*kurios*).
4. husbands were called Lord (1 Pet. 3:6, master (NIV) =*kurios*).
5. a son called his father Lord (Matt. 21:30, sir=*kurios*).
6. the Roman Emperor was called Lord (Acts 25:26, His Majesty=*kurios*).
7. Roman authorities were called Lord (Matt. 27:63, sir=*kurios*).

Christians take Jesus as their “Lord,” but that is not the same as saying he is “God.”

The Bible says that even in the future, the Son will be subject to the Father. “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him [God] who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28 ESV). If Jesus is subject to the Father in the eternal future, then it seems the teaching that the two of them are “co-equal” is wrong.

Jesus was consecrated (sanctified) by God. John 10:36 (ESV) says: “do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?” The fact that Jesus was consecrated, or as it is translated in other versions, “sanctified,” by God shows he is not God, because God does not need to be sanctified.

Philippians 2:6 (ESV) says that Christ “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (cf. NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, Rotherham). There is some disagreement among scholars as to how to translate the Greek text, so other English versions translate the verse somewhat differently. Nevertheless, the point of the verse is that Jesus Christ was highly exalted by God because he was humble and did not seek equality with God. If Jesus was God, then he would never have needed to seek equality with God in the first place—it would have been inherent in him.

Jesus received his direction and his doctrine from his Father, God. In John 5:19 (ESV), he said: “the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.” Jesus repeated that in several different ways. “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge…because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John. 5:30 ESV). “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me” (John 7:16 ESV). “I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me” (John. 8:28 ESV). “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak” (John 12:49 ESV). If Jesus was God, and co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, then he would not have needed to be directed by his Father.

As Jesus said, God, his Father, “sent” him. God has sent people to do His will for millennia. God sent the prophets (e.g., 2 Chr. 24:19; 25:15; Jer. 7:25; 25:4, 5; 28:9; 35:15; 44:4; Baruch 1:21), and He sent John the Baptist (John 1:6), and He sent Jesus (Luke 10:16; John 3:17, 5:23, 7:16; 12:49). The fact that God “sent” Jesus actually argues against the Trinity, because if the Trinity were true, then the Father did not need to “send” Jesus, he would have come on his own.

The Old Testament referred to the Messiah as the servant of God. For example, in Isaiah 52-53, which speak of the suffering and death of the Messiah, the Bible refers to the Messiah as God’s “servant” (Isa. 52:13; cf. Zech. 3:8). When the disciples prayed to God in Acts, they called King David God’s “servant” (Acts 4:25), and later in that same prayer they called Jesus “your holy servant” (Acts 4:30 CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB). They equated the Messiah as a servant of God just like David was, rather than referring to Jesus as if he were God himself (cf. Matt. 12:18; Acts 3:26). Jesus is not God but the servant of God, just like the Bible says.

Many verses indicate that Jesus’ power and authority were given to him by the Father. If Jesus was the eternal God, then he would have always had those things that the Scripture says he was “given.” Christ was:

* Given “all authority” (Matt. 28:18).
* Given “a name above every name” (Phil. 2:9).
* Given work to finish by the Father (John 5:36).
* Given those who believed in him by the Father (John 6:39; John 10:29).
* Given glory (John 17:22, 24).
* Given his “cup” (his torture and death) by the Father (John 18:11).
* “Seated” at God’s own right hand (Eph. 1:20-21).
* “Appointed” over the Church (Eph. 1:22).

These verses and others like them make no sense if Christ is “co-equal” with the Father. Taken at face value they show Jesus is a man approved of God.

A rich young ruler came to Christ and called him, “Good Teacher” (Luke 18:18 ESV). Jesus replied, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Luke 18:19 ESV). If Jesus was telling people that he was God, why did he not compliment this young ruler for calling him “good?” That Jesus gave the man a mild rebuke and said that no one was good except “God” is evidence that Jesus was not teaching people that he was God. Jesus was very quick to make the distinction between himself and God, and in doing so affirmed what this Jewish man would have already believed: that there is one God, and Jesus was certainly not that one God.

Luke 2:52 says that Jesus grew in favor with “God.” But if Jesus were God and part of the Trinity, he could not grow in favor with himself or the Father or the Holy Spirit. The mutual love and blessing among the members of the Trinity would have been eternal and unchanging. Jesus could only grow in favor with God if he himself were not God.

When it comes to assigning positions of authority in the coming Kingdom of Christ, Jesus said that who will sit next to him as people with authority “is not mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it has been prepared by my Father” (Matt. 20:23). If Jesus were God and co-equal with the Father, those positions of authority would be his to give.

Despite the popularity of the term “Deity of Christ,” the phrase never appears in the Bible, nor is Christ ever called “Deity” in the Bible. “Deity” is from the Latin “*Deus*,” which means “God,” and the phrase “the Deity of Christ” as it is popularly (but not biblically) used means the “Godness” of Christ.

Colossians 2:9 (ESV) says that in Christ “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” This verse is stating that God (the Deity) placed all His fullness in Christ, which is quite different from saying that Christ is *himself* a Deity. Earlier in Colossians, the concept is made clear: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (Col. 1:19 NIV84). That is true. But the fact that Christ has “all the fullness” of God does not make him God. Ephesians 3:19 says that Christians should be filled with “all the fullness of God,” as well, but that does not mean Christians will somehow become God.

13) Jesus died, but God is immortal

In the New Testament, 1 Timothy 6:16 is a reference to the Father, not to Jesus Christ, and it says that God alone has immortality. That the verse is about God, not Jesus, is clear from the description in the verse, that He “alone has immortality, who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen, nor is able to see.” Those descriptions refer to the Father, not to Jesus Christ, and “He” (the Father) will bring about the return of Christ in its proper time (1 Tim. 6:15).

Orthodox Christianity teaches that Jesus died and then that he raised himself from the dead, based on John 2:19; 10:17-18. It is so often said that Jesus was God and also that Jesus died that we have forgotten that is actually nonsensical. God cannot die (1 Tim. 1:17, 6:16; Psa. 90:2; Isa. 40:28; Rom. 16:26), and yet the most essential part of our faith is that Jesus died and was raised from the dead. If Jesus was dead then he was not “God” who is immortal, and he did not raise himself from the dead if, in fact, he was really dead.”

Trinitarians get around the fact that Jesus was dead by saying that only his human nature died, but there are quite a few problems with that. Firstly, the Council of Chalcedon, which Trinitarians hold to, would consider that idea a heresy. Speaking of Jesus, it says that he is “acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably… not as though He were parted or divided into Two Persons, but One and the Self-same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ” (The Chalcedonian Definition, Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon, AD 451). The idea that Jesus’ human nature could be separated from his divine nature is a form of Nestorianism which is considered a heresy by Trinitarians and was condemned at the Council of Ephesus (AD 431) and also the Council of Chalcedon, as shown above. Therefore, saying that it was only Jesus’ human nature that died is, according to Trinitarians themselves, a heresy.

Secondly, the Bible never says that only Jesus’ human nature died. In fact, the Bible never says that Jesus had two natures. That is a Trinitarian assumption not directly based on Scripture. Furthermore, the Bible never says “Jesus’ human nature died and was raised,” it says that “Jesus” died and was raised. The more subtle problem with saying that only Jesus’ human nature died, is that then the Trinitarian “Jesus” (with two natures) did not die on the cross. “Jesus” is not just one nature, he is two natures according to Trinitarians. Trinitarian doctrine is that “Jesus” is a Person in the Trinity who has two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. No Trinitarian document about Jesus says that “Jesus” is only the human nature. Trinitarians are unanimous that “Jesus” is a Person with two natures. That would mean that when “Jesus” died, both natures were dead. But that cannot be correct: God cannot die, so Jesus’ supposed “God nature” could not die.

Since according to Trinitarian doctrine the two natures of Christ cannot be split apart, then it seems that any Trinitarian either has to believe that God (Jesus) died, which is nonsensical, or believe that Jesus was not God and therefore, could die for our sins.

14) Major differences between Jesus and God

It is obvious from the Bible that Jesus differed from God in many ways. These points of difference reveal that Jesus cannot be “God.” Many Trinitarians explain the differences between Jesus and God by saying that it is just Jesus’ “human nature” that is different from God, not his “God nature.” However, according to orthodox Christian doctrine established at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), the two natures of Christ cannot be divided (see section 13). It is a heresy to divide the two natures of Christ according to Trinitarian theology. Therefore, Trinitarians have to come up with an acceptable explanation of how “God” (Jesus) could do all the things listed below.

* **Wisdom**
Jesus grew in wisdom, but God is all-wise. The Bible says, “And Jesus increased in wisdom” (Luke 2:52 ESV). Also, Jesus “learned obedience” (Heb. 5:8). God does not need to learn. Trinitarians assert that it was Jesus’ human part that grew and learned, but there is not a single verse that makes that distinction. Also, it would be considered heresy according to the Council of Chalcedon because it would be splitting apart the two natures of Christ.
* **Knowledge**
Jesus had limited knowledge, whereas God does not. Mark 13:32 (ESV) says: “But concerning that day or that hour [when the Son returns; Mark 13:26], no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” But even in the future long after he has ascended into heaven, Jesus still receives instruction from God as to when to return to earth and “reap,” i.e., conquer the earth (Rev. 14:14-16). Other verses also show Jesus receiving knowledge from God after his resurrection and ascension: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him” (Rev. 1:1 ESV). [For a more complete explanation of Jesus not knowing the time of the End, see the commentary on Matt. 24:36, “nor the Son.”]
* **Perfection/Growth**
The Scripture teaches that it was fitting that “God” should make Jesus “perfect through suffering” (Heb. 2:10). God is, and has always been, “perfect,” but Jesus needed to attain perfection through his suffering.

To perfectly obey God throughout his ministry, Jesus needed the gift of holy spirit, and he received it at his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22) and had it upon him when he started his ministry (Luke 4:18). If Jesus was God, he would not need holy spirit, which is the very nature of God. God placed the gift of His holy spirit on the leaders and prophets of the Old Testament so that they would have spiritual power and be able to hear from Him via the spirit upon them (i.e., Num. 11:17-29; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 16:13; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 15:1; Mic. 3:8). Furthermore, the Old Testament prophecies, such as those in Isaiah 11:2; 42:1, and 61:1, indicated that God would put His spirit upon His Messiah, showing that he was not fully equipped without it. Jesus needed the gift of holy spirit to be spiritually powerful just as the other prophets did. Acts 10:38 (REV) says: “Jesus, the one from Nazareth—how God anointed him with holy spirit and with power, and he went around doing good, and healing all those who were being oppressed by the Devil, for God was with him.”
* **Temptation**
Jesus was “one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15 ESV), yet the Bible is clear that God cannot be tempted: “for God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13 ESV).

At times of weakness or difficulty, angels ministered to and strengthened Jesus. Luke 22:43 (ESV) says: “And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him” [in the garden of Gethsemane]. Humans need to be strengthened; God does not need to be strengthened by angels or by anyone or anything else (cf. also Matt. 4:11, Mark 1:13).
* **Death**
Scripture says very plainly that Jesus died. God cannot die. Romans 1:23 and other verses say that God is immortal. Orthodox Christian doctrine is that only the human side of Jesus died, but that assertion is based on assumptions. No verse of Scripture says anything like “only Jesus’ human nature died.”
* **Family**
Hebrews 2:10-11 teaches that we are “brothers” of Jesus and “sons of God,” and Jesus is never ashamed to call us such. Hebrews is making a distinction between God and Jesus that is very important and that we lose if we think Jesus is God. If that were the case, we would be “brothers of God,” but we clearly are not that. A Trinitarian explanation is that we are brothers of the man part of Jesus, but that is adding to the text. The Bible nowhere says or implies that; it is an assumption to support Trinitarian doctrine.
* **Works**
We are commissioned to do “greater works” than Jesus. In John 14:12 (ESV), Jesus told his disciples that “whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do.” If Jesus was God, then his statement would be a commission for us to do greater works than God—which is not possible.

If Jesus Christ was God, he would have to have the attributes of God. Most theologians agree that some of God’s attributes are: unoriginated, self-existent, immortal, all-wise, all-good, all-powerful, and omnipresent. But Jesus had none of those attributes.

* He was not unoriginated. Christ was the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16).
* He was not self-existent. “I live because of the Father” (John 6:57).
* He was not immortal. Jesus died and God resurrected Him (Acts 13:30).
* He was not all wise. Jesus “grew in wisdom” (Luke 2:52).
* He was not all-powerful. Whereas “nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37), Christ said, “the Son can do nothing by Himself” (John 5:19).
* He was not omnipresent. After Lazarus died, Jesus told his disciples “I am glad I was not there” (John 11:15).

15) God is spirit, but Jesus is flesh and bone

God is Spirit (John 4:24) yet even after his resurrection, Jesus said about himself that he was not a spirit, but flesh and bone. When Jesus appeared to his apostles, he said, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39 ESV). That Jesus is still flesh and bone today is exactly what we would expect if Jesus is a “man approved of God.” Part of the great hope that we Christians have is that in the future Jesus “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21 ESV). So in the future we will have bodies like Jesus’ body, but that hardly seems appropriate if Jesus is God in the flesh.

16) Jesus never taught the Trinity

John 1:18 says that Jesus made “God” known to people. But if “God” is a triune God composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then Jesus did not make God known. Jesus never taught the Trinity, even when he had good opportunities to do so. In fact, Jesus taught quite the opposite, he taught that the Father alone was God. A good example of Jesus not teaching the Trinity occurred when Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42), he told her that he was the Messiah (John 4:26), but he never mentioned the Trinity and in fact, he said, “the hour is coming...when the true worshipers will worship the Father” (John 4:23), thus reinforcing the woman’s belief that there was one God that people should worship. Similarly, when Jesus asked the apostles who they thought he was, and Peter said that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus did not take that opportunity to teach them the Trinity (Matt. 16:17-20). In fact, Jesus said that it was “my Father in heaven” who revealed that to Peter, reinforcing Peter’s belief that it was God in heaven who revealed things. Also, when Jesus healed the man who had been blind from birth, he told him that he was the Messiah but did not say a word about the Trinity (John 9:35-38), in fact, the blind man who had been healed thought Jesus was a man who worshiped God and that is why he could heal. The man said, “God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, he hears him...If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything” (John 9:31, 33). Another record is of the rich young ruler, and when the young man called Christ, “Good master,” Jesus not only did not teach the man the Trinity, he rebuffed him and said the only one who was good was God (Mark 10:17-18).

Other examples could also be given, but the point is that even when Jesus had the opportunity to teach the Trinity, he never did. That is astounding if the doctrine of the Trinity is correct, because the people were expecting a human Messiah, not “God in the flesh.” So when Jesus told them he was the Messiah but did not say anything about there being a Trinity, he was only reinforcing what they already thought, and that was doubly true when Jesus not only did not teach the Trinity but pointed people away from himself and to God. A wonderful example of Jesus reinforcing what the Jews already believed is in Mark 12:28-34.

In that record, an expert in the Mosaic Law asked Jesus what was the most important commandment in the Law. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which includes the Shema: “Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.” The expert agreed that was the greatest commandment and then added to what Jesus said by quoting Deuteronomy 4:35, “and there is no other except him” (Mark 12:32). The Jews were not Trinitarians, so this expert in the law would have understood the Shema to be referring to God the Father, and no one else, and certainly not Jesus, the man standing in front of him. Yet Jesus agreed with what the expert said, and thought the expert had answered him “wisely” (Mark 12:34). Jesus even said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34). This conversation is very good evidence that Jesus did not consider himself to be God. Beyond that, according to Trinitarian theology, a person must believe that Jesus is God to be saved, but it is apparent that Jesus did not believe that, because not only did he not make an attempt to “correct” the theology of this expert in the Law, he actually affirmed what the Jew said. So, really, there are two issues that are clarified by this conversation: a person does not have to believe in the Trinity to be saved, and Jesus himself did not teach the Trinity but instead taught that God alone was God.

There does not seem to be any compelling reason not to take Jesus’ words at face value; that he was the human Messiah the Jews were expecting and not a God-man that they were not expecting.

Trinitarians also commonly say that Jesus claimed to be God, and for that reason, the Jews hated him and tried to kill him. But that is not the case. Jesus had been stating in various ways that he was the Messiah, and that is what the Jews were upset about. Throughout their history, the Jews made a clear distinction between “God” and the “Messiah.” They did not think the Messiah was going to be God or a “Person” in a triune God, and if Jesus had walked around saying he was God the Jews would have considered him insane, but not a threat. But for Jesus to claim to be the Messiah of God and also do miracles, now that was a threat. Jesus had not been claiming to be God in the flesh, so at his trial the Jews never asked Jesus, “Are you God in the flesh?” Instead, they asked Jesus about what he had been claiming to be: the Messiah.

At his trial, the High Priest said to Jesus, “‘I charge you under oath by the living God, that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘*Yes*, it is as you say’” (Matt. 26:63-64). The conversation would have been somewhat protracted, and Mark records the High Priest asking, “‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am’” (Mark 14:61-62, cf. Luke 22:67-71). When Jesus stated that he was the Messiah, “Then the high priest tore his garments, saying, ‘Defaming talk! What further need do we have of witnesses? See! Now you have heard the defamation. What do you think?’ They answered and said, ‘He is deserving of death’” (Matt. 26:65-66). So from the trial of Jesus, we see that the Jews correctly assessed that Jesus had been claiming to be the Christ, also that Jesus indeed said he was the Christ, and also that the Jews thought Jesus’ claim was worthy of the death penalty. The trial gives good evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, but not God in the flesh.

17) Many people are saved in the Bible without believing in the Trinity or that Jesus is God

One example of a person being saved without believing in the Trinity is the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet with her tears while he was eating. All Jesus said to her was, “Your sins are forgiven” and “Your trust has saved you. Go in peace” (Luke 7:48 and 50). It is highly unlikely that this Galilean Jewess believed that Jesus was part of a Triune God, and by knowing that she gained salvation. Such an assumption would be to stretch the record beyond credible limits. The woman was a sinner, not a theologian, and if she went to synagogue at all, which is questionable, she would have known about the Messiah only from what the Old Testament taught. The Bible says why she was saved: she loved and trusted in Jesus (Luke 7:47, 50).

When Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16). Peter believed Jesus was the Christ he had been taught about in the synagogue and was expecting, not that Jesus was God in the flesh who was part of the Trinity. Yet Jesus did not correct Peter, but instead complimented him on his insight, saying he was “Blessed” (Matt. 16:17).

The book of Acts records the teachings of the apostles and disciples as they spread the good news of Jesus. Thus, it is reasonable that if the doctrine of the Trinity were a truth not revealed in the Old Testament but necessary for Christian salvation, it should be clearly taught in Acts. We will simply take one story in Acts for the sake of brevity, which is Acts 2:14-36. Peter spoke to the crowd of unsaved Jews in the Temple on the Day of Pentecost, just 50 days after Jesus was crucified. All they knew about the Messiah was from the Old Testament and traditions about him, none of which included the doctrine of the Trinity or Jesus being God. On Pentecost, however, Peter presented Jesus as a “man pointed out to you by God,” who was crucified and whom God raised from the dead, much of which Peter backed up by quoting the Old Testament. Peter never mentioned the Trinity or Jesus being God, yet about three thousand people got saved that day. This is very good evidence that on the Day of Pentecost, the start of the Christian Church, a person did not have to believe in the Trinity to be saved.

One could go through the book of Acts, but you will never find someone teaching the Trinity before people are saved, it simply is not there. A search of the New Testament will show that there is no Trinitarian formula that speaks of three Persons in One God, or Jesus being both fully human and fully God that was spoken to people before they got saved, which is not only evidence that a person did not have to believe in the Trinity to be saved, it is evidence that there is no Trinity.

18) When the Jews thought Jesus was claiming to be God, he denied it

Most Trinitarians assert that Jesus claimed to be God in John 5:16-18: “16And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is always working, and I am *always* working.’ 18For this reason, the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he not only was ‘breaking the Sabbath,’ but also was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

The first thing we should notice is that even the Jews did not say, “Jesus is calling himself God.” They were claiming he was saying he was equal with God, but they were wrong in that. Jesus corrected their thinking and immediately stated: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing….” (John 5:19) This is not an affirmation of equality. If it was, Jesus would not have said that he was not able to do anything on his own. If Jesus was God, or even “equal with God,” he would be able to do things on his own, just as God does. So, Jesus’ refutation of the claim of the Jews is evidence that Jesus is not God.

Most Trinitarians assert that the Jews said that Jesus was claiming to be God in John 10:33 (NIV2011): “‘We are not stoning You for any good work,’ said the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because You, who are a man, declare Yourself to be God.’” The Jews were wrong in their assertion. If what they said was true, it seems that Jesus would have affirmed it in some way.

Instead, right after the accusation of the Jews, Jesus answered them and said, “Is it not written in your law, I have said, you are ‘gods?’ If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’ (John 10:34-36 NIV2011)?” Jesus explicitly says that what he was claiming to be was God’s Son, not God himself. Jesus could not be much clearer here in that he is not claiming to be God himself. Claiming to be God’s Son is not a claim to be God, it is a claim to be the Messiah and the Jews understood that (Ps. 2:7; John 1:49), and that is what they asked him about at his trial before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:63) and that is what they had been asking him about in John 10:24, which was the context of John 10:33. Thus, both of these occurrences in John 5 and John 10 demonstrate that Jesus did not consider himself to be God, and did not teach others that he was God.

Some Trinitarians will say that Jesus is not denying being God in John 5 or John 10 because he does not say, ‘No, I am not God.’ However, believing Jesus’ responses to be an affirmation is unjustified for the reasons stated above and also because we have examples throughout the New Testament of what it looks like when Jesus does affirm people’s claims about him, and they differ greatly from John 5 and John 10. For example, at his trial, the High Priest said to Jesus, “‘I charge you under oath by the living God, that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘*Yes*, it is as you say’” (Matt. 26:63-64). Mark records the High Priest asking, “‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am’” (Mark 14:61-62; cf. Luke 22:67-71). In John 13:13 Jesus says, “You call me, ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.” These are clear affirmations by Jesus regarding his identity, unlike what we find in John 5 and John 10 where he does not affirm his opponents at all but instead calls himself the Son of God (John 10:36). One does not have to say ‘No’ to deny something. For example, if someone says, “Are you the sheriff?” and I respond “I am a nurse,” that is essentially a denial because no one will think, “That person is probably the sheriff and a nurse!” Almost the exact same thing occurs in John 10. The Jews claim that Jesus, “made himself God” (John 10:33) but Jesus replied, “I said I am the Son of God” (John 10:36).

19) Jesus’ miracles do not prove he was God

It is sometimes said that the miracles Jesus did prove that he was God. But almost every miracle that Jesus did on earth was done in some form by earlier prophets or by the apostles. These include healing the sick, raising the dead, multiplying food, and even walking on water. In fact, the Old Testament prophets did some amazing miracles that Jesus did not do, including splitting an ocean apart (Moses), stopping a river (Joshua), making the sun stop in the sky (Joshua), and calling down fire from heaven (Elijah). God was the one who worked the miracles through the prophets, and He worked them through Jesus also (Acts 2:22).

20) The Trinity and the dual nature of Jesus are never called a “mystery”

It is said that no human can understand the doctrine of the Trinity because it is a mystery. But the Bible never even uses the words “Trinity” or “dual nature” of Christ, much less defines them as mysteries. Furthermore, the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον), which is translated as “mystery” in most English Bibles, does not mean “mystery” in the modern sense of the word, but rather refers to a “secret” in the religious or sacred realm. *The Emphasized Bible* by Rotherham correctly translates *mustērion* as “sacred secret.” That *mustērion* does not mean “mystery” can be documented from any number of lexicons or Bible dictionaries, and it is also clear in the Bible itself. The Bible says that many of the *mustērion* of God have now been made known, which shows that they were not actually unknowable “mysteries,” but were God’s secrets that are now revealed (e.g., Rom. 16:25, 26; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Eph. 3:4, 5, Col. 1:26).

The reason why many English Bibles continue to translate *mustērion* as “mystery” in spite of the fact that the scholars and many clergy know that “mystery” is an inaccurate translation is due in large part to the many unbiblical and even self-contradictory doctrines that have crept into the Church over time. When even the clergy could not explain or understand these doctrines, the translation “mystery” became generally accepted because the concept of a “mystery” was a handy way to present inexplicable doctrines to the average Christian. People who challenged the inexplicable doctrines and other traditions of the Church were quickly labeled “heretics” and persecuted, so the translation “mystery” went mostly unchallenged.

Although the Bible says that certain things were secrets, like the Gentiles being included in the Church (Rom. 11:25; Eph. 3:4-6), or the way that living believers would be changed in the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:51), there is no verse that says the Trinity or the dual nature of Christ is a *mustērion* (secret). But if the doctrine of the Trinity or of the dual nature of Christ were true, we would certainly expect that the Bible would include them among God’s *mustērion*. To us, the most logical reason the Trinity and the dual nature of Christ are not referred to in the Bible as a *mustērion* (a secret) is that they are not biblical doctrines in the first place.

Not only are the Trinity and dual nature of Christ not “mysteries,” they are contradictions. Doctrinal statements such as “eternally begotten,” “three ‘Persons’ in One God,” and “Jesus is both 100% human and 100% God,” are actually just simple contradictions. This has been recognized for a very long time, and more than a hundred years ago William G. Eliot wrote: “Mystery and contradiction are very different things. The former is something beyond our sight or seen imperfectly. The latter is plainly seen to be untrue. …we know enough to see that two contradictory statements cannot both be true. …So when Christ asserts that he did not know of a certain future event (see Mark xiii. 32), the assertion that he was nevertheless Omniscient, is evidently a denial of what he said” (*Discourses on the Doctrines of Christianity*, American Unitarian Association, Boston, 1870, p. 6).

The supposed “dual nature” of Christ is never stated in the Bible and contradicts the Bible and the laws of nature that God set up. Nothing can be 100% of two different things. Jesus cannot be 100% God and 100% man; that is not a “mystery,” it is a contradiction and nonsense talk. As was stated earlier in this appendix, the Bible clearly says in many places that Jesus Christ was a man, and the few verses that seem to say he was God are either disputed textually or can be translated and/or understood from a Biblical Unitarian perspective. Furthermore, earlier in this appendix, we saw that the miracles and amazing acts that Jesus did only showed that he walked by the power of God, he did not need to be “God in the flesh” to do them.

A fatal flaw in the “dual nature” theory is that both natures in Jesus would have had to have known about each other. Jesus’ God nature would have known about his human nature. But according to Trinitarian teaching, Jesus’ human nature knew he was God, which explains why Trinitarians say Jesus taught that he was God. But if Jesus knew he was God, then Hebrews is wrong when it says that Jesus was “made like his brothers in every respect” (Heb. 2:17). If Jesus was 100% God and 100% human at the same time, then he was not made like other humans in every way. In fact, he would have been very different from other humans in many respects. For example, in his God nature, he would not have been tempted by anything (James 1:13) but since his human nature had access to that knowledge and assurance, then his human part would not have been tempted either. But Hebrews says he was tempted in every way like we all are (Heb. 4:15). Furthermore, God does not have the problems, uncertainty, and anxieties that humans do, and if Jesus knew he was God then he would not have had those either. Also, Luke 2:52 says Jesus grew in wisdom, but Jesus’ human part would have had access to his God part, which would have given him infinite and inherent wisdom. Also, Hebrews says Jesus “learned obedience” by the things that he suffered, but again, the human part of Jesus would have accessed the God part of him and he would not have needed to learn anything.

Kenotic Trinitarians claim that Jesus put off or limited His God nature, but that theology only developed to try to reconcile some of the verses about what Christ experienced on earth, such as we have seen in Hebrews. The idea that God can limit what He knows or experiences as God is not taught or explained in Scripture, and Kenotic Trinitarianism has been rejected by orthodox Trinitarians for exactly that reason. The very simple way to explain the “difficult verses” that Kenotic Trinitarians are trying to explain about Christ’s human experiences is to realize that Jesus was a fully human being, not both God and man at the same time.

[For more on *mustērion*, see commentary on Eph. 3:9. Some people assert we have to take the Trinity “by faith,” but that is not biblical either. For more on faith, see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’”]

Conclusion

In order to fully love and worship God and Jesus, it is important to know who they really are. God, the Father, is the Creator of the universe, the Author of the plan of Salvation, the Father of Jesus Christ, and *our* One God, and removing Him from that exalted position and having Him share His position as “God” with two other “Persons” diminishes who He really is and what He alone has done. Furthermore, making Jesus into God, instead of elevating him, actually diminishes who he was and is, and what he accomplished and is still doing. It demeans Jesus because his courage, mental tenacity, love, and great faith are unparalleled in human history. He went through life like each human does, with doubts and fears and concerns, and with the possibility of sin. His true greatness is lost if he is God, because “with God all things are possible.” Believing Jesus is God also demonstrates disbelief in Jesus’ own words when he made statements such as “the Father is greater than I” and when he prayed to the Father as “the only true God.” Also, it makes it impossible for us to identify with him and strive to be like him, for how can we ever hope to live like God?

By restoring the Father to His unique and singular position as God, He receives all the worship, credit, respect, and awe He deserves as the One True God. By restoring Christ to his position as the man approved of God—the only-begotten Son of the Father, the last Adam, the one who could have sinned but voluntarily stayed obedient, the one who could have given up but loved us so much that he never did, and the one whom God highly exalted to be our Lord—then Christ receives all the worship, credit, respect, and awe that *he* deserves, and we can draw great strength and determination from his example.

[For information on what the Holy Spirit is and that there is no third “Person” in the Trinity known as “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For information on verses usually used to support the doctrine of the Trinity, see the commentaries on John 8:58, 10:30, and Rom. 9:5.]

Some very helpful books:

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Appendix 7. What is the Holy Spirit?

**Introduction**

It is a great blessing to properly understand the Bible. It is comforting and exciting, and it fosters conviction, enthusiasm, and power in a Christian’s life. In contrast, when we are confused about the Bible and do not understand it, we have less enthusiasm and conviction, and tend to walk with less power in our Christian life. Sadly, there is much confusion in Christianity concerning “the Holy Spirit,” and the goal of this appendix is to clear up some of that confusion.

In the Bible, “HOLY SPIRIT” is primarily used in two very different ways: One way is to refer to God Himself, and the other way is referring to God’s nature that He gives to people. God is holy and is spirit, and “the Holy Spirit” (capital “H” and “S”) is one of the many “names,” or designations, for God (the one God, known as “Yahweh”). Also, however, God gives His holy spirit nature to people as a gift to spiritually empower them, and when HOLY SPIRIT is used that way it should be translated as “holy spirit” (lowercase “h” and “s”). Also, in showing that “HOLY SPIRIT” is either a way of speaking about God, or the gift of God’s nature, this appendix will also present evidence that leads to the conclusion that there is no such “Person” as “the Holy Spirit” who is said to be “the third Person of the Trinity.”

The Bible says that there is one God, whose proper name is Yahweh; one Lord, who is the man Jesus Christ; and one gift of holy spirit, which God, via the Lord Jesus, gives to people to empower them. Before we start into our study, however, there is an important historical fact that we must understand. Most Christians are aware that the original manuscripts of the Bible were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. However, it is not well-known that Hebrew and Aramaic do not have uppercase and lowercase letters, they just have one form for their letters. Furthermore, although Greek does have upper and lowercase letters, the early Greek manuscripts of the Bible were all written with only uppercase letters. Thus, in the early manuscripts of the Bible there was no such thing as “Holy Spirit” and “holy spirit,” what was always written was HOLY SPIRIT (this is why, in this appendix we will sometimes write HOLY SPIRIT instead of using upper and lowercase letters). The English words HOLY SPIRIT are translations of *ruach qodesh* in Hebrew, and *pneuma hagion* in Greek.

So, whenever we read “Holy Spirit” or “holy spirit,” or “Spirit” or “spirit” in the English Bible, the capital or lowercase letters are always a translator’s interpretation. Furthermore, sometimes the translators do not agree, and sometimes they err. For example, in Matthew 12:18, speaking about the SPIRIT that would be upon Jesus, some versions read, “I will put my spirit upon him” (KJV, LEW, NAB, MRD, Tyndale, WEB), while other versions capitalize the “S” and read “Spirit” (CJB, HCSB, ESV, NIV, NLT). The difference is usually due to the theology of the translator. The bottom line is that we cannot know from the Hebrew or Greek texts whether the Author meant “Holy Spirit” or “holy spirit.” The reader must decide based on the context and scope of Scripture whether the reference being made is to God or God’s gift.

Also, although this appendix uses the Trinitarian designation of “Person” in discussing this topic, there is no universally agreed-upon orthodox definition of what “Person” means when it comes to the members of the Trinity. How can there be three “persons” but only one God? Also, it is not the purpose of this short appendix to explain the few verses that are generally used to support the existence of “the Holy Spirit” as a separate “Person” in the Trinity. Those verses are explained in their respective commentaries. For example, see the commentaries on Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4; and 2 Thess. 2:13.

Also, it will help us in this study if we correctly understand the doctrine of the Trinity. The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and the three of them are co-equal, co-eternal, and share the same essence, and together those three individual “Persons” make up the one God; also, Jesus is both 100% God and 100% man, and both Jesus’ divine nature and his human nature live together in his flesh body.

The doctrine of the Trinity, though widely believed, is never stated in the Bible. For example, the Bible never uses the terms “Trinity” or “triune God.” It never refers to any of the “three members of the Godhead” as “Persons.” It never says Jesus or the Person the Holy Spirit are co-equal with God. Thus, a biblically sound case for or against the existence of a separate being known as “the Holy Spirit” has to be built from the entire scope of Scripture, using the tools of exegesis and logic, and avoiding the pitfalls of assumptions, philosophies, and false arguments.

[For more information about Jesus and the Trinity, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

There is great value in correctly understanding HOLY SPIRIT. When HOLY SPIRIT is being used as a designation for God, we see His power and presence actively working in the world, and we can honor Him as God alone—the true God. When HOLY SPIRIT refers to God’s gift of holy spirit, we can see God’s love and grace in His giving us His very nature so that we become spiritually empowered and qualify to be God’s fellow workers (1 Cor. 3:9), even doing signs and miracles here on earth and wrestling against evil spirit powers (Eph. 6:12).

**1) The “Holy Spirit” (capital “H” and “S”) is another way of describing God**

There are many descriptions, titles, and names for God in the Bible. God’s proper name is “Yahweh” (Exod. 6:3), which occurs more than 6,000 times in the Hebrew Old Testament and is generally translated as “LORD.” But God is also referred to as *Elohim*, *Adonai*, *El Shaddai*, the Ancient of Days, the Holy One of Israel, Father, Shield, and by many more designations. Furthermore, God is holy (Lev. 11:44; Isa. 6:3; John 17:11), which is why He was called “the Holy One” (the Hebrew text uses the singular adjective “holy” to designate “the Holy One,” cf. 2 Kings 19:22; Job 6:10; Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa. 1:4; 29:23; Luke 1:49; John 17:11). He is also spirit (John 4:24). Given that God is holy and God is spirit, it makes sense that “Holy” and “Spirit” are sometimes combined and used as one of the many designations of God: “the Holy Spirit.” Thus, when the subject of a verse is God, the Hebrew or Greek words HOLY SPIRIT should be brought into English as “the Holy Spirit.”

Every name or description of God emphasizes a different aspect of His character. For example, “the Ancient of Days” magnifies His timelessness, while calling Him “Rock” emphasizes His strength, stability, and protection. Since the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” (*ruach* and *pneuma*) refer to something invisible that exerts a force or power, when God is referred to as “the Holy Spirit” it emphasizes His power at work and/or His special holiness. God is referred to as “the Holy Spirit” in verses such as Matthew 1:20; 12:32; Luke 1:35; Acts 5:3-4; 15:28; and Hebrews 9:8.

One example that shows how helpful it is to know that “the Holy Spirit” is actually God is in the record of the birth of Jesus. Once we understand that “the Holy Spirit” is a designation for God that emphasizes His power and holiness, we can understand why Mary became pregnant by “the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), and also why Jesus is never called, “the Son of the Holy Spirit.” Jesus is called “the Son of God” because Mary conceived by “God,” but since it was His holy power at work, He is described as “the Holy Spirit” in that context.

None of the dozens of descriptions, titles, or names of God is believed to be a separate, co-equal “Person” in a triune God except for “HOLY SPIRIT,” and there is no solid biblical reason to make “the Holy Spirit” into a separate “Person” either. As stated above, referring to God as “the Holy Spirit” emphasizes His power in action and His holiness.

**2) The “holy spirit” (lowercase “h” and “s”) is the gift of God’s nature**

We have just seen that in some contexts “HOLY SPIRIT” is one of the names of God and should be translated into English as “the Holy Spirit.” However, in other contexts “HOLY SPIRIT” refers to the gift of God’s nature that He placed on people to spiritually empower them, and in those contexts, it should be translated as “holy spirit.”

Our natural fleshly human bodies do not have spirit power, so when God wanted to spiritually empower people He placed a form of His nature, “holy spirit,” upon them (e.g., Num. 11:17-29; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 16:13; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 15:1; Mic. 3:8; Luke 1:41-42, 67; 2:25-27). This holy spirit nature of God was a gift from God to humankind, so the Bible specifically calls it a “gift” (Acts 2:38; 10:45; cf. Acts 8:20; 11:17).

This information about the gift of holy spirit cannot be overstressed, because we need God’s power to do His work, and He provides it to us in the form of the gift of His nature. Knowing that helps us understand why Jesus said to the apostles, “But you will receive power when the HOLY SPIRIT has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). The gift of holy spirit is why the judges and prophets of the Old Testament, and Christians today, have spiritual power. It is why Jesus called the gift of holy spirit the “helper” (John 14:26) and “the finger of God” (Luke 11:20). Properly understanding God’s gift of holy spirit clarifies dozens of otherwise confusing Bible verses, and can give Christians great confidence in acting as God’s ambassadors and fellow workers.

Jesus himself needed God’s gift of holy spirit to have supernatural power, just as the leaders and prophets of the Old Testament did; which is why God put holy spirit upon Jesus. God put holy spirit upon Jesus immediately after he was baptized by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:9-10; Luke 3:21-22). This fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies that God would put holy spirit upon the Messiah, enabling him in his ministry (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1).

After the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the gift of holy spirit was born “in” believers (John 14:17), rather than resting “upon” them, and this is one reason why Christians are said to be “born again” of God’s spirit (1 Pet. 1:3, 23). Christians have spiritual power when they receive the gift of holy spirit (Acts 1:8). Furthermore, because holy spirit is born in them and becomes part of their very nature (2 Pet. 1:4), Christians are called God’s “holy ones” (this is usually translated as “saints” in the New Testament, e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2; see commentary on Phil. 1:1).

**3) The holy spirit as distributable**

In the Old Testament, God put His gift of “holy spirit” (or “spirit”) on as many people as He deemed necessary. At the time of Moses, for example, God took of the spirit that was upon Moses and put it upon the 70 elders of Israel (Num. 11:17-25). In contrast, today everyone who makes Jesus Christ their Lord receives the indwelling gift of holy spirit. That is why on the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophecy in Joel and said that God would “pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17 KJV). The idea that Peter set forth before the Jewish crowd was one that they were familiar with from the Old Testament: that God would give part of His spirit to believers. That God gave a part of His spirit is reflected in a number of English translations (“pour out of my Spirit,” DBY, KJV, NKJV, YLT; “pour out a portion of my Spirit,” NAB).

However, a number of English translations only have, “I will pour out my Spirit” (HCSB, ESV, NIV). Although that is a grammatically acceptable translation, it does not communicate well to the average reader that each believer receives a portion of God’s spirit. Verses such as Acts 2:17-18 and 1 John 4:13 are showing that God can take some of His nature and give it to different people to spiritually empower them. The verses that speak of the HOLY SPIRIT being distributed in portions to different people show us that it is not a “Person” in a triune God, because a “Person” cannot be divided or distributed. In contrast, God’s gift of His nature to people can be distributed to people.

**4) The “holy spirit” as “the finger of God”**

Jesus referred to the “holy spirit” as the “spirit of God” in Matthew 12:28, but in the parallel record in Luke he called it “the finger of God” (Luke 11:20). The holy spirit that God gives to people is called “the finger of God” because it gives believers the power to do God’s work on earth (and also because when it comes to doing God’s work on earth, God is so powerful that only His “finger” is necessary to do the task at hand). The spirit of God is referred to as the finger of God because it is making reference to God’s power in action and His active presence. That Jesus cast out demons by “the finger of God” (the holy spirit) shows us the power that we have because we have the gift of holy spirit born in us (cf. Acts 1:8). In contrast, there is no compelling reason to make the “spirit” in these verses in Matthew and Luke a third “Person” in a triune God who is being referred to as “the finger of God.”

**5) The “Holy Spirit” is never introduced as a separate “Person” in the Bible**

Many scholars admit that the concept of the Trinity, including reference to “the Holy Spirit” as an independent “Person,” cannot be found in the Old Testament. Furthermore, the Jews, to whom the Old Testament was given, did not recognize any such being. It is a well-known historical fact that “Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone,” was the cry of Israel (Deut. 6:4; for the translation “alone,” cf. NAB, NRSV, and see commentary on Deut. 6:4).

If there is no separate “Person” called the Holy Spirit, and no triune God revealed in the Old Testament, then the triune God must be revealed in the New Testament. But the New Testament never explicitly sets forth the doctrine of the Trinity, and every occurrence of the terms “the Holy Spirit” or “the holy spirit” can be understood as either another way of speaking about God, or as the gift of God’s nature that He gives to believers to spiritually empower them. No verse or context openly states, or even directly infers, that there is a separate “Person” called “the Holy Spirit.”

**6) People in the Bible never argued about a “Person,” “the Holy Spirit”**

Although it is an argument from silence, the fact that the Bible does not have even one recorded dispute over the Holy Spirit being a separate “Person” in the Trinity is actually good evidence that no such “Person” exists. The book of Acts, the Pauline Epistles, and the General Epistles show that in the early church there were continual disputes between the believers, and also between the believers and unbelievers. These disputes included arguments about whether or not Jesus was the Messiah, circumcision, baptism, food regulations, Sabbath regulations, clothing, authority, sexual issues, and more. Yet there is not one single recorded dispute about any “Person” called “the Holy Spirit.” This is highly unlikely if there really was such a “Person,” because in the centuries after the apostles died, when the doctrine of the Trinity was being defined and “the Holy Spirit” was being introduced as a separate “Person,” there were huge fights about it, anathemas, and excommunications. Thus, it seems that the logical reason there are no arguments in the New Testament about a newly introduced “Person” called “the Holy Spirit” is that no such “Person” was introduced to the early church. We learn from church history that the doctrine of “the Holy Spirit” as a separate “Person” in a triune God was developed later; primarily in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries.

**7) Getting the pronouns “He” and “it” correct**

In the English language, the only way to tell if the pronoun that goes with a noun should be masculine, feminine, or impersonal (neuter) is to understand the subject under discussion—whether the subject itself is male, female, or neuter (as in the case of an inanimate object like a wastebasket or a bookcase). This also applies in English Bibles. When “the Holy Spirit” is used as a designation for God, it should take a masculine pronoun, such as “he,” but when the subject is the gift of “holy spirit,” the correct pronouns to use are “it,” “which,” etc. However, in English Bibles, translators almost always assume that HOLY SPIRIT refers to a “Person” in a triune God (and most of them are unaware there even is such a thing as “the gift of holy spirit”), so HOLY SPIRIT, and terms that relate to it such as “Helper” (or “Comforter”), are capitalized and are paired with personal pronouns such as “he” and “whom.”

The fact that the term “Holy Spirit” is almost always capitalized and then referred to as “he” is certainly one of the reasons that most Christians believe that it refers to a third “Person” in a triune God. For example, almost every English version translates John 14:17 similarly to the ESV: “even the Spirit of truth, **whom** the world cannot receive, because it neither sees **him** nor knows **him**.” The ESV translators capitalize “Spirit” and use “he” and “him” because of their theology. The Greek word “spirit” is neuter and the text could also be translated as “the spirit of truth” and paired with “which” and “it.” For example, the New American Bible reads, “**which** the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows **it**.”

When God is being referred to as “the Holy Spirit,” capitalizing the “H” and “S” and using the English pronoun “He” is appropriate. However, when the subject under discussion is the gift of God’s nature, “the holy spirit,” the “h” and “s” should be lowercase, and all the pronouns referring to that spirit should be impersonal, such as “it” and “which.” We remind the reader of what was covered above, that the only way to tell if our English Bible should read “the Holy Spirit” and be paired with pronouns such as “he” and “whom,” or read “the holy spirit” and be paired with pronouns such as “it” and “which,” is knowing the subject and the context, the Greek text cannot tell us that.

There is great value in properly translating and understanding the pronouns that relate to HOLY SPIRIT, because then the English reader is able to more clearly see things such as that the “helper,” the holy spirit, is in them to empower and help them, or that the gift of holy spirit does not come and go but is sealed inside them and guarantees them a future inheritance in the Kingdom (Eph. 1:13-14).

[For more on the gift of holy spirit being translated “it,” see commentary on John 14:17.]

**8) The gift of holy spirit belongs to God**

One of the ways we know that “*pneuma hagion*” often refers to the gift of God’s nature is that it “belongs” to God, who calls it “my” spirit. The spirit is called “God’s” spirit in many verses (e.g., Num. 11:29; Isa. 30:1; 44:3; 59:21; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29; Zech. 4:6; Matt. 12:18; and Acts 2:17-18). King David understood that the holy spirit belonged to God, and after he sinned with Uriah and Bathsheba, he wrote: “…do not take **your** holy spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11 NRSV; cf. Neh. 9:30).

The New Testament contains the same truth. 1 Thessalonians 4:8 says, “God, who gives his holy spirit to you.” This echoes Isaiah 63:11 (NRSV): “Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit…?” In addition, the holy spirit is called “the spirit of Yahweh” or “the spirit of God” (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 1 Sam. 10:6; Mic. 3:8). In those phrases, the genitive case, represented by the English word “of,” could be a genitive of origin (“the spirit from God”), or it could be a genitive of possession (“the spirit belonging to God”). However, it is also possible, and even likely, that both meanings are correct, and God used the genitive case because it can express two accurate meanings, and thus two truths, at the same time. Either way, the jurisdiction God holds over the spirit, and His prerogative to give it as He wills, shows that the holy spirit is not co-equal with the Father.

**9) The holy spirit is sent by God and Jesus**

The Bible shows us that “the holy spirit” is under God’s authority and direction, which makes sense when we understand it is the gift of His nature that He gives to believers to empower them. It is “sent” by God (John 14:26); it is “given” by God (Neh. 9:20; John 3:34; Acts 5:32; 15:8; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 John 3:24 and 4:13). After Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, God gave the holy spirit to people by giving it to Jesus who then gives it to people (John 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:33; Titus 3:6).

The fact that the gift of holy spirit comes from God, but via Jesus Christ, explains why some New Testament verses say God gives it and others say Jesus gives it. The ultimate origin is God, and the immediate origin is Jesus. Thus, the way the holy spirit is portrayed in the New Testament fits with it being a gift from God and does not fit with it being a “co-equal” Person in a triune God.

**10) The “holy spirit” is a gift to people**

When God gives His nature, “the holy spirit,” to people so they can be supernaturally empowered with spirit, it is a gift to the person who receives it. We can see God’s love for people when He gives them His holy spirit, and the Bible specifically calls it “the gift of holy spirit” (Acts 2:38; 10:45). In contrast to the gift of holy spirit, “God” is never a gift given to people; He is God. Thus, the fact that “the holy spirit” is a gift to people is good evidence that HOLY SPIRIT cannot refer to a co-equal “Person” in a triune God who is “God the Holy Spirit,” but rather that the Bible is telling us that God gives His very nature, “holy spirit,” to people as a gift.

**11) The gift of holy spirit has different names**

There are different “names,” or more properly, descriptions, for “the holy spirit,” the gift of God’s nature, and these different descriptions emphasize different aspects of it. It is most often called “the spirit of Yahweh” (or similar designations such as the “spirit of God,” or “spirit of the Lord God,” or “spirit of the Living God”) because it is God’s very nature and it comes from Him. That is also the reason God calls it “my spirit” (e.g., Isa. 42:1; Acts 2:17-18). In addition, it is referred to as:

* “the spirit of wisdom” (Exod. 28:3; Deut. 34:9), because through it God communicates wisdom to believers.
* “the spirit of your Father” (Matt. 10:20), because it comes from God and is His nature.
* “the spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 16:13), because through it, God and Jesus give truth to the world.
* “the spirit of the Son” (Gal. 4:6), because God gives it to Jesus, who gives it to people (Acts 2:33).
* “the spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7), and “the spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:19), because it comes to us from Jesus Christ and brings attributes of Christ into our lives.
* “the spirit of glory” (1 Pet. 4:14), because of the glory it brings to the believer, both now and in the future.
* “the gift of holy spirit” (Acts 2:38), because it is a gift from God to His people.
* “the promise of my Father” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4), because God had promised to give it to believers.
* “the helper, the holy spirit” (John 14:26), because it helps us in our life and in our service to God.

These different “names,” or designations, for the gift of holy spirit are extremely helpful in showing us what God has done for us by giving us His gift of holy spirit. Through it God and Jesus give us wisdom and lead us in the truth. It helps us walk powerfully with God and Jesus. It brings a living presence of God and Jesus into our lives, and it assures us of the glory to come. All these different “names” for “the holy spirit” fit with it being a gift from God to people, and also fit with it being God’s very nature, “holy” and “spirit.” In contrast, the designations above do not portray “the Holy Spirit” as a co-equal and co-eternal “Person” in a triune God.

**12) God anoints people with His nature—holy spirit**

The words “Messiah” in Hebrew (*mashiyach* #04899 מָשִׁיחַ) and “Christ” in Greek (*christos* #5547 Χριστός) both mean “anointed one.” Thus, although we call Jesus, “Jesus Christ,” which eventually did become a title, the early Christians would have known him as “Jesus the anointed one.” Kings and priests were anointed with oil and known as “anointed ones” or sometimes as “God’s anointed” (e.g., Exod. 29:29; Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; Num. 35:25; 1 Sam. 10:1; 12:3; 16:13; 24:6; 2 Sam. 1:16; 19:21; 22:51; 23:1; 1 Kings 1:39; 2 Kings 23:30; Ps. 18:50).

That kings and priests were anointed with oil was not “just a ceremony,” the oil was supposed to symbolize the gift of holy spirit that God poured out upon them to give them spiritual power. That spiritual power was why God “anointed” Jesus Christ with holy spirit (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18), and why Jesus was said to have been “anointed” even though people knew he had never been formally anointed with oil (Acts 4:27; Acts 10:38).

That people would be said to be “anointed” with holy spirit helps explain why the Bible also uses liquid vocabulary when describing it and says that God would “pour out” His spirit upon people (Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 12:10; Acts 2:17-18, 33). The liquid vocabulary the Bible uses of the holy spirit, and that it was “poured out,” connects it with the physical oil that was poured out upon kings and priests.

Many words associated with God’s spirit give it the attributes of a liquid, which is consistent with the holy spirit being God’s nature and not a “Person.” We are baptized with and in it like water (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5). We are all made to “drink” from the same spirit, as from a well or fountain (1 Cor. 12:13). It is written on our hearts like ink (2 Cor. 3:3). We are “anointed” with it, like oil (Acts 10:38; 2 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 2:27). We are “sealed” with it as with melted wax (Eph. 1:13). It is “poured out” on us (Acts 10:45; Rom. 5:5). It is “measured” as if it had volume (2 Kings 2:9; John 3:34). We are to be “filled” with it (Acts 2:4; Eph. 5:18). All this language is designed to point us to the truth that the holy spirit is the nature of God that brings with it the invisible power and influence of God, and all these liquid terms fit with the holy spirit being a gift of God that He distributes to people.

**13) The omission of “The Holy Spirit”**

If God wanted to disclose that He had a triune nature or that there was a three “Person” Godhead, there are places in Scripture where He could have easily revealed it. What becomes evident with a thorough reading of Scripture is that if there were a third “Person” in a triune God, then there are many verses that inexplicably leave him out. For example, no one, including Jesus, ever prayed to “the Holy Spirit,” and the Holy Spirit is never worshiped. Instead, when Jesus prayed, he called the Father “the only true God” (John 17:3), and “the Lord of heaven and earth” (Matt. 11:25). Also, only the Father knew the timing of the End (Matt. 24:36). Similarly, when Jesus returns, he will come in his glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels, but no mention is made of “the Holy Spirit” (Luke 9:26). Also, “the Holy Spirit” never greets the Churches, like Jesus and God do (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2).

Furthermore, Scripture teaches that anyone who continues in right doctrine has “both the Father and the Son,” but “the Holy Spirit” is omitted (2 John 1:9). Similarly, Christians are only said to fellowship with the Father, Son, and each other (1 John 1:3). The Bible also says, “No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:23). Similarly, 1 John 2:22 says that a person who denies the Father and Son is an antichrist, but why is the “Holy Spirit” not included as well? Also, why does Jesus only say he speaks and does what the Father tells him, and never gets direction from “the Holy Spirit” (e.g., John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:16, 28, 29; 12:49, 50)? Also, in the everlasting city of Revelation 21 and 22, God and Jesus Christ are portrayed sitting on a throne but there is no throne for the “Holy Spirit” in the everlasting city, and in fact, there is no mention of “the Holy Spirit” at all in the everlasting city.

Something that should stand out for us in all these records—and the many that are similar but are not mentioned above—is that Jesus never taught that there was a Trinity and never taught that there was a “Person” in a triune God referred to as “the Holy Spirit.” Furthermore, he never corrected the theology of the people he was speaking to. Instead, he reinforced what his Jewish audiences already believed: that there was one God, who Jesus called “the Father” and “God,” and there was the Messiah of God, the Son of God, who received direction from God and who obeyed Him. One very good example of that is Mark 12:28-34, in which an expert in Old Testament law asked Jesus about the greatest commandment. Jesus openly taught that there is one God and one Messiah; he never taught that there is a Trinity or that there is a “Person” known as “the Holy Spirit.”

**14) Blaspheming “the Holy Spirit”**

Jesus magnified God’s holiness—and also showed that he was not God and that “the Holy Spirit” was not a third “Person” in a triune God—when he said that if someone spoke against him it could be forgiven, but if anyone blasphemed “the Holy Spirit,” it would never be forgiven (Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10). But we would not expect that to be the case if the doctrine of the Trinity is correct, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal “Persons” in a triune God. If the doctrine of the Trinity was correct and there was “one God in three Persons,” then it would be impossible for someone to blaspheme one of the “Persons” of the Godhead and be forgiven, but blaspheme another “Person” of that same Godhead and not be forgiven.

However, what Jesus said about blasphemy fits perfectly with what the people of the time believed: there is one God who is referred to in many different ways, and one Messiah, Jesus Christ. Someone can blaspheme the human being, Jesus Christ, and be forgiven, but people cannot blaspheme our Holy God and be forgiven. It makes sense that Jesus would refer to God as “the Holy Spirit” in this context because it emphasizes God’s special holiness.

**15) Peter used “the Holy Spirit” when referring to God**

In Acts 5:3, Peter told Ananias that he had lied to “the Holy Spirit,” which in that context can be seen to be another way of referring to God, because in the next verse, Acts 5:4, Peter said Ananias lied to “God.” We can see why Peter used the designation, “the Holy Spirit” to refer to God in this situation because it emphasized God’s supreme holiness, which magnified Ananias’ sin.

Calling God “the Holy Spirit” in one sentence and then “God” in the next is a good example of the common Semitic parallelism of equivalent terms. Throughout the Bible, it is common for something or someone to be mentioned twice, but in slightly different terms.

For example, when Naomi returned from Moab to Bethlehem, having lost her husband and both her sons, she said to the people, “Why do you call me Naomi, since **Yahweh** has testified against me and ***El* Shaddai** has afflicted me?” (Ruth 1:21). Deuteronomy 32:3 speaks of “proclaiming the name of **Yahweh**” and “ascribing greatness to ***Elohim***.” Psalm 46:7 says that “**Yahweh of Armies** is with us; the **God of Jacob** is our refuge.” Deuteronomy 32:15 says that Israel “forsook **God**, who made him, and lightly esteemed **the Rock** of his salvation.” Psalm 78:41 says that Israel “tested **God**, and provoked **the Holy One** of Israel.” In each of the above examples, God is referred to twice, using different names, and many more examples could be cited. All those examples reflect the common Semitic use of parallelism, which draws attention to something by calling it by different names. That is what Peter did to Ananias, who lied to “God,” who he also called “the Holy Spirit.”

**16) The “Holy Spirit” does not have a name**

A reason to believe that “the Holy Spirit” is one of the many designations for God and not a separate “Person” in a triune God is that it does not have a name. God’s name is Yahweh, which occurs over 6,000 times in the Old Testament and also shows up in many personal names that include its shortened version, “Yah.” Joshua and Elijah are good examples. Also, our Messiah has a name: “Jesus.”

In contrast to Yahweh and Jesus, “the Holy Spirit” is not a name, it is a description. Furthermore, we have no evidence in the Bible that “the Holy Spirit” was ever used as a name because no one ever used it in direct address. Many people spoke or prayed directly to God, starting out by saying, “O Yahweh” (translated as “O LORD” in almost all English versions). Furthermore, the name “Jesus” is a Greek form of the name “Joshua” (in fact, the King James Version confuses “Joshua” and “Jesus” in Acts 7:45 and Heb. 4:8), and many people spoke “to Jesus” in the Bible. But no one in the Bible ever used “the Holy Spirit” in direct address; there is simply no actual name for any “Person” known as “the Holy Spirit” anywhere in the Bible, and that is good supporting evidence that no such separate “Person” exists.

**17) The gift of “the spirit” changed**

If “the spirit” was a “Person,” in an eternal triune God, then he always existed and would have always been the same. But John 7:39 (NRSV) says that until Jesus was glorified, “there was no Spirit.” Most scholars agree on the reading of the original Greek text, and with the exception of the word “Spirit” being uppercase when it should be a lowercase “s,” (“spirit,” not “Spirit”), the New Revised Standard Version represents the original Greek text quite well. It reads, “Now he [Jesus] said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Many other versions basically agree with that translation of John 7:39 (DBY, NAB, NJB, Rotherham, YLT, William Barclay’s New Testament, The Kingdom New Testament, and Moffatt’s Bible).

God had given the gift of holy spirit to people in the Old Testament, so why would John 7:39 say that at that time, when Jesus was alive and fulfilling his ministry, there was no spirit? The context tells us. On that occasion, Jesus was speaking about a new fullness of the nature of God that God was about to give to people. Although the “holy spirit” God gave in the Old Testament was God’s nature, after the Day of Pentecost He gave His nature in a new, fuller way than He had ever given it before. This fuller gift of God’s nature had not been given to people before Pentecost, but it had been foretold in the Old Testament (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26). It was because this new spirit was promised in the Old Testament that the New Testament calls it “the promised holy spirit” (Eph. 1:13; cf. Acts 2:33; Gal. 3:14). Also, because Christians are the first to receive this new spirit, we have the “firstfruits” of the spirit (Rom. 8:23), and the spirit we have is a guarantee that we will be in the coming Messianic Kingdom.

Even if the reading of John 7:39 in versions such as the ESV is accepted, which adds the word “given” to the text and reads, “for as yet the Spirit had not been given,” (e.g., KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT), it still cannot refer to a “Person,” the eternal Holy Spirit, because the holy spirit had been given in the Old Testament. We see this from verses such as Psalm 51:11 (NASB), when David said, “do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.” Thus, even English versions that say the Spirit had not been given still present a problem, because it obviously had already been given. The common Trinitarian explanation for John 7:39 is that the fullness of the ministry of “the Holy Spirit” did not come until Jesus was glorified, but that is sidestepping what the biblical text says. John 7:39 does not speak about the “ministry” of the Spirit, or its power, but it speaks of the spirit itself and says that there “was no spirit.” That statement makes perfect sense when we understand the “spirit” Jesus was speaking about was a new, fuller, gift of holy spirit that God was about to give to believers.

The key to understanding verses such as Psalm 51:11 and John 7:39 is that in the Old Testament, God put His nature, holy spirit, upon some believers, but He gave a new and fuller gift of holy spirit on the Day of Pentecost, which is why believers in the New Testament could speak in tongues and also interpret tongues, but believers in the Old Testament who had the holy spirit could not.

[For more on the gift of holy spirit in the Church Age, see commentary on John 7:39.]

**18) The gift of holy spirit as “the helper”**

The Greek noun *paraklētos* has different meanings depending on the context, but primarily refers to an advocate, an encourager, or a helper. In most English versions *paraklētos* gets translated in the New Testament as “comforter,” “encourager,” “advocate,” “counselor” or “helper” (e.g., John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). Jesus Christ himself is referred to as our *paraklētos* in 1 John 2:1.

The “holy spirit” is identified as a “helper” to believers in John 14:26. The Greek word *paraklētos*, translated “helper,” is a masculine noun in Greek, so masculine pronouns are used with it due to grammatical convention. However, it is clear from Christ’s teaching that the helper is not a person; the gift of holy spirit that Christians have is a gift, and thus an “it.” At the time Jesus spoke of the “helper,” it was “with” the apostles, but would soon be “in” them (John 14:17)—which is what happened on the Day of Pentecost when holy spirit went from being with (or “upon”) people in the Old Testament and Gospels (e.g., Num. 11:17; Judg. 3:10; 1 Sam. 10:6), to being born “in” people in the Church Age.

The helper (the holy spirit) is sent by the Father (John 14:16-17) and Jesus (John 16:7). It does not speak on its own, but it speaks only what it hears (John 16:13). Thus, the gift of holy spirit is directed by God and Jesus, which is what we would expect since it is God’s nature born in us. Also, it is very helpful to see that there are distinct overtones of the figure “personification” in the description of the “helper,” such as that it will “speak,” or “guide” us into truth (John 16:13). Personification is a common literary device used in the Bible. For example, we see “Wisdom” personified in Proverbs 8 and 9 (for more on the figure personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20).

The gift of holy spirit is the nature of God, and when it is born in us it becomes part of our very nature (2 Pet. 1:4). As a part of our nature, it is always having an effect upon us and working to form us into the image of Christ. Furthermore, as we might expect, our new holy nature is in conflict with our sin nature, which is also working in us such that we sin (Gal. 5:17). Because of the way the holy spirit nature works in us, and because of the way God and Jesus work through it to help and guide us, personifying the holy spirit in us and saying that it guides, teaches, speaks, etc., is highly appropriate.

**19) Personification of “soul” and “spirit”**

There are times when the Bible says God has a “soul,” but that is not scriptural proof that there is a distinct person known as “Soul,” who is separate from God Himself; it is simply a personification of God’s deep feelings and convictions (e.g., Judg. 10:16; Ps. 11:5; Prov. 6:16; Jer. 5:9, 29; 9:9; 15:1; 51:14). In most English versions, that God is said to have a soul is hard to see, because the Hebrew word *nephesh* is usually translated as “he,” “me,” “myself” or some equivalent word. But the translation of *nephesh* as “soul” can almost always be seen in Young’s Literal Translation.

The word “spirit” is also sometimes used in a similar way. For example, Mark 8:12 says that Jesus “sighed deeply in his spirit.” In this case, it is simply a way of saying that Jesus sighed deeply within himself. It is easy to see in the context that Jesus’ “spirit” does not refer to a separate “Person” in Jesus. Another example is when Mary said, “my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:47). Mary was deeply stirred by what Elizabeth said to her, and her use of “my spirit” does not refer to a separate “Person,” but a deep part of her.

Similarly, there are times when “the spirit of God” is simply a way of referring to God, usually referring to God in action (e.g., Gen. 1:2). Thus, when it comes to God, just as He is sometimes said to have a soul, He is sometimes said to have a “spirit,” but when “spirit” is used in that way, it is just another way of referring to God and emphasizing something about Him. Any time the Bible says, “the spirit of God,” it is the context that clues us to the meaning of the phrase.

[For more on the usages of “spirit” in the Bible, see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**Conclusion**

This appendix has presented evidence that there are two major uses of HOLY SPIRIT: “Holy Spirit” (capital “H” and “S”) is one of the many designations for God, while “holy spirit” (lowercase “h” and “s”) is the gift of God’s nature that God gives to believers to spiritually empower them. When God is referred to as the “Holy Spirit,” it emphasizes His power and special holiness. The fact that the “Holy Spirit” is another designation for God and not a separate “Person” in the Trinity explains why the “Holy Spirit” is never prayed to or worshiped, why it never sends greetings to believers, why it does not have a throne like God and Christ do, why believers are never said to have fellowship with it like we do with God and Christ, and why someone is an antichrist if he denies the Father and Son, but the “Holy Spirit” is not included in that anathema.

In contrast to God, who is sometimes referred to as “the Holy Spirit,” the “holy spirit” is the gift of God’s nature that God “gives” (or “sends”) to people. God calls it “my spirit,” and it is commonly designated as “the spirit of God,” meaning the spirit that belongs to God. Furthermore, the “holy spirit” is divided and distributed among many people, and when it is poured out upon them it empowers them, which is why Jesus referred to it as “the helper.” Also, although God does not change, the gift of God’s holy spirit that believers have today is different from the spirit that God gave in the Old Testament, so the gift of God’s spirit has changed.

The simple and straightforward reading of the Scripture is that there is one God, who is sometimes referred to as “the Holy Spirit” and whose proper name is Yahweh; one Lord who is the man Jesus Christ; and one gift of holy spirit that is the nature of God that He gives to people to spiritually empower them.

[For information on another aspect of the Trinity, that Jesus Christ is actually fully human and not “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more information on the uses of the word “spirit” in the Bible, see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’” For a more thorough understanding of the gift of holy spirit than could be provided in this appendix, see *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ*, by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit.]

Appendix 8. Names of the Devil

The Bible never gives a proper name for the Devil, although it seems clear that at one time he had one. It is fitting that God does not glorify the Devil by telling us what his original name was. It likely contained inherent honor and blessing that he now no longer has or deserves. Originally the Devil was the “morning star” of God; His most brilliant creation. He was the “model of perfection” (Ezek. 28:12). But he became prideful and rebelled against God, managing to convince one-third of the angels to follow him (Rev. 12:4). The cause of the Devil’s sin was a free will choice. The occasion of his sin was pride. The result of his sin was the corruption of his character and the perversion of his power. His end will be in the Lake of Fire.

The Devil is God’s archenemy. He was created as an angel and heads up and rules an army of fallen angels (demons) as well as demonically controlled or influenced people. He is the chief architect of the world’s evil and is responsible for the pattern of evil that exists in cultures and the world in general. Two important sections of Scripture that refer to the Devil are Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. Further evidence that the Devil was the top of all of God’s creation before he fell is that Jesus Christ has now been exalted above God’s creation, taking the Devil’s place, and instead of being the morning star, he is the Bright and Morning Star (Rev. 22:16).

Terms used of the Devil in Scripture: As was mentioned above, there is no proper name given for the Devil in Scripture. Instead, there is a list of appellations and comparisons that, when taken together, build a picture of who he is and what he is like.

**1. Accuser.** The Greek word is *kategoreō* (#2723 κατηγορέω), and it means to accuse, and often to officially accuse before a judge. “For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down” (Rev. 12:10). The Devil relentlessly accuses people.

**2. Adversary.** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς ). The term means “Adversary,” and it was borrowed from the Aramaic, *Satana* (סָטָנָא) which originally referred to one who laid in ambush [as an adversary], and then became used as a proper name meaning “Adversary” (see *Vocabulary of the Greek NT*, by Moulton & Milligan). The word “satan” means “adversary” in all the biblical languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, although sometimes it is used just as “an adversary,” and sometimes, especially with the article, it is used as an appellative, a name, for the Devil.

Being an adversary to God and the things of God is a major part of the Devil’s character and strategy. “Satan” can refer to the direct work of the Devil as in Job 1, or it can refer to indirect work as in Matthew 16:23 when Jesus called Peter “Satan.” Usually the word “Satan” places the emphasis on the indirect work of the Devil. As the great adversary of the true God, the Adversary is the indirect cause of people’s problems by way of situations or circumstances or other people, which he arranges and controls. He is the influence of these situations, circumstances, and people. It has been generally unhelpful that *satanas* has been transliterated as “Satan” rather than translated as “Adversary.” Anyone reading Hebrew or Greek knew what the word meant, but almost no Christian knows that “Satan” is not just a name; it is a word that became used as a name, and its meaning, Adversary, is important.

**3. Azazel.** “Azazel” is found in Leviticus 16:8, 10; and 16:26, and it is a name for the Slanderer (Devil), which gets mistranslated “scapegoat” in the KJV. The *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia* says, “In 1 Enoch, Azazel appears at the head of the rebel angels.” The text note in the NET (First Edition) on Leviticus 16 reads: “The most common view among scholars today is that it is the proper name of a particular demon (perhaps even the Devil himself) associated with the wilderness desert regions. Levine has proposed that it may perhaps derive from a reduplication of the ז (zayin) in זe combined with אֵל (’el, “mighty”), meaning ‘mighty goat.’” This assessment seems correct. The appellation “mighty goat” would be very fitting for the Devil because goats were independent, rebellious and destructive. In Islam, Azazil (spelled slightly differently) is said to be the original name of Satan. Modern occultists recognize Azazel as a demon, but not the Devil himself. However, given the way that he is mentioned in Leviticus and the goat sent to him, it seems clear that Azazel is another name for the Devil himself.

[For more information on Azazel, see Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT*; *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*, the appendix on Azazel.]

**4. Beelzebul.** The Greek is *Beelzeboul* (#954 Βεελζεβούλ), which gets transliterated into English as Beelzebul. “Beelzeboul” literally means, “lord of the dung” or “Lord of the dunghill.” This comes from the Hebrew *zebul* (dung, a dunghill). Beelzebul is found in Matthew 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18 and 11:19.

Among the ignominious names given to idols by religious Jews both before, during, and after the time of Christ (in the Talmudic period), the general and common one was “dung.” They also used the name Baal-zebul (Lord of dung) to describe the chief demon (Lightfoot, *Commentary from Talmud*). The use of “dung” as a name for idols and demons appears many times in the Talmudic writings but not in the Hebrew text itself.

Because the Hebrew word *zebul* also means “height” or “dwelling,” a few commentators say that “Beelzebul” means something such as “lord of the heavenly dwelling.” However, this is not likely. We can envision the Jews trying to associate Jesus with the “lord of the dunghill,” especially given the common Jewish practice of degrading idols (and Jesus) whenever possible, and the frequent use of “dung” to refer to idols and the chief demon. It is easy to imagine the Pharisees saying that Jesus was possessed with the “lord of dunghills” and was casting out demons by it. It is less likely that they actually called “the prince of demons” the “lord of the heavenly dwelling.” That would have been uncharacteristic of the way they thought and spoke of idols and demons.

The Jews certainly had the right idea about how to name the chief demon, whom we know as the Slanderer (the Devil). He was certainly “lord of dung.” He is smelly and worthless, and the demons and people who follow him are smelly and worthless, and will eventually come to an end in the Lake of Fire.

The Latin and Aramaic texts read “Beelzebub” (Lord of the flies) instead of Beelzebul in the New Testament, apparently adapting the text from the OT god of Ekron (2 Kings 1:6). This apparently led to some Greek texts being changed from “Beelzeboul” to “Beelzebub,” (we can imagine a scribe who knew Latin well, simply copying “Beelzebub” from memory into the Greek text), and from there “Beelzebub” came into some English versions such as the King James. However, modern textual research has shown that “Beelzebul” is the original reading in the Greek text (e.g., CEB, CJB, CSB, ESV, Moffatt, NAB, NASB, NET, NJB, NIV2011, NRSV). “Beelzebub,” “Lord of the flies,” would place an emphasis on the Devil’s ability to bother and pester (cf. *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*).

**5. Belial.** From the New Testament we learn that “Belial” is a name for the Devil (2 Cor. 6:15). The Hebrew word “Belial” means “worthlessness,” and the phrase son or daughter of Belial is used many times in the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 13:13; Judg. 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 30:22; etc.). Unfortunately, most modern versions of the Bible translate the meaning of “Belial,” which is “worthless” into the text, so what is clearly in the Hebrew text as “son of Belial” becomes something like, “a worthless person.” While it is true that people who have such an intimate relation with the Devil that they are called “sons of Belial” are indeed worthless, much of the meaning of the Hebrew text is lost when the phrase “son of Belial” is not translated that way. When we study the people who are referred to as “sons of Belial” in the Old Testament, they are similar in character to the people who are associated with the Slanderer as a “father” (see “Father” below). They seem to be wholly evil.

[For more on Belial and those who are “children of Belial” see the REV commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12.]

**6. Devil.** The Greek is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which means “slanderer.” The English word “Devil” came into English from the late Latin, which itself came from the Greek word *diabolos*, which means “slanderer.” So the word “Devil,” is not a translation but is close to being a transliteration from the Latin. Interestingly, the Septuagint reads *diabolos* while the Hebrew text reads *satan* (Satan). To see more about the appellation “Devil” see this appendix under “Slanderer.”

**7. Dragon.** The Greek word *drakōn* (#1404 δράκων) means “dragon.” One of the New Testament names for the Devil is “the Dragon.” Since the Devil is not literally a dragon, this is the figure of speech hypocatastasis comparing the Devil with a dragon. The name “Dragon” emphasizes his fierce, ferocious qualities. Like a dragon, the Slanderer (Devil) is powerful, ferocious, pitiless, merciless, dangerous, and deadly. It is part of the Devil’s general and ongoing plot to either hide himself or change himself into something harmless or beneficial, and much recent literature, movies, etc., portray dragons as friendly and helpful beasts who are more misunderstood than actually dangerous. We must make no mistake, when God calls the Slanderer the “Dragon,” we are dealing with an evil, powerful, and dangerous adversary. The Slanderer is referred to as the Dragon in Revelation 12:3-17; etc.

[For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**8. Father.** This New Testament designation of the Devil emphasizes his relationship to those he has “fathered.” It is not clear exactly what the Devil does to people so that he becomes their “father.” However, it seems that in the places where “father” is used in reference to the Devil it is more than just the standard Semitic idiom where it means mentor. There is good reason to believe that a person who has the Devil as his actual “father” has committed the unforgivable sin (cf. Matt. 12:32; Mark 3:29). Jesus said to some of the religious people who opposed him that “You are of your father, the Devil” (John 8:44). A study of these religious people (and also of the sorcerer who opposed Paul who was referred to as a “son of the Devil”; Acts 13:10) shows that they did indeed have the characteristics of their father: they were godless, evil, murderers, and so totally spiritually blind that no amount of truth or evidence could convince them they were wrong. For example, when told by the guards who watched the tomb of Jesus what happened at the tomb, rather than repent and admit they were wrong about Jesus, they bribed the guards to say Jesus’ body had been stolen (Matt. 28:11-13). The wise Christian is aware that there are still people who are that blind and evil on earth today, and they cannot be reasoned with or convinced. Like the sorcerer in Acts 13:10, they have to be removed from power so they cannot accomplish their destructive evil desires. [For more on what the sons of the Devil are like, see the REV commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12.]

**9. god of this age.** This phrase emphasizes the Slanderer’s rulership over this age and the worship associated with it. It is used only one time (2 Cor. 4:4), and frankly, the general Christian teaching that “God is in control,” and “The Devil can only do what God allows him to do,” has obscured the powerful meaning of this phrase.

The Bible does not use the word “god,” lightly or haphazardly. By using the word “god” for the Devil, our God is giving us a glimpse into the tremendous power and control he exercises over the world—a control that is obvious when we stop and think about it. Famines, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, epidemics, hatred and wars, envy and murder—these are all engineered by the “god of this age.” And that is just one part of his power. From behind the scenes he manipulates people to do his will, and is so powerful that it is safe to say that almost no one has a truly carefree life. Evil, hatred, jealousy, envy, and the use and abuse of people are everywhere, all promoted by the “god of this age.”

Another thing the phrase “god of this age” brings into focus is his insatiable desire for worship. The word “age” (sometimes mistranslated as “world”) is *aion*. While it is true that *aion* refers to an age, a period of time, the meaning is actually much deeper. It refers to the spiritual and moral climate of a time, the characteristics that mark the age. In restaurant terms, it means “atmosphere.” The Devil is the god in control of the “atmosphere” of our world, its spiritual and moral climate, and its physical activities.

[For more information on the control the Devil has over this world, see the REV commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**10. Lucifer.** This comes from the Latin. See under “Shining One.”

**11. Opposer (or the “Opposing One”)**. The Greek word translated as “opposer” is *antikeimai* (#480 ἀντίκειμαι), and it refers to someone who is in opposition, or an opposer. The Devil always opposes God, so the reference to him as the “Opposer” is appropriate (1 Tim. 5:14). Sadly, although the Greek text of 1 Timothy 5:14 does not say “adversary,” using the word “satan,” many English versions read “adversary” instead of the more accurate, “opposer.”

**12. Ruler of the demons.** This is not so much a “name” for the Slanderer (Devil) as a descriptive phrase that emphasizes the Slanderer’s rule over demons. The phrase occurs in Mark 3:22. The Greek word translated “ruler” is *archōn* (#758 ἄρχων), which is from *archē*, “first,” and it means the one who is first, thus the “ruler, commander, chief,” etc. There are three designations of the Slanderer which refer to him specifically as “ruler.” There are three designations of the Devil that refer to him specifically as “ruler.” The ruler of the demons (Mark 3:22), the ruler of the world (John 12:31; 14:30, and 16:11), and the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Eph. 2:2). These three, combined with the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), show how complete the Devil’s control of what happens on earth really is when it comes to the age and world we live in. The Slanderer rules, and thus controls to a large extent, the demons under him, the world, and even what goes on in the air.

**13. Ruler of this world.** This phrase emphasizes his rulership of the world (John 12:31).

**14. Ruler of the kingdom of the air.** This phrase is found in Ephesians 2:2. That the Devil is the ruler of the “kingdom” of the air emphasizes his rulership of the evil spiritual powers that move about in the air. The word “air” is *aēr* and refers to the atmosphere immediately above the earth’s surface. We would want to call it the lower atmosphere, but the Greeks thought that it extended to the moon (Zodhiates). Above the *aēr* was the lighter, purer air the Greeks called *aithēr* (“ether”). Both the Jews and the Greeks believed that the air was inhabited by supernatural powers, which it is. As the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the Slanderer (Devil) exercises power both in the spiritual realm over demons, and in the physical realm over the air itself. We see his influence over the physical atmosphere in many ways, including hurricanes, tornados, and “freak weather patterns.” He also has the power and authority over the air to influence electromagnetic energy and thus disrupt communication, radio, radar, etc. It is quite possible that some, if not many, of the UFO sightings are actually demonic manifestations. In the same way that a demon can come into concretion as a ghost or apparition on earth, if one comes into concretion in the sky it would be seen as a UFO. These UFO sightings do the same basic thing in the air that ghost sightings do on earth: they distract and confuse people, and often cause them not to believe what is clearly written in the Word of God.

**15. Satan.** The word “Satan” is a transliteration from the Hebrew, and later the Greek. See under “Adversary.”

**16. Serpent.** One of the names of the Slanderer is “the serpent.” The Slanderer is not a literal serpent, so his being called that is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication; for more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2). Calling the Slanderer a “serpent” compares him with a serpent, and imports the characteristics of a serpent onto the Slanderer. Thus we can see that, among other things, the Slanderer is hard to see and recognize (he is very good at hiding), crafty, and deadly.

Another thing about the serpent that is worth noting is that, in nature, when a snake goes after its prey, it almost always eats its head first. Similarly, “the Serpent” goes after the minds of people. He lies to them, threatens them, lures them, and even controls them by the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). For the Christian, putting on “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16) and “the helmet of salvation” (Eph. 6:17), are essential to being able to live a godly life.

It is important for us to notice that the very first time the Slanderer appears in the Bible is Genesis 3:1, and he is called “the serpent.” Sadly, this has confused Christians, who have all manner of discussions about this “snake,” including if it could somehow walk and talk. There should have never been any doubt about the fact that it was not a “snake” in the Garden at all, but rather the Slanderer himself, who likely came as a shining celestial being, something that would have gotten Eve’s complete attention and been able to convince her that what God said was not correct. We should have known this because 2 Corinthians 11:3 says it was the “serpent” who deceived Eve in the Garden, and in that record, this “serpent” can be seen to be “the Adversary,” who is specifically identified in verse 14. Furthermore, Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 call the serpent, “that old serpent,” which is very appropriate since the serpent is the very first mention of the Adversary in the Bible.

The places the Slanderer is referred to as a serpent are Genesis 3:1, 2, 4, 13, 14; 2 Corinthians 11:3; and Revelation 12:9, 14, 15 and 20:2.

**17. Shining One.** One of the names the Devil is commonly known by is “Lucifer,” which comes from Isaiah 14:12. The Hebrew word is *heylel* (#01966 הֵילֵל), and it literally means “shining one.” In the Hebrew language, *heylel* was used as a name for the planet Venus, while in Latin, “Lucifer” (literally, “Light Bringer”) was a word commonly used for the planet Venus. Thus, for the Latin Vulgate to translate *heylel* as “Lucifer” made perfect sense, because both *heylel* and “Lucifer” were used of the planet Venus. The association between the “Shining One” and Venus also explains why so many versions say, “morning star.” Venus was well-known as the morning star. So *heylel* meant “Shining One, and was used as a name for the planet Venus, which was the “morning star.”

Some theologians think that in Isaiah 14:12, *heylel* is not a proper name, but rather just a description of the Devil. However, the context seems to demand that the word *heylel* is being used as a name. Actually, *heylel* seems to be the figure of speech hypocatastasis, using the planet Venus as a comparison to the Devil, thus showing his brilliance and beauty.

[For an explanation of hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2, “dragon.”]

If we want to use a proper name in Isaiah, we could use the literal, “Shining One,” and explain how and why it, as a name of Venus, would have been used there in Isaiah. Or we could use the name “Venus,” and then explain how and why the Devil was referred to as Venus, which was because he was the dominant light among the stars of God (angels are sometimes called “stars,” cf. Job 38:7). Either translation, “Shining One” or “Venus,” would be better in our English versions than “Lucifer,” which does not mean anything in English.

Further evidence that “Shining One” is a reference to the planet Venus, which was being used as a hypocatastasis for the Devil, is the fact that the Hebrew text reads, “Shining One, son of Dawn.” In Hebrew, the word translated “dawn” is *shachar* (#07837 שַׁחַר), and, as it appeared in cognate languages such as Ugaritic, it was used as a divine name. In Greek mythology, Venus was the “son of Eōs,” (“son of Dawn”). Eōs was the female Titan who was the personification of the dawn (the Titans were the first generation of gods, before the Olympian gods that we are more familiar with, who were ruled by Zeus). Of course, we know that the Devil was not the son of a Greek Titan, but the reference to “son of the Dawn” in Isaiah emphasizes the fact that the Devil, and the angels who supported his rebellion, should have known that he was not the Creator God, but was himself a created being who owed allegiance to his Creator.

Modern versions do not use “Lucifer” in Isaiah 14:12, but because “Lucifer” appeared in the Vulgate and KJV, and thus was the dominant translation of Isaiah 14:12 for around 1600 years, “Lucifer” has become one of the most well-known names for the Devil.

**18. Slanderer.** The Greek is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which means “slanderer,” “the one who slanders others,” but in Christian tradition and translation the word diabolos is brought into English as “Devil” rather than being translated as “Slanderer.” Slander, and the lying that always accompanies it, is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. It seems unfortunate that *diabolos* has traditionally been transliterated as “Devil” rather than translated as “Slanderer,” because it has caused Christianity to lose a significant amount of understanding about him. The meaning of *diabolos* is important because God uses the meaning of names to describe the character of the one who has the name. Actually, we would learn a lot more about most of the Bible characters if their names were translated rather than transliterated. However, we also know that many times the literal meaning of a name becomes less important than knowing the one who has the name, because the person or being is always bigger than the name. An example would be, “Abraham,” who was “father of a multitude,” which is the meaning of his name, but he was much bigger than that. For example, Abraham is also the father of those who believe. So too, the Devil does much more than slander, so given our culture and the many different contexts in which *diabolos* is used in the Bible, transliterating it “Devil” is not a bad choice.

When it is used without the definite article “the,” *diabolos* usually does not refer to the Devil, but to a person who is a slanderer (cf. 1 Tim. 3:11; Titus 2:3). The Devil is “the Slanderer,” and slander is one of his major characteristics. He is spoken of in many places in the NT (cf. Matt. 4:1; 13:39; John 8:44; Acts 13:10; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 12:9).

In English, the word “Devil” only has meaning because we have all called God’s archenemy “the Devil” for so long, but the name “Devil” has no actual meaning in English. God specifically gave His arch-enemy the name “Slanderer” to teach us about one of his most prominent characteristics, and every Christian needs to be aware that a primary characteristic of the Devil is slander, and Christians should avoid slander at all costs.

**19. Tempter.** The Greek is *peirazō* (#3985 πειράζω, pronounced pay-'rah-zō), which means to tempt, to put through an ordeal. It can also be used in a good sense, to test with the idea of the one tested being successful, but that is not its meaning when it is used of the Slanderer. The Tempter is an apt name for the Slanderer because he is constantly at work to set traps and temptations up so that people will fall. The Adversary comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), and often he sets the stage with a temptation so that we end up destroying ourselves. “The Tempter” is used in Matthew 4:3.

**20. Wicked One (or Evil One)**. The Greek is *ponēros* (#4190 πονηρός), which the BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’” *Ponēros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun; for more on substantives, see the commentary on Matt. 5:37).

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time, he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been aggressively and destructively doing and causing wickedness wherever he can. The places where he is called “the Wicked One” are Matthew 5:37; 6:13; 13:19, 38; John 17:15; Ephesians 6:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18 and 5:19.

Part of the “wickedness” of the “Wicked One” is his constant attack on the meaning of words. He knows that God communicated to mankind in words, and if he can lessen their impact, or cause people to not understand them, that is a major victory. “Wicked” is one of the words that has almost lost its meaning today. The Adversary has worked in our “pop culture” to turn the meaning of “wicked” upside down, and today in many social circles it is usually used to refer to something that is very good. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (11th edition) defines “wicked” as “morally very bad,” and Webster’s 1828 Dictionary says it is “deviating from the divine law; addicted to vice; sinful; immoral. This is a word of comprehensive signification, extending to everything that is contrary to moral law.” That sums up the Greek meaning of *ponēros*, and describes both “wicked,” and the activities of the Devil.

Appendix 9. On Calvinism and Predestination

Although Calvinism is believed by a great number of good people, there are many reasons why predestination can be seen to be an erroneous doctrine. It is important to understand the terms involved: in this appendix “predestination,” is used in the Calvinistic sense that everything that happens is God’s will, and God chooses those who will be saved and those who will be condemned to Gehenna (not all “Calvinists” believe exactly that, but that is a major tenet of what John Calvin, and his followers such as Jonathan Edwards, believed and taught). The doctrine of predestination and Calvinism are inextricably linked, and there are more erroneous doctrines in Calvinism than just predestination, so although most of the things below apply to predestination, this appendix will also deal with some other errors in Calvinism. It is important to note that some people claim to be Calvinists without believing in what is referred to as “five-point” Calvinism, but for the purpose of this entry, a Calvinist is someone who adheres to the full teaching of five-point Calvinism, although most of the points below also apply to anyone who calls himself a Calvinist, including “four-point” Calvinists.

**1). Calvinism makes God unloving.** It is a major tenet of Calvinism that God condemns people to Hell just because He decided to. Calvinists argue among themselves, as well as with non-Calvinists, over whether predestination is “single predestination” or “double predestination.” In double predestination, God actively predestines some people to heaven and the rest to “Hell.” In single predestination, God predestines people to heaven, and people go to “Hell” due to their own sin.

To us and many other theologians, the difference between double and single predestination is only semantic. If God predestined only some people to heaven, then by default He predestined the rest to Gehenna. Single-predestination Calvinists claim that God did not force sinners to sin, but the fact is that by His predetermining the sin and fall of Adam and Eve, and by His unwillingness to help sinners escape sin, He renders the unsaved state of sinners inescapable, and thus actually predestines them to Gehenna.

Since Calvinism teaches that people can only choose to be saved when God enables them to, and it is God Himself who makes the decision not to enable the doomed to go to heaven, then in fact He does choose some people for Gehenna. Interestingly, double predestination Calvinists themselves say that “single predestination” is doubletalk: if God predestines one group, then by default He predestines the other.

The doctrine of predestination makes God unloving. If a person motors a boat past a drowning man but does not rescue him even though he could have done so, we would say the man in the boat was unloving. Similarly, if God saves only those He chooses and leaves the rest to Gehenna even though He could have saved them, in every usual sense of the word “love,” that makes God unloving.

**2). Calvinism makes God the author of sin and evil.** Since according to strict Calvinism everything that happens is God’s will, then the sin and evil that occur are His will also. Many Calvinists admit this, but refer to it as a necessary consequence of God’s sovereignty. But saying that God is the author of sin and evil contradicts the most fundamental tenets of the Bible, that God is love and does not sin or encourage sin, and on that basis it can be seen to be a false doctrine.

Some Calvinists try to explain that what looks evil to us is not really evil because it is in the master plan of God. But that is double-talk. Jesus said that we could know people by their fruit. God defines love in many places, among them 1 Corinthians 13. If God is the author of sin and evil, then either love is not what He says it is, or He is not loving. The easy and biblical solution to this problem is that Calvinism is in error and God is not the author of sin or evil.

**3). Calvinism forces God to have two different wills.** Some Calvinists refer to these two wills of God as His decretive will and His preceptive will. God’s decretive will is defined as His sovereign and efficacious will; it is what actually happens. In contrast, God’s preceptive will (from the word “precept”) is defined as what God commands but what may not happen. The reason that Calvinism forces God to have two different wills is that God has hundreds of commands in which He tells us to behave in a certain way (“Do not steal,” “Do not commit adultery,” etc.), and yet because Calvinists believe that God predetermines everyone’s behavior, that means He made it certain that people would sin and break those very commands. For example, according to Calvinism, God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree in the middle of the Garden (His preceptive will), while at the same time having determined from eternity past that they would eat of the tree (His decretive will) in disobedience to His command.

But a doctrine that makes God have two different wills that are often contradictory and in conflict with one another makes God schizophrenic and it contradicts the Scripture that God cannot lie. If God commands us not to do something while willing and predetermining that we do it, then He is a liar. The fact that Calvinism forces God to have two different wills that often contradict one another shows that the doctrine is false.

**4). Calvinism makes it unavailable to read the Bible and believe it at face value.** According to Calvinism, an unregenerate person who is not empowered by God cannot choose to do anything good. Yet God asks everyone, in many different ways and places in the Bible, to do good. For example, God asks people to “choose life” (Deut. 30:19), but according to Calvinism people cannot “choose life” on their own, but have to have God’s enabling power to do so.

In Ezekiel 33:11 God says, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” But how can anyone make sense of this verse when it is read from a Calvinist point of view? The verse says God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but according to Calvinists, God gets glory from their death and He planned it in the first place. Furthermore, in Ezekiel 33:11, God is pleading with people to turn from their evil, but according to Calvinists, they cannot turn without God’s help. Thus, according to Calvinist doctrine, God is pleading with Israel to do something He knows they cannot do. Worse, He could help them turn from their sin, but He refuses to. This makes God’s plea disingenuous and misleading.

On the other hand, if Ezekiel 33:11 is read from the point of view that people have freedom of will to choose good or evil, it makes perfect sense. God does not want anyone to be wicked and die, so He pleads with them to turn from their evil ways, and He saves them when they do.

There are many verses that do not make sense if Calvinism is correct. One example is God’s statement just prior to the Flood: “So the LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground…for I am sorry that I have made them” (Gen. 6:7 RSV). If Calvinism is right, the Bible says God was “sorry” He made all the people, but actually they were doing exactly what He wanted and predestined them to do. So why was He sorry? Another example is Luke 7:30 (NIV84), “But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves….” Unless there is genuine free will, how could anyone reject God’s purpose for themselves? Or Isaiah 1:2 (NIV84), “…the LORD has spoken: ‘I reared children…but they have rebelled against me.” If everyone is doing what God predestined for their life, then no one is “rebelling” against God, they are all obeying Him. These examples could be multiplied a hundredfold, and they show that if Calvinism is correct, the Bible cannot be read and believed at face value.

**5). If Calvinism is correct, then we humans cannot trust our senses.** We humans generally trust our senses, and it clearly seems that people actually make genuine choices, choices to do good and even the choice to accept Christ. Furthermore, God tells us that wisdom is the principal thing, and above all to be wise (Prov. 4:7). The reason wisdom is so important is that it enables us to discern good choices from bad ones. But if predestination is correct, we do not actually make the choice for Christ on our own, but God enables us to make the choice, which we then automatically make even though it feels like we are making the choice on our own. Similarly, unsaved people think they could choose Christ but simply refuse to, when, according to Calvinism, that is not the case at all—they are actually unable to choose Christ. If Calvinism is correct, the good choices we think we are making are just mental deceptions; we are not really making them, and so people cannot trust their senses.

**6). Calvinism claims that God never intended to save everyone, in direct contrast to the simple teaching of Scripture.** The Bible says God so loved the “world” that He gave His Son, that “whosoever” believes will be saved. But that simple scripture contradicts the fundamental tenet of Calvinism that God never intended to save everyone in the world; He only intended to save the ones He chose. Some Calvinists try to skirt this issue by redefining “world” or “whosoever” (and “all people” in 1 Tim. 2:4) by saying that these words are being used in a limited sense, not a universal sense, but there is no actual justification for that explanation other than it fits with the Calvinist’s preconceived doctrine.

There are Calvinists who admit that “world” and “whosoever” refer to everyone, but then they go so far as to say that God does love the “world,” and sending people to the Lake of Fire is an expression of His love because they get to suffer eternally for His glory. The old Calvinist saying is that, “those who find themselves suffering in hell can at least take comfort in the fact that they are there for the greater glory of God.” This makes God, along with anyone else who torments people for their own glory, unlovable.

God saying that He loved the world and sent His Son to save anyone who would believe is simple and straightforward, and shows that God does indeed love everyone and also that people have genuine freedom of will and can reject His love if that is the choice they make.

**7). If Calvinism is correct, evil does not actually exist.** Many Calvinists assert that everything—every single thing—that happens is God’s will; God predestined and controls everything that happens on earth. Since, by definition, God is good and God is love, Calvinist doctrine then means that everything that happens is good and loving; it is only that we humans cannot see that fact because we cannot see “the big picture of God’s master plan.”

At face value, the Bible disagrees with that assertion about God’s supposed “master plan.” God gave us His Word to teach us about Him and life, and it clearly reveals good and how to act in a good way, and evil and what kinds of thoughts and actions are evil. The Bible even says, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isa. 5:20). By making everything that happens part of God’s master plan and predestined by God Himself, Calvinists not only deny genuine evil, they make evil into good. Furthermore, the Bible clearly distinguishes between good and evil, so Calvinism cannot be right in making everything God’s will and therefore good.

**8). Calvinism creates a paradox for Christians.** Calvinism makes God the author of sin and evil, and the Bible tells us to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1). So to imitate God we would have to sin and cause evil. But the Bible also commands Christians not to sin and do evil. Since we would not be obeying God by imitating Him unless we were causing sin and evil, but since causing sin and evil would be breaking a different command of God, Calvinism creates an unobeyable paradox for Christians.

The simple and biblical answer to the paradox is that God is not the author of sin and evil. As the Bible says, God is good and loving, and He commands us to be that way too. Some people say they are Calvinists, but they also assert that God does not cause sin, He only “permits” it. However, Calvinism asserts that God is the Author and Designer behind every action and event, and everything that happens is according to His will, so to then say He only permits sin is a contradiction and doubletalk. The only way that there can be sin without God’s being the Author of it is for people (and demons) to have genuine free will.

**9). Some Calvinists claim that people do have free will even though God predetermines their destiny.** Some Calvinists believe that people have free will but God determines their eternal destiny. But to believe those contradictory things, Calvinists have to define free will as a person doing what he wants to do even though he cannot make a choice to do something else. For those Calvinists, the fallen nature of man and God’s predestination makes it certain that people whom God does not help are only able to make bad choice after bad choice, but those bad choices are “freely” made. However, logic dictates that if a person cannot make any other choice than the bad choices they are making, then they do not actually have free will. The very definition of free will is that a person can do things that they are not currently doing. There is no logical reason to define free will as “a person can only make a bad choice.” Free will involves assessing all the choices one has and then making a choice to do something, whether that choice is good or bad. An individual with free will can choose everlasting life with God rather than burning up in Gehenna.

We assert that the historical Arminian or libertarian definition of free will is the correct definition: the ability to decide to do, and do, other than what one is doing. And that is the definition of free will that is accepted in the world today: people who are doing hurtful things are told by family members, co-workers, counselors, police, etc., to stop doing harm and start doing good and helpful things. The world operates on the principle that people can change what they are doing, and that assumption is throughout the Bible as well. According to that definition of free will, a sinner can make the decision to stop sinning and accept God’s offer of salvation.

**10). Calvinism overstates the power of the fallen nature of mankind.** While it is true that every human is fallen and has a sin nature, Calvinists teach that the fallen nature makes it unavailable for the unsaved to make a truly “good” choice, such as choosing salvation. Calvinists teach that fallen man can only make the choice to do one bad thing after another, but not to choose a “good” thing instead of a bad thing. However, this is just an assumption made to fit their theology. There is no verse that says the fallen nature of mankind keeps people from making a good choice. Quite the opposite. When the Bible is read in a simple and straightforward way, we can see that in many verses God asks fallen people to choose Him and salvation. Furthermore, the Bible tells us that God is upset and angry when unsaved people do not make the choice to do good. Unsaved people make “good” choices all the time; choices about their money, jobs, friends, health, etc. Making the choice to live forever instead of dying forever is a “naturally” wise choice, just like eating healthy and exercising to live better and longer is a “naturally” wise choice. Those wise choices do not take divine intervention.

**11). Calvinism distorts repentance and forgiveness.** Forgiveness, in any meaningful sense of the word, presupposes guilt. There are conditions that must be met in order for a person to be guilty: for example, the person must be responsible in some way. A person is not responsible for something they did not do and could not prevent, or for something they could not help but do.

Calvinism teaches that God did not create people with the ability to make a “good” decision unless He helped them; especially the decision to repent and ask God to forgive their sin. But if a person cannot repent on his own, then God cannot righteously hold him responsible for not repenting. It would not be righteous or loving for God to hold people accountable for something they cannot do. Yet the Bible presents “repentance” as something that every person is asked to do: “...now he [God] commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30; cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 26:20).

The straightforward reading of the Bible is that God asks everyone to repent, which means that people have the ability to obey God’s command if they want to of their own free will. Calvinist doctrine is that when the Bible says that God asks “all people everywhere” to repent, it does not actually mean “all” people “everywhere,” and thus it is not a genuine invitation to everyone. Calvinism is forced to say that the phrase “all people everywhere” uses “all” in the restrictive sense of “all those He plans to save anyway.” But that causes another problem: Since Calvinism teaches “irresistible grace,” meaning that no one who God wants to be saved can resist His will and remain unsaved, then it is not really accurate to say that God “commands” people to repent. God could not technically “command” people to repent who cannot repent on their own without His help, and neither would God need to “command” people to repent who could not help but repent when given His irresistible grace to get saved. The fact that the prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others faced crowds of unbelievers and pleaded with them to repent is solid biblical evidence that those unsaved people had free will and could repent if they chose to do so.

**12). Calvinism makes Jesus’ statement, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), meaningless, in fact, erroneous.** According to Calvinism, there are huge numbers of unsaved people God could save, but He chooses not to and instead has them suffer in torment in Gehenna. Furthermore, God is the ultimate cause of every disaster. But Jesus said that if anyone really saw him, that person would have seen what the Father was like. We cannot imagine Jesus allowing anyone to suffer if he could have helped that person, and we cannot imagine Jesus causing disasters. In fact, looking at Jesus, and then looking at the God that Calvinists present to us, show two totally different ways of being: Jesus helped everyone he could; while God helps only those He wants to help and lets the others suffer “for His glory.” Jesus taught us that we would know evil people by their fruit, but if Calvinists are correct that God is in control of the world today, then the fruit of His control is horrible because in general, the world is a hard and dangerous place.

The Bible says that God loves humankind, and He evidenced that love by giving dominion over the world to Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:26-28), who then gave it over to the Devil (Luke 4:6), and the Devil now has dominion over the world (1 John 5:19), and has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Furthermore, there is a real, genuine war between Good and Evil (Dan. 10; John 8:42-45; John 10:10; Rev. 12:7). This is one reason why God is referred to as a “man of war” (Exod. 15:3), and why, when His people are under attack by evil forces, He rouses Himself and goes to war (cf. Ps. 18:6-18; Josh. 10:9-14; 2 Kings 7:5-7; 19:35-36; 2 Chron. 20:22). God is good and fighting for good on earth. Like Jesus, God is good, giving, selfless, and sacrificial. God gave His only Son so that anyone who wanted to could be saved, and then He honors our choice as to whether to accept salvation or not.

To see whether Calvin’s God was selfish or selfless all we need to do is ask the question, “Why would God willfully choose to not empower certain people to be saved, knowing they will then be damned forever?” Although a Calvinist might assert that why God did not save everyone is a mystery, the traditional Calvinist answer to that question is that God does all things for His glory, even predestining people to suffer in Gehenna. But it is commonly known that caring for one’s own glory more than the well-being of others, and especially allowing others to suffer for one’s own personal glory is the height of selfishness and is diametrically opposed to the loving character of God that is set forth in Scripture, and it certainly is opposed to the way Jesus lived his life.

**13). It is a common Calvinist claim that if God is not totally in control of life, then God would not be God.** A good answer to that assertion is, “Who says?” There is no verse that says any such thing; that is just an unsupported assertion. God does not have to control the destiny and actions of everyone in order to be God. God is God because He is God, and part of the work of humankind is to see Him for who He is by the way He reveals Himself in His Word. The Bible reveals Him to be loving, honest, and just, and He allows people to make their own free will choice as to whether or not they want to spend eternity with Him.

In fact, if God is love as love is commonly understood, then He would not control the free will choices that angels and humans make. It is universally recognized that controlling other people who have the maturity to make their own decisions is not loving, kind, or even good. People are created in the image of God, and people resent it when others are overbearing, micromanaging, and controlling. In modern vocabulary, a “helicopter Mom” is a mother who hovers over her children and oversees their decisions in an unhealthy way. “Total control” is often unloving, not loving. God created people to resent being controlled so we would do something about the situation and assert who we are as individual creations of God. In a similar way, it seems that God does not, and does not want to, control everything that people do. He wants to give them the truth and wisdom and allow them to make wise choices on their own. Logic dictates that for God to be the God revealed in the Bible through the straightforward reading of Scripture, He cannot be using “irresistible grace” to control the decisions that people make. In any case, there is no verse or logic that says God cannot be God unless He controls everything happening.

**14). Calvinism makes being an ambassador for Christ meaningless (2 Cor. 5:20).** According to Calvinism, no one we approach with the Gospel can believe without God’s help. But if God is the one who gives people the ability to see the truth and get saved, then they can see the value of Christ on their own without our help. Churches that are Calvinistic, such as the Presbyterian Church, never do altar calls or ask if anyone wants to be saved, because they do not believe that anyone’s response matters. They assert that God will save those He wants saved. This contradicts the command in Scripture that we witness for Christ and try to spread the Gospel.

Scripture says, “We plead on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God.’” (2 Cor. 5:20 HCSB). We assert that God has made us ambassadors for Christ and told us to plead with others on behalf of Christ because they need to hear about the Gospel in order to make their own choice for Christ out of the freedom of their will. In fact, that is the testimony of Scripture (Rom. 10:14-17).

**15). Calvinism is not uncontestably supported by Scripture, as many Calvinists claim.** The verses that seem to support predestination and Calvinism in some translations, such as Ephesians 1:5 and Romans 8:28, can all be either translated or understood in a non-Calvinist way. In contrast, there are hundreds of very simple and clear verses that support genuine freedom of will. These verses, such as John 3:16, have to be misread or redefined by Calvinists to fit their theology.

God authored the Bible so that the average believer could read it and understand the heart and message of God, and there are hundreds of plain and straightforward verses in which God asks people to choose Him, to have faith in Christ, obey God, etc. The message of free will and personal responsibility for accepting or rejecting God is throughout the Bible and is clearly and simply written. God wants all people to be saved; He so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believed would be saved, and He pleads with us to “choose life.”

Appendix 10. God’s Promise of Salvation

Through the centuries of the Christian era there has been debate about whether Christians can lose their salvation. The position of Spirit and Truth Fellowship is that Scripture teaches when people are born again of God’s gift of holy spirit, their salvation is guaranteed and they are not in danger of the “Second Death” (Rev. 20:12-15). Salvation is of ultimate importance to every human being, since those who are saved will live forever and those who are not will die in the Lake of Fire. Therefore, God has spent considerable time on the issue of the permanence of salvation in the New Testament Epistles and approaches it from many different angles to emphasize it. It behooves students of the Bible to study this issue carefully and meticulously. The purpose of this appendix is to provide a resource for this task by expounding on the permanence of Christian salvation.

This appendix focuses on the verses that show the permanence of Christian salvation. It does not explain verses used to argue that Christians can lose their salvation. Those explanations are found in the REV commentary on those individual verses. A list of some of these verses can be found at the end of this appendix.

Due to the length of this appendix, the following table of contents serves as a guide to its structure:

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**a)** [New Way to be Saved.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_3) **b)** [New Birth and New Incorruptible Seed.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_4) **c)** [Adoption.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_5) **d)** [A New Divine Nature.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_6) **e)** [New Creations.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_7) **f)** [Sealed with a New Holy Spirit](#tocdest3_10_1_1_8) **g)** [Salvation is Guaranteed.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_9) **h)** [Christians are Part of the Body of Christ.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_10) **i)** [Already Saved.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_11) **j)** [Already Raised from the Dead.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_12) **k)** [Already Seated in Heaven.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_13) **l)** [Already Citizens of Heaven.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_14) **m)** [Already Glorified.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_15) **n)** [New Relationship with God—the Love of a Birth-Father.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_16) **o)** [New Ending.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_17) **p)** [A One-Time Event.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_18) **q)** [Christians Will Not be Condemned to Die in the Lake of Fire.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_19) **r)** [Christians Can Know They Are Saved.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_20) **s)** [Totaling the Evidence.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_21)

**3)** [An added bonus: Christians have a new language.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_22) **4)** [Can You Relinquish Your Salvation?](#tocdest3_10_1_1_23) **5)** [Concluding Thoughts.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_24)

**a)** [Why is the permanence of salvation debated in the Church?](#tocdest3_10_1_1_25) **b)** [Why not just say we cannot lose our salvation?](#tocdest3_10_1_1_26)

**6)** [Addendum: List of Some Commonly Used Verses to Argue the Conditionality of Salvation.](#tocdest3_10_1_1_27)

1) General Background: Administrations in the Bible

One of the greatest truths of Scripture is that, for the accomplishment of His purposes and the benefit of His people, at different times in history God changed the “rules” He directs people to live by. In other words, God has administered His people differently at different times in history. Although God did not generally name the time periods governed by the different rules (although a couple are named), for ease of discussion theologians call the set of rules associated with a specific time period an “administration” or “dispensation.”

The systematic theology that acknowledges the importance of these different administrations or dispensations is referred to as “Dispensationalism.” It should be noted, however, that even theologians who do not consider themselves dispensationalists realize that God has changed His rules for mankind from time to time. Thus, under the entry “Covenant Theology” in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (W. Elwell, editor), one finds the comment, “...the covenant of grace includes various dispensations” (p. 280).

Overlooking or misunderstanding the administrations in the Bible causes confusion and makes Scripture seem to contain significant contradictions. There are many examples of rule changes in the Bible. For example, in the Garden of Eden, God commanded that Adam and Eve eat only plants (Gen. 1:29). God changed that rule after Noah’s Flood and allowed people to eat meat (Gen. 9:3). Then the Mosaic Law stated that only certain meats could be eaten (Lev. 11:4-24). Later, Jesus changed the rules given by Moses and made all meat clean to eat (Mark 7:19). Other examples of God changing the rules include rules about sacrifices and offerings, requirements about going to Jerusalem three times a year to worship (Deut. 16:16), not working on Saturday (Exod. 20:8-11), the rule that if a woman’s husband died she had to marry her husband’s brother (Deut. 25:5-6), and the rule that under the Law no one could be a priest unless he was a lineal descendant of Aaron.

The potential problems that arise in not recognizing God’s rule changes become evident when the commandment in Genesis that descendants of Abraham must be circumcised is compared with the New Testament statements that Christians are spiritual descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:29) but if a man is circumcised Christ will be of no benefit to him (Gal. 5:2). Which is the truth, Genesis or Galatians? Recognizing the administrations in Scripture allows for both Genesis and Galatians to be true, they just apply to God’s people at different periods of time. Another potential contradiction that comes from not recognizing how God’s laws changed is that under the Mosaic Law, God allowed a man to have multiple wives. This explains why King David and many other men had multiple wives without being in sin and why God had to give specific laws about the wives, such as that a man could not marry both a woman and her daughter or have two or more sisters as wives (Lev. 18:17-18). But for the New Testament Church, God forbids multiple wives (1 Cor. 7:2-3). The bottom line is that if these rule changes are not considered in view of different administrations, the Bible becomes confusing and contradictory. Almost 100 years ago, Bible scholar Martin Anstey wrote: “…the golden rule is, ‘Distinguish the dispensations and the difficulties will disappear.’” (*How to Master the Bible,* p. 23.).

About 50 days after Jesus died and was raised, on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God started a new administration with some wonderful new rules. The death and resurrection of Jesus paved the way for many wonderful changes that benefit Christians. There is so much goodness and grace in the administration in which Christians live today that God calls the current administration “the administration of God’s grace” (see the REV commentary on Eph. 3:2). Some of the things God changed when the Church Age started on the Day of Pentecost concerned salvation. The death of Christ on the cross and his payment for the sins of humankind was such a world-altering event that it only makes sense that it brought huge changes in how God dealt with people. One such major change is that today, in the Administration of Grace, salvation is a one-time event with everlasting consequences. Note that salvation was not guaranteed during the times of the Old Testament or the Four Gospels, but it is guaranteed for Christians. Indeed, a huge part of the “grace” of the Administration of Grace is that salvation is guaranteed. There are significant and substantive evidences in Scripture that in the Church Age, which stretches from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture, people who believe and are “born again” become part of the Body of Christ and receive permanent salvation.

2) The Evidences

There is plenty of scriptural evidence that salvation is permanent for Christians. To see the permanence of Christian salvation, it is vital that one pays attention to things that are new and unique to the Christian Church and that are not stated in the Old Testament or Gospels. The Bible communicates truth by the words that it uses. To learn the truth, close attention must be given to the words and phrases used in the Bible, including when and where they are used. If salvation is guaranteed for Christians but was not guaranteed before the Day of Pentecost, then that should be reflected in the vocabulary that is used in the Bible. A careful study of the subject of salvation reveals that specific wording and statements made in the New Testament Epistles do not appear in any form in the Old Testament or Gospels, and furthermore, that certain statements about salvation in the Old Testament and Gospels do not appear in the Church Epistles. The unique expressions about salvation that are found in the New Testament Epistles, which apply to Christians, serve as a beacon to call attention to the truth that the salvation achieved by Jesus Christ’s sacrifice is special and different from what people had before he died.

a) New Way to be Saved

The New Testament Epistles reveal that Christians have a new, simple, and straightforward way to be saved: Romans 10:9 (NIV84) says, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” This verse agrees with others in the Church Epistles, such as Romans 3:22, Galatians 2:15, 16, and Ephesians 2:8, which state that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and “not by works.” The way Romans 10:9 is worded is very important. It says that you will be saved “if you confess…and believe.” In the Greek text the verbs are in the aorist tense, which indicates a one-time action; i.e., a singular event. Romans 10:9 does not say “keep confessing and keep believing.” The wording about salvation in the New Testament Epistles shows that Christian salvation is a one-time, instantaneous event. Furthermore, Romans 10:9 finishes by saying “you will be saved.” The person who confesses and believes “will be saved.” That is a promise, and God will make it happen. Throughout history, people have often been uncertain about their futures. God’s promises take away such uncertainty. For as Romans 10:9 states: people who confess and believe “will” be saved.

Faith has always been the way to salvation, but before the Administration of Grace there was no new birth or guarantee of salvation, so a person’s faith had to continue throughout their life (cf. Ezek. 33:11-20). That is why Moses said that righteousness came by being careful to obey the Law (Deut. 6:25) and why there are verses in the Old Testament and Gospels that say a person had to be faithful until death to be saved (e.g., Matt. 24:13). The difference in how people were saved before and after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is shown by the different responses given by Jesus and the apostle Paul regarding this subject.

Jesus and the apostle Paul both taught the way of salvation, and both were asked the basic question, “What must I do to be saved?” Jesus was questioned by a young ruler, and he answered by saying, “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments” (Matt. 19:17). In contrast, Paul answered the Philippian jailor: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). When Jesus answered the young ruler, he had not yet died for the sins of humankind, so people still had to be faithful until death to be saved. But after Jesus died for people’s sin, the New Birth became available and salvation became an instantaneous event and permanent for Christians. That is why Paul said to the Philippian jailor that what he had to do to be saved was believe in Jesus. The verb “believe” in Acts 16:31 is in the aorist tense like the verbs in Romans 10:9, indicating a one-time event. Christian salvation is a one-time event with everlasting results.

b) New Birth and New Incorruptible Seed

When a person acts on Romans 10:9 by confessing that Jesus is Lord and believing that God raised him from the dead, God our Father puts His gift of holy spirit, His very nature, which is referred to as a spiritual seed, into that person, and he is “born again.” Scripture says, “For you have been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). The New Birth is unique to the Christian Church. No one in the Old Testament or Gospels was said to be “born again.”

Although many English versions have the phrase “born again” in John 3:3 and John 3:7, that is a mistranslation. The two Greek words that are often translated “born again” in John 3 are different from the Greek word translated “born again” in 1 Peter 1:23. In the context of John 3, the Greek *gennēthē anōthen* (γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν), which only occurs in the Bible in John 3, should be translated “born from above.” The birth from above of John 3:3 and 3:7 refers to resurrection from the dead, not the New Birth that Christians experience. A number of English versions accurately translate *gennēthē anōthen*, and read “born from above” instead of “born again” in John 3:3 and 3:7 (GW, NAB, NET, NJB, NRSV, YLT, *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*, Charles Williams’ New Testament, *The Kingdom New Testament* by N.T. Wright, and *The Source NT* by A. Nyland. Also see the REV commentary on John 3:3, “born from above,” and John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*, Appendix “H”).

God uses the concept of “birth” to communicate what happens in Christian salvation. There are many parallels between physical birth and spiritual birth. One similarity is that physical birth is permanent and cannot be undone. It is so important to God that Christians understand the New Birth that He uses three different words for it:

1. *Anagennaō* (#313 ἀναγεννάω; from the Greek prefix *ana*, “again” or “up,” and *gennaō*, “to give birth”). It means to be given birth to again, or to be born again, and occurs in 1 Peter 1:3 and 1:23, “in his great mercy he has given us new birth…” (1 Pet. 1:3).
2. *Palingenesia* (#3824 παλιγγενεσία; from *palin*, “again” and *genesis*, “genesis” or “origin”). It means to have an origin again, a new genesis, and occurs in Titus 3:5: “He saved us through the washing of rebirth….”
3. *apokueō* (#616 ἀποκυέω; from the Greek prefix *apo*, “away from,” and *kueō*, “to be pregnant”). It means “to give birth to,” and occurs in James 1:18, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth….”

Every one of the three Greek words listed above was used by the Greeks for birth, and in the context of the New Birth they all appear in the New Testament Epistles and nowhere else in the Bible. *Anagennaō* and *apokueō* appear only in epistles to the Church. *Palingenesia* appears in the Gospel of Matthew, but in Matthew it is not about people but refers to the regeneration of the earth.

As every parent knows, the predominant truth about a birth is the continuing, physical presence of a baby. God used all three commonly understood words for “birth” to underscore that what happens when a Christian is “born again” is a continuing, spiritual presence, i.e., the holy spirit born within a person. Just as a physical birth is permanent and cannot be undone, so also this spiritual birth is permanent and cannot be undone. The fact that these three words are used scripturally only of Christians shows the uniqueness of Christian salvation.

People who believe Christians can lose their salvation argue that things that are born die, so Christians must be able to die, too. But the Christian New Birth is not of flesh and blood that can die, it is of God’s spirit. In all of God’s creation there was never a birth like the New Birth. God’s created spirit beings, such as angels, were created, not “born again,” and even Jesus Christ was not “born again” in the New Testament sense of the word—he was born of God, but not “born again.” Only Christians are “born again,” and the fact that the teaching of the New Birth in the epistles to the Church is mentioned along with “everlasting life” means that the Christian is born of God and will never die. We have an everlasting future.

One aspect of spiritual birth is that the Christian is born again of spiritual “seed.” 1 Peter 1:23 (REV) says, “for you have been born again, not from corruptible seed, but from incorruptible, through the living and enduring word of God.” If the holy spirit that is born in the Christian is called “seed,” then 1 Peter 1:23 is saying it is “incorruptible,” and therefore it gives the person who has it everlasting life.

c) Adoption

Birth is permanent, so to emphasize the permanence of our guarantee of salvation God calls it “birth.” But since in the Roman culture adoption was also considered permanent, God calls our new birth “adoption” as well, in part to emphasize its permanence (see the REV commentary on Eph. 1:5). “Adoption” does not by any means introduce uncertainty or the possibility of becoming undone, but rather emphasizes that Christians are a permanent part of God’s family.

d) A New Divine Nature

Every child is born with the nature of the parent. Because Christians have been born of God, 2 Peter 1:4 says Christians are partakers of the divine nature, the nature of God. That Christians have a divine nature is unique to the Christian Church. No one in the Old Testament or Gospels is ever said to receive, or “partake of,” a divine nature, not even the prophets who had God’s holy spirit upon them. Christians have the nature of God because they are His children by birth, but people who lived before the Church Administration did not have His divine nature in them because they were not “born” of God.

In actuality, Christians have two natures—a new divine nature (the result of their spiritual birth) and an old sin nature (the result of their physical birth). These antithetical natures struggle against each other within every Christian. Galatians 5:17 (CJB) says, “For the old nature wants what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is contrary to the old nature. These oppose each other, so that you find yourselves unable to carry out your good intentions.” Only in Scripture specifically addressed to the Christian Church does the Bible say that the “nature” of sin (sometimes called the “flesh” or “old nature”) and the “nature” of God (the “spirit”) “are in conflict with each other” because only since Pentecost have believers been “born again” and had a divine nature born within them.

It is also important to notice that since Christians have a divine, holy nature they are called “holy” themselves. Most English versions represent this fact by calling Christians “saints,” but a clearer translation would be “holy ones” (see the REV commentary on Phil. 1:1 concerning “holy ones”). There were “holy ones” in the Old Testament, but a study of the subject shows that the people who were called “holy” in the Old Testament were called “holy” because of their works. But after the Day of Pentecost, every person who makes Jesus Christ their Lord and is born again becomes “holy” because the presence of “holy” spirit born inside imparts a divine, “holy” nature. Thus, there is a shift between the Old Testament and the Church Age when it comes to what makes a person “holy.” Godly works made a person holy before Pentecost, while the indwelling presence of the gift of holy spirit makes a Christian “holy” today. This explains why the Church Epistles are addressed to the “holy ones” (saints). That salutation recognizes that every Christian is a “holy one,” not just those in the Christian Church who live holy lives.

Since it is the presence of holy spirit inside that makes Christians holy, Christian salvation is assured. Ephesians 1:13-14 says that Christians are sealed with holy spirit until the fullness of their redemption is manifested at the time of Christ’s return for His Church. If the Christian is sealed “until” they are fully redeemed, then they cannot lose their holy nature before the time; they cannot sin and become unholy or unsaved. The exhortation for Christians to live holy lives is not so they can be saved or somehow maintain their salvation, but so that their physical lives line up with what God has already done for them spiritually. In this way, they can have many blessings God has in store for them now, and also garner rewards they will enjoy in their life to come.

e) New Creations

The New Birth is an act of creation—God creates His nature in people when they become Christians. “If anyone is in *union with* Christ, *he is* a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). People in the Old Testament and Gospels believed in God, but God never created anything in them when they believed. This explains why the Bible never calls any believer in the Old Testament or Gospels a “new creation.” In contrast, when a person in the Administration of Grace believes, God actually “creates” something new and permanent in them. Other verses besides 2 Corinthians 5:17 also indicate that Christians are new creations (e.g., Col. 3:10).

Some people believe that “new creation” just refers to the fact that Christians are supposed to live a new, godly life. However, if that were true then the term “new creation” should appear throughout the whole Bible because every believer, no matter when they lived, was exhorted to live a new and godly life. But the phrase “new creation” is unique to the Church Epistles. Each Christian is literally a “new creation” because God’s gift of holy spirit was created in them, and before the New Birth, before the Day of Pentecost, no believer was a “new creation” because the holy spirit was not created in them. Note that in 2 Corinthians 5:17, the Bible says that if anyone is “in union with Christ,” they are a new creation, so being a new creation is dependent on the New Birth, because a person is only “in Christ” if they are born again and thus part of the Body of Christ. So Corinthians is saying that if a person is “in Christ,” which means they are born again with the gift of holy spirit created in them and part of the Body of Christ, then they are indeed a new creation.

f) Sealed with a New Holy Spirit

Each and every Christian is sealed with the gift of holy spirit—a new holy spirit that came on the Day of Pentecost and had not existed before. Christians are sealed at the time of their New Birth. Every Christian is born of God, and in birth, the nature of the parent is passed down to the offspring. In the New Birth, the nature of the Father, God, is passed to believers, His children. But what is the nature of God? The Scripture says that God is “holy” and God is “spirit,” so what is “born” (by creation) inside each Christian is God’s gift of “holy spirit.” Thus, another way God emphasized the permanence of Christian salvation was by saying that Christians are “sealed” with the holy spirit. Ephesians 1:13-14 says, “in whom you also, when you heard the word of truth—the good news of your salvation—and when you believed in him, were sealed with the promised holy spirit, 14which is the guarantee of our inheritance, until the redemption of *God’s own* purchased possession, to the praise of his glory.”

[For more on the holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Being “sealed” with holy spirit is new to the Administration of Grace. No one in the Old Testament or Gospels is said to be “sealed” with holy spirit. Quite the opposite! God took His holy spirit from King Saul when he sinned (1 Samuel 16:14). Also, Psalm 51:11 records that after committing adultery with Bathsheba and having Uriah killed, King David asked God not to take holy spirit from him. But in contrast to the way God gave holy spirit before the Day of Pentecost, in the Church Age the gift of holy spirit is “born” by creation in Christian believers and thus they are permanently sealed with holy spirit. Furthermore, the Bible says Christians are sealed “until the redemption of God’s own purchased possession,” that is, until the time that their redemption is fully realized and every Christian receives their new everlasting body that is like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21). Christians are not sealed “until they sin” or “until they renounce Christ,” they are sealed “until the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). The holy spirit created by God inside a person “seals” that person as God’s property and guarantees their salvation. Christians never have to pray like David did, begging God not to take His gift of holy spirit from them.

An understanding of the gift of holy spirit that Christians receive from God is important in understanding the permanence of salvation for Christians. Christians are “born” of God because the holy spirit was “born” in them at the time of their salvation. They are new creations because the holy spirit was born in them by an act of creation. They are God’s children because He has given birth to His nature, holy spirit, in Christians, which is also why they are partakers of God’s divine nature. Christians are called “holy ones” (saints) because God’s gift of “holy spirit” within them makes them holy.

Another key in understanding the role of God’s gift of holy spirit in the Christians’ guarantee of salvation is that the holy spirit they have today is called “the promised holy spirit” (Acts 2:33; Eph. 1:13). In the Old Testament, God promised that in the Millennial Kingdom, He would pour out holy spirit upon His people, and it would be a “new spirit” (Ezek. 11:19, 20; 36:26, 27; Joel 2:28, 29; John 14:17; cf. Isa. 32:15; 44:3-5; Ezek. 37:12; 39:29; John 15:26; 16:13). John 7:39 tells us that new spirit had not been given up to and including the time of Christ’s ministry. It says, “for as yet there was no spirit, because Jesus was not yet gloried” (John 7:39 has not been translated well in most English Bibles; see the REV commentary on John 7:39).

Before Christ died, God did not give the new holy spirit that He promised in the Old Testament because Jesus had not yet inaugurated the New Covenant by the shedding of his blood. But on the Day of Pentecost, less than two months after his death and resurrection, Jesus gave this new holy spirit to the Church (Acts 2:33). One of the attributes of the holy spirit God promised was that it would be permanent in people (Isa. 59:21; Ezek. 11:19-20; 37:12-14). What Christians have today is the gift of holy spirit that God promised in the Old Testament would be permanent. If Christians cannot lose the gift of holy spirit, then their new birth cannot be reversed, and they cannot lose their salvation. This explains why Romans 8:38-39 says that “nothing” can separate us from the love of God. That is not a platitude or hyperbole, it’s a statement as to the guarantee of Christian salvation.

g) Salvation is Guaranteed

One of the things that is unique to the Christian Church is that Christians have a guarantee of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:14). Ephesians 1:13-14 (REV) says: “in whom you also, when you heard the word of truth—the good news of your salvation—and when you believed in him, were sealed with the promised holy spirit, **14**which is the guarantee of our inheritance, until the redemption of *God’s own* purchased possession, to the praise of his glory.” This “guarantee” is indeed unique for the Church—there are no verses in the Old Testament or the Four Gospels that say salvation is guaranteed.

Although some English Bibles translate the Greek word *arrabōn* (#728 ἀρραβών) in Ephesians 1:14 as “guarantee” (cf. CJB, ESV, GW, NIV, NKJV, NLT, RSV), there are versions that instead use “earnest,” “pledge,” “deposit,” “down payment,” or something similar. But saying “pledge” or “down payment” does not change the meaning of the verse, which is that Christians have something now that assures them that they will have the fullness later. The Greek word *arrabōn* means a deposit in advance that guarantees the full payment to come. For Christians, that means the presence of the gift of holy spirit in them now assures them that they will be given new, immortal bodies and will be with Christ forever. The NIV gets the sense of the text very well: “Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Cor. 5:5). If God “guarantees” everlasting life, then it is indeed guaranteed. The Bible never says that the guarantee is in any way conditional, like, “I guarantee it IF you will do such and such.” Christians are God’s children by birth, and His guarantee of everlasting life is absolute and unconditional.

[For more on *arrabōn* and “guarantee,” see REV commentary on Eph. 1:14.]

There are some theologians who argue that salvation is guaranteed only to those who remain faithful to Christ throughout their whole lives, but that is not what the text of Ephesians says. There is no “if” in God’s saying that the holy spirit is a deposit that guarantees us our future inheritance. But more to the point, if what the Church Epistles are saying is that a person will be saved only if they remain faithful to God, then there is nothing new about that message; it is the same message that is in the Old Testament and Gospels. If the “guarantee” of salvation in the Church Epistles is really just the same message that the Bible has proclaimed since Genesis, then either the Church Epistles should not use the word “guarantee” or the whole Bible should use it. It is essential to recognize that when God changes vocabulary in the Bible, it is a signal that something is important. In the Church Epistles God uses new vocabulary that is not used in the Old Testament or Gospels in order to describe the new reality of permanent salvation and the new reality that Christians have a “guarantee” of their salvation.

h) Christians are Part of the Body of Christ

When a person is born again, they become part of a newly-created spiritual Body, “the Body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27; cf. Rom. 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 10:16; 12:12-20; Eph. 1:23; 3:6; 4:4; Col. 1:18; 3:15). The “Body of Christ” started on the Day of Pentecost and is part of the Administration of Grace. It did not exist, nor was it mentioned, in the Old Testament or Gospels. Like the physical body, the Body of Christ is comprised of many members, with Jesus Christ as its head (Eph. 5:23).

The Body of Christ is unique to the Administration of Grace and is made up of all those who believe, no matter what their gender, nationality, or social standing in this world. Galatians 3:28 makes it clear that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, nor slave nor free person, in Christ. This is a shift from the Old Testament and Gospels, in which the people of God are distinctly counted as being either a Jew or a Gentile—and there were many Gentiles who lived righteous lives in the Old Testament, in fact, there were not even any Jews at all until Jacob was born, and by then the Old Testament was chronologically more than half over.

Once a person is a member of the Body of Christ, there is no indication they can be severed from it. There is not one explicit verse in the Church Epistles that states a person can be amputated from the Body of Christ. Ungodly behavior can affect a person’s fellowship relationship with God and others and can affect the rewards a person will receive in the future, but it does not cause a person to be severed from the Body of Christ and lose their salvation.

i) Already Saved

One of the unique statements made to Christians after the Day of Pentecost is that they “have been saved” (Eph. 2:8). But to truly understand what Ephesians 2:8 means when it says that Christians “have been saved,” we must understand what “salvation” is in the Bible. The Greek verb commonly translated “saved” is *sōzō* (#4982 σῴζω) and it means to be rescued, delivered, or saved; in some contexts, it can have a specific meaning such as “healed” (Matt. 9:21). No one is “saved” yet in the literal sense of the word because no one has yet been rescued from weakness, sickness, and death, and no Christian yet has the things that are promised when they are actually “saved,” such as a glorious new body that is immortal and incorruptible (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:42-44, 51-54).

But if Christians are not saved yet, what do they have now, and why does Ephesians say that Christians “have been saved”? The Bible says Christians “have been saved” in order to fully assure them they will be saved in the future. It is well-known that if a person is to correctly understand the Bible then they must understand the language and idioms the Bible uses. One such idiom is called by scholars the “prophetic perfect.” The “prophetic perfect” is an idiom that is mainly used in Semitic languages, but occasionally in others as well, to emphasize the certainty of a future event by speaking of it as if it has already happened. (Several examples of the prophetic perfect idiom will be discussed in this appendix).

God used the prophetic perfect idiom many times in the Bible to assure people about future events. For example, in Isaiah chapter 53, the prophet Isaiah uses many past tense verbs to describe what was going to happen to Messiah even though he was writing more than 700 years before Messiah was born. Isaiah 53:5-8 (REV abridged) says, “But he **was pierced** for our transgressions, **crushed** for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace **was** on him…Yahweh **has laid** on him the iniquity of us all… He **was oppressed** and he **was afflicted**, yet he **did not** open his mouth...He **was taken away** by oppression and judgment…he **was cut off** out of the land of the living and **stricken** for the disobedience of my people..” Why did Isaiah use past tense verbs to describe a future event? Isaiah used the prophetic perfect idiom and wrote about the Messiah as if he had already come to assure the people he would come and suffer for their sin.

The REV, quoted above, translates the verbs in the Hebrew text literally as past tense verbs. It should be noted that some English versions try to avoid confusing the English reader by translating the verbs as future tense verbs. While that can help the English reader, it does not teach the important lesson that the Bible often speaks of future events in the past tense to assure the reader that the events will occur.

The Hebrew text does not read that Christ “will be” despised and rejected, even though that would be literally accurate. Instead it employs the prophetic perfect idiom because the coming sufferings of Christ were certain to happen. Similarly, God assures us that Jesus will come back by saying in Jude, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones” (Jude 1:14 NASB, a quite literal translation of the Greek text). Even though the Lord Jesus has not come back yet, God speaks of it in the past tense in Jude—that Jesus “came”—so that Christians can be assured that he is coming back.

The Hebrew text makes many promises about the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom using the prophetic perfect, but the English reader cannot see most of them because English Bibles often change the past tense verbs to the future tense so the reader will not be confused. For example, in the Hebrew text, God told Abraham he “had given” the Promised Land to Abraham’s descendants before Abraham even had any descendants (Gen. 15:18). Job said of his redeemer, “my eyes have seen him,” some 2,000 years before Christ came (Job 19:27). The prophet Balaam said, “a star [the Messiah] has come out of Jacob” some 1,400 years before Jesus was even born (Num. 24:17). Isaiah said, “To us, a child has been born,” but Jesus’ birth was still more than 700 years away (Isa. 9:6). Similarly, Isaiah 11:1 says, “A shoot [the Messiah] has come up from the stump of Jesse.” All these prophecies state future events as if they were in the past in order to assure people they would happen. The same is true of what God says about Christians being saved now. Christians are not literally saved yet, but they have a promise and guarantee that they will be in the future.

[For more about the prophetic perfect, see the REV commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Scholars can usually tell if a verse is using a past tense verb literally or idiomatically as a prophetic perfect because if the past tense verb is idiomatic there will be other verses about the same subject that use the future tense and thus state the truth literally. For example, it is clear that when Jude says the Lord “came,” the prophetic perfect is being used because there are many verses that say the Lord’s coming is still future. Similarly, Ephesians 2:6 says Christians are already seated in heaven, but one can tell the verse is using the prophetic perfect because many other verses say Christians are on earth, and besides, it is peoples’ common experience that they live on earth, not in heaven.

In the case of Christian salvation, there are a couple of verses that say Christians are saved, but there are many more that say, or clearly imply, that salvation is still future (e.g., Rom. 5:10; 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:5). The verses that say salvation is still in the future are literal, because when Christians are fully saved they will no longer experience weakness, sickness, or death and they will be in their new, everlasting bodies that will be like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21). Christians “will be saved” (Rom. 5:10; 10:9) in the future. What Christians have today is a promise that they will be saved; a guarantee of future salvation. When Ephesians 2:8 says Christians already “have been saved,” it is using an idiom to powerfully express the truth that they will absolutely be saved in the future.

The expression of the biblical promise that Christians will be saved in words that indicate they are already saved is unique to the New Testament Epistles. The Bible never records God speaking to any group before the Day of Pentecost and telling them they “were saved” while they were still alive. Before Pentecost, people had to remain faithful to be saved. But in contrast, Christian salvation is a one-time birth event, and “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from among the dead, you WILL [emphasis ours] be saved” (Rom. 10:9). God can use the prophetic perfect idiom when speaking of Christian salvation because once a person confesses Christ as Lord and is born again, their salvation is guaranteed.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom as it refers to salvation, see commentary on Eph. 2:8.]

j) Already Raised from the Dead

One of the many things that is unique to the Christian Church is that Christians are said to be raised from the dead before they have even died. For example, Ephesians 2:6, written to living Christians, says that God “raised us up with him.” Also, Paul wrote to the church at Colossae and said, “you were raised with Christ” (Col. 3:1). But how can the Bible say that Christians have been raised from the dead before they died? The Bible saying that living Christians have already been raised from the dead is another use of the prophetic perfect idiom (explained above). Paul wrote in Ephesians and Colossians that Christians were already raised with Christ because they were born again, and because of that reality, Paul knew they would be raised from the dead in the future.

When a person gets born again and becomes a Christian, that person becomes part of the Body of Christ and is “in Christ.” The Bible says Christians are “in Christ,” often meaning “in union with Christ,” and this union is an actual mystical union accomplished in the spiritual world. By virtue of being in union with Christ, the Bible says that Christians went through what Christ himself went through. This is expressed in the Bible when it says that Christians were circumcised with Christ (Col. 2:11); baptized with Christ (Rom. 6:3); crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8; 2 Tim. 2:11), buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12, 3:1), and are now seated with Christ in heaven (Eph. 2:6). By virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, what happened to Christ is said to have happened to the Christian.

To correctly understand the Bible, it is vital to notice that only Christians are said to go through those things that Christ went through. No Old Testament believer was said to be baptized with Christ, or died with Christ, or was raised with Christ. No believer in the Gospels was said to be circumcised with Christ, or crucified with Christ, or seated in heaven with Christ. The Body of Christ started on the Day of Pentecost, and only on and after that day could people be born again and be in union with Christ such that they experienced in a spiritual way what Jesus experienced physically (scholars sometimes refer to the union of the Christian with Christ as a “mystical” union because the nature and process of the union are not known). So when the Bible speaks of events that happened in the past for Christ, such as being raised from the dead and seated in heaven, and says that Christians have experienced those things even though they are still future for Christians, the Bible is using the prophetic perfect idiom to assure Christians that those things will indeed happen to them and for them. The Bible’s use of the prophetic perfect idiom regarding these things expresses God’s guarantee that Christians will be raised from the dead, be seated in heaven with Christ, and live forever with Christ.

As was stated earlier, one way that scholars know when the prophetic perfect idiom is being used is that the Bible will almost always have that same truth expressed literally somewhere else. It is clear that when Ephesians or Colossians says Christians “have been raised” from the dead, for example, they are using the prophetic perfect idiom because there are many other verses that say Christians “will be raised” from the dead in the future when Christ appears. This illustrates that God uses literal language as well as the prophetic perfect idiom to communicate to Christians that their salvation is guaranteed and they will live forever with him.

An example of the use of literal language that shows the permanence of Christian salvation is found in Romans 6:3-8. This set of verses establishes a connection between Christians being in union with Christ and the promise that they will be raised from the dead.

Romans 6:3-8 REV (abridged):

3Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into *union with* Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4Therefore, we were buried with him by baptism into *union with his* death…5For if we have become united *with him* in a death like his, we will certainly also be in a resurrection like his... 8Now since we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him,

Romans 6:5 speaks of our being raised from the dead in the future and says “we WILL certainly also be in a resurrection like his.” This statement is unique to the Christian Church. There is no verse in the Old Testament or Gospels that promises that if someone believes at one point in their life, they will “certainly” be raised like Christ was. The “certainty” of Christian salvation is due to the New Birth and being in the Body of Christ. Paul also writes, “we believe” we will live with Christ (Rom. 6:8), which does not mean “we hope,” but rather that “we believe it.” God says that if we died with Christ, we will live with him, so Christians can rest assured in that belief, just as Paul did.

Romans 6:5 and 6:8 make the point that Christians have a secure salvation—if we died with Christ we will be raised like Christ, and the Christian has died with Christ. A similar verse is 2 Timothy 2:11: “This statement is trustworthy: For if we died with him, we will also live with him.” Every Christian died with Christ, so every Christian will be raised from the dead like he was. God wants Christians to know that their salvation is not in doubt, so He makes the literal statement that we will be raised with Christ in the future, and the figurative statement (using the prophetic perfect) that we have already been raised from the dead with Christ. God said that Christians would be raised from the dead two different ways, figuratively and literally, so we would not miss the point—Christians will be raised from the dead into everlasting life in the future.

[For more on “in union with Christ,” see the REV commentary on Eph. 1:3.]

k) Already Seated in Heaven

The Bible says Christians are seated in heaven. God “raised us up with him [Jesus] and seated us with him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). Of course, Christians are not literally in heaven right now as both the Bible and life experience show. But God wanted to make it clear via the phrasing of Ephesians that salvation is secure and Christians will one day be in heaven with Christ. Consequently, God used the prophetic perfect idiom and referred to it as a past event to establish the unassailable certainty that a person who is born again will live forever with Christ.

It would be disingenuous of God to use the prophetic perfect idiom and say Christians are already in heaven if in fact they might not be there in the future. Thus, once again one can see God using unique vocabulary in the Church Epistles to describe a reality that is new for the Christian Church and different from what the believers in the Old Testament and Gospels had available to them. God never told the believers in the Old Testament or Gospels that they were already in heaven. God could not have used the prophetic perfect idiom for Old Testament salvation because it was not secure. Guaranteed salvation based on the completed work of Christ could not be offered until Christ died for the sins of humankind. It is only in light of Christ’s death and resurrection that the prophetic perfect idiom can be used to describe Christian salvation because it is guaranteed. It is just as Romans 10:9 says: if a person confesses Christ as Lord and believes God raised him from the dead, that person “will be saved,” or, as stated in the prophetic perfect idiom, is “already in heaven.”

l) Already Citizens of Heaven

As children of God, born-again Christians belong to God’s heavenly kingdom, not to the earthly realm where their physical bodies reside. Scripture makes this clear: “But our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20 REV). Here again, the uniqueness of the Christian Church is revealed. Many people in the Old Testament and Gospels believed, but none were referred to as citizens of heaven. Christians can be called citizens of heaven, while believers in the Old Testament and Gospels could not, because Christian salvation is guaranteed. In contrast, people in the Old Testament and Gospels had to stay faithful to be saved because their salvation was not guaranteed. Thus they could not be called citizens of heaven while they lived. Furthermore, there is no way a Christian’s heavenly citizenship can be revoked because Christians are sealed with holy spirit until the day of redemption, at which time they will no longer be in an earthly body, but will be in a new heavenly body, taken up to heaven with Jesus (1 Cor. 15:42-44; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). The only reason the Bible can say Christians are citizens of heaven now is because their salvation is guaranteed; if their salvation was not guaranteed, the Bible would have to say that they “might be” citizens of heaven one day.

m) Already Glorified

The Administration of Grace, with its guarantee of salvation, is much more glorious than the Mosaic Law. The Law was glorious in that it gave light and justice where there had been confusion and darkness, but Scripture reveals that the glory of the Administration of Grace far surpasses the glory of the Mosaic Law. “For what was glorious [the Law] has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory” (2 Cor. 3:10). But what has God given the Christian Church that is so new and so glorious that in comparison to it the Law of Moses had “no glory?”

At this point, it helps to properly understand the biblical meaning of “glory.” While “glory” has many meanings and therefore the exact meaning in any given verse is subject to the context, the basic idea of “glory” is “importance, weight, respect, honor, majesty, and reputation,” and it also often involved “being praised.” Given that, what could Christians have that is so glorious—so weighty, important, respectable, honorable, and praiseworthy—that there was “no glory” in the Law in comparison? After all, Old Testament believers could be saved, and some of the miracles they did, such as splitting an ocean or stopping a river, have not even been recorded in the Church Age. That seems like a lot of glory, but the Bible says the glory Christians have makes the glory of the Old Testament appear as “no glory” in comparison.

Some of the “glorious” things Christians have that people in the Old Testament and Gospels did not have include having God as their birth Father and having the powerful presence of the holy spirit created inside them. However, the primary “glory” that Christians have is the permanence of salvation brought by the New Birth —that God’s children by birth are not in danger of everlasting death. The guaranteed promise of everlasting life is the greatest “glory” there is.

But not only do Christians have a new glory that is so glorious that the Law had “no glory” in comparison, the Bible says Christians are already glorified (Rom. 8:30), i.e., they are already in their new glorious bodies and in glory with Jesus. As was stated in Ephesians 2:6 above, Christians are already seated in heaven, which is an example of the prophetic perfect. Peter also speaks of already being a partaker in the glory that is still future (1 Pet. 5:1).

Christians are said to be already glorified because it is absolute and certain that they will be glorified in the future. Romans 8:17-18 says their glory is in the future, which is literally true. However, Romans 8:30 emphasizes the fact that their future glory is secure by using the prophetic perfect. The Christian salvation is secure. Christians will be glorified and be in heaven, so the Bible says they are already glorified and seated in heaven. Thus, both literal language and figurative language is used to emphasize the truth that Christian salvation is secure.

Believers in the Old Testament could become unfaithful and thus not attain salvation, so the Bible never says anyone in the Old Testament or Gospels is already glorified. But Christian salvation is unique because it is a one-time birth event and guaranteed. This means that Christians can be spoken of as already glorified even though their actual glorification will come in the future when they are taken to be with Christ. The reason God spoke about Christians differently than the believers in the Old Testament and Gospels is precisely because Old Testament salvation was not guaranteed, while Christian salvation is guaranteed.

n) New Relationship with God—the Love of a Birth-Father

One of the promises unique to the Christian Church and absent from the Old Testament and Gospels is that the Christian cannot be separated from the love of God. This promise provides additional assurance to Christians of the permanence of their salvation. Because of the New Birth, God is the birth Father of Christians. The bond between parents and their birth children is practically universal. No matter how a child behaves, the parent loves the child. The permanence of Christian salvation based on the New Birth is also seen in the shift in how God expresses His love relationship with Christians as opposed to what He said about Israel in the Old Testament. The way this is worded in Romans is especially impactful because Paul specifically notes that what Christians have in Christ is different from the Old Testament. In this regard, Paul even quotes Psalm 44:22 from the Old Testament, but says “No.”

Romans 8:35-39 (REV)

35What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36As it is written [in Ps. 44:22], “**For your sake we are being killed all day long, we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered**.” 37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Those verses express two great truths: first, that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39), and second, that this is a change from the Old Testament. Paul makes his point clearly and powerfully, and some of the impact of what Paul wrote can be seen when it is compared to what God said to His “chosen people,” the Jews in Israel, when they turned away from Him. Because of Israel’s sin, God told the prophet Hosea to name his daughter “Lo-ruhamah,” that is, “No-Compassion” (or “Not Pitied”) because He would not have compassion on Israel. Then, when Israel still did not repent and obey God’s commands, God told Hosea to name his son “Lo-ammi,” that is, “Not My People,” saying Israel was no longer His people and He was not their God (Hos. 1:6-9). Furthermore, Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8 speak of God divorcing Israel and sending her away: “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries” (Jer. 3:8 NIV). God did indeed send Israel away. The Israelites were defeated and carried away from the Promised Land by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and scattered around the Assyrian empire, and they are still scattered around the world to this day.

In contrast to Israel, who became unloved and were no longer considered God’s people because of their sin, God specifically promises that Christians cannot be separated from His love for any reason. This means Christian salvation is secure. If Christians could become unsaved and then destroyed in the Lake of Fire, then they would be separated by death from God and His love. But God says Christians can never be separated from His love, thus giving them an assurance of everlasting life.

[For more on God being called our “Father,” see commentary on Rom. 8:15 in the REV.]

o) New Ending

The Administration of Grace began on the Day of Pentecost when Christ poured out the new gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:4, 33) and it will end with the Rapture when dead Christians are raised, living Christians are changed, and both groups are taken to heaven in new bodies like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-54). The Rapture is only spoken of in the Church Epistles and is something that only Christians will experience. It is new and only for them. In the Rapture, Christians will meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air (not on the earth). Some people believe that Matthew 24:37-41 is about the Rapture, but it is not. Reading it in context shows that it refers to Christ’s coming to earth as a conqueror and a judge and compares the Judgment Day of the wicked of Noah’s day with the Judgment Day of the wicked at the time Christ comes back to earth (see commentary on Matt. 24:40).

Since the Rapture occurs only in the Church Epistles, many scholars deny that it will ever occur, thinking that if it was going to happen, it would have been spoken about in more than just a couple of places in the Church Epistles. That, however, is exactly the point: only Christians are in the Rapture, so it is only spoken of in the Church Epistles. It is unique to God’s children by birth, so it is not in the Old Testament or the Gospels.

The Bible teaches that Christians will be raptured into heaven as the Church Epistles state, while believers who lived during the period of the Old Testament and Four Gospels will come up out of their graves in the Resurrection of the Righteous, also called the “first resurrection” and the “resurrection of life” (cf. Ezek. 37:11-14; Dan. 12:2; Luke 14:14; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:5).

[For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

p) A One-Time Event

The vocabulary used to refer to Christian salvation shows it is a one-time event. The terms and phrases used to express Christian salvation such as New Birth, sealed, new creation, the gift of holy spirit, receiving a new divine nature, and becoming citizens of heaven, highlight the truth that what is being described is not a process but a one-time event occurring in a moment of time the outcome of which is irrevocable. In contrast, none of those concepts is applied to people in the Old Testament or Gospels precisely because their salvation was the outcome of continued faith in God, not a one-time birth event. Furthermore, unlike Christian salvation, Old Testament salvation was not guaranteed because it was conditional on people continuing in faith until they died.

q) Christians Will Not be Condemned to Die in the Lake of Fire

According to the Bible, one of the unique promises to the Christian Church is that no Christian will be condemned to die in the Lake of Fire. God’s promise of “no condemnation” cannot be found in the Old Testament or Gospels; it is exclusive to the Christian Church. Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in *union with* Christ Jesus.” The Greek word translated “condemnation” in Romans 8:1 is *katakrima* (#2631 κατάκριμα). It only occurs three times in the New Testament—Romans 5:16, 18; and 8:1—and its use in those three verses is consistent. *Katakrima* refers to both the pronouncement of guilt and the ultimate infliction of punishment. Thus, in a legal setting, as in Romans, *katakrima* refers to both the guilt of the offender and the retribution the offender deserves and will receive.

Romans 5 is about Adam’s transgression and how Adam’s sin resulted in “condemnation” for all people. Romans 5:16 says that “judgment came from one transgression [Adam’s sin] resulting in condemnation [*katakrima*].” Romans 5:18 gives the same message: “one transgression resulted in condemnation for all people.” Thus, every person is “condemned” because of Adam’s sin. But condemned to what? Every person is condemned to death (Rom. 6:23) by being burned up in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15; cf. Matt. 10:28). Romans 5 is saying that Adam sinned, and the result was “condemnation” for everyone. Everyone is guilty before God, and unless their sin is paid for, they will die in the Lake of Fire. Thankfully, Romans 5 also says Jesus paid the price for sin by dying in place of sinners. Since Jesus paid the price for sin, those who accept him as their Lord and Savior are declared righteous in God’s eyes and consequently granted everlasting life (Rom. 5:6-10).

[For more on death in the Lake of Fire see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on the legal setting of Romans and being “declared righteous” by God, see REV commentary on Rom. 3:20.]

r) Christians Can Know They Are Saved

Christians can “know” they are saved, they do not have to wonder or guess. This is unique to the Christian Church and is due to the New Birth, the presence of the gift of holy spirit, and the guarantee of salvation.

2 Corinthians 5:1

For we **know** that if our house here on earth, our tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, everlasting in the heavens.

1 John 3:2

Beloved, we are children of God now, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. We **know** that when it is revealed, we will be like him because we will see him just as he is.

1 John 5:13

I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you can **know** that you have life *in the* age *to come*.

2 Corinthians 4:13-14

But since we have the same spirit of trust as that shown in what has been written, “I believed, and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and so we speak, **knowing** that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us up also to be with Jesus, and will bring us, along with you, into his presence.

It is sometimes said that people like Paul, Peter (1 Pet. 5:1), and John could know they were saved because they were such holy people, but the average Christian cannot know they are saved. But note that in 2 Corinthians 4:14 and 5:1, Paul not only says that he knows that he will be with Jesus, but that the people in the Church at Corinth would also be with Jesus. Paul may have been confident in his own walk, but one has only to read the Epistles to the Corinthians to see that the Corinthians had lots of problems and sin. Given that, the only sure way Paul could write that he “knew” that the people of Corinth would be with him in the presence of the Lord would have been if he knew their salvation was secure in Christ—he could certainly not be sure that none of them would reject him.

Furthermore, there are other verses that do not specifically use the word “know” that show that Christians can know they are saved. For example, Paul wrote to the Church at Colossae and said, “*but* when Christ—your life—appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). Paul knew Christian salvation was secure, so he wrote to the church at Colossae, which had plenty of problems, and said they would appear in glory with Christ when Christ appeared. But Paul could not have written that to the whole church if Christian salvation was not secure.

Before the New Birth in the Administration of Grace, people had to maintain their faith to be saved. That meant there was always some room for them to doubt their salvation, and people could wonder if they maintained enough faith in the sight of God to have everlasting life. The consistent message in the Old Testament and the Gospels is that people had to be faithful throughout their lives, and this is quite clearly stated in Ezekiel (in the section of Ezekiel below, “live” means “live forever,” and “die” means “die forever).”

Ezek. 33:12-19 (REV)

12And you, son of man [Ezekiel], say to the children of your people: The righteousness of the righteous person will not deliver him in the day when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked person, he will not fall by it in the day that he turns from his wickedness; nor will the one who is righteous be able to live by it in the day when he sins. 13When I say to a righteous person that he will live, yes live, if he trusts in his righteousness and commits injustice, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but because of his injustice that he has committed, because of it, he will die. 14But when I say to a wicked person, ‘You will die, yes, die,’ if he turns from his sins and does what is just and righteous, 15if that wicked person returns the pledge, gives back what he had taken by robbery, walks in the statutes *that give* life, *and* does not commit injustice, he will live, yes live, he will not die! 16None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and righteous; he will live, yes, live! 17Yet the children of your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ But as for them, *it is* their way that is not fair. 18When a righteous person turns from his righteousness, and commits injustice, then he will die because of it. 19But when a wicked person turns from his wickedness and does what is just and righteous, he will live because of it.

What God said in Ezekiel—that if a righteous person turned to a life of sin they would die forever, and if a sinner turned away from their sin and obeyed God they would live forever—is consistent throughout the Old Testament and the Four Gospels. Here are some other examples:

Deuteronomy 6:25 (REV)

And it will be our righteousness if we are careful to do every one of these commandments before Yahweh our God, as he has commanded us.

Matthew 19:16-17 (REV)

And look! A man came to him and said, “Teacher, what good thing must I do in order to have life in the age *to come*?” **17**And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about that which is good? There is One who is good. But if you want to enter into the Life, keep the commandments.”

Matthew 24:10-13 (REV) (abridged)

10And then many will fall away.11And many false prophets…will mislead many. 12And…the love of the many will grow cold. 13But the one who endures to *their* end, this one will be saved.

These examples could be multiplied many times, but they make the point. The Bible says Christians are born again in a one-time event and then “will be saved” and they can “know” it for certain. But the message to the people before and after the Christian Church and Administration of Grace was that they had to be faithful to maintain their salvation. No verse in the Old Testament or Gospels says a person can “know” they are saved. Christians live in the Administration of Grace, and are truly graced by God because of the work of the Lord Jesus. One of the great blessings Christians enjoy is being able to know they will live forever because once they are born again, they “will be saved.”

s) Totaling the Evidence

As we have seen above, there is a large amount of evidence in the Church Epistles that Christians are guaranteed everlasting life. Note some of the major things unique to the Christian Church: Christians are “born again” of God’s gift of holy spirit and “sealed” with that holy spirit until the Day of Redemption. The born-again Christian has a new, divine nature. Christians have a “guarantee” of salvation, and since the New Birth is an act of creation, Christians are “new creations” with a new, spiritual life. Furthermore, with that new life comes a new language: speaking in tongues (more on that below). As God’s children by birth, Christians are already said to be raised from the dead, to be citizens of heaven, and to be seated in heaven. Since God is now the birth Father of Christians, they are His children and nothing can separate them from His love. Also, Christians are already said to be glorified with a glory so glorious that the Mosaic Law had “no glory” in comparison.

The Scriptures make clear that it is impossible for a born-again Christian to somehow lose their salvation. For that to happen, their spiritual birth would somehow have to be undone; they would have to somehow be “unsealed” and lose the gift of holy spirit that was promised to be in them until the Day of Redemption; their “divine nature” would have to be taken away; the “guarantee” they have from God would have to be made null and void; they would have to become “uncreated” and amputated from the Body of Christ; their new spiritual life would have to be killed; their heavenly citizenship would have to be revoked; God’s promise that Christians are already raised from the dead, already with Christ in heaven and already glorified would be shown to be worthless; the promise that nothing could separate Christians from God’s love would be shown as false; and the fact that Christians “know” they will be with Christ would be revealed as only wishful thinking.

3) An added bonus: Christians have a new language

The Bible says Christians can “know” they are saved, but how? One way that Christians can know they are saved is that God gave them a new language unique to the Administration of Grace. The Bible refers to it as “speaking in tongues.” Speaking in tongues happened for the very first time on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). In fact, speaking in tongues is one of the many indicators that God started something new and different on the Day of Pentecost that had never existed before. Speaking in tongues is prayer and praise that edifies the one speaking, but arguably the most important thing about it is that it conclusively shows a person they are born again and do not have to worry about not having everlasting life. No wonder God says, “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5). No one has to speak in tongues to be saved, but properly done it is a way for Christians to know the gift of holy spirit is born in them.

[For more on speaking on tongues, see the REV commentary on 1 Cor. 14:5.]

4) Can you relinquish your salvation?

Some scholars acknowledge that Christians cannot lose their guarantee of salvation by sinning or behaving in an ungodly manner, but they believe that if a person wants to become unsaved or wants to repent of their salvation, they can do that. However, when a person becomes born again, they are a new creation with a new nature. Christians cannot “uncreate” themselves or change their nature. The New Birth changes people in a way that cannot be reversed. There are some changes people can make to their own bodies in the physical world and in the spiritual world that are permanent and that cannot be changed later even if the person wants to. The New Birth is one such change. There are plenty of examples of this in the physical world. For example, if a man decided he did not want to see sinful things and so blinded himself, he would not be able to repent and restore his sight—he would be permanently blind. Similarly, when a person gets born again, they are permanently changed and they become God’s purchased property. There is no verse in the New Testament that says they can reverse their decision or that God would ever grant someone’s request to not be saved.

5) Concluding Thoughts

a) Why is the permanence of salvation debated in the Church?

In the light of all the evidence in the Epistles to the Church, why would anyone think Christians can lose their salvation? There are a number of reasons. One is the long-standing tradition that people can lose their salvation—that they can sin and go to “hell”—and many people are uncomfortable going against the tradition of the Church or their ancestors. However, no matter how long a tradition is entrenched, it is the Word of God that must be followed, not tradition.

Another reason some people believe salvation is not guaranteed for Christians is that they read the Old Testament and the Gospels and see that salvation was not guaranteed during those times, and therefore think it is not guaranteed for Christians either. However, God did something wonderful for Christians after Christ’s death paid for the sins of humankind. In calling attention to this, God even called the time in which Christians live the “Administration of Grace.” An integral part of the very unique “grace” Christians have been given by God is the permanence of Christian salvation.

Another reason some believe Christian salvation can be lost is that they do not read the whole Bible, and especially the Church Epistles, often enough and carefully enough to notice things written to the Christian Church that are never written anywhere else in the Bible. Prominent among these things is the “guarantee” of everlasting life which only occurs in the Church Epistles. One must read the entire Bible carefully and prayerfully to understand it. Frankly, it takes reading it over and over to really understand the scope of what it is saying. When one approaches the Church Epistles in this manner, the utter uniqueness of the salvation given to the Christian Church stands out brilliantly.

Some people believe Christian salvation can be lost because they are scandalized by the thought that a person can become a Christian by faith in Christ and then return to sin and still be saved. They do not think that is logical or fair. But everyone sins, and the wonderful thing about the death of Christ is that it covers all sin, not just “little sins.” Some of the sins covered by Christ’s death are egregious, but the blood still covers them. The guarantee of salvation is logical if we understand “birth.” Many parents have children who become very ungodly, but they are still their children. The same is true for God’s children by birth: even if some behave in a very ungodly manner, they are still God’s children. It also helps to realize that in the future there will be salvation and rewards. Salvation is a free gift but rewards are earned. The person who gets saved but continues in sin will lose rewards (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”).

Another reason some people believe Christian salvation can be lost is because there are some verses in the New Testament Epistles that seem to say that it is possible. However, there are many verses that show Christian salvation is secure. With some study, the verses that seem to say salvation is not secure can be explained in light of the teaching that salvation is guaranteed for the Christian. A list of some of those verses is provided below.

There are also people who believe Christian salvation can be lost because they think it would be unfair of God to guarantee salvation to the Christian Church but not to people in other administrations. However, God made Christian salvation permanent for His purposes and to reveal His wisdom (Eph. 3:10). It was certainly in line with His purposes, and not “unfair” that the Jews had very strict food regulations but Christians do not, or that under the Mosaic Law, a person could not be a priest unless he was born one whereas any Christian can become a leader in the Church. When God changes the rules, it is His choice and He does so with great wisdom and love.

b) Why not just say we cannot lose our salvation?

One logical question people ask is, “If our salvation is permanent, why doesn’t the Bible just say that you cannot lose it?” The answer is simple but can seem strange: the Bible does not say, “You cannot lose your salvation” because Christians are not actually “saved” yet. This point was made earlier in this appendix. If Christians are not literally saved yet, then they cannot lose their salvation because no one can lose what they do not yet have.

What Christians have today is a guarantee of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14), not the actual fullness of salvation itself, which is still future (cf. Rom. 5:10; 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:5) When Christians are actually fully “saved” (rescued) from this body of sin, they will have new bodies like Christ’s (Phil. 3:21) and they will be immortal/incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:51-54)—free from the curse of sin, sickness, and death. There are a couple of verses that say Christians are saved, such as Ephesians 2:8, but as has been seen above, this verse employs the prophetic perfect idiom. Today Christians have the “hope” of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8), the hope of being rescued from sin, sickness, pain, and death.

Scripture says it succinctly and plainly: If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, you WILL be saved. By the grace of God, Christians have the guarantee of salvation and will live forever.

6) Addendum: List of Some Commonly Used Verses to Argue the Conditionality of Salvation

To read the arguments for these and other verses, see the REV commentaries on 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 15:2; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Galatians 5:21; Colossians 1:23; 2 Timothy 2:12; Hebrews 3:14; Hebrews 4:1; 2 Peter 2:12; and 2 Peter 3:17.

Appendix 11. The Role of Women in the Church

**1 Corinthians 14:34-35:** One of the advantages of living in our modern age is that we continue to improve in our ability to reconstruct the “original” text. Of course, this is of inestimable value because the original God-breathed Word is priceless, but it also allows us to see into the mindset of the copyists who sometimes altered the text. Although often changes to the biblical text were just simple copying mistakes, sometimes they were an attempt to “correct” the Bible and reflected the theology and culture of the time. When scholars encounter a word (or words) that is in some ancient manuscripts but not in others, they have certain tests they apply to see whether the word was added to the original, or omitted from it. Scholars consider things such as the age of the manuscripts, the type or style of the writing, the ink that is used, and the “manuscript family” the texts come from. A very important principle in finding the original text is that the more difficult reading tends to be original. That is because scribes tended to alter texts to make them easier to understand or to fit into accepted theology more easily.

One test of the originality of a verse is its placement in the Bible. If a phrase is in the original text, then obviously, when it is omitted, it is always omitted from the same place. However, if a phrase is not in the original text, a scribe adds it but a later scribe, thinking it fits better somewhere else, adds it in a different place or moves it somewhere else. The sentiment that women should not be leaders, or take a prominent role in the Church, caused scribes and copyists to change quite a few biblical texts about women, and the fact that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 do not appear in the same place in every manuscript of 1 Corinthians, is one reason some scholars conclude they were added to the text by a copyist. Alan Johnson (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: *1 Corinthians*, p. 271), and Richard Hays (*A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: 1 Corinthians*, p. 247), are two such scholars.

Additions to the text often break the context and even cause contradictions, and that is the case here. Scholars have long noticed that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 break the flow of the passage, which makes perfect sense without them. 1 Corinthians 14:36 makes perfect sense after 1 Corinthians 14:33 because the prophets who spoke had a revelation (1 Cor. 14:30), but they still must listen to other prophets. The word of the Lord had not come “to you only,” i.e., only to those prophets. However, if we add verses 34 and 35, we create contradictions in the text.

One of the contradictions created by the addition of these verses is that there is no evidence any women thought the Word of God came to them only, as verse 36 asserts. There is nothing in Greco-Roman or Jewish culture, or in the context of these verses, that leads us to think that the women in Corinth asserted that the Word of God came only to them, or only out from them. The fact that the women of Corinth wore head coverings as a sign of the authority over them (1 Cor. 11:5) is evidence that they were not being rebellious or acting as if God was speaking only to them. Paul’s comment in verse 36 seems especially inappropriate if addressed to the women because it is harsher than a simple statement, it is, as Robertson and Plummer point out, actually sarcasm (Robertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 326).

Being sarcastic to the women is inappropriate and out of place. On the other hand, writing the phrase about the Word of God coming to “you only” would make perfect sense if it were written to one of the prophets. A prophet who got a revelation from God, as is indicated in verse 30, might have felt so strongly about his revelation that he might try to persuade the entire congregation of his point of view no matter how other prophets saw the situation. Since it can take a real jolt to convince a prophet to let go of his idea, if the sarcastic sentences in verse 36, and the phrase, “has it come to you only” are applied to the prophets in verses 29 and 30, they fit perfectly. That verse 36 applies best to the prophets of verse 30 and not to the women of verses 34 and 35, is powerful evidence that the verses about the women being silent were added.

The phrase about the women “asking their husbands” at home is more good evidence these verses were added to the text. Earlier in Corinthians the Word of God says, “But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I [Paul]” (1 Cor. 7:8 NASB). How “good” would it be to remain as a widow if it meant that you could not express yourself in the church and also had no husband at home to ask questions and represent you in the Church? It seems quite insensitive and disingenuous for God to say in chapter 7 that it would be good for a woman to remain single and then in chapter 14 to say she cannot express her opinions in church, and to ask her “husband.”

Another problem with limiting women to asking their husbands is that not every husband could answer the questions of their wives. The wording of the text would leave the women who had no husbands, or whose husbands could not answer their questions, with no clear instruction about what God wanted them to do. Still another problem with “asking the husbands at home” is it unrealistically limits the reasons that women speak in meetings. Women speak in the church for a lot more reasons than just to ask questions so they will “learn.”

Another clear contradiction caused by 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is that the women were in fact speaking in the first-century Church. The immediate context mentions prophecy, and even scholars who believe that women should not lead or teach admit that God allows women to prophesy in the congregation. At the very start of the Church when the gift of holy spirit was poured out, Peter made it clear that both men and women would receive holy spirit, and both would prophesy (Acts 2:17-18). Since it is quite clear even from Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians that women could prophesy and pray openly in the church (1 Cor. 11:5), it makes no sense that Paul would immediately follow a verse about them prophesying with a verse saying they had to be “silent” and not speak.

But the women were regularly speaking up besides just giving prophecy. One verse that gives evidence for that is 1 Corinthians 14:26 (the word “brothers” is often used to refer to both men and women; cf. Matt. 25:40, Rom. 8:29, Eph. 6:23, Rev. 12:10). Both the context of 1 Corinthians 14:26 and its contents make it clear that everyone, not just the men, was speaking. As for women teaching in the Church, the fact that some of the Church Fathers spent time condemning teaching by women seems to be a good ancillary argument that they did teach, something confirmed in 1 Timothy 2:12, a verse that has been historically mistranslated and misunderstood (see commentary on 1 Tim. 2:12). Furthermore, in the book of Revelation, the prophetess Jezebel is castigated because “she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20 NASB). It is important to note that she is not reproved for teaching, but for teaching error.

Another very good piece of evidence that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 was added to the text is the phrase, “as the Law also says.” Scholars have long had a problem with this phrase because the Law does not say women should be silent. Commentators have tried very hard to justify Paul’s supposed statement by coming up with verses from the Law which would support the idea that women should be silent, and cited verses such as Genesis 2:20-24; 3:16, and Job 29:21, but these verses do not say women should be silent. In fact, there is nothing in the Law about women being “silent.” Would the actual Word of God contain a contradiction as blatant as this one seems to be? We say, “No.”

Another problem with 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is that they contradict 1 Timothy 2:12 (This is true no matter how the verses in Timothy are translated or understood.) When properly translated and understood, 1 Timothy 2:12 confirms that women can teach in the Church, see Catherine Clark Kroeger and Richard Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992), pp. 79-113, and also the commentary on 1 Tim. 2:12). As traditionally understood, however, 1 Timothy 2:12 says that women cannot teach. But 1 Timothy was written a decade or so after 1 Corinthians, and if Corinthians said that women could not even speak, then there is no logical reason that Timothy would be more lenient than the verses in Corinthians, perhaps even causing confusion in the Church. Timothy is a leadership epistle, and it is a general tenet of the leadership epistles that the directions within them are more specific and more stringent than the directions within the epistles written to the Church in general. Therefore, if 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which say women should not speak, are actually in the original text, it makes no sense that Paul would seem to water that down in Timothy and say the women could not teach. In reality, there was no confusion in the early Church because the verses we know as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 were not in the original text.

Yet another piece of evidence that Paul did not write 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is that those verses contain some vocabulary that is not characteristic of Paul. This is something that has been pointed out by a number of Greek scholars, and in and of itself would be a weak argument that the verses were not written by Paul. However, given the other weighty evidence that the verses were a scribal addition, the unPauline vocabulary is more evidence that leads us to the conclusion that the verses were not part of what Paul originally wrote (cf. Gordon Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1987), p. 702).

Another reason that it would not be out of the ordinary for these harsh verses about women speaking in the Church to be added to the biblical text was that soon after the era of the first apostles, an anti-feminine bias entered the Church from the Greco-Roman culture. This bias against women eventually became so strong that women were denied positions of authority in the Church and the men who ran the Church, the clergy, were forced to be celibate. In time, many verses that elevated women were changed by scribes. One text that scribes changed was Acts 18:26. The original text listed Priscilla before Aquila, but it was “corrected” by scribes so that Aquila came first in the list. Since this error was in the Byzantine manuscripts that were used in translating the King James Version, the KJV has Aquila first.

Another place the text was altered to minimize the importance of women was Acts 17:12. The original text read καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνίδων γυναικῶν τῶν εὐσχημόνων καὶ ἀνδρῶν οὐκ ὀλίγοι. (“also of the prominent Greek women, and of the men, not a few”). In codex Bezae, a fifth-century manuscript, the text was altered to καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ τῶν εὐσχημόνων ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες ἱκανοὶ ἐπίστευσαν (“and many of the Greeks and men and women of high standing believed;” See Metzger; *Textual Commentary on the Greek NT*). This shows us that by the 400s AD, it was offensive enough to some scribes that the women were referred to as “prominent” and were placed before the men, that they would change the text so that the men and women were both said to be prominent, and the men came before the women.

Another example of bias against women in the Church is Romans 16:7, in which the feminine name “Junia” was altered to the masculine name “Junias” (see commentary on Rom. 16:7).

Another place the text about women was altered is Mark 3:31. The original text, which read “his mother and brothers” (referring to Mary and Jesus’ brothers), was changed to “his brothers and his mother.” This was the reading of some of the Byzantine texts that were used as source texts for the King James Version, and so “brothers” comes before “mother” in the KJV. Interestingly, the word “mother” was allowed to remain first in verse 32.

A place where the text may have been altered to minimize the influence of women is Acts 17:34. Although the original text contained the line, “and a woman named Damaris,” that line does not appear in codex Bezae. The scholars are divided as to whether the omission of the line about Damaris is a case of anti-feminine bias in the Church or was accidental.

One thing that Christians can be thankful for is that when something is wrong with Christian doctrine, the spirit of God usually moves powerfully in people to overcome the problem. That certainly is the case when it comes to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Perhaps no supposed command of God is as regularly ignored as this one. In churches and fellowship halls around the world, women speak up. Even in many denominations that do not allow women to teach the congregation, they are allowed to contribute before or after the sermon.

Their speaking up is even more apparent in the many house churches and cell groups that are being run all over the globe. In those small settings, women often openly share the Word of God, their testimonies, ideas, and opinions. This is important, because when Corinthians was penned by the apostle Paul around the middle of the first century, house churches were the only “churches” that existed. Were first-century house church meetings so different from ours today? Could it be that a spirit of rebellion is running rampant in today’s Christian women who speak up in spite of the command not to, and Christian men either cannot seem to hear the spirit of God or are too spineless to force the women to be silent? That is not likely. It is much more likely that God did not tell the women to be silent in church, but rather that was the opinion of a copyist or scribe that years later became copied into the Bible, and the spirit of God is moving in people today to ignore that spurious command.

In spite of the evidence the verses were added, many scholars feel that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are original, even though they are “difficult.” This has led to a large number of ways, some of them quite imaginative, that these verses have been explained. The explanations generally fall into two general categories. The first category is that the verses are literal and women should not speak at all in the Church, and the second is that women can speak, but with limitations as to who and when.

Commentators who fall into the first category, saying that women are to be silent in public worship, must explain the verses that say they can speak, and frankly, they have been unsuccessful in doing that.

The second category of dealing with the verses is to say that it cannot be God’s true intention to have all women be silent and never speak, so therefore the verses must mean something other than what they literally say. Some commentators say that Paul only meant for these verses to apply in Corinth, but the actual language of the verses themselves does not support that conclusion. Some scholars say that these verses apply only to married women, but again, the verses do not say that, and besides, married women such as Prisca (or Priscilla in some versions) did lead in some ways and are commended by Paul. Other commentators say that these two verses were not Paul’s position at all, but that of people opposing him and that Paul was actually refuting that position. However, again, a straightforward reading of the verses does not show that. Some commentators say that the Greek word translated “speak,” *laleō*, refers to “chatter,” speaking that is not pertinent to the meeting. However, a study of *laleō* even in just the 34 times it is used in the First Epistle to the Corinthians shows that it has a wide range of meaning, so saying it means “chatter” in this particular verse is just an arbitrary explanation without actual support. The truth of the matter is that there is no explanation of this verse that actually explains what the verse says in plain Greek (or English), which is strong evidence that the verse is not part of the original text in the first place.

In spite of much evidence that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 were added to the text, we must still admit to the possibility that they were original. If they are original, then they need to be understood and acted upon like the other verses that are in the original text but are specifically applicable to the culture of the time when Paul wrote. What they say must be understood in a limited sense that would apply to the church at Corinth due to the customs and culture of the time. In that sense, they would be similar to other verses such as those that say women should wear a head covering when they pray or prophesy, or those that direct women not to cut their hair but leave it long. These are understood to have applied to the church at Corinth but are not generally applicable today. If God authored these verses due to the specific circumstances of the first century, then it should be obvious that today, when women are as educated and equipped as men to minister in the church, they should be allowed to do so, especially since it is clear that there is neither male nor female in Christ. Thankfully, women are leading and teaching in the Church today, and the evidence from congregations around the globe is that they are as spiritually able to minister as the men.

Our Adversary, the Devil, has worked overtime to keep Christians from fulfilling their God-given calling. Let’s not allow the Devil, or people who have been tricked by him, to limit the effectiveness of half of the Body of Christ by some mistranslations and misunderstood verses. Women have an important place in the Body of Christ and a calling on their lives, and the Church needs them fulfilling their ministries.

[For more about women’s position in the family, society, and Church, see commentaries on Acts 17:12; 18:26; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7.]

**1 Timothy 2:12:** In light of the complex grammar, and the literally hundreds of pages of commentary that have been written on 1 Timothy 2:11 and 2:12, we will be setting forth our view of the text and limiting our comments to some major points we feel need explanation. One thing that seems to be self-evident is that the interpretation has to fit with both the immediate context, the historical context, and the scope of Scripture. Whenever a verse is capable of multiple translations, it is even more important than usual that the interpretation fit with both the context and historical context, and that the explanation be logical (God tells us that wisdom is the principal thing, so we dare not discard wisdom when trying to understand a verse of Scripture). Some commentators have done massive word studies on the vocabulary of the verse and in part based their interpretation on the weight of numbers (a certain word means this more often than it means that). That is not the right way to interpret verses, because even if a given Greek word in the text is translated one way many times and another way only a few times, the few times are still valid if that translation best fits the context and historical context.

We feel there are serious problems with the standard interpretation of the verse, that women are not to teach or have authority over men. R. T. France is correct that if Paul meant the verse to be interpreted as the orthodox Christians do, then he worded the verse in a very obscure way. We believe there is a much better translation that better fits both the historical context and the context of the chapter.

**1) “Teach.”** We believe that the meaning of the verb “teach,” *didaskō* (#1321 διδάσκω), must be understood in light of the verb *authenteō* (#831 αὐθεντέω; traditionally “exercise authority”). It does not stand on its own, making the verse mean that women cannot teach to men, period. The essence of the meaning of the verse seems to be well expressed by the Kroegers (*I Suffer Not a Woman*) and by A. Nyland (*The Source NT*): that Paul did not permit women to teach a specific thing, in this case, that a woman is the originator of man.

One reason we say that the verb “teach” is not forbidding women from teaching men is that women did teach in the early Church. It had always been a practice among the Jews that if a woman had the spirit of God, she could teach what the Lord had taught her. A good example of this is the prophetess Deborah, who was a Judge over Israel (Judg. 4-5), and the Bible gives other examples of prophetesses to whom men went for guidance and direction, even kings. That brings us to Acts 2, when Peter quotes the book of Joel and makes the point that now, in the Christian Church, both men and women have the spirit of God and will prophesy and dream dreams (Acts 2:17, 18). Can it really be the case that in the Old Testament, a woman with the spirit of God could instruct men, but today women with the spirit of God cannot? That seems very unlikely, especially given what we know about the manifestations of holy spirit, including the revelation manifestations, which are given to both men and women “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7; cf. commentary on 1 Cor. 12:7-10).

Also, when someone came into a church, that person could be prophetically called to account and convicted by the “whole church,” both the men and women. Furthermore, today in the Church, all the members are “one,” and there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). God recognizes the sexes, but we are “one” because “we were all baptized in one spirit into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). It is the gift of holy spirit born inside every Christian that makes men and women equal in Christ, and it is the degree to which people dedicate their lives to the Lord that determines how spiritual, and how spiritually powerful, they are. It is due to the spirit of God that a woman can be an apostle (Rom. 16:7) or a deacon (Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:11). In fact, Ephesians says that when Christ assembled, he gave gifts to people (Eph. 4:8; *anthrōpos* is not “men,” but collectively to “people.”). These gifts include “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.” It is well-known that the purpose of these equipping ministries is to build up the Body of Christ, but how are women who have these ministries supposed to walk in the fullness of them if they cannot teach? For example, is it really the will of God that a woman evangelist can teach about Jesus to women everywhere, but only to men if they are in “informal settings?” Or can a woman pastor give helpful advice to women anywhere, but only to men if the men are in “informal settings?” Given what we know about proper decorum and wisdom when it comes to men and women being together, it actually makes more sense that a woman would speak to a group of men rather than just to one man alone.

When we study the history of women as teachers, we find there is historical precedent for women teaching in religious settings in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. In some of the worship of Roman gods and in the Roman mystery religions, women led the religious services and/or acted as priests. Among the Jews, in spite of the fact that it was usual for women to not be educated like the men were, there were exceptions, and thus sometimes women acted both as elders in synagogues and even sometimes as synagogue leaders (cf. Nyland; *The Source NT*; note on 1 Tim. 2:11). Thus as the Christians Church developed and it was accepted that both men and women had holy spirit and could walk in the inspiration and power of God, it would have been culturally accepted for women to actively participate in Church meetings. The Bible teaches that women can pray in meetings (1 Cor. 11:5), speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5, 23), interpret tongues (1 Cor. 14:5), prophesy (1 Cor. 14:24), receive revelation from God (1 Cor. 12:8; cp commentary), and contribute that revelation in the meeting (1 Cor. 14:26).

As for women teaching in the Church, we have seen in 1 Timothy 2:11 that women were to learn, and one of the main reasons for learning was to be able to raise up disciples. We have seen that Priscilla taught the great orator Apollos (Acts 18:26). Colossians 3:16 says Christians are to teach one another. Furthermore, in the book of Revelation, the prophetess Jezebel is castigated because “she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20 NASB). It is important to note that Jezebel is not reproved for teaching, but for teaching error. Furthermore, some of the Church Fathers spent time condemning teaching by women, which is good ancillary evidence that women did teach in the Church. We should also note that historically, by the time of the Church Fathers, the orthodox Church was returning to the cultural belief of the Greco-Roman world that women were inferior to men. Thus the problem that the Church Fathers had with women teaching was not a continuation of Apostolic beliefs, but a return to the error of the culture around them, an error that even led to the teaching that marrying these “inferior women” made a man less pure or powerful spiritually, which then led to the doctrine that clergy should be celibate (a direct contradiction of the Word of God).

Commentators such as Thomas Schreiner who defend the traditional orthodox understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12, agree that the Bible says Priscilla taught Apollos, but asserts her teaching him was okay with God because she did so as “private teaching.” He also notes that Col. 3:16 can be taken to mean that women can teach men, but says that was “mutual instruction that occurs among all the members of the body [of Christ]” (*Women in the Church*; p. 128). Similarly, most conservative commentators recognize that God permits women to instruct men and have authority in settings outside of “formal church,” such as scholastic settings, job-related settings, etc., but they say that in a formal assembly of the church, God has limited the teaching to men. Does the “setting” make that much difference to God? We think not, and believe 1 Timothy 2:12 should not be interpreted the way it usually is in the orthodox Church.

We must keep in mind that for the first two or three centuries after Christ, almost every Christian church was a home church or a church in a small setting such as the catacombs or in an outdoor setting (cf. Acts 16:13). After more than 40 years of house church ministry across the globe, we of Spirit & Truth have seen that most house churches are a dozen or fewer people, and even large house church meetings are less than two dozen people. Can it really be true that it would be fine for Priscilla to teach Apollos one-on-one, but as soon as eight or ten people gather in a house, the women can no longer contribute until the meeting breaks up and there is “mutual instruction?” Frankly, most home churches we know of are run in such a way that “mutual instruction,” i.e., people speaking up and contributing as the opportunity presents itself, occurs throughout the meeting.

At this point, it is helpful to remember that the typical Western teaching format used in schools and big churches that consist of a teacher in front of a class reading from a book and mostly talking about information and theories while students sit quietly paying attention, was only a small part (and sometimes not a part at all) of the biblical style of “teaching.” We have no examples of Moses, Samuel, or Elijah lecturing students, yet they were all revered teachers. When Jesus taught, he spoke to audiences, but he also taught by example, told stories, and shared his experiences. Jesus taught everywhere he was, but the only time he is recorded actually having a text of the Bible in front of him was when he was in a synagogue. Thus, “teaching” was not connected to a certain style, it was whatever best communicated information in the situation.

It was not easy for people in the small first-century churches to open a Bible and teach from it. For one thing, only a small percent (10% or less) of the population could read. Also, the books of the Bible were on individual scrolls, and every scroll was handwritten and very expensive. Thus, although most churches might have a piece of the Bible, almost none would have even a large part of it, much less an entire Bible (it took a scribe about a year to hand copy the entire Bible—imagine how much a Bible would cost if it cost a year’s salary for a professional writer). We assert that in small home meetings, both ancient and modern, women often openly shared their experiences, testimonies, ideas, and opinions—which biblically is “teaching.”

Seen in that light, the supposed prohibition against women teaching in a “formal” setting cannot be the correct interpretation of the verse. That interpretation would make the Bible say that women can learn (2:11). However, if they learned something and wanted to share it, they could tell it to all their male acquaintances one at a time, but if the church was meeting and all their male acquaintances were at one place at one time, then God forbids them from sharing what they have learned. God tells us to rule our lives by wisdom (Prov. 4:7; 16:16), but there does not seem to be any wisdom in that interpretation of the text.

Once we understand that “teaching” was not just explaining a text of Scripture, but was communicating the heart of God to people to help them live more godly lives, we can see how limiting it would be to say women cannot “teach” men. For example, if a man and woman go on a missionary trip together and are invited to speak at their church and share their experiences, that, biblically, is “teaching,” because people are learning from their experiences. The orthodox interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 would dictate that the man would be allowed to share his experiences with the church, but the woman would not. Interestingly, this is ignored even by Churches that strictly prohibit women from “teaching” from the pulpit on Sunday morning, because almost all of them allow women missionaries or women who have had powerful personal experiences to share them from the front of the Church. So in fact, even churches that say women should not teach, often allow them to “teach” without knowing it.

Another reason we believe that 1 Timothy 2:12 is not saying that women should not teach men is the “reason” for that prohibition, which is given in verses 13 and 14. The standard conservative orthodox answer to why women cannot teach men is the “reason” given in verses 13 and 14: that Adam was created before Eve, and Eve, not Adam, was tricked by the Devil. We will have more to say about their order of creation later, but if the reason women cannot teach men was that Adam was created before Eve, then Adam’s primacy is a “creation ordinance,” i.e., linked to the very creation of men and women. But if women cannot teach men because Eve was created after Adam, then women should never be able to teach men at any time, not just in “formal church.” To say, “Adam was created first, so women cannot teach men in church, but they can teach men in the workplace, the university, and informal settings” invalidates the very “creation ordinance” argument. Worse, if we say that God does not permit women to teach because they are more likely to be deceived than men based on Eve’s example, then we have to say that men are more likely to sin deliberately than women based on Adam’s example (Adam sinned deliberately; cf. Rom. 5:12-14). But to us, it seems worse to let deliberate sinners teach than people who can be tricked into sinning. These problems leave the conservative orthodox scholar with no logical reason women are not supposed to teach men, and in fact, show that the conservative interpretation of the verse is in error.

Another reason why 1 Timothy 2:12 should not be interpreted in the standard orthodox way is that there is nothing specifically stated about the setting (“Church”) in the context of this verse. The assertion that this verse is speaking of women teaching men in a formal church setting is actually unsubstantiated in the text, but is an arbitrary explanation without any solid evidence to back it up. The first verse in the chapter starts with prayers, and prayers are offered in both formal and informal settings. The context then shifts to the behavior of men, admonishing that men be holy “in every place.” Then the context shifts to the adornment of women, that they should dress modestly, which also applies everywhere, certainly not just in “formal Church situations.” Then the context shifts again to the section about women learning and teaching (vs. 11-15). But there is nothing in those few verses that dictates that the Bible is now only referring to a formal church setting. After speaking of activities of Christian men and women that can and do occur everywhere, we should assume that the next verses continue that same idea unless we are clearly directed otherwise by the text, which we are not. In contrast, if the verse is about teaching error like we assert it is, then like prayer and modest attire, teaching doctrine that blatantly contradicts the Bible is forbidden in every place.

One thing that Christians can be thankful for is that when something is wrong with Church doctrine, the spirit of God usually moves in people to overcome the problem. That certainly is the case when it comes to 1 Timothy 2:12 and women teaching men. The supposed command is regularly ignored in the Church. Although there are denominations that do not allow women in the pulpit, even in those denominations women do often end up teaching men in many contexts. More and more denominations and churches either ordain women or allow women to speak from the lectern on certain occasions. Furthermore, many denominations that do not allow women to teach the congregation allow them to contribute to any discussion before or after the sermon. Also, more and more women are writing books on theological subjects that are used for reference in seminaries and churches, and women are also included on the translation committees of many of the newer versions of the Bible. Also, women teachers can be found instructing boys in Christian schools across the world, and whether we want to admit it or not, the female instructors in Christian colleges are not teaching “male children,” but men, many of whom are supporting themselves and sometimes are married and the fathers of children. Does it make sense that God allows a woman to teach men as long as she is standing behind a desk in a classroom and the men are in sitting in chairs behind desks, but He does not allow her to teach those same men if she is standing in a pulpit and they are sitting on benches we call pews? We say it does not.

When properly translated and understood, 1 Timothy 2:12 is one more verse among many that supposedly is against women but is actually not. Interestingly, even the way this verse has been interpreted by more conservative commentators, it is still less restrictive than the way it is acted out in many conservative Churches. When properly translated and understood in light of both the Jewish and Greco-Roman culture of its day, it is obvious the New Testament was a Magna Carta for women, giving them rights and privileges they had never had before.

[For other verses in the NT that elevate women’s position in the culture, see commentary on 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34, 35; commentary on 1 Tim. 2:11; 3:2; 5:14; and commentary on 1 Pet. 3:7.]

**2) “Claim authorship.”** The Greek verb is *authenteō* (#831 αὐθεντέω; traditionally “exercise authority”). Since this word is used in combination with “teach,” above, in order to fully understand it, that entry should be read first. *Authenteō* is a very rare word, with several meanings. Traditionally it is said to mean “authority,” but many scholars take issue with that definition here. After pointing out that *authenteō* is a rare word even in Greek literature, and used nowhere else in the Bible, R. T. France says: Had he [Paul] wished to speak about authority in the normal sense, he could have used a more regular Greek verb, such as *proistēmi*...or the noun *exousia*. ...If he intended to say that no woman may ever be in a position where she has authority over a man, he has chosen an unnecessarily obscure way to say it! (*Women in the Church’s Ministry*, pp. 65, 66). France makes a powerful point. If Paul simply meant to say that he did not want women to teach, and he did not want them to have authority over men, he had easy and clear ways to say that. The fact that both the grammar and the vocabulary of verse 12 are obscure should lead us to the conclusion that translating the verse as if it were saying something that ordinarily would have been said in a much more straightforward way is probably a poor translation.

In the previous commentary on this verse, we have seen why the standard conservative orthodox translation, that women cannot teach or have authority over men, is almost certainly not what God meant. Another major problem we face if we translate *authenteō* as “authority,” is that it does not make sense, even in a formal church context. What would it mean to say that a woman should not have authority over men in a formal church service? The act of teaching or preaching is not “authority.” Every teacher knows this, and both men and women often modify or ignore what the teachers say. So what kind of “authority” does the person in front of the congregation have? He cannot make the congregation arrive for the service on time or stay for the whole church service, he cannot order them to behave in certain ways, he cannot make the congregation believe what he says. There is no actual “authority” in leading a Church service.

Genuine “authority” over others in a church service would have to involve some kind of ability to command people or exercise church discipline. However, an individual leading the meeting almost never has autonomous “authority” to discipline a person in the church, and if he tried to “command” people, he would soon see his building empty. Leaders almost always must have the consent of others before they direct the congregation, and usually, any actual “discipline” that is carried out is merely enforcing the rules and regulations that have been established beforehand by committees or the vote of the congregation. Most matters that actually do involve the “authority” of the church, such as what is proper attire at church functions, what kinds of music can be played in a worship service, what version of the Bible will be used, and what behaviors are allowed or forbidden, are voted on by the members of the church, or the decision is made by church staff or committees. But since church congregations are usually more women than men, and since church staff and committees almost always have women members, the fact is that the real “authority structure” in the Church includes women.

Thus, there are a couple serious problems that occur if we try to translate *authenteō* as “authority.” The first is, as we have seen, that even a man does not have “authority” over men in the formal church service, so saying a woman should not have authority over men in that formal setting does not make sense. The second is that although there is no real authority in leading a church service, there is real authority in the church, but that authority is based on the decisions that have been made by the congregation, staff, or committees in the church, and these almost always involve women. It makes no sense for God to command that women cannot “lead meetings,” which does not involve any genuine authority over men, but then allow women to make decisions on church policy, which does involve genuine authority over men. On this basis, it seems clear that “authority” cannot be the correct translation of *authenteō*, and cannot be what the verse is speaking about.

In light of the problems with the standard translation and meaning, scholars have set forth many other interpretations. Some say the verse refers only to wives, but that ignores the context, which is not about wives. Some scholars point out that *authenteō* is often related to violence (especially murder), and think the verse means something like Kenneth Bailey’s paraphrase of the verse: “I do not allow these ignorant women to batter the men. They are to stop shouting and calm down” (quoted in R. T. France, *Women in the Church’s Ministry*; p. 66). Although that could be a legitimate translation of the Greek (as we already pointed out, the Greek is very complex and can be translated many ways), it does not fit with the context, which is about Adam being created first and Eve being tricked by the Devil.

The best answer we have found to the difficult grammar and the difficult context of 1 Timothy 2:12 are solutions set forth in works such as *I Suffer Not a Woman* by Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger, and *The Source New Testament* (text and notes) by Dr. A. Nyland. Although the Clark Kroegers offer several translations (pp. 103, 191, 192), and these differ from Nyland’s translation, the gist is the same. Paul was writing to Timothy, who was based in Ephesus. Between some types of Gnostic doctrine, and some of the types of the “mother goddess” worship of Asia Minor, it was being taught in the culture surrounding Timothy that a female god created Eve before Adam, or that God created Eve before Adam. It is typical of converts to Christianity that they blend Christian beliefs with their past pagan beliefs (this is referred to by scholars as syncretism, and is how orthodox Christianity picked up many of its modern beliefs and practices, such as “Easter Sunday”). Syncretism could have certainly been occurring in Ephesus, and would have been a very important reason why Paul would tell the women to learn, but forbid them from teaching things from their pagan past such as that a woman was the origin of men.

Added to the above historical context is that *authenteō* can mean “originator” or “author,” and when linked to the word “teach,” can refer to a person teaching that woman is the originator of man. The translation given by the Clark Kroegers that they feel is the most likely is: “I do not allow a woman to teach nor to proclaim herself author of man” (p. 103, 192). However, they also say the verse could be translated “I do not permit a woman to teach that she is the originator of man...” (p. 191), or “I categorically forbid a woman to teach [anyone] to maintain that she is responsible for the origin of man” (p. 192). Nyland translates the verse: “I most certainly do not grant authority to a woman to teach that she is the originator of man....”

Given the historical context of 1 Timothy, the difficult vocabulary and grammar of the verse, and the “reason” for the verse in the first place, which is verses 13 and 14, we felt that the best understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12 was the general understanding of Nyland and the Clark Kroegers, that Paul was forbidding women to claim feminine origin of man.

**3) “Not to cause a disturbance.”** (See commentary on 1 Tim. 2:11). We should pay attention to the fact that *en hēsuchia* (ἐν ἡσυχία #2271) is in verse 11, then repeated in this verse. Why would it need to be repeated, which is obviously for emphasis? Could it really be that the Christian women, who supposedly had been commanded to be silent in the Church (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12), were being so rebellious that they had to be told twice in these two verses to be silent? That hardly seems credible. It is much more likely that the women had never in fact been told to be silent in the Church, but instead were used to speaking up and expressing their thoughts and deeply held convictions. However, in areas where those deeply held beliefs contradicted true biblical teaching, such as about the origin of men, the women had to be told and reminded not to press their traditions and cause a disturbance, but to be in subjection to what they were learning and those they were learning from.

One of the points that conservative scholars make against the translation that Paul is forbidding women from teaching feminine origination of men is that if that erroneous teaching was being circulated, it would make sense that Paul would not just forbid women from teaching it, but would forbid anyone from teaching it. This argument seems to make sense on the surface. But when we read the leadership epistles, we can see that there are a number of issues that actually pertain to both men and women that are addressed only to one or the other. For example, is it the case that only men should pray everywhere and be holy (1 Tim. 2:8), or does that apply to women also? Similarly, should only women dress modestly and adorn themselves with good deeds, and not be gossips (1 Tim. 2:9, 10; 3:11), or do those things also apply to men? We know that those things apply to men and women, but are more appropriate for the gender to whom they are addressed. Similarly, it would be the normal tendency for women to be more vocal and defensive than men about the teaching that Eve was created before Adam, so it makes sense that Paul would address that reproof to women.

Appendix 12. The Bride of Christ

There is a lot of confusion in Christendom concerning the “Bride of Christ.” Some people say it is Israel, others say it is the Christian Church, others say it is both, and so forth. The two primary reasons for the confusion on the subject of the bride are failure to carefully read what the Bible actually says, and failure to identify and understand important figures of speech God uses in the Bible. We will start our study on the bride by studying the figures of speech of comparison, because we will never be able to understand why Israel is called a “virgin,” a “daughter,” “bride,” or “wife” unless we understand those figures of speech.

In the Bible, three common and important figures of speech of comparison are simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis. A simile (pronounced 'sĭm-ĭ-lee) is a comparison by “resemblance,” usually using words such as “like” or “as.” If a person is noisy and sloppy when he eats, a person might look at him and say, “You eat **like** a pig.” The sloppy eater is said to “resemble” a pig, and that kind of comparison is a “simile.” Psalm 1:3 uses a simile when it says a righteous person is **like** a tree planted by the water.

A metaphor is a comparison by “representation.” In a metaphor, one noun represents another, usually by using the verbs “is” or “are.” If the pig example above is made into a metaphor, instead of saying, “You eat like a pig,” the person would compare the man to a pig by representing him as one and saying “You **are** a pig.” Jesus used a metaphor when he said to his disciples, “I **am** the vine; you **are** the branches…” (John 15:5 NIV).

A hypocatastasis (pronounced hī-poe-cä-'täs-tä-sis) is a comparison by “implication.” The comparison is not directly stated, but it is implied. If we turn the pig example into a hypocatastasis, someone at the dinner party would simply look at the sloppy man and say, “Pig!” Just saying “Pig,” effectively communicates the implied comparison between the man and a pig. The flexibility in language and figures allows for hypocatastasis to import meaning in more ways than just factually stating the implied image. For example, at a dinner party of family members who were used to poking fun at one another, instead of saying “Pig,” one person might just look at the other and say, “Oink, oink.” Doing that would effectively communicate the implied meaning of “pig.” A linguist might point out that what seems to be going on in that example is that the sound the pig makes is put for metonymy for the pig itself, which is then being imported by hypocatastasis. However, linguistic expressions are often unique and fluid enough that they cannot be easily put into tightly defined boxes, and hypocatastasis seems to handle the “oink, oink,” example well on its own. A hypocatastasis using “pigs” in the Bible is when Jesus said not to “throw your pearls in front of pigs” (Matt. 7:6). In the biblical culture, pigs were unclean, and so a “pig” was a godless, unclean person.

The figures metaphor and hypocatastasis can be confusing because the figure can be missed and people think that the figure of speech is literal. An example of this happening with metaphor is when Christ took the bread at the Last Supper and said, “This is my body.” He meant, “This bread represents my body.” An example of hypocatastasis being missed is Genesis 3:1 when the Devil is called the “serpent” by hypocatastasis. The comparison should be clear because literal snakes cannot talk, the Devil is referred to as the serpent in other verses of Scripture (Rev. 20:2 is very clear!), and when 2 Corinthians 11:3 (KJV) says that “the serpent” beguiled Eve, the context is Satan and his ministers (v. 14, 15). Nevertheless, many people miss the hypocatastasis and think that the “serpent” in Genesis was some kind of actual snake, and artists do not help much when they paint pictures of a snake with Eve in the Garden of Eden. The artists would have been more helpful to our understanding of the Bible if they had painted Eve with the Devil, appearing as a shining spiritual being.

As well as the figures of speech of comparison mentioned above, we also need to understand the figure of speech personification. “Personification” occurs when something that is not a person is described as a person. We humans relate so well to other humans that referring to something as a person often makes it easy to understand. There are many examples of personification in the Bible. Wisdom is portrayed as a woman calling out for people to listen to her (Prov. 8:1). Ethiopia is portrayed as a woman stretching out her hands to God (Ps. 68:31 KJV, ESV, NASB). Ethiopia is “Cush” in some versions). In Joel 1:10 the ground is “mourning” because the weather has been bad and the grain, grape, and olive crops failed. Also, of course, the nation of Israel is portrayed as a woman many times, which is the subject of this study on the Bride.

The figures of comparison and personification do a good job of communicating information and emotion. For example, saying the people of Israel broke their covenant with God gives us information but does not communicate much emotion. In contrast, referring to Israel as a woman and saying she committed adultery with her pagan lovers brings up a lot of different emotions. In the Bible, Israel is personified as a woman, and then that personification is intertwined with the figures of comparison when “she” is called a virgin, daughter, wife, etc.

Although Bible teachers know Israel is not a woman, they are confused about the words “bride” or “wife” and invest more literal meaning into those terms than they are meant to communicate. Furthermore, because those teachers do not understand that “bride” is simply a comparison, they try to figure out who is the bride and when the marriage occurs. We do not get confused when Israel or Judah is called a lioness (Ezek. 19:2), a horse (Jer. 5:8), a vine (Jer. 2:21), a camel (Jer. 2:23), or a wild donkey (Jer. 2:24). In a similar way, we should not get confused when God calls His people a “daughter,” “virgin,” “bride,” or “wife.” There are so many spoken and unspoken emotions, expectations, and commitments between a man and a woman that it is more succinct and powerful for God to occasionally refer to His people as a “daughter,” “virgin,” or “wife” than to try to describe the relationship in a large paragraph.

The female figurative terms that God uses to describe His people include “daughter” (Mic. 4:8), “virgin daughter” (Jer. 14:17), “virgin” (Jer. 18:13; 31:4, 21; Amos 5:2), “sister” (Ezek. 16:45, 52; 23:11), “espoused” or “bride” (Jer. 2:2), “wife” (Ezek. 16:8, 32; 23:4, Isa. 54:6; cf. Jer. 3:1-14; Hos. 2:7), and “mother” (Ezek. 16:20, 36; 23:4; Hos. 2:2). These terms do not just refer to the women of Israel, but to both men and women collectively. It is misunderstanding the figures of comparison for a man to think that when God’s people are called a “virgin daughter,” the meaning God is importing into the text does not apply to him because he is a man. Similarly, women should realize they are included when God’s people are called “sons.” When God calls His people a “vine,” we know the term applies to both men and women, and similarly when God uses hypocatastasis and refers to Israel as a “bride,” the term includes both men and women.

It also helps to realize that sometimes the biblical vocabulary is not clear. Reading Jeremiah 2:2 in different versions shows that some versions use the word “bride” and some do not. The problem is in part caused by the original languages, because the word for a newly married woman in Hebrew and Greek also had other meanings. The Hebrew word *kallah* (#03618 כַּלָּה) meant a daughter-in-law, a bride, or a wife (recently married or married long before). The Greek word *numphē* (#3565 νύμφη) referred to an engaged woman, a recently married woman, a young wife, and a daughter-in-law. Thus, whether or not the verse in question should be translated “bride,” “wife,” or “daughter-in-law” had to be determined by context.

There are many ways we can tell that the female terms God uses to describe His people are figures of speech. One of them is by comparing the terms themselves. It is not possible for Israel to literally be a virgin daughter and also God’s wife at the same time. Furthermore, in the Old Testament God married Israel and Judah, and although He divorced Israel, He is going to be married to her again in the future under the New Covenant (Hos. 2:16-25). But in the Four Gospels and the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ is the bridegroom, not God (Matt. 9:15; John 3:29; Rev. 21:9). This should catch our attention because in the Law of Moses a person could not have sexual relations with his father’s wife, so legally Jesus cannot be the “bridegroom” and marry his Father’s wife (Lev. 18:8, 15; 20:11, 12). The solution to that “problem” is that the marriages are not literal, they are figures of speech used to describe the personal relationship that both God and Christ will have with the people.

Another problem that would be created if the marriages were literal and not figures of speech is that Israel and Judah are called “sisters,” but God marries them both and even has children by them both (Ezek. 23:4). Yet the Law of Moses forbids a man from marrying women who are sisters (Lev. 18:18). God cannot break His own Law! Furthermore, the Law says a person could not marry his daughter or granddaughter (Lev. 18:6, 10), but Israel is called God’s virgin daughter and yet He married her, which again would be breaking His own law.

Still more evidence that the female terms that God uses to describe Israel are figurative comes from the fact that there is no orderly chronological progression in the use of these terms in the Old Testament. If they were meant literally in some way, Israel would start as a daughter, a virgin, and then become espoused (engaged), then get married, then be a mother. Instead, there is no flowing chronology to the use of the terms. Note the following chronology as Israel goes from being a wife to a virgin to a daughter back to a wife, and note how especially confusing things would be in books such as Jeremiah if the terms were literal.

* **1450 BC**. Israel becomes God’s wife after she leaves Egypt. (Ezek. 16:8 portrays the covenant made between God and Israel at Mount Sinai as a marriage covenant).
* **Late 700s BC**. Israel is a virgin (Amos 5:2).
* **About 700 BC**. “Jerusalem” (also called “Zion”) is a daughter (Mic. 4:8).
* **About 700 BC**. The prophet Hosea shows Israel as acknowledging having once been God’s wife (Hos. 2:7). There is a future time coming when Israel will again be a faithful wife—this is prophesied for the future (Hos. 2:16). Hosea also portrays Israel as a mother (Hos. 2:2).
* **About 700 BC**. Israel is a wife (Isa. 54:6).
* **About 600 BC**. Jeremiah shows God’s people as engaged or “espoused” to Him (Jer. 2:2); a wife (Jer. 3:14), a “virgin daughter” (Jer. 14:17), and a “virgin” (Jer. 18:13; 31:4, 21).
* **About 595-570 BC**. Ezekiel portrays Israel through her history from Sinai as an adulterous wife (Ezek. 16:32; 23:4).

​More evidence that the female terms used of Israel are figurative comes from the fact that Israel is sometimes not called a woman at all, but a man. Israel is called God’s “son” (Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1; 13:13). Hosea 7:9 refers to Israel as a man with gray hair, and Hosea 12:7-8 refers to Israel as a merchantman who has become rich by dishonesty. In Malachi 2:11 Judah is portrayed as a husband who has married the daughter of a foreign god. Isaiah 61:10 uses the figure simile to compare Israel to both a bride and bridegroom in the same verse! Obviously, Israel is not both a man and a woman, or a bride and bridegroom, in any literal way.

The key to recognizing the seemingly confusing references to Israel as a man or woman is realizing that each reference is a figure of speech and each reference stands on its own. In each case, God is using a specific illustration to make a point, just as He does when He calls His people a “vine,” “wild donkey,” “sheep,” or “camel.” When God compares Israel to an animal or plant, we do not try to build a chronology, as if Israel could evolve from a vine to a donkey. Similarly, we should not try to build a chronology when God calls Israel a virgin or wife. Each term imports into the text a picture and a meaning that is important to the point that God is trying to make in that specific context, and each term stands on its own.

When God calls Israel a “virgin,” or “daughter,” He is placing the emphasis on attitudes and behaviors that were important to young women in that culture, such as purity, chastity, modesty, and obedience. When He calls Israel a “wife,” He is emphasizing things such as fidelity, commitment, love, and respect. When God calls Israel a “son,” He is emphasizing the intimacy of the relationship, family love and pride, and obligations and privileges of the family. When God portrays Israel as a man with gray hair, He is pointing out that through bad decisions Israel has become old and weak. When God portrays His people as a husband who has married a foreign woman, He is lamenting the covenants that His people have made with idols.

When God calls Himself a husband, He is emphasizing His love for Israel, His commitment to her, His expectations, and His disappointments with her behavior. When the Bible refers to Jesus as the “bridegroom,” it is highlighting the intimate relationship between Jesus and his people, their obligations to each other, and what they can expect from each other. The Bible says that both God and Christ marry Israel, not as a contradiction, but because both God and Christ have a relationship with Israel and want and deserve the love and devotion from the people that a husband should have from his wife.

The most dominant comparison in the Old Testament that is used of God’s people is the figurative portrayal of Israel as God’s wife. This figurative imagery is very deeply embedded in the text and it is expressed in many different ways: sometimes by calling God a “husband” and Israel a “wife,” sometimes referring to the “marriage,” sometimes calling Israel a “whore” for her unfaithfulness and referring to it as “adultery,” sometimes noting that the couple got a divorce, and so forth. In fact, there are so many verses that in some way make reference to the marriage that it would be difficult to catalog them all.

God’s “marriage” to Israel occurred on Mount Sinai after God gave some of the Law to Israel and the people made a covenant to obey Him. Ezekiel describes this in figurative terms.

**Ezekiel 16:8**

Now when I passed by you and looked at you, behold, your time was the time for love; and I spread the corner *of my garment* over you, and covered your nakedness. And I swore to you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord Yahweh, and you became mine.

The context of Ezekiel 16:8 is important to the subject. Ezekiel 16:3 refers to the pagan ancestry of Israel, which is accurate because Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia. Ezekiel 16:4-5 says that when Israel was born she was despised. Exactly when God considered Israel to be “born” is not stated, likely because her “birth” is not literal but is part of the personification of Israel as a woman. Interestingly, although God refers to Israel as His daughter in other places, He does not do so here because He certainly did not despise her on the day of her birth. We know from history and the Bible that as Abraham’s descendants multiplied, they were in fact despised while they were in Haran, Canaan, and Egypt. Nevertheless, God pitied Israel and made her to grow and flourish (Ezek. 16:6-7).

When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He made a blood covenant with her (Exod. 24:3-8). Bulls were sacrificed, and half their blood was sprinkled on the altar (representing God), and half on the people. We commonly refer to that blood covenant as “the Old Covenant” (or “Old Testament”), but God figuratively refers to it in Ezekiel 16:8 as His marriage covenant with Israel. After that covenant, when the Israelites sinned against God, He often referred to their behavior as “adultery.” When God uses words like “adultery” (Jer. 3:6, 8, 9; Ezek. 16:32; 23:37; Hos. 1:2; 4:15), or accuses Israel of “whoredom” or calls her a “whore” or “harlot” (KJV: Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; 3:9; 13:27; Ezek. 16:15, 33; 20:30; Hos. 2:2-5; 5:3), He is clearly indicating that He had married her and she was His wife. When versions such as the NIV say “prostitution,” usually the Hebrew word can refer to prostitution or adultery. Since God was married to Israel, “adultery,” is usually a better description than “prostitution.”

God tolerated Israel’s spiritual adultery only so long, and then He “divorced” her, abandoning her to her enemies (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8). Nevertheless, God promised to remarry Israel in the last days and never be separated from her again (Hos. 2:16-23; esp. 19, 20). For her part, Israel will repent of her wickedness and return to God, her husband, saying, “I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now” (Hos. 2:7). God will be glad, saying, “In that day...you will call me ‘my husband’” (Hos. 2:16). This “marriage” is still future, and represents the time, after the Second Coming of Christ, when God’s people will be faithful to Him. Just as the first “marriage” was a covenant (the Old Covenant), this new marriage will be associated with the New Covenant, and it will last forever (Jer. 31:31-33).

The figurative use of the bride not only fits Israel, it fits the Christian Church. This makes sense because what God and Christ want from people does not change over time and is well represented by figuratively using the term “wife:” love, devotion, and fidelity. Thus, the Church is clearly compared to a bride or wife twice in Scripture. One of them is in 2 Corinthians.

**2 Corinthians 11:2 (NASB)**

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you *as* a pure virgin.

In this verse the husband is Christ and the engaged virgin is the Church. The point of the verse is that the Church is to be a “pure virgin” for “one husband,” who is Christ. In the Old Testament, Israel was to give herself only to God, and when the people worshiped other gods it angered Him and He called her actions “adultery.” In the New Testament, the figure of the virgin bride is again used to effectively communicate how Christians are to be devoted to Christ and not be led astray to another lord or another Gospel.

The personification of the Church as a wife helps us relate to what Jesus did for “her” and what we are to do for him, as well as instructing Christian husbands and wives on how to relate to each other in a godly way.

**Ephesians 5:25-27**

**25)** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

**26)** to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,

**27)** and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

The figure personification helps us understand how Christ gave himself for the Church, and effectively communicates the actions, commitments, and expectations of Christ with minimum words but maximum impact.

In Revelation 21:9-11, the bride of Christ is specifically identified as the New Jerusalem. The verse refers to the New Jerusalem as both the “bride” and “wife” of Christ. Of course, the wife of Christ is not the city, but the city figuratively represents all the people who live there. Thus, in the book of Revelation, we see that the wife of Christ is neither Israel nor the Christian Church, but rather is every saved person who has ever lived, all of whom will live forever in the New Jerusalem.

Portraying all the saved people as the wife of Christ shows us the love and devotion that will exist into eternity between Christ and the people he died for. Also, we must recall that the Old Testament prophecies foretold that God would also be married to these saved people, and as God’s wife they would also give Him the love and devotion that He deserves forever and ever.

Comparisons such as “son,” “virgin,” “bride,” and “wife” import a host of meaning into the text. We are thinking rightly about the comparison when we focus on the meaning it is importing into the text and ask ourselves why God is using the illustration and what lesson He wants us to learn from it. God wants and deserves love and devotion from His people, and the human terms God uses to describe us illustrate that well. As God’s sons, let us take our family pride and our responsibility to love, provide for, and protect our own fellow family members seriously. As husbands, let us keep our covenants pure and not develop relationships with God’s rivals and enemies. As virgins, let us diligently keep ourselves pure and unspotted from things that ruin our, or our Father’s, reputation. As daughters let us be diligent in our work to better ourselves and our family. As brides and wives, let us be loving and devoted to God and Christ, and show them true fidelity, making sure they are the most important things in our lives. These concluding illustrations of sons, husbands, virgins, daughters, and brides/wives, should be understood in terms of the biblical culture. Gender role models are often significantly different today, but it is important for us to understand the meaning of figures as God intended them to be understood.

Let us not be “goats,” ignoring the things of God, or “wolves” tearing his flock, but be “sheep” willingly following the Shepherd, and “lions” fighting for God’s kingdom.

Appendix 13. Can We Pray to Jesus?

There is a debate among some Christian groups as to whether or not people can pray to Jesus. As we will see from the evidence below, Scripture testifies that it is permissible to pray to Jesus. Before we explore the issue of prayer to Jesus, it is important to understand that the basic meaning of “pray” is “ask.” While any given prayer may have some praise in it, or some general communication of our thoughts and feelings, the word “prayer” fundamentally refers to asking for something. In contrast, “praise” is fundamentally related to thanksgiving. Saying we can pray to Jesus is simply saying we can ask him for things.

The bulk of what we understand about prayer to Jesus comes from the Last Supper and the New Testament from Acts to Revelation. Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper marked a tidal shift in his relationship with his disciples, and so it makes sense that some of the pieces of evidence below come from Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. All four Gospels record the Last Supper, but only the Gospel of John records Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke spend less than half a chapter on the Last Supper, the Gospel of John spends 5 chapters on it (chapters 13-17—almost one-quarter of the Gospel). At the Last Supper, Jesus spent much time telling his disciples about the new relationship he would have with them after his resurrection and ascension (cf. John 14:1-4, 18, 28; 16:5-7, 16). For example, he told them they could ask him for things, that he would not leave them as orphans, and he would now call them “friends,” not servants. The body of the Appendix below gives biblical reasons supporting the fact that Christians can pray to Jesus.

***1. Ask me.*** One of the clearest points of Scripture that supports prayer to Jesus is John 14:14, which occurs at the Last Supper. Since a major part of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper was about his relationship with the disciples after his resurrection and then ascension, it fits with the general theme that John 14:14 is about asking Jesus for things after he ascends into heaven. Jesus said, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do *it*.” After Jesus was given all authority and ascended into heaven, believers can pray to both him and God.

The manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being in the original text. Modern textual scholars have concluded that some of the scribes copying the Greek text either thought that the wording, “ask me anything in my name” seemed strange, or they wanted to avoid what they thought was a contradiction with John 16:23, so they omitted the word “me” from the manuscripts they were copying (or in a couple of manuscripts, scribes changed “me” to “the Father”). This explains why “me” is not in the King James Version—the manuscripts used in making the King James did not have the “me.” However, the weight of the manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being original, which is why almost all modern versions include it.

The “me” occurs in the earliest manuscripts such as p66, a wide representation of Greek manuscripts, Syriac (Aramaic), Latin, and Gothic manuscripts, and a number of lectionaries. (Cf. Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* and *The Greek New Testament*, United Bible Society, 3rd edition). Further textual evidence that the “me” is original is that often, scribes took what they considered difficult passages and changed them to be simpler and more easily understood. Omitting the word “me,” would certainly do that, especially in light of John 16:23, but there is no good reason why any scribe would add the word “me” if it was not in the original text because that would create a more difficult reading and the very apparent contradiction some scribes were apparently trying to avoid.

Also, since it was the tendency of the scribes to simplify the text to avoid apparent contradictions, it makes more sense that they would change “me” to “the Father” in a few manuscripts to avoid a contradiction, than that many scribes would add the word “me” while a few others added the phrase “the Father.”

Jesus telling his disciples that they could ask him for anything after his resurrection certainly fits with the scope of Scripture, since Jesus knew that he was about to be given great authority as the Son of God. That Jesus told his disciples that they could ask him for things after his resurrection and ascension is no doubt the reason that the early Church did indeed ask Jesus for things, as evidenced by both Acts and the Epistles, and also from early historical evidence about Christianity.

Acts and the Epistles show that the early Christians did indeed ask Jesus for things, which is what the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord Jesus” refers to (1 Cor. 1:2; see point 5 below; calling on the name of Jesus).

[For more information on John 14:14 not contradicting John 16:23 see commentary on John 16:23. Also, see commentary on John 14:14.]

***2. Jesus is “Lord.”*** Another point of Scripture and logic that supports us praying to Jesus is that he is Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12), and the very essence of “lordship” is being in charge and running things. That is why the Greek word for “Lord” was used of rulers, landowners, and heads of households. Jesus is Lord because he is God’s “right-hand man” and is directly in charge of the Church. To be able to do that job, God gave him all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). In order for Jesus to be our “Lord” in any meaningful sense of the word, we have to be able to communicate with him and ask him for help. Hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of people asked Jesus for things when he was on earth, and if Jesus is truly functioning as “Lord,” then we must be able to ask him for things.

Someone might say, “Well, when Jesus was physically present on earth people could ask him for things, but now that he is not physically present we cannot ask him for things.” We would respond that the Lord said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the Age” (Matt. 28:20), and we trust that his being with us now is every bit as real and vital as his being with people when he physically lived on earth. Jesus may not be with us physically, but he is still “with” us.

***3. Fellowship with Jesus.*** Another reason we believe Scripture supports prayer to Jesus is that it says we are to have “fellowship” with him. 1 John 1:3 says, “…and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” The word “fellowship” in the Greek is *koinōnia* (#2842 κοινωνία, pronounced koy-no-'nee-ä), and it is used in several different ways in the New Testament. Fundamentally, it refers to a close association involving mutual interests and sharing; a close relationship characterized by involvement and sharing (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3). From that fundamental definition, it developed a second definition and also came to refer to the love or good will that comes with a close relationship; thus “generosity, sharing, participation” (2 Cor. 9:13). *Koinōnia* also came to have a third definition, referring to the result of close association, which is “a gift, a contribution” (Rom. 15:26).

When it comes to the fellowship that people have with one another, *koinōnia* has sometimes been defined as “full sharing,” which has been more fully explained as “intimate joint participation.” In the Scriptures where people “fellowship” with each other, we can sometimes clearly see that there is intimate joint participation. For example, in Acts 2:42, the people were meeting together, eating together, praying together, giving their possessions to one another, and following the apostles’ teaching. In a similar vein, Galatians 2:9 says that James, Peter, and John extended the “right hand of fellowship” to Barnabas and Paul, meaning they jointly and fully shared things among themselves. Also, 1 John 1:3 shows that John told the disciples all about Jesus so they could have “fellowship,” intimate joint participation, with John and the other apostles who had seen the Lord. In contrast, light has no “fellowship” with darkness because there is no intimate joint participation (2 Cor. 6:14).

The use of “fellowship” in 1 John clarifies what our fellowship with Jesus is supposed to be. 1 John 1:3 uses “fellowship” to refer to the fellowship we have with other believers, with God, and with Christ. Logic would dictate that the meaning of “fellowship” is the same for all three: believers, God, and Christ. Our fellowship with God is an intimate joint participation: we expect Him to hear us and to hear from Him. The same is true of our “fellowship” with other believers. It would be unusual if, in that same context, our “fellowship” with Jesus was fundamentally different. That we have fellowship with God and Jesus fits with what Jesus said at the Last Supper about revealing himself to those who love him and keep his commandments. Jesus promised: “Whoever has my commandments, and is keeping them, that is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him” (John 14:21).

If we obey Christ and follow his ways, we will have fellowship with him and he will reveal himself to us, just as he promised. Our asking Jesus for things (praying to him) is just a natural part of that fellowship.

[For more information on “fellowship” with Jesus, see commentary on 1 John 1:3.]

***4. Head of the Body.*** Another reason we believe Scripture supports prayer to Jesus is that he is the “Head” of the “Body of Christ” (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). The Greeks, indeed, most cultures, used the word “head” in many ways, for example, the literal head of the body; a leader or someone of superior rank in a group; the top, start, or extremity of something (we speak of the “head” of a line and a “head” of foam on top of the beer), and more. The Bible follows the cultural use of “head” and uses it in different ways too. For example, it calls the “cornerstone,” the stone that sets fundamental lines and levels of the building (1 Pet. 2:7), “the head of the corner.” Given the different uses of “head,” we must discover its meaning in any given verse by the context and way it is used. When it uses “head” in the context of Jesus being “the head of the body of Christ,” then we know that God is making a comparison between the way Christ works with his body and the way the human head works with the human body.

The “Body of Christ” is a spiritual reality, and every individual Christian is an individual part of the Body. Just as the human head is in intimate and immediate contact with every part of the human body, and the body in contact with the head, so too Jesus is in contact and communication with his Body, the Church, and the members of the Church are in contact with him. As the Head of the Body, the Lord Jesus is actively involved in guiding and sustaining each Christian, and each Christian should be in contact with Jesus, requesting his help and guidance. It would be at least confusing, and perhaps even disingenuous, to say Jesus is the “Head” of the Body of Christ but not in direct communication with the Body.

***5. Call upon Jesus.*** Another solid piece of evidence that people can pray to Jesus is the phrase, “call upon the name of the Lord.” Christians are to call on the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, ask him for things they need. The phrase “call upon the name of” is a formula of petition, of prayer.

The record in 1 Kings 18:24-38 of Elijah standing against the prophets of Baal is a clear example of the phrase “call on” being used as a prayer formula. When Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, he said, “you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh. The god who answers by fire—he is God” (1 Kings 18:24). What ensued after that was a “prayer contest.” The prophets of Baal “called on the name of Baal from morning till noon,” but no one answered their prayers, and they continued through the afternoon with still no result. Then Elijah stepped forward and said, “O Yahweh…let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command…then the fire of Yahweh fell” from the sky. So Elijah’s prayer—calling on the name of Yahweh—was answered while the prayers of the false prophets were not.

Throughout the Old Testament, when people “called upon the name of Yahweh,” it was to pray to, appeal to, or ask for help from God (cf. Gen. 12:8; 1 Sam. 12:17; 1 Kings 18:24; 2 Kings 5:11; Ps. 99:6; Zech. 13:9). The New Testament continues the use of the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord,” but it often makes clear that the “Lord” being called upon is now Jesus. For example, 1 Corinthians 1:2 says, “all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.”

About the phrase “call upon the name of” the Lord, *Vincent’s Word Studies* says: “It is used of worship, and here implies prayer to Christ” (see his entry on 1 Cor. 1:2). Similarly, R. C. H. Lenski writes in *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, “‘To call on him’ means to praise, bless, thank, worship him, and to ask of him all that we need for body and for soul.” James Dunn writes:

“In common Greek, too, *epikaleisthai* is regularly used of calling upon a deity. So it is not surprising that the Septuagint uses the phrase frequently, *epikaleisthai to onoma kyriou* (“to call upon the name of the Lord”), that is in prayer. The same usage naturally reappears in the New Testament, where invocation of God is in view. More striking, however, is the fact that it is the Lord Jesus who is ‘called upon’ on several occasions. And even more striking is the fact that believers can be denoted simply as ‘those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1:2). The defining feature of these early Christians (‘those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’ is almost a definition, equivalent to ‘Christians’) marked them out from others who ‘called upon (the name of)’ some other deity or heavenly being” (James Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* ebook 1.2, “Other Vocabulary”).

Dunn’s point in contrasting the Christians who “called upon Jesus” from the pagans who would have called upon another deity is an important one. Biblical culture, whether Christian, Jewish, or pagan, was very religious. The gods were everywhere. Temples abounded, and the gods were honored and their help invoked at every public event, play, or the public games, and even for such things as a ship taking sail out of harbor or a person being installed in office (hence the English word “inaugurate,” i.e., to install upon the approval of the “augur,” the priest). The gods were represented as statues and bas-reliefs and depicted on mosaics, paintings, and pottery. One Roman satirist claimed that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Given that almost every person called upon one god or another for assistance, an easy and clear way to distinguish Christians from the rest of religious society was to call them “those who called upon Jesus Christ,” a designation that worked because Christians were in fact calling upon Jesus for assistance and not asking help from the gods.

Prayer to Jesus must have been common among Christians, which is why Paul would write about “all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—theirs and ours.” Indeed, Bible verses showing that the early Christians called upon the name of the Lord Jesus include: Acts 7:59; 9:14, 21; Romans 10:12, 13; and 1 Corinthians 1:2. The scriptures in Acts are especially pertinent because they show that the first-century Christians did indeed pray to Christ.

[For more on calling on the name of the Lord, see commentary on 1 Cor. 1:2.]

***6. Know Jesus.*** Another piece of evidence that supports our praying to Jesus is that we are to “know” Jesus (Phil. 3:8, 10). In Philippians, Paul wrote about knowing Jesus, and there is a huge difference between “knowing about” Jesus and actually knowing him. Paul did not just want to “know about” Jesus. In fact, he said he counted any position he could claim in the world to be just dung compared to knowing Christ. Really knowing someone involves personally interacting with the person. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how we could really “know” Christ without personal interaction with him. Christians can personally interact with Jesus, which is often via the gift of holy spirit, and part of that interaction certainly includes feeling free to ask him for help when we need it.

[For more on knowing Jesus, see commentary on Phil. 3:8.]

***7. Chief Shepherd.*** Another reason we know we can personally communicate with Jesus Christ is that he is the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4) and is “the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14). In fact, the Bible prophesied that Jesus would shepherd the people (Micah 5:4, quoted in Matt. 2:6), and refers to Jesus as the shepherd in a number of places (cf. Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; Rev. 7:17). Every good shepherd works hard to have a personal relationship with his sheep so that they know and trust him. This fact is well-known by anyone who works with sheep, and is clearly set forth in Scripture. A good shepherd knows each sheep by name (John 10:3). He leads them and they willingly follow because they know his voice (John 10:4). In fact, they will not follow a stranger because they do not know the stranger’s voice (John 10:5).

Referring to Jesus as a “shepherd” and we humans as sheep is metaphorical language, and metaphorical language only really works if the metaphor accurately represents many of the facts of the situation. In the biblical culture, the shepherd and sheep had a very close relationship; the shepherd communicated with the sheep, and the sheep were able to make their needs known to the shepherd. Jesus could not legitimately be called “the good shepherd” if we could not communicate with him and expect help from him. Jesus promised: “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20), and he is. No sheep would expect to tackle life without the shepherd’s personal attention and help, and similarly, we should not tackle life on our own without Jesus’ guidance and help. Let us regularly and diligently look to Jesus for help and guidance.

[For more on Jesus being the Chief Shepherd, see commentary on 1 Pet. 5:4.]

***8. Friend.*** Another piece of evidence that we can pray to Jesus is that he calls us “friends.” At the Last Supper, Jesus told his followers that they are his “friends” (*philos*) if they do what he commands (John 15:13-15). In fact, he shows his apostles what he means, and proves to them that they are indeed his friends, by telling them that he has told them what he heard from his Father—an intimate communication that he would only tell to his friends. He emphasizes his point by saying that slaves/servants do not know what the Lord does, but friends do. What Jesus said has huge implications for Christians, because Jesus is opening the door for us to be “friends” with him. And nothing could be of greater worth. No wonder Paul said that he counted all his worldly credentials as dung in comparison to “knowing” Jesus, that is, having a firsthand, experiential relationship, or “friendship,” with Christ (Phil. 3:8-10).

Actually, the concept of having a genuine friendship relationship with Jesus Christ is part of the very fabric of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. It is vital to understand Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper because, for much of it, he was telling his disciples things that would define their roles and relationship after his resurrection and ascension. Jesus knew what his disciples did not know: that in a few hours he would be arrested, then crucified, and after his resurrection, his relationship with them would be on a different level. Even with Jesus gone, his disciples had to be confident that he would continue to be in close contact with them even though he would be in heaven and they would be on earth. Jesus built their confidence and calmed their fears by saying in a number of different ways that he would be with them. These different ways included: he said that he and the disciples would be “friends” (John 15:14, 15), they would “see” him (cf. John 14:19), they would be in union with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20), he would show himself to them (John 14:21), he and the Father would make their home in them (John 14:23; *monē* means “home,” “residence,” “dwelling place”), and they could ask him for what they needed (John 14:14).

One of the hallmarks of genuine friendship is that we can ask friends for things. It is quite inconceivable that Jesus would say that those disciples who followed him would be his “friends,” but could not be in touch with him. Regular and intimate communication is part of friendship.

[For more information on our friendship with Jesus, see the commentary on John 15:14, “friends.”]

***9. Not orphans.*** A very graphic way that Jesus, at the Last Supper, told his disciples he would still guide and direct them after his resurrection and ascension was when he said, “I will not leave you as orphans” (John 14:18). The Greek word translated “orphans” is *orphanos* (#3737 ὀρφανός), and it was an important word referring to what could happen in the teacher-disciple relationship. In the biblical culture, a person who was a father figure, mentor, and guide, was called a “father.” Thus, Joseph said he had become a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8), the prophet Elisha referred to the elder prophet Elijah as his “father” (2 Kings 2:12), and the king of Israel referred to the prophet Elisha as his “father,” his spiritual mentor and guide (2 Kings 6:21).

In turn, just as a mentor was called a “father,” a disciple was called a “son” (*huios*, #5207 υἱός), or a “child” (*teknon*, #5043 τέκνον). Although *huios* means “son,” it is sometimes translated as the gender-neutral “child,” and although the Greek word *teknon* is gender-neutral and means “child,” if the context is clearly about males or females, it may legitimately be translated as “son” or “daughter.” A clear example of the word “son” being used for disciples occurs in the Old Testament when the disciples of the prophets were called “the sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.). When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, he said, “If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? (Matt. 12:27). The “sons” of the Pharisees were the disciples of the Pharisees. The apostle Paul referred to Timothy as his “child” (1 Tim. 1:2), and also Titus (Titus 1:4), and Onesimus (Phlm. 1:10). At the Last Supper, Jesus referred to the apostles as his “little children” (John 13:33; *teknion*, #5040 τεκνίον, the diminutive of *teknon*.)

Because the word “father” was used of a teacher/mentor, the Rabbis taught that if a great teacher died or left, his followers were “fatherless,” thus “orphans.” From John 13:33-14:6 Jesus very clearly told the disciples that he was going away. No doubt they were alarmed and concerned. They would be orphans, without their “father.” What would they do? Jesus calmed their fears by saying, “I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you” (John 14:18). In telling his disciples that he would not leave them as orphans, Jesus promised to continue to teach, guide, and direct them. He would do this personally, by coming to them and making a home in them (John 14:23), and also by sending an Advocate, the holy spirit.

Orphans were often taken advantage of in society, and so they needed an “advocate,” which is one of the primary meanings of the Greek word *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος). This advocate (*paraklētos*), the holy spirit, is known as the “Helper” (ESV, REV); “Comforter” (ASV, KJV); “Counselor” (HCSB, NIV84); and “Advocate” (NET, NIV2011). It is noteworthy that the only time the holy spirit is called an Advocate is at the Last Supper, when Jesus was trying to comfort the disciples by telling them they would not be left as orphans and by explaining to them how things would work after he was gone.

[For more on Jesus’ use of “orphans,” see commentary on John 14:18.]

***10. People praying to Jesus.*** Besides the general examples of Christians calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus, the Bible also contains examples of people who spoke to or prayed to Jesus, asking him for things. One such person was the first martyr of the Church, Stephen. The Bible says, “And as they were stoning Stephen, he was calling upon *the Lord* and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’” (Acts 7:59). The phrase “calling upon” is very specific, and is a prayer formula, as we saw above. Stephen asked Jesus to do something for him, which is a prayer. He asked, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And he kneeled down, and cried out another request with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” It is important that although Stephen saw both Jesus and God in his vision of heaven (Acts 7:56), he called upon Jesus to fulfill his request.

Paul also prayed to Jesus, and pleaded with him about his “thorn in the flesh.” 2 Corinthians 12:8 says, “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it might depart from me.” It is clear that the “Lord” Paul prayed to is Jesus, because Jesus answered him and said, “*my* power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9), so Paul stated that he would “boast all the more in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” That Paul also prayed to Jesus seems clear from 1 Timothy 1:12, which says, “I give thanks to the one who has empowered me, Christ Jesus our Lord.” That this was part of Paul’s prayer life can be seen from the fact that in 2 Timothy 1:3, Paul prays to God using the same opening formula: “I give thanks to God, whom I serve….”

Ananias was another disciple who spoke with the Lord, and when he spoke with Jesus the conversation was normal, casual, and comfortable, not strained or filled with surprise and anxiety. It seems clear from the record in Acts 9 that Ananias did not think that talking to Jesus was unusual.

[For more information on Ananias and Jesus, see commentary on Acts 9:10.]

It also seems clear that in Acts 1:24 the apostles prayed to Jesus to see whom he had chosen to replace Judas. Jesus chose the original apostles (Luke 6:13; and this is confirmed in Acts 1:2), and he places apostles in the Body (Eph. 4:11), so it seems most natural that the apostles would ask Jesus whom he had chosen to replace Judas [For more on the prayer in Acts 1, see commentary on Acts 1:24].

The apostle John also offered a short prayer request directly to Jesus in Revelation 22:20 when he prayed, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Had it been inappropriate for John to ask that directly of Jesus, we would expect the text to say, “Father, send the Lord Jesus.”

In summary, the New Testament tells us of Jesus’ personal interaction with Stephen (Acts 7:56); Saul/Paul (Acts 9:1-9; 16:7; 23:11; Gal. 1:12; 2 Cor. 12:9); Ananias (Acts 9:10-16); Peter (Acts 10:9-22; 2 Pet. 1:14); and John (Rev. 1:9-18). Some say “the Lord” Peter addressed in Acts 10 was God, but there are good reasons to believe it was Jesus. First, Peter was in the habit of calling Jesus “Lord.” Second, he had a history of arguing with Jesus, but never with God. Third, the voice came from “the Spirit” (verse 19), and in direct address after Pentecost, Jesus is called “the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 2:7; etc.).

***11. An early Christian prays to Jesus Christ*.** That early Christians prayed to Jesus is almost certainly supported by early Roman “art” as well as the Bible. A piece of Roman graffiti known as the Alexamenos graffito, most likely from around AD 200, shows a young man worshiping, likely praying to, a crucified man with a donkey head, and the inscription, written in Greek, says, roughly translated, “Alexamenos worships his god.” The Romans loved graffiti, and this graffiti was found on the wall of a room near the Palatine Hill in the city of Rome. The evidence that Alexamenos was praying is due to the fact that the artist referred to what he was doing as “worship,” but there was no sacrifice, incense, or any other thing that would be associated with common Roman worship practices. Also, since Romans were polytheistic, it was not generally their practice to demean the worship of others, but Christians were certainly an exception, and the Roman artist mocked Jesus as being a donkey. The Roman artist apparently understood that Alexamenos’ prayer to Jesus was worship.

***12. Singing to Jesus***. Although singing is not necessarily praying, many songs do contain requests, and most contain praise, and all songs “to” someone are communication with that individual. Ephesians 5:19 instructs Christians to be “singing and making music in your heart to the Lord,” that is, to the Lord Jesus. We can tell that the word “Lord” in this verse refers to Jesus because the end of the sentence, which is in Ephesians 5:20, makes a distinction between God, “the Father” and “our Lord Jesus Christ,” clearly referring to the Father as “God” and Jesus as “Lord.” In fact, the evidence suggests that every use of “Lord” in Ephesians refers to Jesus Christ.

The evidence in the Bible that we are to sing to Jesus is backed up by evidence from the Roman world. About AD 112, the Roman Pliny wrote to Emperor Trajan regarding Christians, and said, “…it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before the daylight and sing antiphonally a hymn to Christ as [to] a god” (Quoted in D. G. Dunn; *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* ebook, Chapter 2.2 “Hymns”). It would be unusual to assume that Christians would sing to Jesus but somehow carefully avoid any lyrics that were a request lest that be considered prayer. Many songs contain requests, and we can quite confidently assume that if the early Christians sang to Jesus, at least some of those songs contained prayers.

***13. Jesus’ involvement with the Church.*** As the Lord with all authority and Head of the Body of Christ, Jesus is actively involved with each member of his Body. In his role as Lord, what he does includes that he:

* Pours out the gift of holy spirit to believers (John 15:26; Acts 2:33).
* Gives us grace (Rom. 1:5; 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 8:9; 13:14; Gal. 1:6; 6:18; Eph. 4:7; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 1:12; 3:18).
* Gives us peace (2 Thess. 3:16).
* Gives us mercy (1 Cor. 7:25).
* Blesses us (Rom. 10:12; 15:29. In Rom. 10:12, the text is more literally, “being rich to,” i.e., “enriching” (NAB), “richly blesses” (NET, NIV)).
* Empowers us (Phil. 4:13).
* Nurtures and cares for the Church, holds it together, and causes it to grow (Eph. 5:29; Phil. 1:19; Col. 1:17; 2:19).
* Directs us (1 Cor. 16:7; 2 Thess. 3:5).
* Is interceding for us (Rom. 8:26, 35).
* Gives the equipping ministries to the Church (Eph. 1:1; 4:8, 11).
* Gives revelation (2 Cor. 12:1; Gal. 1:12. Cf. the number of times he appeared to people and gave revelation to them, e.g., Acts 9:10ff; 18:9; Rev. 1:11, 17ff).
* Will transform our bodies at his appearing (Phil. 3:21).
* Will judge, reward, and punish people, according to what they deserve (John 5:21, 22; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:23-25; 1 Thess. 4:6; 2 Thess. 1:8).

It makes perfect sense that we can ask our Lord, Head, Shepherd, and Friend, for whatever we need.

***14. Honoring God.*** Something we should keep in mind when it comes to prayer to Jesus is that it does not dishonor God, it honors Him. God is the one who elevated Christ to His own right hand, made him Lord, gave him a name above every name, made him Head of the Body of Christ, entrusted all judgment to him (John 5:22), allowed him to be the one to give the ministries to the Church (Eph. 4:8, 11), and more. John 5:23 says, “that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.” If we are going to follow these verses and honor the Son just as we honor the Father, we must ask ourselves, “How do we honor the Father?” Surely one way we honor Him is by our praise and thanksgiving to him, and by our prayers to Him. According to Scripture, we are to honor the Son in the same way.

***15. Not forbidden****.* Another thing that is important to remember is that there is nothing in the Scripture that forbids us from praying to Jesus. We have to use this argument carefully, because there are thousands of things we should not do that the Scripture does not forbid. On the other hand, we should be aware that the Scripture specifically forbids many things, for example, eight of the Ten Commandments are specific prohibitions; “Thou shalt not…!”

Generally, God specifically forbids something when “logic” or emotion might lead us to do it. Thus, for example, “do not steal” and “do not commit adultery,” which one could argue God did not need to forbid, He did specifically forbid because of human weakness. Since Jesus said we could ask him for things, is our Lord, our friend, one we fellowship with, the Head of the Body, the Chief Shepherd, and “with us always, even to the end of the age,” logic would lead us—indeed, some would say compel us—to the conclusion that we should talk to him and ask him for things. Given that, it would be reasonable that if God did not want the Body speaking to the Head, or the sheep being in communication with the Shepherd, He would have forbidden it. However, no verse prohibits us from asking Jesus for what we need, a good indication that we can indeed be in intimate communication with him.

***16. Jesus’ power and authority.*** A common objection that Biblical Unitarians use to say that people cannot pray to Jesus is that since Jesus is still a man, he cannot possibly be in communication with everyone in the Body of Christ. The answer to that objection is that just because we cannot understand how Jesus could communicate with each member of his Body does not mean it does not happen. There are many ways that Jesus could answer prayers even though the Bible does not explain them. Also, Jesus has many powers we do not understand, such as how he gives holy spirit to each person who gets born again (Acts 2:33), how he will change our bodies to be like his body (Phil. 3:21), or how he gives ministries to all the different people in the Church (Eph. 1:1; 4:8, 11), but Scripture testifies he does those things. God has given Jesus “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), so we should not be quick to say what he cannot do.

***When do we pray to Jesus?*** Once we realize we can pray to God and also to Jesus, the question arises, when do we pray to God and when to Jesus? The Bible never answers that question. God, Jesus, and Christians are a family, and just as each member of an earthly family has an individual relationship with the other members of the family, sharing differently with the different members, so it is with us and God and Jesus. Each Christian will develop his own individual relationship with God and with Jesus, and the specific communication between them will come naturally out of that relationship.

***How can Jesus hear and answer all the prayers of Christians?*** Biblical Unitarians believe that even after his ascension, Jesus Christ is still a fully human being. Jesus certainly was given authority by God to act on earth, and he certainly is powerful, but there is no evidence that Jesus is now somehow omniscient. In fact, there is biblical evidence that Jesus is not omniscient. For example, Philippians 3:21 says we will have a body like his body, and 1 John 3:2 says we will be like him, and also, it seems clear from Revelation 14:14-16 that Jesus had to hear from God the exact time to return and conquer the earth.

Given that Jesus is not omniscient, it is a reasonable question to ask how can Jesus hear and answer all the prayers that Christians pray. The Bible never addresses this question so at this point we do not know for sure. However, we can make some points and some logical assumptions. One of those assumptions is that God helps Jesus do the work that God assigned him to do. Thus, when it comes to prayer, it is logical to assume that God hears the prayers and communicates with Jesus the essence of what people are praying and the answers that he needs to give. It is also logical to assume that just as God uses angels to do his work on earth, Jesus also has an army of angels that does what he asks.

We should also note that there is no verse that actually says that Jesus hears all of our prayers, only that if we ask him in his name he will answer the prayer (John 14:14). But how he “hears” what we pray, and how he answers those prayers, is not stated in Scripture. He could hear them as God relates them to him, and he could answer them by giving general directions to Angel administrators who would carry out his will. Also, we should note that Jesus specifically said that if we asked the Father in his name, he would not tell those requests to the Father because the Father Himself would treat us as friends and therefore supposedly answer our requests (John 16:26-27).

We can be sure that if God wanted us to know the exact process by which Jesus hears and answers prayers He would tell us, and the fact that He does not should tell us that at this time it is enough for us just to know that we can pray to Jesus and that somehow those prayers get answered.

[For information on Jesus being a fully human being, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For information on the Holy Spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For information on singing to Jesus, see commentary on Eph. 5:19. For information on worshiping Jesus, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Appendix 14. Fool and Foolish

**Fool and related words:**

***Anoētos*** (#453) “without *noeō* (#3539).” N*oeō* = to perceive or observe with the mind. Thus it is “without comprehension; lacking intelligence; unreflecting.” Used of one who is unwilling to use one’s mental faculty to understand; also used of one who does not govern his lusts and acts out his passions without thinking. Foolish, unthinking. **“Unthinking; foolish.”**

* Christ told the two men on the way to Emmaus they were “foolish” and “slow of heart to believe” (Luke 24:25).
* The Galatians were foolish because although they had believed in the risen Christ, they wanted back under the law, and although they had believed in justification by faith, they wanted back under works (Gal. 3:1; 3:3).

***Anoi*a** (#454). “without *nous* (#3563).” *Nous* = mind, the organ of mental perception. Folly, madness, lack of understanding (with the implication there is an unwillingness to understand). “**Irrational.”**

* When Christ healed the man with the crippled hand, the religious leaders were filled with *anoia*, they became as insane, mad (as in the “mad hatter” of Alice in Wonderland), totally without reason (Luke 6:11).
* The men of depraved minds who oppose the truth are *anoia* (2 Tim. 3:9)

***Aphrōn***(#878). “without *phrēn* (#5424).” The *phrēn* is the diaphragm, that which restrains. Thus figuratively it is used of the mind, the seat of mental and emotional activity, which governs one’s life. *Phrēn* means the mind, the disposition, feelings. Thus *aphrōn* = imprudent, inconsiderate, rash, senseless, unwise, foolish, destitute of sound principle. **“Senseless.”**

* The man who had goods for years and said “Eat, drink and be merry” is senseless, rash (Luke 12:20).
* Paul said he had become a fool, a senseless one, in his boasting (2 Cor. 12:11).
* Christians are to realize the seriousness of the times and not be fools, be senseless, acting without restraint by getting drunk and wasting time (Eph. 5:17).

***Aphrosunē*** (#877). Feminine noun from aphron. Not using the capacity for understanding. Folly, foolishness, lack of sense, unwise. **“Senselessness.”**

* Paul told the Corinthians to bear with him in his “folly,” his senselessness, (figure of speech: irony) as he fought for them against the “super-apostles” (2 Cor. 11:1, 17).

***Asophos*** (#781). “without *sophos* (#4680).” *Sophos* = wise, prudent, skilled, knowledgeable. Thus: Unwise, foolish, not walking the way God expects. Used only once. **“Unwise.”**

* Christians are not to be unwise (*asophos*), but wise (*sophos*) (Eph. 5:15).

***Asunetos***(#801) “without *sunetos* (#4908).” *Sunetos* = to reason out, perceive, understand, gain insight. Thus *asunetos* is to be without understanding or without insight. **“Without understanding; devoid of understanding.”**

* Jesus was amazed that the disciples had no understanding, no insight, into what he had taught (Mat. 15:16).
* Those who rejected God and had no understanding became darkened (Rom. 1:21).

***Kenos*** (#2756). “Empty, hollow.” When used of people, the implication is that since they are “empty” concerning good or godliness, and since nature abhors a vacuum, evil of some type has filled the void. Empty, vain, fruitless, false (empty words are false for the simple reason that they are not true). **“Empty; worthless, empty-*headed*.”**

* The son of the landowner was sent away empty, with nothing (Mark 12:3).
* If Christ is not raised from the dead, Paul’s preaching is “empty” and so is our faith (1 Cor. 15:14).
* Let no man deceive you with empty words (Eph. 5:6)
* Do you not know, O empty-*headed* man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:20).

***Mōros*** (#3474). Used of people who are foolish, dull or silly with an emphasis on moral worthlessness. The *mōros* person is a fool, uncultured, uncouth, with no discernment, committing countless blunders, in a stupor in the face of God’s revelation. Versus **raka** ( #4469). *Mōros* scorns one’s heart and character. **“Fool; no-good.”**

* If you call someone a “no-good” you will be in danger of Gehenna (Matt. 5:22)
* Christ called the Pharisees “no-goods” and blind (Matt. 23:17).
* The virgins were “no-goods” and did not bring oil (Matt. 25:2, 3, 8).
* God’s most no-good, foolishness is still wiser than men (1 Cor. 1:25).
* God chose the no-goods of the world to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1:27).
* Avoid “no-good” questions (Titus 3:9).

***Raka*** (#4469). Empty, therefore foolish, stupid, worthless. This scorns the mind and calls the man “Stupid,” whereas *mōros* scorns his heart and character. **“Stupid.”**

* The man who calls someone “Stupid!” will be in danger of a lawsuit (Matt. 5:22).

***Skotizomai*** (#4654) “to darken.” Figuratively used of moral darkness (Rom. 1:21; 11:10).

* but their thinking (*dialogismos* = internal dialogue) became futile and their foolish (*asunetos*) hearts became darkened.

***Tuphlos*** (#5185) “to envelope with smoke,” i.e., to be unable to see clearly. Hence, “blind.” The common word used when one is blind in the eyes. Figuratively, unable to comprehend, unable to see the end result of the action one is taking. Usually translated “blind.”

* Jesus called the religious leaders, “Fools and blind!” (Matt. 23:17)

***Tuphloō*** (#5186) “to blind.”

**From the dictionary:**

Fool = One who is regarded as deficient in judgment, sense or understanding.

**From the thesaurus:** English words close to fool.

Ass (a vain, self-important, or aggressively stupid person): Birdbrain: Blockhead: Bonehead: Boob: Bore: Buffoon: Clod: Clown: Cretin (An idiot; From French *cretin*, a deformed and mentally retarded person, from the Vulgar Latin *christidnus*, a Christian, a poor fellow): Dimwit: Dolt: Dope: Dumb ox: Dunderhead: Fathead: Goose: Half-wit: Idiot: Ignoramus: Illiterate: imbecile: innocent: jerk: lamebrain: lightweight: loon: moron: nerd: nincompoop: ninny: nitwit: numskull: oaf: sap: silly (lacking wisdom or good sense; lacking seriousness or responsibleness): simpleton: stooge: sucker: turkey: twerp: twit:

Appendix 15. Usages of “Spirit”

The word “spirit” has many meanings. This is true in English, and also true in Hebrew (*ruach* [#07307, רוּחַ] = spirit) and Greek (*pneuma* [#4151 πνεῦμα] = spirit). The Greek noun *pneuma* comes from the verb *pneō*, “to blow or breathe.” Thus, to the ancient Greeks, *pneuma* was “breath,” and it came to be associated with invisible things that exerted a force or power. Although *pneuma* is a noun, it is a “verbal noun,” (a noun that has the inherent characteristics of a verb or is grammatically related to a verb), so *pneuma* is always associated with the invisible power exercised by it. The word “wind” is a good example of an English noun that inherently is associated with action, although “wind” in English is not technically a verbal noun. There is no such thing as “wind” without action, even though “wind” is a noun—wind without action would be just “air.” Similarly, *pneuma* is associated with its action or power. In fact, a good basic definition of *pneuma*, “spirit,” is something invisible that exerts a force. That is why some of the things that are called “spirit” in the Greek language are: God (John 4:24); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38); angels (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 8:28); “breath” or “life” (Luke 8:55); wind; and attitudes, thoughts, or emotions (Matt. 26:41). All of these things are invisible but exert force or power.

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, also has a basic meaning of air in motion, but has a very large semantic range and can refer to many different things depending on the context, including God in motion (“the spirit of God moved…”); wind; breath; the gift of holy spirit God put upon some people in the Old Testament; good spirit beings, evil spirit beings, the natural life of our fleshly bodies that is sometimes referred to as “soul;” the life force that will animate resurrected bodies; and the activities of the mind including people’s thought, attitudes, and emotions.

Since *pneuma* and *ruach* can refer to so many different things, the way to tell what the word is referring to in any given verse is by the context, and that is not always an easy task, in fact, sometimes the word can refer to more than one thing and give the verse a couple different possible meanings.

**1. *Pneuma* is used of an immaterial “substance.”**

John 4:24 says, “God is spirit.” God is an immaterial substance.

**2. *Pneuma* is used for “wind.”**

This was certainly true in the secular Greek writings, but it is not used that way in the New Testament unless Hebrews 1:7 is an example.

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used of the wind (cf. Gen. 8:1; Exod. 10:13; 1 Kings 18:45; Job 21:18; Ps. 1:4; 18:42; Prov. 25:14; Isa. 17:13; Jer. 2:24).

**3. *Pneuma* is used for “breath.”**

It was common in Greek writings for *pneuma* to be used of breath, but it is uncommon in the Bible. Revelation 11:11, speaking of God’s two witnesses, says, “the breath of life” entered them (the Greek text reads, *pneuma zōēs*; “spirit of life,” or “breath of life”). The same phrase is used in the Septuagint in Genesis 6:17, which says that when the Flood came, God would destroy “all flesh in which was the breath of life.”

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used for the breath (cf. Job 7:7; 19:17; Ps. 135:17; Isa. 30:28; 33:11).

**4. *Pneuma* is used as a name for God.**

Since God is “spirit” (John 4:24), it is natural that He would be called “the Spirit.” Yahweh is called “the Spirit” in Ezekiel 1:12, 20; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; and 11:1, 24 (see commentary on Ezek. 8:3). John 3:8 speaks of being born of “the Spirit,” i.e., of God; and Matthew 12:31 says that blasphemy against “the Spirit,” i.e., God, would not be forgiven. The Bible has many names that refer to God. Because God is holy (Isa. 6:3; John 17:11), He was also known as “the Holy,” which usually gets translated as “the Holy One” (2 Kings 19:22; Job 6:10; Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa. 1:4; 29:23; Luke 1:49; John 17:11).

Sometimes “Spirit” is combined with “holy,” and God is called “the Holy Spirit,” *pneuma hagion*. In fact, holiness and “spirit” are so essential to God that it would be strange if “the Holy Spirit” were not one of His names. Thus, in Acts 5:3, Peter told Ananias, “You have lied to the Holy Spirit,” whom he identified in verse 4 as “God.” Every name of God emphasizes a different aspect of His character. Since “spirit” is used of invisible power, when God is called “the Spirit,” or “the Holy Spirit,” it emphasizes His invisible power at work. The Gospels say Mary was impregnated by “the Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), because that name emphasized God’s power at work. That “the Holy Spirit” is a name for God and not a separate being explains why Jesus is always called “the Son of God” and never the Son of the Holy Spirit.

There is no reason to make “the Holy Spirit” into a separate “Person,” as Trinitarians do. We do not make any of the rest of God’s names into other “Persons.” There is one God, and He has many names. Every use of “the Holy Spirit” and “holy spirit” can either be explained as being a name for God or the name of the gift of God.

**5. *Pneuma* is used as a name of Jesus Christ in his resurrected body.**

Just as there are many names for God in the Bible, there are many names for Jesus, and one of them is “the Spirit.” Luke 24:39 makes it clear that Jesus had flesh and bone and was not a spirit being like an angel. However, Jesus’ resurrected body was animated and empowered by spirit, and God has given him immense spiritual power, so the name “the Spirit” is appropriate. 1 Corinthians 15:45 says that Jesus Christ became a “life-giving spirit” [*pneuma*], and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 says, “Now the Lord is the Spirit...the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Jesus refers to himself as “the Spirit” many times in the book of Revelation (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Other verses that refer to Jesus as “the Spirit” are Romans 8:16 (the first “Spirit” in the verse), and Revelation 14:13 and 22:17.

**6. *Pneuma* is used of the gift of holy spirit that God put upon certain believers, such as prophets, before the day of Pentecost.**

The original man, Adam, was a body made from the ground that was animated by *nephesh*, usually translated “soul” (Gen. 2:7). Adam was the pattern of all humans ever since, and each of us has a physical body that is animated, made alive, by “soul.” Although God can communicate in various ways with the natural human of body and soul, in order to communicate with the natural person more directly, in the Old Testament and Gospels God put “spirit,” His nature, upon certain people. This can be seen quite clearly in Numbers 11:16, 17, 24, 25.

Before the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when God gave His gift of spirit to people, He:

1. Gave it to only some people,
2. Gave different measures to different people,
3. Could take it away from those people to whom He had given it, just as He did with King Saul.

Examples of the spirit of God coming upon Old Testament people include: Exodus 31:3; 35:31; Numbers 11:17, 25; 24:2; 27:18; Judges 3:10; 1 Chronicles 12:18; Isaiah 42:1; and Ezekiel 2:2. The “spirit” that God put upon some people is more fully referred to as the “holy spirit” (Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:11). Some New Testament believers who had holy spirit upon them before the Day of Pentecost were Elizabeth (Luke 1:41), Zechariah (Luke 1:67), Simeon (Luke 2:25), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15).

The gift of holy spirit was “upon” certain people in the Old Testament. Being “upon” people, it was not permanent. God could take it from people, as He did with Samson and King Saul; and after David sinned with Uriah and Bathsheba, he prayed that God would not take the holy spirit from him (Ps. 51:11). Also, as He had done with the prophets of the Old Testament, God put holy spirit upon Jesus Christ (Luke 3:22), something that had been foretold in the Old Testament (Isa. 11:2; 61:1; cf. Matt. 12:18; Luke 4:18).

Jesus Christ knew from the Old Testament prophecies that God was going to give the gift of holy spirit in a new way as part of the New Covenant, so in accordance with prophecies such as Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26-27; and 37:14; Jesus taught that the holy spirit that was upon them (“with them”) would be “in” them (John 14:17).

[For more about the gift of holy spirit being “upon” in the Old Testament and “in” after the Day of Pentecost, see commentary on Eph. 1:13, “promised holy spirit.”]

**7. *Pneuma* is used of God’s gift of holy spirit that has been given in birth to every believer since the day of Pentecost.**

God put His gift of holy spirit upon only certain select people in the Old Testament, but after the day of Pentecost God put a new and different “holy spirit” into each Christian. The gift of holy spirit we have today is different from the gift of holy spirit God gave to some believers in the Old Testament and Gospels, and it did not exist before it was given on the Day of Pentecost. John 7:39 says, “Now he said this about the spirit, which those who believed on him were going to receive, for as yet there was no spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (see commentary on John 7:39). This new holy spirit is born inside each Christian (1 Pet. 1:23) and guarantees us everlasting life (Eph. 1:14). Indeed, it is the presence of the holy spirit which is born into and sealed inside a person that, in God’s sight, makes that person a Christian. The gift of holy spirit is mentioned many times in the New Testament (cf. Acts 2:33, 38; 8:15, 17, 19; 9:17; 10:45, 47; 15:8; 19:2; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:12).

**8. *Pneuma* is used of good spirit beings.**

Good spirit beings are referred to as “spirits.” There are different types of “spirits.” Angels (divine messengers), are one type of spirit. Hebrews 1:14 says, “Are not all angels ministering spirits*.*” (cf. Heb. 1:7)*.* Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5 and 5:6 are examples of good “spirits” that are apparently not angels, and the cherubim and seraphim mentioned in the OT are spirit beings but apparently not angels.

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used of good spirit beings (cf. Ps. 104:4).

**9. *Pneuma* is used of evil spirit beings.**

Evil spirit beings are referred to as “spirits.” At least some of these evil spirits are “demons” (cf. Matt. 4:24; 10:8; 12:22). Matthew 10:1 says “He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits [*pneuma*] and to heal every disease and sickness.”

Like the Greek, the Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used of evil spirit beings (cf. Num. 5:14; Judg. 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:16; 1 Kings 22:23; Job 4:15; Isa. 19:14; Hos. 5:4; Zech. 13:2).

**10. *Pneuma* is used of the natural life of the body, often called “soul.”**

We generally think the natural life of the body as being “soul,” which is the Greek word *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay). However, the *psuchē*, “soul,” that animates the body is invisible and exerts a force that can be seen, so it is a kind of *pneuma*, “spirit,” and therefore “soul” is sometimes referred to as “spirit.” Luke 8:55 says that Jesus raised a little girl from the dead, and “her spirit [*pneuma*] returned, and at once she stood up.” James 2:26 also uses *pneuma* to refer to the life of the body when it says “the body without the spirit [*pneuma*]*,* is dead,” meaning the body without the life is dead.

[For more on “soul” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Some people do not understand the many meanings and applications of “soul” (*psuchē*) and “spirit” (*pneuma*) in the Greek language, so they read verses such as James 2:26 and think that there is something they call “the spirit of man” that is part of a person’s natural body. This theology makes the natural man a being with a physical body, an invisible animating force (soul), and an invisible spiritual essence (spirit). However, Genesis is clear that when God created mankind, He made a physical body and then gave it life when He animated it by “soul” (Gen. 2:7; Lev. 17:11). The few times mankind is said to have a “spirit” can all be easily explained when we understand that “soul” is a kind of “spirit.” There is no need to make the natural man a being of body, soul, and spirit, and the saved individual a being of body, soul, spirit, and holy spirit. Also, the Hebrew words *nephesh* (soul) and *ruach* (spirit) have the same kind of flexibility that the Greek words *psuchē* and *pneuma* do, so Old Testament verses about soul and spirit can be explained in the same way verses in the New Testament can.

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used of the natural life of the body (cf. Gen. 6:17; 7:15, 22; Job 12:10; Ps. 104:29; 146:4\*; Eccl. 3:19\*; Hab. 2:19\* (\* These could also be “breath”).

**11. *Pneuma* is used of the “spirit” (the invisible life force) that will animate the resurrected bodies of those who are saved.**

Our human bodies are now animated by a kind of spirit that the Bible calls “soul.” However, when dead people are raised at the resurrection, or when people are changed at the Rapture, we will no longer be animated by “soul” but will be animated by a new kind of life. That life will be a kind of spirit, just like the life force that we now call “soul” is a kind of “spirit.” Thus, Ezekiel 37:5-14 refers to God putting *ruach*, “spirit,” into people and making them come alive. Unfortunately, most versions translate the Hebrew word *ruach* as “breath” and not “spirit,” but some versions, such as the Douay-Rheims, NAB, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, and YLT, say “spirit” in these verses. While “breath” is a legitimate translation of *ruach* in some contexts, “breath” is what happens after the person is alive. A study of the whole Bible on this subject shows that God puts *ruach*, spirit, into the dead bodies which then come alive and begin to breathe as a result of the life God put in them. (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44).

**12. *Pneuma* is used by metonymy for manifestations of holy spirit that are produced by God’s energizing of the gift of holy spirit, particularly prophecy.**

This can be confusing to readers who are not used to the figure of speech metonymy, but in the Bible, the effect of holy spirit, e.g., prophecy, is called “spirit.” That is why, for example, the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 14:12, when translated literally, says that people are to be “zealous for spirits.” We are not to be zealous for angels and demons, we are to be zealous for manifestations produced by the gift of holy spirit, that is, zealous for “spiritual utterances,” such as prophecy or the interpretation of tongues, which are things spoken by the power of the gift of holy spirit. (See commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:12).

**13. *Pneuma* is used of attitudes, emotions, etc.**

The word *pneuma* can refer to a person’s emotions, attitudes, thoughts, desires, or will.

* Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit [*pneuma*]*...*” The phrase “poor in spirit” does not refer to the amount of holy spirit one has received from God, but rather refers to an attitude of meekness in the mind. Blessed are those who are humble in attitude.
* Matthew 26:41 (REV): “Stay awake and pray, so that you do not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” The “spirit,” the attitude is willing, but the flesh is weak.
* Acts 18:25 (HCSB): “This man [Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught the things about Jesus accurately.” Apollos was fervent in his attitude and emotions when it came to the things of God.
* Galatians 6:1: “Brothers, if a person gets overtaken in some trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness.” Here, “a spirit of meekness” means an attitude of meekness.
* 2 Timothy 4:22: Paul wrote to Timothy: “The Lord be with your spirit.” In other words, may the Lord be with you and keep your attitude and emotions positive (cf. Phlm. 1:25).
* Romans 12:11 (HCSB): “Do not lack diligence; be fervent in spirit; serve the Lord.” In other words, be fervent in your attitude.

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used of people’s thoughts, attitudes, and emotions (cf. Gen. 26:35; 45:27; Exod. 6:9; Deut. 2:30; Josh. 2:11; 5:1; Judg. 8:3; 1 Sam. 1:15; 1 Kings 10:5; 21:5; Job 6:4; 7:11; 17:1; 21:4 (KJV); Ps. 34:18; 51:17; 77:6; 78:8; 143:4; Prov. 16:18, 19, 32; 29:23; Eccl. 1:14; Isa. 54:6; Ezek. 11:5; and Hag. 1:14).

*Pneuma* can also be used to intensify an emotion. The Greek text of Mark 8:12 is literally translated, “And he sighed in his spirit [*pneuma*].” The word *pneuma* shows that Jesus’ sigh was an action of the mind, from the heart of Jesus’ emotions. Thus the NIV translated the verse “He sighed deeply and said...” “Sighed deeply” is exactly what Jesus did, represented in the Greek text as “sighed in his spirit.”

**14. *Pneuma* is used as a part of a person put in place of the whole person, via the figure of speech synecdoche*.***

In *Figures Of Speech Used in the Bible,* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI, reprinted 1968, pp. 613-656)*,* E.W. Bullinger gives many excellent examples of synecdoche in the Bible. Under the category, “The Part for the Whole,” Bullinger has 17 pages of examples.

There are places in the Bible where a person’s spirit, *pneuma*, seems to be used for the whole person. In Luke 1:47, Mary says, “...my spirit [not just her spirit, but her entire being] rejoices in God my Savior.” (It is possible but less likely that this is a use of spirit as “attitude or emotion”).

**15. *Pneuma* is used by the figure of speech metonymy for a related noun.**

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated. A good example of the word “spirit” being used in a metonymy is John 6:63, when Christ said, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit.” The words themselves were not spirit, they were words, but Jesus referred to them as “spirit” because they produced spiritual life in all those who believed.

Appendix 16. Usages of “Soul”

The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and *psuchē* has a large number of meanings. Any good Greek lexicon will show many of the ways that *psuchē* can be translated. For example, some of the meanings in the BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* are: that which animates animal and human life; life; that which possesses life; the person himself; and the seat and center of the inner human life in its many and varied aspects, which includes desires, the seat of enjoyment, and the emotions and feelings. As well as our emotions and feelings, *psuchē* includes our attitude.

The Hebrew word sometimes translated “soul” is *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), and it does not mean the same thing that the Greek word *psuchē* means, although there are many overlapping meanings. There are times when it is unhelpful to think that “*nephesh* means ‘soul,’” such as when it means “desire” or “appetite,” although the connection comes from the fact that our desires are driven by the life force inside us.

The primary meaning of “soul” in Hebrew is “self” or “life,” so when the text says that there are things that are an abomination to God’s “soul,” it means God Himself (Prov. 6:16). *Nephesh* can refer to an animal or person, or the invisible life force in an animal or person. However, like in Greek, it can also refer to the workings of the mind, including thoughts, desires, attitudes, or emotions. Also, *nephesh* can refer to a person’s or animal’s desires (Prov. 13:2) or appetites (including for food and sex), and so it can be translated “desire” or “appetite.” Thus, a person who likes to eat is referred to in Prov. 23:2 as “the owner of a *nephesh*” (“an appetite,” cf. Prov. 13:25; 16:26). Other uses of *nephesh* can be determined from the culture and context, such as the Hebrew, “the heart knows the bitterness of its soul” (Prov. 14:10), which means the heart knows its own bitterness. The “counsel of the soul” (Prov. 27:9) is sincere or earnest counsel. To be “wide of *nephesh*,” (wide of appetite or desire) is an idiom for being greedy (Prov. 28:25). To be “bitter of *nephesh*” is to be bitter in one’s thoughts, attitudes, and emotions (Prov. 31:6.).

Although some of the definitions of the Greek word *psuchē* are found more clearly in Greek literature than in the Bible, many of them are clearly in the Bible. Meanings of “soul” (*psuchē*), that we find in the Bible include:

A. The life force that animates the body, both human and animal. Matthew 2:20 says the angel told Joseph to take Jesus back to Israel from Egypt because “those who were trying to take the child’s life [soul] are dead” (NIV). In Matthew 20:28, Jesus said he came “to give his life [soul] as a ransom for many.” Acts 20:10 speaks of Paul raising a boy from the dead and saying, “His soul [i.e., his life] is in him” (cf. John 10:11; Acts 20:24; Rom. 11:3). Revelation 8:9 speaks of the creatures of the sea that have “soul” will die. In other words, the living sea creatures will lose their life and die. The Hebrew word *nephesh*, “soul,” is also used for the life of the body of people and animals (cf. Gen. 9:4; 35:18; Exod. 21:23; Lev. 17:11, 14; 24:17, 18; Num. 35:31; Deut. 12:23; 19:21; 2 Sam. 1:9; Job 12:10; Prov. 12:10; Jer. 38:16; Jon. 1:14).

B. Emotions, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. The phrase, “My soul is troubled” (John 12:27) is roughly equivalent to “I am feeling troubled.” When the prophet Simeon told Mary, “A sword will pierce your soul” (Luke 2:35), he was saying that Mary would be terribly hurt mentally and emotionally by things that would happen to her son, Jesus. When Acts 14:2 says, “The Jews who were defiant stirred up the souls of the Gentiles,” it means that the Gentiles were mentally and emotionally upset. In Philippians 2:20, “equal souled” means to think alike, or feel the same way about, something; thus the translation, “like-minded.” The Old Testament also uses *nephesh*, soul, in the same way, meaning thoughts, emotions, and attitudes, and also for desires and appetites (cf. Gen. 23:8; Exod. 15:9; 23:9; Lev. 26:16; Num. 11:6; Deut. 6:5; 24:15; 28:65; Judg. 10:16; 16:16; 18:25; 1 Sam. 1:10; 2 Sam. 17:8; Job 7:11; Ps. 35:13; Eccl. 6:7; Isa. 38:15). “Whatever” is in God’s “soul” almost certainly means whatever is in His “mind” (1 Sam. 2:35).

C. The person; the individual: Acts 2:43 says, “Every soul kept feeling a sense of awe,” and it means that every person felt awe. Acts 27:37 says, “And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls [i.e., people].” Romans 13:1 says, “Let every soul [person] be subject to the higher powers.” (cf. Acts 7:14). The man in Luke 12:19 says, “I will say to my soul,” meaning, “I will say to myself.” The Old Testament also uses *nephesh*, soul, to mean a person or individual (cf. Gen. 2:7; 14:21; 46:15, 18, 22; Exod. 1:5; 12:4; Lev. 11:43; 16:29; 17:12; Num. 15:27; 19:18).

The life force of the body, which we refer to as “soul,” is a type of “spirit,” so to better understand “soul” we must understand “spirit.” The Greek noun *pneuma* is derived from the verb *pneuō* (blow, breathe out) and it refers to something invisible that exerts a force that can be seen or experienced. The Greeks used *pneuma* to refer to “wind,” “breath,” “life,” “attitude,” and “emotion,” as well as “spirit.” These are all invisible, but produce results that we can experience. Many things are called *pneuma* in the Greek New Testament. A partial list includes God (John 4:24); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38); angels (Heb. 1:14); demons (Mark 5:2, 8, 13); breath or life (Luke 8:55); wind (John 3:8); and attitudes, thoughts, and emotions (Matt. 26:41). All of these are invisible but can exert power that can be seen. As a kind of spirit, “soul” is invisible but it exerts a force that can be seen, both as the life that animates the body and as the emotion or attitude we express.

It can be confusing that in both the Old and New Testaments, animal and human life, as well as our emotions, feelings, and attitudes are sometimes called “spirit” and sometimes called “soul,” but that is because “soul” is a type of spirit. “Soul” is the specific type of spirit that animates and gives life to the body. We do not get confused when sometimes a dog is called an “animal” and sometimes it is more narrowly called a “dog,” and we should not get confused when sometimes human life or feelings are sometimes called “spirit” and sometimes more specifically referred to as “soul.” Because the words “spirit” and “soul” can be used to refer to the same thing, they are used in the same way in verses such as Job 7:11 and 1 Samuel 1:15. The man Job says he has anguish of spirit and bitterness of soul, saying the same thing in two different ways. In 1 Samuel, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, is troubled in her spirit and so she pours out her soul to Yahweh. She is emotionally troubled and pours those troubles out to Yahweh.

There are some very common mistakes people make when thinking about “soul.” One is that people have souls but animals do not. A second is that the soul is immortal. A third is that soul lives on after the body dies such that the person is still alive, but as a soul without a body. A fourth is to think that when “soul” is used in the Bible, it is exclusively (or even primarily) used of the life force of the body.

As to the mistaken belief that humans have a soul but animals do not, both the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek text of the New Testament make it clear that both humans and animals have “soul” that makes them alive. Sadly, that is not at all clear in the majority of English translations, which do not translate the word “soul” literally in those verses. It is in large part because English versions do not translate “soul” literally from the Greek and Hebrew that the average Christian does not know animals have a soul. Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible often translates “soul” literally when it appears in the Hebrew text. Thus the following verses make it plain that animals have soul as well as man does:

* “And God said—Let the waters swarm [with] an abundance of living soul…And God created the great sea monsters,—and every living soul that moveth—[with] which the waters swarmed after their kind” (Gen. 1:20, 21 Rotherham).
* “And God said—Let the land, bring forth, living soul, after its kind, tame-beast and creeping thing and wild-beast of the land, after its kind. And it was so” (Gen. 1:24 Rotherham).
* “I have given…to every living thing of the land—and to every bird of the heavens, and to every thing that moveth on the land, wherein is a living soul, every green herb for food” (Gen. 1:29, 30 Rotherham).
* “I, therefore, behold me! establishing my covenant with you [Noah],—and with your seed after you; and with every living soul that is with you, of birds, of tame-beasts, and of all wild-beasts of the earth, that are with you,—of all coming forth out of the ark” (Gen. 9:9, 10 Rotherham).
* “And if a man takes the life [soul] of any human being, he shall surely be put to death. And the one who takes the life [soul] of an animal shall make it good, life [soul] for life [soul]” (Lev. 24:17, 18 NASB. Even Rotherham has “life” instead of “soul” in this verse, which is understandable since the “soul” refers to the life of the man or animal in these verses).
* “and the third of the creatures which were in the sea, which had life [“soul”], died, the third of the ships, was destroyed” (Rev. 8:9 Rotherham; cf. Rev. 16:3).

Many other verses in the Bible show that birds, land animals, and sea creatures have soul, and these can easily be discovered by doing a search on the Hebrew word *nephesh* and the Greek word *psuchē*.

Historically the reason that it has been taught that humans have a soul but animals do not is that it has been wrongly believed that the soul was immortal. Thus, through the years it has been taught that it was the soul that allowed a person to live forever in heaven or hell, but animals did not live on after their body died because they did not have an immortal soul. However, that teaching is not biblical. For one thing, as we will see below, the soul is not immortal. Furthermore, it is not the presence of soul that allows a person to live forever, but the power of God to resurrect people. Believers will be resurrected in new bodies like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21), and that new body will not be animated by soul, but by spirit, a different kind of spirit (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44). In this life, both humans and animals have a life force that animates the body, and the Bible calls that life force “soul.”

As for the mistaken belief that the soul is immortal, there is no such thing as an “immortal soul.” That is a traditional belief, but it is not a part of Scripture. The phrase “immortal soul” is not in the Bible, and neither is the concept of an “immortal soul,” a soul that cannot die. The Bible says very clearly that “soul” can be destroyed (Matt. 10:28). Ezekiel 18:4 says, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” and although that verse is using “soul” to refer to a person, the point of the text is that the person will die because his soul, his life force, will die. Furthermore, the Bible says that Jesus gave his soul as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). Most English versions say that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many, which is an understandable translation since “soul” is the life force of the body. Nevertheless, we must realize that Jesus gave up his soul, his life, as a ransom for many, meaning that his soul died. It had to. If Jesus did not really die, then he never actually paid the price for our sin, which is death. When God raised Jesus from the dead, his body was no longer powered by soul, but by spirit. There are many verses in the Bible that refer to the “soul” dying or being dead, although often *psuchē* is translated “life” in those verses, with the result that people reading the English Bible cannot see that the soul dies (cf. John 10:11, 15, 17; 13:37, 38; Acts 20:24; 27:10; 1 John 3:16; Rev. 8:9; 12:11; 16:3).

It is also a mistaken belief that the soul lives on after the body dies. When the body dies, the soul is dead; gone. There were cultures such as the Greeks who believed the soul was something like a ghost that lived on after the body died, complete with memory, cognition, and emotion. In fact, it was the Greeks who were in large part responsible for that belief coming into Christianity—first from the Jews who spoke Greek and read the Greek Bible, and then by Greek converts to Christianity. The Greeks conquered Egypt in 332 BC, and greatly influenced the Jews who lived there to believe that the soul inhabited the body and lived on after the body died. Around 250 BC, Jews in Egypt produced the Greek translation of the Old Testament we know as the Septuagint, which translates the Hebrew word *sheol* as the Greek word *hadēs*. That was a very inaccurate translation because *sheol* is “the state of being dead,” “gravedom” (the reign of the grave), and people in *sheol* were dead and not alive in any form. In contrast, in the Greek language *hadēs* was the place where human souls go to live after the body dies, and in *hadēs* the souls are alive. Thus, by the stroke of a pen, the translators of the Septuagint gave life to the dead, and the Bible of those Jews who did not read Hebrew now said that when a person died, he was alive in *hadēs*. At the time of Christ the group we know as the Pharisees were one group of Jews who believed that the soul lived on after the body died (the Sadducees did not). When those Jews were converted to Christianity, many of them continued to believe what they had always believed, and thus brought the belief of the immortal soul into Christianity.

Later, when Greeks were being converted to Christianity, they often held on to their belief that the soul lived on, and thus that belief was brought into Christianity by the Greeks as well as by some of the Jews. Eventually, the belief that the soul lived on after the body died became the traditional belief of the Church. Nevertheless, that belief is not biblical. “Soul” is simply the life that empowers the body of humans and animals, and when a person or animal dies, the soul is just gone; it does not “go” anywhere, it just dies.

It will help to clarify our thinking on the subject of the death of the soul life if we think about soul on a cellular level. The “soul” inside us is not a unified thing like a ghost in our body. “Soul” is the life that animates our body—each and every cell. Furthermore, the soul that animates a body cannot live on its own. It is sustained by a functional body. It is clear from the book of Genesis that God made “soul” to make the body alive. It is important to note that God first formed Adam’s body—and it was a fully formed and functional body—from the ground, and then put “soul,” life, into it. The “soul” that was put into Adam’s body could not live without the body, i.e., before Adam’s body was made, but also Adam’s body was not alive until it had soul—the life that animated it.

Every cell in the body has “soul,” and indeed, the existence of the soul in the cell is what differentiates a living cell from a dead one. So, for example, if a carpenter cuts off a finger, it remains alive for a short time, and during that time it can be reattached to his body. Why? Because the “soul” that is in each cell of the finger has not died yet, so the cells are alive. In time, the cells of the finger “die” because the soul that made each of them alive dies. At that point the finger cannot be reattached to the body. It is dead. Yet no one asks, “Where did the soul life in the finger go?” No one thinks the finger (more accurately, the individual cells in the finger), was supposed to go to heaven when it died. We are content to say that the finger “just died,” and that is the truth.

God did not design soul life to be something that lived forever on its own. He designed it to give life to a body and then die and be gone. There are scientists who have kept individual heart cells alive in laboratories for years. These living heart cells are alive because they have “soul,” and when the environment they live in no longer supports life, they die. At that time, the soul that animated them does not “go” anywhere; it just dies and is gone. Similarly, when a person dies, the soul life in each cell of the body dies, cell by cell. “Soul” is still “soul” and it does not “go” anywhere no matter if all the cells of the body die at approximately the same time, such as happens in a normal death, or if just some of our cells die but the person lives on, such as would happen if a soldier had an arm blown off in battle.

“Soul” is not immortal, it can and does die. However, soul can live on year after year if it has a viable body that supports it. We have the same soul as Adam. That soul was created by God for Adam about 6,000 years ago (which God then took and put in Eve also), and it has been passed down from generation to generation in the living eggs of women and the living sperm of men. The reason that an egg is alive and can be fertilized is that it has soul, and the reason a sperm is alive and can fertilize an egg is because it has soul. In the lifetime of a woman thousands of living eggs die, and in the lifetime of a man millions of living sperm die, yet in those cases we do not ask where the “soul” goes. It just dies. Since “soul” empowers every cell, God never designed the soul that animates our cells to live forever. If it did, every hair that was ever pulled out of our heads by the roots would still be alive somewhere, and every sperm or egg that was ever produced by a man or woman would still be alive somewhere. Instead, God originally designed our bodies to be a perfect and ongoing environment for soul to stay alive and thus animate our bodies forever. When that perfect environment is gone (when we die), the soul in us dies and is simply gone.

When the person dies, he is said to be “asleep.” That does not mean that the person, his soul, or his spirit, are literally asleep. The person is dead and the soul and spirit are gone, as we have just seen. For why the Bible calls death sleep, see commentary on Acts 7:60.

Another question that understanding “soul” answers is, “When does human life begin?” The life of a new human starts when a living egg (an egg that has soul) is fertilized by a living sperm (a sperm that has soul). That fertilization starts the life of a new organism, a new person, who has “soul,” i.e., human life. The soul inside the new fetus is actually the soul that has come down from Adam, and the new fetus is clearly alive: it has metabolism, growth, movement, response to stimuli, excretion, and secretion.

It has been argued occasionally that the fetus is not alive because it does not “breathe.” Actually, the fetus does breathe, just not through its own lungs. It gets oxygen through the umbilical cord of the mother and metabolizes it into carbon dioxide that then has to be removed back through the umbilical cord. Thus the baby “breathes” in basically the same way a person on a lung-bypass machine breathes. Doctors doing lung surgery on patients keep them alive by using a lung bypass machine that oxygenates the blood. If a doctor turned off the machine, the patient would suffocate and die. Similarly, if a pregnant woman is killed, the most common way the baby dies is by suffocation—the mother stops breathing and oxygen stops flowing to the fetus, which then suffocates. At birth, a valve in the baby’s heart that allows blood to flow to the lungs and get oxygen opens for the first time, and the baby can then get oxygen through its own lungs. At that point, the umbilical cord is no longer needed, but at the cellular level, the use of oxygen and the expelling of carbon dioxide is the same as when the baby was in the womb and the umbilical cord was its lung by-pass machine.