



DOES GOD EXIST?
What is Your Bet?

**Dedicated
to
Laura Diane Jacobson Botich**

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INTRODUCTION

The first time I thought about this question, I was sitting on the couch with Mary Ruth, my older sister. I had been thinking about death, and I was afraid that our parents would die. At the same time that I was thinking about death, I was wondering whether God existed. I couldn't see him. I couldn't hear him. Mary Ruth comforted me, and so I put my fear of losing our parents aside, but only for a time.

It seemed to me that the world around me required someone to create it, but the question that bothered me was, who created the Creator? Doesn't God's existence require a Creator? Where does it stop? It's difficult for me to think of someone or something that has existed for eternity, with no beginning and no ending. I was only five or six years old at the time, so I set it aside, thinking that I would eventually find the answer.

The answer to my question came to me when I was twenty-three years old. I had left home to take a job with Greene Machinery in Dallas, Texas. The first thing I needed to do upon arriving in Dallas was to look for a place to live. After skimming through the newspaper, I found a rooming house. Breakfast and supper were included, and so I moved in. My roommate was JJ Hunt. JJ was not an abbreviation. JJ was his name. He had just been discharged from the Navy, and he was a new Christian. He worshipped every Sunday morning and evening. He invited me to attend worship, and I went with him occasionally. The old question surfaced again: Does God exist; and if so, what is He like?

Within six months I began to find an answer to my questions. While I did not join JJ's church, I did join Tyler Street Methodist Church in Oak Cliff, Texas. The TNT Sunday School Class began to nurture me and pointed me to a direction where I could seek an answer. That place was Texas Wesleyan College in Fort Worth, Texas. Dr. Alice Wonders and Dr. Benitos listened to my questions and helped me to search for the answers myself. After

college, I went to Candler School of Theology and Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, where I earned a Bachelor of Divinity and a Ph.D. Clinton Gardner, Ted Runyon, and Ted Weber guided me in my search for an answer.

Have I found the answer? Yes and No, but I did discover that the search for God is as interesting as the answer to my question. I don't suppose anyone can ever have a scientific answer, but the question can be answered by faith. I hope you'll join me in this exciting search for God. Let us not stop until we have discovered both his existence and his personality. At that point I learned that God was searching for me before I began my search for Him.

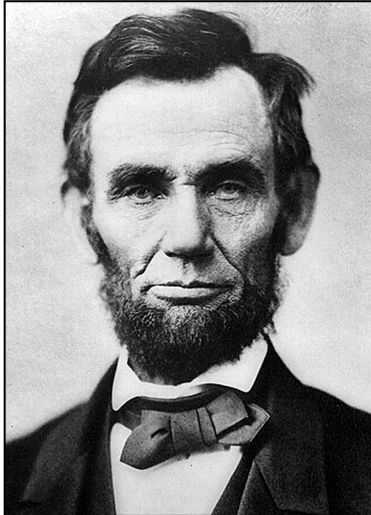
PART ONE
Does God Exist?

Immanuel Kant



*Two things fill the mind
with ever new and increasing admiration and awe,
the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.*

Abraham Lincoln



*I never behold [stars]
that I do not feel I am looking into the face of God.*

1. THE STARRY HEAVENS ABOVE

In writing about the existence of God, I'm doing Theology, for Theology is nothing other than the study of our belief in God's existence and God's personality. Everyone who believes in God is at least a practical theologian. The tools for Theological Study are Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience (feelings, emotion, etc.). It is ideal to strike a balance between reason and feelings. By using these tools, it is my intention to deal with the following two questions about God:

Does God exist? If God does exist, this leads us to the second question, which would be: What is God like?

Let us begin with the two most important evidences of God's existence: the existence of the universe and the moral law. Although Immanuel Kant did not believe in a personal God, he did believe in God's existence and he stated it better than anyone else:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.

Abraham Lincoln based his belief in God on the starry heavens above and said:

I never behold [stars] that I do not feel I am looking into the face of God. I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God.

I agree with both Kant and Lincoln, that the very existence of the universe requires a Creator. It seems reasonable to me to draw such a conclusion, but let's also look briefly at the traditional rational proofs for the existence of God. There are at least four such proofs.

Anselm



God is that than which no greater can be conceived.

Thomas Aquinas



Everything has a first cause.

The Four Rational Proofs for God

The Ontological Proof for God

The Ontological Proof was put forth by Anselm (1033-1109 C.E.). Anselm defined God as something greater than anything else that could be conceived. Such a being must exist, insisted Anselm, for if he did not, he would not be the greatest conceivable being. This abstract, but rational argument, was not based on any kind of observation. It was not even based on the observation of the starry skies above. It was based on reason alone. The argument put forth by Anselm can be put into one sentence:

God is that than which no greater can be conceived.

The Cosmological Proof for God

The Cosmological Proof was put forth by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 C.E.). Aquinas drew on the writings of Aristotle. The argument states that everything has a first cause. Without a first cause, nothing would exist. The first cause of the cosmos, said Aquinas, is God. This argument was based on reasoning, but also on the existence of the cosmos or the starry skies above. The big bang theory, which finds acceptance by most scientists, gives some credence to the Cosmological Proof for the existence of God. Aquinas puts his argument in concise terms:

Whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another.
This cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover.

The Teleological Proof for God

The Teleological Proof was put forth by Thomas Aquinas and William Paley (1743-1805 C.E.). Design and purpose, they proposed, are evidence for God's existence. As a watch indicates the existence of a watchmaker (Cosmological Proof), evidence of design and purpose in the universe points to a purposeful Creator (Teleological Proof).

William Paley



A watch must have a maker.

Jürgen Moltmann



Both arguments are based on reason, which reflects on observation. Paley summarizes his argument

Suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place. The inference...is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker.

The Moral Proof for God

Then there is the moral proof of God. This rational proof is based on several questions, such as: What is the source of our moral values? How do we make sense of right and wrong? Why do we all value justice and fair play? Our sense of moral values points us to a moral Creator. The Moral Proof of God also draws its rational conclusion on the basis of observation. That observation may not be on the starry skies above, but it does base its conclusions on the moral law within. I will deal more in depth with the moral law within, but first, I would like to quote Jürgen Moltmann's summary of the rational proofs for God:

The traditional proofs of God can be divided into three major groups: (1) the proofs of God from the world, from the cosmos of the history of reality, (2) the proofs of God from human existence, from the soul or from the self-consciousness of man's necessary ability and obligation to be a self. (3) the proofs of God from "God", the proofs of the existence of God, or of the quest of God, from the concept or name of God.

The Role of Science

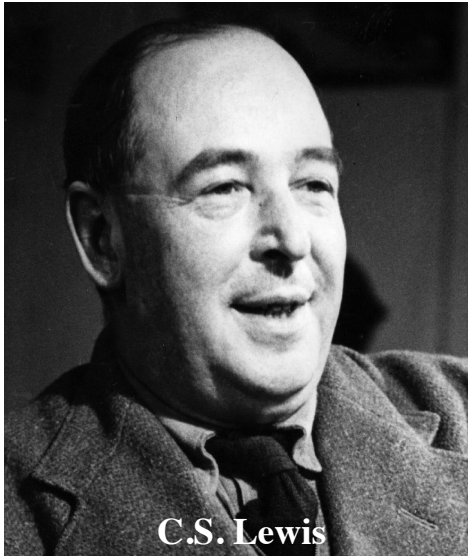
I agree with C.S. Lewis, who said that Science has an important, but limited role to play. It is not the role of Science to prove or disprove the existence of God.

Science works by experiments. It watches how things behave. Every scientific statement in the long run, however complicated it looks, really means something like, "I pointed the telescope to such and such a part of the sky at 2:20 a.m. on January 15th and saw so-and-so," or,

“I put some of this stuff in a pot and heated it to such-and-such a temperature and it did so-and-so.”

Do not think I am saying anything against science: I am only saying what its job is. And the more scientific a man is, the more [I believe] he would agree with me that this is the job of science—and a very useful and necessary job it is too.

It is usually the journalists and popular novelists who have picked up a few odds and ends of half-baked science from textbooks who [claim, on the basis of science, that God does not exist].



The Wager

This does not mean that scientists cannot speak on the subject of God’s existence. They certainly have a right to believe in God, but they have to admit that science cannot prove or disprove God’s existence. I believe that there is evidence in the starry skies above, in the cosmos, and that we can reasonably affirm the existence of God. Nothing, however, is proven. In the

end it is a matter of faith, or as Blaise Pascal put it, a wager. In his “reasons of the heart,” Pascal wrote:

God either exists or he does not. If we believe in God and he exists, we will be rewarded with eternal bliss in heaven. If we believe in God and he does not exist then at worst all we have forgone is a few sinful pleasures.

Reason’s last step is to acknowledge that an infinity of truth lies beyond it. ...either God exists or he does not exist.... What is your bet? The stake to be put up is slight or even nothing compared to the prize to



Blaise Pascal

I agree with Pascal. My bet is that God exists. There is nothing to lose. If I’m right, my search for God will not be in vain. If I’m wrong, then at least, I will have attempted to live a moral life.

What is Your Bet?



St. Augustine in His Study
BOTTICELLI
c. 1480

Augustine

And our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.

2. THE MORAL LAW WITHIN

The second piece of evidence for the existence of God is the moral law within. Like the starry skies above, the conclusion one draws is an exercise of faith, not a scientific conclusion. Faith, however, can be based on evidence and it does enable one to see, as stated by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.):

To have faith is to believe what you can't see,
and the reward of faith is to see what you believe.

Defining The Moral Law

Since there have been a number of terms used for the moral law, it is important for me to define what I mean by the moral law. The moral law is an appeal to a standard of behavior which we expect all others to acknowledge. We call this standard by a number of names, such as:

The Law or Rule of Fair Play
The Law or Rule of Right and Wrong
The Law of Nature or Natural Law
The Law of Human Nature

I prefer to use the term “moral law.” The law of nature or natural law could be used to describe observable laws like the law of gravity. This is not what I mean by the moral law. The law of human nature comes close, as does the rule of fair play and the rule of right and wrong, but these latter rules are more like definitions of the moral law.

How the Moral Law Works

Let us look next at how the moral law works within us. It indicates to us the way in which we are to behave and how we expect others to behave. We may indeed discover that frequently we do not behave in this way, nor do others; but when this happens, we discern that something is wrong. We recognize that we can choose to obey or disobey the moral law, but we also recognize when it is violated either by us or by someone else. It is easier to see its violation in someone else than in ourselves. The



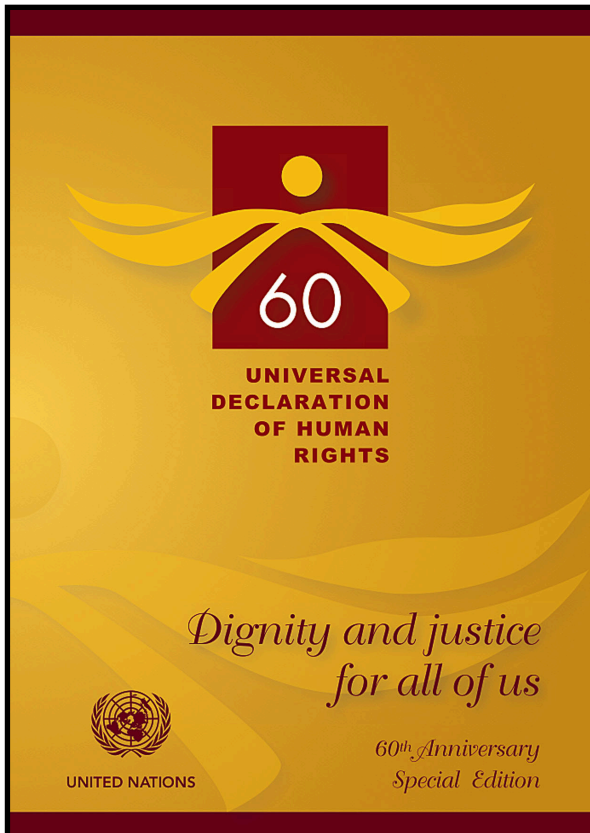
moral law tells us the tune we are all to play, and our human instincts are the keys enabling us to play the tune. If we don't play the right keys, the tune will be out of harmony.

The moral law must be distinguished from human instincts and impulses. Human instincts and impulses are neither good nor bad, they just are. They do, however, have to be controlled. The moral law is a tune, which we call goodness or right conduct. This tune directs our human instincts and impulses. Together they conform to the tune making beautiful music. If they do not conform, then the tune is out of sync. All of our human instincts and impulses are important. We cannot simply focus on one and forget the others. C.S. Lewis gives us a good example of focusing only on the instinct of love for humanity.

You might think that the Instinct of love for humanity is a good Instinct to follow, but if you leave out justice, you will find yourself breaking agreements and faking evidence in trials “for the sake of humanity,” and in the end you will become a cruel and treacherous person.

Is the moral law relative? This is a question that is frequently asked. Different societies seem to play different tunes and project

different values. This does not mean that the values of all societies are in sync with the moral law. We easily recognized that something was wrong with the values of Nazi Germany and the Klu Klux Klan. They were out of sync with the tune of the moral law. The United Nations came up with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948. If the moral law was relative, why would they do that? If the moral law was relative, no one could hold anyone responsible for following different values. If the moral law was relative, it would make no sense to talk about moral progress. The moral law is not relative. Elements of the moral law are recognized in all societies. Moral progress moves us closer to the moral law.



The moral law assumes that we all have free will or the ability to make choices. We can conform to the moral law or we can resist it. The moral law informs all human beings how they ought to behave. We did not create this sense of ought, nor did we create the moral law, which we frequently resist. The moral law must have come from somewhere else. There are two views on this—the materialist and the religious view. In the materialist view, matter and space just exist, human beings evolved by chance, and they created their own values and laws, including the moral law. In the religious view, matter and space were created by a conscious and intelligent mind. That mind created the universe, and that mind put us under a moral law, which we did not make, we cannot forget, and we cannot fully obey. The religious view sounds more rational to me than the materialist view' therefore, I bet that the religious view is correct.

3. DOES GOD EXIST?

Does God exist? Someone or something exists, and I believe it is someone, whom I choose to call God. The evidence is two-fold:

1. The Universe is very beautiful, but it is also a dangerous place. It does not tell us what God is like.
2. The moral law is evidence of God's goodness. It informs us of fair play, unselfishness, and courage. It also expects us to respond in good faith, honesty, and truthfulness.

The moral law is part of that yearning for God, who placed the moral law within us. Augustine stated it ever so clearly:

*Thou has formed us for Thyself
And our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.*

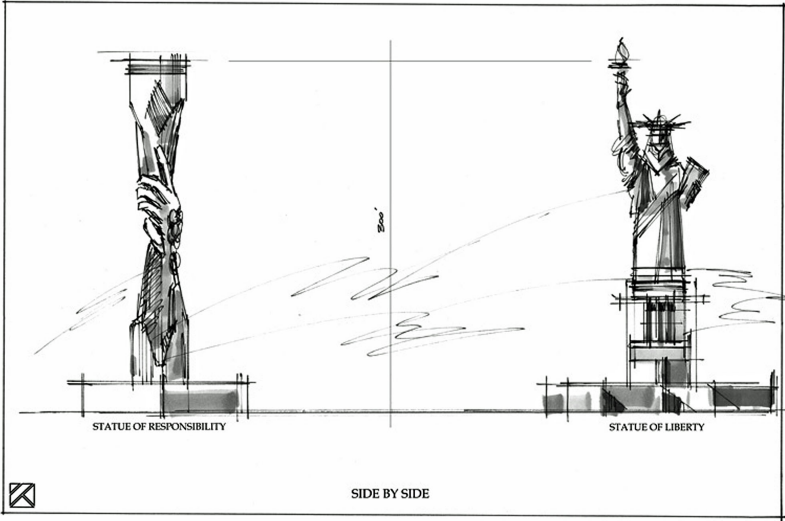
The moral law shows itself inside ourselves as an influence or a command trying to get us to behave in a certain way. Something is directing the universe, which appears in us as a law urging us to do right, and making us feel responsible and uncomfortable when we do wrong.

Viktor Frankl recommended "that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast should be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast." In addition to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, we need the United Nations to come up with a Declaration of Human Responsibilities. Perhaps we already have that in the Ten Commandments.

Every covenant, especially those made with God, must include both liberty and responsibility. I think that we ought to build such a symbol on the west coast:

The Statue of Liberty has served as a symbol of liberty, both in America and throughout the world. Its counterpart, the Statue of Responsibility, will likewise serve as a symbol—a visible representation and call to responsibili-

ty—both in America and abroad. These two principles—liberty and responsibility—when linked together, will help engender and secure freedom for the present generation, and for generations yet unborn, wherever a thirst for freedom exists. Only by balancing Liberty with Responsibility can Freedom be sustained.



I'll go along with Frankyl. Freedom alone does not represent any moral law, but the balance of freedom and responsibility does. What is your bet?

PART TWO
What is God Like?

4. THE GREAT DIVISIONS

Belief and Atheism

Having accepted Pascal's wager that God exists, I find myself in the majority. The majority of people have chosen to believe in God or gods in contrast to the minority who have chosen not to believe, whom we call atheists. They too have made a wager, only their wager is radically different from that suggested by Pascal. I call the atheist wager radical because of the position in which they place themselves. They have to affirm that all of the world's religions are completely wrong. Christianity lines up with the majority, but this does not mean that Christianity believes that all religions are equal. Some religions are closer to the truth than others. Christianity does believe that God has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the one, says Christianity, who tells us what God is like.

Pantheism and Theism

If the first great division takes place between those who believe in God and those who do not believe, the second great division takes place among those who believe in God. The division is between those who believe in Pantheism and those who believe in Theism.

Pantheism. Let us look first at Pantheism, which is the belief that God is beyond good and evil. God animates the whole universe as we animate our bodies. If the universe did not exist, neither would God. One of the best examples of Pantheism is Hinduism.

Theism. In contrast to Pantheism, Theism believes God to be Good or Righteous. God does not animate the universe. He created it as a painter paints a picture. If the universe disappeared, God would still exist. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all affirm Theism. All three religions are related, but their understandings of God differ.

Christianity and Dualism

The third great division exists between the three theistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and Dualism. Their resistance to Dualism is similar, but I shall contrast Dualism with Christianity.

Dualism. According to Dualism, there are two equal and independent powers which are referred to as Good and Evil. These equal and independent powers are fighting an endless war against one another, and the outcome of that war is uncertain. Evil is just as likely to win as Good.

Christianity. Christianity also affirms the presence of Good and Evil, but does not attribute to them equal and independent status. Satan, who symbolizes Evil, is not an equal or independent power. He is a fallen angel, who has led humanity astray. Humanity and the universe were created good, but went wrong. Humanity still retains the memory of what was supposed to be. There is indeed a war going on between Good and Evil, but it is not a war between equal and independent powers. It is a civil war, and the outcome is certain. God (Good) will overcome Satan (Evil).

All this distinguishing between Good and Evil supports the existence of the moral law. If there were no moral law, the terms Good and Evil would have no meaning.

Christianity and Deism

Deism believes in the existence of a supreme being, a creator who does not intervene in the universe, nor does the creator interact with humankind. On the other hand, Christianity believes in theism, which believes in a creator who intervenes in the universe and sustains a personal relationship with creation and humankind.

5. THE WORK OF GOD IN CHRIST

The Claim of Jesus

Simple Christianity?

Having recognized the existence of Good and Evil, we must now face another reality. There is no such thing as a simple Christianity. Simple Christianity, wrote C.S. Lewis, “is the view which simply says there is a good God in Heaven and everything is all right—leaving out all the difficult and terrible doctrines about sin and hell and the devil, and the redemption.” Christianity must face the reality of Good and Evil, even if It believes that in the end God will eradicate Evil.

By creating human beings in his own image, God made evil possible. Being made in the image of God means that we have been granted free will. We are free to do good and we are free to do evil. Free will is the dilemma of humanity. Free will makes goodness, love, and joy possible, but it also makes evil possible. While God wants us to voluntarily unite ourselves to him, we try to find happiness and peace apart from him. With the conflict going on between Good and Evil, that peace is not easy or simple to find.

God has tried a number of approaches to reunite us to himself. The first approach was to work within the human conscience, which works together with the moral law. Then he called a people, the Jews, to be his light to the world. Within that people, he called the prophets to interpret the moral law within. They cried out, “Thus saith the Lord,” but only a few listened. They were trying to let their people know what God was like and what humanity ought to be like. It’s always been there in the moral law, but since it was being ignored, the prophets proclaimed it. They knew there was a civil war going on between Good and Evil, and they chose the side of Good, Righteousness, and Justice. Islam sees Mohammad as the last of these great prophets.

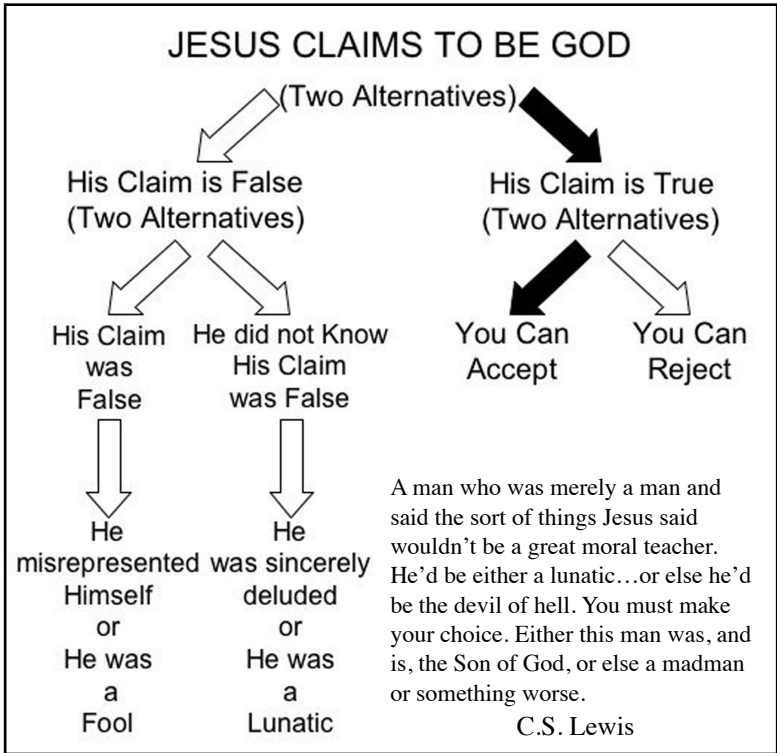
The Radical Claim

At first many believed that Jesus, like John the Baptist, preached in that same tradition, but Jesus made a radical claim to be God himself. One can begin to see that radical claim in the idea that he existed before Abraham, that he could forgive all sins, and that he would be present at the end of time to judge the world. There's nothing simple about his claims, but the big claim was that He and the Father are one and the same. C.S. Lewis dealt seriously with this claim, and wrote:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

The Early Theories

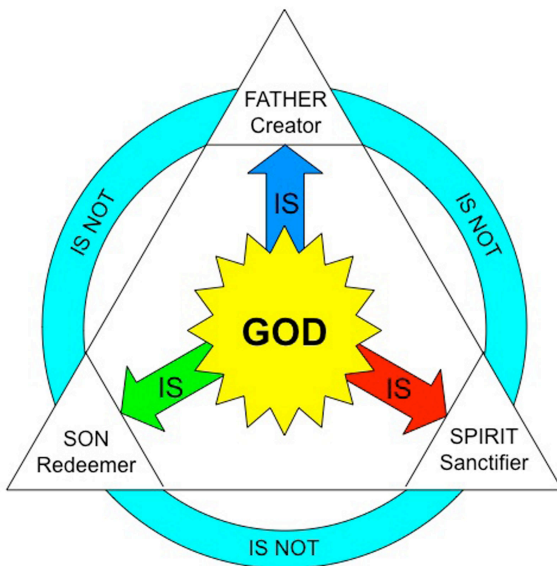
Not everyone took Jesus at his word. Most saw something unique in Jesus, but his radical claim was far from simple. One of the first theories (teachings) was that Jesus was indeed divine, but not human. The Church was quick to reject that theory. Another theory was that Jesus was only human. He was not divine. This theory is still around. Lewis insists this is one thing that we must not accept. It goes against Jesus central teaching about himself. If he is wrong here, how can we accept anything else he says? A combination of these first two theories is that he was



born human, but became divine, perhaps at his baptism when God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and blessed his ministry. Another theory similar to the last one is that his body was human, but his Spirit divine. The difficulty with this theory is that the Jewish Religion never saw any sharp separation between body and Spirit. When Jesus died on the cross, they assumed he was dead. They had no confidence that his Spirit would rise, leaving his body behind. The resurrection of his body fits in with Jewish belief, but it does not fit in with the theory that while his body was human, his Spirit was divine.

That leaves us with the position that was finally accepted by the Church and has become known as the orthodox position. Jesus is fully human (100%) and fully Divine (100%). This position was confirmed at the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. and by

the Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E. All the other theories are to be rejected. There were other theories, but most of them did not deal with the nature of Jesus and his very complicated claim to be God.



The Atonement: the Central Work of Jesus

If we meet God in Jesus, then we discover what God is like. Jesus clearly taught that he did not simply come to teach or heal. He did come to forgive sins and reunite humanity back to God. The central Christian belief is that Jesus came to put all of humanity right with God and to give everyone a fresh start in life. He did this through his suffering and death on the cross. We call this the atonement or at-one-ment.

There are at least four theories of atonement. I shall list them first, with a brief definition and then I shall attempt to give a more complete definition of each one.

Ransom Theory: God paid Satan off with a bribe.

Sacrificial Theory: Jesus appeased God by becoming the perfect sacrifice.

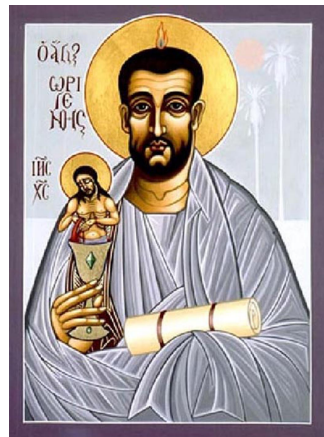
Substitution Theory: Jesus was punished in our place.

Moral Theory: Jesus' death was an example of God's love.

The Ransom Theory (Objective). This theory was proposed in the early church by Irenaeus and Origen. The idea was that humanity had subjected itself to Satan (Evil). The mark of this subjection was sin and death. Jesus, being the only sinless human being, was offered as a ransom for freeing humanity from the grip of sin. Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:28 offer Scriptural support. The passage in the Gospel of Mark sums it up best: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a **ransom** for many."



Irenaeus (125-202 C.E.)



Origen (185-254 C.E.)

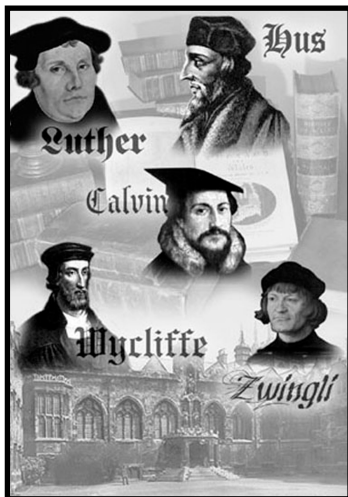
The Sacrificial Theory (Objective). In the Medieval Church, Anselm of Canterbury proposed the Sacrificial Theory. The theory begins with the idea that since sin alienated humanity from God, a perfect sacrifice is required to forgive sin. God is just and needs a sacrifice (or satisfaction) in order to forgive human sinfulness. Sometimes this theory is called the satisfaction theory. Roman Catholics favor this theory and view the Mass as a re-

peated sacrifice in our time. Several passages of Scripture support this theory, and they are Ephesians 5:1-2; Colossians 1:20; and Hebrews 9:11-14. The Ephesian passage sums it up: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and **sacrifice** to God.”

The Substitution Theory (Objective). Too many names are associated with the substitution theory of atonement. For the most part, they are all within the reformed tradition.



Anselm (1033-1100 C.E.)



The Reformers

It is sometimes called the penal substitution theory. It states that humanity has sinned and that God’s justice requires punishment. Jesus accepted the punishment for the sins of humanity, opening the way to God. The Scripture passages that support this theory are Romans 4:24-25 and I Peter 3:18. The Romans passage sums up this theory quite well: “It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.”

The Moral Atonement Theory (Subjective). This theory was first proposed in the Medieval Church by Peter Abelard. Although Abelard admitted the presence of sin in humanity, he rejected the idea that God demanded some kind of objective payment. When people see God's love on the cross, insisted Abelard, they are transformed. They will repent of sin and seek fellowship with God. Galatians 6:14 says it best: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." One of the most beautiful hymns in the English language also supports this theory. It is...



**Peter Abelard and Heloise
(1079-1142)**

*When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.*

While my personal preference falls on the Moral Theory of Atonement, the other theories have their place. No explanations on the death of Christ are adequate, not even my preferred Moral Atonement Theory. All four theories are attempts at explaining how the death of Christ makes us one with God. The central Christian belief is that the death of Christ somehow puts us right with God and gives us a fresh start. The death of Christ also reveals to us the heart of God. C.S. Lewis ignores most of the theories of atonement, but draws a great conclusion on the subject:

In Christ a new kind of man appeared: and the new kind of life which began in Him is to be put into us. ...a Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man

who is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble—because the Christ-life is inside him, repairing him all the time, enabling him to repeat (in some degree) the kind of voluntary death which Christ Himself carried out.

6. THE CHURCH AND ETERNAL LIFE

The Conductors of the New Life

The conductors of the new life in Christ are the study of the Scriptures, the experience of grace, baptism by water and the Spirit, and the Lord's Supper. These are four ways in which we come to the One who claims to be God, and knowing Him, we come to know God.

The Study of the Scriptures. One can start anywhere, but of course, most of Christianity has to be understood from the Scriptures that have been set aside to define what I would call sacred history. The Bible is the sacred history of God's involvement with human beings. While it is an inspired book, it is also a dangerous book, for it can be easily misunderstood. That's why I would advise studying it with others. At least one of those others needs to be someone who has been theologically and biblically trained; otherwise, participants are only sharing their ignorance. Of course people can train themselves. There are many good commentaries and videos available to help in the process of Bible Study.

The Experience of Grace. Herein lies the key. Grace is a gift, faith is the response, and Good Works is the result. Ephesians 2:8-10 says it all:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Grace is the gift. Faith and works are the response that cannot be separated. They are like two blades of a scissors that work together. Separated they are useless.

This relationship between faith and good works helps us to understand just how the New Life works. Martin Luther and C.S. Lewis give slightly different, but similar explanations of the rela-

tionship. Luther said, “Good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good works.” C.S. Lewis shows us how God’s grace makes us good, enabling us to do good works:

But the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because he loves us....



The gift of grace, however, must be viewed in three dimensions. It might be easier to understand these three dimensions of grace if we compare our moving from outside into a house. Prevenient grace is the invitation to enter the house and works on us even before we want to enter, right up to the time we first approach it. Justifying grace moves us through the door into the house, and sanctifying grace makes us at home within the house. The goal, however, of all three dimensions of grace is holiness or perfect love. That is the nature of the New Life. Grace is the gift, faith and good works make up the response.



We have to be careful with grace. If we take it for granted, it can become what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called cheap grace. Bonhoeffer makes the distinction between cheap and costly grace in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, ... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. ... it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Baptism by Water and the Spirit. The Baptism of John was the baptism of repentance symbolized by water. The Baptism of Jesus was the baptism of the Holy Spirit symbolized by the dove or fire and wind. We have confused the Baptism of Jesus by as-

sociating it too closely with water. The method of Baptism, whether by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling, is not as important as submitting one's self to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, which starts one on a journey to holiness or perfect love. Holiness or perfect love has to do with learning how to obey the commandment to love God with one's whole being and to love one's neighbor as Christ has loved us. This isn't easy, but it's the goal of the New Life in Christ. It is also the only way we will ever become truly acquainted with what God is really like.

A word needs to be said about infant baptism. It is obvious that the infant does not know what is happening to him or her, but that can also be true of adults. Infants are baptized with the idea that grace is bestowed upon them even before they know anything about it. That grace is the prevenient grace I talked about earlier. Infants must be baptized with great caution, for they are not ready to make any response that involves faith and good works. Dietrich Bonhoeffer gives a wise warning on the subject of infant baptism:

As far as infant baptism is concerned, it must be insisted that the sacrament should be administered only where there is a firm faith present which remembers Christ's deed of salvation wrought for us once and for all. That can only happen in a living Christian community. To baptize infants without a Church is not only an abuse of the sacrament, it betokens a disgusting frivolity in dealing with the souls of the children themselves

The Lord's Supper. If baptism is the entry point into the New Life, the Lord's Supper is the place where that New Life is fed and nurtured. All traditions teach that in some mysterious way Christ is present in the Lord's Supper, whether we call it the Mass, the Eucharist, or Holy Communion. For Roman Catholics Christ is physically present. For Lutherans Christ is somehow present with the elements of bread and wine. For most other Protestants, the bread and wine symbolically point to the presence of Christ, which is accessed by grace through faith and good works. The issue is this: In what way is Christ present? Is

He physically or spiritually present? I affirm the latter, but the point of His presence is to be with us constantly, not only when we partake of the elements of bread and wine.

Discipleship

The Church is the Body of Christ, which creates disciples, and then sends them out to live the New Life and invite others to become disciples and live as citizens of the Kingdom of God. In this community of believers every member is a priest and every member has at least one spiritual gift. Many members may have more than one spiritual gift; and would therefore, be expected to exercise multiple gifts. I'll expand on this later.

The church's Mission, according to Jesus Christ, is to make disciples.¹ Disciples have the following seven characteristics:

1. Disciples commit their lives to Jesus Christ
2. Disciples pray for God's Will
3. Disciples worship regularly
4. Disciples study in small [accountability] groups
5. Disciples minister with their spiritual gift(s)
6. Disciples give cheerfully and proportionately
7. Disciples support missions

Disciples recognize themselves individually and corporately as Temples of the Holy Spirit.² George Macdonald describes the experience that all disciples feel as they are transformed into the New Life, becoming part of the Temple of God. Macdonald describes it as an individual experience, but his imagery can apply to the corporate Temple as well, where living stones make up the Temple of God

Imagine yourself as a living house.
God comes in to rebuild that house.

At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing.
He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof

¹ See Matthew 28:16-20.

² 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20 and 1 Peter 2:4-10

and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing
and so you are not surprised.

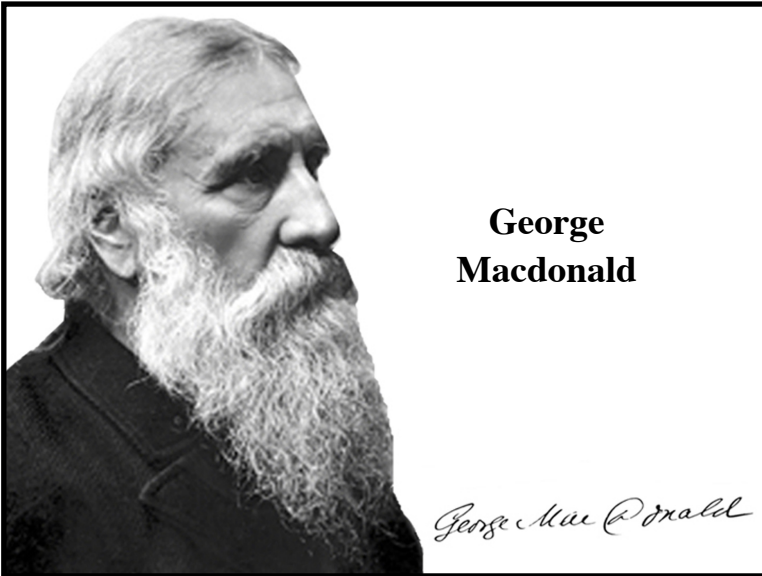
But presently he starts knocking the house about
in a way that hurts abominably
and does not seem to make sense.

What on earth is He up to?

The explanation is that He is building quite a different house
from the one you thought of—
throwing out a new wing here,
putting on an extra floor there, running up towers,
making courtyards.

You thought you were going to be made
into a decent little cottage: but
He is building a palace.

He intends to come live in it Himself.

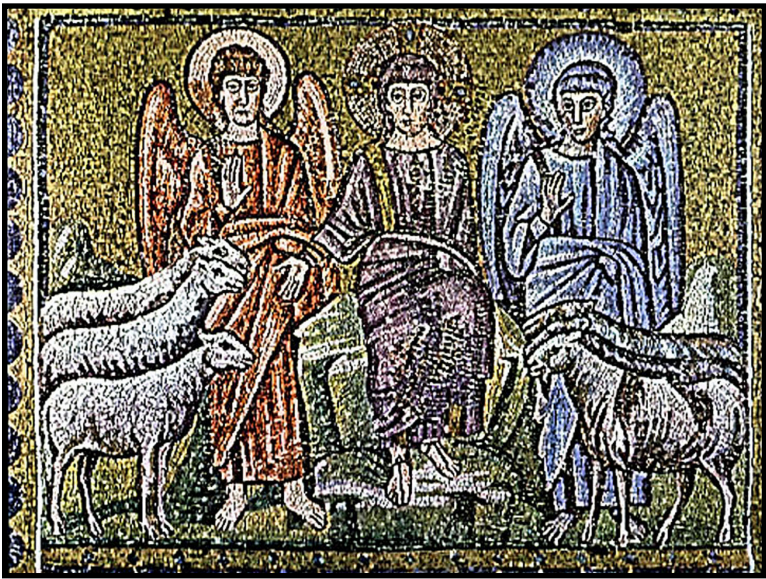


The Final Judgment

What about those who refuse to become disciples? Are they sent to Hell? While the Old Testament is relatively quiet on the

subject of Hell, the concept of Hell is taught throughout the New Testament. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus describes the Last Judgment:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory,
and all the angels with him,
then he will sit on the throne of his glory.
All the nations will be gathered before him,
and he will separate people one from another
as a shepherd separates
the sheep from the goats,
and he will put the sheep at his right hand
and the goats at the left.¹



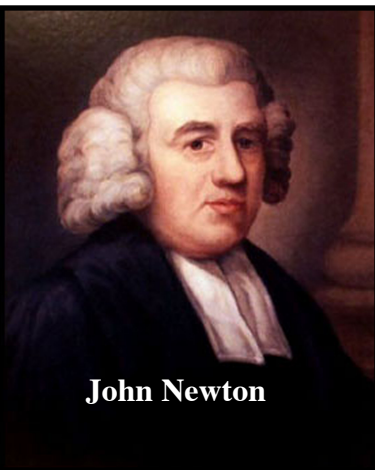
Heaven and Hell

In commenting on Jesus' description of the Last Judgment, John Newton wrote:

¹ Matthew 25:31-33

If I ever reach heaven I expect to find three wonders there: first, to meet some I had not thought to see there; second, to miss some I had expected to see there; and third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there.

I am not the man I
ought to be, I am not
the man I wish to be,
and I am not the
man I hope to be,
but by the grace of
God, I am not the
man I used to be



John Newton

Jesus' description of the Last Judgment is full of surprises. The sheep represent those who will enter the Kingdom of God (Heaven), and the goats represent those who will go away into eternal punishment (Hell).

But is anyone really cast into eternal punishment? To some extent Hell has to exist even if only Heaven existed. Those who reject discipleship and the New Life would not be happy in Heaven. In fact, Heaven would be a Hell to them. Heaven and Hell are choices we make, as one anonymous author has defined Heaven and Hell:

Heaven is life with God.
Hell is life without God.
Heaven and Hell are not rewards.
They are consequences
of the choices we make.

John Milton said about the same thing when he wrote:

The mind is its own place,
and in itself
can make a Heav'n of Hell,
A Hell of Heav'n.

As long as people rebel against God, there has to be a Hell, even if it's only inside of their own minds. God casts no one into Hell. Hell is a choice we make. "To turn aside from Thee," wrote John Greenleaf Whittier, "is Hell, to walk with Thee is heaven." C.S. Lewis states it even more strongly:

I willingly believe that the damned are,
in one sense, successful, rebels to the end;
that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.

Once a man is united to God
how could he not live for ever?
Once a man is separated from God,
what can he do but die?

One question remains. If Jesus is the one who reveals what God is like and invites us into discipleship and the New Life, what about all those people who have never heard of Jesus, or for cultural reasons, remained nonChristians? C.S. Lewis asked this question, and at the same time gave a reasonable answer.

Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.

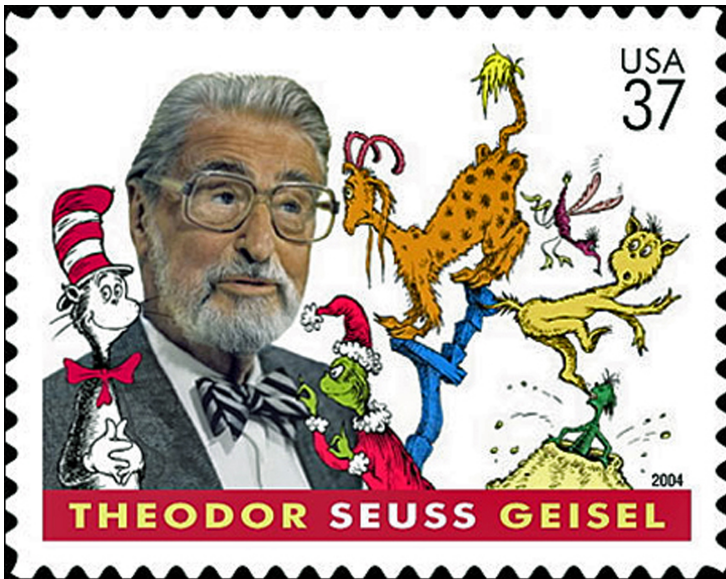
Heaven and Hell are choices we make. We have to make choices even when we do not know all the answers to our questions. C.S. Lewis again gives us guidance in our decision-making.

There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch,
every split second is claimed by God
and counterclaimed by Satan.

Now, today, this moment,
is our chance
to choose the right side.

God has given us freedom to choose. It is not as difficult as
some of us would make it. Dr. Seuss makes the process of choos-
ing crystal clear:

You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself
any direction you choose.



Conclusions

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is simpler than most theologians
admit. According to Mark 1:14-15, “Jesus came to Galilee, pro-
claiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is ful-

filled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” If those who heard him would have repented and believed in the good news, that would have been all that was necessary. Jesus would not have had to face the cross, and we wouldn’t have to decide which theory of atonement is the right one or the best one.

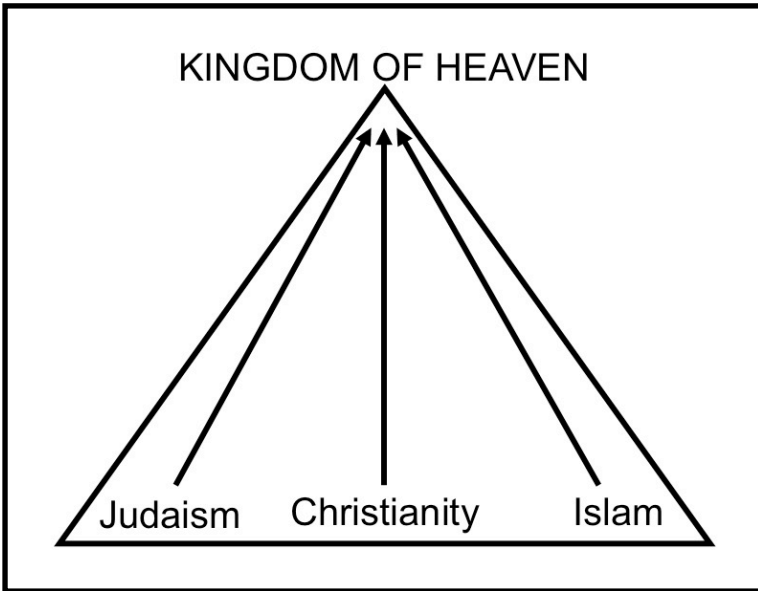
The cross was only necessary because Jesus was not taken seriously. He knew *that* would make the cross inevitable. Jesus took his disciples to Caesarea Philippi, and asked them, “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples answered him, John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Then Jesus asked his own disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” Then Jesus began to teach them that he would have to undergo great suffering and be killed, but after three days, he would rise from the dead.¹ Even the disciples had difficulty understanding what Jesus was saying, but it wasn’t all that difficult.

The resurrection of Jesus on the third day authenticates everything he taught about himself and God. But what did he teach? His teachings have been beautifully summarized in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, but he taught more. Some Jews gathered around him and demanded, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered,

I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.²

¹ Mar 8:27-31

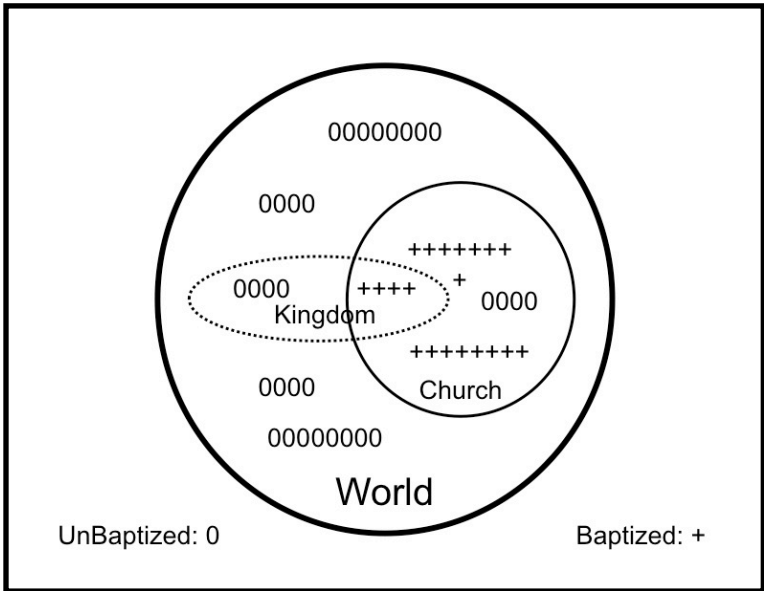
² John 10:24-30



If God was truly in Jesus Christ, then the above image of the three monotheistic faiths using different roads as they climb the same mountain is false.

The descriptions of God and his Kingdom just aren't the same. God can't be leading the people of all three faiths up different roads on the same mountain into His Kingdom. Is there a better way to describe what is really happening. Jesus says that he knows his sheep, and that he also has other sheep. "I have other sheep," he says in John 10:16, "that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." Perhaps Augustine has the best image when he draws the contrast between the earthly city and the heavenly city.

These two cities were made by two loves: the earthly city by the love of self unto the contempt of God, and the heavenly city by the love of God unto the contempt of self. The earthly city glories in its own power, the heavenly in the power of God.



I would illustrate Augustine's concept as above, only I would make the contrast between the Kingdom of God and the world. The Kingdom of God would be Augustine's heavenly city and the world would be his earthly city.

Where I have placed the Church, a Muslim could place the Mosque, or a Jew could place the Synagogue or Temple. The pluses (+) symbolize baptized Christians and the zeroes (0) symbolize the other sheep, that Jesus recognizes. Some baptized Christians find themselves inside the Kingdom as well, and some baptized Christians find themselves outside of the Kingdom. The same can be said of the other sheep. Some find themselves inside the Kingdom, and some find themselves outside of the Kingdom. The above should not surprise us, for did not Jesus say in Matthew 7:13-14: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

There are those, of course, who don't like the idea of Jesus talking about judgment and hell. They would rather focus on God as love and a Jesus who doesn't talk about judgment and hell, but this isn't the kind of Jesus we find in the New Testament. So, I must ask the question. Do we cease to give priority to Scripture so that we can paint a picture of a loving God? Should we create God in our own image, or should we conform to the image of God we find in Scripture? My bet is with the Scripture, but to answer this question, we'll have to explore the source and content of what we call Scripture.

PART THREE
Is the Bible Accurate?



7. THE ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE

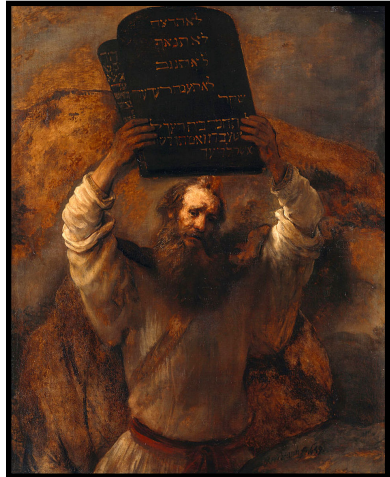
The Bible is a Library

The word “Bible” comes from the name of an ancient city in Lebanon. The name of that city was Byblos. The Greeks applied “Byblos,” to the papyrus, which they imported from Byblos. Today, this city goes by the name of Jubayl.

The Bible is not a single book. It is a library of sacred books, which went through the human process of writing and editing. All of these books were written between 1450 B.C.E. and 150 C.E. The Old Testament books were written between 1450 and 400 B.C.E., while the New Testament books were written between 45 and 150 C.E.

Events of Divine Origin

These books were considered to be authoritative and of divine origin. In Exodus 34:27 we find God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses, who, in turn, was to share them with the people. The LORD said to Moses, “Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke.” In Deuteronomy 6:1-3, Moses passes the message onto the People:



Moses

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children, may fear the LORD your God all the

days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Following the Law, the literary prophets appear to interpret the meaning of the Law. They seem to have an intimate connection with God, for they frequently cry out, “Thus says the Lord.” They feel compelled to write down their messages. In Jeremiah 30:1-2, God tells Jeremiah to write it down.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah....

As the Law became Scripture, now the writings of the prophets became Scripture. We even find God commanding people to write down their stories in the Apocrypha. One example of this can be found in chapter 12 of Tobit, where, an angel named Raphael, reveals himself to Tobit and Tobias. When they prostrate themselves before the angel (a messenger of God), the angel says, “So now get up from the ground, and acknowledge God. See, I am ascending to him who sent me. Write down all these things that have happened to you.” (Tobit 12:20) This became a tendency among the Jews, to write everything down. This tendency led to the recording of the revelation of God’s will as the written word. Out of such an emphasis developed the idea of Sacred Scripture.

When we come to the New Testament, the primary focus is on the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection three days later. Many of the New Testament books claim to be written by eyewitnesses. Although Paul was not an eyewitness, his letters preceded the Gospels, which tell the story of Jesus crucifixion and

resurrection. The early church had three criteria for including or excluding books for the New Testament. (1) First, the books must have apostolic authority. They must have been written by the apostles themselves, who were eyewitnesses to what they wrote about, or by associates of the apostles. (2) Second, the books must conform to what was called the “rule of faith.” Books must be congruent with the basic Christian doctrines that the church recognized as normative. (3) The books had to enjoy continuous acceptance and usage by the church at large. *The Gospel of Thomas*, for example failed to



Jesus

meet these criteria. The book was written around 140 C.E., and was not written by Thomas. None of the early church fathers quote from it, and up to 1945, only a single fifth-century copy in Coptic had been found. Then in 1945 a Greek manuscript was found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. This compares very poorly to the thousands of manuscripts that authenticate the Four Gospels.



John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom appears to be the first writer, in his Homilies on Matthew, to use the Greek phrase “Byblos” (books) to describe both the Old and New Tes-

tament together. Chrysostom delivered this homily between 386 and 388 C.E.

The Accuracy of the Bible

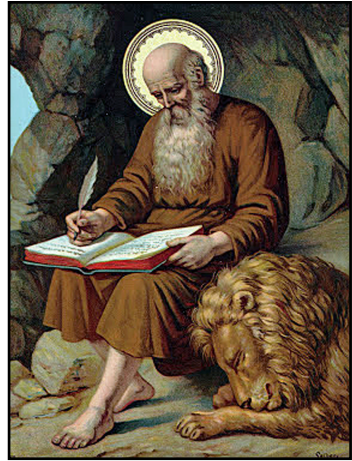
Scholars admit that there are over 200,000 variants in the New Testament alone. These variants are not only errors. Every misspelled word or an omission of a single word in any of more than 5,600 manuscripts would be counted as a variant. One would expect more variants than that, and one would also expect the variants to affect the contents. The 200,000 variants have not affected a single article of Christian doctrine. The New Testament has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book in antiquity, but it has survived in a purer form than any other great book. Westcott and Hort, in the 1870's, stated that the New Testament remains 98.3 percent pure, and scholars Norman Geisler and William Nix conclude that it is 99.5 percent pure.

The writers of the New Testament, which was written in Greek, looked to the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The original manuscripts of the Old Testament were either in Hebrew or Aramaic. This new Greek translation was finished around 250 B.C.E. and was called the Septuagint. It is sometimes designated LXX, which is the Roman numeral for "70." It was believed that 70 to 72 translators worked to translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. There is also a legend that the 72 translators, 6 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, worked in separate cells, translating the whole, and in the end all their versions were identical. In fact there are large differences in style and usage between the Septuagint's translation of the Torah and its translations of the later books in the Old Testament. The Septuagint was often used by the New Testament writers when they quoted from the Old Testament, and it was the translation of the Old Testament that was used by the early church. Greek was the international language of the world.

We do have manuscripts in Hebrew that can be compared to the Septuagint. In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. The manuscripts date from 200 B.C.E to 70 C.E., and they con-

tain the entire book of Isaiah and portions of every other Old Testament book but Esther.

In 380 C.E. St. Jerome translated the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament into Latin. This was called the Latin Vulgate. The Latin Vulgate became the Bible of the Western Church and remains the authoritative translation of the Roman Catholic Church to this day.



Jerome

During the Protestant Reformation the Bible was translated into the common language of the people. The Bible was divided into chapters in 1227 C.E.

by Stephen Langton and into verses in 1551 C.E. by the French printer Robert (Estienne) Stephanus.¹

The first English translation of the Bible was done by John Wycliffe in 1380 C.E. Wycliffe was forced to translate from the Latin Vulgate because he did not know Hebrew or Greek. His



John Wycliffe

was a translation from a translation and not a translation from the original Hebrew and Greek. When Gutenberg printed the first Bible in 1456 C.E., it was the Latin Vulgate. In 1514 C.E., Erasmus published the first New Testament in Greek.

In 1611 C.E. the King James Version of the Bible was translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek.

¹ Stephen Langton was professor at the University of Paris. Later he became the Archbishop of Canterbury. Robert Stephanus' last name is sometimes spelled "Stephens" and "Estienne."

A flood of translations and paraphrases followed. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV) was intended to be readable and literary accurate. The New Testament was published in 1946, the Old Testament in 1952, and the Apocrypha in 1957. It was replaced by the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV) in 1989. The New International Version (NIV) was published in 1983. It is more of a thought-for-thought translation than a word-for-word translation. The latest revision was published in 2011.



King James

Is the Bible accurate? Homer's *Iliad* was written about 800 B.C.E. It was as important to ancient Greeks as the Bible was to Christians. There are over 650 manuscripts of the *Iliad*, but they date from 200 to 300 C.E., which is over a thousand years after the *Iliad* was written. There are over 5,664 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament dating as early as 125 C.E. and a complete New Testament that dates around 350 C.E. The Bible is accurate enough for me. What's your bet?



Jerome's Study

8. CANONIZING THE BIBLE

The Canonization of the Old Testament

The first five books (the Torah) were recognized as Scripture around 400 B.C.E. Shortly after 200 B.C.E. the prophetic books were regarded as Scripture. In addition, a third collection of books, called the writings, was gradually taking shape. Around 90 C.E. a council of rabbis convened in Jamnia, on the coast of Palestine, to consider what writings would be authoritative for the Jewish Faith.

Several things contributed to the urgency of their task. With the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., there arose a fear that their traditions would be distorted or obscured. This demanded that some kind of standard or “canon” be established. Two other factors added to the crisis. There was (1) the excessive popularity of the apocalyptic writings, and (2) the wide circulation of the Christian writings.

There was a great deal of uncertainty as to how to draw the boundaries. The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and the Pseudepigrapha¹ were very popular after 200 B.C.E. Some of these books were included in the Qumran library. The main problem was to decide which books belonged to the Writings.

The first principle to be applied was the need for harmony with the Torah. The book of Esther posed difficulties. Besides its secular character, it deals with a festival (Purim), for which there is no provision in the Torah. Even the book of Ezekiel was questioned by some rabbis, for at some points it conflicts with prescriptions of the Torah. The Pharisaic freedom of interpretation, based on the oral law, meant that the principle of harmony with the written law could be applied with flexibility.

¹ Spurious writings attributed to Jewish patriarchs and prophets.

The second principle had to do with the doctrine of prophetic inspiration. According to this doctrine, prophecy began with Moses and ended in the post-exilic period with Ezra (according to Josephus) or in the time of Alexander the Great (according to the Talmud). Finally, the rabbis rejected all of the books written in Greek, since that language was not employed in the period of prophetic inspiration. This meant that all of the books of the Pseudepigrapha¹ and the Apocrypha were rejected. Although the rabbis rejected the Apocrypha, Jerome included it in his Latin Vulgate, which meant that some of these books would be accepted in the future by the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Most Protestant Churches followed the Jewish lead and rejected them. At any rate, the Old Testament Canon was closed at Jamnia around 90 C.E.

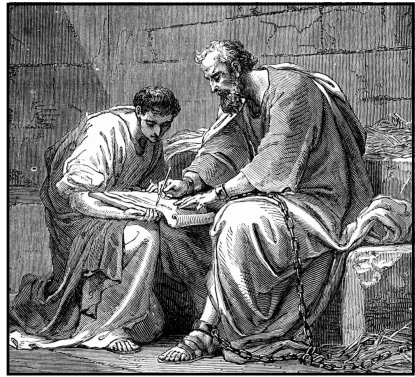
Old Testament	
400 B.C.E.	The Law (Torah)
200 B.C.E.	The Prophets
90-95 C.E.	The Writings
90-95 C.E.	Council of Jamnia

¹ Pseudepigrapha has to do with spurious or pseudonymous writings, especially Jewish writings ascribed to various biblical patriarchs and prophets, but composed within approximately 200 years of the birth of Jesus Christ.

The Canonization of the New Testament

The concept of the New Testament first appears in the Old Testament¹ (Hebrew or Jewish Bible). In Jeremiah 31:31, we read, “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new *covenant* (testament) with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” The words “covenant” and “testament” are alternative translations. Either one can be used, but we have used “testament” for so long, that it would be difficult to exchange it for “covenant.” Christians understand this New Covenant (testament) to be the fulfillment of the Old Covenant (testament). I personally prefer Covenant, but for the sake of clarity, I’ll use Testament.

The New Testament does not contain as much material as the Old Testament, nor did it take as long to canonize. The Letters of Paul, the Catholic (General) Epistles, the Four Gospels, The Book of Acts, and the Book of Revelation make up the New Testament or the New Covenant. I mention the Letters of Paul first because they were the first New Testament books to be written, and read in the churches.



Paul

According to Irenaeus in the late second century, the four Gospels were joined to the other collections and single works in different combinations to form the various forms of Christian canons of Scripture. Irenaeus also asserted the necessity of the four Gospels:

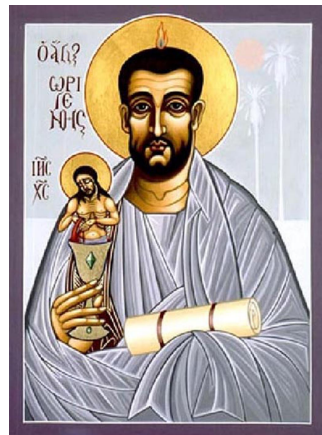
¹ Christians call it the Old Testament. Jews call it the Hebrew or Jewish Bible.

It is not possible that the gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the church is scattered throughout all the world, and the “pillar and ground” of the church is the gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh.

Although all these books were floating around, Christianity still lacked a canon that was universally accepted.

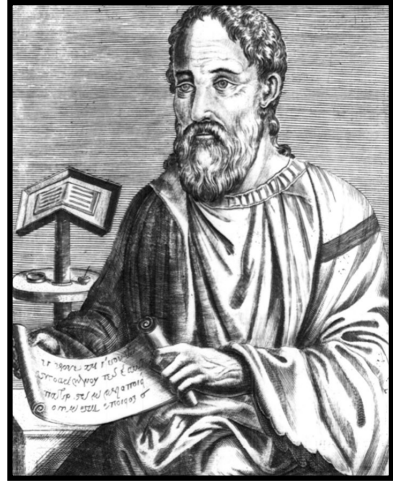
Marcion, a layman from Sinope, Pontus, attempted to create a canon of Scripture in 140 C.E. He was the first one to create a canon of Scripture, but he was unable to obtain popular support. The canon of Marcion rejected the Old Testament, but included a modified version of the Gospel of Luke, and ten letters of Paul. Marcion’s canon was increasingly rejected by other groups of Christians; and yet, the church gradually formulated the New Testament canon in response to the challenge posed by Marcion. Let’s remember, however, that Marcion’s theology and ethics was, and still are, considered to be heretical.

Origen may have been using the twenty-seven books, which we consider the canon in our time, but there were still disputes over the canonicity of the Letter to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, 2nd Peter, 2nd John, 3rd John, and the Book of Revelation. Origen was responsible for the *collection of usage* regarding the texts, which ultimately supported the New Testament. Eusebius got his information about which texts were accepted and which ones were disputed from Origen. While Origen did not try to create a canon of the accepted books, Eusebius did attempt to create a canon of



Origen

twenty-two books. Origen would have included in his list of “inspired writings” other texts, which were kept out by Eusebius. Those texts are the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and 1st Clement. While Origen was not the originator of the idea of a Biblical canon, he certainly gave philosophical and interpretative underpinnings to the idea. While the Church struggled to create a canon of acceptable books, Constantine commissioned



Eusebius

Eusebius to order fifty Bibles, to be paid for by the Empire. This may have been the motivation for making the final decisions about which books would be accepted and which books would be rejected.

The information used to create the famous 4th century Easter

Letter was probably based on the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius of Caesarea, but it was Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, who sent in his Festal Easter Letter (#39) of 367 C.E. the completed list of the twenty-seven books, which would become the New Testament. The first Council to accept the canon of the New Testament was the Synod of Hippo in North Africa. The acts of this council are lost, but a brief summary of the acts was read and accepted by the two



Athanasius

Councils of Carthage in 397 C.E. and in 419 C.E. These councils met under the influence of Augustine, who regarded the canon closed.

Following the councils of Hippo and Carthage we have the reconfirmation of the twenty-seven-books of the New Testament in the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent in 546 C.E., the 39 Articles of Religion in 1563 C.E. for the Church of England, the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647 C.E. for Calvinism, and the Synod of Jerusalem in 1672 C.E. for Eastern Orthodoxy.

Although it is tempting to say that the church councils determined what books would be included in the biblical canon, a more accurate reflection on this matter would indicate that the councils only recognized or acknowledged those books that had already obtained prominence from usage among the various early Christian communities. Scholars suggest that when these bishops and councils spoke on the books of the Bible, they were only ratifying what had already become the mind of the Church.

The New Testament	
140 C.E.	Marcion's List
325 C.E.	Eusebius' List
367 C.E.	Athanasius' Letter
393 C.E.	Council in Hippo
397 C.E.	1st Council in Carthage
419 C.E.	2nd Council in Carthage

9. THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

The Right Question

Is the Bible, including the Old Testament, and the Apocrypha, inspired? That may be the wrong question. Let's look at two of the thirty-nine Articles of Religion in the Anglican Church:

Article VI. *Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation*

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

Article VII. *Of the Old Testament*

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for **both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ**, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, **no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.**

The right question might be posed: Are the Scriptures sufficient for leading us into a relationship with God and one another? The answer is: They are because they point us to Jesus Christ, the only mediator between ourselves and God. In entering into that relationship, which we call Salvation, Christians are not obli-

gated to obey the Ceremonies and Rites of the Old Testament, nor are we obligated to the Civil Precepts of the Old Testament. We are, however, committed to the Commandments, which are moral.

The Manger that holds the Christ

“The Bible,” as Martin Luther put it, “is the manger in which we find Christ, the swaddling clothes in which he is wrapped.” This manger includes both the Old and New Testaments. Don’t be surprised when you find some straw in the Bible. How can that be, we ask, if the Bible is the inspired Word of God? E. Stanley Jones answers our question when he says, “The Bible is not the revelation of God. It is the inspired record of the revelation. Otherwise, the revelation—the Word become flesh—would be printer’s ink. The revelation is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.” Edward P. Blair summarizes

Since people wrote about their experiences with God, we ought not to expect inerrant fact and perfect understanding from their writings. When light shines through a glass, there is inevitably some distortion of the light. God took the risk of human distortion in order to communicate with us in our language and forms of thought. The clearest revelation, of course, came through those persons in whom there was the least opaqueness and imperfection. Only through the one perfect human personality, Jesus Christ, did the light shine without distortion.

Jesus, not the Bible, is the Word of God. The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments contain the Word of God. Therefore, as we read the Bible, we must always analyze what we are reading through the light or prism of Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God.

Divine Events and Multiple Authors

Certain divine events stand at the center of the inspiration of the Bible. In the Old Testament those events are God’s deliver-

ance of the Hebrew slaves, the giving of the Ten Commandments through Moses, and the building of the Tabernacle and eventually the Temple. In the New Testament, those events are Jesus' death on Good Friday, his resurrection on Easter Sunday, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Around these divine events, we find many authors and editors, whose writings we call Scripture. Some of them were firsthand witnesses, but this cannot be said of all of them.

The Documentary Hypothesis is only one example of multiple authors and editors who wrote the Books of the Law. In the Documentary Hypothesis, we find four authors or editors. We recognize their different writing styles and the different words they use for God. Below is a brief description of those differences that distinguish them:

J: An author who uses Jahweh for God.

E: An author who uses Elohim for God.

P: An Author who writes as a Priest.

D: An author who uses a different style.

Three Themes in the Bible

In addition to multiple authors and editors, we find various themes. Three such themes have been of particular interest. They have to do with Light, Covenants, and the Temple. Since light is the simplest theme, I'd like to begin with Light.

Light. According to Genesis 1:3-5, light was the first thing God created.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

Light and darkness are not only used to describe day and night. Light is also used to describe those liberating special events.

Light is to be taken to those who live in darkness. Two examples can be found in Isaiah 42:6-7 and 49:6:

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

This same theme is taken up in the New Testament, where Jesus says in one of his seven I AM statements, found in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” In Matthew 5:14 and 16, Jesus says to his disciples, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Maybe we can’t be the light of the world in the same sense as Jesus, but we can be mirrors, who reflect that light into the darkness of this world.

This theme comes to its conclusion in the final chapters of the Book of Revelation, where we read in Revelation 21:23-26 and 22:5:

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Seven Covenants. The second theme has to do with seven covenants that run through both the Old and New Testaments. The word “Testament” could be translated as “Covenant.” I think it would be more accurate to rename the two sections of the Bible, “the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.” I haven’t been consistent with this because the majority of people seem to prefer the traditional terms of Old Testament and New Testament.

The seven covenants that run through the Bible are as follows:

1. The Covenant through Noah (Genesis 9:8-17)
2. The Covenant through Abraham (Genesis 15:9-21)
3. The Covenant through Moses (Exodus 19-24)
4. The Covenant through Phinehas (Numbers 25:10-13)
5. The Covenant through David (2 Samuel 7:5-16)
6. The Covenant through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34)
7. The New Covenant through Jesus (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-23)

In the Covenant through Noah, God promises never to destroy earthly life with a natural catastrophe. The symbol is an upside down Bow, which becomes a Rainbow. In the Covenant through Abraham, God blesses Abraham for his faith and promises to shape his descendants into a nation, giving them a land of milk and honey. The symbol of this is Circumcision. In the Covenant through Moses, God sets Abraham’s descendants free from slavery in Egypt, and gives them the Ten Commandments, which will help them to maintain their freedom. The symbol of the Covenant through Moses is the Ten Commandments written in Stone. In the Covenant through Phinehas, a promise is made with the zealous priest to provide Israel with a perpetual priesthood. No symbol is suggested. An appropriate symbol might have to do with the equipment of the priesthood. The covenant

through David was an unconditional promise to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty forever. An appropriate symbol would be the Star of David. The Covenant through Jeremiah is a promise of God to forgive his rebellious people and establish a new relationship with them by writing his Law in their hearts. The final covenant, to which Jeremiah refers, is the covenant through Jesus to forgive sin and offer eternal life to all who accept his free gift of grace. The appropriate symbols would be the Cross and the Bread and Wine, which symbolize Jesus broken body and shed blood, the price paid for Divine Grace.

All the covenants are fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of God (the Promised Land) is open to Jew and Gentile alike, for according to Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus sends his disciples out to make disciples of all nations, not just Israel.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

The Commandments, which were written in stone, are now written in the heart, and in Mark 12:30-31 they have been reduced to two: "...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." According to 1st Peter 2:9 we move from the covenant through Phinehas to the universal priesthood of all believers. "...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Here the themes of light and covenant merge. There will still be pastors and deacons, but every Christian is a priest. Everyone is called to proclaim the mighty acts of God, calling people out of darkness into God's marvelous light.

The Human Temple. The third theme running through the Scriptures has to do with how we experience the presence of God, who promises to be with us always, even to the end of the age. Do we experience him in nature, history, the tabernacle, the temple, or in our heart? The answer lies in all of the above. The Old Testament begins with nature, that is in the Garden of Eden. Human disobedience drives the first couple out of the Garden, but nature is still important. God gets fed up with human disobedience and decides to punish his creation with a flood. We still call acts of nature, “acts of God.”

With the call of Abraham, we begin to experience God in history. We read in Genesis 12:1-2: “Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” Abraham was doing something unique. Most travelers would worship the god in the new country, but Abraham continues to worship the same God who called him to move to a new land. Although he probably believed that other gods existed, he worshipped the one who called him. This God promised to make of his descendants a great nation.

The emphasis on history continues with the story of Moses and the Exodus, although God seems to work through nature right along with history. It’s at the burning bush and on top of Mount Sinai that Moses encounters God and is given the Ten Commandments. Nature and history seem to be working together, but nature can’t be relied upon in the desert. God will have to provide the manna and the water to sustain them on their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. In Exodus 25:17-22, God instructs them to build an Ark for their covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Then you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its width. You shall make two cherubim of gold; you shall make them of hammered work, at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at the one end, and one

cherub at the other; of one piece with the mercy seat you shall make the cherubim at its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings. They shall face one to another; the faces of the cherubim shall be turned toward the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant, I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites.

The Ark of the Covenant plays a huge role in their relationship with God, but the Ark is housed in a Tabernacle. After David unifies the twelve tribes into a United Monarchy, with his capitol in Jerusalem, he begins to dream of housing the Ark of the Covenant in a Temple. But God said to David, “You shall not build a house for my name, for you are a warrior and have shed blood.” (1 Chronicles 28:3) The Temple would finally be built by Solomon from 970 to 964 B.C.E. It was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. and rebuilt around 515 B.C.E. In Jesus’ time the Temple was being remodeled and expanded. When Jesus breathed his last breath on the cross, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.¹ The Ark of the Covenant lay exposed. In 70 C.E., the Temple was destroyed by the Romans, never to be rebuilt; and today, no one knows where the Ark of the Covenant is.

Was or is the Temple really needed? In Jeremiah 32:31-34, the prophet said that God would write his commandments on the heart. No Tabernacle or Temple would be needed. When Jesus talks about the Temple, he refers to himself. When the Jews asked him for a sign, Jesus said:

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

The Jews then said, “This temple has been under con-

¹ See Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; and Luke 23:45

struction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.¹

The Apostle Paul follows Jesus’ thinking about the Temple and equates the Church as the Body of Christ with the Temple. Two examples should suffice:

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

The Conclusion

The light and covenant themes now merge with the temple theme. According to Revelation 21:22-26, the covenant with God is fulfilled, in Jesus, the Lamb, and there will be no Temple, for it will not be needed. Like the Light, God’s presence will be everywhere.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

Is the Bible inspired? Yes it is, but one must understand the divine events and be able to follow the various themes

¹ See John 2:18-22

through the Bible. The Old Testament is the foundation for the New Testament. One cannot insist upon inspiration of a word, phrase, or sentence without looking at its context and how its related to the divine themes in the Bible.

Is the Bible accurate? Is the Bible inspired? I'm betting it is both accurate and inspired? What is your bet?

PART FOUR
What is Faith?

10. CORRECT BELIEFS

Who is Jesus?

In the early years of Christianity, the main question was, “Who is this Jesus who was crucified on a cross on Friday, but rose from the dead on the following Sunday?” A second question was, “Who is the Holy Spirit, who was promised following the ascension of Jesus into Heaven?”

There were many answers given to these questions, but they were finally answered in the Nicene Creed, which was adopted in the year 325 C.E. in Nicaea (present day Iznik in Turkey). The Nicene Creed has been normative for the

Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, and for Protestant Churches. The Nicene Creed is as follows:

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.



**Constantine, accompanied by the Bishops
of the First Council of Nisaea (325 C.E.)**

Another creed accepted in the Western Churches, but not used in the Eastern Churches is the Apostles' Creed. In its present form, it is later than the Nicene Creed, but in its earlier form it preceded the Nicene Creed. In its earlier form it dates back to the Old Roman Creed and the Rule of Faith, which can be found in Romans 12:6: "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith." The Apostles' Creed follows:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

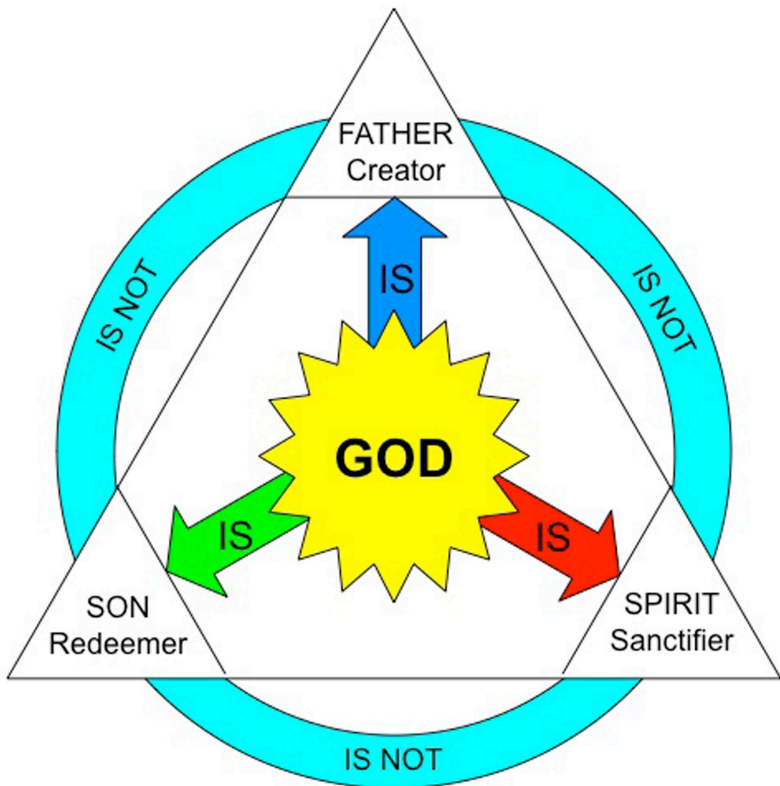
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Because of the early original form of the Apostles' Creed, it does not address some of the Christological issues defined in the Nicene Creed. It says nothing about the divinity of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. This made it acceptable to many Unitarians. The first mention of the Apostles Creed occurs in a letter of 390 C.E. from a synod in Milan, Italy. It was called the Apostles Creed because it was believed that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each of the Twelve apostles contributed an article to the creed.

What are the right beliefs, that the Nicene Creed clearly teaches? Both creeds answer the following three questions:

1. Who is God?
2. Who is Jesus?
3. Who is the Holy Spirit?

The answer is simple, but extremely complex. There is only one God and that God exists in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In regard to Jesus, the Son, the conclusion was that he is 100% human and 100% divine. In God we find three persons in one. Hence, the first article of faith is the confession of faith in the Trinitarian concept of God. Below is a chart to explain the concept of the Trinity, but we also have to acknowledge that the Trinity is a mystery that is unexplainable.



If what the creeds say about Jesus, the Son, is not true, then we are engaged in idolatry. No one can prove it, and there are skeptics within Christianity itself. It's tempting to simplify Jesus' relationship to God by saying that God revealed himself through this perfect human being. This would put Jesus in the category of the prophets, who cried, "Thus saith the Lord." That's certainly the claim for John the Baptist, but it's not the claim of Jesus, who said, "The Father and I are one."¹

The Scriptures affirm the oneness of Jesus the Son with God the Father. It took a couple of hundred years for the Church to state its belief in the Trinity in the creeds, or, in some cases in its articles of faith or religion.

How do we come to faith? It's obvious that not everyone is right in their beliefs about Jesus' relationship to God. I'd rather be accused of idolatry than to be guilty of rejecting God himself. Everyone has to proceed by faith, even those who reject Jesus' claim to be one with the Father.

Although faith is a choice, we cannot create faith. "It is not faith that makes Jesus the Christ;" wrote Jürgen Moltmann, "it is Jesus as the Christ who creates faith." Karl Barth said about the same thing when he wrote: "To have Christian faith means to live as a man who is faced by Jesus Christ." That's why the more we learn about Jesus, the stronger our faith will be, but we have to decide whether to turn to him, or walk away.

¹ John 10:30

11. CORRECT PRACTICES

How do We follow Jesus?

“I was led to unbelief,” wrote Jean-Paul Sartre, “not through conflicting dogma, but through my grandparents’ indifference.” Where faith is truly present, good works are sure to follow. Ephesians 2:8-9 is frequently quoted to demonstrate that God’s gift of grace is freely bestowed upon those who exercise faith. Ephesians 2:10 should be quoted with Ephesians 2:8-9.

Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:10: For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Faith and good works go together. They cannot be separated. The best definition I ever read was Martin Luther’s definition of faith, which is located in his *Introduction to the Book of Romans*.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure that it would die a thousand times for it. Such confidence and such knowledge of God’s grace makes a man joyous, gay, bold and merry toward God and all creatures. That is what the Holy Spirit does in faith. Thus, without being driven, a man begins willingly and gladly to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer all sorts and kinds of things, and to love and praise God, who has shown him such grace; so that it is as impossible to separate works *from* faith as it is impossible to separate light and heat from the fire.



Martin Luther

If the desire to do good is absent, so is faith. In commenting on the lukewarm condition of the Laodicean Church, William Barclay said that “the lukewarm Christian is no Christian at all.” John Wesley had a great deal to say on the same topic. He said it would be better to be an atheist than a lukewarm Christian.

If right belief was the first leg of a three-legged stool, then right practice is the second leg of the three-legged stool. In addition to a statement or confession of faith, almost every church adds a set of social principles to guide their members in putting their faith into action.

These principles will be based upon the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament and Jesus’ reinterpretation of them in the New Testament. Below is a chart to illustrate this concept:

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS CONTRASTED			
Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time	One God (Exodus 20:2-3)	But I Say Unto You	God is Father (Matthew 6:9)
	No Images (Exodus 20:4-6)		God is Spirit and Truth (John 4:23-24)
	No Blasphemy (Exodus 20:7)		God’s Name is to be Hallowed (Matthew 6:9)
	Man for the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8)		The Sabbath is for Man (Mark 2:27-28)
	Honor your Parents (Exodus 20:12)		Honor your Human Family (Mark 3:32-35)
	No Murder (Exodus 20:13)		No Anger (Matthew 5:21)
	No Adultery (Exodus 20:14)		No Lust (Matthew 5:27)
	No Stealing (Exodus 20:15)		Give Freely (Matthew 5:42)
	No False Witnessing (Exodus 20:16)		Tell the Truth (Matthew 5:33-37)
	No Coveting (Exodus 20:17)		Covet Righteousness (Matthew 5:6)

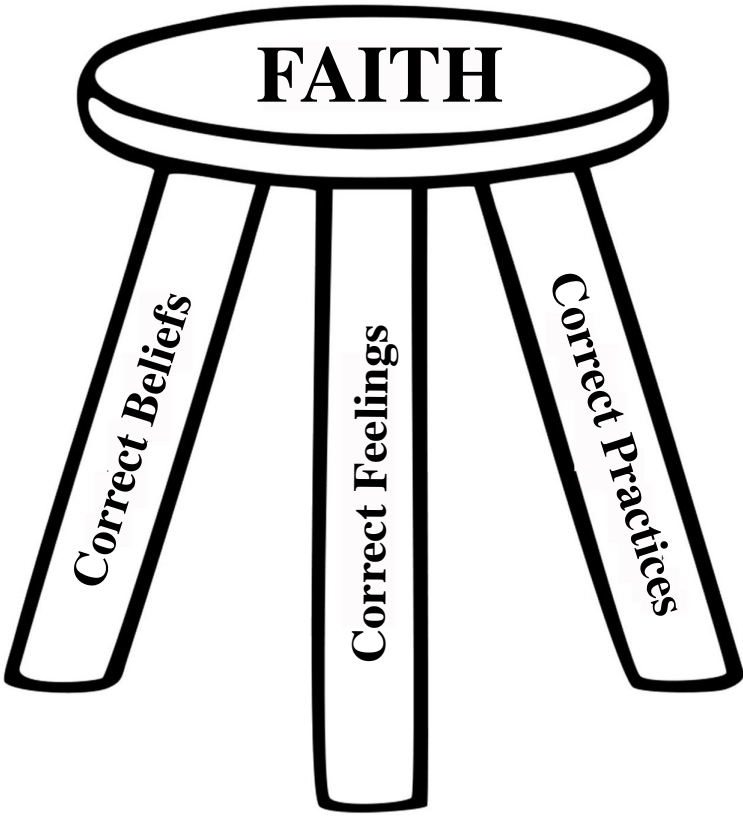
The Shema in the Old Testament, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Jesus' First and Second Commandments in the New Testament, found in Matthew 22:37-40, summarize the Commandments.

The Shema: Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

The Second Commandment: "...you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18)

The Great Commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Jesus' other teachings can be found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and in his many parables. The two most significant parables would be the Parable of the Lost Sons and the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The difficulty is not knowing what Jesus taught, but in applying what he taught to our daily lives.



12. CORRECT FEELINGS

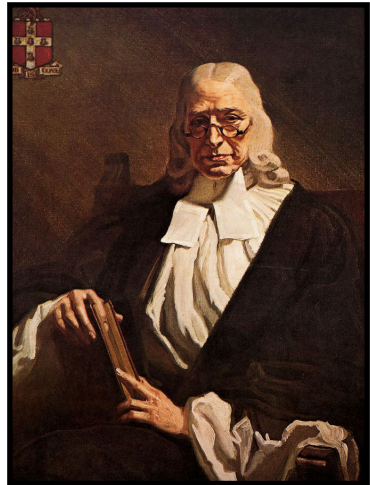
How can We Experience God?

“I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it,” said John Wesley, “though many may imagine they have it, who have it not.” Wesley put the third leg on the stool, making it a three-legged stool, capable of standing up.

What was Wesley looking for? My answer would be, “He was looking for the same thing that I’m looking for—Assurance. Wesley found his assurance in a small religious society meeting on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738. This is not the date of Wesley’s conversion, but the date on which he received the gift of assurance. I would date his conversion to 1729 when he decided no longer to be half a Christian, when he gave his soul, body and substance to God. It would be almost another ten years before he would find that assurance. He tried to obtain it by good works, but it came to him as a gift and in a strange warming of his heart.

I **felt** my heart strangely warmed. I **felt** I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an **assurance** was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

One can teach right beliefs (Orthodoxy), and one can teach right practices (Orthopraxis), but how does one teach right feelings (Orthopathy)? The Moravians taught something that was called *stillness*. Those who practiced *stillness* would wait before God for the gift of assurance. Although Wesley received the gift of assurance in a Mo-



John Wesley

ravian religious society, he could not accept the practice of stillness. He felt that one can do a number of things while he or she is waiting for the gift of assurance. Wesley incorporated six spiritual disciplines in the the General Rules. They are as follows:

1. The public worship of God.
2. The Ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.
3. The Supper of the Lord.
4. Family and private prayer.
5. Searching the Scriptures.
6. Fasting or abstinence.

The purpose of these spiritual disciplines was to sensitize one's spiritual senses. It's easy to name the five physical senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell; but it's difficult to name the spiritual senses. I made a meager attempt at naming the spiritual senses in another book.

1. Conscience
2. Reason
3. Feelings
4. Insight
5. Intuition
6. Will

Some would call the conscience “the oracle of God,” (Byron) or “the seat and throne of God,” (Barclay) but others would call conscience “the echo of the social mores,” (Freud) or “our opinion in moral matters” (Locke). The *autonomous* conscience cannot be a spiritual sensor, which enables us to experience or to feel God, but the *theonomous conscience*¹ can do just that. The conscience focused on God is open to receiving the Holy Spirit, and that makes all the difference. The same would be true in our reason, our feelings, our insight, our intuition, and our will. When we submit our whole being to God, the Holy Spirit enters into our lives and we have what many of us would call a religious or spiritual awakening.

¹ The theonomous conscience takes its view from God.

Assurance came to me around midnight on September 1, 1958. I had gone to a worship service that evening with JJ Hunt, who was my roommate in a boarding house. After the service JJ asked me if I were a Christian. I said, "I'd like to be one, but how?" The pastor offered to pray for me. The moment he placed his hands on my head to pray, I felt the presence of God in my heart, and I surrendered my whole being to God. The Scripture that best summarizes what happened to me is 2 Corinthians 5:17:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

I had a spiritual awakening. No one had to tell me what changes I had to make. I knew that the way I was living was wrong, and I willingly submitted myself to God, trusting that he would make the appropriate transformations in my life. He started with my smoking and drinking, but that was only the beginning. Without being told, I began reading the New Testament. In my first year as a Christian, I read the New Testament twenty-eight times. I had a thirst to know what to believe and what to do as a Christian. As I proceeded on my new journey I felt good about my decision to follow Christ. The feelings were right.

Good feelings follow our decision to live out a moral life. A friend of mine told me how he and his daughter spent an afternoon delivering food to families so they could celebrate Thanksgiving. After they finished their deliveries, they indicated how good they felt. I don't think God would call us to do good works, which would make us feel bad. God works through our conscience, and when we obey our conscience, we feel good.

The conscience has the same effect on our beliefs as it does on our moral behavior. When we make the right choices, we feel good. Those who made a decision to become a disciple of Christ as children, will most likely not remember making that choice. On the other hand, those who made a conscious decision as adults, are likely to remember making the choice, and their feel-

ings may well be more intense, particularly if they weren't raised up in the church.

It's like falling in love. If you've always been in love with someone, you won't be able to name the time and place when and where it all began. But if you meet for the first time as adults, and fall in love, the feelings will be intense, but you have to discern between lust and love. The feelings that emerge out of love will be good and they will last. The feelings that emerge out of lust will not endure.

The conscience that guides both what we believe and our moral behavior is what I call the theonomous conscience. Hudson Taylor illustrates the kind of relationship that should be present in our relationship with God.

I used to ask God to help me.

Then I asked if I might help Him.

I ended up by asking Him to do His work through me.

I like that. "God works through us." This also means that God gives us the spiritual gifts that are consistent with what he intends to do through us.

PART FIVE
What is Sanctification?

13. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Spiritual Fruit and Spiritual Gifts

Although I felt good about committing myself to Jesus Christ, I was confused about the promise of the Holy Spirit. My roommate believed that the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit was speaking in tongues. While I acknowledge speaking in tongues as one of many spiritual gifts, I do not acknowledge that speaking in tongues is the only sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life.

The Holy Spirit was present long before Pentecost. The remarkable thing about the Old Testament is that God wanted all His people to be holy as He is holy. According to Leviticus 19:1-2, "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'" The New Testament agrees. In 1 Peter 1:15-16 the Apostle writes, "as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

The work of the Holy Spirit is to sanctify us, that is, to make us holy. The moment we commit our lives to Jesus Christ, the process of sanctification begins. Jesus is the perfect image of God, and he came to reshape us into his own likeness. We were made in God's image, and the process of sanctification restores the divine image in us.

I would like to suggest that the fruit of the Spirit are nine signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The nine fruit of the Spirit are contrasted with more than fifteen works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-25:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Works of the Flesh		
1. Fornication	6. Enmities	11. Dissensions
2. Impurity	7. Strife	12. Factions
3. Licentiousness	8. Jealousy	13. Envy
4. Idolatry	9. Anger	14. Drunkenness
5. Sorcery	10. Quarrels	15. Carousing

By contrast, the nine fruit of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Fruit of the Spirit		
1. Love	4. Patience	7. Faithfulness
2. Joy	5. Kindness	8. Gentleness
3. Peace	6. Generosity	9. Self-Control

Sanctification is a continuous process, beginning at conversion, and aiming at entire sanctification. The process is continuous, and although we aim to be changed and shaped into the likeness of Christ and the Image of God, we must say with Paul in Philippians 3:12, “Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”

There are several ways in which the Holy Spirit relates to us as we undergo a lifetime of sanctification:

1. **The Holy Spirit convicts us of Wrongdoing:** And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. (John 16:8-11)
2. **The Holy Spirit guides us into all Truth:** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-14)
3. **The Holy Spirit gives us a New Birth:** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:4-5)
4. **The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the Body of Christ:** For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)
5. **The Holy Spirit assures us of our Salvation:** For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:14-17)
6. **The Holy Spirit helps us in our Prayers:** Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. (Romans 8:26)

7. **The Holy Spirit seals us for the Day of Redemption:** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:30)
8. **The Holy Spirit distributes Spiritual Gifts:** For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith

and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

I'd like to finish this section with my question about speaking in tongues. While speaking in tongues is a spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit, it is not the only sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. There are many signs of the Spirit's presence. How does one explain what happened on the Day of Pentecost? Acts 2:7-8 points to an answer to my question. "Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?'"

Paul Brand tells a story in his book, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, which helps me to understand this Spiritual Gift of Speaking in Tongues. The story is about Abbe Pierre, who visited medical students in Vellore. Pierre had been a beggar who managed to help himself, and as a result desired to help others help themselves. He went to Vellore to see if Dr. Brand could help him to find others he could help.

Now there was a tradition in the dining room. Visitors were invited to be brief. The tolerance of students was about three minutes. If the speaker took longer than three minutes, the students would stamp their feet. Abbe Pierre spoke in French for twenty minutes. Dr. Brand could not keep up with the translation, and no one understood French. Dr. Brand waited for the students to stamp their feet. It never happened. When Pierre sat down, the students burst into the most tremendous ovation he had ever heard in that hall. Completely mystified, Dr. Brand asked some of the students, "How did you understand? No one here speaks French." One student replied, "We did not need a language. We felt the presence of God and the presence of love." Could that be what happened at Pentecost?

The moment we accept the gift of Grace, the Holy Spirit begins the process of sanctification. We know this is happening when we reject the works of the flesh and begin to live by the nine fruit of the Spirit. Grace transforms us and we have a spiritual awakening

14. SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Distribution of Spiritual Gifts

While all Christians are to live by all nine of the fruit of the spirit, the spiritual gifts are distributed. No one has all of them. There may be some Christians who have more than one, but no one has all of them. We don't even know how many there are. What follows is only an estimate of how many spiritual gifts exist.

In Romans 12:3-8, Paul names seven spiritual gifts, which are all extensions of the one body in Christ:

Romans 12:3-8
1. Prophecy in proportion to faith
2. Ministry in ministering
3. Teacher in teaching
4. Exhorter in exhortation
5. Giver in generosity
6. Leader in diligence
7. Compassionate in cheerfulness

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 Paul names a number of spiritual gifts, which cooperate with the same Spirit. The manifestation of the Spirit is for the common good. Paul names nine spiritual gifts, which are:



1 Corinthians 12:4-11
1. Wisdom
2. Knowledge
3. Faith
4. Healing
5. Miracles
6. Prophecy
7. Discernment of spirits
8. Speaking in tongues
9. Interpretation of tongues

In Ephesians 4:11-13, we find another list of spiritual gifts, only this time there are only five gifts. These gifts are given to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for the building up of the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13
1. Apostles
2. Prophets
3. Evangelists
4. Pastors
5. Teachers

Some of the spiritual gifts found in Romans are similar to some of the spiritual gifts found in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. Their purpose is also similar. Spiritual gifts are given to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, that is to say, the Church, and for the common good.

One book in my library has been read so many times, that the binding no longer holds the pages together. I will never part with that book. It was written by C. Peter Wagner and the title is, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*. Wagner names and defines the following twenty-seven spiritual gifts.

C. Peter Wagner		
1. Prophecy	10. Faith	19. Evangelist
2. Service	11. Healing	20. Pastor
3. Teaching	12. Miracles	21. Celibacy
4. Exhortation	13. Discernment	22. Poverty
5. Giving	14. Tongues	23. Martyrdom
6. Leadership	15. Interpretation	24. Hospitality
7. Mercy	16. Apostle	25. Missionary
8. Wisdom	17. Helps	26. Intercession
9. Knowledge	18. Administration	27. Exorcism

Believing that the church needs spiritual gifts to succeed with its mission, I have tried to match these gifts with members of the church. I figured that if I could only get the right gifts with the right people, the body of Christ, the church, would be built up and thrive. To accomplish this task, I used a variety of Spiri-

tual Gift Inventories to match the spiritual gifts with members of the church. After doing this for several years, I discovered that all I was getting was people's interests or talents.

One's interests and talents are not the same as one's spiritual gifts. What's the difference? When we practice our spiritual gifts, it is the Holy Spirit working through us. But there is more. I noticed that although faith and (prophetic) hope were present, love was absent, even in Wagner's expanded list of the spiritual gifts. Paul not only includes love, he considers it the more excellent way. After describing how the spiritual gifts work together to build up the Body of Christ, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:27-31:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

That more excellent way is love, but love is also one of the fruits of the Spirit. Every Christians is to live by the fruits of the Spirit. Because it is so important, Paul takes a whole chapter to define love. The heart of that chapter can be found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

In addition to any of the spiritual gifts, one must be filled with this kind of love, and only the Holy Spirit can love like this. That's why it is so necessary for the Holy Spirit to work through us. Without that Spirit, all we have are interests and talents. They are not spiritual gifts. When our spiritual gifts are infused with

divine love, there is no longer room for sin. Sin is driven out by perfect love and perfect love is entire sanctification. This happens when the Holy Spirit has perfect control over our spiritual gift or gifts.

How do we know what our gift or gifts are? The answer to this question can only be found through prayer and the help of other fellow disciples who are not only looking after you in love, but are willing to tell you what your strengths and weaknesses are. This happens best in a small group, not in taking a spiritual gifts Inventory. We have to tell one another what our spiritual gifts are, and that will take knowing one another spiritually.

Everyone has at least one spiritual gift. This doesn't mean that your spiritual gift is better than everyone else with the same spiritual gift. I was sure that a friend named Cheryl had the spiritual gift of singing spiritual songs that she wrote herself, but because she didn't sound like Amy Grant, she didn't think it was a spiritual gift, I encouraged her to stop trying to imitate Amy Grant and let the Holy Spirit flow through Cheryl.

Finding one's spiritual gift can be a very difficult task indeed. Although I used to think my spiritual gift was preaching, the feedback I was getting caused me to think that my spiritual gift was teaching, especially in a small group setting.

15. PERFECT LOVE

The Goal of the Christian Life

“Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” is a well-known phrase in the United States Declaration of Independence. I would make one change to what this declaration says has been given to all human beings by their Creator. I would only change one word, and that word would be happiness to holiness.

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Holiness

Holiness is the goal of the Christian life, and I would also say Human life. Happiness is the fruit of Holiness.

Holiness is a confusing word. Other words that are used with similar meanings are Entire Sanctification, Christian Perfection, and Perfect Love. Sanctification is the process of actually becoming Holy, to become like Christ. Jesus is the new person in the image of God, *humanity* as God meant us to be. To bring this about is the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul summarizes it in this way: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18) These words teach us three important things about the work of Sanctification.

1. **Sanctification is a free Gift.** Paul insists that we are “being changed” into Christ’s likeness. The verb is passive. The changing is not something that we do, but something that is done to us. Sanctification is a gift, not a task. The one who gives it to us is the Holy Spirit. We only awaken to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. At that time we either ignore or cooperate with the Holy Spirit,
2. **Sanctification is Christ-likeness.** To be Holy is to be as wholly human as was Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 and 47, Paul writes, “The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ... The first man was

from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.” Instead of calling Jesus the last Adam or the man of heaven, we might call him the ultimate human being, who is the Image of God. That ultimate human being pours out his life-giving Spirit on us, and that causes a spiritual awakening in us.

3. **Sanctification is a continuous process.** We “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” We can never come to a point in the Christian life, where we can say that we have arrived and the work of the Holy Spirit is finished. Even Paul, at the end of a long and fruitful life in Christ, could look back and say in Philippians 3:12: “Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Those whom we have counted as the greatest Christians have been most conscious of how far short they fall of the full likeness of Jesus.

What does it mean to be human as Jesus was human? It means to be filled, just as he was, with the love and power of God in perfect balance. To have power without love is dangerous, and to have love without power is ineffective. What people noticed most about Jesus is that he was a character full of love and actions full of power. The Holy Spirit wants to bring into our lives both the character and the ability of Jesus.

The purpose of Sanctification is to make us Holy, which is to say “perfect in love.” We call this Christian Perfection. There is both a positive and a negative aspect to the process of Sanctification, but the supreme goal is Perfect Love. Let’s look first at the positive aspect of Sanctification. John Wesley never tired of reminding us that Christian Perfection is nothing greater and nothing less than “loving God with all our heart, and loving our neighbor as ourselves.” He summarizes “the whole of scriptural perfection” as “pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions.”

When Dr. Gibson, Bishop of London, asked Wesley what he meant by Sanctification and Christian Perfection, Wesley replied, "Sanctification is Perfect love, loving God with all our heart and serving Him with all our strength, Nor did I ever say or mean any more by perfection than thus loving and serving God." Upon hearing what Wesley meant by Sanctification, Dr. Gibson said, "Mr. Wesley, if this be all you mean, publish it to all the world." Wesley replied, "My Lord, I will." And he did.

Such a love forbids us from limiting our love to those with whom we have common interests or those from our own social class. We are to regard every person as our neighbor, even the enemies of God. There is no distancing ourselves from sinners, because it is precisely sinners that divine love is seeking out. We are to become conduits of God's love. As the image of God, we are called not just to receive God's love but to reflect His perfect love into the world, to share it perfectly with our fellow human beings. We are both conduits of God's love and mirrors reflecting God's love. Wesley used to quote Galatians 5:6, which says, "the only thing that counts is faith working through love." Again, he summarized the whole of scripture as "pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions."

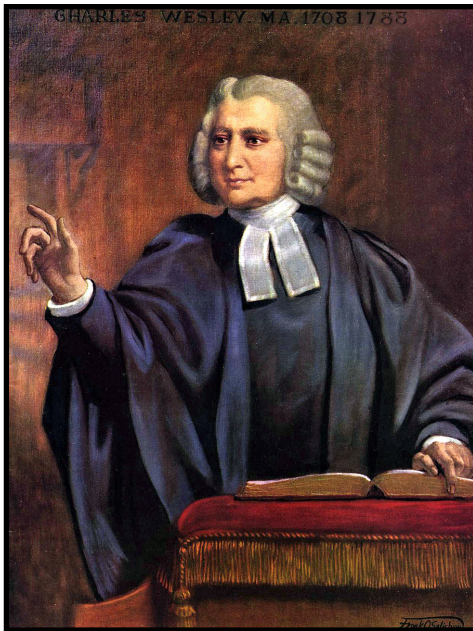
The negative aspect of love does not compete with the positive aspect of love, which is the increase of love through Sanctification. God's Perfect Love does not hesitate to fight injustice and evil. Together, the negative and positive aspects of love are united in the battle to reclaim the world and to enlist humanity in that struggle. Wesley believed that Perfect Love changes those who receive it. He believed that we could have an awakening which would remove the "evil root" of sin from the soul, freeing us from the power of temptation. "For as long as love takes up the whole heart," said Wesley, "what room is there for sin therein?" It must be noted however, that the process of Sanctification does not make us so perfect as to free us from ignorance, errors, and infirmities. Pierre Teilhard De Chardin suggested that, "Some day, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love

and then for the second time in the history of the world man will have discovered fire.” That sounds good, but it won’t happen without the process of Sanctification. Charles Wesley had better insight into what is needed:

Give me a new, a perfect heart,
From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free;
The mind which was in Christ impart,
And let my spirit cleave to thee.

O that I now, from sin released,
Thy word might to the utmost prove!
Enter into the promised rest,
The Canaan of thy perfect love!

Open my faith’s interior eye,
Display thy glory from above;
And all I am shall sink and die,
Lost in the astonishment of love.



Charles Wesley

In Charles Wesley's verses we find both the positive and negative aspects of Sanctification, but he concludes that Perfect Love is the work of the Holy Spirit. It's not something we can create ourselves.

I began this book with Pascal's wager. I'm going to end it with John Wesley's wager:

Suppose we were mistaken, suppose no such blessing ever was or can be attained, yet we lose nothing. Nay, that very explanation quickens us in using all the talents which God has given us; yea, in improving them all, so that when our Lord cometh he will "receive his own with increase."

PART SIX
The Conclusion

THE CONCLUSION

Five Questions about God

I've tried to answer five questions I have about God and Religion.

The first question was about the existence of God. My answer to the question, "Does God Exist?" is a resounding, "Yes." My "Yes" is very much related to the starry skies above and the moral law within. I'm convinced that without a creator, we wouldn't exist, and neither would the world in which we live. Do I have doubts? Of course I do. If my existence needed a Creator, what about God? Didn't he need a Creator too? That God always existed, or that he was Aquinas' first mover, doesn't answer my question, which is, "Where did God come from?" I don't know the answer, but my bet is not only that God exists, but that he has always existed and will continue to exist throughout eternity. Can I comprehend how that can be? No, but that's my bet.

I believe that there is a moral law within everyone, but some people don't recognize it. I admit that this law might be grounded in culture instead of God. The presence of evil challenges my belief in the moral law coming from God. Even if I claim that "free will" causes human evil, that doesn't explain natural evil, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, etc. I like how Pascal puts it: "...either God exists or he does not exist.... What is your bet? The stake to be put up is slight or even nothing compared to the prize to be won."

I'm voting with the majority of people who believe in the existence of God, but I still have to deal with the second question, "What is God like? Pantheists and theists alike believe in the existence of God, but they don't agree in the characteristics of God, and how this God is active in his created world. The three major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are theistic. They believe that God acts in his created world. We must ask the question, "If God is all powerful, all loving, and all knowing, then why is their evil in the world?"

Some would suggest that God is all loving. That may be one of the most important characteristics of God, Justice is another important characteristic of God. A loving God without justice and judgment is not an accurate description of God in any of the three ethical monotheistic religions. Do we have to ignore the Scriptures of these religions in order to keep our image of a loving God? If this is what we prefer to do, then we are making an idol out of Jesus.

Who is Jesus? Christians claim that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. Identifying Jesus as 100% human and 100% divine is confusing. We call it a mystery. If we accept Jesus' claim to be one with the Father, and we are wrong, then we are indeed making him into our idol. If we are right, then we are worshipping the living God. There's no way to know for sure. We all have to decide: "Is Jesus God, or is he a Prophet?" I don't think it matters all that much. If he's only a Prophet, his teachings come from God. He has revealed God to us.

The cross has always been puzzling to me. When Jesus began his ministry, he cried out, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:15) He says nothing about the necessity of the cross. He talks about the cross later, before his disciples even know who he is. I'm not downplaying the significance of the cross. The cross confronts us with the high cost of divine grace, Had we listened to his teachings and obeyed them, maybe the cross wouldn't have been necessary. We didn't and so the cross became necessary.

What if we reject Jesus' teachings and his death on the cross? We are free to do this, but we must remember, both the choice and the consequences are ours. God doesn't throw us into Hell; we choose to go there. The Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible doesn't have much to say about Hell. Jesus is the one who warns about judgment and Hell. Those who don't believe in Hell have to manipulate Jesus' teachings and the New Testament. I bet there is a Hell, but I wouldn't be disappointed if I'm wrong.

My third question has to do with the Bible. What is the Bible? Everyone recognizes the value of the Bible, but very few people read or study the whole Bible. For me, Jesus is the Word of God, and the Bible is the manger in which we find the Christ. The Bible is a Book about Theology. It was never intended to be a Book about History, or a Book about Science. The two important events around which the Bible is written, are the Exodus in the Old Testament, and the death and resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament. Everything else is commentary, and some of it is nothing but straw. Remember the Bible is the manger that holds the Christ, and there is plenty of straw in and around the manger.

Is the Bible accurate? The two events mentioned above are true. The Exodus and the death and resurrection of Jesus are rooted in history, but not everything around these events can be taken literally. The creation stories were not meant to be taken literally. They are not scientific statements, but theological interpretations of who we are and why we sin. Whether original sin is passed on through the human race through biology or sociology makes little difference. The point being made is that everyone sins and mars the image of God in which we all have been created. Salvation is the restoration of that image while we are living on earth, but it is also a preparation for our life with God in Heaven.

I look for the diamonds in the Bible, not the straw. Both can be found, and that should not disturb us. Jesus is not only the Word of God, but he is the prism through whom we are to read and study the Bible. No book in history has gone through such evaluation and criticism as the Bible. We need to read and study it from cover to cover. From the diamonds we find in the Bible, we build our Theology and Morality. That's why it's so important to read and study the whole Bible. I bet my whole life on the accuracy and inspiration of the Bible. How about you?

The fifth question springs from our understanding of the Bible. "What is Faith?" Faith is more than belief. Faith consists of correct beliefs (orthodoxy), correct practices (orthopraxis), and correct feelings (orthopathy). I have a great deal of confidence in

the early church leaders who developed the Apostles and Nicene Creeds in order to define correct beliefs. Out of correct beliefs we develop correct practices. This is where we usually stop, but correct feelings are also important, but how can we teach feelings. We can state what we believe, and we can list our practices, but how do we pass on feelings?

The key to our feelings can be found in discovering our spiritual senses and practicing our spiritual disciplines. While we can easily recognize our spiritual disciplines, it is difficult to name, less define our spiritual senses. The most accepted spiritual sense may be our conscience. The difficulty with the conscience is that it may be connected to the culture in which we grow up. That's why I'd like to talk about the theonomous conscience, which is grounded in God.

Hardly anyone wants to deal with my fifth question: "What is Sanctification?" That's because the common perception is that we obtain Christian Perfection by our own efforts. We prefer to emphasize the power of Grace which is obtained by faith alone without the burden of doing good works. "Self-justification and judging others go together," Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, "as justification by grace and serving others go together." Paul follows up his famous passage on salvation by faith alone in Ephesians 2:8-9 with, "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." Sanctification is about doing good works, but we don't have to do them on our own. Sanctification is a gift that empowers us to love perfectly.

We are to become a mirror of Christ and a conduit for the Holy Spirit. Mother Teresa had it right when she said,

We must become holy, not because we want to feel holy, but because Christ must be able to live his life fully in us. We are to be all love, all faith, all purity, for the sake of the poor we serve.

The Holy Spirit equips us for this task by distributing spiritual gifts among us. Everyone has at least one spiritual gift, and many

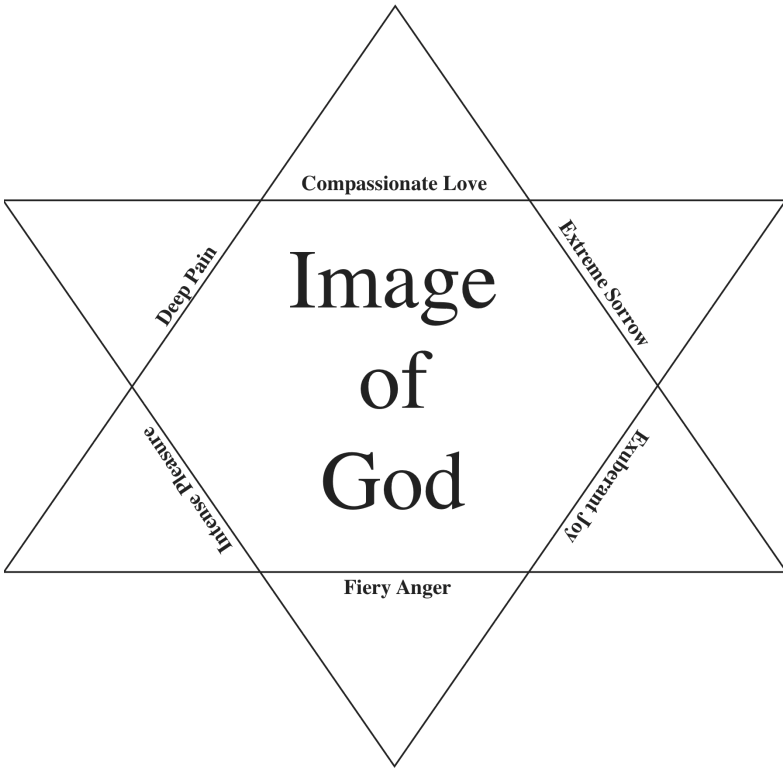
have more than one. The trick lies in discovering what our spiritual gifts are. Although I have listed numerous spiritual gifts, it isn't easy to find out which one has been given to us. When we think we've discovered our spiritual gift, we have doubts because we see others with the same spiritual gift, and they seem to be outperforming us. What we need to realize is that it is the Holy Spirit working through us that makes a spiritual gift. We need to be able to distinguish between talents and spiritual gifts. They are not the same.

The starry skies above and the moral law within convince me that God exists. Jesus Christ convinces me that God is both loving and just. The inspiration of the Bible emerges from two events: the Exodus, the deliverance of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt; and, the death and resurrection of Jesus, which delivers us all from sin. These two events confirm the inspiration of the Bible and prepares us for a spiritual awakening of what to believe and what to do. Feelings follow our beliefs and our actions. We do not have to proceed alone, for the Holy distributes spiritual gifts among us to build up the body of Christ and for the common good.

*My bet is that God exists and that Jesus revealed him to us.
What is your bet?*

Appendices

THE IMAGE OF GOD



Now when God fashioned human beings, he planted in them emotions and inclinations, but at the same time he enthroned the mind among the senses as a sacred governor over them all.

4 Maccabees 2:21-22

THE TRINITY

God Creates

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

(Genesis 1:1)

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image,
in our likeness..."

So God created man in his own image,
In the image of God he created him;
Male and female he created them.

(Genesis 1:26-27)

God Redeems

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
And the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things were made;
Without him nothing was made that has been made.
In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

(John 1:1-4)

God Sanctifies

But the Counselor,
The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name,
Will teach you all things and will remind you of everything
I have said to you.

(John 14:26)

THE HEBREW BIBLE

1. The Law (Torah)

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

2. The Prophets (Nebhiim)

Joshua
Judges
Samuel
Kings

Earlier
Prophets

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
12 Minor Prophets

Later
Prophets

3. The Writings (Kethubhim)

Psalms
Proverbs
Job

Canticles
Ruth
Lamentations
Ecclesiastes
Esther

The 5 Rolls

Daniel
Ezra and Nehemiah
Chronicles

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

BOOKS OF THE LAW

Genesis,
Exodus,
Leviticus,
Numbers,
Deuteronomy,

BOOKS OF HISTORY

Joshua,
Judges,
Ruth,
The First Book of Samuel,
The Second Book of Samuel,
The First Book of Kings,
The Second Book of Kings,
The First Book of Chronicles,
The Second Book of Chronicles,
The First Book of Esdras,
The Second Book of Esdras,
The Book of Esther

BOOKS OF WISDOM,

The Book of Job,
The Psalms,
The Proverbs,
Ecclesiastes or Preacher,
Cantica, or Songs of Solomon,

BOOKS OF PROPHECY

Major Prophets

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel

12 Minor Prophets

THE GOSPELS

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

HISTORY

Acts

EPISTLES

Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon
Hebrews
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude

APOCALYPSE

Revelation

THE APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

And the other Books the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine; such are these following:

Additions to Esther
Azariah, Prayer of
Baruch
Bel and the Dragon
Ecclesiasticus
1 Esdras
2 Esdras
Esther, Additions to
Jeremiah, Letter of
Judith
Letter of Jeremiah
1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees
3 Maccabees
4 Maccabees
Manasseh, Prayer of
Prayer of Azariah
Prayer of Manasseh
Psalm 151
Sirach, Wisdom of Jesus, Son of
Song of the Three Jews
Susanna
Tobit
Wisdom of Solomon

I personally think all of these books should be read. There may be a lot of straw in these books, but some of them contain nuggets of gold or even diamonds.

SEVEN COVENANTS OF THE BIBLE

1. **The Covenant through Noah**

(Genesis 9:8-17)

The first Covenant was made with Noah and his descendants. It consists of the unconditional promise made by God never to destroy earthly life with a natural catastrophe. The symbol of this first Covenant is the rainbow.

2. **The Covenant through Abraham**

(Genesis 15:9-21 and 17:1-27)

The second Covenant was made with Abraham and his descendants. God promised in this Covenant to bless Abraham for his faith, shape his descendants into a nation, and give them a land of milk and honey. The Covenant is conditional, that is, it is dependent upon Abraham's faith and the faith of future descendants. The symbol of this second Covenant is circumcision.

3. **The Covenant through Moses**

(Exodus 19-24)

The third Covenant was made with Moses and the children of Israel (Jacob) at Mount Sinai. God would deliver his people from slavery and take them into the Promised Land if they would consecrate themselves totally to him. The symbol of this third Covenant is the 10 Commandments, which signify both the theological and ethical foundation of God's people.

4. **The Covenant through Phinehas**

(Numbers 25:10-13)

The fourth Covenant was made with the zealous priest named Phinehas. It was an unconditional promise made by God to provide his people with a perpetual priesthood. While no specific symbol emerges to designate this Covenant, it has been called the Covenant of Peace. Perhaps a symbol of peace would be appropriate, or some symbol of the priesthood.

5. The Covenant through David

(2 Samuel 7:5-16)

The fifth Covenant was made with David. It was an unconditional promise to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty on the throne of Israel. This means that God would forever provide his people with a godly king like David. The symbol of this Covenant is the Star of David.

6. The Covenant through Jeremiah

(Jeremiah 31:31-34)

The sixth Covenant was made through Jeremiah just as God was expelling his rebellious people from the Promised Land because of their unfaithfulness. It was an unconditional promise to forgive his people and establish a new relationship with them by writing his law on their hearts. This Covenant was to be based on pure grace.

7. The New Covenant through Jesus

(Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; and Luke 22:7-23)

The seventh Covenant was made through Jesus on the night before his death on the cross. God made an unconditional promise to forgive sin and offer eternal life to all who would accept his grace, which he revealed through the death of Jesus on the Cross. This is the Covenant of pure grace. Bread, Wine, and the Cross are the symbols of this Covenant.

THE JOURNEY TO NEW LIFE

THE JOURNEY TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

1 IN SCRIPTURE

The Origin of Sacred Scripture
The Bible as Sacred History

1

STEPS INTO NEW LIFE:

Accept God's Love

John 3:16

Respond with Faith

Ephesians 2:8-9

Do Good Works

Ephesians 2:10

Submit to the Spirit

Romans 12:1-2

Aim at Perfect Love

John 13:34-35

Experience New Life

2 Corinthians 5:17

Witness to the World

Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8

2 IN TRADITION

The Sermon on the Mount
The Story of Christianity

2

IMPORTANT TEXTS:

The Ten Commandments

Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21

The Shema

Deut. 6:4-6

The New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The Beatitudes

Matt. 5:1-12;

Luke 6:20-26

The Lord's Prayer

Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4

The Golden Rule

Matt. 7:12

The Great Commandment

Mk. 28:29-31; John 13:34-35

The Great Confession

Mk. 8:27-30

The Great Invitation

Mk. 8:34-38



The Gate is Open

3

IN REASON

The Christian Faith
Christian Ethics

In theological reflection, the resources of tradition, reason, and experience are integral to our study of Scripture without displacing Scripture's primacy for faith and practice. These four sources—each making contributions, yet all working together—guide our quest as United Methodists for a vital and appropriate Christian life and witness.

4

IN EXPERIENCE

The Spiritual Senses
The Spiritual Disciplines

PROFILE OF A DISCIPLE

1. Commit their lives to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.

For one believes with the heart and so is justified,
and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

Romans 10:9-10

2. Pray for the Will of God

Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:9-10

3. Worship regularly

And let us consider how to provoke one another
to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together,
as is the habit of some,
but encouraging one another,
and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:24-25

4. Study in small [accountability] groups

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching
and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:42

5. Minister with their Spiritual Gift(s)

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second
prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power,
then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership,
various kinds of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?
Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing?
Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

But strive for the greater gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

6. Give cheerfully and proportionately

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind,
not reluctantly or under compulsion,
for God loves a cheerful giver.

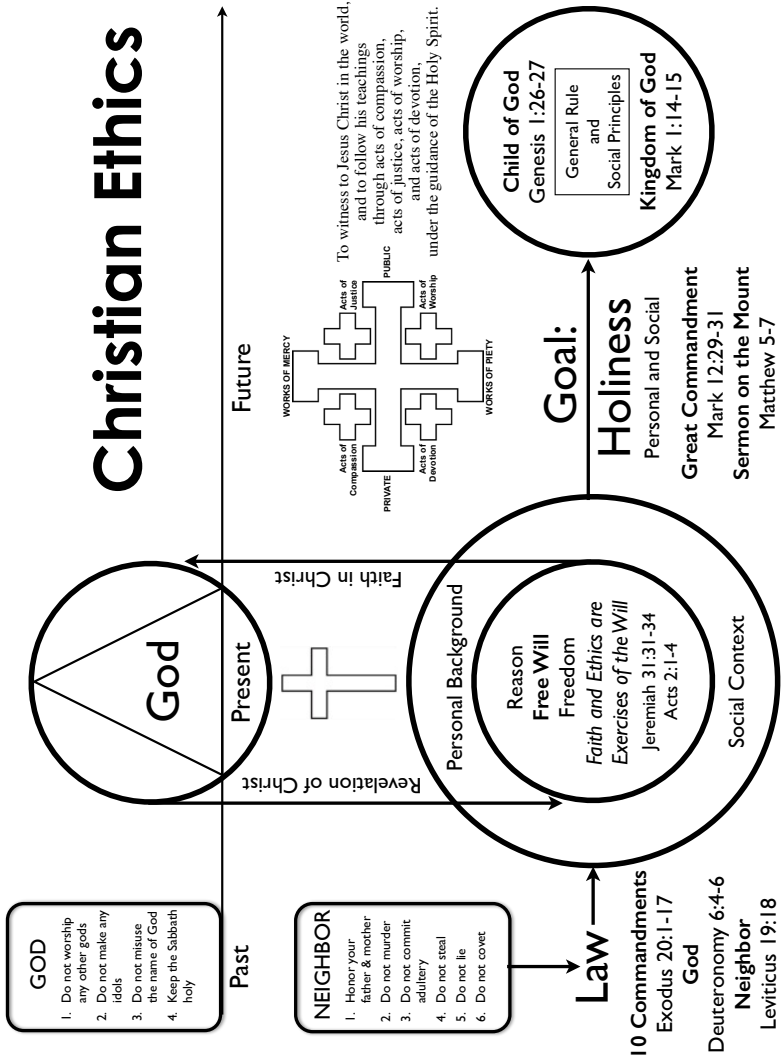
2 Corinthians 9:7

7. Support Missions

Then the king will say to those at his right hand,
“Come, you that are blessed by my Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you
from the foundation of the world;
for I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
I was naked and you gave me clothing,
I was sick and you took care of me,
I was in prison and you visited me.”

Matthew 25:34-36

CHRISTIAN ETHICS



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

DOES GOD EXIST?

1. When did you begin to think about God?
2. What in nature is most beautiful to you?
3. What in nature is most threatening to you?
4. Name some moral laws!
5. Name some cultural norms!
6. Should we build a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast? Where?

WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

1. What does Theism mean?
2. Who is Jesus? Is he human or divine or both?
3. What is simple Christianity? Do you believe in simple Christianity?
4. What was Jesus' radical claim? Do you believe it?
5. Which atonement theory makes the most sense to you?
6. Do you believe in the existence of Hell?

IS THE BIBLE ACCURATE?

1. What are the events of divine origin in the Old Testament? In the New Testament?
2. Why was the Gospel of Thomas rejected?
3. What were the criteria for being accepted in Scripture?
4. Was Marcion right in rejecting the Old Testament?
5. Why do we only have four Gospels?
6. Discuss the themes of light, covenant, and Temples!

WHAT IS FAITH?

1. Who led you to belief or unbelief?
2. Which Creed do you prefer? Why?
3. Is the Trinity a problem for you?
4. Do you agree with William Barclay that a lukewarm Christian is no Christian at all?
5. How important are feelings to your faith?
6. Of what value are the Spiritual Disciplines? Spiritual Senses?

WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

1. What does it mean to be holy?
2. What is the work of the Holy Spirit?
3. Do you know what your spiritual gift is? Do you have more than one?
4. What is the purpose of a spiritual gift?
5. What is Sanctification? What is Entire Sanctification? How does it work?
6. What was Wesley's wager? Is this your wager, or is yours different?

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OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

1. **The Bible as Sacred History:**
Survey of the Bible
2. **The Struggle with God:**
Genesis through Deuteronomy
3. **Sacred Stories:**
Joshua through Esther
4. **The Search for Wisdom:**
Job through Ecclesiastes
5. **Time is Running Out:**
Major and Minor Prophets
6. **Between the Testaments:**
Books of the Apocrypha
7. **The Messengers:**
The Four Gospels
8. **An Explosion of Faith:**
Acts and Revelation
9. **The First E-Letters:**
All of the Letters
10. **The Second Creation:**
Revelation (Formatted: 6x9)
11. **A Vision of Hope:**
Revelation: (Formatted 8.5x11)
12. **New Testament Photos 1**
13. **New Testament Photos 2**

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BOOKS

1. **Ignited for Mission:**
A Call to Missions
2. **Reformulating the Mission of the Church:**
A Theology of Missions
3. **Our Spiritual Senses:**
Five Spiritual Senses
4. **Our Spiritual Disciplines:**
Six Spiritual Disciplines
5. **The Ordinary Christian Experience:**
Fourteen Common Experiences
6. **Faith is a Choice:**
Choosing Faith and Morality
7. **A Brief Story of the Christian Church:**
A Survey of the Church
8. **The Heart of Methodism:**
Renewing the Church
9. **The Light:**
Our Moral Compass
10. **Does God Exist?:**
Five questions about God

EDITED BY THE AUTHOR

1. **Foundational Documents:**
Basic Methodist Documents
2. **Instructions for Children:**
by John Wesley
3. **Speaking Iban:**
by Burr Baughman
4. **The Essentials of Methodism:**
Basic Methodist Beliefs

