

DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Unmasking The Spirit Of The Antichrist

Every person believes something about God, the afterlife and the supernatural realm. Some believe that God does not exist. Others worship thousands of “gods”. There are those who claim to be on a “pathway to enlightenment”. Many worship demons, or ascribe spiritual power to objects or the forces of nature. Some even worship themselves.

Mankind is clearly spiritual. Even today, with all our modern technological advances, people still yearn to understand the basic meaning of life. Deep within, people hunger for greater purpose and understanding that goes beyond day-to-day living. People wonder, “Is there more to life than what can be seen, heard, felt, tasted or touched?”

These questions reveal how God created mankind. **We were created (Gen 1:26,27) to know God and His purposes in a personal way (Jer 29:11-13).** Unfortunately, man’s choice to sin destroyed the innocent communion he once had with his Creator. Thus, the biblical record reveals man’s long and inevitable descent into spiritual darkness.

But the Bible reveals a profound truth as well: God is at work, drawing mankind back to Himself. God has provided a way of salvation for mankind to be restored back to Him.

However, Satan and his demons are also at work. Using deception and lies, they are ceaselessly striving to keep people from the Truth of God and His plan of

salvation. Satan knows that the Truth will set humanity free from the bondage of the consequences of sin (John 8:32).

This issue of ACTS Magazine will refresh your understanding of God’s great plan of salvation. It will show the clear contrast between true, biblical Christianity and other religions active in the world today. It will expose the “*spirit of the Antichrist*” – which the Bible reveals as the controlling force behind all false religions.

The purpose of this magazine is to better equip you to lead people out of the bondage of false religions and into true, eternal salvation through Christ Jesus. This information is not intended as an attack on other religions or the people who follow them. Nor should it be used to accuse or judge others.

Our prayer is that this magazine will help you, as a church leader, understand how to:

- Confront false religions **in prayer**;
- Answer the questions of those bound in false religion who are seeking the Truth;
- Lead people out of the darkness of false religion, and into the glorious light of the Gospel of God the Son, Jesus Christ!

“For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2Cor 4:6, nas). ■

EXPOSING THE SPIRIT OF THE ANTICHRIST

There are hundreds of different religions practiced in our world today. Some may appear to have strange beliefs, while other religions seem more acceptable. However, ALL except true, biblical Christianity are “false religions” — filled with error and ungodly human wisdom, and having demonic origins.

Many false religions and cults attempt to counterfeit true Christianity. They may use “Christian language” or biblical words, and may even include Jesus Christ’s name. But a closer examination reveals that false religions deny the full counsel of the Word of God and contradict Who Jesus Christ is and what He taught. The Bible identifies this as “*the spirit of the Antichrist*” (1John 4:3).

False religions have one unifying factor: they originate with, and are given power by, Satan and demonic spirits. The main strategy of the demonic realm in false religions is to lead people **away from God**, His truth, salvation through Jesus Christ, freedom, and eternal life; and instead lead them **into** deception, bondage, and eternal separation from God.

In this teaching, we will examine what the Bible reveals about the spirit of the antichrist, its characteristics, and how it functions through false religions.

As you study, make sure you **look up each Bible reference mentioned and read it carefully**. The better you know and understand the Word of God – **and** our God Who has given us His Truth – the better equipped you will be to recognize and not be deceived by the spirit of the antichrist and false religions (Heb 4:12).

I. The Spirit Of The Antichrist: At Work Today!

The “Antichrist” is commonly believed to be a **specific person** who will rise up in the last days and, filled with demonic power, lead the world astray (this is true, and described in the Book of Revelation).

But the Bible also reveals that there is a “*spirit of the Antichrist*” which is **already** at work in the world, even as it was in John the Apostle’s time (1John 2:18-23; 4:1-3). This demon spirit opposes the truth of Who Jesus is and what He accomplished at the Cross. Disguised to appear acceptable, this spirit works through willing vessels to lead people astray.

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And

no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2Cor 11:13-15).

Keeping Humanity In Darkness

The main strategy used by the spirit of the antichrist to oppose Jesus Christ is clearly identified in the Bible: **The spirit of the antichrist denies the “incarnation”** [God the Son taking on human flesh] **of Christ**.

*“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour... Who is a liar **but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?** He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also”* (1John 2:18,22,23).

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And **this is the spirit of the Antichrist**, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world”* (1John 4:1-3).

In the Gospel of John (1:1-14), the Son of God is described as “the Word” Who is eternal in nature and coexistent with God. God the Son was the primary Agent in creation (v.3) and in Him is salvation (v.4). The Son of God came into our world so that mankind might be saved through Him (vs.10-13) and He **took on the form of human flesh** (read also Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:14; 10:5).

Jesus, the Son of God, was born into our world according to the plan of God (Gen 3:15; Isa 7:14; Acts 2:23; Gal 4:4,5) for the purpose of taking on our sins (Rom 5:9-11; 2Cor 5:21) and paying for them at the Cross (1Cor 15:3,4). By dying in our place, Jesus provided our salvation and our restoration back to God through faith in Christ (Acts 4:12; Rom 1:16,17; 1Thess 5:9,10).

The spirit of the antichrist **denies** that Jesus was **God come in the flesh**, and thus attempts to remove our confidence in what Christ accomplished. “*For*

INTERNATIONAL EDITION
Volume 31 / Number 2
Published by World MAP

ACTS

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VISION AND MISSION OF ACTS MAGAZINE

To provide practical Bible teaching and ministry training free of charge to church leaders in Asia, Africa and Latin America who preach or teach from the Bible to 20 or more persons each week, so that they will be equipped to fulfill the Great Commission in their own nations and around the world.

ACTS (ISSN 0744-1789) is published semiannually by World MAP, 1419 North San Fernando Blvd., Burbank, CA 91504-4194, U.S.A. Address inquiries to World MAP at the above address or to P.O. Box 4142, Manila, Philippines; or Private Bag, White River 1240, South Africa.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to ACTS, World MAP, 1419 North San Fernando Blvd., Burbank, CA 91504-4194 U.S.A.

Visit our website at:
www.world-map.com

many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2John 7). These demons deny Christ because salvation through faith in Christ, His atoning work on the Cross, and His victorious resurrection, are the very foundation of Christianity.

By denying that Christ was the Son of God come in the flesh, the spirit of the antichrist is denying that Jesus the Christ was actually God in human form. To deny this is to reject the **work** that Jesus Christ accomplished – the payment for our sins with **His own blood**, as a sinless sacrifice, through His actual death (1Pet 1:18-21) and resurrection.

Some false religions acknowledge that Jesus was perhaps a “great prophet”. But they do NOT believe that Jesus was, and is, the only Son of God sent to earth in human form to die for the sins of humanity and then be resurrected from the dead. Many believe that Jesus was just one more prophet in a long line of prophets.

Many acknowledge that Jesus was a “great moral teacher”. But they do not accept His very clear teachings – that Jesus is God (John 8:58; 10:30-33) and that salvation is possible ONLY through Him (John 14:6).

Demons know that God is real, that Jesus Christ is truly God (Mark 3:11; Luke 8:26-29), and that He is the sacrificial Son of God through Whom we have salvation. Therefore, demon-inspired false religions and cults fervently **deny** that God the Son came in the flesh and paid for our sins; they deny this in order to keep humanity in darkness regarding the true and only way of salvation (John 1:4; 8:12).

Demonic Tactics

The spirit of the antichrist is the main force promoting and empowering false religions and cults, all of which deny the deity and true work of Jesus Christ. This evil, demonic wisdom (2Cor 11:15; 1Tim 4:1; Jas 3:15) feeds rebellion, ignorance and deception in people to keep them from knowing the One true God and the salvation He has provided through Christ.

Satan and the demonic realm are in constant opposition to Jesus Christ and the advancing of His Kingdom through the Church. Let us examine six main manifestations of this opposition presently used by the demonic realm to oppose Christ and His Church.

1. Deception. All demonic spirits work through lies, half-truths, and perversions of the truth. Deception is the nature and function of the whole demonic realm – beginning with the father of lies, Satan (John 8:44).

Specifically, the spirit of the antichrist uses – and works through – false religions and cults to sow deception and confusion among people, in order to keep them from eternal salvation through Jesus Christ and from restoration to God.

The spirit of the antichrist will even try to deceive Christians, attempting to lead sincere but immature believers into error or destruction (2Cor 11:3, 4,13-15; 1Tim 4:1-3; 1John 2:26). That is why a thorough familiarity with, and proper understanding of, the Bible and the doctrines of Christianity are so very important.

2. The demonic realm opposes anything that is godly, biblically moral, or righteous. The spirit of the antichrist works not only through false religions and cults; but also through secular means (government, institutions, and general society) to oppose Christianity. When a government allows false religions the rights and freedom to gather, yet hinders and persecutes Christians and Christianity, this is the spirit of the antichrist at work.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:12, *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”*.

The demonic realm will tempt people (even Christian leaders) to use religion as a cover for fleshly activities (see 2 Peter 2:1-3,12-22). Demonic spirits will attempt to work through other people to hide, suppress or confuse the truth about Jesus Christ (Rom 1:18,19,32) and the Church. This strategy is particularly seen in the news media and entertainment industries today.

The spirit of the antichrist endeavors to intimidate or discourage Christians from ministering or sharing the Gospel. Demonic forces attempt to sow doubt and fear in the hearts of believers, to silence their witness and lead them astray. Thus, any serious, committed disciple of Jesus will have to wage spiritual war (through prayer and the truth of God’s Word) against the demonic realm.

Satan and his demons were defeated at the Cross (Col 2:15; Matt 16:18,19). Demonic forces **must** bow and yield to the awesome and overcoming power of God released through prayer in Jesus’ Name. There is no name that is greater than the Name of Jesus Christ our Savior (Phil 2:9-11). At the Cross, Jesus Christ not only paid the ransom for our sins (Matt 20:28; Col 2:13,14), but He also destroyed Satan’s control over human destiny (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14-16). **The only control Satan and his demons have over Christians is what Christians will invite, accept or allow.**

3. The demonic realm is divisive and seeks to separate believers in Jesus Christ from each other and the local church. Demonic spirits attempt to deceive people to form “new” doctrines or beliefs that are opposed to what the Bible teaches. Once deceived, those led by the spirit of the antichrist will seek to separate themselves from the Body of Christ and form exclusive groups (see 1 John 2:19). This is how many false religions and cults begin. Beware of groups with new or “exclusive” revelations, especially if they claim that joining their group is the only way to be saved.

Demon spirits will also attempt to divide believers in an individual church. If we succumb to this strategy – and allow our flesh, pride or weakness to create divisions, confusion and arguments – it is destructive and harmful to the church and its function (Jas 3:13-18). We must instead *“put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make **NO** provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts”* (Rom 13:14).

Unity within a local church – as well as among Bible-based Christian churches – is **essential** if believers are to please the Lord and grow into maturity (Eph 4:11-16). Jesus Himself prayed for unity among the believers: *“that **they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me”*** (see John 17:20-22).

Unity releases the full blessing of God, and the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit to work in and through the Church. (See Psalm 133, where oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit’s work because of unity.) Unity is a testimony to the world of genuine faith in Christ (John 12:34,35).

Christ commanded **unity** in the Church, not **uniformity**. There **is** room for difference of **expression** within the Body of Christ and among churches. The worship styles, the type of building, the order of the service, the name of the church, or the day of the week that the church gathers, are a few examples of acceptable differences that should **not** create divisions.

But **there are essential doctrines and theology clearly expressed in the Bible that ALL believers must hold to and agree on; otherwise we are no longer the true Church of Jesus Christ** [please see “Essential Christian Doctrines” for more information].

As a church leader, make unity a priority in your church; and reach out to other church leaders in your area. Pray together, encourage each other in sound doctrine, talk together, and make plans to reach your community for the Kingdom of God. Give **NO** place for the divisive spirit of the antichrist!

4. Demon spirits promote “legalism”: holding to an outward religious form while denying the true presence, love and power of God.

The devil does not care whether people act religious or not. His desire is to keep people away from a real and life-transforming relationship with the One true God through Jesus Christ, His Son.

Obviously, the spirit of the antichrist will use false religions to keep people from the truth. But another method of deception can sometimes be found **within** the Church – among protestants, evangelicals, charismatics, in large denominations or small ones.

This demonic strategy leads people to hold to an **outward form** of religious practice, titles or words, but deny the transforming power of God that works inward change and deliverance from our sinful nature. This is sometimes referred to as the “spirit of religion”.

This type of deception is addressed in the Bible as those “*having a form of godliness, but denying its power*” (2Tim 3:4). These are people who may act religious and appear godly, but their hearts and actions do not reveal genuine, transforming faith in Christ or love for God. Jesus recognized and addressed this empty, outward form of religious practice (see Matthew 23).

Churches that are bound by a **religious spirit** are far more concerned with their “rules” and who is following them, than they are with reaching the lost and discipling believers in love. These churches often inhibit the presence and Spirit of God from being present and active in their church services or individual lives. They do not welcome the work of the Holy Spirit or teach obedience to ALL of the Scripture. They may not welcome “outsiders” in their meetings. Instead, they emphasize rules, outward forms, or traditional ceremonies and rituals, most of which are not even based on the Scriptures. This kind of manifestation is called **legalism**.

The Apostle Paul warned the Colossians of the dangers of legalism and religious rituals **replacing true faith in Christ** (Colossians chapters 2 and 3). Paul exhorted the Colossian believers to resist legalism and beware of the false teachers that promote these practices.

Paul also warned Timothy about those with the **appearance** of godliness: “*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than*

lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power...” (2Tim 3:1-4).

These terrible traits are displayed by those “*having a form of godliness*” – those who only outwardly appear religious! They may be churchgoers, elders, priests or ministers. But the Bible calls them hypocrites (Matt 7:21-23). Inwardly, they have denied, resisted and rebelled against the life-changing power of the Lordship of Christ in their lives. They have an outward, spiritual “form”, but they are not allowing their hearts and minds to be transformed by Christ’s love and power (Rom 12:1,2; 2Cor 3:18). They do not exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:15-26) or the character of Christ in their lives (Rom 12:9-21; Col 3:12-17). Paul warns: “*And from such people turn away!*” (2Tim 3:5; also read verses 6-9).

True believers in Jesus Christ have the Spirit of God within them. The conviction and power the Holy Spirit gives **can** and **will** transform us from the inside out, if we will respond! Jesus did not come to make us outwardly “religious”, but rather to make us adopted sons and daughters (Rom 8:12-17) and **to conform us into His image from the inside out** (Rom 8:28-39). Christ came to set us free!

Let us never deny our Lord by living unworthy of His great sacrifice (Titus 1:15,16). Do not be deceived by the spirit of the antichrist into thinking that an outward show of spirituality is enough. “*For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart*” (1Sam 16:7).

5. The spirit of the antichrist seeks to exalt itself and steal the worship that rightfully belongs to God. “Lucifer” was an angelic being filled with pride and rebellion who was defeated and cast out of Heaven by God. He became known as Satan (“adversary”) in Scripture (Luke 10:18). In Isaiah 14:12-14, we encounter five startling statements – each beginning with “I will” – that show his desire and intent to take the place of the Most High God and be worshipped as God. God’s response to Lucifer’s rebellious arrogance is recorded in Isaiah 14:15-20.

We encounter Satan’s same wicked desires in the temptations of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11. At one point Satan offers the “*kingdoms of the world and their glory*” if Jesus will only fall down and worship him. Jesus’ response in verse 10 lays bare Satan’s evil desire: “*Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’*”

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4, Paul describes “*the man of sin*”, the “*son of perdition*” who will appear at the very end of the Church Age. This will be the ultimate and final Antichrist, possessed by Satan himself, “*who*

opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God". The Antichrist will attempt to lead all of humanity to worship him instead of God (Revelation 13; see also Daniel 7:25).

The spirit of the antichrist is already working in the present Church Age to steal the glory, worship and heart-surrender of humanity away from God. This spirit obviously uses false religions and cults to lead people astray and capture their allegiance and worship. Jesus Himself warned that there would be those who would claim to be Christ, or to be a prophet with some new and important "revelation".

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt 24:23,24).

The spirit of the antichrist desires to divert people's attention, love, obedience and worship away from God. Millions who are bound in false religions worship dead founders of their religions, other people (living or dead), idols, objects, demon spirits – instead of worshipping the One true God, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

It is very tempting even for Christians to fall prey to this demonic strategy by striving for the praise of men (Matt 6:1-7), or by idolizing other people and their works. This is demonically-inspired and pride-filled, and robs God and Jesus Christ of due honor. May we be diligent to **give to God and Jesus Christ the glory and the worship that are due them – and only them!**

6. The spirit of the antichrist appeals to our sinful nature through pride and self-exaltation. The spirit of the antichrist is marked by pride and a desire for the position and exaltation that belong only to God.

"I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images" (Isa 42:8). It was through his own pride that Satan rebelled, attempting to overthrow God and His divine rule.

Pride is the **enemy** of every sincere disciple of Jesus Christ and a doubly dangerous foe to leaders in the Body of Christ. The love of fame or position, and the desire for the praise of men, appeal to the fleshly nature (John 12:42,43); but they are invitations for the working of the demonic.

Paul, in his letter to Timothy, warns of the destructive power of pride. In discussing the qualifications for leadership, Paul declares that a leader should not be *"a novice, lest being puffed up*

with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil" (1Tim 3:6).

Proverbs 16:18 tells us that *"pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"*. In Proverbs 6:16,17, pride is one of the seven characteristics *"the Lord hates"*; He considers it an "abomination".

James 3:13-4:10 condemns the attitudes that are a result of pride: *"For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there" (Jas 3:16).* This passage also reveals that those who give place to arrogance become self-deceived and so *"lie against the truth" (Jas 3:14).* Pride in the human heart is a fertile soil for the lies of Satan to flourish and grow, leading one further and further from the truth.

Satan uses people's pride, encouraging them in their "independence" to look elsewhere for answers and salvation rather than to Jesus Christ, the embodiment of Truth.

God is **actively opposed** to the proud (Jas 4:6). James also exhorts: *"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you"*, and *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (Jas 4:7,10).*

The Pitfalls Of Pride

Once pride is given entrance, it takes root and begins to grow. As pride grows, the things of the Spirit of God are lessened in one's life, including the humility necessary to walk uprightly before the Lord. Some doorways for pride are:

1. Seeking out position, notice or praise rather than servanthood;
2. Taking credit that others should rightfully receive.
3. Receiving flattery and vain words instead of giving thanks and credit to God;
4. Believing you are in some way superior to those you lead, and expecting privileges because of your "position";
5. Having attitudes of self-righteousness and pointing out the flaws or failures of others, while putting yourself in a good light;
6. Blaming others for problems or failures, and not taking your share of the responsibility;
7. Lying about or exaggerating your experiences, knowledge or accomplishments;
8. Becoming angry, envious or competitive when others do well or are admired; criticizing their success.

If you have found any of these wrong attitudes (or similar attitudes) in your own heart, stop right now. Take a moment to repent (turn away from such behavior and refuse to entertain it); ask Jesus to

forgive you and cleanse you of sin (1John 1:8,9); then purpose to walk in humility and servanthood before the Lord.

It is your choice alone as to whether you will cooperate with your flesh and the devil and give place to pride – or instead choose to be a servant who walks humbly before God and with others (Rom 13:14; Eph 4:27; Mic 6:8).

II. False Religions And The Spirit Of The Antichrist

One of the primary means through which the spirit of the antichrist works to oppose Jesus Christ and God's Kingdom is **false religion**. The major false religions of the world have certain beliefs in common:

1. The false religions of the world have other gods with other names. But the Bible teaches that there is only One God, the Lord God Most High, Yahweh (Deut 6:4,5; Mark 12:29; 1Cor 8:6). There is no other way to know or approach the One true God except through His Son, Jesus (John 14:6; Rom 1:16,17); there is no other name by which we can and must be saved, except the Name of Jesus (John 3:16; Acts 4:12).

2. False religions require many "works" (human effort) in order to obtain their version of salvation or heaven. False religions and cults teach that outward adherence to rules and regulations, or correct performance, will "earn" a person the right to be saved or gain him approval from his "gods".

But we know from Scripture that God's acceptance can **never** be earned. Our relationship with our heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, is based on **God's love and acceptance of us**. God loves us completely, even in our sinful condition (John 3:16; Rom 5:8). Our works have nothing to do with God's **love** for us.

The Bible does reveal, however, that our sin does **separate** us from God. Just one lie, one evil thought, one rebellious attitude, one thought of anger or lust or covetousness – any **one** of those is enough to condemn us before a perfect God. James 2:10 tells us, *"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."*

So we see that there is **no one** who can perform perfectly and satisfy the full Law of God (except Jesus Christ). Thus, **all** mankind is condemned to death and eternal separation from a holy God. **BUT God**, in His

great love, does not leave mankind in that hopeless condition!

The eternal purpose of God the Father was to send God the Son to provide the **ONLY way of salvation** to all humanity by paying the penalty for our sins, which is death (Gen 2:17; Ezek 18:20; John 3:16,17; Rom 6:23; 1Pet 1:18-21). Christ **paid the penalty** for **all** of humanity's failure with His own spilled blood and death. Thus, **all** who put their faith in Jesus Christ and receive what He has done for them will be saved (Rom 10:11-13) and restored back to a relationship with God (2Cor 5:18; Col 1:19-23). For all believers, the past is forgiven; and they have God's promise that He will forgive and cleanse them from any future sin they confess to Him (1John 1:9). Hallelujah!

This overwhelming provision of God through Christ **cannot be earned**. It is a **free gift**. Jesus Christ – in His life, death on the Cross, and resurrection – provided us with **eternal salvation and acceptance from God – freely!**

It is **crucial** for every believer, especially leaders in the Church, to have a clear understanding of this essential doctrine. The central truth of **salvation by grace through faith** in Jesus Christ – **not** by man's works – is the heart of the Gospel; it is what separates Christianity from every other religion in the world.

Doing good works to try and be acceptable to God leads to **self-righteousness**.

The Bible reveals that *"all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags"* (Isa 64:6). The only **true** righteousness we can have that makes us acceptable to God is **given** to us freely in Christ (1Cor 1:30; Rom 5:17-21; Titus 3:4,5).

Human works or outward performance will **never** transform the inward, unredeemed heart – the sin nature of mankind – which is the real source of what separates mankind from God.

Biblical Christianity **starts** with the human heart, which is transformed through God's power (Rom 12:1,2). This process begins at salvation, when the power of sin is broken (Col 2:13-15), a new nature is received (2Cor 5:17), and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within a person (Acts 2:38). The Spirit of God then supplies the ongoing conviction, strength and ability to obey God and do His will (John 14:26; 16:5-14; 1Cor 12:11; Eph 2:10). Thus, as believers respond in obedience to God, the Word and the Holy Spirit, they experience a growing transformation of their heart and nature (2Cor 3:18). That inward change will

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show itself outwardly in changed behavior and attitudes.

True, we are exhorted in Scripture to *express our faith* in Christ by good works (Heb 10:24; 1Pet 2:12). But we are **not saved BY** those good works; we are **saved FOR** good works (Eph 2:10).

And even the good works we do in Christ's name are to be done through the grace, strength and wisdom of the Lord – by *His power*, not our own (Mark 10:27; John 15:5).

The Jews of Isaiah's time were rebuked for their empty religious works (Isa 1:11-15; 29:13); so were the Pharisees of Jesus' time (read Matthew chapter 23). The early Jewish disciples of Jesus were oriented toward doing works of the Law to try and obtain righteousness. They asked Jesus, "*What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?*" Jesus answered and said to them, "*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent*" (John 6:28,29).

God has so much more for people than vain religious rituals and outward forms; He desires personal *relationship* with man, made possible by Christ's provision of salvation!

Christ's death and resurrection opened the way for salvation by grace – faith in Christ's finished work on the Cross, "*not of works lest anyone should boast*" (Eph 2:9; see also Romans 3:27,28; 4:1-8).

3. False religions teach ideas about their "gods", but only Christianity offers real relationship with the One true God. The message of the born-again Church is totally unique among all the religions of the world. "*The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.*

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:26,27).

"*Christ in you*" declares what no other religion in our world can hope for: that God, by His Spirit, has come to dwell inside individual believers. We can **know God** and have a personal relationship with our heavenly Father!

All religions have their moral rules. Many have a type of "theology". Some religions even claim to have "holy writings". All religions have their ceremonial days and required rituals. **But no other religion but Christianity can claim God's presence through Jesus Christ!** The "gods" of false religions are portrayed as being far off, unknowable and untouchable. They are angry or capricious, and must

always be appeased. Or they are believed to be small – living in trees, statues, animals or even rocks.

What fundamentally separates Christianity from all the rest of the religions of the world is the true presence of God! He lives within the hearts of believers in Jesus Christ, and invites them to share relationship with Him. His glory and presence come wherever He is truly welcomed and worshipped (Matt 18:20) in spirit and in truth (John 4:23,24).

4. False religions are Satan's tool to lead people into deception and eternal separation from God. Jesus Christ stripped all power from Satan at the Cross. Satan is only a created being whom God will throw into the lake of fire forever upon judgment day (Rev 20:10). Satan hates and opposes God, but cannot hurt Him. Therefore, Satan strikes at the object of God's love – all of humanity – using **deception** as his main weapon. False religions are riddled with demon-inspired half-truths in order to confuse people and lead them away from the One True God and His plan of salvation.

The Church Must Prevail!

Satan knows about God's plan to save, build and work through **the Church**. The living Body of Christ – the Church – is the people who have personally received Jesus Christ as Savior and who have a living, growing relationship with Him (Matt 16:18,19). These "born again" believers (John 3:3-6) are the special "tool" set apart by God for spiritual purposes. They are charged to bring His Good News of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to the rest of the world (Mark 16:15; Eph 3:8-12) and to make disciples (Matt 28:19).

When the Church understands this role – and is moving aggressively and obediently in the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill this role – Satan cannot hold onto his "spiritual territory" (which is his hold on people who are in bondage to sin and deception).

Jesus declared: "*...I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*" (Matt 16:18). The word "gates" in the Bible is symbolic of a place of authority. The "*gates of Hades*" have lost all authority (Matt 28:18) and cannot stop the Church from reaching those who are in darkness and bringing them out into Christ's marvelous light (Matt 4:12-17; Acts 26:18). There is **only one thing** that can stop the Church from bringing Christ's salvation to those who sit in the darkness of false religions: the failure of the Church to carry out its God-appointed mission!

What fundamentally separates Christianity from all the rest of the religions of the world is the true presence of God!

III. Man's Part In Deception

We have briefly studied the nature and function of the spirit of the antichrist which *"is now already in the world"* (1John 4:3). Paul exhorts us to understand our adversary in order to not be deceived, *"lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices"* (2Cor 2:11).

It would be incorrect, however, to try and blame only the devil and demons for people's rebellion against God. Unfortunately, much of the growth of false religions and cults has to do with the selfish hearts of human beings darkened by their own sinful choices (Eph 4:18). Carefully read Romans 1:16-32 to see a clear picture of man's rebellious and resistant self-will, summarized as follows:

- Salvation is for everyone who believes in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (vs.16,17);
- Fallen, selfish humanity – in concert with the demonic realm – suppresses this truth (v.18);
- God's nature, attributes and power are *"clearly seen"* in creation (v.20);
- Sinful mankind is not grateful for this knowledge (v.21) and exchanges it, or trades it, for a lie (vs.23,25);
- Fallen humanity chooses to believe lies, thus *"professing to be wise, they became fools"* (v.22); they refuse to retain the knowledge of God (v.28);
- Mankind stubbornly resists the commands of God as found in His Word (v.25);
- Thus, God relinquishes His loving control (He hands the rebellious over to their evil desires) (vs.24,26,28);
- Then mankind, with suggestions and temptations from the prince of lies and darkness (John 8:44; Eph 6:12), pursues:
 - ◆ perverted religions (vs.24,25),
 - ◆ perverted sexual practices (vs.26,27),
 - ◆ perverted lifestyles (vs.28-32).

Jesus Christ came to set people free from sin. But sinful humanity sometimes does not want this freedom, and in their rebellion would rather pursue darkness and their own way.

Even those who have known the Lord can choose to fall away (Heb 10:26-28) and allow demonic deception to lead them astray. *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons..."* (1Tim 4:1).

The phrase "latter times" means that time period between the first coming and the second coming of Christ. This is the time in which we now live.

People will pursue teachers who will condone their wrong behavior and tell them what they **want** to hear instead of the truth of the Bible. *"For the time*

will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2Tim 4:3,4).

Leaders and teachers in the Body of Christ must be faithful to teach only what the Bible teaches. They must exhort others *"in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will"* (2Tim 2:25,26).

God loves us and desires to show His mercy to us. His Word declares to us:

- We were ungodly – yet Christ died for us (Rom 5:6);
- We were sinners – yet we have been justified by His blood (Rom 5:8,9);
- We were enemies of God – but we are now reconciled to God through Christ (Rom 5:10).

Truly, this is the **Good News** we are called to proclaim to those bound by sin and their own rebellion! We who were dead in sin – but have believed in Jesus Christ – have now been saved, not through our own works, but by grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:1-10).

Christ came to set us free from our bondages to deception and sin, and to give us eternal life after physical death. But this glorious freedom comes **ONLY** through what Christ has done for us at the Cross. Our faithfulness to follow and obey God's ways and His Word will cause us to grow in strength, and will enable us to recognize and resist the strategies of our adversary the devil and the spirit of the antichrist.

Conclusion

All false religions of the world are the inventions of men and/or demons. They are based on the false premise of earning salvation through works and coming to God apart from Christ and His work.

In false religions, man is trying to reach for "god". Only in biblical Christianity is **God reaching to man** through His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom 5:6-10; 1John 4:9,10).

Only in biblical Christianity is **salvation a gift offered freely by God**. *"For the wages of sin is death but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom 6:23; see also Romans 3:21-24). Only through Jesus Christ is there **eternal salvation** (Acts 4:12).

Through Christ Alone

It is often claimed today that there are "many ways to God", or that any religion is acceptable as

long as one is sincere in following it. But **Jesus did not agree with this** or teach this. He gave **no other way** to come to or know God except through **salvation in Jesus Christ alone**.

Jesus stated very clearly: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6).

The apostles and preachers of the New Testament church also clearly taught that salvation was possible only through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; Rom 1:16; 1Tim 2:5,6a).

Some “religious” people might say that they know or believe in God but do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. However, the Bible makes it very clear that **you cannot know the One true God without coming to Him through His Son Jesus Christ** (1John 2:23; see also John 5:23; 14:6; 15:23; 17:3; 1John 4:15).

The promise of salvation is valid for **every person** who believes (Rom 1:16). But without a personal faith in Christ, one is lost and under the judgment of God (John 3:18; 1John 5:11,12) and will be separated from God for eternity (Rev 20:6,11-15; 21:8).

Let His Light Shine

One cannot escape the truth that the founders of false religions are dead – **but Jesus Christ is alive!** Since we have become the adopted sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ (Gal 4:3-7; Eph 1:3-5), we have the privilege of being God’s *“ambassadors for Christ”* (2Cor 5:20).

We have been charged by God to lovingly share the Gospel with every person (Mark 16:15) – whatever false religion or cult that person may belong to, and whether that person is a businessman, teacher, farm worker, old or young, rich or poor, male or female! We are to be faithful to *“preach the Word”* (2Tim 4:1,2), and the Holy Spirit will open their hearts and *“convict them of sin, righteousness and judgment to come”* (John 16:7-14). He will open their eyes to God’s great love for them and the truth that will set them free (John 8:32).

We serve a mighty God Who sent Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to be the Light of the world. Live in His light, walk in His light – and let His light so shine through you to the world that they, too, will glorify the Father (Matt 5:14-16). ■

*“I am the way, the truth,
and the life. No one
comes to the Father
except through Me” -*

John 14:6



ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

All False Religions DENY Essential Christian Doctrines

When Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthian church, he was aware that the forces of darkness were already sending out deceiving demon spirits to promote false doctrine.

Paul tells the young Corinthian church, “*But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted – you may well put up with it!*” (2Cor 11:3,4).

In this passage Paul was rebuking the Corinthian church for tolerating false teachers who were promoting error. These false teachers, motivated by the spirit of the antichrist, were preaching:

- Another “christ” – not **the Christ** born into our world and revealed in Scripture;
- Another “spirit” – not **the Holy Spirit**, Who is the third Person of the Trinity (the Holy Spirit is fully God) Who dwells within those who surrender their lives to Jesus Christ;
- Another “gospel” – not **the Gospel** preached by Jesus and the apostles and revealed in the Scriptures.

False religions of today are still preaching the same kind of error.

The teachings of the world’s largest false religions, various pseudo-Christian cults, and a wide variety of lesser-known religions, vary greatly in their doctrines and practices. Yet, **all of them share in common the denial or distortion of foundational Christian doctrines.**

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

It is of utmost importance that you, as a church leader, study this section and become very familiar with the basic Christian doctrines presented here. Your study and knowledge of these key doctrines will provide a solid foundation for both your faith and your ministry to others. This study will enhance your ability to discern false religions and the cults that attempt to masquerade as genuine Christianity.

Knowing the truth will keep you from the bondage of error (John 8:32).

The Bible exhorts, “*be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2Tim 2:15). Church leaders and other believers should become “*diligent workers*” who study the Word of God **daily** and **thoroughly**. When they are very familiar with the **real** truth, false teaching or error will be immediately recognizable.

To illustrate this concept: A bank clerk needs to know how to discern whether money is genuine or “counterfeit”. He is trained to do this by spending hours and hours handling **genuine** money. Then when a counterfeit bill is slipped in, the bank clerk can readily spot that it is not right. The more familiar he is with the “real thing”, the harder it is to be fooled by a fake.

In a similar but much more important way, being familiar with the genuine **truth** of the Bible will help you more readily spot heresy and error that contradict the Bible.

Sound Doctrine

Regarding sound doctrine, take special note of Paul’s exhortations to Timothy: “*Till I come, give attention to reading [the Scriptures], to exhortation, to doctrine*” and “*take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you*” (1Tim 4:13,16). [For further study, read John 7:16,17; Acts 2:42; Romans 6:17,18; 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 4:6; 6:3; 2 Timothy 3:16; 4:2-4; Titus 2:6-10.]

For almost two thousand years Christians have held to Bible-based, orthodox Christian beliefs which are agreed upon by believers in Jesus Christ. Though **small** points of difference among believers might still exist, these are insignificant compared with the extreme and heretical differences found in the false doctrines of cults and false religions.

Presented below are some biblical, foundational doctrines that conservative Christians ALL hold in common. There is not room to present every detail; neither is it possible to discuss every Christian doctrine. But this list does reflect the **basic core beliefs held by and essential to historic Christianity** and can be used to help compare and

discern the erroneous teaching of false religions and cult groups.

1. The Doctrine of the Scriptures

The Holy Bible is the *only true revelation* given by God to the prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testaments. However, false religions and cults:

- Attempt to promote their own writings as equal or superior to the Bible
- Claim that they have a “newer revelation” that replaces the Bible
- Claim that there are errors in the Bible or that it is incomplete. They assert that **their** beliefs, doctrines, revelations or writings “correct” the supposed errors or add the missing parts.

The Bible (the Old Testament and New Testament) is the ultimate authority because **the Scriptures were given to us by God Himself** (2Tim 3:16). The Holy Bible, the Word of God, has been revealed directly *by God* into the hearts and minds of men who faithfully and carefully recorded those words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The foundation of the Bible’s authority is **God Himself**. All true authority is ultimately based upon and derives from God (Rom 13:1). The Bible has its ultimate origin with and from God. Because God is the Author, the Bible has **authority**. It is considered to be **authoritative** (trustworthy) concerning God, salvation and the Christian life. To accept the Bible’s authority means that we should believe and practice what the Bible teaches.

There are three principles that are key to the Doctrine of the Scriptures:

a. **The Inspiration of the Scriptures** – All Scripture is “God-breathed” (inspired by God), given to us by God (2Tim 3:16; read also 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:20,21). The Bible is not the invention of men or a collection of men’s opinions, ideas or mythical stories.

b. **The Inerrancy of the Scriptures** – The Bible is completely trustworthy because it is **inerrant**, which means the Bible contains NO mistakes or contradictions.

It must be remembered that **whatever God speaks is the Truth – and without error!** This is because He is the “*God of truth*” (Isa 65:16) Who “*cannot lie*” (Titus 1:2; see also Numbers 23:19; Hebrews 6:18). Therefore, since God is true (John 3:33), His Word is also true (John 17:17). The Bible is a completely trustworthy guide for our faith (belief in God) and practice (life and behavior).

Jesus Christ, Who quoted from the Scriptures repeatedly throughout His ministry, bore witness to the fully divine authority and trustworthiness of the

Scriptures (Matt 5:17,18; Luke 4:4,8-10; 24:27,44,45; and many others).

c. **The Infallibility of the Bible** – The Bible, God’s Holy Word, is totally trustworthy for all that we need to know for doctrine, salvation and the Christian life.

This is why the Scriptures exhort us to “*be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth*” (2Tim 2:15; read also 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

The Word of God – the Holy Bible – is **complete** as it is written. **Nothing** is to be ADDED to the Bible. **Nothing** is to be REMOVED from the Bible. **No part** of the Bible is to be ALTERED or DISTORTED. Many historical documents have been found that clearly prove that the Bible has been preserved accurately for thousands of years. The last book of the New Testament warns of the seriousness of altering the Scriptures (Rev 22:18,19; read also Deuteronomy 4:2,12,32; Proverbs 30:6.)

Many false religions and cults have removed portions of the Bible they did not like. Some have added “new revelations” that were NOT from God, creating new “bible” texts or books.

[For more information on the authenticity and authority of the Bible over all other religious writings, please see the previously published issue of ACTS Magazine from January 2000].

2. The Doctrine of God

God is infinite. The human mind, however, is finite and therefore cannot fully comprehend God; nor can human language adequately describe God (see Job 11:7-9; Isaiah 55:8,9; Romans 11:33). Yet God, through His Word, has revealed to us everything we need to know in order to approach, love, worship and serve Him (see Exodus 34:6,7; John 1:18; Heb 4:14-16; 1John 4:9,10).

Though **the entire Bible is a revelation of God** and Who He is, let us look at some very specific Scripture references about the nature and character of God:

a. God’s Nature

God Is:

All Knowing – Isa 29:15,16; 40:27,28; 1John 3:20

Everywhere-Present – 2Chr 6:18; Ps 139:7-10; Jer 23:24

All Powerful – Jer 32:17-18

Infinite (not limited by time, space or the physical universe) – 1Ki 8:27; 2Pet 3:8

Eternal (without beginning or end) – Ps 90:2; Isa 57:15; 1Tim 1:17

Self-Existent (“I AM”) – Exo 3:14; Isa 43:10-13; Rev 1:8

Unchanging in Character – Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17

Transcendent (apart from and above creation) – Ps 14:2; Isa 6:1, 2; Col 1:17

Immanent (near and personal) – Jer 23:23,24; Ps 139:7-10; Acts 17:27,28

Creator of All – Gen 1:1; Neh 9:6; Heb 11:3

The Only God – Deut 4:35,39; Ps 86:10; Isa 44:8; 46:9; Jer 10:10

Spirit - John 4:24

One (in being and substance) – Deut 6:4; Mark 12:29-32; 1Cor 8:4

Three (as Persons equally God and equally eternal) – Gen 1:26; Isa 6:8; Matt 28:19; 2Cor 13:14

- God the **Father** – Matt 11:25; John 6:27; 1Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6
- God the **Son** – Luke 5:17-26; John 1:1; 5:18; 20:28; Titus 2:13; 2Pet 1:1
- God the **Holy Spirit** – Luke 1:35; Acts 5:3,4; Heb 9:14

b. God’s Character

God Is:

Holy – Ex 15:11; Hab 1:13; Rev 4:8; 15:4

Just and righteous – Deut 10:17; 32:4; Ps 145:17; 1John 2:29

Good and merciful – Ps 25:8-10; 34:8; 100:5; Matt 5:45

Love – 1John 4:8

Truth – Num 23:19; Deut 32:4; Isa 65:16; John 14:6

Faithful – Deut 7:9; Isa 49:7; 1Cor 1:9; 2Tim 2:13; Heb 10:23

3. The Doctrines of Mankind and Sin

Only the Scriptures can adequately and accurately describe who mankind is and what his current spiritual condition is. In the Genesis account of mankind’s creation, Scripture states that mankind (male and female) are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26,27).

This is not a physical “image” because God is spirit and does not have a physical body (John 4:24). This “image” can be expressed in the following characteristics of people (includes **both** men and women):

a. People are **personal** beings, just as God is (Gen 2:7).

b. People are **moral** beings, with an inbuilt “conscience” and sense of right and wrong. This gives them the ability and responsibility to choose between right and wrong (Amos 5:14,15; Rom 2:14,15; 12:9; Heb 9:14).

c. People were **created** out of the same material as the rest of creation (“*dust*”, Gen 2:7); however, people are **distinct** from the rest of creation in that they (male and female) were created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). People have an inbuilt awareness that a “higher power” exists. They are consistently religious and will worship **something** – even if it is themselves.

d. People are **spiritual** beings. Though housed in physical bodies, they were created with the capacity for relationship with God Who is Spirit. A person’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and therefore is not to be used for sinful purposes (Rom 6:12,13; 1Cor 6:19,20). The physical bodies of believers in Christ will be resurrected at the Second Coming of Christ, and the mortal will take on immortality (1Cor 15:50-54). Nonbelievers’ bodies will be resurrected for judgment at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15).

e. People are created for **rulership**, with the capacity to participate in dominion over creation. God gave people the capacity and authority to rule over creation (Gen 1:28) and sometimes over other people (Rom 13:1-7) – but they are to do so with the principle of **love** as their guide (John 13:34,35; Rom 13:8-10). Redeemed people are also destined to rule and reign with Christ (2Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10).

God created people in His own image, and gave them the capacity to live a life of holiness, love and service. However, as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, people have a sin nature – which gives them the capacity to choose the lowest depths of sin and depravity (Mark 7:21,22; Rom 3:10-12).

Yet, those who believe in Christ (though they are not sinless while still in this life) can be gradually restored, transformed more and more into the image of Christ (2Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

Sin and its effects span every barrier of race, age, language, economic status, nationality and gender. ALL people EVERYWHERE, of EVERY time in history, are sinners (Rom 3:23). The Word of God declares this to be true, and it can be easily observed by – and in – any one of us.

It is absolutely essential that we understand that **God is not the originator of sin** in our universe (Jas 1:13). He is the Creator of all things *created* (Rev 4:11), but He is NOT the author of sin and evil. The Bible makes very clear that it is not possible for God to have created sin (Deut 25:16; 32:4; Job 34:10; Ps 92:15; Isa 6:3; Zech 8:17; Jas 1:13; Rev 4:8; 15:4). Scripture records that it was Satan (Lucifer) who first rebelled against God in his pride and selfish ambition (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:12-17), thus bringing sin into the universe.

God, by creating humanity in His own image, gave humans the ability to make choices. God knew that it would be possible for mankind to either choose to love and walk with Him – or choose to sin and rebel against Him. This did **not** make sin a **necessity**, only a **possibility**.

God created mankind perfect and placed him in a perfect environment. God gave Adam and Eve everything they needed – and only the simplest of commands to obey (Gen 2:16,17).

God, in His righteousness and goodness, did not permit Satan to **force** Adam and Eve to sin. Nor does God permit Satan to force any born-again Christian to sin today. Satan cannot force us to sin against our will (1Cor 10:17). Satan did, however, **tempt** Adam and Eve by using deception and twisting the truth to lead them astray.

Adam and Eve **chose to disobey God** and yield to temptation. This process of (1) temptation and (2) willful choice to give in to temptation, is still how sin is brought about today. *“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death”* (Jas 1:14,15).

Satan can be blamed for **tempting** Adam and Eve; but they were responsible for **their own choices** to yield to Satan’s temptation. The same is true for us today when we face temptation. God will hold each of us responsible for the choices we make. No one else is responsible for our sinful choices (Rom 14:12; Heb 4:13). Temptation alone is **not** sin; but it can **lead** to sin and therefore must be resisted (Rom 6:12,14; 13:14) through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The nature of sin is best described as anything that offends, violates or contradicts God’s character or holiness. Sin is willful rebellion against God and His just and righteous commands. The Bible says this about sin: *“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin”* (Jas 4:17). Sin is more than just a single wrong act; it is the natural disposition of the sinner (Gen 6:5; Matt 7:17,18; Rom 1:18-32). Therefore, man must be “born again”, and given a new nature (John 3:7; 2Cor 5:17).

The penalty for sin is death (Rom 6:23). This means three kinds of death:

- Being **spiritually dead** while still physically alive (Eph 2:1-5);
- A **literal, physical death** and then the judgment (Heb 9:27);
- **Eternal death**, the separation of the human spirit from God for eternity. This last death is called the *“second death”* (Rev 21:8; read also Matthew 25:41).

As already mentioned, sin is universal to all mankind (Ps 143:2; Isa 53:6; Rom 3:10-12; 1John 1:8). *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23). But God, in His great mercy, is *“not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2Pet 3:9). Therefore, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, Who *“died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again”* (2Cor 5:15).

4. The Doctrine of Jesus Christ – His Person and Work

The Person of Jesus Christ – and the work accomplished by Him as the Founder of the Church – is **central** to the Christian faith. Christianity is NOT just another belief system, a list of moral codes, or a set of mysterious “revelations”. True Christian faith is based upon and inseparable from our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Therefore, having an accurate and thorough understanding of Christ’s Person and work is essential.

A. Jesus Christ’s Person

1) Jesus Christ’s Virgin Birth

(Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-35; John 1:14; Gal 4:4).

The virgin birth of Jesus was prophesied in the Old Testament (Isa 7:14) as a sign of the Messiah’s arrival. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is critical and foundational to His Person and work, and therefore to all of New Testament theology.

If Jesus had been born of a natural, human father, He would have inherited the sinful Adamic nature of the human race (Rom 5:12-21). Thus, He would not have been sinless. If Christ had not been sinless, His atoning death on the Cross would have been invalid: He would have died for His own sins and thus would not have been able to be the sinless sacrifice for all humanity (2Cor 5:21; Heb 7:26,27; 1Pet 1:18,19).

If Jesus did not have a virgin birth, it would mean that He is not God born in the flesh. Therefore, He could not return as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 1:17,18; 17:14; 19:16).

Without His virgin birth, Jesus Christ could have been nothing more than a well-intended but misguided and mentally unstable religious zealot. All of His claims about His deity, His death, His subsequent resurrection from the dead, and God’s unfolding revelation as to His Kingdom, would be invalid without the fact that **Jesus Christ was God born of a virgin**.

2) Jesus Christ’s Humanity

Jesus shared in the burdens, weaknesses, temptations and limitations of being born *“in the likeness of men”* (Phil 2:7; read also Hebrews

2:14,17,18). He became fully human, yet was without sin (Heb 4:15).

Jesus:

- was born an infant (Luke 2:7);
- grew up after the manner of all children (Luke 2:39-51);
- grew up physically, intellectually and socially through childhood to adulthood (Luke 2:52);
- hungered for food and thirsted (Matt 4:2; John 4:7);
- experienced weariness (John 4:6);
- needed sleep (Matt 8:24);
- felt sorrow and grief; wept (Luke 19:41; John 11:35);
- physically died (John 19:33);
- was physically resurrected from the dead as the “*first fruits*” (1Cor 15:20-23) prefiguring the resurrection of all believers in Christ (Matt 28:1-8; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:24-29; 1Cor 15:4-7).

3) Jesus Christ’s Divinity (Deity)

False religions and cults seek to deny that **Christ was and is fully God**.

Some false religions or cults acknowledge that Christ was a real, historical person – but they deny that He is God. Other groups teach that Christ was a “spirit-being” who “worked his way” to “godhood”, and claim that other people can do the same through their “good works”. Many bound in false religions consider Jesus to be a mystic or great teacher; but they do not accept what Jesus, the Son of God, actually taught.

Any religion, person or teaching that denies that Jesus Christ is fully God is false and in error.

There can be no doubt from the biblical record that **Jesus was – and is – God**. By contrast, the founders of other religions are considered significant by their followers because of their teachings. However, **none of them ever claimed to be God**; nor did they perform the kind of works that would prove such a claim to be true. **Only Jesus Christ** has made this claim and proved it through His life, ministry, teachings, sacrificial death, and subsequent resurrection.

It is important to remember that Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, **was not created by God**. Rather, Jesus Christ:

- Is part of the Trinity, and is coeternal and coexistent with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (John 1:1,2; Acts 5:3-4; 2Cor 3:17,18);
- Is eternal (Mic 5:2);
- Was before Abraham (John 8:58);
- Was active at the creation of the universe (John 1:1-3; Col 1:16,17; Heb 1:2,10);
- Existed before that creation (John 17:5,24);

- Continues forever (Heb 1:8,11; Isa 9:6; Rev 1:11);
- Is unchanging (Heb 13:8);
- Is ever-present with us (Matt 28:20).

Biblical Proof That Jesus Christ Is God

During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ claimed to be God (John 5:18; 8:58; 10:30). Mark 2:5-12 reveals that Jesus forgave a paralytic’s sins; then, to prove that He had the right and power to do so as God, Jesus Christ *healed* him. Jesus Christ gives eternal life (John 10:28). He gives His disciples power to perform miracles (Matt 10:1,8). Jesus declared that He and the Father are One (John 10:30). The Jews clearly understood that Christ claimed to be God (John 10:31-33); this was the reason for their negative, hostile reaction to His claim.

Jesus Christ said that He and God the Father are identical in character, purpose and mission (John 14:9). He did the works of His Father (John 5:17; 10:37,38) and demonstrated authority over nature (Mark 4:35-41). Jesus Christ knew the thoughts of people (Mark 2:8; Luke 6:8; John 2:23-25). He had the power of life and death (John 6:63; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:1-44). He also taught His followers to pray in His Name (John 16:23,24). Jesus received worship (Matt 2:2,11; 14:33; 28:9,10,17; John 9:38; Heb 1:6), knowing that God alone is to be worshiped (Ex 34:14; Matt 4:10). Jesus received worship because He is truly God!

Jesus Christ: Fully God And Fully Man

The New Testament affirms that **Jesus is God**. Jesus is described as: “*the brightness of His [God’s] glory and the express image of His [God’s] person*” (Heb 1:3); the “*image of the invisible God*” (Col 1:15) with “*all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*” dwelling in Him (Col 2:9).

Jesus and God the Father are One (John 10:30). The Greek language in this verse indicates that They are one in **substance** but not the same **Person**; this supports the theology of the Trinity.

Jesus is called “*our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:13); “*my Lord and my God*” (John 20:28); and “*God...manifested in the flesh*” (1Tim 3:16).

Christ also possessed – and demonstrated by His life, ministry and sacrificial death – the **character of God**. Christ’s moral attributes include:

- a. Love** – John 3:16; 13:34; 15:12,13; Rom 8:35
- b. Truth** – John 8:31-36; 14:6; Rev 3:7
- c. Servanthood** – Matt 20:25-28; John 13:13-17; Phil 2:5-8
- d. Holiness** – Luke 1:35; Acts 4:27,30; Heb 7:26; Rev 3:7

e. **Righteousness** – Rom 5:17-21; 2Tim 4:8; 1John 2:1,29; 3:7

It is abundantly clear that the Scriptures teach that **Jesus Christ was and is God**. He was both **fully man** and **fully God** at the same time. Other religions acknowledge Christ's existence, but attempt to deny His deity and do not believe what the Bible so clearly teaches about Him. **Any teaching that denies Who Jesus Christ is according to the Bible is heretical – and must be rejected.**

B. Jesus Christ's Work

As stated, Jesus affirmed His Divine nature when He said, *"I and My Father are one"* (John 10:30). The Jews' reaction clearly reveals that they understood the implications of Jesus' statement – He was claiming to be God (10:31,33).

But Jesus did not just **claim** to be God, even though that was and is true. He validated (proved the reliability of) His claim by the works He did. He repeatedly told His listeners that (a) His works were of God and (b) His works proved that He was/is God. *"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him"* (John 10:37,38; see also John 5:17,36; 9:4; 10:25; 14:10,11; 15:24).

1) His Ministry

Jesus, in His earthly ministry:

- healed the sick, blind and deaf;
- raised the dead;
- cast out demons;
- supernaturally fed the hungry;
- thwarted the devil;
- confronted the religiously self-righteous;
- taught repentance from sins and forgave sins;
- revealed the loving heart and character of God the Father in both His Person and His teaching.

2) The Cross

Death and eternal separation from God are the consequences of man's sin. However, Jesus Christ *"wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us...[and has] taken it out of the way, **having nailed it to the cross**"* (Col 2:14). By dying on the Cross as a sinless sacrifice for mankind, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin and reconciled us back to God. [For more on the Cross, see the "Salvation" doctrine.]

3) His Resurrection

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ after His death is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Ps 16:10; Acts 2:31). But more than that, it is foundational to faith in Christ for salvation

(Rom 10:9,10). Paul affirms that the Christian faith is based on the truth of the resurrection of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:14-19. If the resurrection of Jesus Christ were not a fact, then:

- the apostle's preaching would be in vain (v.14);
- the faith of the believers in Corinth (and the faith of all Christians) would be in vain (v.14);
- the apostles and others would be false witnesses (v.15);
- the Corinthian church (and all Christians) would still be in their sins (v.17);
- those who have died believing in Christ would be without salvation (v.18);
- Christians would be of all men the most miserable (v.19).

The **literal, physical resurrection** of Jesus Christ from the dead is a key component of the Gospel (1Cor 15:4; 2Tim 2:8; also, see "What Is The Gospel?").

The resurrection of Christ stands alone in its importance and uniqueness in all of history.

The following scriptural facts help us understand the implications of Christ's resurrection for every believer:

a. Jesus Christ was truly and completely dead **physically**. He did not just faint, nor was He in a temporary coma (Mark 15:44,45; John 19:33-35; Rev 1:18).

b. Jesus Christ was **bodily** resurrected; the resurrected Christ was NOT a disembodied spirit or an apparition (Luke 24:36,39,41-45; Ps 16:10; Acts 2:31).

c. Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, was **seen in His physical body by many witnesses** (Luke 24:30-36; John 20:19,26; Acts 1:3,21,22; 1Cor 15:3-8).

d. Jesus Christ's resurrection was unique in that **He would never die again** (Acts 13:34; Rom 6:9,10; 2Tim 1:10; Rev 1:18). There have been other people miraculously resurrected from the dead (e.g., John 11:1-44), but each of these goes on to die a physical death at the end of their life on earth.

e. Jesus Christ's resurrection **proves His claim to Deity** (Matt 12:38-40; John 2:18-22; Rom 1:4).

f. Jesus Christ's resurrection shows that **His sacrifice on the Cross was accepted by God the Father** (Rom 4:25; Heb 9:23-28; 10:11-14).

Jesus Is Alive!

Jesus Christ died on the Cross for our sins, then was resurrected on the third day. The following facts could be true **ONLY** of a **living Savior** Who is presently and eternally reigning in power and glory:

- Christ is Head over all things to the Church (Eph 1:19-23);
- Christ is our High Priest, representing the heavenly Father to us, and representing us to God

the Father (Rom 8:27; Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14,15; 5:5-11; 6:20; 7:25,26; 9:11);

- Christ has given spiritual gifts to the Church (Eph 4:8-13);

ANGELS: Not To Be Worshipped

Angels are created beings (Neh 9:6). As created beings, they are vastly inferior to God in every way. Angels are spirits without bodies (Heb 1:7), but have appeared at times in a bodily form (Gen 19; Judg 2:1; Luke 1:11-20). Angels are **not** human beings who have died and been glorified; they were created separate and distinct from people (1Cor 6:3; Heb 12:22,23). Angels do not have the attributes of God, although their power and knowledge is greater than man's (2Sam 14:20; 2Pet 2:11). They do not marry or die (Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34-36). They are intelligent, rational beings that are not human or divine.

The word for "angel" in Hebrew means **messenger**. Angels were created to minister for God, assisting Him in the carrying out of His will and purposes (Heb 1:14). However, there are angels who chose to be evil (Satan and his demons), who are opposed to God's benevolent will and Kingdom. These evil angels were not created to be evil, but rather chose rebellion over righteousness. Since they cannot harm God, these evil angels (demons) seek to deceive and enslave God's most treasured creation – mankind (2Cor 11:3,12-15).

The true angels of Heaven have as their highest and most important ministry **giving praise and worship to the only living God** (Luke 2:13,14; Rev 7:11,12) **and to His Son, Jesus Christ** (Heb 1:6; Rev 5:11,12). Angels ministered in Christ's life on earth (Matt 4:11; Luke 22:43). They minister to us as heirs of salvation (Heb 1:14). They reveal God's will (Job 33:23).

It is of great importance to note, however, that **angels are not to be worshipped**. The Bible clearly warns against such practice. Fallen mankind has a pronounced weakness toward idol worship. The Israelites – even though they had seen God's powerful signs and wonders by day and night during the exodus from Egypt – still demanded that a golden calf be made for them to worship (Ex 32). Similar idolatry continues to this day as sinful people continue to exchange the worship of a glorious God for the worship of the corruptible glory of creation (Rom 1:21-25). **Worship of angels is forbidden** (Col 2:18; see also Revelation 19:10; 22:8,9). It is also forbidden to worship anything or anyone other than God and Jesus Christ. The angels who are loyal and obedient to God will NOT accept worship; they forbid anyone to give them worship.

- Christ, as "*the firstborn from the dead*" (Col 1:18), guarantees for all believers a physical resurrection at His second coming, and the same for the rest of humanity at Judgment Day (Acts 17:31; 26:23; Rom 8:11; 1Cor 15:20-24, 50-52; Phil 3:7-11; Col 1:18; Rev 20:11-15). [For more about the final resurrections, see "Doctrine of Last Things".]

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep [died]" (1Cor 15:20). Hallelujah! Christ is risen! Thus, through every toil, sorrow and tribulation, believers may be confident and joyful – knowing that Christ has conquered death, we are triumphant, and we will rise and reign with Him victorious throughout eternity!

5. The Doctrine of Salvation

The Cross

Because false religions and cults deny that Christ is God, they also completely reject the fact that Christ's sacrifice on the Cross provided for mankind's full salvation.

Of all the glorious works of our Savior, **Christ's death on the Cross in mankind's place is of supreme importance**. In one single act, Christ "*wiped out the handwriting [certificate of debt] of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*" (Col 2:14). "*That through [His] death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*" (Heb 2:14,15).

The Cross was not an accident or afterthought! God purposed and foreordained His plan of salvation from the moment of man's fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:14,15; Acts 2:23,24). Death and eternal separation from a loving God was the consequence of man's sin. However, God, because of His great love, planned a way for the price to be paid for sin so that mankind would not be separated from Him forever.

The focus of this divine plan was in the Person of Jesus Christ and His substitutionary sacrifice of His life for ours. Christ did for us at the Cross what we could never do. By dying on the Cross for us, Jesus took on the penalty we ourselves deserve. His death paid the ransom for our sin and allowed us to be restored back to God. Hallelujah!

All other religions attempt to gain credibility by pointing to the **teachings** of their founders. Christianity goes well beyond, because of the supreme importance of the teachings AND the **death and resurrection** of the Founder!

Without Christ's death and resurrection as the incarnated God/man, Christianity would be nothing more than rules and rituals – just another religion. But *because of* Christ's death, we have eternal salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord! By His death on the Cross, Christ made it possible for **man to be reconciled to God**: "...Who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ" (2Cor 5:18; see also Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:16). Christ's substitution for mankind on the Cross satisfies **for all time** the demands of God's justice and Law in regard to our sin.

To simply illustrate this **reconciliation**, imagine God and man standing and facing each other at creation. When Adam sinned, he chose to turn his back toward God. Then God, Who cannot condone sin, had to turn His back to Adam. Christ's death satisfied the requirements of a holy God, so God turned back to face man. Now the choice is man's to accept Christ's sacrifice and salvation and thus "turn around" (**repent**) to face God again in relationship.

Jesus Christ's sacrifice was foreshadowed in type by the Levitical sacrifices commanded in the Old Testament. The animal to be sacrificed for sin had to be perfect, without blemish (Lev 9:2,3). This was a foretype of the sinless and perfect Lamb of God, Who would come to earth to give His life as a ransom for our sin (Matt 20:28; John 1:29). His death was necessary (Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22) because the penalty for sin is death (Ezek 18:4,20).

A sinner cannot be forgiven only on the basis of his or her repentance. God can forgive only when the penalty for sin has been paid and His justice has been satisfied. **Christ paid that penalty** for our sins at the Cross. This allowed God, Who is righteous and just, to forgive us based on our repentance *and* our faith in Christ.

Christ's death provided a **covering over** (or atonement) of the guilt of the sinner, making the sin invisible to the eyes of a Holy God. This concept of God no longer recognizing our sin is conveyed in Isaiah 38:17: "*For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.*" (Read also Psalm 51:9; 103:12; Isaiah 43:25; Micah 2:19.)

Jesus Christ's **substitutionary atonement** has satisfied God's justice, freeing God to be merciful in offering us the free gift of salvation (Rom 6:23) by grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8).

Why Are Not All Saved?

Scripture clearly teaches that Christ died for **all** humanity, not for just a privileged few (read John 1:29; 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2). The question might then arise, "If Christ died for everyone, why then are not

all saved?" The answer to this question is quite simple.

Yes, Christ died and made payment with His own blood for the sins of **all** mankind. But in order to receive and enjoy the benefits of this "paid-in-full" salvation, *each person* must believe in and receive Christ and His work for himself or herself **personally**.

All **can** be saved by Christ's sacrifice – and God desires that none would perish without salvation (2Pet 3:9). However, in order to be saved, it requires **an individual decision** by each person to believe in Christ (John 3:16).

This truth is reinforced in Romans 10:9,10: "*That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*". Christ's provision of salvation must be believed and received personally and individually by faith. That is why we **must** share the Good News of the Gospel with others (Rom 10:14; see also John 1:12; 3:16).

God's Gracious Provision

Since Christ died for all people everywhere – and since it is necessary to personally receive His salvation – what happens to those who die in infancy?

Those who die before they are mentally able to make a moral choice to either accept or reject Christ's offer of salvation are covered by Christ's atoning work at the Cross. The sin of rejecting God and His provision of salvation through Jesus Christ is not possible for an infant or a very young child.

At some point in a child's mental, emotional and spiritual development, he or she becomes able to make a conscious choice to believe and receive salvation through Christ. Different children may reach this point at different ages. Therefore, it is very important that churches provide for teaching, ministry to, and even evangelism for children in a language and way they can understand. **Children can be saved**; they are also capable of worshipping, praying, learning Scripture, and even ministering to others. Each child should certainly be taught how to function as part of a church body and how to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ (Matt 18:1-6; 19:13-15).

In this matter of salvation for those who are mentally unable to make the decision to receive Christ, let us give thanks that we have a merciful and loving heavenly Father, of Whom we may proclaim, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Gen 18:25).

6. The Doctrine of the Church

In Matthew 16:16, Peter declares that Jesus is "*the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Jesus

responds with, “*Blessed are you... And I also say to you that you are Peter [Greek *petros*, small pebble] and on this rock [Greek *petra*, bedrock] I will build My Church*” (Matt 16:17,18).

With this statement, Jesus proclaims that the Church will be built upon Jesus’ Divine Person – upon **the bedrock of Peter’s confession** that Jesus is truly the Son of the Living God! The Church will not be built upon any ordinary person or system of church government. The government of the Kingdom of God, which includes the Church, is upon Jesus Christ’s shoulders (Isa 9:6-7; Mark 12:10; 1Cor 3:11; Eph 1:22; 5:23,24; Col 1:18).

What is “the Church”? The Greek word for “Church” is *ekklesia*, which means “the called out ones”. It describes **a group of people called out for a special purpose**. In New Testament usage, the word “church” refers to those who have been “*born again*” (John 3:3,5), those we call saved.

To better understand what the Church *is*, let us first look at some things the Church is *not*:

- The Church is not one particular denomination. Some denominational groups claim that only their members are the true Church. This is false and cannot be supported from the Bible, especially in light of how the New Testament defines “church”. Though there are various denominations with differing emphases, the Bible warns against divisiveness (1Cor 1:11-17) and exhorts us to “*keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Eph 4:1-6). **All those who truly believe in and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are part of His Church!**

- The Church is not a social club or any other kind of civic group or organization. The Church was divinely begun (Matt 16:18) and exists to fulfill the will of the Founder, Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Eph 3:10; 1Tim 3:15). The primary purposes of the Church are: to preach and teach the Word of God, making disciples; to exalt the Name of Jesus and God the Father through worship and in prayer; to serve the practical needs of the surrounding community; to carry out a consistent program of missions and evangelism to the whole world.

- The Church is not a building. The word *ekklesia* is always used in the New Testament to indicate **people** (believers). There were no special buildings for the use of Christian gatherings until three hundred years after the Church began! As time passed, it became convenient to call the buildings in which Christians gathered “churches”. But **a Church is the people who gather**, not the building they gather in.

Essentially, the true Church of Jesus Christ is the Body of His “called out” people: Those called out from a life of sinful self-service and death, to live in the blessedness of a loving relationship with God the Father both now and through eternity. The true Church is made up of those who have sincerely put their trust in Christ for salvation (John 3:3-6; 1Cor 12:13; Heb 12:23). Just attending a church service, or holding a position or title in a church or denomination, does not make a person saved or part of the Body of Christ (His Church). Being truly born again (John 3:3,5) – and having the transforming work of the Spirit of God active in one’s life (Titus 3:5) – is what qualifies one to be part of the Church, the Body of Christ.

The Church can be viewed in two ways:

- First, as **the universal Church**, which consists of all those who have been born again of the Spirit of God and baptized into the Body of Christ by that same Holy Spirit (John 1:13; 1Pet 1:22-25; 1Cor 12:13).

- Second, as the **local church**, which is any group of believers in Jesus Christ who are gathered in a local setting to celebrate their hope and salvation through Christ and to grow as disciples (Matt 18:20). Examples in Scripture include: the churches in Asia (Rev 1:4); in Galatia (Gal 1:2); in Corinth (1Cor 1:2); in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1); at Ephesus (Acts 20:17); in homes (Acts 2:46,47); and many more.

Each local church is to reflect the character of Christ, the Head of the Church; each local church is to mature into fulfilling all of God’s will and purpose (Eph 4:1-16).

7. The Doctrine of Last Things

The “end times” is a large subject that is often controversial. There are many books, charts, plans and opinions one can study. The Bible does not tell us **everything** about the last days, and because of this there is much speculation about end-time events. However, the Scriptures do reveal very clearly truths that are without question, and that we know will happen.

These key truths are of great importance to us as Christians. They also have profound implications for those caught in false religions and cults.

For the purposes of this study, there are **four very important and clearly revealed scriptural truths regarding the end times** that need to be understood:

A. The Literal Return of Jesus Christ (The Second Coming)

The Bible makes very clear that **Jesus Christ will come back to earth!** Acts 1:9 records that Jesus (after

His resurrection) physically went up into Heaven while His disciples watched. Suddenly, angels appeared to them and said, “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*” (Acts 1:10,11).

Jesus, during His earthly ministry, also promised His disciples that He would return (Matt 24:30; 26:63,64; Mark 13:33-36; Luke 19:11-27; John 14:3).

The first apostles taught extensively on the Second Coming of Christ. Peter preaches about Christ’s return (Acts 3:19-21); rebukes those who scoff at it (2Pet 3:3,4); and stresses the unexpected nature of Christ’s return (2Pet 3:8-10).

The Apostle Paul’s writings are filled with references to Christ’s Second Coming (1Cor 15:51,52; Phil 3:20,21; 1Thess 4:16,17; 2Thess 1:7-10; Titus 2:13). James tells us to be patient for Christ’s coming (Jas 5:7,8). The writer of Hebrews refers to it twice (Heb 9:28; 10:37). John gives several references to Christ’s personal and public return (1John 2:28; 3:2,3; Rev 1:7; 22:12).

Scripture records that many events will take place in the final days. It is not stated, however, at what point during those events Jesus Christ will gloriously return to earth. Yet it is enough for us to know that **Jesus Christ will return** according to God’s perfect plan (Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7). Be assured that our Savior loves us eternally and has promised, “*I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*” (John 14:3) and “*I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you*” (John 14:18).

B. The Two Resurrections

In the Gospel of John, Jesus states: “*Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*” (John 5:28,29). In the last days, there will be two resurrections.

The First Resurrection

The first resurrection will occur at Jesus Christ’s Second Coming: “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first*” (1Thess 4:16).

The first resurrection will be for those Christians who have already died. Then immediately following will be the taking up of those believers in Christ who are still alive. “*Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be*

with the Lord” (1Thess 4:17; see also 1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

These events are all part of the first resurrection, and will include all the saints (redeemed ones, believers) who have ever lived; this is the “*resurrection of life*” mentioned in John 5:29.

The Second Resurrection

The second resurrection will take place just before the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:4-13). This second resurrection will be for all the rest of the dead who will be raised for the “*resurrection to condemnation*” (John 5:29).

C. The Judgment

Hebrews 9:27 states, “*It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.*” This and other Scripture verses (Gen 3:19; 1Cor 15:22; 2Cor 5:10; Rev 20:13) make clear that there is **one death, and then judgment for all**.

There are no endless cycles of reincarnation, no earning the way to various levels of heaven by good behavior, no “holding places” of decision. Each person will die but once; and each person will then face judgment after his or her death.

Every person will face the almighty and all-knowing Creator God, Who will judge every life on its own merit. Just as there are two resurrections, there will be two judgments:

1) The Judgment of Believers in Jesus Christ

Believers in Christ will **NOT** be judged according to their sins. The judgment for sin that believers deserve, along with its necessary punishment, **was already laid upon Christ at the Cross!** Jesus Christ fulfilled the judgment and penalty for sin that should have been ours (Isa 53:5,6,10; John 5:24; 2Cor 5:21). **Repentance from sin and belief in Jesus Christ** allow believers to receive this great salvation!

For the sins we commit in this life after we have come to know Christ as our Savior, we are convicted by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:5-13; Gal 5:16-25) and disciplined by the Lord (1Cor 5:5; 11:32; Heb 12:7). When we repent and confess our sin to God, we are forgiven – through Christ’s atoning blood – of the sins we commit (1John 1:9).

Believers will be required to give an account for – and will be judged on – the deeds they have done or not done while on earth (1Cor 3:12-15; 2Cor 5:10). We are **not saved by our works**, as we have already studied. However, each believer in Christ will be judged as to the use made of the life and possessions God gave him or her.

Believers will be judged in the following areas:

a. “As stewards of the mysteries of God” that are now revealed (which are the Gospel and the plan of salvation). What did we do with what we knew and

understood of Christ? (Col 1:24-29). Were we faithful to His revelation? (1Cor 4:1-5).

b. The use of the gifts, talents, abilities and opportunities given by God. Were these used to build up the Body of Christ and reach out to the world? (Matt 5:14-30; Luke 19:11-27).

c. The use of the material resource that God gives. Did our money and possessions help to further God's Kingdom purposes, or were they used only for satisfying our own desires? (Matt 6:19-21; 2Cor 8:8-15; 9:6-15).

d. The use of every opportunity to preach the Gospel and thereby fulfill Christ's last command – the Great Commission. Did you freely share your faith and testimony with anyone who would listen? Did you do your best to support and assist with evangelism and missions? (Matt 28:18-20; Rom 10:14; Col 1:28; 2Tim 4:1,2).

e. The use of every resource available to reach out to a needy world around us. Did we: “*do good to all people*” (Gal 6:10); show hospitality (Matt 25:35; Heb 13:2); care for the sick and imprisoned (Matt 25:34-40); take care of widows and orphans (Jas 1:27)? Even a cup of cold water given in Jesus' name has its reward (Matt 10:42).

f. The enduring of suffering and tribulation that comes to believers because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Did we remain faithful to Jesus Christ and His Gospel message in spite of hardship or persecution? There will be reward in this life and in eternity for those who endure and remain faithful (Matt 5:11,12; Luke 6:22,23; 2Tim 2:3,12; Jas 1:12; 1Pet 2:20; 3:14,17; 4:15-19).

Stricter Judgment For Leaders

Leaders in the Body of Christ will receive a stricter judgment because they have a greater privilege and therefore a greater responsibility to lead the flock of God.

- A leader's **teaching** will be judged (Eccl 5:1-3; Jas 3:1).
- A leader's **life** is to be an example of Christlikeness and godliness (Phil 3:17; 1Tim 3:1-13; 4:12-16; Titus 2:7,8).
- A leader's **obedience** to the Word and to the promptings and conviction of the Holy Spirit is of utmost importance. God is not as interested in our great programs, buildings or self-efforts as He is in our **obedience** to all He asks and requires (1Sam 15:22,23).

This is by no means a complete list of biblical standards for church leaders. But it serves as a reminder that, as His word attests, God is VERY concerned about our character. He cares more about what we are **becoming** in our obedience to Him, than

about any works we might do (Matt 7:22). God desires that we be shaped more and more into the image of Christ, growing in discipleship and obedience, and serving as a good example to those we lead (2Cor 3:18; Phil 3:12; 2Thess 3:6-9; 1Tim 4:12; 1Pet 5:2,3).

2) The Judgment of Non-Believers in Jesus Christ

Although mentioned in several places in the Bible, the judgment of non-believers in Jesus Christ is best explained in Revelation 20:11-15. This is referred to as the **Great White Throne Judgment**. According to Scripture, this judgment will take place after the 1000-year Millennium, following the second resurrection (Rev 20:4-13).

Those who have died in Christ (believers) will have already been resurrected at the first resurrection. This second resurrection is to bring all of those who have ever lived – and those living on earth at the time of the second resurrection – before the throne of God to receive their judgment.

There are seven principles found in Romans 2:1-16 that form the basis of this judgment upon the unbeliever. This judgment of God is:

- a.** according to truth (not imaginations) – v.2;
- b.** according to accumulated guilt – v.5;
- c.** according to their deeds (absolute justice) – v.6;
- d.** without partiality toward anyone – v.11;
- e.** according to **obedience** to – and not simply the knowledge of – God and His Word – vs.12,13;
- f.** by Jesus Christ, Who is appointed by God to judge the world – v.16 (cf. Acts 10:38-43; 17:29-31);
- g.** according to the Gospel of eternal salvation as a free gift by the grace of God through faith in Christ.

Scripture seems to indicate that there will be degrees of punishment at the judgment (Luke 12:41-48). But regardless of the punishment, **every person** that dies without Christ will be separated from God completely. This absolute separation from the Person of God and from every trace of His great love, grace, goodness and kindness will last for an eternity (Matt 25:46; Luke 16:19-31, esp. v.26; Rev 14:11); this is the worst possible consequence of non-belief in Christ.

This very fact of the **final judgment** and **eternal separation from God** that awaits unbelievers should stir us with compassion for those who do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Christ has already paid the price to save them from that dreadful judgment. This is the Good News of the Gospel message – that **all** who receive Christ and His sacrifice can be saved from eternal damnation!

All those who die without Christ are held in **Hades**, the place of the dead (Rev 20:13). They are kept there until the second resurrection. **There will be**

no more opportunity for a decision for Christ once a person has died. At the second resurrection, the unbelieving dead will be raised to stand before the Great White Throne in the presence of God to receive their eternal judgment. They will then be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:15) along with Satan, his demon angels, the false prophet and the beast (Matt 25:41; Rev 19:20; 20:10).

D. Eternal Life

“And these [the wicked] will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:46). There are many, many Bible verses about the unending duration of life after death, too many to list here.

The Greek word, *aion*, and its derivative, *aionios*, are used almost two hundred times in the New Testament. Both of these words convey the idea of “**duration without end**”.

There is one eternal destiny for the *unrighteous* – those who have rejected Christ or never heard and responded to the Gospel. There is a very different eternal destiny for the *righteous* – those **made** righteous through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8,9), receiving the free gift of salvation made possible by His payment for sin.

1) Eternity for the Unrighteous

The eternity appointed for those who die *unsaved* (the unrighteous):

- a. complete separation from God (Luke 13:25,28);
- b. everlasting punishment (Matt 25:46; 2Thess 1:9);
- c. everlasting contempt (Dan 12:2);
- d. unquenchable fire (Matt 9:43,45; Jude 7; Rev 20:10);
- e. a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:42,50);
- f. consignment to outer darkness (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 2Pet 2:17; Jude 13);
- g. the wrath of God (Rom 2:5,8-9; 1Thess 1:10);
- h. everlasting torment (Rev 14:10,11);
- i. punishment in accordance to their works (2Cor 11:14,15; 2Tim 4:14; Rev 22:12);
- j. eternal destruction or ruin (2Thess 1:8,9; 2Pet 3:7);
- k. the second death (Rev 20:14; 21:8).

An eternity without Christ would be a terrible destiny indeed. We must heed Paul’s exhortation when he declares, “*Him [Jesus Christ] we preach,*

warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect [complete] in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (Col 1:28,29). And to Timothy, “*Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching”* (2Tim 4:2).

Though **all** people have sinned (Rom 3:23) and deserve eternal punishment, God is “*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2Pet 3:9). Thank God for His indescribable free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ! (Rom 6:23). By God’s grace and Christ’s sacrifice, we are saved from eternal damnation and have been given this message of salvation and reconciliation to give to the world (2Cor 5:19,20).

2) Eternity for the Righteous

For the believer in Christ Jesus, eternity is radically different than it is for the unbeliever.

The eternity appointed for those who die *saved* (the righteous):

- a. upon the moment of death, the believer is present with the Lord (2Cor 5:6-8; Phil 1:21,23);
- b. eternal life (1John 5:11,12);
- c. the mortal shall put on immortality and death shall be no more (1Cor 15:50-58);
- d. full transformation into the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29; 2Cor 3:18; 1John 3:2);
- e. the end of suffering, pain, sorrow and death (Rev 21:4);
- f. continuance of our personal identity in Heaven:
 - Our names, which are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, signify personal identity (Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3);
 - Our bodies will be resurrected or raptured, signifying God’s redemption of the whole person–body, soul and spirit (1Thess 4:16,17);
 - We will be recognizable in Heaven, only without sin’s presence to warp Christ’s image in us (1John 3:2).

With such a glorious future ahead for the believer, let us follow the admonition of the Scriptures: “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”* (1Cor 15:58). Hallelujah! ■

“What Is The Gospel?”

Jesus said, “*Go into all the world and preach the Gospel*” (Mark 16:15; see also Luke 24:47). This is a responsibility of every person who believes in Jesus Christ. But what is this Gospel message that believers are being asked to preach?

Many Christian groups, ministries and denominations throughout the Body of Christ have as their main goal the preaching of the Gospel. Yet, they have a wide variety of practices or special emphases that make them somewhat different from each other.

However, what unites **ALL** Christians is the shared belief in foundational biblical doctrines pertaining to the Gospel.

Essential Elements Of The Gospel

The core of biblical doctrine and truth regarding the Gospel is expressed most simply in the following verses:

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas [Peter], then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles” (1Cor 15:3-7).

Let us look briefly at the key biblical doctrines highlighted in the above verses:

- “*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received*”.

With this phrase, Paul reminds us that he received the **revelation** of the Gospel “*through the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (Gal 1:11-17). Paul is not merely reciting historical facts (true as they are) of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. He is declaring the very heart of the Gospel given to him **by direct revelation of Jesus the Son of God**, not through the teaching of men.

- “*...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...*”

Paul uses the term “Christ” to remind his readers of Who Jesus is – the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of God, Who is fully God Himself yet born in the form of man. It is this **God-man**, Jesus, who **died**. He did not faint, go into a coma, fake death or substitute someone else in His place. Jesus the Christ **actually and truly died** (Heb 2:9). He died just as any of us would die, as His soul was separated from His body and His body ceased to function.

But His death was **different** in that it was for a **specific and uniquely divine purpose**. Jesus was killed not simply because He opposed the religious system of His day. His death was pre-planned and foreordained by God the Father, with the Son’s willing obedience to fulfill His Father’s sovereign will (Gen 3:15; Acts 2:22,23; Phil 2:5-11; Heb 10:1-11). Even Jesus, during His earthly ministry, spoke often of His coming suffering and death (Matt 16:21; 17:22,23; Mark 8:31; 9:30,31; Luke 9:21,22; 18:31-33).

Christ’s death was not only pre-planned, but it accomplished a **purpose**: “*Christ died for our sins*” (1Cor 15:3). Man is separated from God because of man’s rebellion and sin, for which the just penalty is death (Ezek 18:4,20). Christ’s death **fully satisfies this penalty** and provides the way for man to be reconciled to God – which is known as the **atonement** (Rom 5:10,11; 2Cor 5:18,19; Col 1:19-23; 1Tim 2:5,6).

Christ’s substitutionary atoning death was “*according to the Scriptures*”. It was prophesied: (a) from the time of the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:15); (b) through Moses (Deut 18:15); (c) through the prophets (Isa 7:14; 9:1-6; Isa 53). (See also Psalm 22 and Luke 24:25-27.)

- “*...and that He was buried...*”

This phrase continues to affirm the fact that Christ’s death was indeed a **physical** reality. He was buried, just as any person is buried after that person has physically died. The importance of this is highlighted in 1 Corinthians 15. This passage reveals that those who die with a personal faith in Christ will, like Christ, one day have a physical resurrection (1Cor 15:51-57; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5). They will, like Christ, be raised again to eternal life, where the “*mortal puts on immortality*” and death is forever conquered.

Christ’s death was a literal, physical and historical fact. Without His death, there would be no payment for mankind’s sins. Without His death and burial, there would be no subsequent resurrection from death to conquer death. Therefore, without Christ’s death, burial and physical resurrection, our faith would be made void, we would still be in our sins, and our beliefs would be false (1Cor 15:12-19). That is why many cults and false religions attempt to deny these important facts about Christ’s life and death.

- “*...and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures...*”

In the original Greek, Paul's words mean that Christ **rose** from the dead; **and** that Christ is **still** raised. Christ's one-time resurrection is joined with the fact that Christ is still raised from the dead.

This means that what was once-and-for-all accomplished **on the Cross is still as powerful today as it was thousands of years ago** when Christ died, was buried and rose again. Our Savior conquered death, and is **alive and reigning now!** He is interceding for us (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25), and effectually mediating the "*better covenant*" of our salvation (Heb 8:6). His sacrificial death and resurrection satisfied the penalty for our sin and gave us right-standing ("justification") before God.

The phrase "*on the third day*" reflects the point in time when the empty tomb was discovered and when the risen Christ began to appear to His followers. Jesus Himself prophesied that He would rise from the dead three days after His death (Matt 16:21; John 1:18-22). There were also prophetic "foretypes" of Christ's death and resurrection on the third day (2Ki 20:5; Hos 6:2; Matt 12:38-40).

- "...and that He was seen by Cephas [Peter], then by the twelve..."

In this passage, Paul affirms Christ's resurrection when he recites a list of eyewitnesses who saw Christ alive after His crucifixion and death. Christ appeared to many people in His physically resurrected body. Many of these eyewitnesses were still living when Paul wrote to the Corinthians. The Gospels record still

other eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Lord (Matt 28:1-10; Luke 24:13-35; John 20:11-18). The Word of God gives undeniable testimony to the literal, physical resurrection of Christ.

There is much more to Christianity and the Gospel ("*good news*") than 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 reveal; yet, these verses contain the **essential elements** of the Gospel which distinguish Christianity from all other religions and cults of the world.

Central and **indispensable** to Christianity is **the Person of Jesus Christ** – Who died for us at the Cross to pay the penalty for our sin and reconcile us to God, and Who then rose again from death to prove He was God and to seal our eternal salvation. Mankind can never earn this free gift of salvation through good works or by any other means. It is provided **only** through God's loving plan of salvation, made possible through Jesus Christ and His great sacrifice (John 3:16; Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8,9).

Hallelujah! We serve a risen Savior Who *lives*, and is alive forevermore! The founders of the major false religions of history are all dead – but our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ lives, rules and reigns over all forever and ever (Rev 1:18; 5:18,19).

It is **through Christ** – and **ONLY** through Christ – that we are restored to God; it is **in Christ** – and **ONLY** in Christ – that we have eternal life with Him (John 11:25,26; 1Cor 15:22; Eph 2:1-10). That is the message – the Good News – of the Gospel! ■

CHRISTIANITY CONTRASTED WITH FALSE RELIGIONS

In the following sections, we will briefly compare biblical Christian faith with the major false religions of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Also included is a brief summary comparing Christianity with less renowned false religions and cults. The size limitation of this magazine prevents us from giving every detail about each false religion. However, a brief history of each religion, with its significant doctrines and systems of belief, will be outlined in order to show the clear contrast between true biblical Christianity and false religions and cults.

ISLAM COMPARED WITH CHRISTIANITY

History And Background

Mohammed, the founder of Islam, was born in AD 570 in the city of Mecca (present day Saudi Arabia). According to Islamic tradition, Mohammed received a “revelation” from the angel Gabriel in AD 610. This was the first of many such messages that were eventually compiled into a book called the Qu’ran, Islam’s sacred book.

Mohammed’s revelations formed the basis of a new religion, Islam. This new belief system eventually united the Arabic tribes of the region. Mohammed died on June 8, 632.

Today, there are over 1.2 billion Muslims (followers of Islam) worldwide, living primarily in the Middle East, North Africa, South-Central Asia and Indonesia. Although Islam began in Saudi Arabia, today there are more non-Arab Muslims than Arab Muslims.

Beliefs And Obligations Of Islam

The term **Islam** means “submission”, focused on a fatalistic view of Allah’s will – that whatever happens is Allah’s will and must be accepted. Orthodox Islam teaches that Allah has predestined both good and evil. Every thought, word and deed was supposedly foreseen and predetermined by Allah, and will take place according to Allah’s will. This position makes Allah responsible for evil and takes away human free will; thus people are not responsible for their personal choices.

The person who submits in this way to Allah is called a Muslim.

A. Beliefs Of Islam

The Muslims have five basic doctrines:

1) God. Muslims believe there is only one god, and his name is Allah. Nothing and no one can be added to him or associated with him; to do so is to commit an unforgivable sin (Sura 4:48).

2) Angels. Islam promotes a hierarchy of angels between Allah and man. Gabriel is the chief angel in their hierarchy and is believed by Muslims to have given revelations to Mohammed. There is also **Shaitan** (from Hebrew **satan**) and other spirits called **djinn** or **jinn**.

3) The Prophets. According to Islam, Allah has sent a prophet to every nation to preach the way of Islam. Mohammed is considered to be the final and most important prophet.

4) Day of Judgment. Muslims believe that there will be a day of recompense for each person’s deeds. Hell will be a place of torment and heaven a place of sensual pleasure. Those qualified for Islamic heaven (paradise) will have done enough good deeds to

outweigh their bad deeds. For those destined for punishment, the opposite is true. However, the balance of a person’s deeds, good or bad, is known only to Allah until Judgment Day. The result is that a Muslim has no assurance or confidence that he will be accepted by Allah. This is a type of a “salvation by works” approach to eternal life.

5) Muslim “Holy” Books. For the Muslim, there are five “holy books” mentioned in the Qu’ran: The **Scrolls of Abraham** (which Muslims say is now lost); the **Tawrat** (Torah) given to Moses; the **Zabur** (Psalms) given to David; the **Injil** (Gospel) given to Jesus; and the **Qu’ran** given to Mohammed. Muslims believe that only the Qu’ran has been correctly preserved; they teach that the four other books mentioned have been either “corrupted” or lost, and are not to be accepted as now presented. Therefore, for the Muslim, the Qu’ran replaces the true Scriptures of the Bible.

B. Obligations Of Islam

1) To recite the shahadah. The word **shahadah** means “to bear witness”. To recite the shahadah, a Muslim says, “I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his messenger.” To become a Muslim, a person must recite this phrase with sincerity before two witnesses.

2) To pray (salat). Muslims are required to pray five times per day, reciting certain portions of the Qu’ran at dawn, noon, midafternoon, dusk, and two hours after sunset. They are to ritually wash themselves and pray facing toward Mecca. On Fridays, a noon service is held and Muslims are expected to attend.

3) To fast (sawn). Muslims memorialize Mohammed’s receiving of the Qu’ran during Ramadhan, the ninth month in the Muslim calendar. They are expected to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual relations during the daylight hours. After sundown, they may resume all these activities until sunrise.

4) To make the pilgrimage (Haji). All Muslims are required to make a trip to Mecca once in their lifetime (even if by proxy). They are to wear a white robe (to signify no status or class distinctions) during both the pilgrimage and the visit to several other sacred locations. While visiting the Ka’bah, pilgrims try to touch or kiss the Black Stone – a round medium-sized rock, representing Allah.

5) To give alms (zakat). A Muslim is commanded to give one-fortieth (2.5%) of his income as an alms tax, primarily for the poor.

Beliefs of Christianity and Islam Contrasted

	Christianity	Islam
GOD	God is revealed in Scripture as a compound unity – One in essence yet three in Person: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit; three Persons Who are coeternal and coequally God (Matt 28:19; 2Cor 13:14).	No god but Allah; a singular unit. Justice is Allah's primary concern. The Qu'ran portrays Allah as merciful and compassionate, primarily in sending messengers warning of judgment and revealing Allah's requirements for obedience.
JESUS CHRIST	Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity and is the Son of God born in the flesh. Jesus lived, taught, performed miracles, declared the Gospel, suffered and died on the Cross to pay the price for mankind's sin, rose from the dead, lives eternally, and will return again to earth as the King of kings and Lord of lords (John 1:1-18; 3:16; Acts 2:22-33).	To Muslims, Jesus was only a man. They recognize Jesus as a prophet but consider Him inferior to Mohammed. They consider it blasphemy to call Jesus God. They do, however, recognize the virgin birth and the miracles Jesus performed.
MAN	Man is created in the image of God, for the purpose of personal relationship with Him. After the Fall, man is now corrupted by sin and separated from God. Man is spiritually dead and not capable of doing good apart from God's grace and saving faith in Christ (Gen 1:26,27; Eph 2:1,5,8-10).	Man is essentially good with a spark of the divine in him called tagwa . This enables him to choose good. Conscience is of high value to the Muslim, as love is to the Christian.
SIN	Sin causes spiritual death. Sin is moral rebellion and willful serving of selfishness and resistance to God. Man is not capable of saving himself; no good works are enough to satisfy the requirements of a perfectly holy and just God (Eph 2:5,8,9).	Sin for the Muslim is rejecting right guidance. It can possibly be forgiven by repentance and dedication to good works. No atonement is necessary.
DEATH OF CHRIST	It was God's foreordained plan to send Jesus to earth to die for the sins of all humanity. Jesus voluntarily gave His life for mankind. He actually died a physical death, was buried, and rose again on the third day after His death. He was resurrected in an immortal Body and was seen by hundreds of witnesses. Jesus' sacrifice brought Him not dishonor, but the highest exaltation (1Cor 15:3-7; 2Tim 1:9; Rev 13:8).	According to the Qu'ran, Jesus did not die on the Cross. Judas died in His place while Jesus ascended to Heaven. Muslims consider it deeply disrespectful to God to believe He would allow one of His prophets to be crucified.
SALVATION	Salvation comes as a free gift given only through faith in Christ as the Son of God and Savior; salvation is not based on human effort, which is insufficient to satisfy an absolutely Holy God. The gift of salvation is offered by God because of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross in our place. The born-again believer has assurance of salvation in this life through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. God gives the free gift of salvation to all those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord, because He loves all people of the world equally (John 3:16; 1Tim 2:4; Rom 8:16,17).	For the Muslim, salvation lies in a person's good deeds outweighing his bad deeds. Therefore, salvation comes through human effort. There is no assurance of salvation. Salvation must wait for Allah's decree on Judgment Day. The Qu'ran says Allah does not love those who do wrong and salvation must be earned.
THE BIBLE	The Bible is the authoritative, authentic revealed Word of God. It has final authority for all matters of faith and truth. It is internally consistent and totally accurate. All discoveries of ancient texts clearly support the unchanged, uncorrupted texts we now have in both the Old and New Testaments (Isa 40:8; Matt 24:35; 2Tim 3:16,17).	The Muslims are taught that the Bible as we now have it is filled with corruptions and that Christians and Jews have changed the Scriptures. The Bible is replaced by Mohammed's Qu'ran. However, in several places in the Qu'ran, Muslims are advised to consult the Bible and to believe in it. The Qu'ran uses both the Old and New Testaments to attempt to authenticate Mohammed as a prophet. Islam's attitude toward the Scriptures is both inconsistent and contradictory.

Answering Muslims' Questions About Christianity

There are several questions Muslims commonly ask about Christianity:

A. "Do Christians Worship Three Gods?"

Muslims have difficulties with the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Though there are a few similarities between the Muslim's Allah and the God of the Bible, there are critical and important differences.

As to the **similarities** between Allah and the God of the Scriptures, both are represented as:

- One God;
- The sovereign Creator and Lord over the universe;
- The supreme ruler of Creation and all-powerful;
- One who knows the thoughts, intents, motives and plans of men's hearts;
- One who has spoken to man through angels, prophets, teachers and the written word;
- One who will ultimately judge all men.

The **differences** between Allah and the God of the Bible are crucial, as shown in the two-column comparison below:

The God Of The Bible

God is One in essence, but compound in His makeup, and consisting of three coeternal and coequal Persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:26; Matt 28:19; Luke 3:21,22; John 5:18; 10:30; Acts 5:3,4).

God has an everlasting love for **all** mankind (John 3:16; Rom 5:8-10; see also Luke 15:11-24 as a metaphor for God's heart toward humanity).

God is merciful and kind to all (Matt 5:45; Acts 14:16,17), and His great love causes Him to take NO pleasure in the pain, suffering or death of the unrepentant wicked (Ezek 18:23).

God desires that **all** people be saved and come to know Him (Rom 11:32; Gal 3:22; 2Pet 3:9). Therefore, He sent God the Son to bring mankind salvation. This salvation did not come in a new message or new set of religious rules, but in the Person of Jesus Christ (Gal 4:4-7; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:2,3; 2:14-17; 12:2; 1John 4:9,10).

Man could not save himself and no amount of good deeds could ever satisfy God's standard of perfect holiness (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16). Thus, God sent His Son, a sinless Savior, Jesus Christ, Who took mankind's sins upon Himself at the Cross and paid the penalty for them in mankind's place (Matt 20:28; John 10:9-11; 2Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; 1Thess 5:9,10; 1Pet 1:15-21).

The Allah Of The Qu'ran

Allah is one god, and is linked to no other.

Allah has no love for sinful man (according to the Qu'ran – Suras 3:140; 4:107; 6:142; 7:31).

Allah capriciously afflicts men because of their sins (Suras 4:168,169; 5:49; 7:179; 9:2; 40:10).

Allah demands that his will be obeyed but does nothing to help mankind achieve this. Salvation for the Muslim is through his own personal efforts, with no assurance or hope of salvation from Allah or the Qu'ran.

Allah commands that each man bear his own burdens, either good deeds or bad (Suras 17:15; 35:18) and that good deeds must outweigh bad deeds in order to enter the Muslim version of heaven (Suras 7:8,9; 21:47).

The Concept Of The Trinity

When discussing the Trinity with a Muslim, always affirm that Christians do NOT worship three gods, because there is only One God (Deut 6:4; 1Cor 8:4). Muslims sometimes mistakenly believe that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity consists of God, Mary and Jesus (Sura 5:116). It is important for a Christian to show, from the Bible, the actual **compound unity** (the **tri-unity**) of God. In the Bible, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – **all three – are referred to as God** and are acknowledged as possessing the attributes of God:

	Referred To As God	Acknowledged As Possessing The Attributes Of God
The Father	Matt 11:25; John 6:27; 8:54; Eph 4:6	Jer 23:24; Ps 146:5,6; Mark 13:19; Acts 4:24; 17:24,25
The Son	Luke 5:17-26; John 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13	Matt 18:20; 28:20; John 1:1-3,14; 1Cor 8:6; Col 1:16,17
The Holy Spirit	Acts 5:3,4; 2Cor 3:14-18	Gen 1:1-3

God The Son

Muslims often have difficulty believing that God has a physical Son (Arabic **waladdu'llah**). Christians who have a Muslim background suggest that Jesus be presented to a Muslim as the spiritual Son of God (Arabic **ibn**).

However, it must be **clearly and unequivocally affirmed** that Jesus came to earth as a Man – that He was born in a physical body, lived on earth, and died a physical death.

It can be pointed out that God is all-powerful and therefore could certainly manifest Himself in a human form; for there is nothing too hard for Him (Jer 32:17; Luke 1:37).

The biblical doctrine of the Trinity does not contradict itself – even though it is difficult for our finite minds to comprehend this, as we are limited in our ability to understand. It is important to communicate to a Muslim the truth that **God is One in essence and three in Person**. God is **One in essence** in that each Person of the Trinity shares in the same self-existent attributes and qualities that are unique to God. Yet God is **three in Person** in that each Person of the Trinity is uniquely distinct within the essence of God.

B. “Is It Possible That The Bible Has Been Corrupted Or Altered?”

Muslims are taught that the Bible as we now have it was altered from the original writings by Jews and Christians. Muslims call this the doctrine of **tahrif**, or alteration.

The Bible: God’s Unaltered Word

It is important to assure Muslims that it is actually **impossible** for the Scriptures to be altered. It would require that Jews and Christians from all over the world agree on many supposed changes in the Scripture over centuries, and then not allow one copy to exist that did not have these exact changes!

Not only that, but subsequent archaeological discoveries such as the Dead Sea Scrolls (dated from 100 BC and found in 1947) completely confirm that the **Old Testament** has remained unchanged over all these centuries.

To establish the authenticity of the **New Testament**, researchers have gathered 3,157 Greek manuscripts that contain either the entire New Testament, or portions of it. These documents date from AD 200 (400 years before Mohammed). The only inconsistencies found in comparing these texts are insignificant errors, such as a wrong letter in a word.

The idea that changes to the sacred texts of the Bible have occurred, thus causing changes to biblical history and doctrines, is **completely false** and without factual basis.

C. “Why Would God Crucify Jesus?”

The Muslims believe that it would be a dishonor for God to have allowed one of His messengers to be martyred.

Muslims who have difficulty with the crucifixion of Jesus might be helped to know that Jesus continually predicted His own death. And He did so because His atoning death was a focal point of His ministry (Matt 10:28), not just the convergence of forces opposed to His teaching. Read the following verses with a Muslim: Matthew 12:39,40; 16:4,21; 17:22,23; 20:17-19; 26:2; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33,34; Luke 9:22,44; John 10:11,17,18; 12:32,33.

Part of a Muslim’s struggle is **why** God would have Jesus die. Have them read Isaiah 53:4-12 to help answer this question. The final verse begins to answer the Muslim’s objection that Jesus would be dishonored by such a death. Instead of dishonor, Jesus was **exalted by God** for His obedience and submission to God’s will (Phil 2:8,9; Heb 12:2; see also Hebrews 10:5-10). It is the obedience of Jesus to the Father’s will that fulfilled God’s plan to bring salvation to all mankind. A Muslim should actually honor Jesus for His true submission and obedience to God!



Be thoroughly familiar with your Bible.

Personal Faith

In answering these common questions Muslims have about Christianity, it must be remembered that theological arguments will not save a person. Each person must make a personal decision of faith: To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and His work of salvation for them. A Muslim has no assurance of salvation – only the unsure hope of having done more good deeds than bad deeds. He must be shown that **a person can be assured of salvation by receiving God's grace through faith in Christ.** Obedience to the law or other religious rituals and regulations will never be sufficient for salvation.

Practical Guidelines For Sharing With Muslims

1. Befriend them and show love and respect to them (this can take a long time). Above all, be Christlike, and remember that it is the kindness of God that leads to repentance (Rom 2:4). Do not be critical or disrespectful of Islam, the Qu'ran or Mohammed.

2. As friendship develops, offer to pray for them or for the needs of their family if they will permit it.

The power of God at work in their situation will be a mighty testimony indeed!

3. Meet individually with them. People will more easily voice their doubts and questions in a less public setting. Do not argue with them; instead, help them think about the truth by using questions or parables from the Bible (such as God's unconditional love shown in the parable of the Prodigal Son [Luke 15:11-32]).

4. **Be thoroughly familiar with your Bible** and cite specific passages from it often to support what you are saying. Also, be somewhat familiar with the Qu'ran in order to understand a Muslim better and to show respect.

5. Handle your Bible carefully and treat it with the utmost respect. Do not put it on the floor or even lower it below your waist; do not write in your Bible in front of a Muslim; such actions are considered disrespectful according to the Muslim way of thinking.

6. Always point a Muslim to Jesus. It is critical that a Muslim (or anyone else) understand that

Christianity is not a religion; it is a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

7. Be patient, yet persistent. Do not invite them to church until you think they are ready to respond. If you do take them to a church service, explain to them beforehand what to expect and how to interpret the things they will see.

8. Be **prayerful**. Trust the Holy Spirit to bring conviction to them (John 16:5-15) and to reveal to them the truth of Who Jesus is (John 15:26; 16:14). Let the Holy Spirit lead and guide you as to what to say and when to say it; or even when to be silent and listen.

Remember: A Muslim is a person with the same needs, fears, desires, pride and failures as any other person. He or she is a person whom God loved so much that He sent His Son to die for him or her. So treat them in a way that is a living demonstration of Christ, the hope of glory, living in you! ■

HINDUISM COMPARED WITH CHRISTIANITY

Historical Background

Hinduism began around 1500 BC as new people groups mingled with the people already living on the subcontinent of India. Over the centuries their religious beliefs combined and changed, forming what is known today as Hinduism.

This new religion of worshipping many gods (polytheism) and the forces of nature was at first very simple in its rituals and practice. As time passed Hinduism grew and changed, becoming increasingly complex. It is reported that there are approximately **330 million** gods that can be worshipped in Hinduism.

Today, there are nearly one billion Hindus, living primarily in India. Hindus also make up large portions of the populations of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Fiji, Mauritius, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Surinam, Trinidad and the Indonesian island of Bali.

Hindu Literature

The poetry, hymns, prayers and mythical legends of early Hinduism were written down and became known as the Vedas, Brahmans, Aranyakas and the Upanishads. Together these writings are known as the *Vedic literature*.

The Upanishads developed the idea that behind all the multitudinous gods there is one force, and “Ultimate Reality”. This new Ultimate Reality was called “Brahman”. Brahman is an *impersonal, monistic* (“all is one”) *force* that takes no personal interest in any individual person.

With the passage of time, Hinduism developed the concept of Ultimate Reality toward a more personal notion of Brahman, who manifested in three forms: Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Protector/Preserver, and Siva the Destroyer.

Beliefs Of Hinduism

Hinduism teaches that the universe is not real, and thus it cannot be the creation of a loving and personal God. For Hindus, the universe exists only in the mind of Brahman, the Hindu God.

According to Hinduism, the universe is in an endless cycle of destruction and recreation that occurs approximately every 4 billion years. Humanity must play its part in this endless “cycle” by constantly seeking to become “one” with Brahman.

To the Hindu, each human is part of the divine. They use the example that just as the air inside a jar is the same as the air outside a jar, so the “self” (air in

the jar) is part of the Divine essence (air outside the jar). Therefore, the goal of enlightenment is to lose the individual self and its separate identity into the Universal Self of Brahman.

Hinduism is not a religion with a single belief system. It is comprised of many beliefs and ideas that interact with and blend into each other. A person could be considered a staunch Hindu and believe in one god, many gods, or no god at all. This is not considered contradictory by a Hindu because all reality is seen as “one”.

Three other religions have developed out of Hinduism: Jainism, Buddhism (to be discussed in the following section) and Sikhism (which combines elements of Hinduism and Islam).

To the Hindu, mankind’s primary problem is his unawareness of his “divine nature”. Because of this unawareness, people become attached to earthly desires and individual needs.

Therefore, according to Hinduism, mankind must go through innumerable cycles of birth, death and rebirth in order to be purified of these desires and thereby attain to a loss of self in oneness with Brahman.

Two Major Beliefs

All Hindus essentially agree on two major facets of Hinduism: reincarnation and “karma”.

Reincarnation is the belief that the soul (*atman*), which is uncreated and eternal, must go repeatedly through recycling in this world. These repeated lives can be lived as a person, an animal, a plant, or even as an inanimate object (i.e., a rock). These continued reincarnations into various lives on “the great wheel of life” (*samsara*) are part of the “journey through suffering”. This journey supposedly purifies the soul in order to reach *moksha* – freedom from suffering and total union with the impersonal infinite.

The *law of karma* is the moral equivalent to the natural law of cause and effect. According to Hinduism, a person can build up good karma (merit) or bad karma (demerit) in this life. This karma (good or bad) becomes attached to the person’s soul and determines what kind of life and degree of suffering a person must endure in their next reincarnated life on the wheel of *samsara*.

These Hindu concepts of reincarnation and *karma* differ from the Word of God. The Bible states, “*it is*

appointed for men to **die once**, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27).

The Hindu idea that the soul (*atman*) is uncreated and eternal, making possible endless reincarnations, also differs from Scripture. The Bible teaches that people are **created** by God (Gen 1:26,27; 2:7) and each person will **die once** and then be resurrected at the judgment (1Cor 15; Heb 9:27; Rev 20:11-13). All people have but **one life** to live.

The human soul is eternal in the sense that it will live on when the physical body dies. However, it will live on either in the presence of God (2Cor 5:8), or in eternal judgment (Rev 20:11-15). The human soul does **not** live on in another life on the earth.

The Hindu teaching on *karma* has a **small amount** of similarity to the biblical concept of sowing and reaping: the relationship between our choices or actions and the results that are produced by those choices and actions in our lives (Job 4:8; Prov 11:18; 22:8; Gal 6:7,8).

However, *karma* **differs** from the Bible in the following significant ways:

- A person’s oneness with Brahman (“god”) is the same whether the person’s *karma* is good or bad. The Bible teaches, however, that sin damages and

breaks mankind’s *relationship* with a perfectly holy and moral God. Sin reveals man’s selfish heart and his rebellion against a loving Creator.

- *Karma* does not allow for the possibility of forgiveness or mercy. The *law of karma* is an unchangeable concept with absolutely inevitable consequences.

But the Bible reveals a God Who is both just and merciful. Through what Christ did for all of mankind at the Cross – by dying in our place and fully satisfying the penalty for our sins – we can receive God’s forgiveness and have the broken relationship with Him mended. Christ’s willing sacrifice was the fulfillment of God’s sovereign will. He did this for all of mankind because God loves us all with an eternal love.

As with all false religions and cults, there is a small portion of truth contained in their beliefs. But this small amount of truth is corrupted by a large amount of deception and lies, which leads one away from what is true and real. The **full and undistorted truth** is found **ONLY** in the Person of Jesus Christ and God’s plan of salvation as revealed in the Bible.

The two-column chart below compares Hinduism and Christianity on other important doctrines:

	Christianity	Hinduism
God	Infinite yet Personal Being.	Impersonal force.
Humanity	Separate from the Person of God, created by God in His image for personal relationship with Him.	Extensions of the being of Brahman, always existing.
Humanity’s Problem	Moral rebellion against a sovereign Lord and God.	Ignorance of man’s divinity.
Solution to Humanity’s Problem	To repent of our selfish rebellion, receive God’s saving grace, and be reconciled to Him in personal relationship.	Enlightenment that sets one free from ignorance and the illusion of this life.
Means of Salvation	Trust in Christ’s finished work at the Cross to pay for our sins, and surrender of our lives to His Lordship in personal relationship with Him.	Continuous striving to be free of one’s desires, seeking through personal effort a consciousness of unity with the divine within one’s self.
Result of Salvation	Restoration of eternal and personal relationship with God.	Absorption into the “Oneness”; loss of all individuality.

For the Hindu, enlightenment is a major key to finding unity with Brahman, the “Ultimate Reality”. There are three basic paths to this unity:

- *dharma*: a path of works – by trying to fulfill a specific set of religious and social obligations. This will include staying within your caste, marrying within your caste, and raising up at least one son who will do the same.
- *inana*: the path of knowledge – a life of self-renunciation and meditation upon the pantheistic realities of Hinduism. This path includes the practice of *yoga* (a difficult physical regimen using breath control, posture and concentration in order to control one’s consciousness). This path is open only to men in the highest castes.
- *bhakti*: the path of passionate devotion – this focuses usually on one god out of the 330 million gods of Hinduism. This path has its greatest appeal to the lower castes, and consists primarily of passionate worship of that one god, goddess or demigod chosen.

Worshipping Many Gods

This brief overview of Hinduism shows its orientation toward a kind of salvation by works and through the worship of many gods.

The practitioner of Hinduism is engaged in a search for enlightenment. The direction of his effort is from *mankind toward God*. All of his work is based on his own effort to attain this mystical state in the face of an impersonal god.

By contrast, in biblical Christianity it is God Who has taken the initiative. The direction of revelation and divine effort is *God reaching toward humanity* in love. And, as shown earlier, salvation is a free gift given by God which cannot be earned by human effort and striving (Rom 6:23; 1John 4:10). It can only be **received** by a person.

Also, the goal of Hinduism is the complete and total absorption of self into the divine, where there is no longer personal identity. This concept is often illustrated by the picture of a drop of water (a person’s soul) falling into and being completely absorbed by, or becoming one with, a larger body of water (the “Ultimate Reality” of Brahman).

For the Christian, biblical salvation means a restoration of relationship between a person and His sovereign God and Creator. Relationship, in order to be accomplished, **requires two separate identities** – God and a person. We were individually created by God and are called to be in communion with Him as an infinite yet personal and caring God; we are NOT called to be dissolved and absorbed into an impersonal force.

Practical Guidelines For Sharing With A Hindu

The following are some practical suggestions to help you effectively answer the questions of people who have a Hindu background:

1. Seek first to understand.

Hinduism is more of a philosophical view of life and a perception of how the universe supposedly works, rather than a formal religion. Therefore, Hinduism has no single concept of Who God is. Hinduism seeks to bring all religions under its canopy, believing that there are many paths to God, and that He has many different names.

Because of this wide diversity and apparently tolerant attitude toward other religions, people who follow Hinduism may have a wide variety of beliefs. It is essential that you ask key questions regarding God, man, sin, salvation, etc., and listen closely to their answers. Once you understand what they believe, you can better explain to them what the Bible teaches, and describe to them God’s true plan for humanity.

You can lovingly show them that there is ONE SURE WAY to God: Jesus Christ – Who said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6).

2. Focus on the life and teachings of Jesus.

Hindus regard Jesus as a “great teacher” or an “enlightened person”. Even Gandhi, a revered Indian Hindu leader, encouraged Hindus to study the teachings of Jesus (Hingorani 23). Hindus do NOT, however, consider Jesus Christ to be the only Son of God.

Hindus are attracted to Jesus’ suffering. They see it as a lifestyle to emulate, but not as the Bible describes it: *an essential part of His mission to die for the sins of humanity*.

Two facets of Jesus’ ministry are very effective in reaching Hindus: **love** and **forgiveness**. These two principles are powerful in drawing Hindus to Christ because they offer relief from the law of *karma*. *Karma* teaches that whatever you experience in life, especially suffering, is what you somehow deserve. According to *karma*, if bad things happen to someone, they must deserve it. Hindus believe they are suffering for something wrong they did in either this life or a previous life.

Thus, Hindus are openly responsive to love and acts of service and kindness. Show them passages in the Bible that reveal God’s unconditional love for them which is not based on their behavior (such as John 3:16; Romans 2:4, 8:31-39; and 1John 4:16,19).

Forgiveness of sins is very important to everyone, but especially to Hindus. For the typical Hindu, there is no forgiveness for wrongdoing, only the accumulation of more bad *karma*. This bad *karma*

God loves the Hindu as much as He loves any other person.



results in worse suffering in this life, and more suffering in future reincarnated lives.

Remember that Hinduism is a salvation-by-works religion. Therefore, the truths of forgiveness of sins in Christ and God's abundant love and grace will be excellent witnessing tools. Matthew 11:28-30 reveals that Jesus has taken on the burden of salvation for us. Also, Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1 through 7:29) provide a good example of what it means to truly be a Christian.

Be Sensitive

Hindus often see Christians as spiritually inferior. That is because Christians will eat meat (which most Hindus will not); and Christians may consider material things to be blessings from God, whereas Hindus believe having less makes a person more spiritual. Hindus, therefore, regard poverty and suffering as virtues. For the Christian, however, neither wealth (Ps 62:10; Matt 6:19-24; Luke 12:15; 1Tim 6:6-10) nor poverty (Prov 30:7-9; Phil 4:11-13) *in and of themselves* gain favor with God or achieve greater spirituality. The one thing of supreme importance to the Christian – whether rich or poor – is his true relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, keep a humble attitude when witnessing to a Hindu; but do not be timid. A Christian has a message that will be welcome news to a Hindu!

3. Present the Personhood of God

For the Hindu, God (Brahman) is an impersonal “force”. Hindus believe that since their god (Brahman) is an impersonal force, then it follows that there could be many “paths” to finding Him.

However, the Bible reveals God to be loving, caring and personally interested in each human being. We must continually show a person of Hindu background exactly how the Bible reveals God: as a loving Father, as a sacrificing and compassionate Savior.

We must also emphasize that Christianity is not about more empty religious practices or another “path to God”. Rather, Christianity is about a **personal relationship** between the God Who is personal and each individual who turns to Him in faith for salvation.

Jesus continually showed His personal nature in His warm and approachable way of ministering to:

- the poor (Luke 4:18; 7:22);
- the diseased (Matt 11:4-6; Luke 4:40);
- the demon-possessed (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 4:41);
- the lame (Matt 4:24; 9:1-8);
- the social outcast (Luke 19:1-10);
- the sinner (Luke 15:1-7; John 8:1-11).

When asked by His disciples to show them what God is like, Jesus answered: “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (John 14:7-11).

The God of the Bible is intensely interested in the life of each person. He cares about each daily need (Matt 6:25-34; 7:7-11) as well as each eternal destiny (Luke 19:10; Rom 5:6-8; 2Cor 5:19,20).

Glorious News

Hinduism teaches that mankind's failures and sins are due to *ignorance*. But it is clear that many people *know* what is right to do – yet they do not do it. Sin and failure are a result of rebellion and disobedience. Our sin is against a holy and morally perfect God; no amount of works (*dharma*), knowledge (*inana*) or devotion (*bhakti*) can bring us to God or save us (Matt 7:21-23; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8,9; Titus 3:5).

God the Father loves each person with an everlasting love (Rom 8:37-39; 1John 4:19) and sent God the Son into the world (John 3:16-21) to save us from sin and from an eternity of separation from Him. God loves us so much that He was willing to make a great sacrifice in order to show His love for us and to provide a way back to Him through Jesus Christ (1John 4:9,10).

God loves the Hindu as much as He loves any other person, and is “*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2Pet 3:9). The Gospel is truly glorious news for the Hindu – and you have this news to share! ■

BUDDHISM COMPARED WITH CHRISTIANITY

History And Background

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama in the sixth century BC. Siddhartha was born a Hindu and grew up in a very privileged and wealthy lifestyle, sheltered by his father from the pain and poverty of the surrounding society of India.

According to tradition, on a pleasure trip outside his palace, Gautama briefly encountered various forms of suffering: old age; sickness; death; the poverty of an ascetic monk begging for money. This experience so upset him that he abandoned his wife and newborn son, and went off in search of the answer to the meaning of existence.

After six years, Gautama concluded that neither a life of luxury and plenty, nor a life of extreme poverty, hunger and asceticism, could lead to spiritual fulfillment and freedom. At one point, so faint from hunger he could hardly move, he sat under a tree. He vowed to not move until he received enlightenment as to how to achieve spiritual freedom.

Traditions vary as to whether it took one day or 49 days. But as Gautama resisted the temptations of Mara (“the evil one”) to give up his pursuit of enlightenment, he, according to tradition, reached a highly-exalted state of consciousness or “enlightenment”. At this point, Siddhartha Gautama became known as the “Buddha” – or “enlightened one”.

After having this life-changing experience, Buddha began to expound his new teaching, which he called the “middle way”. Soon he founded his own order of followers called the **Sangha**.

Buddha died approximately 45 years later, possibly from food poisoning. Today there are an estimated 600 million Buddhists worldwide.

The Teachings Of Buddhism

The **middle way** teaching was so named because of Buddha’s rejection of the extremes of asceticism on one side and the pursuit of a sensual lifestyle on the other. This **middle way** consists of “four noble truths” and the “eight-fold path to enlightenment”.

The **four noble truths (the “Middle Way”)** according to Buddha are:

1. Suffering is universal – even after death – because of the endless cycle of death, rebirth, suffering and death on *samsara* (“the wheel of life” already described in the section on **Hinduism**). The state of *nirvana* is the release from this cycle.

2. The cause of suffering is selfish desire; attachment to this life results from ignorance of the nature of reality, which is impermanent.

3. To eliminate suffering, one must eliminate all desire.

4. To eliminate all desire and craving, one must follow the “eight-fold path to enlightenment”.

The **eight-fold path** teaching of Buddhism represents eight ways of “right living” that supposedly eliminate all desires. One must have:

1. right understanding or viewpoint;
2. right thought;
3. right speech;
4. right behavior;
5. right occupation or livelihood;
6. right effort;
7. right awareness;
8. right meditation.

These eight concepts, according to Buddhism, are not to be approached in sequence; rather they are all to be practiced simultaneously. However, the first two concepts – right understanding and right thought – form a foundation for the other six concepts.

Along with the **middle way** and **eight-fold path**, there are a number of ethical teachings regarding behavior. Many of these resemble portions of the Ten Commandments (Exo 20:1-17). These moral precepts of Buddhism forbid stealing, killing (of any life form), immoral sexual behavior, and lying. This moral code is known as **sila**. It is accompanied by mental discipline and **samadhi**, a deep state of consciousness or trance in which a person loses all sense of personal identity.

Buddha’s teachings focused on the elimination of suffering through enlightenment and through the liberation from **samsara** (the endless cycle of death, rebirth and death). This was to be done, according to Buddha, by the elimination of cravings and desires. As the follower of the **middle path** eliminated his attachments to an unreal world and imaginary self, **karma** (merits or demerits based on good or bad behavior) would have nothing to attach itself to. This would lead to **enlightenment**, which is the state of **nirvana**, the Buddhist concept of salvation.

Nirvana was and is a difficult term to define. Even Buddha did not attempt a clear answer as to the make-up of **nirvana**. The word itself literally means “the ‘blowing out’ of the flame of desire”. To Buddha,

real persons never existed, and all people are only imaginary. But Buddha did maintain that life in this world is real and the suffering that accompanies it is also real.

Nirvana was portrayed as a complete escape from both **karma** and the cycle of **samsara**. This was a rejection of Hindu teaching that the world is an illusion and the suffering experienced by those living in this world is also an illusion.

Buddhism flourished in India for several centuries until it was absorbed by Hinduism. The Hindu priesthood even declared Buddha to be an incarnation of Vishnu (one of their main gods). Buddhism was spread throughout Asia by Buddhist monks.

Buddhism Today

There are three main branches of Buddhism and hundreds of variations in many places of the world, but primarily in Asian countries. These three main forms of Buddhism are:

1. **Theravada Buddhism** – In this branch of Buddhism, enlightenment is available to only a few, primarily monks. Others must simply hope to be reincarnated as a monk in a future life in order to pursue enlightenment. This group has a closed canon of Buddhist writings consisting of Buddha's teachings, ethical rules for monks, and a variety of philosophical teachings. Theravada Buddhism stresses that a person should be concerned with his own enlightenment and not with another's enlightenment.

2. **Mahayana Buddhism** – This branch of Buddhism teaches that enlightenment is available to all people. Mahayana teaching developed the idea of **bodhisattva**: **bodhisattva** is someone who has attained enlightenment but refuses to enter **nirvana**, in order to guide others to achieve enlightenment. Buddha's original teaching emphasized that you are the only one who can save yourself. But Mahayana Buddhism developed the concept of "savior gods" who can be called upon by other Buddhists for help. Mahayana Buddhists reasoned that this is why Buddha stayed on earth 45 years after his enlightenment, in order to help others achieve **nirvana**. The Mahayanas make Buddha the first **bodhisattva**. The Mahayana branch accepts writings from India, China, Japan and Tibet.

3. **Vajrayana or Tantra** – This branch of Buddhism comes from a form of Hinduism that emphasizes occult practices for the development of spiritual power. Vajrayana Buddhism is the primary religion of Tibet. The primitive folk religions of Tibet have also been incorporated into this form of Buddhism. The practices include: chanting phrases repeatedly; prayer wheels; appeasing hosts of demons,

spirits and other evil forces through worship and sacrifice.

Beyond these three main branches of Buddhism, there are several other major forms of Buddhism:

Zen Buddhism – which focuses on meditation to achieve instantaneous enlightenment.

Pure Land Buddhism – which teaches faith in an incarnation of Buddha called "Amida Buddha." Amida supposedly established a paradise kingdom that people who trusted in Amida could enter after death. This was said to be attained by calling on Amida through chanting, not on self-reliance or meditation.

Vichiren Shoshu Buddhism – includes a new and different chant that supposedly replaced the **Pure Land** chant. Followers believe that this form of Buddhism will replace all other forms of Buddhism and eventually bring peace to all mankind by uniting the world.

Comparing Christianity With Buddhism

Buddha maintained that the cause of suffering was ignorance of the "pathway" needed to be rid of desires and cravings. The Bible has a very different perspective. Scripture does not deny the reality of suffering in our world, but points to a very different cause for it. The whole world and especially humanity suffers because of the entrance and continued practice of sin (Rom 1: 18-23; 5:12). Humans are born with a sin nature and willfully choose to sin, desiring to live a selfish life independent of a loving God.

Though Buddha claimed that the presence of *any* desire is the source of suffering, Christianity affirms that there are desires that are **good** and **right**. These good and right desires will lead to fulfillment and joy, not suffering. For instance:

- the desire for God (Ps 73:25);
- the desire to glorify God through worship and service to Him and service to our fellow man;
- the desire to obediently live by the truths revealed in the Bible;
- the desire to pray and ask the Lord to answer (John 15:7);
- the desire for the gifts of the Spirit (1Cor 12:31; 14:1);
- the desire for the Word of God (1Pet 2:2).

All of these are good and right desires.

The Bible also reveals that there are bad desires as well. James 1:13-15 reveals how the desires of our sinful natures lead people to sin. This sin eventually brings both spiritual and physical death (Rom 6:23).

The Buddhist is taught that suffering is caused by desire, and therefore to eliminate suffering he must eliminate desire. He must also do all of this through self-effort, with no outside help.

By contrast, Christians have been given a Deliverer – Jesus Christ – Who has redeemed them from their sins and provided the free gift of salvation. Christians have been given the Holy Spirit, Who helps them become free of the bondages caused by sin!

Hallelujah! (See John 8:32; 14:16,17,26; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 2:1-13.)

The following chart makes some additional important major contrasts between Christianity and Buddhism:

	Christianity	Buddhism
GOD	God exists as sovereign King and Creator of the universe, and is intimately involved in humanity's affairs (Job 12:23; Ps 75:6,7; Dan 4:25; Acts 17:26,28); Jesus is the Son of God (Ps 2:7,8; Rom 1:1-4; Heb 4:14; 1John 5:9-13).	God does not exist and is not relevant to the middle path ; Jesus is acknowledged as a teacher, but not as great or important as Buddha.
MAN	Man is created by God in His image. God through Jesus is the Creator of the physical universe (Gen 1:26,27; John 1:3).	Man is a fiction; there is not a real "self", only an illusion; the physical world is an illusion to be escaped.
Man's Problem	Man is in moral rebellion against a righteous and perfectly Holy God (Ps 14:1-3; Isa 53:6).	People suffer because of desires and cravings.
Solution	Man has a sin problem that only the forgiveness of sins can solve; this solution was given to man in the Person of Jesus Christ, Who died in man's place to pay for man's sins (2Cor 5:21; 1Pet 1:18-21).	Eliminate desire and attain enlightenment through self-effort (Theravada) or by help received from various <i>bodhisattvas</i> (Mahayana).
Incarnation	Jesus is the unique and only God-the-Son Who took on human flesh through the virgin birth to die for the sins of mankind and be resurrected (1Cor 15:3-6; Phil 2:5-9; Heb 2:14-17).	For Mahayana Buddhists, there are many <i>bodhisattvas</i> (incarnations). For Theravada Buddhists, Buddha was only a man – no God or gods are needed or wanted.
Salvation	Jesus declared that He is the Way of salvation and there is no other means of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We have only this life to make our decision regarding Christ, and then comes the judgment (Heb 9:27).	There are many paths to God based upon human effort; these are only through many cycles of death and rebirth.

Christians have been given a Deliverer – Jesus Christ – Who has redeemed them from their sins and provided the free gift of salvation. Christians have been given the Holy Spirit, Who helps them become free of the bondages caused by sin! Hallelujah!

Practical Guidelines For Sharing With A Buddhist

Though Christianity and Buddhism differ in their fundamental points of belief, they do both acknowledge the following principles:

- The value of a moral life;
- Desires *can* cause suffering;
- Prayer is of value;
- Self-discipline brings rewards.

The following are some suggestions for answering questions a Buddhist may have about Christianity:

1. Ask questions to find out what branch of Buddhism they are part of, and whether or not their beliefs are filled with animism. Feel free to share your beliefs based upon the Word of God, since most Buddhists do not truly understand the true message of Christianity.

2. For the Buddhist, salvation is a matter of self-effort. The Bible, however, gives the assurance that “*whoever calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved*” (Rom 10:13; see also Acts 16:30,31).

Mahayana Buddhism expanded to allow for the “help” of **bodhisattvas** (incarnated Buddhas), who are supposedly able to give some of their “karmic merit” to other Buddhists.

Deep within every human heart is the realization that their own human effort is not enough to save them and deliver them from sin. Remind the Buddhist of this, and of what **is** enough: faith in the only One Who can save him, Jesus Christ.

3. Both Buddhism and Christianity acknowledge a set of moral standards by which to live. Yet man, being by nature sinful, cannot perfectly live up to these moral standards – and therefore cannot obtain salvation through his own efforts.

However, the Christian can testify of a Personal God Who is both **willing and able to forgive sins** through Jesus Christ (1John 1:9), and Who makes **all things new** (2Cor 5:17).

4. What makes Christianity unique is **the personal presence of God**. This truth should compel you as a Christian to do two things:

- Share your personal faith in God with others, and tell them of what God has done for you – answering your prayers, loving you, being with you at all times, forgiving you, giving you power to live this life, etc.
- Emphasize that God is personal. He is very near us (Ps 139; Matt 28:20; Heb 13:5). He delights in us coming to Him with our prayers and worship, and He delights in answering our petitions (Ps 22:3-5; 34:17; Prov 15:29). The One true God understands and has compassion upon our affliction (Ps 69:33; Heb 4:15), and He loves us eternally (Rom 8:37-39).

5. Buddhists believe that everything is impermanent except in the “void” where individuals can find permanence.

For us as Christians, our permanence is in Christ and our eternal relationship with Him. Jesus Christ does not change (Heb 13:8). The Scriptures teach us that God does not change (Ps 33:11; Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17) nor do His promises (1Ki 8:56; Rom 4:20, 21; 2Cor 1:20). His justice is perfect (Gen 18:25; Deut 10:17,18) and is perfectly balanced with His love and mercy (Ps 103:17; Ps 136; Lam 3:22-24; Rom 8:31-39).

As a Christian, you have so much you can share with a Buddhist who is hungry for truth and something that is real. As in all witnessing situations, **be much in prayer**. Treat others and their beliefs with respect and sensitivity. Remember, “*the goodness [kindness] of God leads you to repentance*” (Rom 2:4). Therefore, let us share our faith boldly, while also **showing the love of Christ** in all that we do, say and are – let all things be done with **love** (1Cor 16:14).

ANIMISM CONTRASTED WITH CHRISTIANITY

Animism is one of the most widely practiced religions in the world today. Some experts estimate that nearly half of the world’s population is involved in some type of animism. It is so widespread that a person practicing some form of animism could also be a member of almost any religion; animism is practiced even by some who profess to be Christians! However, animism has no formal theology, no training schools, no founders, and no geographical point of origin.

What Is Animism?

Animism is most easily defined as the belief that our physical world is filled with spiritual forces, and that every **event** or **object** has some type of spiritual cause or impact. All forms of animism include three basic beliefs:

- 1) belief in some type of **supreme being** (who is represented as far off and unconcerned with man’s daily needs and challenges);
- 2) belief in a **spirit world** that is filled with the spirits of the dead, with devils and with other spiritual beings (which are subject to the “supreme being”);
- 3) belief in **mystical powers** (witchcraft, sorcery, voodoo, divination, etc.)

As with all false religions, animism contains **partial truth**. For instance, we know from Scripture

that there actually is a Supreme Being, Who is God Almighty, the Creator of the Universe and our sovereign Lord.

The Bible reveals that our world does have a “spiritual realm”, and that there are spiritual beings both obedient to God (angels) and rebellious against God (demons) who exist in this realm. We also know from the Bible that there are demon forces at work to deceive, steal from, and destroy human beings (John 10:10; 2Cor 4:4; Eph 6:12; 1John 4:1-6).

However, animism takes such truths as these – which are clearly revealed in the Bible – and blends them with all kinds of superstition and other demonic practices, creating “false religion”. Participants in animism are led away from godly, biblical spirituality and into demonic activities.

Animism has a strong appeal to many people. Even those who are well educated or who live in a technologically advanced society may practice animistic beliefs. For example, many athletes in Western nations have certain “rituals” they follow before they participate in sporting events. They might put on items of clothing in a certain order, or wear a piece of equipment or jewelry they consider to be “lucky”; they believe these rituals will give them good fortune or a better performance in the athletic competition. Many people engage in this form of animism.

Animism is expressed more blatantly through divination, witchcraft, sorcery, idol worship in many forms, and ancestor worship. It can include the belief that certain objects, plants, animals or places are inherently evil or good and have magical powers.

A Desire To Take God’s Place

At the core of animism – and all forms of false religion and cultic practices – is an attempt to replace the lordship of the One true God with man’s own rulership. Fallen mankind, in an attempt to get his own way on his own terms, will deify creatures and make idols to worship (Rom 1:22,23), rather than surrender his rebellious and sinful nature to a loving God.

Satan is the ultimate reflection of a pride that desires to take God’s place and receive the worship that rightfully belongs only to the One true God, our Creator and Lord (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:11-19; 1Tim 3:6). Satan’s desire is to lead people into willful separation from God.

Animism’s Dark Deceptions

Let us now take a more detailed look at the three basic beliefs of animism.

A. Supreme Being

Animists acknowledge a “supreme being” who they believe rules the universe. However, their beliefs about this “being” are vague and unformed. He is

thought of as distant, uncaring and uninvolved in the daily existence of a person’s life.

Yet animists, like all people, still face difficult situations and decisions in life. They feel the need for guidance, healing, or help in work or other practical necessities. Since they believe that God will not help them directly, they seek answers and help from the “spirit world”, which includes demonic spirits, household idols, the spirits of dead ancestors, and other forms. Demon spirits respond to this seeking, and use it as a means to lead people into deception, bondage and death.

By contrast, the Bible reveals that the One true God – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – is actively at work through His Holy Spirit in the hearts and daily lives of His people. He is loving, compassionate and deeply concerned with mankind’s condition and needs (Matt 6:31,32). God’s Spirit brings: **conviction** (John 16:8-11); **His comforting presence** (John 14:16); **assurance of salvation** (Eph 1:14,15; 2Cor 5:5); **great peace** (Rom 15:13); and much, much more. God, through His Holy Spirit, will lead Christians into all truth and glorify Jesus in their midst (John 15:26; 16:13,14). He will empower them to be witnesses to all the world and to move in anointed ministry (Acts 1:8; 2:16-21).

B. The Spirit World

Animists strongly believe in the presence and activity of spiritual forces in our world. It is important to note that *spiritual activity DOES take place* in the world today. There is the presence and working of the **Spirit of God** and angels as described in the Scriptures (Ps 91:11; 104:4; Heb 1:4; 13:2). There is also the presence and working of **demon spirits** (Eph 6:12). But there are **NO other** spirits present – not of ancestors or any others.

Luke 16:19-31 teaches that there are fixed boundaries in the spiritual realm that do not allow for those who are dead to enter back into the realm of the living.

Those who attempt to communicate with ancestors or others in the spiritual realm are **actually communicating with demons** who are masquerading as people who once lived. Once a person has died, that person can no longer communicate with those who live in this world.

Demonic forces will always seek to deceive people and lead them away from the truth and away from a genuine relationship with the One true God of Scripture (John 8:44; 2Cor 11:3). Demons will deny that Christ came in the flesh (1John 4:2,3) or even use false signs and wonders (Matt 24:24; 2Thess 2:9) to coerce people into putting their trust in the demonic realm instead of in God. By contrast, the Spirit of God

will **always** lead people to faith in God, confirm the truth of God's Word, and seek to bring glory to Jesus Christ (John 16:13,14).

In Bondage To Fear

Animists believe they will suffer consequences inflicted by spiritual beings unless they appease those spiritual beings. The animist is not as afraid of offending God as he is of falling out of favor with a local spirit. Animists live in continual fear that a spirit-being might take revenge upon them through accident, injury, loss or broken relationships. Thus, the animist is constantly trying to appease these spirits by making offerings to them and by giving worship and obedience to them.

The animist's fear is fed by animistic leaders, such as witches, sorcerers, witch doctors and others. These leaders wield great personal power over those who believe in animism. Animistic leaders frequently make "pacts" with demons, are often themselves possessed by demon spirits, and use this demonic power to control or punish others. Demons use these tactics in order to deceive people into believing that demons have ultimate power. **Remember, the goal of demons is to torment and deceive humanity – to lead them away from God and away from a saving faith in Jesus Christ** (John 8:44; Eph 6:12; 2John 7; Rev 12:9) – and to keep people in bondage to Satan.

Animistic societies have other "spiritual leaders" – such as diviners, medicine men, rainmakers, herbalists, seers, and priests of local religions. Though these leaders may **appear** to have a positive function, it must be noted that **they, too, are empowered by demonic forces**.

These demonic forces want to deceive people into putting their faith and trust in **the demonic realm**, rather than in salvation through Jesus Christ, before Whom *"every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil 2:10,11; see also 1 Corinthians 8:5,6).

C. Mystical Powers

Animism places individual spiritual power higher than doctrinal and moral truth. This "spiritual power" is used in an attempt to gain personal and selfish desires. Animism may include a belief in personal spirits who are looked upon as "mediators" between people and God, and who are thought to control natural events. The animist will attempt to appease these spirits in order to receive favorable help in a given situation.

Animists believe that impersonal forces (such as rain, wind, floods) or physical objects can be controlled or influenced by rituals or incantations.

These rituals are also believed to have a kind of power that can be used to obtain a person's desires.

Animists use forms of divination to attempt to discover how to please or avoid offending a spirit, or to try and discover the future. Some common forms of divination are: astrology; reading tea leaves, palms, tarot cards, or the internal organs or bones of an animal; attempting to contact the dead; interpreting dreams or "visions"; or the demonic possession of a person (usually a shaman) by what is believed to be an ancestral spirit.

Animism also involves the widespread use of magic, including: "black" magic (used by witches and sorcerers to hurt people and promote evil and tragedy); "white" magic (used to try and protect people from black magic); protective amulets; mystical powders, herbs and stones; incantations; scrolls of paper upon which are written formulas for success or protection, etc.

It is **vitaly important** to remember that the use of **any** magic (whether "black" or "white"), any form of divination or other mystical ritual **is the work of demons**, whose source is Satan himself. There are always **very serious consequences** for the person involved with demonic powers – including oppression, demonic manifestations, spiritual possession, and more evils.

The demonic realm has **no goodness** in it. Like their master, Satan, demons are hate-filled, evil liars whose goal is to deceive and destroy people. Demons know that their time is short before they will be judged and sent to hell forever (Rev 12:12). The demons' hatred for God and for the object of God's love – humanity – drives them to do as much damage to people as possible.

Life In A Fallen World

It is important to remember that many unusual and tragic occurrences do NOT have their basis in the spiritual realm. For example:

- Some who claim to have "mystical powers" really do not, but deceive others into thinking they do – in order to gain wealth, prestige or influence. Their own selfishness – not spiritual forces – dictates their actions.
- People are often blinded and deceived by Satan (*"the god of this age"* – 2Cor 4:3,4) into believing that their animistic practices or superstitions actually have some kind of power, when in reality they have no power.
- Circumstances often occur that have a very natural explanation. Not every sickness, dream, mishap, accident or natural disaster is caused by some spiritual force or mystical power. These events are often just a part of living in this broken,

sin-filled world that is far from what God originally created it to be. But some people mistakenly believe that they can live in such a way as to never be touched or impacted by the consequences of living in a fallen world. They think that if they can just live right, “think positive”, perform enough rituals, or appease the “bad spiritual forces”, nothing bad will ever happen to them. This is a form of animism that even some Christians fall victim to.

Combating The Forces Of Darkness

While it is true that not all harmful events have a spiritual cause, the Bible does reveal that there truly are fallen demon spirits in the world (Eph 6:12) – and that these demon spirits are actively attempting to harm mankind and draw mankind away from worshipping God.

Demons do have a form of satanic power, and they share this power with those who willingly cooperate with them – but at GREAT COST to those who are foolish enough to cooperate with them. Demonic spirits use deception in any form: lies (John 8:44); temptation (1Cor 7:5); false signs and wonders (2Thess 2:9); trying to appear as an angel from God (2Cor 11:14); and more. These evil spirits are at work even now to control the hearts and lives of those who are not submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Eph 2:2,3). But for the Christian, the demonic realm is not to be feared, for it can be confronted and overcome (Matt 16:18; Mark 16:17; Luke 10:17-20; Acts 8:7; 2Cor 10:3-5).

At times it can be difficult to determine whether an event or tragedy has a demonic origin or is just a result of life in this broken world. To help make this determination, the Christian has been given the **gift of discernment** through the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:10). We are also exhorted to “*test the spirits*” (1John 4:1-4) to determine whether a person is speaking the truth according to God’s Word, or speaking from another source. Christians need to be aware of Satan’s workings (2Cor 2:11) in order to oppose them in both private prayer and direct confrontation through spiritual warfare.

Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the devil (1John 3:8), and He will eventually destroy the devil himself (Heb 2:14). Satan does not have final power over humanity, because the condemnation of sin was broken at the Cross (Col 2:14,15).

The children of God – those who have faith in Christ for salvation – are called to join with Christ under His leadership to combat the forces of darkness. We have been given powerful, anointed, spiritual equipment to do just that (2Cor 10:3-5; Eph 6:11-18).

Rebellion Is As The Sin Of Witchcraft

To effectively combat the deception of animism, we must understand that magic, divination, witchcraft, sorcery, etc., ALL have their source in demon spirits working through **man’s rebellion against God**.

This rebellion began with Adam and Eve. God gave them much freedom and authority in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1:28). They were to use these God-given gifts for good, while submitting to God and following His will and desire.

Satan tempted and deceived Adam and Eve by appealing to their pride. He falsely claimed that they would “*be like God*” if they disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:5) – and they succumbed to his temptation.

Satan, the father of lies, pretended to offer Adam and Eve “godlike” knowledge and power; but the cost was disobedience to and rebellion against God, which brought them out from under God’s loving care and righteous Lordship. Their selfish desire for their own knowledge and power led them right into Satan’s wicked trap (Gen 3:5). This same prideful desire for independence from God is repeated many times in the Bible’s account of mankind’s history.

People today have inherited Adam and Eve’s sinful nature. The use of “magical powers” appeals to mankind’s wish to bring about some desired result that is beyond human ability. Man turns to demonic spiritual sources to get his way apart from God.

The use of demonic powers is in **direct rebellion** against submission to the will of God and against trust in the Lord to establish His will for a person or their situation. Thus, the use of magic (“white” or “black”), witchcraft, sorcery, wizardry, etc., is **rebellion against God**.

This is why the Bible equates rebellion with witchcraft: “*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry*” (1Sam 15:23a). Those who practice animism deny God’s righteous authority and sovereign Lordship over His creation; they seek knowledge, power and material possessions from demonic sources rather than trusting in God’s gracious provision.

Direct Defiance

Another example of rejecting God’s Lordship is **divination**: the occult practice of seeking to obtain knowledge of future events, attempting to determine a right course of action, or trying to find the cause for misfortune. Divination combines human effort and demonic powers in order to try and gain knowledge or power. This practice is an act of rebellion against God; it is a direct defiance of the biblical injunction to submit to and seek God in obedience and trust.

God Forbids Magic

Practitioners of various forms of animism are sometimes nothing but frauds; however, the Bible does warn us that there can be very real demonic power at work in magical practices. The magicians in Pharaoh's court were able to produce miracles similar to those performed by Moses (Ex 7:11,22; 8:7). However, the demonic forces that empowered Pharaoh's magicians were no match for the absolute authority and power of God. Nor were the magicians and conjurers in the Babylonian court any match for the power of God wrought through Daniel (Dan 1:20; 2:2,27-30; 4:7-9; 5:11,12).

On this the Bible is very clear: **ALL** forms of witchcraft, divination, sorcery, communication with the dead, magic, etc., are **condemned and forbidden by God**. Such activity is **directly linked to the demonic realm**.

Scripture equates sorcery and witchcraft with **spiritism** (2Ki 23:24), **spiritual harlotry** (Nah 3:4), and **idolatry** (Mic 5:12-14). Involvement with these occult practices is rebellion against God – an attempt to replace His rightful rule with human effort and demonic power (Isa 8:19). God clearly forbids such practices.

Remember: the goal of the demonic realm is to attempt to overthrow the Kingdom of God, which is ruling **in** believer's hearts and **through** them in the world. This continual attack by Satan and his demons upon God's Kingdom is seen throughout the Bible.

Magic Forbidden And Condemned: The Old Testament

God's warnings against involvement in demonic practices are certain and severe.

In the Old Testament, God commanded Israel, *"nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying"* (Lev 19:26; see also Leviticus 20:6). God gave clear and strict instruction to Israel: *"When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations"* (Deut 18:9).

God specifically **prohibited** every occultic practice of the Canaanites: child sacrifice; witchcraft; soothsaying; interpretation of omens; astrology; sorcery; conjuring and spells; mediums; spiritists; attempting to contact spirits of the dead (Deut 18:10-14). God forbade ALL these activities, and God's judgment was brought upon the Canaanite people for such practices (vs.12-14).

God promised the same severe judgment upon His own people, the Israelites, if they engaged in these demonic practices (Ex 34:12-17; Lev 18:24-28; 2Ki 17:13-18; 21:1-15; Isa 2:6-9; Jer 27:9,10; 29:8,9; Mic 5:12-15; Zech 10:12).

Magic Forbidden And Condemned: The New Testament

The history of the early Church as recorded in the Book of Acts reveals numerous encounters with those practicing witchcraft, sorcery, divination and idolatry:

- Simon the sorcerer was rebuked by Peter and commanded to repent (Acts 8:9-24);
- Elymas, a sorcerer and false prophet, was called *"son of the devil"* and *"enemy of all righteousness"* by Paul (Acts 13:6-12);
- The Apostle Paul delivered a demon-possessed slave girl who practiced divination (Acts 16:16-19);
- Those practicing magic of all forms in Ephesus, after receiving Christ, brought their charms, books of spells, and other items of magic and burned them (Acts 19:18,19).

The New Testament cites additional mystical powers and those who participate in them:

- Sorcery is listed among the works of the flesh, and is linked with idolatry (Gal 5:20);
- Sorcery is a cause for God's wrath to be poured out on mankind in the end times (Rev 9:20,21);
- Sorcerers are forbidden and excluded from the holy city, the new Jerusalem, and from the tree of life (Rev 21:8; 22:15).

These passages, and many others throughout the Bible, make it clear that God condemns and forbids the use of any form of magic, witchcraft, sorcery, divination, attempts to contact the dead, and all other animistic practices. Whether these forms of magic are considered harmful, or are thought of as "helpful", does not matter. What does matter is this: **ALL** forms of magic have the same source – **demon spirits working through rebellious humanity** – and participating in ANY form of magic is **forbidden by God**.

Spiritual Harlotry

Israel often rebelled, repeatedly ignoring God's warnings and becoming filled with sorcery, divination, idolatry and other occult practices. God charged Israel with "spiritual harlotry" for participating in these forbidden practices and thereby violating her relational covenant with God (Judg 2:11-23; 1Chr 5:25,26; Ps 106:34-39; Isa 57:1-13; Jer 3; Ezek 16; etc.).

God brought the people of Israel into judgment for their "spiritual harlotry"; He often allowed them to be conquered and brought into captivity for their animistic abominations.

God continues to forbid and condemn the use of magic, sorcery, divination, and all forms of mystical powers – in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and even to the very end of the Church age.

Therefore, any Christian who becomes involved with demonic, mystical powers **is in direct disobedience** to the expressed will of God as clearly revealed in the Scriptures.

A believer in Jesus Christ is “married” (joined spiritually) to the Lord in a covenant relationship with Him (1Cor 6:15-20). Through this relationship, the Lord cares for the Church as a husband should care for his wife (Matt 6:25-34; Eph 5:22-32). Therefore, if a Christian consults a medium or spiritist, or becomes involved in the use of magic, witchcraft, or any other demon-filled mystical power, he/she is committing *an act of spiritual harlotry* – an unfaithful act against the Lord Jesus Christ.

Any involvement with magic and mystical powers of any kind **always** leads to contact with demons. This contact brings confusion, deception, oppression, bondage, even demonic possession (1Cor 10:19-21) and leads people far away from God. Therefore God, though the Scriptures, clearly forbids any and all involvement with the demonic realm.

**Christian:
FLEE From Animism!**

Sometimes, even Christians may attempt to participate in occultic, animistic practices. They may not understand that the rituals or practices they are engaging in are animistic and demonic. They may be immature in their faith, or ignorant that the Bible forbids such things. Though they call themselves “Christians”, they may have never truly been “*born again*” (John 3:3-7); they may never have given their lives and obedience to Christ. Or they may be willful, rebellious and unconcerned with the consequences of engaging in animism.

Regardless of the reason, the Bible is clear: **A Christian must never be involved in ANY kind of animistic, demonic practices such as witchcraft, idolatry, sorcery, magic, etc.**

Only Through Christ

Man (and woman) is born with a sin nature, inherited through the generations from Adam and Eve. Because of this sin nature, man lives in rebellion against God; thus, man lives with constant anxiety and fear. He may turn to witchcraft, divination, or “lucky” charms or spells in order to attempt to ward off evil. But in reality, these practices invite even **worse evil** into a person’s life!

Man’s deepest problem is his moral rebellion against God – sin. Mankind has within him a deep spiritual need that can be met **ONLY** by **the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ**. It is only the Gospel – with the full teaching of the eternal Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit – that can deliver mankind from his bondage to sin. Only the Gospel can satisfy

man’s spiritual need – for it is only when man knows God, his Creator, that his spiritual needs will be met.

It is **only** through salvation in Christ that mankind can find true freedom from sin, guilt and fear. It is **only** by the power of Christ’s blood that the bondage to sin and the grip of the demonic realm can be broken. It is **only** through a heart fully surrendered to God through Christ that we can experience true joy, love, grace and strength – and have **ALL** that we need for life and godliness (2Pet 1:3). It is **only** through God’s precious, unchanging Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we can find help for **ALL** of life’s challenges and direction in life.

The true needs of mankind can **never** be found in empty, evil pursuits of mystical powers and magical practices. In fact, it is the pursuit of such demonic practices that will guarantee mankind’s increased bondage, pain and destruction.

It is in God alone, through Christ, that mankind can truly find salvation, freedom and a life of purpose and meaning.

Witnessing To An Animist

Remember: As is true of all who are in bondage to false religions, God loves animists and Christ died to save them (John 3:16). Because this is true, we should approach them with bold confidence. What we have to share – the Gospel – is powerful and life-changing. But we should also approach them with humility and compassion for their blind and lost state. Many have already sensed their own bondage and have a desire to be free – they just do not know how to truly be free.

You can begin by asking them questions about their beliefs. This can give you insights into how to best talk to them.

It is important to stress to an animist that **God** – the God of the Bible, the God Christians believe in – *is very personal and desires to know them personally and be with them each day*. God is infinite not only in His power, but also in His love. Help them understand that God is not distant or uncaring, but He cares so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to live among us and give His life for our salvation and freedom.

The animist lives in constant fear of somehow offending a local spirit and then suffering painful consequences. Let them know the following truths about Jesus Christ:

- Jesus Christ loves people personally and unchangingly (Rom 8:37-39).
- Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross was a once-for-all payment for **every** sin or wrongdoing. Those who accept Christ’s atoning sacrifice and free gift of salvation and eternal life no longer need to live in fear (Heb 2:14,15; 7:25-27; 9:11-15).

- Jesus Christ is the **only** Mediator between mankind and God (1Tim 2:5). It is useless to pray to ancestral spirits, other dead people, household idols, other living people, or any other object or spirit; these things have no power to help or save (Ps 115).
- Jesus Christ made the willing sacrifice for our sins once and for all. The way is now open for us to have a personal relationship with God, our loving Creator (Eph 3:12; Heb 4:16; 10:19-22).
- Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us conquered death, hell and the powers of the demonic realm, defeating them and their workings (Heb 2:14-18; Col 2:13-15; 1John 3:8).

As you minister to a person who is involved in animism, you must assure him/her that God is truly trustworthy:

- God's Word does not fail (1Ki 8:56; Isa 40:8; 55:10,11);
- God is aware of mankind's every need (Matt 6:25-34; 10:29-31);
- God does hear and answer our prayers (Ps 118:5-9);
- God is all-powerful (Jer 32:17; Luke 1:37) and there is nothing too hard for Him (Jer 32:17,27);
- God's love is never-failing, never-ending, and we can never be separated from it (Rom 8:31-39).

No spirit or devil can provide even the smallest measure of what God has for each one of us in Christ Jesus (1Cor 2:9). So be bold, yet sensitive, as you lead the animist to examine what the Bible says about Jesus (use the Gospels of Mark or John). Pray for the person as you are led by the Holy Spirit – then watch what God will do! It is God Who desires that every person come to know Him through the salvation provided in Christ. God's Spirit will draw a person to Christ as you speak the truth in love. God's presence will be with you as you declare the truth of Jesus Christ to those who are lost and without a saving knowledge of Him.

Faithful Undershepherds

A special message to all pastors, evangelists, church leaders, elders and ministers:

We must disciple, train and teach our people the whole counsel of the Word of God! We must warn our people of the severe dangers of animistic practices; we must warn them against the use of ANY magical or mystical powers. We have been charged by God to faithfully serve as *undershepherds*, submitted to Jesus, the Great Shepherd – “*as those who must give account*” (Heb 13:17) in caring for the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1Pet 5:2-4).

This may require us to confront the demonic realm, as we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and

the instruction of the Word of God in bringing people to full deliverance.

Confronting the demonic is not something a Christian should approach lightly; but neither should they be afraid. We must be strong in the Word and in prayer; we must understand our authority in Christ and the strategies of spiritual warfare.

The Bible instructs that the “*weapons of our warfare*” are prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29), the declaring of God's Word (Heb 4:12), our authority in Christ (Matt 16:18; Col 1:13-15), and our spiritual armor (Eph 6:10-18).

Victory In Christ

If, as a faithful undershepherd, you must confront the demonic, you can have every reason for unswerving confidence! For God's eternal, unchanging, living and powerful Word declares:

- “*No weapon formed against you shall prosper... This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD*” (Isa 54:17).
- “*A curse without cause shall not alight*” (Prov 26:2).
- “*Most assuredly, I [Jesus] say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father*” (John 14:12).
- “*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God*” (2Cor 10:3-5).
- “*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*” (1John 4:4).
- “*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil*” (1John 3:8).
- “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2Tim 1:7).

Christ has already defeated Satan and his kingdom at the Cross (Col 2:13-15). Because of Christ's victory, He invites us and empowers us by the Holy Spirit to join with Him in bringing the light of the glorious Gospel to a sin-darkened world (Eph 5:8-14; 1Pet 2:9). The “*gates*” of Satan's kingdom cannot halt or hinder the Church of the Living God as we go forth under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit and are led by our Commander, the Lord Jesus Christ! (Matt 16:18,19; Eph 6:10-17). ■

CULTS CONTRASTED WITH CHRISTIANITY

Among false religions, there is a sub-classification known as **cults**. What differentiates cults from the major false religions is that cults will frequently *claim to be Christian*. Their doctrines may **appear** similar to biblical Christian doctrines, but they actually differ in significant and dangerous ways. Involvement with cults actually leads people **away** from a true, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though this section is not a complete study of every cult group, we will examine the common characteristics and beliefs that define most cults.

1. Cults twist Bible passages or Christian terms and give them a radically different meaning. Teachings about Who God is and what Christ accomplished for mankind are distorted from their true biblical meaning in order to suit the purposes of the cult or its leader(s). Biblical terms like **faith, salvation, healing, sin** and **heaven** are given definitions that are completely different from what the Bible actually teaches about them. This is one reason why it is essential to be thoroughly familiar with the Bible and the truth about the doctrines of Christianity, so that you will not be led astray by “*every wind of [false] doctrine*” (Eph 4:14).

For instance, in Mormonism (a cult also known as “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints”) it is claimed that a person can be saved by “faith in Christ”. Though that sounds similar to genuine Christian doctrine, it means something very different in Mormonism. Mormons teach that **all** people have received a “general salvation” from *Adam’s original sin* through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross; however, once all people are resurrected, they will be judged according to their **works**. According to Mormon teaching, these works – and NOT faith in Christ – are what will allow a person to be forgiven of his personal sins and saved.

Among the eight works Mormons consider necessary for salvation are: membership in the Mormon Church; doing work in Mormon temples; belief in Joseph Smith (the founder of Mormonism) as God’s prophet. Without these works, the Mormons teach, a person will not be forgiven or saved on Judgment Day. This is, of course, COMPLETELY FALSE and contradicts what the Bible teaches about salvation.

Thus, even though Mormons use biblical phraseology, they apply a very different meaning to the words than what the Bible actually teaches. One of

the purposes of this distortion is to deceive poorly trained or immature Christians into joining Mormon churches and performing works that will promote the Mormon cult.

The Mormon “church” – like many other cults – portrays itself as a Bible-believing, truly Christian church, but **does not believe, teach or practice true biblical doctrines**. Mormon teaching – and the teaching of other false religions and cults – leads people away from a genuine salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ **alone**, and enslaves them to the deception of “salvation by works”.

2. Cults reject the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, which affirms that God is One Being in essence, yet composed of three co-eternal, co-equal Persons. Specifically, cults (and all false religions) **reject the biblical doctrine that Jesus Christ is God**. Cults may acknowledge Jesus as a “moral man”, a “great teacher”, a “prophet”, or a person so good that He earned his way to “godhood”. But cults and false religions do NOT recognize or accept Jesus Christ as God “*taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men*” (Phil 2:7). They attempt to either bring Christ down to the level of men, or raise men up to the level of Christ. Some cults say Jesus Christ was just a gifted man; other cults teach that all men can become “gods” like Christ if they do enough good works. All cults and false religions deny that Jesus Christ **was** and **is** truly God. [Read “Exposing The Spirit Of The Antichrist” for more detailed information.]

3. Cults deny that man can be saved by faith in Christ alone. Cults teach “salvation by works” to their followers. This counterfeit form of “salvation” is based on obedience to that particular cult’s doctrines and requirements for membership. This allows the cult to control the behavior of its members – intimidating those who do not perform as required with the threat of loss of salvation.

Oftentimes, cult members are required to do things that the Bible does NOT teach – even things that the Bible forbids – in order to be “saved”. These can include: giving the cult leader all your money or possessions; performing immoral sexual acts with cult leaders or members; swearing secret blood oaths; rejecting basic medical attention for you or your children; marrying only those whom the cult leader appoints; being baptized on behalf of dead ancestors.

Such requirements are misrepresented by cults as “God’s will”; cult members are told that failure to keep these requirements will displease God and result in the loss of salvation.

4. Most cults reject all Christian churches and all Christians as “unsaved”. Cults maintain that only their own members are truly “saved”; all others (including those in other cults) are regarded as deceived and unsaved. Cults promote the false idea that they alone have the “real truth” or “revelation” about God and salvation. Following their rules and regulations is, they claim, the only way to “salvation” – regardless of the truth taught in the Bible.

5. Most cults are built around one specific individual leader – or upon one particular misinterpretation of the Bible. False religions and cults share this in common: one specific person claims to have received some “new revelation” about how to truly be saved that contradicts what is in the Bible. This leader will insist that following his or her teaching is the only way to be saved.

Sometimes a cult leader will even claim that they are the person of Jesus Christ manifested in His promised second coming. This false claim is made by Sun Myung Moon of the Unification Church and the woman leader of the Chinese-based Eastern Lighting cult. Jesus Himself warned that there would be those who would claim to be Him in order to lead people astray (Matt 24:23-25).

Remember: God has already revealed His plan for salvation in the complete and unchanging Word of God, the Bible. There is **nothing** that can be changed in, added to, or subtracted from God’s plan for salvation. God’s plan for salvation has already been fully revealed through the Bible, and has already been accomplished and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

6. Cults often claim to believe in and follow the Bible. But, as mentioned above, cults twist and distort the meaning of biblical terms, or replace true Christian doctrine with their own particular teaching or “new” doctrine (see Colossians 2:20-23 and 1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Many cults accuse the Bible of having been “corrupted” or “improperly translated”; they use this as an excuse to rewrite the Bible or add to it. Their “new interpretation” of Scripture then becomes the means to promote their false doctrine and further their heresy.

The **Jehovah’s Witnesses** cult invented their own “translation” of the Bible, and called it “The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”. Their deliberately mistranslated passages promote heresy, such as denying Christ’s sacrificial death and bodily resurrection, and even denying that Jesus Christ was

God. They also claim that the Holy Spirit is not God, but is some impersonal, invisible force. They have set the date for Armageddon at 1914; then again for 1925; then for the 1940s; and then for 1975. Every time it doesn’t happen, they falsely claim to receive a “new revelation”, and reset the date yet again. Such heresies and false predictions are spread by those whom the Bible calls “*false prophets*” (Matt 24:11; 2Pet 2:1-3; 1John 4:1).

Deception By Any Name

There exist today **many different cult groups** with a wide variety of beliefs and practices. Often even the **names** of these heretical groups include biblical terminology in an attempt to sound legitimate. Listed here are only the largest and most commonly known cults:

- The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism)
- The Jehovah’s Witnesses
- Christian Science
- The Unity School of Christianity
- The Unification Church (of Sun Myung Moon – also known as “Moonies”)
- The Church of Scientology
- Falong Gong
- Eastern Lightning
- Spiritism
- The Theosophical Society
- Unitarianism
- The Children of God
- The Way International

They Need The Gospel!

As with all false religions, the doctrines promoted by cults have their origin with demons (1Tim 4:1-3; Heb 13:9; 2Pet 2:1-3; see also “Exposing The Spirit Of The Antichrist” for more on this subject).

Though a group’s name or meeting place may make it **appear** to be a true Christian, Bible-believing church, the group may be promoting heresy or deception under the guise of something similar to Christianity.

It is important to remember that **God still loves** those who are involved with cults or false religions. Christ died to save them, too. The people bound in false religion are not necessarily evil; but they are deceived and in bondage to sin, “*having no hope and without God in the world*” (Eph 2:12). They need the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the true message of salvation. They need to be reconciled with the God Who loves them and Who created them for His purpose and glory. Only through salvation through Christ can they be freed from sin and the bondage of deception to a cult. ■